Pleasures, participation or practices? Unpacking the black box of designing in and with organizations

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PLEASURES, PARTICIPATION OR PRACTICES? UNPACKING THE BLACK BOX OF DESIGNING IN AND WITH ORGANIZATIONS

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ABSTRACT
As a contribution to the field of design management, this paper responds to the uptake of design in organizations by developing and fleshing out a relational approach. The dominating approaches are methodological and cognitive, putting the human designer and her capabilities front and center. In contrast, the relational approach pays close, empirical attention to how designerly contributions come into being as the designer relates to her organization. Thereby, the relational approach enables a more critical understanding of what organizations and designers can achieve together. We unfold our arguments through ethnographic accounts of crucial moments in a development project concerning workplace design. These ethnographic moments were crucial, as they questioned what we could achieve together. We suggest evaluating such achievements through three distinct modes of designing: 1) Designing for human pleasures, 2) Designing for human participation, and 3) Designing for socio-material practices.

INTRODUCTION
In recent years, many designers have left behind the design studio to employ their competencies in other organizational settings. Nevertheless, what can, and should designers do in and with organizations? The field of design management gives some answers. Here it is suggested that managers and organizations today would do well to adopt a “design attitude,” implying that managers “would [then] approach problems with a sensibility that swept in the broadest array of influences to shape inspiring and energizing designs for products, services, and processes that are both profitable and humanly satisfying” (Boland & Collopy, 2004: 3). Richard J. Boland and Fred Collopy, both professors in management, develop this design attitude by contrasting it with what they term a “decision attitude”: “In a clearly defined and stable situation, when the feasible alternatives are well known, a decision attitude may be the most efficient and effective way to approach problem-solving. But when those conditions do not hold, a design attitude is required. The decision attitude and the analytic tools managers have to support it were developed in a simpler time” (Boland & Collopy, 2004: 4).

But how, more precisely, to unfold this design attitude in practice? How to make sure that designers aid organizations in harnessing the broadest array of influences, resulting in inspiring and energizing designs? Design researchers have responded to these questions in three distinct ways. The first response is methodological. This methodological response develops recipe-like, process-oriented models for how to work as a designer in organizations (see, for instance,
Tschimmel, 2012). The second response is cognitive, focusing on describing the cognitive styles of designers and arguing that these styles are different from those employed by non-designers (see, for instance, Dorst, 2011, 2015). The problem with these two responses is that by putting the human designer and her methodologies and cognitive abilities front and center, they neglect and make absent the organizational setting in which she operates (see, for instance, Law & Singleton, 2005). This neglect of the organizational setting hampers critical analyses of specific uptakes of design in organizational settings. Such analyses seem more needed than ever, as understandings and deployments of design have become increasingly variegated, resulting in a proliferation of purposes, hopes, and dreams attached to having designers do work in and with organizations (Julier, 2017, see also Kimbell 2011, 2012).

This paper develops a relational approach to enable critical analyses of designerly engagements with organizations. With this relational approach, we “treat everything in the social and natural worlds,” design methodologies and cognitive styles included, “as a continuously generated effect of the webs of relations within which they are located” (Law, 2009: 141). This relational approach enables us to describe and analyze how organizational specificities – specific people and artifacts, politics, and cultures, for instance – all take part in deciding what designers can and cannot do in and with organizations.

We do so through a developmental design project in which one of us, Lindek, took part, which aimed at re-designing how work was to unfold at the town hall of a municipality in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of Lindek’s engagement in the project, Lindek developed ‘the relay conversation method’. After completing the project, and as a part of Lindek’s current doctoral work, Lindek approached Petersen to discuss how the relay conversation method might be developed from a consultancy method to a method for conducting research through design, as this is one of the central ambitions for her doctoral work. “Well, is designing only about enabling conversations?” Petersen asked. This question prompted Lindek to give a detailed account of the project. It became clear that the town hall managers, employees, and artifacts had drawn Lindek into their specific understandings of what a designer like her had to offer their specific organization.

An organization like the town hall can, in a relational approach, be understood as “an exercise in ordering” (Law, 1994: 43), and in the following, we will tease out three such ordering attempts: designing for human pleasure, designing for human participation, and designing for socio-material practices. We aim to show how such ordering attempts enable specific organization-artifact-designer configurations, and point to “artful integrations” (Suchman & Bishop 2000) of the designer’s work rather than a take-it-or-leave-it revolutionizing value-creation. By forwarding these configurations, we wish to enable less heroic and more modest and situated discussions of what design can and should do in organizations.

THE PROJECT: NEW WAYS OF WORKING IN THE WAKE OF COVID-19

The project and its steering group were created by the city council of a Danish municipality. The COVID-19 pandemic gave the town hall managers and employees new experiences with working remotely. The city council wished to explore how these experiences could power the creation of new and better working practices at the town hall. This wish resulted in the project being developed as a part of the partnership agreement with our design school in June 2021. The steering group comprised 15 members (see, Figure 1).

![Figure 1: project overview](image-url)
13 were employed at the town hall, fulfilling roles such as manager, head of department, consultant, and union representative. Two, employed at our school, fulfilled the roles of design consultant and Head of Business Development. This steering group answered to the city council, which was also to approve the recommendations formulated at the end of the project process. Additionally, 5 internal working groups from the town hall were created: Interior & Design, Capacity & Rebuilding, Digitisation & IT, and Parking & Home Offices. All 5 internal working groups referred to the steering group. The last organizational construct created by the project was a project group, in which the design school had one of 6 seats. The project group’s task was to ensure that the project did not run astray by outlining three focus areas, which we outline below.

This partnership agreement reads:

“As an effect of the experiences gained with working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic, employees and management at the town hall voiced a desire to continue enabling remote work. To work remotely more extensively would enable several more departments and employees to be moved to the town hall. However, working from home also places new demands on flexible solutions.”

The requirements for these “flexible solutions” are elaborated upon in the project management framework through the three focus areas mentioned. While working from home utilizing digital solutions was adequate for completing concrete tasks, the steering group urged us to find out how working remotely could also support learning and creativity. The second focus was acknowledging the need for office spaces that embraced quiet zones, knowledge sharing, and common areas, such as the canteen and meeting rooms. This need was to be fulfilled through specific furnishings and interior design. The third focus had less to do with the COVID-19 pandemic. It highlighted, instead, that the town hall is a public building, and the steering group wished to ensure it could continue enabling trusting meetings and relations between citizens and authorities.

These 3 focus areas and the steering group’s wishes for the project to give the impression that the experiences gained during the COVID-19 pandemic had left the town hall ready for a radical re-design of its physical layout. However, the 3 focus areas came with 6 caveats, also spelled out in the project management framework:

- The building is not to be enlarged or remodeled.
- The solutions must be specific to the departments – only meeting rooms, canteen, and conversation facilities should be cross-departmental.
- The individual departments need permanent locations in the town hall.
- No fixed agreement will be made on how much the employees are allowed to work at the town hall or remotely.
- The project’s questions of where and how to work in the future spur many opinions and emotions, and therefore a co-creational process to create ownership was important.
- The project must clarify the advantages of working at the town hall or remotely.

Taken together, the complex organizational set-up of the project, including the three focus areas and the 6 caveats, left us in a bit of a pickle: On the one hand, we were met with expectations of changing everything at the town hall – its physical layout, interior design, and the working practices unfolding there. On the other hand, we were not allowed to change anything – we could not, for instance, enlarge or remodel the town hall building or experiment with the individual departments’ permanent locations. One solution was to insist that design – through the designer’s specific methodologies and cognitive abilities – can somehow clear up this mess of contrasting expectations. This solution would entail stories of a somewhat heroic designer sorting out organizational messiness all by herself. Another solution embeds the designer in the messy organizational realities and sees her methodologies and cognitive abilities as outcomes of the specific ways she “relates to the object of study and to the socio-material collective in which he or she operates” (Vikkelso, 2007: 298). It is this second option we unfold here, as it allows us to bring to the fore and discuss what kinds of value-creation design work sensitive to organizational messiness might enact.

The following sections give ethnographic accounts of three pivotal moments in the development project: an introductory meeting, setting up and completing relay conversations, and looking for unused spaces. They were pivotal because they asked Lindek to relate to the socio-material collective of the town hall in three different ways, highlighting three different ways by which she could come to create value in the project.

**ENDOWING ARTIFACTS WITH DESIGN**

At the first introductory meeting, we met the Head of HR & Administration at his town hall office. We came prepared with a ‘conversation starter’: a piece of A4 paper upon which we had printed the three themes of the project: 1) The physical layout of the town hall, 2) Online meetings, and 3) The home office. The material conversation starter was our attempt at ensuring that the conversation with the Head of HR & Administration would tell us more about what we believed to be the
project's key themes. It was also to function as a place to take notes.

The Head of HR & Administration told us he had worked at the town hall for many years. He knew every nook and cranny of the town hall and the history of every reconstruction made. He also wanted us to know this history and handed us a booklet detailing the transformations that the town hall had undergone over the years. Further, he told us about his specific vision for the transformations the project should bring about. He stressed that “furniture is important,” elaborating that “we have a lot of designer furniture and beech tables, which we would like to keep.” When we walked around the building with him, he pointed out the furniture they wanted to keep.

During the meeting, he also underlined that the white painting on the walls was non-negotiable. Earlier, employees could choose between a range of colors in a color guide when rearranging or swapping offices, but such rearranging and swapping had resulted in too many layers of paint on the town hall’s old walls. So, from now on, only white.

MODE I: DESIGNING FOR HUMAN PLEASURE

What to make of this meeting? The conversation underscored that the Head of HR & Administration had specific expectations as to what we, as designers, could and should be able to do in his organization, that is, the town hall. He referred to us as ‘designers’ during the conversation several times. We thought he expected us to compile a new design guide on aesthetics and finish. While within our competencies, our point is that he referred to a specific version of designers and design competencies, seeking to enact a specific mode of designing.

We suggest that the central assumption within this particular mode of designing is “that design is something with which an object can be endowed” (Shove et al. 2007: 129), enabling specific human affective experiences. We were unsurprised that the Head of HR & Administration approached us with these expectations. The idea of designing as endowing products or services with ‘something’ that results in positive human experiences is perhaps the most widespread way for designers and design agencies to market their value (Shove et al. 2007: 125). Within design research, we also find a body of work that highlights and seeks to develop this mode of designing artifacts for the human experience. Desmet & Hekkert (2007), for instance, argue that the “emerging interest in user-centered design has stimulated a shift of focus from the users’ behaviour and cognition to the users’ affective experience of (and involvement in) the human-product interaction” and attempt to “develop a general framework of product experience” (Desmet & Hekkert, 2007: 57). Another critical contributor to this mode of designing is Patrick W. Jordan, who combines his backgrounds in mechanical engineering, ergonomics, and psychology in devising ways in which the designer might come to design “pleasurable products” (Jordan 2000).

While this mode of designing – designing artifacts for human pleasure – could be of value in the project, it was not the mode of designing we had envisioned we would take part in unfolding. During our tour around the town hall, we passed by the canteen. Here the Head of HR & Administration remarked that he would like to see a change from the current “cafeteria-like look,” a place designed for eating lunch, to a place where employees could meet and mingle across departments, that is, designed to take part in fostering cross-departmental collaboration. Through this remark, our interlocutor alluded to a quite different mode of designing, which came closer to our expectations, namely that we would enable the town hall employees to participate in designing the future layout of the canteen and the whole town hall.

PARTICIPATION THROUGH RELAY CONVERSATION

To enable such employee participation in the town hall’s future layout, we developed the participatory method of relay conversations. We did so in two steps.

First, we invited representatives from each of the seven existing departments on a walk and talk, where they showed us their working spaces. They told us stories about the situation right now – their experiences of work at the town hall amid the pandemic – intermingling stories of the past and hopes for the future. We distilled 6 analytical categories from these walks and talks: Possibilities, Challenges, Place, Time, Qualities, and Community.

In the second step of involving the employees, we invited 43 employees, representing the seven existing departments and the two departments moving in, to engage with us in individual relay conversations (see, Figure 2). With a pending pandemic, we decided to

![Figure 2: Relay conversation steps and duration, inspired from Sanders and Stappers “path of expression” (Sanders & Stappers 2014). Focusing first on the present, then the past, and then the future.](image-url)

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undertake all the conversations online. We used an online whiteboard upon which we had put photos of artifacts specific to the town hall environments, and floor plans as a facilitation tool.

In formulating questions for the employees involved, we took inspiration from Sanders and Stappers’ “path of expression” (Sanders & Stappers 2014). This path of expression utilizes psychological theory about memory and creativity. It asks participants to go “through the successive considering of present experiences, good and bad memories from the past, and hopes and dreams for the future” (Sanders & Stappers 2014: 8, see also Sanders & Stappers 2012). In our case, we elicited the employees’ present experiences working through a pandemic. We talked with the employees about their good and bad memories. And we asked them to detail their hopes and dreams for the future layout of the town hall. We asked the employees to tell stories from their everyday work life at the town hall, prompting them to tell us about a good and challenging day at work. We extracted the essential elements from these conversations and asked them to place them within the 6 categories developed through the walk and talks. We introduced the baton from the previous conversation and ended by having them formulate a baton. We could all see, read, rethink, and adjust the outcome by live sharing our notes on the online whiteboard.

We used an online calendar to organize the many conversations where the employees could choose a fitting timeslot. As a result, the employees were involved in random order, and the resulting relay strings were cut across all nine departments (see, figure 3).

To give an example of the contents of the relay conversations: one employee stated that our bodies are not made for sitting still in front of a screen for 7,5 hours a day. We told this employee of a colleague with whom we had had a conversation earlier, who went to get one cup of coffee at a time instead of fetching a whole pot. At a first glance, this seems like a waste of time. However, when explaining this behaviour in a later conversation, the employee pointed to the integrated exercise of body and brain, the opportunity of chance meetings with colleagues, and – of course – fresher coffee. This need for integrating bodily movement and exercise into the workday was expressed throughout the relay conversations, and later materialized as kitchenettes on each of the town hall floors.

Building on such and other analytical results of the relay conversations, we formulated 5 principles regarding the future layout of the town hall:

- Citizen- and business-oriented activities are to take place under joint official hosting.
- Outdoor spaces and exercise opportunities will be an integrated part of the layout of the town hall.
- Meeting and conversation facilities are shared by all the employees as is already the case with kitchen and canteen facilities.
- Executive offices are to be moved to smaller offices with limited meeting facilities.
- More spaces are allocated for developing ideas and for immersive work.

These 5 principles were presented to the city council, who, we were told, regarded the 5 principles as having “a nice ring to them.” The 5 principles were then approved and adopted by the city council.
MODE II: DESIGNING FOR HUMAN PARTICIPATION

In this part of the project, we engaged in and were drawn into a different mode of designing. While the first mode of designing considers how humans might get pleasure from relating to artifacts enriched with design, this second mode asks the designer to enable human participation in the design process. Design research on Participatory Design (PD) inspires this second mode of designing. Halskov & Hansen 2015, which conducts a review of all full papers from the Participatory Design Conferences (PDC) 2002-2012, offer 5 fundamental aspects of PD:

- **Politics**: People affected by a decision should be able to influence it.
- **People**: People play critical roles in design by being experts in their own lives.
- **Context**: The use situation is the fundamental starting point for the design process.
- **Methods**: Methods are means for users to gain influence in design processes.
- **Product**: Participation aims to design alternatives, improving quality of life.

All 5 fundamental aspects of PD were present in this part of the project. However, participation cannot be ensured by checking points on a list. We agree with Andersen et al. (2015), which argues that “although designers constantly consider and address participation, there is a surprising lack of detailed accounts and analyses of what constitutes participation” (Andersen et al., 2015: 252). Instead, Andersen et al. (2015), urges us always to understand participation as “a specific achievement,” which “must be accounted for as such” (Andersen et al., 2015: 251). So, what specific kind of participation did we achieve here?

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Introductory meetings | Relay-conversations

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Workshops | Report & presentation

Figure 4: Project timeline, activities, and examples of ethnographic moments. Mode I, the Head of HR & Administration specific expectations as to us. Mode II, the relay conversations. Mode III, steering group meeting about 6 chairpersons’ and 33 one-person offices.

Various kinds of workshops have been forwarded as the preferred method for designers keen to achieving participation (see, for instance, Greenbaum & Kyng 1991, and Robertson & Simonsen 2012). In this project, however, we departed from the collaborative enactment of participation that the workshop format enables by conducting individual relay conversations with the employees and letting some time pass between the conversations. Individual conversations enabled the employees to tell their stories of their daily work, bypassing existing organizational hierarchy and layers of decision-making. Letting time pass between the conversations enabled the employees involved to reflect upon their participation in the project while allowing us to mediate and inspire across relay strings (see, Figure 4). The delay between the relay conversations created an opportunity for talks in the corridors, which we encouraged by telling the employees: “If you talk to your colleagues and come up with new ideas, come to think about new perspectives, or something else, please reach out to us!”

This encouragement proved to work well. Before entering the relay conversations, several employees referred to informal conversations with colleagues. Further, employees self-organized small-scale trial-and-error experiments in their offices and meeting facilities. One example is the decision to establish kitchenettes on each floor. Another example: Employees tested how it would affect working procedures if the Head of the Secretariat moved from an individual to an open office. As designers, we know that participation can be challenging to achieve – participation is best understood as a “matter of concern” within rather than a “matter of fact” of PD (Andersen et al. 2015, see also Latour 2004).

Moreover, the specific form of participation that unfolded here did not align with the steering group’s idea of what kind of participation the project should yield. Before the relay conversations and the employees’ trial-and-error experiments, the steering group had agreed to share the baton statements of the employees involved with all employees at the town hall. This was to let them in on the contents of the relay conversations. Subsequently, this decision was reversed by the steering group. The employees’ participation had become somewhat unruly, the steering group found. The relay conversations were not only about present, past, and future work at the town hall. They also prompted transformations in daily work practices. Transformations that the steering group had not envisioned. And perhaps these transformations did not
align with the dreams of the city council, to whom the steering group was responsible.

We learn here that designing for participation can spill over into the third mode of designing, namely designing for socio-material practices. It is to this third and last mode we turn now.

**OFF-LIMITS: 6 CHAIRPERSONS’ AND 33 ONE-PERSON OFFICES**

Apart from the 5 principles for the future layout of the town hall introduced above, we were also asked to develop concluding recommendations. We approached this task by meeting up with the steering group. During the meeting, we pinpointed the challenges expressed in the relay conversations. Based on this meeting and two subsequent workshops, we transformed the 5 principles into a new layout for the town hall. The critical challenge, as already highlighted in the 5 principles, was a need for more space for unfolding a more dynamic workday while at the same time avoiding disturbing one another. One employee having online meetings in the office space, for instance, was disturbing to fellow employees, and thinking about not disturbing fellow employees was felt by other employees to restrict creativity in solving their tasks. Another concern was how to handle confidential citizen and business cases. This concern clashed with the wish to be a welcoming and open institution and would, to be solved, require spaces dedicated to confidential conversations (see, Figure 5).

![Figure 5](image)

**Figure 5:** These are examples of 2 of the 6 analytical categories: a) statement about disturbing fellow employees (Possibilities category); b) statement about sound traveling and confidentiality versus hospitality (Place category).

Walking around the town hall and mapping the layout and the use of it to find more space, we came across 6 offices on the second floor. These offices were used on Wednesdays only. We wondered why we had not been shown these 6 offices earlier on. We asked the relevant employees. While some did not know, others told us the offices belonged to the 6 committee chairpersons. They, the committee chairpersons, only used their offices on Wednesdays, where they held meetings. “Great,” we thought, “these offices can be utilized as meeting facilities on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays!” We presented this idea of dual use of the committee chairpersons’ offices to the steering group. Their faces expressed avoidance. They told us that they would get back to us later on that matter. A few days passed, and we were told we could not touch those offices as it was “a delicate political matter.”

Another example: During our work, we learned that the town hall comprised 33 one-person offices occupied by managing employees and equipped with meeting facilities. During the relay conversations managing employees and employees had all expressed a wish to keep this convenient resource, where they did not have to book nor share the meeting facilities with the other departments. Since this solution was unsustainable due to the many new colleagues at the town hall, we recommended separating offices from meeting facilities. This recommendation was, again, regarded as a delicate political matter. It was seen as “a drastic change” by the managing employees having to give up the sole occupancy of their offices. However, as shown above, it was accepted as one of the 5 principles.

**MODE III: DESIGNING FOR SOCIO-MATERIAL PRACTICES**

In this third mode of designing – designing for socio-material practices – artifacts such as an office equipped with meeting facilities are not to be endowed with design as in Mode I. Neither are the offices solely utilized to elicit human participation as in Mode II. What, then? We suggest, with analytical help from anthropologist and design researcher Arturo Escobar, that we were here drawn into what Escobar terms “ontological design” (Escobar, 2018). Escobar elaborates: “Design is ontological in that all design-led objects, tools, and even services bring about particular ways of being, knowing, and doing” (Escobar, 2018: 9).

In this part of the project, we suggested tinkering with the designed artifacts of the 6 chairpersons’ and the 33 one-person offices. Not only as something we as designers could endow with certain qualities or as written or talked about in our recommendations. But as designed artifacts that, in Escobar’s view, participate in enabling particular ways of being, knowing, and doing, that is, particular socio-material practices. Through our tinkering, the offices went from being understood as a passive container for human work to becoming “vibrant matter” (Bennett 2010). The offices’ vibrant participation in, for instance, keeping organizational hierarchies in check or, perhaps, bringing about more intense collaboration between managers and employees was a deciding force in determining what we, as
DISCUSSION

Our research question read: What can, and should designers do in and with organizations? Perhaps counter-intuitively, we approached this question by bracketing strong statements concerning our commitment to unfolding a specific design methodology or applying specific cognitive abilities belonging to only us, the designers. This bracketing allowed us, instead, to develop and tell stories about three specific modes of designing: designing for human pleasure, designing for human participation, and designing for socio-material practices. What to make of these three modes of designing? What do they tell us about what designers can and should do in and with organizations? To answer these questions, we will un bracket the human designer and discuss what she can and should do when entering organizations, working in and with organizations, and leaving organizations behind.

WHEN ENTERING ORGANIZATIONS: EMBRACING ORGANIZATIONAL MULTIPLICITY

Our notion of modes of designing is “an attempt to find a way of imputing quite general patterning strategies to the materially heterogeneous networks of the social” (Law 1994: 95), specifically the materially heterogeneous networks of designing in and with organizations. As we saw in the stories above, when the designer leaves the design studio behind and starts working in and with organizations, she is confronted with, drawn into, and asked to handle patterning strategies that may differ from those performed in and by the design studio. Think about the Head of HR & Administration. He enrolled pieces of furniture, which to him were endowed with design, in his attempt at ordering the project and its potential value creation along the lines of artifacts eliciting human pleasure. A second ordering attempt was the project management framework’s call for creating ownership amongst the employees and managers for the recommendations produced in the project. An ordering attempt that we responded to by employing the participatory method of relay conversations.

We admit that then and there – when we first entered the project with the town hall – these attempts at ordering us as designers and our potential value creation created frustrations. We became frustrated because these ordering attempts did not fully align with what we expected that we would be doing and the value we would be creating. This frustration was expressed in our impression that the steering group expected us to change everything without touching anything. Our frustration can be understood as an outcome of us expecting organizational singularity while being confronted with organizational multiplicity. We suggest understanding and working with organizational multiplicity as the norm rather than the exception when entering into collaborations with organizations. This can be done by listening carefully to the differing expectations formulated by the organization and trying to connect these expectations to relevant modes of designing. Or, as we did in this project, to attempt to background what we found less relevant modes of designing, in our case designing for human pleasures.

WHEN WORKING IN AND WITH ORGANIZATIONS: EMBRACING SPILLOVERS BETWEEN MODES OF DESIGNING

All three modes of designing describe specific configurations of relations between the organization, artifact, and designer. Designing for human pleasure highlights an organization’s aesthetics – in our case, we were asked not to let the project destroy the town hall’s existing aesthetic qualities. Designing for human participation speaks of a lack of employee engagement in organizational change processes. It expects the designer to enable such participation through various artifact-driven methods, the relay conversations employed here being the case in point. Designing for socio-material practices offers to transform how work is done, and in doing so, it enrolls artifacts and prior conversations as change agents. We saw this in the employees’ self-organized trial and error experiments, through which they experimented with their future working practices on-site. We also saw how these employee experiments were later shut down by the steering group as the steering group felt that these experiments were premature.

These examples should make it clear that we do not want to suggest a simple hierarchy between the three modes of designing. Designing for socio-material practices, for instance, is by no means always and everywhere a more value-creating response to organizational challenges than, say, designing for human pleasure. What we do want to suggest, however, is that the three modes of designing can spillover into one another in quite unpredictable ways. Designing for participation can spillover into designing for socio-material practices which again can ‘spillback’ into designing for human participation and designing for human pleasure. Such spillovers and spillbacks are not solely in the hands of the designer. To attempt ultimate control would be in vain. What can be done by the designer, however, is to register spillovers and spillbacks, and to embrace and analyze them as resources for navigating the organizational multiplicity in which she operates.
WHEN LEAVING (AND RE-ENTERING)
ORGANIZATIONS: EMBRACING MORE THAN
CONVERSATIONS

We will end by returning to Petersen’s question to Lindek: “Well, is designing only about enabling conversations?” The answer, now, is no. Designing in and with organizations is, instead, about being drawn into, experimenting with, and handling different modes of designing. Here we have suggested three modes of designing, which all urge the designer to embrace that her value creation lies not only in engendering conversations but also in tinkering with organizational ways of being, knowing, and doing.

This also raises questions concerning the generalizability of the three modes of designing developed here. Are they only unfolding in this specific development project, at this specific town hall, or could they be useful in other development projects, working with other kinds of organizations and at other sites? We have developed the three modes of designing as a response to situated field encounters, but these encounters also resonated with bodies of design research literature. This means that it is likely that similar modes of designing unfurl in other projects. And that is precisely the point of this paper: design has overspilled into other fields, the relevant field here being management, that have formed specific ideas about what design is and how it works. These ideas might be misunderstood. We suggest, however, taking the situated ideas very seriously, as they take part in determining what organizations, artifacts, and designers might achieve together. The designer, keen to work in and with organizations, thus, would do well to understand better what is already on the canvas. The three modes of designing developed here are meant as an analytical aid in working up this understanding.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have proposed a particular take on collaborations between organizations, artifacts, and designers. Existing approaches place the human designer front and center, arguing that the human designer brings specific design methodologies and cognitive styles into organizations. Here, these methodologies and cognitive styles can be employed to solve the thorny organizational problems of our time, the field of design management proposes. These approaches fail to care for the specificities and vibrancy of the organizational setting to which the designer relates. As an effect, they bridle our ability to systematically and critically discuss what designers can hope to achieve in and with organizations. Instead, we suggest a relational approach, which understands everything — the designer and her methodologies and cognitive styles included — as relational effects.

This relational approach prompted us to give ethnographic accounts of critical moments in a developmental design project. These were key moments, as they made present different configurations of the relations between the organization, designer, and artifacts and thus gave different answers on what designers can and should hope to achieve when collaborating with organizations. We transformed the three critical moments into three modes of designing: 1) Designing for human pleasures, 2) Designing for participation, and 3) Designing for socio-material practices. We hope these three modes of designing will be taken up and developed further by designers as analytical tools for navigating and ensuring the broadest possible value-creation in organizational design collaborations.

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