

Unpacking Inscriptions

A sociomateriality perspective on
the design process of a milk package

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Today's trend of fast-paced innovation in the field of, for example, information technology results in an acclaim of quick changes. At the same time, product innovation is only one facet of market offerings as industry standard comprise multiple interests that stabilize object characteristics, something which complicates change. Such industry standards are not unique to advanced technological objects. This thesis illustrates how the design process of a milk package, an exemplary piece of a mundane engineered object, is dependent on inscriptions wherein various interests and expert knowledge shape how this milk package is engineered and used in a practical setting.

This thesis starts out from an object perspective to explore the milk package's design process, but also emphasizes the environment and the specific conditions through which it travels. Based on a sociomateriality perspective, the study emphasizes a relational ontology and identifies the social and material conditions that influence the design of an engineered object. Over its lifespan, the milk package is used in different contexts and for different purposes (e.g., as a container of food, an item in a logistic system, and waste product) which emphasize various actors' interests. On the basis of these mechanisms, the milk package is best described as an 'engineered object multiple' wherein what the thesis describes as *inscription domains* play a key role in determining the physical, aesthetic, and symbolic properties of the object.

The concept of inscription domains enable detailed exploration of how an object is stabilized (or modified) by multiple interests, as advanced by various actors. Seen this way, new design processes unfold on the basis of previous inscriptions and become the result of compromises between different, and sometimes conflicting, interests. Based on this specific case on the engineering of the milk package, a number of theoretical contributions as well as managerial and policy implications are formulated, but so too are calls for more studies of how mundane engineered objects are constitutive of everyday life.

Keywords: sociomateriality, inscription domains, negotiation process, mundane engineered objects, milk package, design process

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