



HDK - HÖGSKOLAN FÖR DESIGN OCH KONSTHANTVERK

# (re)Forming Accounts of Ethics in Design: Anecdote as a Way to Express the Experience of Designing Together

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# Abstract

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Designers and design researchers routinely engage other people in shaping preferred futures. Despite a growing recognition of designing as a social practice, however, the ethics of engagement often only appear ‘between the lines’ of the accounts design researchers provide about their experiences designing together. In a practice that often dances between exploration and exploitation, design researchers who overlook the ethics permeating their work can easily perpetuate systems that do more harm than good. To tackle perils that often appear subtly and ambiguously in designing together, the design research community needs to enhance ethical learning.

On the ground, ethics does not present itself as dilemmas of principle, but as part of experience. Common forms of accounting for experience, however, often leave out the qualities, feelings, and emotions that play an essential role in guiding the conduct of design researchers. Through this research project, I highlight potential for the artistic—as a form communication that brings forward the qualitative dimension of experience through expression—to open up new avenues for reflecting on the ethics of designing together.

The investigation addresses the ethics of everyday conduct—ethics in practice—and how to account for experiences of it. Based on three practice-based design research projects, I use creative writing to develop a series of anecdotes that express the interconnections among experience, engagement, and ethics in designing together. Building on the work of pragmatist philosopher John Dewey, I develop an approach to accounting that emphasizes qualitative experience in practice and in communication.

The outcomes of the investigation contribute to design research by showing that, if designers want to communicate experience, they need to express it. Three parts of the thesis support this overall contribution. First, I show that the design research community has neglected the expression of experience. Second, I make a pragmatist theoretical framework accessible to design researchers, who can use it as support for maintaining the unity of experience in their own expressive accounts. Third, I make a methodological contribution by providing concrete examples of how to express experience through the development of anecdotes based on particular moments. Ultimately, this research investigation shows that matching the unruly ethics of designing together requires communicating experience through expressive forms that can broaden the ethical sensitivities of design researchers.