

# PERSONAL EXPERIENCES IN THE DESIGN PROCESS

- How designers recognize and utilize their personal experiences in the design process

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## HENKILÖKOHTAISET KOKEMUKSET OSANA MUOTOILUPROSESSIA

- Kuinka muotoilijat hyödyntävät ja jäsentelivät henkilökohtaisia kokemuksiaan muotoiluprosessissa

Opinnäytetyö tarkastelee sitä kuinka muotoilijat hyödyntävät ja refleктоivat henkilökohtaisia kokemuksiaan osana muotoiluprosessia. Työ kyseenalaistaa kokemuksiin suhtautumisen automaattisesti vääristyneinä ja pohtii miksi kriittisen ajattelun tulisi olla tärkeä työkalu näiden kysymysten käsittelyssä muotoilun kentällä. Aineisto-osiossa työ tutkailee teorioita ja ajatuksia erilaisten teemojen kuten luovan ajattelun ja muistin, kognition ja ennakkoluulojen, hermeneutiikan, autoetnografian sekä muotoiluajattelun aloilta. Työtä varten kerättyinä aineistona analysoidaan laadullista kyselytutkimusta sekä palvelumuotoilijoiden syvähaastatteluita.

Opinnäytetyö tutkii tutkijan minän roolia muotoilutyön osana ja se valottaa oletuksia sekä ajatusprosesseja jotka usein jätetään joko huomiotta tai joita ei tunneta muotoilun kentällä yleisesti. Tutkimus kyseenalaistaa muotoilijan omien kokemusten käsittelemättä jättämisen käyttäjäkeskeisyyden nimissä ja pohtii onko omia kokemuksia edes mahdollista jättää huomiotta. Voitaisiinko omia kokemuksia kriittisesti tarkastelemalla päästä lähemmäs muiden ihmisten syvempää ymmärtämistä tai muiden kokemuksia omiin peilaamalla löytää uusia hedelmällisiä tarttumapintoja?

Uteliaisuus ja uudet kokemukset ovat elintärkeitä muotoilijoille ja luovalle ajattelulle. Ihmisen mieli on kuitenkin monimutkainen kokonaisuus ja muotoiluajattelu perustuu yhtälailla intuitiiviselle ja tiedostamattomalle ajattelulle kuin tutkittuun tietoon. Muotoilijan tasapainottelevat näiden kahden välillä ja taustalla vaikuttavat prosessit saattavat poiketa paljon asiakkaalle esitetyistä. Opinnäytetyö vertailee hermeneuttista kehää iteratiivisen kehän kanssa ja tutkailee autoetnografiaa mahdollisena kokemusten reflektoinnin työkaluna muotoilun prosesseille.

Työn haastatteluosiossa palvelumuotoilijat pohtivat omia ajatusprosessejaan, sitä kuinka he toimivat tutuissa ja tuntemattomissa ympäristöissä ja millainen on muotoilijan rooli monialaisissa tiimeissä. Työ tarkoitus ei ole tarjota avaimet käteen -tyyppistä ratkaisua kriittiseen ajatteluun vaan synnyttää tarinoiden pohjalta pohdintaa ja keskustelua.

### ASIASANAT:

Kriittinen ajattelu, Palvelumuotoilu, Muotoiluajattelu, Muotoilun tutkimus, Autoetnografia, Hermeneuttinen kehä, Ennakkoluulot, Luova prosessi, Poikkiteieteellisyys, Muotoilijan identiteetti

# PERSONAL EXPERIENCES IN THE DESIGN PROCESS

- How designers recognize and utilize their personal experiences in the design process

The thesis explores how designers utilize and reflect on their personal experiences within the design process. It tackles the reasons why these experiences should not be automatically rejected as biased and why critical thinking should be a fundamental tool for exploring these questions in the field. The secondary research part of the thesis investigates theories and ideas from themes such as creativity and memory, cognition and prejudice, hermeneutics, autoethnography and design thinking. The primary research part of the thesis consists of an analysis of a qualitative survey and in-depth service designer interviews.

The thesis investigates the designer's role of within the design briefs. It aims to bring light to presumptions and thought processes that are often ignored or unfamiliar to designers. The research raises questions about whether or not it is beneficial to exclude the designer's personal reflection from the process in the name of being human-centric and if that is even possible. Could it be beneficial to critically examine personal experiences in order to get closer to understanding others or would we find new sharp and worthwhile perspectives by comparing the differences between our experiences and those of others?

Curiosity and experiencing new things is vital for designers and creative thinking. The human mind is a complex system and design thinking is based as much on intuitive and unconscious thinking as it is on researched knowledge. Designers constantly balance between the two and the hidden processes can be very different from the ones that get presented to the client.

This thesis compares the hermeneutic circle with the iterative design process and examines autoethnography as potential tool for reflecting on personal experiences within the process. In the interviews service designers reflect on their thought processes, how they work in both familiar and unfamiliar surroundings and what the designer's role is when working in interdisciplinary teams. The aim of the thesis is not to offer one-size-fits-all solutions for critical thinking but to offer narratives to reflect on and to stimulate discussion.

## KEYWORDS

Critical thinking, Service design, Design thinking, Design research, Autoethnography, Hermeneutic circle, Prejudice, Creative process, Interdisciplinary team, Multidisciplinary team

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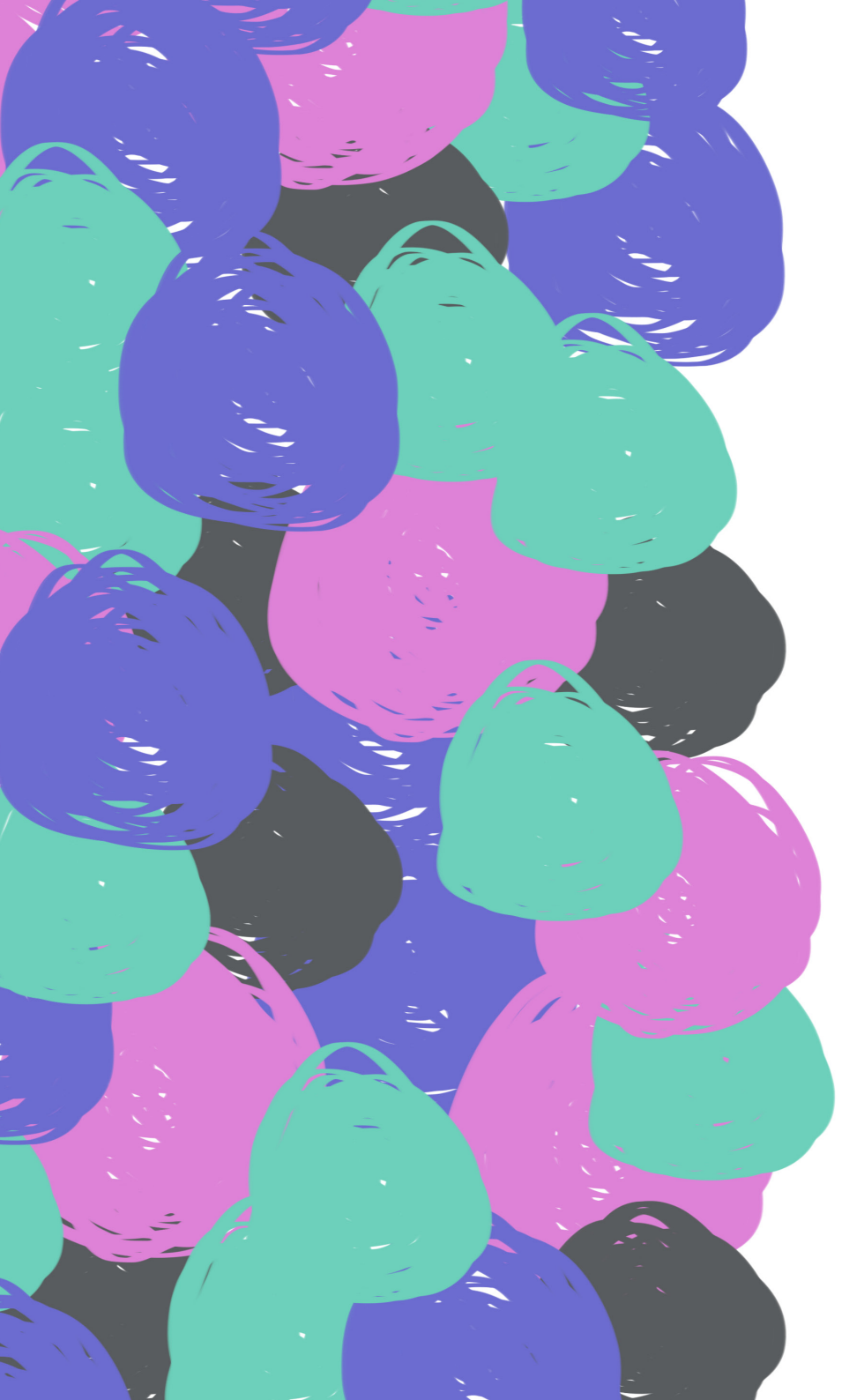
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# 1 INTRODUCTION

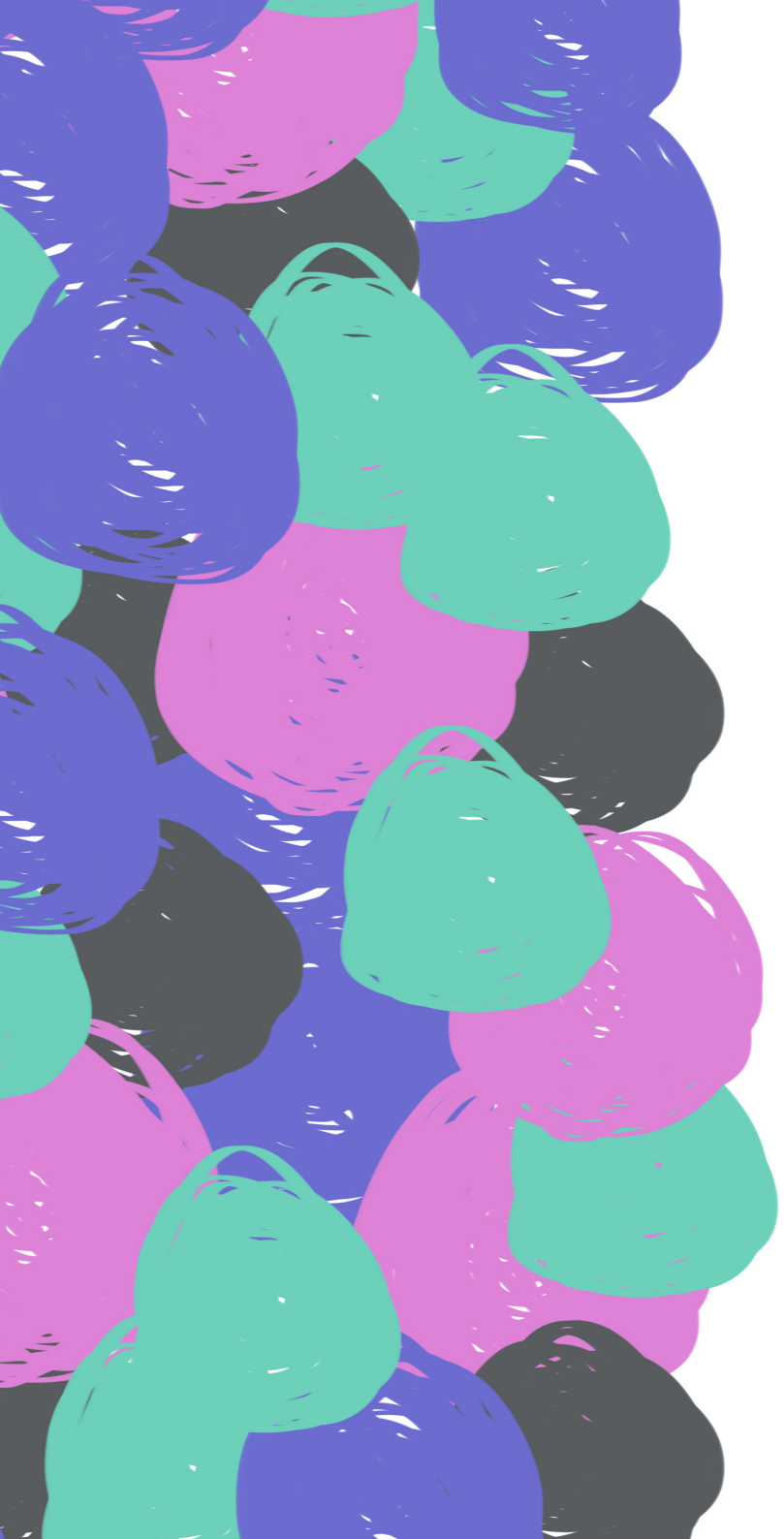
The topic for my thesis has developed over the last two years. When I started the process in the UK, I was set out to work on utilizing autoethnography in design and the method of autoethnography was at the very core of my research. When I carried on with the research in Finland, the topic started to evolve and I realized that autoethnography was just a small part of a larger whole. I realized that the problem I was interested in was the use of personal experiences in the design process and that autoethnography was a method to make use of in the potential solutions.

I have been rather expressive and passionate my whole life and it is something that I have always struggled with. So, for me the concept of objectivity has always been puzzling. As I grew up I was taught to seek objectivity and it became the norm for being smart. When I found my way to design, I felt at home. Finally the individual had value and the experiences of people or 'users' were meaningful. In my studies I found myself approaching subjects that I found interesting and felt I knew something about, had experience in. For me this never meant that I would only design based on my personal experiences but rather use them as a canvas to reflect other people's experiences on. After all, I could only see the world through my own eyes.

Along the way I have come across different academic fields of thinking that questioned objectivity and wanted to learn more about them. After all, for some reason I found myself spending a lot of time with people who seemed to believe in objectivity and who saw it as a goal that could and should be reached. I wanted to be able to study these differences and perhaps be able to articulate the views I held in a way that might convince others. Luckily in my search for answers I found people with the right backgrounds and wisdom to quote, who made it a lot easier for me to discuss matters with people who speak in references. It also gave me a chance to talk to people about their views in the topic and I was lucky to have such great conversations with people in the design field.

I have knowingly written this thesis in the first person to both emphasize the power of autoethnography and to clarify how I came to these conclusions. The aim of my thesis is to bind together theories from different disciplines and use them to highlight the underlying processes that affect designers among other humans. Most importantly this thesis will not offer a kit for utilizing personal experiences in design.

This thesis will hopefully challenge and provoke critical thinking and self-reflection, much like it did in the interviews narrated in Chapter 4.







## RESEARCH GOALS, QUESTIONS & METHODS

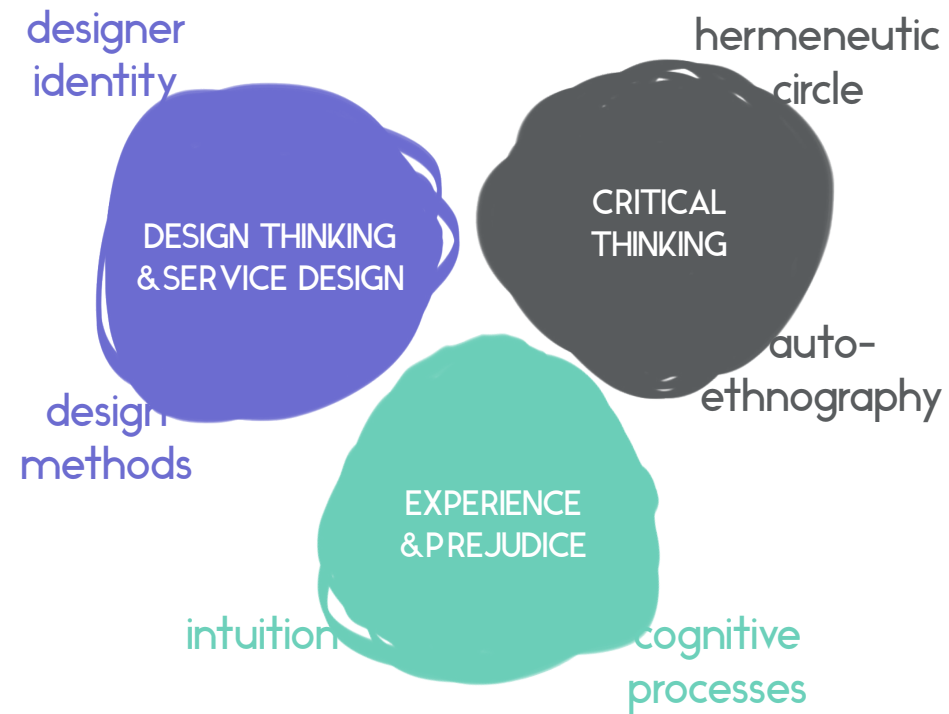
## 2.1 RESEARCH GOALS

Since a thesis is a demonstration of what I have learned and how well I can report on my work, it is vital that it represents my interests and breadth of knowledge. My thesis therefore aims to bind together my knowledge and interest in design and social sciences, both of which have greatly influenced my development as a designer. The goal beside my academic and professional development is to offer a curated but coherent view of why it would make sense for designers to observe their attitudes in addition to researching the end user's experiences.



I have not come across discussions about issues such as how personal experiences affect our choices and therefore our work in the field of design and I hope to spark conversation in the design field. My thesis aims to explain that a lot of compelling and interesting points could come from this kind of selfreflection and discussion.

## 2.2 FRAMEWORK



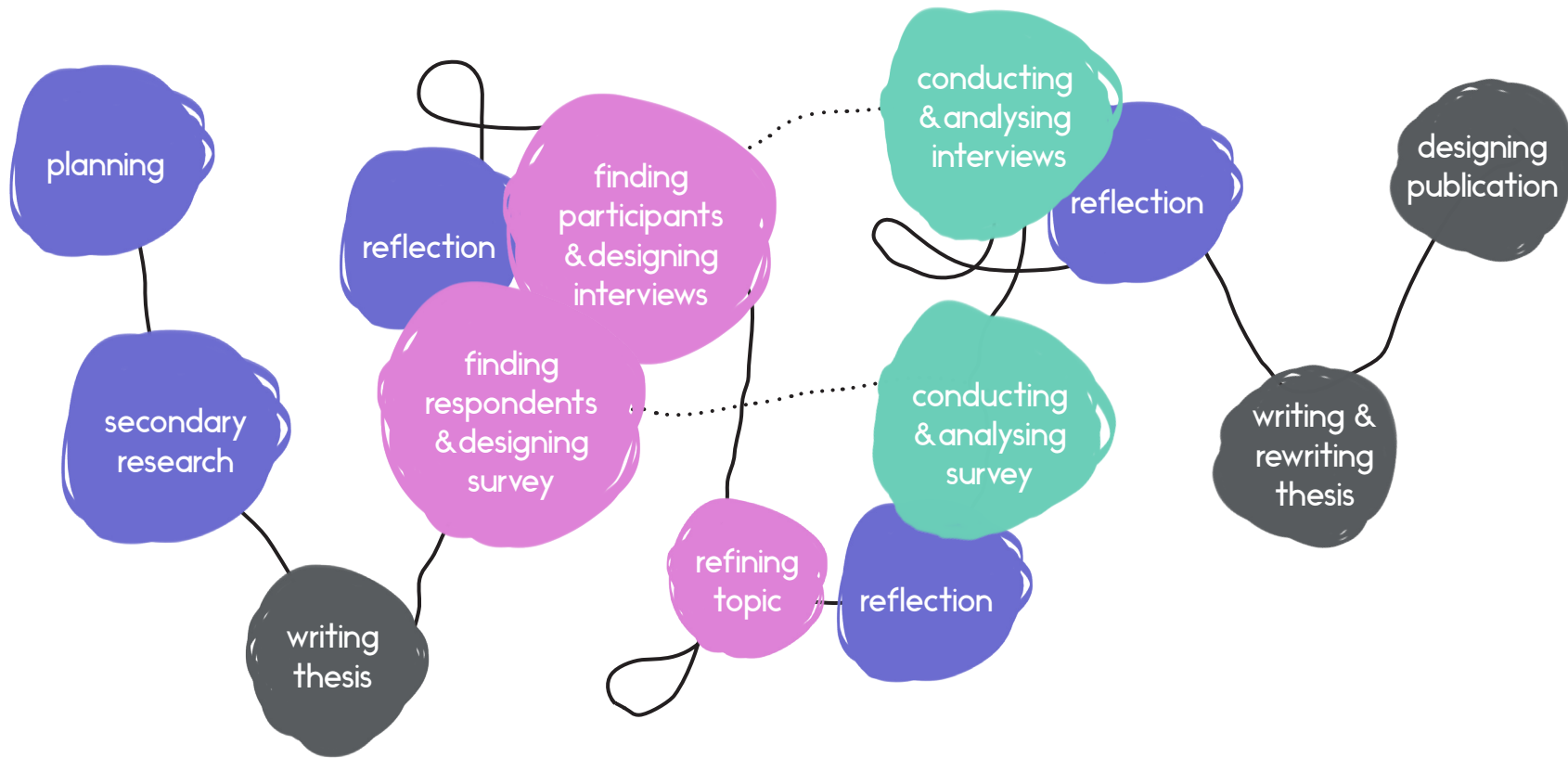
# 2.3 PROCESS FLOWCHART

DEFINING GOALS

POSSIBILITY MAPPING

DATA GATHERING & ANALYSIS

PUBLICATION DESIGN



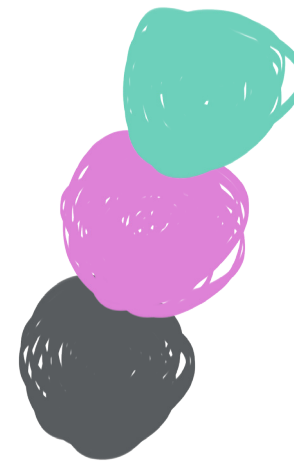
PICTURE 2. PROCESS FLOWCHART

## 2.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions for the thesis are:

1. How designers recognise and utilize their personal experiences in their work?
2. Why might designers want to pay attention to their experiences?

The specifics of these research questions have developed greatly during the process of both researching and writing the thesis. The difference between this thesis and other articles that explore hermeneutics in design is that while others concentrate on how these processes could be used in design, this thesis focuses on why we should think about these questions in the first place. The first research question therefore paves the way for the second, which is the core theme of this thesis.



## 2.1 RESEARCH METHODS

### 2.5.1 Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics emphasize the connection between evidence and values. Unlike positivism, hermeneutics does not exclude values from scientific thinking but rather tries to connect the phenomena under evaluation with others occurring at the same time and in the same space. (Anttila 1998) My approach to design research and the design process in this thesis is based on thoughts of hermeneutics and critical thinking and as Mika Hannula describes in his article in *Taiteellinen tutkimus* (2001), my goal too is not to theorise and philosophize hermeneutics but rather use it as an approach and attitude towards research.

Hannula (2001) mentions that the hermeneutic approach does not restrict nor give answers. It opens up more paths and helps in determining if the questions we ask are meaningful and how they relate to tradition. Hannula describes hermeneutics as being about accepting that our interpretation is set in a time and place and that it is about the past being present in the now. He argues that the substance of the interpretation is highly dependent on who is interpreting, from which situation and with what hopes and needs.

Most important is to openly and publicly open up about the requirements and prepositions of the interpreter and the situation. (Hannula 2001, 70)

Anttila describes the foundation for critical knowledge in her extensive review on research methods with the notion that humans are naturally reflective, especially concerning their personal thinking and actions. We may therefore feel that we understand others but we do not. The reason for misunderstandings can be inefficiencies in our communication or different interpretations of ideologies and thoughts. The critical voice is found within ourselves. It is a part of reflection that occurs while we become aware of the backgrounds of matters. (Anttila 1998)

Based on these findings I argue that since humans are naturally reflective and work within their own abilities of perception and interpretation, it is crucial to use this ability to reflect deliberately and with care.

## 2.5.2 Survey

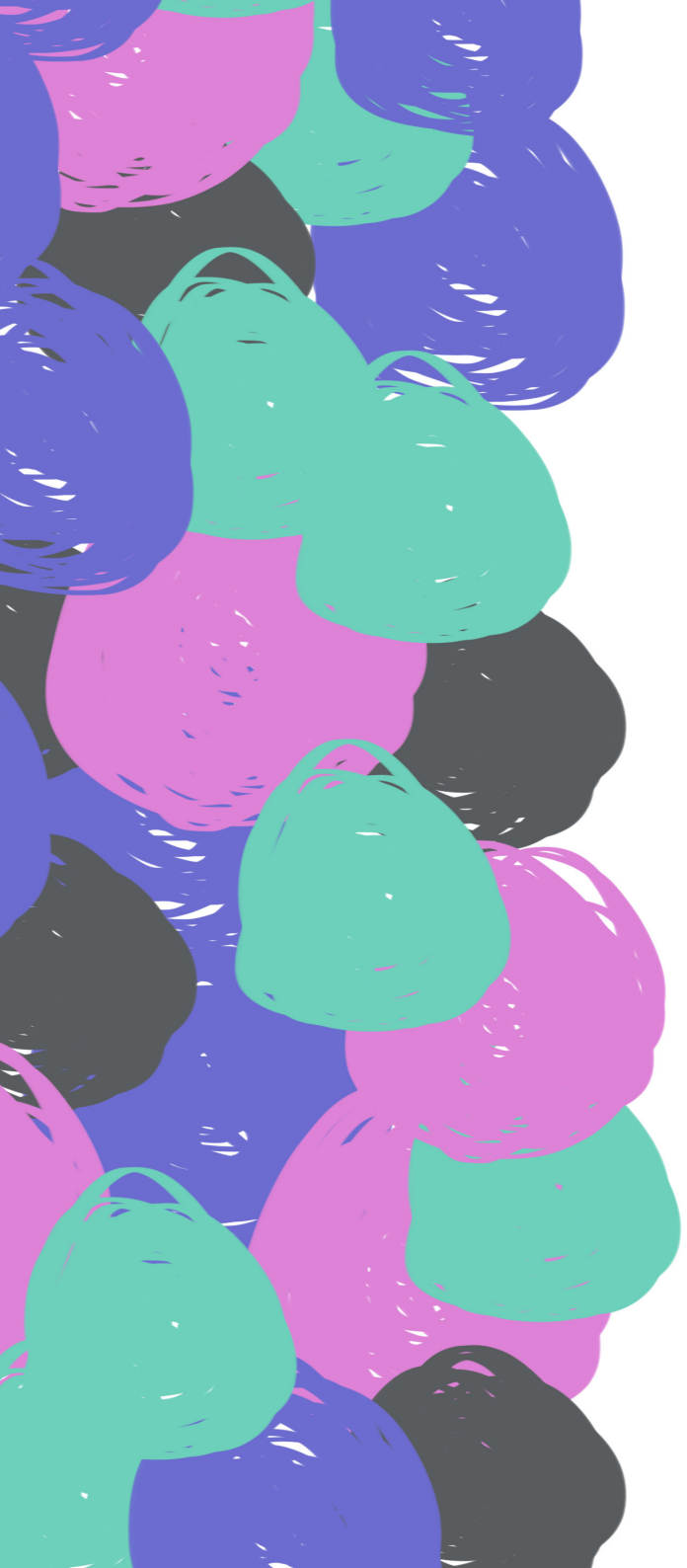
To gain a better understanding of the attitudes in the field, I started my research with an online survey. The survey I conducted does not meet the requirements of a quantitative survey as described by Anttila (1998). However, thirty design professionals from all over the world answered to the survey questions and shared sharp insights. My goal for the survey was to determine if and how designers use and reason their use of personal experiences in their work.

The survey had ten questions that can be found in the appendices of this thesis. Eight of these questions were closed-ended and two of them open-ended. All of the closed-ended questionnaire questions, however, had an option where respondents could share their insights and argue their answers in more depth. The responses from the survey guided my direction with the interviews, and I will explore the gathered data in the primary research part of this thesis in more detail.

## 2.5.3 Interviews

Anttila defines interviews as conversations between the researcher and the informant or as collaborative efforts between two people with different roles. While the main focus is on the questions and answers provided, non-verbal communication is often also considered. (Anttila 1998) There are various types of interviews and for my thesis I conducted three in-depth interviews. I conducted two of the three in-depth interviews with individuals and the third with two colleagues.

Anttila calls in-depth interviews as “conversations with intention”. My in-depth interviews varied between interviewees but in all cases, I had some preliminary questions at hand. The questions can be found in the appendices of this thesis. While I used some of the questions in all interviews to keep the conversation on track, the interviews were very informal and each interview offered great input for the next one. I was also able to conduct a group interview (with two participants) in addition to my one-on-one interviews, which proved to be very illuminating. As Anttila mentions, in-group interview participants have the opportunity to think out loud and because the participants in my case had a great professional relationship they were able to discuss topics deeply and build on each other’s insights. (Anttila 1998)







## SECONDARY RESEARCH

## 3.1 DESIGN THINKING

My Bachelor's course is called industrial design and I did a yearlong exchange in Falmouth University's sustainable product design course. Even though my educational background is therefore very product oriented I was always the most interested in immaterial design practises, such as service design and design thinking. In my studies, whenever possible, I created services and digital solutions instead of physical products and concentrated on the why and for whom rather than the aesthetics. This thesis is mainly written from the service design perspective and while all of the interviewees are service designers, my understanding of design has elements of product-oriented disciplines.

Paula Bello, the first and former service design manager at KONE describes her view of design thinking as almost a philosophy. She sees it as a way of thinking that involves both the product and the processes around it and mentions that she has met accountants that are good designers and designers that are not really designers.  
(P. Bello, personal communication 8.2.2016)

There are as many views on design thinking as there are designers and I agree with Paula Bello that you don't even have to be a designer to be a great design thinker.

Having worked in interdisciplinary projects and with people from different educational and cultural backgrounds I find the design consultancy Humantific's views on design thinking the most relevant. Especially within organisational change and when tackling social issues within interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary teams where the role of the designer is getting more and more fluid it is important to know where you come from and what your experiences and assets are.

Humantific has established four levels of design thinking. These four levels give great insight into how different the roles of designers can be and what they may be in the future. In my view, it also explains very well why there is a growing need for reflective designers in the future.

MAINSTREAM  
design thinking

THE OTHER  
design thinking



low complexity



high complexity

PICTURE 3. DESIGN THINKING AS EXPLAINED BY HUMANTIFIC

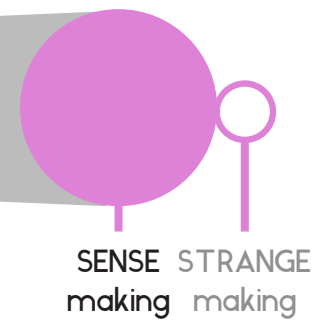
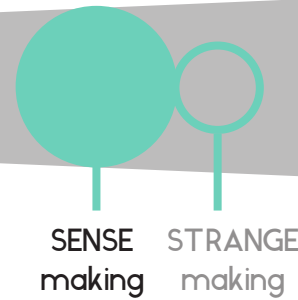
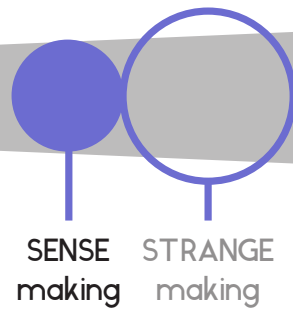
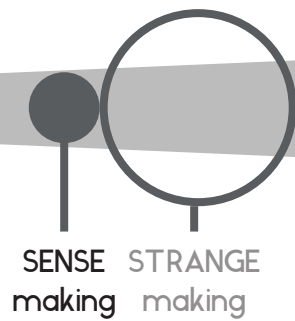
## MAINSTREAM design thinking



## THE OTHER design thinking



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PICTURE 4. FROM STRANGE MAKING TO SENSE MAKING AS EXPLAINED BY HUMANTIFIC

As can be seen in Picture 3, Humantific separates design thinking into mainstream design thinking (Design **1.0** and **2.0**) and the OTHER design thinking (Design **3.0** and **4.0**). Design **1.0** is about solving “a little mess” with a product and the challenges lie in communicating that product to the people. Design **2.0** takes place when companies try to solve problems in existing products and services and create new services and products.

In both **1.0** and **2.0** design is about making the familiar strange. Humantific calls this process “strange making”. In both design **1.0** and **2.0**, the designers and users of the products are involved in the process but in design **2.0** the project team is multidisciplinary whereas in design **1.0** it consists of designers only. (Pastor 2013)

In the OTHER design thinking (Design **3.0** and **4.0**), the challenges grow more complex. In design **3.0** the “messes” are organisational, and they face systems challenges as well as challenges within industries. In design **4.0** the problems are societal, and they require transformation on the scale of countries, societies and even the planet earth as a whole.

In design **3.0** and **4.0** complex issues require and benefit less from strange making (see Picture 4), meaning that there is no presumption that the end goal is necessarily a product or a service. In design **3.0** and **4.0**, the process is mainly about sense making. In addition, to designers, there are organisations, multidisciplinary project teams and individual stakeholders taking part in the process. (Pastor, 2013)

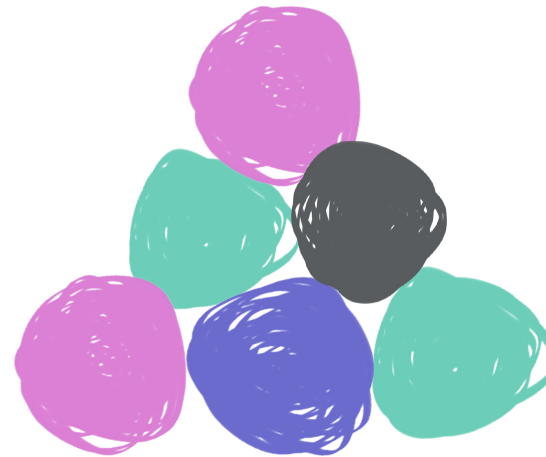
Such variety within the groups of stakeholders requires different thought processes for sense making to occur. This thesis will explore why and how designers might want to make sense of their personal experiences to better communicate with these different stakeholders and people participating in the process.

## 3.2 MEMORY AND CREATIVITY

*“A frame is an active perspective that both describes and perceptually changes a given situation. A frame is, simplistically, a point of view; often, and particularly in technical situations, this point of view is deemed “irrelevant” or “biasing” because it implicitly references a non-objective way of considering a situation or idea.*

*But a frame—while certainly subjective and often biasing—is of critical use to the designer, as it is something that is shaped over the long-term aggregation of thoughts and experiences, through the above process of sensemaking, and is therefore a larger way of viewing the world and situations that occur in it.”*  
(Kolko 2010)

If I were to split my creative process into pieces, it would mainly consist of breaking down memories, both other people’s and mine. It is about reaching for either conscious or unconscious memories. The UCLA’s neurology professor John Stern (Gute & Gute 2015) explains that a part of the creative process is the brain reaching for the “preconceived experiences”, meaning experiences that have not yet formed consciously. Stern argues that creative people achieve great insights when they are distracted and not actively forcing the idea. (Gute & Gute 2015, 17)



There is a lot about creativity that we do not yet understand, but it is safe to say that a lot of creative ideas involve finding a new use for existing knowledge. (Markman 2015) This applies especially well in design, where the goal often is to make remarkable improvements using as few changes in equipment as possible. As Art Markman mentions in his article in the Harvard Business Review, it is important for creatives to have time for experiencing seemingly irrelevant things, so that their arsenal of experiences and knowledge grows and gives them more to work with when solving problems. In an article for Psychology today, Markman describes finding creative solutions as a process of finding information in your memory that will relate to the problem you are trying to solve. He recognizes that creativity is driven by memory and that it is crucial to reach into existing knowledge to be able to create something new. (Markman 2015)

Designers work with and as artists and scientists, both acquiring knowledge to research topics and using that information as inspiration in their designs. As I will explore in more detail in the primary research part of this thesis, hunches and designer intuition play a large role in the design process and the solutions are not solely based on empirical data gathered in the research phase.

The designer's job is to create new concepts, which often requires taking risks and exploring novel ideas for experiences that the users might not even know they need yet. This part of the creative process is different from the analytical processes that take place and requires divergent thinking and at least to some degree I claim, self-analysis.

The significance of memories in the creative process is one of the reasons why I find it so crucial that designers recognize the role of their personal experiences in the process. If and when their work builds on their memories, which again are recollections of their experiences it is important to realize that these experiences (however irrelevant to the topic at hand they might seem) affect the process at least unconsciously. I believe we should admit this and work on being aware of these processes. So instead of these processes affecting the decision making as biases in our thinking we can make use of them consciously.

## 3.3 COGNITION AND PREJUDICE

One of the arguments against the use of self in the process is the bias argument. It supposes that exploring one's thoughts, feelings and attitudes would mean that objectivity is lost, and, therefore, the end results only apply to them. As a teacher once explained to me, this was something that design was trying to get away from, not embrace. I did not see how they were connected but at the time, I had no words to explain it. I now wonder if people who think like this somehow think that acknowledging one's experiences means that no other kind of research will take place.

There is a vast amount of research on the role of cognition in stereotyping. (Hinton 2000, 55) For decades, there has been a discussion in the field of social psychology around how and why people are prejudiced. One of the theories is that people only have a certain amount of mental capacity and that stereotyping is the cognitive way of clearing space for more complex thinking processes to take place. As an example,

Hinton (2000) mentions a study by Macrae et al. (Macrae et al. 1994, 37-47) where the study participants had two separate memory tasks, one with remembering people's characteristics and another with geographic information. The participants who had characters with traits that were in line with the common stereotype were able to remember more of the traits in addition to doing better in the unrelated geography task. In the study Macrae deducted that stereotypes worked as "energy savers" that release space for other tasks. (Hinton 2000, 70) Hinton (2000) quotes Fox claiming,

"prejudice is not a form of thinking  
but that thinking is a form of prejudice".  
(Fox 1992, 151)

I agree with Fox that prejudice as a word has got very negative connotations and that we should explore it as a neutral thought process as well as a damaging process in social relationships. However, it is also clear that while prejudiced thinking may be part of our cognitive processes and while it serves some important functions, it does not mean that we have no control over our actions. (Hinton 2000, 68)



Hinton mentions that when people have the right motivation and time to pay attention they can learn to look at people and their attributes without having to resort to stereotyping. (Hinton 2000, 77-79)

Why is noting the processes behind stereotyping important for designers? Designers have been taught to observe others and make assumptions based on their behaviour. However, when we make those deductions and decide whom to include in our participant groups, we may fall prey to stereotyping.

Since designers who work on projects that may come from very versatile disciplines are required to know something about everything, they have to rely on what Hinton (2000) points out as Johnson-Laird (Johnson-Laird 1983) calling “mental models”. Mental models are the models in our heads that we reach for when trying to remember how things work. As an example, I have a mental model of a phone where you can make calls and send messages. This model, however, excludes most of the applications people use their smartphones for today.

Designers use all sorts of tools for mapping journeys – or schemas and scripts as they are called in the field of social psychology – that are narratives of what occurs in certain situations.

Designers could utilize the research on prejudice and stereotyping to better understand what to consider when interpreting the data gathered from participants. It would also be useful to scrutinize and perhaps question their own thought processes to get to the most meaningful insights.

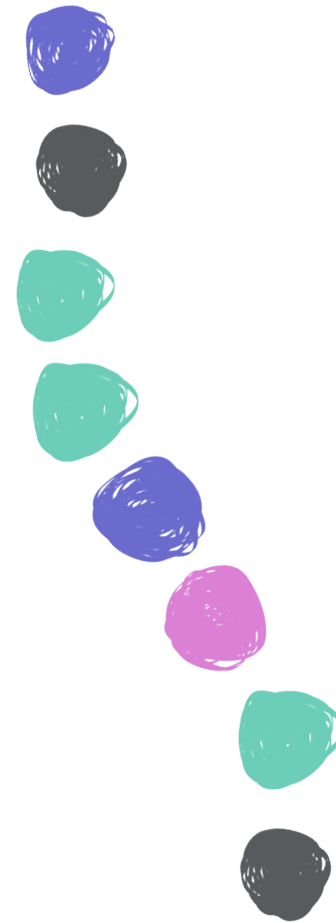


## 3.4 HERMENEUTIC CIRCLE

Before I discuss the hermeneutic circle, I will address the four principles of understanding that form the foundation for hermeneutical understanding. The following principles are based on the principles of Heidegger and described by a Finnish philosopher Juha Varto. The principles can be used as a foundation for exploring the manner in which the research is conducted and how and why the research topic and questions are chosen. (Varto 1992, 100-106) The book by Varto is in Finnish and I have translated the terms used in the following text.

The four principles of understanding as described by Varto:

- 1 The world as a horizon of meaning is different at different times and for different people because
- 2 People are interested in different things (interests position views differently)
- 3 Every researcher has an experience of the world that is uniquely his or hers and no-one else can share it as a whole
- 4 The foundations for assumptions and goals – of the scientific or from a practical origin of need – are different.



The first of the four principles explores the notion of locality, which means that we are all born into a place and time, and it fundamentally shapes our view of everything from the moment we are born. Being born into a certain place and time means that we are different from the people who were there before us but also from the people who we share our surroundings with in the present. Even in the present and in the same place no two people share the exact same experiences. This means that we have to understand everything outside our personal experience through a proxy and usually by comparing it to our inner world. We can try to understand unfamiliar as if it were familiar and vice versa but there will always be a difference between the two since we as humans can only experience the world through ourselves. There is no technique in which we could create a space of neutral understanding and rid ourselves from the distinction between the two. (Varto 1992, 102-103)

The second principle describes the way in which people's interests and motivations explain how they understand phenomena and why they choose to research certain topics from specific points of view. Varto also mentions the possibility to consciously shape one's view of the world. (Varto 1992, 104)

The third principle explains further how we all have structures in which we make sense of the world. These structures are born from what is given to us, what we are interested in and they influence the way in which we approach the new. If we find topics that have been chosen and studied from sets of interests and views that are completely different from ours, we can then investigate them using both the previous and the fresh points of view. (Varto 1992, 105)

The fourth and final principle states that the expectations in the scientific fields of study vary and they have differing expectations regarding how research is conducted, controlled and taught. Some of these rules are clear while others are implicit and challenging to explain. In any case, they too influence the way in which research is conducted. (Varto 1992, 105) An example of the fourth principle is if someone wanted to study a physical phenomenon using autoethnography, which might be frowned upon, by the physics field. Equally a purely statistic and quantitative research might not be well received in the art education context.

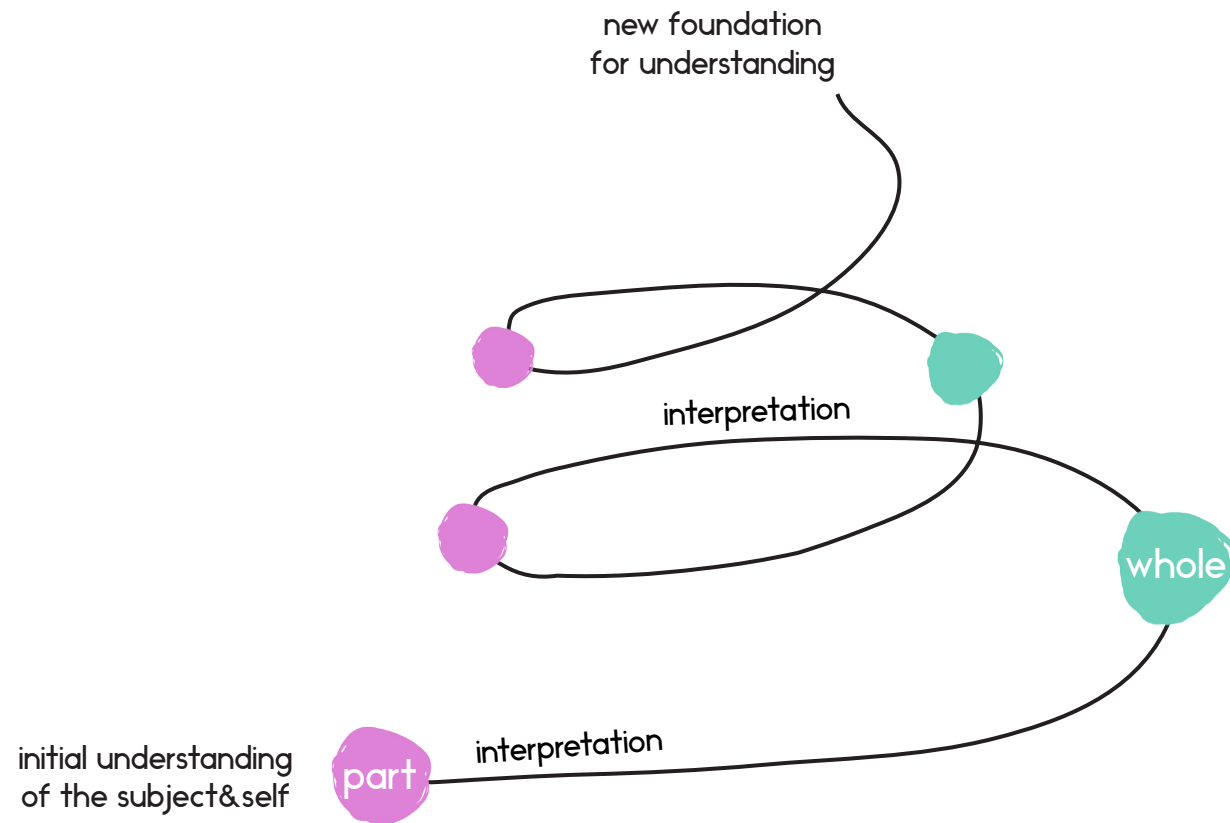
## The Hermeneutic Circle

The hermeneutic circle (or spiral) is a process that aims to understand the ways in which we interpret things. The foundations for Varto's interpretation of the circle are the principles mentioned before since understanding always starts from within these principles and then circles back to them. Understanding one's motivations and expectations can free from being their slave. However, it also means that the reached understanding is the new foundation, of which one must then be freed. The hermeneutic circle, therefore, is not a closed circle.

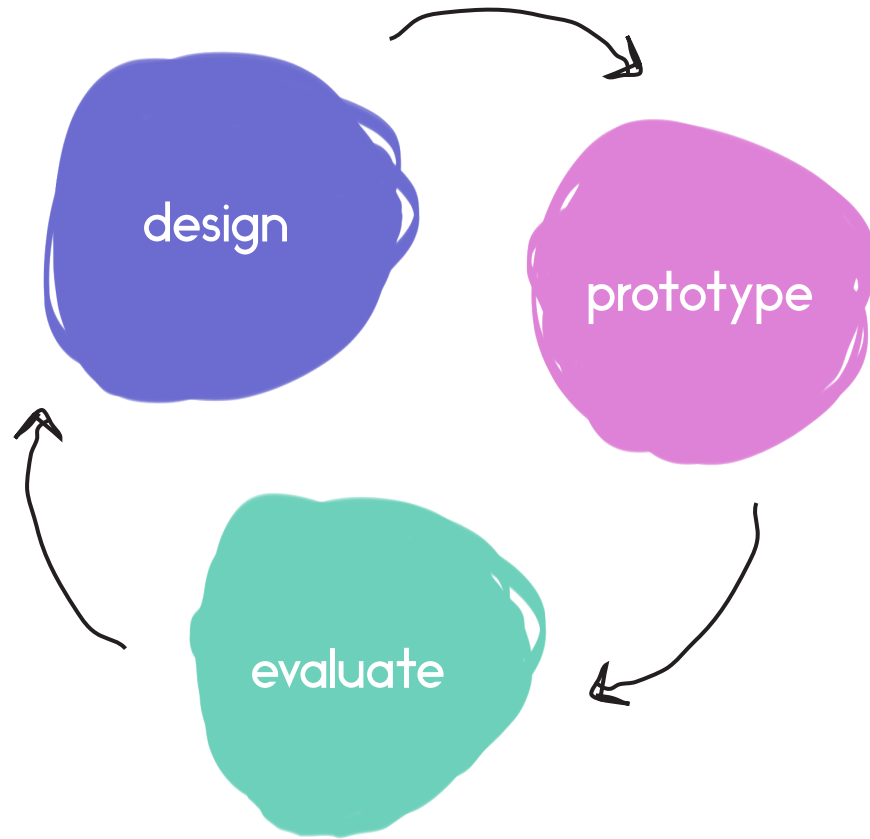
According to Varto, when we understand how the first approach was intuitively about ourselves, we can then approach the subject free from these previous assumptions. Every circle of interpretation then guides us closer to the subject itself and unravels our identity in so creating a deeper self-understanding. (Varto 1992, 107-108)

There is an emphasis on the notion of parts and a whole in other definitions of the hermeneutic circle. (Anttila 1998) It explains how everything we try to understand consists of parts of a whole and how we cannot understand the whole without understanding its parts. The hermeneutic circle then means that when looking at a part such as service design, we must also understand the whole, which is the world and context in which the service design exists and the people who practise it as well the history that made it possible for it to develop. When we as researchers aim to analyse these parts we must try to empathize and use our intuition in order to understand. We must then reflect on the product of our understanding in contrast with the whole and alter it when necessary. (Anttila 1998)

Both in the human-centred design process and in the hermeneutic circle it is vital to study the problem from the perspective of the human or user as the "part" and the context and culture as the "whole". This makes it easy to see how the hermeneutic circle could be naturally utilized in the design process.



PICTURE 5. MY VISUALIZATION OF THE HERMENEUTIC CIRCLE BASED ON VARTO'S DESCRIPTION



PICTURE 6. MY VISUALIZATION OF THE ITERATIVE DESIGN PROCESS

The hermeneutic circle and the iterative design process used in the design field are similar in many ways. In the iterative design process there are many different versions of what steps need to be taken on each round but the end product from the first cycle is always used as a foundation for the second. When the first version is analysed, it can be changed completely or the understanding gathered in the interpreting phase can be used for tweaking the original. (The Design and Technology Association, 2016) In any case, when the process is seen as iterative and not as something that has a beginning and an end, and the previous end “product” is analysed and further developed, the process is iterative.

The meaningful difference between the definitions of the iterative process and Varto’s interpretation of the hermeneutic circle is the notion of self-understanding and personal growth. As human beings, we learn from our previous experiences and one of the aims of this thesis is to emphasize the value of self-reflection beside the on-going design process so we can grow to be more aware of our limitations and learn when we might need to consult others to gain more inclusive results.

## 3.5 ETHNOGRAPHY IN DESIGN

Ethnography is a qualitative anthropological research methodology for studying cultural patterns and people. (Rodgers & Enusas 2008, 1) Ethnography is the most applied in social sciences such as anthropology, and sociology. (Stickdorn & Schneider 2010, 108) Many of the user-centred design research tools in use today are rooted in ethnography and the in-depth knowledge gathered within social sciences has an excellent use for designers as it both describes and interprets the data. (Innokylä.fi 2016) Because future designers will not only be judged by their traditional design skills but also the use of research methods in the field of human-centred design, their abilities to conduct and understand ethnographic research material is becoming increasingly relevant in the design world. (Rodgers and Enusas 2008, 1)

In my view, the main difference between ethnography and autoethnography is that with ethnography the researcher is not a part of the group of study before entering the field. In ethnography the researcher is an outsider, making notes and observing but not affecting the events. Ethnographers are expected to gather “native point(s) of view” without imposing their own conceptual frameworks.” (Rodgers and Enusas 2008, 2)

How much of the ethnographer’s personal perceptions and feelings are recorded and communicated in the research varies within the field. Self-reflexivity is practiced at least in realist ethnography and just how autoethnography and highly self-reflexive realist ethnographies differ from one another, is under debate. (Anderson 2006) & (Ellis & Bochner 2006)

Observing people in their natural social environment gives ethnographers insight into what people do and how they do it, even when they might think they are doing something completely different. It provides ethnographers a deeper insight into the culture of study as well as techniques for systematic analysis of the gathered data. (AIGA 2016)

The field of design ethnography differs from its analytical sister in social sciences in some ways. Whereas in the academic world it is important to present the data in its untangled form, in design ethnography it can both inform and inspire the design process. Design ethnography is a tool for communicating the insights gathered from research to all stakeholders so that conversations between different groups can take place. (Stickdorn & Schneider 2010, 110)



## 3.6 AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

I became familiar with autoethnography through my husband who studied art education and used autoethnography as a method in his BA dissertation. As we discussed the method that is autoethnography, I found it reflected my views and issues with traditional scientific knowledge. I started to look into autoethnography a lot more and decided I wanted to explore it in depth in my own thesis.

At first, I thought I wanted to study autoethnography as a method and somehow apply it in design. However, it soon became evident that before the how, I had to answer the why. I was surprised that the method had not often been used in design since it fitted in perfectly. I had always seen design as a highly reflective activity and for me it was a shock to realize that there was a dominant group of people in design that thought design research should aim to be objective. Meaning that the researcher's background and motivations were something to ignore or get rid of and that in human-centred design the designer was seen only as a vehicle for other people's experiences.

During my design studies my colleagues had teachers tell them to, for example, approach a familiar space that they were designing for as if they'd never been there before. I was taught to use empathy tools such as homemade gloves that would somehow make me realize how it feels to

have an illness. I was somewhat baffled with both the first and the second assignment. I could not see why or how it could be possible for someone to go to a place that they had already visited as if they had never been there before. If you had experiences there, the experiences would have left their mark in at least the subconscious level and pretending they had not, made no sense to me.

The second example about empathy tools is one of the reasons I why I chose the topic for my thesis. While I realize that using tools such as modified gloves have merit in understanding the motoric and other physical challenges, I noticed that using them without considering their limitations conveniently excludes all the social and psychological aspects of the illness or disability. I understand that these kinds of tools are not the sole source of information when designing, but I find it is very important to acknowledge their limitations out loud. Designers make these tools and they decide what parts of these experiences they want to simulate.

For some reason utilizing emotional experiences (even in a conscious and critical way) is unquestionably seen as a bias but these kinds of experiences that are achieved using self created tools don't get the same kind of critique. These physical experiences are as much personal as

mentally experienced ones and the designers themselves artificially design these experiences. It is crucial to remember that they do not offer a complete picture of an experience. Keren Solomon ponders whether simulating an experience for example in a hospital ever means that you can understand the patient since you do not have the fears and emotions that come with being sick, and you have the ability to get up and leave. (Solomon 2010, 75)

I have witnessed many design processes where designers would start to research a topic or community that they were a part of and then start gathering research to support their personal experiences. My survey responses from practicing designers worldwide later supported this finding. Some survey respondents mentioned that in the beginning they have an experience or an idea how things work and they then look for research to back it up. (Survey 2015) Problems arise when these connections are hidden because perhaps they would be branded as biased and therefore they may lack the analysis, insights and honest debate that could make them useful. I wanted to see if autoethnography could offer tools for using this depth of understanding that comes from personal involvement and long-term exposure to the topic in a more transparent way.

In my experience when the designer is a part of a community – such as designing equipment for a sport that they practice – there is not much opposition to utilizing their experience in the subject but when we move to more emotional or painful subjects the opposition grows. For me this seems strange since it is not too difficult to get decent insights from interviews around loved hobbies that are pleasant to talk about whereas interviewing people about distressing or emotional subjects present a lot more ethical issues and difficulties. To me these difficult subjects are the ones that would be the most positively affected by detailed insights by the designer, in case they have them. By this I do not mean that the end results would be based solely on the individual experience but that they would be given the same weight as an outside interviewee's experience.

It was well after I started research for my thesis when I realized that the main issue I was dealing with was not how to create tools for designers to use in their work but rather how I could understand and activate the reflective and emotionally analytical side of the process. How could designers scrutinize their own attitudes and assumptions during research? No one likes to think that they are prejudiced so it might prove to be challenging to do it in a way that inspired these thought processes without making people defensive.

## Autoethnography

Ellis describes autoethnographic research as retrospectively and selectively writing about

*“epiphanies that stem from, or are made possible by, being part of a culture or by possessing a particular cultural identity.”* (Ellis, Adams, Bochner 2011)

Autoethnographers must also analyse their personal epiphanies and explore how others might go through similar experiences. In so doing their personal experience may then represent a wider cultural experience. To make personal experience understandable for others they need to compare their experience with existing research, interviewing other members of the group under study or investigate relevant artefacts. (Ellis, Adams, Bochner 2011)

Comparing personal experiences with existing research and accounts of others is something that is widely useful and highlights the way in which autoethnography differentiates from autobiographies or fictional self-absorbent pieces of self-analysis. For autoethnographic data such as personal field notes and diary entries must be evaluated in the cultural context and examined as a part of a larger cultural understanding.

There are competing views on the field about what autoethnography should be (Journal of Contemporary Ethnography 2006), and it is fair to say that autoethnographic text can have many forms. Autoethnographic text can be evocative and aesthetically pleasing, and it can use authorial voice. (Ellis, Adams, Bochner 2011) However, even Leon Anderson, the promoter of so-called “analytic autoethnography” states that the researcher must be a highly visible actor in the written autoethnographic text. (Anderson 2006) Ellis, Adams, and Bochner also point out that autoethnographic text has the potential to reach a wider audience than traditional research when the narrative is engaging. (Ellis, Adams, Bochner 2011)

Autoethnography as a field lies somewhere in between science and art. It receives criticism for not being scientific enough as well as not being imaginative enough to be considered as art. (Ellis, Adams, Bochner 2011) Similarly design is often seen as part art part science. These reasons make it especially interesting to see how it could be applied in design.

One of the only ones who have done so is Keren Solomon, who explores the difference between ethnographic and autoethnographic research as a part of a product development process in an article. (Solomon 2010) Solomon researched the

topic of breastfeeding by comparing an older ethnographic study she had conducted on the subject, with an autoethnographic study she conducted. She based her autoethnographic study on an extensive diary about her experiences, behaviours, and emotions. She found that even though the data gathered was similar in nature there were some differences between the two approaches.

First, she mentions the availability of pictures to document her breastfeeding that would have been trickier to gain when using an outside participant. (Solomon 2010, 68) Honest material about painful or embarrassing experiences can be hard to gain when using outside participants, and there are ethical questions involved in gathering this kind of information. While there are ethical considerations when writing about your personal experiences regarding your close relations that may appear in the text, the person that decides the level of openness is you. You can choose to share painful experiences and your every waking minute in your work since you have the control over the outcome and access to yourself “24/7”. (Solomon 2010, 71)

An interesting finding was that when Solomon conducted the autoethnographic study, she realized the importance of the father and others around the mother. (Solomon 2010, 70) Solomon also mentioned that she was surprised to see how

much more her decision-making was influenced by chance and circumstance instead of logic. (Solomon 2010, 69) Autoethnographers are often claimed to be self-absorbed narcissists (Ellis, Adams, Bochner 2011), but it is worth noting that shifting focus and perspective can mean finding new vital participants in the process. Solomon also discovered that she understood the pressure and challenges on research participants better than before, and she realized how much effort gathering these required insights take. (Solomon 2010, 70 & 75)

There are a few great rules from Solomon’s article that can help when choosing whether or not autoethnography is a suitable method for research. First is to ask ourselves whether we would be accepted as participants in the study? Second is its value in studying life-changing issues such as disease, or other emotionally charged topics. Third is the possibility to challenge the assumptions we have about our surroundings. The fourth is whether or not you as the researcher are ready to self-reflect and grow personally. (Solomon 2010, 75-76)





# PRIMARY RESEARCH

## 4.1 SURVEY

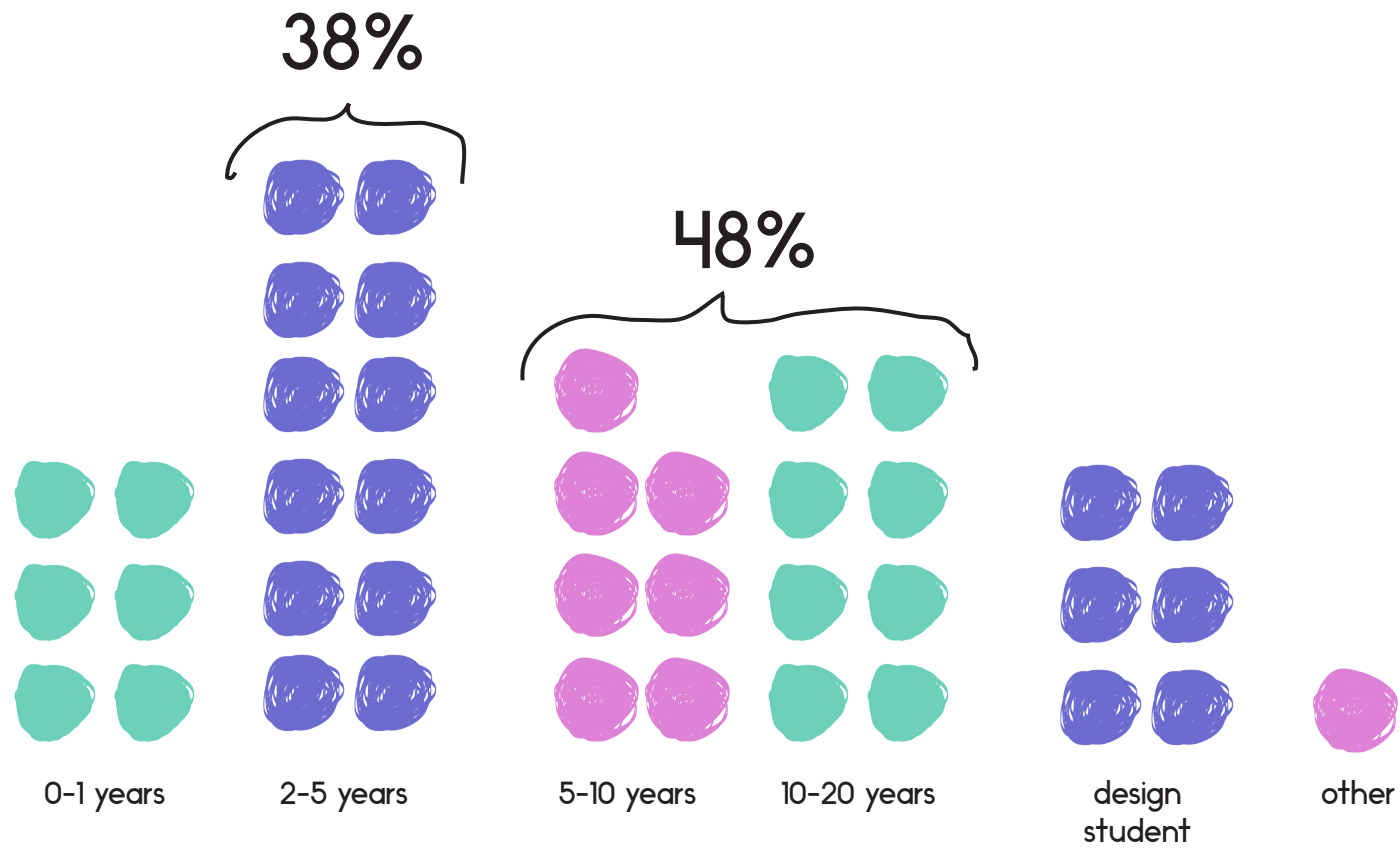
In order to pinpoint the current attitudes around my thesis topic in the field, I created an online survey with ten questions. The survey responses were collected in November and December in 2015. In total, I received 31 responses to my questions and the respondents were creative professionals from 17 different countries. The residence countries of the participants can be seen on the map in Picture 7.

In order to receive responses from active designers in the field, I decided to share the survey in two separate service design-related Facebook groups. The first one is called “Service Design, Design Thinking, Service Innovation” and the second “Young Professional Service Designers”.

I was pleasantly surprised how many people showed interest in the topic and shared their views and ideas in the survey.



PICTURE 7. THE RESIDENCE COUNTRIES OF THE SURVEY PARTICIPANTS



PICTURE 8. HOW LONG THE SURVEY RESPONDENTS HAVE BEEN PRACTISING DESIGN



I received responses from professionals with various backgrounds, from design students to experienced designers some of whom were also partners in their service design studios. As can be seen in Picture 8, 48% of all the respondents had been in the field for 5-20 years and 38% for 2-5 years. From these figures we can conclude that the survey consisted of answers from very experienced designers as well as novices who were still new to the field.

The first question in the survey was: Do you use your personal experiences in the design process? Three said they had not thought about it but the vast majority (28/31) answered that they do. One of the respondents clarified their answer by saying that:

*“of course, personal experiences builds your character and self. when your designing your always digging that, thats why research is extremely important. it exists to add experiences to the designer.”*  
(Survey 2015)

The second question was: How do you explain your choices to others if they are based on personal experience or intuition? In this question I did not differentiate between the various levels

and meanings of intuition (Raami 2015) but rather used the word that I have heard creatives use when they explain their choices to others. A handful of respondents mentioned the words *“in my experience”* as something of a magic phrase they rely on when explaining their choices and experiences to others. A couple of them said that they create storyboards or other visual tools to demonstrate and illustrate their experiences hoping that others can identify with their experiences. It was often mentioned that these experiences must then be backed up with experiences of others and explanations of why this experience is relevant to the project.

One of the answers pointed out that the experiences of the designer are not less or more important than anyone else’s and in order to empathise with others designers need to use their personal experiences as a way of

*“feeling the problem even more”*. (Survey 2015)

This acknowledgement of using personal experiences, as a tool for tapping into emotions and feeling deeper empathy was one of the premises I had when I entered the research. If we accept the premise that empathy is vital for understanding others, we can employ it in many ways.

We can feel and re-live emotions, for example, by remembering a time when we felt them before, mimicking the precise facial expressions for the emotions or by witnessing other people experience the emotions. (Ekman 2003, 65-70) We cannot share all experiences or nuances of emotion and temperament with other people but we can make ourselves see the world through a certain emotion. Sometimes, especially when dealing with emotional topics this ability can be a huge help in understanding others and the way they behave.

In the third question I wanted to know which tools designers mostly use during their processes. I had provided a set of examples to choose from and most of the respondents said they use notebooks for sketching and making notes. It was also very common to use smartphones for capturing moments and objects of relevance as well as using the phone for creating quick sketches. I was rather surprised to see that people also used voice recordings and video diaries for their processes. It would be very interesting to know more about the goals and ways in which they use these tools in their work.

In the fourth question I asked if people analysed the data they had gathered using previous methods. 67% said they do and 39% said they do not really analyse the data. I can recognise myself in

both, especially notes and pictures on my phone often work as a tool for processing something in the moment and I do not necessarily remember to get back to them later. The more consciously gathered data such as interviews and conscious observations receive a lot more attention and analysis afterwards. Especially if they end up being the foundation for a concept or have to be presented to someone else.

In the fifth question I asked the respondents to explain how they analyse the data they have gathered. The answers varied from re-reading notes, using colours and clustering data to using methods such as the six-thinking hats (De Bono 1985).

One designer even said:

*“If there is anyone who doesn't analyze that is no designer. Design solves problems of needs.”*  
(Survey 2015)

This notion is interesting and some recipients said they do not go through their materials that much since the insights are already in their head. So if they do not necessarily systematically go through their materials again, does it mean that they do not analyse them? It would seem by the answers that there was a difference between how much designers trust their memory.

Many saw it very important to refresh their memory with the original notes they had made. Going back to these original materials later in the process to gain new light in the findings was also mentioned. Going back to the materials was mentioned more when they were collected by the designers themselves and not by someone else.

An experienced designer summarized the analysis by saying:

*“Repetition creates a better understanding of your own thoughts, ideas and reflections”*  
(Survey 2015)

I find myself reflecting on this particular participant’s answers a lot. The notions of reflexivity and understanding one’s personal thoughts resonate with my findings and conclusions very well. However, I want to bring forth the possibility of contradicting statements too, which make it clear that this kind of process does not suit or interest everyone. Looking back at the answers I would argue that all designers analyse their data in some way, some using conscious reflexivity and others perhaps more intuitively and without realising it.

The final question I will delve into was: Do you ever systematically analyse your previous encounters with the group you are designing for?

I should have made this question open-ended since the few answers in the open response section were fascinating. One respondent acknowledged something that had also been brought up before in the survey.

He said that:

*“I KNOW what I am after when designing with the particular target audience, but I don’t quantify anything or look into studies with hard data. Maybe I should, but I fear it will turn my design process less into a creative process and more into a scientific research with perfectly tailored but soul-less results.”*  
(Survey 2015)

This idea of losing the ability to be creative with “hard data” is something that I have often heard in discussions about creativity. I wonder if the problem is that since hard data is considered true, therefore, one can only draw logical conclusions out of it, or that since it is often used in environments that promote logical thinking, it feels wrong to use it creatively? Whatever the case may be, Raami argues in her research that the most gifted designers have the ability to access and use different cognitive styles and modes of thinking in order to think holistically, (Raami 2015, 29) meaning that rational and intuitive thinking do not need to be mutually exclusive but rather used in sync.

One of my favourite answers from the survey was to the question about whether the respondents ever analyse their previous encounters with the group they are designing for. To which one respondent answered:

*“Only when something goes wrong “*  
(Survey 2015)

This very honest response made me think how often it is that we do not think about our views or preferences before someone makes us question them. We cannot consider problems that we do not see, understand or experience ourselves. Only when a product or service gets through a process for us to conclude that in the end it does not do anything or that it even hurts the people we were trying to help, we take a step back and think about what we actually know about these people and whether it is based on reality or our personal assumptions.

When and if design and production teams are homogenous, there is a chance that all the designers have similar sets of worldviews and assumptions that no-one questions. These assumptions then define whom they pick to interview and ask to participate in the process. If we recognize that prejudice is a part of human cognition (as I argued earlier in this thesis), we benefit from making sure that we are aware of our personal assumptions and cognitive limitations and therefore, know when they might be affecting our decisions.



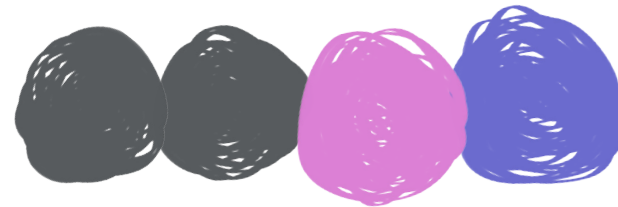
## 4.2 Interviews

I conducted three official designer interviews for my thesis. In addition to these, I also consulted with Ilkka Kettunen who is the head of teaching design at Savonia University of Applied Sciences. Kettunen wrote his doctoral dissertation about using autoethnography in the design process and his insights helped me greatly when I was trying to determine how to make sense of the topic. (I. Kettunen, interview 17.10.2015)

The conducted interviews are written as narratives as is customary for autoethnography. Ellis describes autoethnographies as

*“aesthetic and evocative thick descriptions of personal and interpersonal experience. They accomplish this by first discerning patterns of cultural experience evidenced by field notes, interviews, and/or artifacts, and then describing these patterns using facets of storytelling (e.g., character and plot development), showing and telling, and alterations of authorial voice.”*  
(Ellis 2011)

While the following interviews are written as narratives, they do not fully meet Ellis’s requirements for evocative autoethnography.



## 4.2.1 Interview with Lotta Julkunen and Jukka Isosaari

First of the interviews is the one I conducted at Hellon – a service design agency in Helsinki – with two of their service designers. The designers I interviewed were Lotta Julkunen and Jukka Isosaari who both have a Bachelor's degree in industrial design. Lotta Julkunen completed her Master's degree in innovation design engineering and Jukka Isosaari in industrial design while focusing on designing services. The points I saw relevant to the research are covered below.

The first interview question I ask is if the designers have a certain project in mind where they had a personal connection to the topic somehow. Julkunen starts by mentioning that quite often the projects are about services and concepts we use in our everyday lives. For example, when working for an electricity company you have probably received an electricity bill at some point in your life or when designing for a pharmacy you have most likely been to a pharmacy before. So instead of having one project that is uniquely personal there have been many which had an everyday connection to her life. Isosaari says that he often thinks about his experiences using comparable services in other fields such as when, for example, designing an experience for air travel he might remem-

ber a negative experience he had buying tickets for a concert and decide not to repeat that mistake in this context. Similarly with positive experiences, he tries to think about how those experiences would translate into this context. Especially when working in a team setting, he would then share his experiences and compare them with others. Julkunen adds that she would often think about whether or not she had used a similar service somewhere abroad and then try to remember these unique concepts to explore them for the current project.

I ask if Julkunen and Isosaari think that being abroad and being out of the familiar cultural context helps in noticing differences in behaviour and ways of seeing their surroundings. Julkunen says that she noticed that her senses are more alert and she thinks about mundane things a lot more when she is in a different culture and when everyday things and actions are not automatic. Isosaari adds that this might be because we have specific expectations for our native habitats where we know and expect services to work in a certain way. Abroad, or in an unfamiliar setting, we are observant to those small differences because we are not on autopilot and we have to be present in

the moment. He mentioned an example of visiting a pharmacy abroad and wondering why the staff came and talked to him about the weather. This small detail stuck with him because it was different from what he was used to. Julkunen adds that she has noticed a difference between the roles of sales people in the UK and Finland. In the UK, sales people act as themselves when dealing with customers whereas in Finland sales people often have a particular salesperson character they play at work and they leave their personalities at home.

Julkunen mentions that the topic of my thesis is interesting because while of course we have certain expectations of services when starting a new project, it is surprising how objectively she feels she can start examining them, especially when observing participants and conducting research. I ask whether she puts her experiences aside and forgets them when doing this or tackles and dismantles them somehow. She says that she usually first puts them aside and tries to approach the subject objectively and then later compares the objective insights with observations and her personal experiences. Isosaari responds that he also tries to forget his experiences even though it is sometimes difficult. He says that sometimes the process of thinking about participant groups and their needs is very easy, and in these cases he comes back to his personal experiences, later

on, to reflect on which participant group he would be a part of. Sometimes, at this point, he might notice that he is not a part of any existing group under study, and that may help him in addressing new problems by using his perspective for comparisons between experiences. Isosaari comments that he has not ever consciously thought about these things before we dive deeper in the questions.

Julkunen brings up visual design as an example of gathering material into your subconscious mind. She notes that in the end, you may think that you have created the end result on your own when in reality it is more likely a combination of things you have seen before. She wonders whether that is also the case when designing services and if personal experiences have a way of sneaking in there, too. Isosaari comments on the value of authentic experiences and their role in creating empathy for the people you are designing for.

*“An authentic experience is always an authentic experience, whose ever it may be”*

Isosaari concludes.

Julkunen compares service design with more traditional design; you can often see the influences that the designer has had. Service designers, however, work from the client’s point of view, and

when they offer new ideas and concepts for participants to consider, it is hard to say how much of the chosen concepts are guided by the designer's assumptions and conclusions. To this Isosaari replies that one of the biggest dilemmas in designing is the role of intuition. While there is a lot of gathered data and objective client understanding that drives the project forward, there is also the designer's gut feeling of why a particular idea seems better than something else. Isosaari wonders just how much of the ideas are based on the designer's personal history and experiences?

When Julkunen continues with *“And how much of the ideas are based on the subconscious knowledge that the designers have come across or realised when reading about for example megatrends for the future. Sometimes it is hard to remember what exactly you are basing your knowledge on or if you are unconsciously referencing something.”*

To which Isosaari replies *“This is where we try and test things,”* Julkunen nods in agreement and concludes *“This is where we can compare the concept purely based on data with the designer's educated intuitive solution and see which brings better results,”*.

Julkunen points out that she believes that we as humans register a lot more than we consciously know of and that the findings and suggestions can be based on that intuitive knowledge even when do not know it. Julkunen's argument is supported by Asta Raami's doctoral dissertation *Intuition Unleashed*, where Raami argues that especially when dealing with very complex problems our

*“capacity for rational, analytical thinking is not enough. The analytical mind chokes with too many options, and it starves when there is a lack of information — With such constraints, the intuitive faculties can operate with higher accuracy than conscious reasoning.”*  
(Raami 2015, 33-34)

After a while of discussing designer's intuition and creativity in general Isosaari mentions that he does not know whether it is a personality trait or something that designers learn in their education, but that designers effortlessly dream and imagine things that do not yet exist. He also mentions that when, for example, facilitating workshops, it often helps to tell a personal story that makes you human in the eyes of the participants to break the ice. Julkunen continues that her favourite way of starting workshops is to ensure that the worst ideas are always brought up first, so the pressure to come up with rational ideas vanishes.



I ask the designers if they have ever had projects where their personal experience was in conflict with participant experiences. Isosaari says that even when you cannot honestly relate to participant experiences personally, the answer can usually be found in differences in, for example, age, sex or background. Julkunen names an example of working on a medical project where she personally was uncomfortable with the device in use but she soon realised that people she was designing it for did not have a problem with it.

Julkunen's example makes me wonder that when focus groups are put together, the minority of users who are uncomfortable with the device might not be included in the panel. When the designer involved has that experience, they bring the voice of the minority into the process even when there is no one representing them in the focus group. In these cases, the designer's experience can represent a larger group that has been otherwise excluded from the process and, therefore, it can have more weight than it does in other projects. Different experiences around the project topics and the fact that designers are fluent in certain processes – whether by trade or the age and social group they represent – can create fruitful contrasts for comparing experiences between participants and designers.

In addition to designers and participants themselves, the existing networks of designers often have a voice in the process. Isosaari mentions that when he worked on a brief regarding busy entrepreneurs, he talked to his friends who fit the focus group to have their opinions. The reason he found these informal interviews beneficial is that he knew these people very well and, therefore, had knowledge of their lives and personalities and knew they would have no reason to say something just to look good. Julkunen agrees and says that she often talks to people she knows and who have relevant experience regarding the briefs. She also adds that these are an addition to all of the other research methods and they do not replace other interviews that take place in the process.

I ask the designers how they interpret the word empathy. Isosaari responds that he goes back to his personal experiences. When he does not have experience in the particular encounter, he tries to think of a time when he experienced similar feelings about something else. The goal is to feel similar emotions as the participants in the encounters under study. He adds that of course whenever possible he tries to go out and have the particular experience, but when dealing with complex issues, it is not always possible. Julkunen thinks about the term and says that she often does mental exercises where, for example, when she sees

someone in a wheelchair starts thinking about how long they have been in the chair and what kind of obstacles they may face in their everyday lives. She notes that this does not always work since there are limits to what you know about others in different situations. As an example, she brings up the experiences of refugees and the fact that since she did not grow up in a war zone, there are limits to what she can imagine. Isosaari nods in agreement. Julkunen adds that it is important to remember that you cannot make generalisations about your one-day experience in a wheelchair or about one interview since there are always a million others with different experiences about the same thing. Isosaari notes that it is important to develop a sense of understanding others so you can learn to interpret what people say between the lines.



*“Somehow since you deal with your personal experiences inside your head they rarely make it on paper”*, Lotta thinks out loud when we start discussing methods for our processes.

She analyses other parts of her process on paper and touches on the notion that since experiences and memories are in your head, you maybe feel that you do not have to draw them out because you think you can visit them anytime. Isosaari smiles and says that it seems almost weird now that we analyse others so much and spend so little time thinking about our own attitudes and behaviour. He then remembers that he does create journey maps of his personal experiences at the beginning of the design process.

(J. Isosaari & L. Julkunen, personal communication 7.12.2015)

## 4.2.1 Interview with Núria Solsona

The second interviewee is Núria Solsona. Solsona is a senior service designer at LiveWork, one of the very first service design companies in the world. Before LiveWork, she first worked and studied graphic design in her hometown Barcelona and then moved to London to complete her Master's degree in innovation management.

The first thing I ask Solsona is what kinds of projects she has worked on while she has worked in service design. She says that she has worked on many different types of projects – often related to transport – that have varied by industry, size of the project, its impact, the nature of the challenge and the team settings. Sometimes the clients have a new service design team that they want to create capabilities for and other times it is about making an organizational change.

*“For me, it is a big project when it makes a big impact on the organisation”* Solsona says.

Her favourite projects have been connected with either transport as a sector or been about organizational change. She points out that all projects are about organizational change because when you redesign a service the operations are eventu-

ally impacted. Creating customer-centred services demands new ways of working and this means breaking silos within organisations and shifting from processes to a customer outcomes mind-set. Most of Solsona's projects have been with international companies and in global settings.

I ask Solsona if she knows where her interest in organizational change comes from and she replies that it comes from frustration. When she worked in graphic design, she realised that to create real change, you need to understand which part of the company ecosystem your department is in and that there are departments that function as executors to someone else's vision. She wanted to create real change within the organisations and says that sometimes she saw projects that did not work out because the people did not see the whole picture and, therefore, did not understand what they were doing. They would try and understand clients' needs, but the gathered information would not necessarily move forward.

I ask Solsona how she ended up working on international briefs at LiveWork. She remembers that her first project was for a Spanish customer, and one thing led to another and since she was happy to travel she had organically built a

reputation of working on international projects. She mentions that since her life is not rooted in one place, culture or language, she is open to new things and that openness created her the expertise to work internationally.

Solsona acknowledges that being from a different culture can be both good and bad in a project. On the one hand, you have some distance to the subject but, on the other hand, you do not have all the knowledge about the culture. She adds that the consulting designers work in very close collaboration with the local teams because the locals are the ones that can tell them what works. Solsona emphasizes that it is important to build the services together with the locals and that the solutions must be run by the people who will stay with the project to avoid the dependency on the designers who will eventually leave.

She names a project in Thailand where they had the locals conduct the interviews so that they would be carried out in their mother tongue and that the designers were there to provide the tools, understanding and frameworks. Solsona says that as a foreigner you maybe have a vague idea of what is happening in the country and that is just not enough to understand everything. As an example, she mentions paying for public transport. In Catalonia it is not considered bad if you do not

pay for it whereas in Finland the whole system is based on trust and almost everyone pays. In Catalonia, people do not trust the system and continually challenge it.

I inquire if Solsona utilizes the experiences from her previous projects when working on the current ones and she replies that she builds understanding on how to deal with people. She says that you learn about listening, how hierarchies work and how to read relationships between people in the workspace. She mentions that it is crucial to understand the business culture and as an example she offers the concept of a workshop. For example, in Thailand people will not present their ideas naturally if there is a person with seniority in the room with them. So in the case of Thailand designers cannot assume that people from all levels can discuss and suggest improvements in the same space together. When you understand these things, you can take them into consideration when conducting interviews and deciding on what methods to use in the process.

Solsona brings up that service designers are less reluctant to try new things, meet new people and that they expose themselves to new situations. As an example for her, moving to Finland was not a big deal because she sees the world as a connected whole.

I ask if she differentiates between personal and professional experiences much and she replies that she does not. She believes in prototyping, both in her professional and personal life. When she, for example, prototyped a long distance relationship for a week, she found that variables such as the quality of the Internet connection affected the experience in unexpected ways.

I bring up the notion of objectivity and Solsona wonders if we are ever able to achieve that. She mentions that it is important to work with other people and to use various methods. She also mentions that since service designers are very much in touch with their clients, they hear so much from them. They also see many projects tackling the same issues that these issues get quickly put in the same packet and get offered the same solution. She says it is important that we do not filter and misinterpret things people say to us but that it is also difficult since we are all people and users at the end of the day. The most important aspect is to make sure we have different perspectives and inputs and she does not worry about it too much since the process includes constant checking with other people.

As a service designer you offer people ideas and validate them, and then you create visuals and validate those as well. So it is about validating and

testing all the time.

*“We touch base constantly with our customers and clients to make sure we are aligned which is important because we cannot detach ourselves from who we are.”* she explains.

Solsona thinks about the difference between being objective and curious and mentions that in her opinion designers are curious by nature, and they are genuinely interested in the person they are talking to.

She mentions that since service design is more about the qualitative than the quantitative, the knowledge is more tacit. She thinks that it is important when, for example, interviewing to separate oneself from their professional role and brief and focus on really trying to understand what this person is saying.

*“So do not detach from yourself because then we detach from being humans and that is what makes us closer to understanding people”* Solsona concludes.

The highest value that she thinks service designers provide to customers is that they help their clients see how they in turn see their customers, how often that view is incomplete and how diverse these people in fact are.

Solsona tells me about the backgrounds of the employees at LiveWork and mentions that even though they are almost all from design backgrounds, there are variations between projects. Even though they all have the same solid tools to use they are all different and, therefore, the projects turn out differently depending on who works on them. The personalities and dynamics of people in both the design team and the client's team affect the results. She points out that her answers to my questions are most likely different from the replies a colleague of hers might give.

By detaching from the brief Solsona means that it is important to allow uncertainty and make space for surprises. Changes and incidents will happen and in service design, we have to create things that work for a lot of people.

*“Listen first and then build on that.”* She says and carries on with *“In most of the cases we won't fix the problem by creating something new, but we might fix it by making it more efficient or adapting the internal processes for the staff. Better communicating is key.”*

She says that especially with complex global companies the product or service might seem very simple to the end-user but for the company it can be super complicated.

Especially when they have different processes for offering the same service in the various countries

*“Let's start simplifying the operations within the organisation first and then we can talk about service innovation.”* Solsona suggests.

(N. Solsona, personal communication 10.12.2015)



### 4.2.3 Interview with Paula Bello

The third and final interview is with Paula Bello. Bello completed her BA in Mexico and came to Finland for her Master's degree where she ended up doing her doctorate as well. Bello met the KONE head of design Anne Stenroos on a project and then joined the design team at KONE. By the end of her time at KONE they had built a service design team within the company. At the time of writing this thesis Bello works as design consultant.

I start by asking about the team settings at KONE. Bello responds that the teams in these settings are huge and there are people from all over the world as well as from multiple disciplines working on the projects. Bello mentions that she currently works on her family's hotel business in Mexico and in that context she puts design tools to use in a business perspective whereas at KONE she strictly represented the design department. One difference between the two is that with the family business Bello knows the people she works with while at KONE she knew the design team but the changing extended teams were remote and, therefore, the people were not as familiar. I ask if she thinks that the personalities within the team affected the results where Bello replies that they did.

Especially since the teams were very international and people came from different cultures and backgrounds. Even the time difference has a surprising effect since when you are working with people from three continents it is always midnight for someone in the team. So the differences can vary from such practical matters to variations in ideologies and ways of working. Bello mentions China as an example of a place where the hierarchies present a challenge for some of the participatory design methods. Similarly to Solsona's example from Thailand, in China where people are expected to agree with the highest ranking person in the room it can be difficult to gain honest answers and worries from the people. Bello says that this is where the local people who can read between the lines and help adapt the methods are crucial for success.

Bello mentions that since her design career has mostly been outside of Mexico she has therefore had an experience of seeing things from a different perspective. She says that all your previous experiences affect you; your history, the context and the situation as well as the fact that design is a small piece of the big puzzle. So there a lot of compromise and negotiating that occurs between these different pieces. At KONE the design team

works on one piece of the puzzle and the most difficult part according to Bello is the communication between departments and teams. Since KONE is a complex organisation with complicated products working in global markets, there is always a project owner or manager overseeing the process as a whole. Before coming to work at KONE, Bello worked on projects in crafts and curating. Her previous experience with the technical side of design and engineering were the conversations between her father and brother who were very much into cars.

Bello mentioned that working on a project in Mexico with KONE was one of the easiest, since she understood the processes that had been created in Finland as well as the Mexican culture where they were being applied. She mentions that there were aspects, such as chaos, that she found easier to understand because of her background. She first learned to manage different ways of doing things when she was the coordinator of twenty international design students who had to manage the university cafeteria for two weeks. From this challenge Bello also learned that it is okay to make mistakes and that is how you learn.

She says that the best way to argue concepts to others is through stories. As an example she mentions stories told by customers themselves and

the impact they have on, for example, the marketing people working on the briefs. Bello thinks that it is very hard to shut down the view of the customer especially when there is more than one of them saying the same thing. When Bello compares the world of a multinational organisation with the academia, she mentions that there is a great difference regarding time. In academia you have time to think about things and prepare for them whereas in the business world you have to gain results and the whole process is more iterative and agile.

I ask what Bello thinks she learned during her time at KONE. She explains that she has never been in such a complex context and she learned that it is about trying to understand the situations and the dynamics of a situation and not whether you are an engineer or a business professional. She mentions that it is also crucial to listen to the people you work with and not just the customers. Sometimes designers are wrong. You also have to find the balance between listening and being loud and pushing your ideas or they will never happen.

The last question I ask Bello is how she feels about objectivity in design where she replies,

*“More than objective you have to be in a way coherent.”*



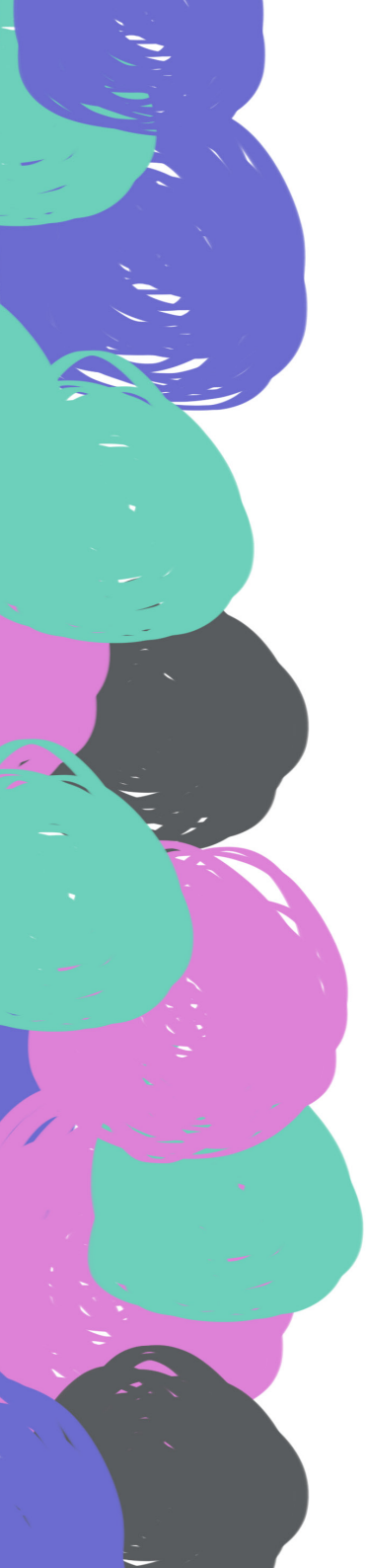
She adds that there are elements of objectivity in the process but also of instinct and sometimes it is possible to translate subjective things such as customer opinions into a framework that is more measurable. So the question is not as much subjective versus objective but rather about being able to measure things. The importance of measuring is to be able to compare things, for example, before and after or between two concepts.

Bello says that she does not know if you can be objective even when you apply strict methodologies for gathering and analysing data since nothing is black and white.

*“There are always colours”* she concludes.

(P. Bello, personal communication 8.2.2016)







## RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

## RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

This thesis has given me a deeper understanding in how designers work within their briefs, and it has allowed me to ask questions that have sparked many interesting conversations. The research started with a single method and developed into an exploration of how designers reflect on their processes and why might they want to.

When I started the research, it was a lot more about justifying why one person's (in this case the designer's) experiences should not be ignored. The more I talked to designers in the field, however, the more I learned that it is quite rare to have briefs that somehow touch the big questions of life, and the day to day work is more about topics that do not necessarily move us as individuals that much. In these cases, it is easier to approach the subject without a strong presence of emotions and the process is organically more objective. We observe others and make deductions without having to make ourselves vulnerable. After writing the previous sentence, I realise that all this time I have thought the opposite of objectivity is subjectivity while in my head, unarticulated, it has been vulnerability. With vulnerability, I mean the kind of empathy where you put yourself out there and expose yourself to the possibility of being hurt or delighted among the people you are with.

Ellis mentions that writing itself is a method of

enquiry and that we learn about ourselves while writing. (Ellis, Adams & Bochner 2011) I agree with Ellis since most of the big aha moments I have had during the process have been while writing the text.

Hermeneutics offer excellent tools for exploring the field of design and the ways in which designers work within their briefs. When talking to designers, I realised that most of them were very interested in reflecting on their processes, and they were genuinely surprised that they had not thought about them before. Just bringing up the critical perspective had an impact on the way people think. It would be interesting to see how sparking this kind of critical conversation would affect the way in which designers work or think on a larger scale.

The process of writing this thesis has certainly made me much more aware and conscious about the choices I make when I do not necessarily know I am making them. The theories that explore memory and creative thinking as well as the cognitive traps (as discussed in Chapter 3) are limited, and there is still a lot we do not know about how creative processes work. Luckily we can do a lot by deciding to be more aware and start paying attention to how these known mechanisms work. (Hinton 2000, 77-79)

The hermeneutic circle offers designers touch points that help them explore both their briefs and their ways of working more critically. This kind of critical reflection could be very beneficial in for example the complex international design processes covered in the interviews with Núria Solsona and Paula Bello. Acknowledging cultural differences and the differences in ideologies and backgrounds is crucial to making international projects work as Paula Bello mentioned in her interview. (P. Bello, personal communication 8.2.2016) It is often easier to see the need for this kind of reflection when the differences between people and cultures are radical, but it is equally important to remember that no two people have the exact same experiences, even when they share their environment and culture. (Varto 1992, 102)

I mentioned in the beginning of this chapter that most of the design briefs do not necessarily resonate with the designers on a very deep level. In these cases they might not have experiences directly related to the brief. If we do not have an immediate relationship with the subject, a good rule of thumb for checking if our personal experiences have weight in the process is the one Keren Solomon offered in her study. If we would be chosen as research participants for the research, our ex-

perience can be valuable to the project. (Solomon 2010, 75-76)

As Jukka Isosaari mentioned in his interview it can also be helpful to compare your personal experience with the participant's to see if there are interesting intersections or notions that add new layers to the project. (J. Isosaari, personal communication 7.12.2015) From a personal growth perspective it can be meaningful to explore these questions even on projects that might not at first seem very personal.

## The Autoethnographic Designer

Personal growth is central to the idea of an autoethnographic designer as described in Picture 9. Ilkka Kettunen drew the original sketch for this picture after our meeting about autoethnography. The picture's goal was to both summarize what we had discussed and to conclude how autoethnography could fit within the design process. I dug out the picture when I was finishing the conclusion chapter for my thesis and was pleasantly surprised that even though I had moved to themes outside of autoethnography my findings were still very much in line with how Kettunen had summarized our discussion about the autoethnographic designer.

To me an autoethnographic designer is not someone who strictly designs using autoethnographic methods but someone who sees the process as a whole, perhaps utilizes tools from hermeneutics or other critical disciplines and acknowledges their limitations while growing professionally and as a person.

Picture 9 divides designers into three categories. The first of the three is the unreflective designer who merely carries out the task of designing.

The second is the reflective designer who deliberates and debates with the situation at hand but is not aware of the process. The third is the autoethnographic designer, who both acknowledges and accepts his or her own preconceptions and grows and changes in the process. The autoethnographic designer recognises that they are set in a time and place and that by openly examining these with their experiences and the gathered data, they can give their readers tools to interpret their narratives and results more comprehensively.

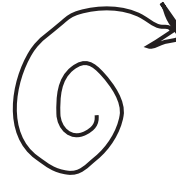
Designers utilize their personal experiences in their design processes and some of them are more aware of these processes than others. The designers I interviewed for my research and talked to during the process found the topic interesting to talk about and started reflecting on their processes very comfortably.

UNREFLECTIVE  
DESIGNER



carries out  
the task

REFLECTIVE  
DESIGNER



discusses with the situation  
(is not aware of the process)

AUTO-  
ETHNOGRAPHIC  
DESIGNER



acknowledges and accepts  
their preconceptions & grows



open & public process

PICTURE 9. THE THREE TYPES OF DESIGNERS

Both in the survey results and in the interviews it became clear that there are as many ways to reflect and make use of personal experiences, as there are designers. The differences lie in how designers articulate the use of these experiences to their clients, research participants and colleagues and whether they have reflected on the subject before discussing it. Some designers also question and modify their design tools more than others and make themselves more vulnerable in the process by for example sharing personal stories and experiences when interacting with people.

Many design tools that are used to study others can also be used on the designers themselves. In the future I would like to see more discussion around the role of values and motivations in design as well as critical reflection on why certain methods are considered automatically valid while others are criticised without knowing much about them. Values and attitudes define whom designers and researchers choose to participate in their research and therefore even human-centred design practices do not automatically include all relevant groups of people. When we do not know a group of people or experiences exist we cannot include them in the process. It is vital that we start to discuss and recognize these limitations.

In the future I hope to combine different fields of critical thinking with design thinking. I would love to work with professionals from other relevant fields and meet with designers on a much larger scale to understand what kinds of processes take place in the field and provoke conversation around the subject.

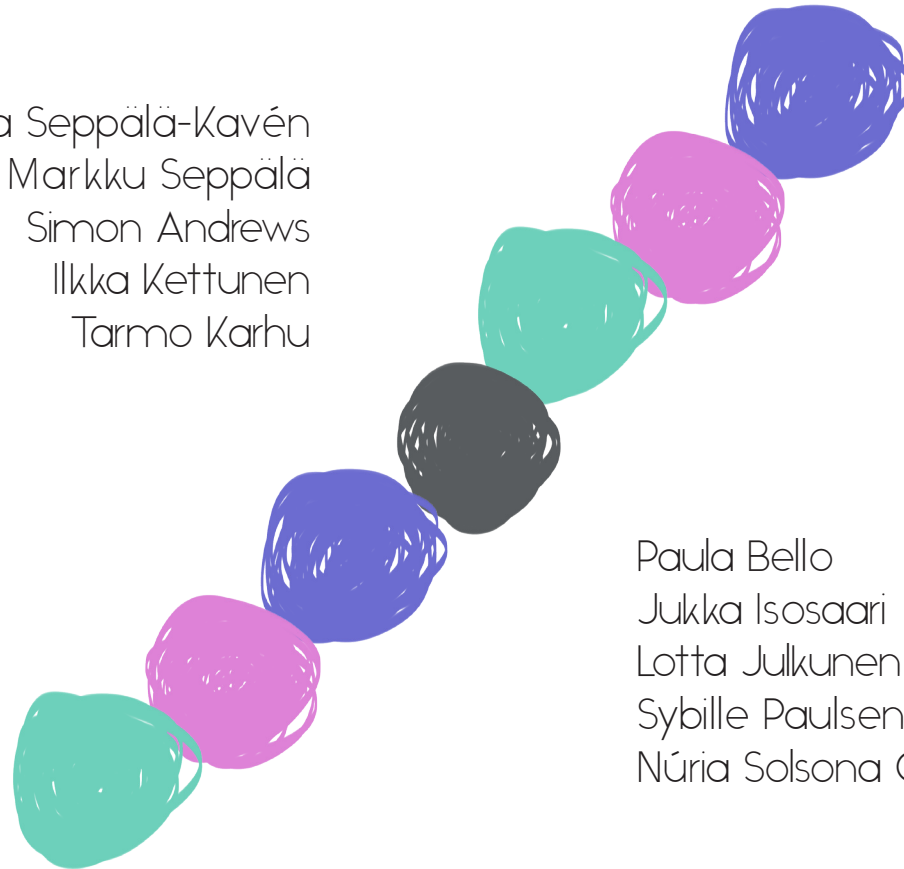
In conclusion, exploring your personal experiences becomes especially important in complex international teams where the personal attributes and backgrounds of the team members have a more direct impact on the project. In these kinds of complex settings the suggested tools such as the hermeneutic circle and autoethnography can help designers make sense of the project and their place in it. They can also help in discussing complex situations and problems as well as trigger conversation about the motivations and values that define the processes and therefore the results.





# THANK YOU

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# APPENDIX 1

## The questions used in the in-depth interviews in Chapter 4

1. What kind of projects have you worked on?
2. Where any of them of personal significance?
3. Or about topics/ group of people you know well?
4. If not, how do you try to empathize with the users?
5. How do you document your process outside the team settings?
6. Do you share your personal experiences in interviews or workshops?
7. What do you do if your personal experience is conflicted with the user experience?
8. What do you think about objectivity?

# APPENDIX 2

## The questions used in the survey in Chapter 4

1. Do you use your personal experiences in your design process?
2. How do you explain your choices to others if they are based on personal experience or intuition?
3. Do you utilize the following methods as a part of your design process:  
*Traditional diary (written entries), Notebook for sketches and random thoughts, Camera for documenting interesting ideas, Video diary, Voice recording, Blog, Other (please specify)*
4. Do you analyse the data you've gathered using previous methods?  
*Yes, Not really I never watch/read/listen to the data afterwards and Other (please specify)*
5. How do you analyse them / Why don't you analyse them?
6. Do you ever systematically analyse your previous encounters with the group you're designing for?
7. Name your favourite design research methods? (e.g.interviews, shadowing etc.) Why do you like them?
8. Would you like to have tools for utilizing your personal experiences in the design process?
9. How long have you been practicing design?
10. What is your job role? In what country do you work?



