

## Inclusive Design

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## Topics of interest

- The real-life design processes
- Social construction of age and disabilities by design
- Aesthetics of health products
- Design ethics
  
- What does design do for/to people?

## Three research projects

- **From mini-skirts to granny dresses**
  - Industrial fashion design and practices of middle-aged women constructing social age
  - 1999-2007
  - Doctoral study, dissertation published 2007
- **Close to the Body**
  - The Ethics and Practice of Patient Clothing and Assistive Technology Design
  - 2004-2008
  - Research project, several publications
- **Dressed at home**
  - Design of clothing and textiles used by people with dementia receiving care at home
  - 2009-2012
  - Post-doctoral researcher, no publications yet

## Inclusive design

- Called also Design for All (DfA), Universal Design, Transgenerational Design
- Including people of all ages and abilities in the target group
  
- Usually focuses on the functionality
- Aesthetics are seldom studied
  
- Usually viewed as an "automatically beneficent" approach
- Seldom studied from a neutral, non-political perspective

## Structure of the lecture

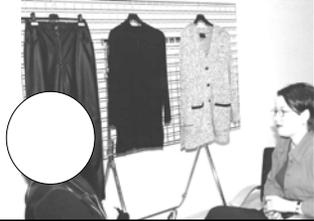
1. **The method: Using material and visual objects in interviews**
2. **Results: Constructing social age by clothes**
3. **Results: Ethical implications of design practices**
4. **The future**

## The method

**Using material and visual objects in interviews**

**- the case of mainstream fashion and women at the age of 50-60 years -**

**Designers** chose a set of clothing to represent their view of "good design". In the first interview, we discussed these samples.



**Designers** assessed each others' samples in the second interview.



**Users** assessed the designers' samples...



• ... and tried them on.



**Personal photos,**  
• 36 in total  
• ... were discussed in groups of users.



**Users** chose a set of their favourite clothing and it was discussed in the group.



The research assistant took photos during the interviews.



Me and the research assistant built a studio where the interviews took place.



## The method

Was including concrete clothes and photos in interviews useful?

Useful: yes!

- Direct intimate questions may be difficult to ask and answer
- Difficulties to verbalize experiences
- My questions were targeted at the objects
- Talking about clothes = talking about the body
- A rich data on experiences of ageing and ill health



Maija (b. 1946), 1949 Niisä

### Memories of all the senses

... the itchy woollen stockings.

**ELLA:** When we were children we had suspenders and stockings. The girls always had a skirt, and when you played in the snow thighs were uncovered. I really don't miss that. (laughs)

**MARJA-LIISA:** Did you have woollen stockings?

**ELLA:** Yes.

**MARJA-LIISA:** Me too, and they were so itchy. It was terrible.

**ELLA:** Oh, it was awful the way they made you itch. (laughs)



Maarit (b. 1948), 1965 Helsinki

### Memories of one's body as not ideal

**MIA:** I never was slim. My grandmother wrapped a towel around me for the nights to make me smaller. She wrapped it so tight and used safety pins to keep it that way.

**MAARIT:** That's awful! (...) It's weird that your body image just stays the same.

**MIA:** It does. When you have listened to that "you are a pig, pig, fat" all your childhood, it never goes away.

## Verbalizing age-related norms

**SONJA:** *What do you think is too youthful then, at your age? [...]*

**MALLA:** *One shouldn't wear shorts at the age of sixty. If you have veined legs you shouldn't show them.*

**MAARIT:** *It's funny how you don't always see how your body changes with age. You think you still look the same, but then you see photos or hear comments, and you are like 'oh my god'.*

*You may be really pleased that you have lost weight, your legs are thinner. And then you look downwards at your thighs and see a battlefield, or a potatofield. Saggy skin the whole way. Can cellulite spread from hips all the way to the knees?*

*If you wear shorts at this age... It's not good, because your skin is one of an old person.*

## Visualising stereotypes

... the "granny dress".

**ELLA:** *The grannies had a frumpy dress. From the early 1900's to year 2000, it's the same dress. (laughs) It never changes. (laughs)*

\*\*\*\*\*

**ELLA:** *My mom is 38 years old in this photo, and she looks older than in her 80's.*



Ella (b. 1952), 1956 Nilsia

## Useful: yes!

- **Talking about designers' own sample**

Advertising speeches, avoiding negative aspects

Descriptions of ideals

**DESIGNER 1:** *This collection is designed for the youthful, adult women. [...] But there really are no age-limits, it's more a question of style than age.*

## Useful: yes!

- **Assessing other designers' samples**

Critique

Suggestions for improvement

Detailed and normative descriptions

**SONJA:** *What do you think is a flop for this age group [50 to 60]?*

**DESIGNER 4:** *If you design something that is really close-fitting, or with fringes, or showy. As a designer I think that's **bad taste**. It's so demanding that it **suits very few people** in this age. Even if you have a good body, the body is a bit saggy. Tight clothes **are not good** for you then.*

## The method

### Practical considerations

## Practical considerations

- **Budget**

→ need for careful planning and extra funding

- **Travelling and logistics**

→ Easy and comfortable for the interviewed may be difficult and expensive for the research team

- **Time limits in the interviews**

→ Not too many objects to be assessed and photos to be taken

## Practical considerations

- Dressing up and undressing during the interview
- Similarities with the situation of fitting when making a dress
  - neutral or functional gaze
  - functional reasons for touching – explained verbally – sensitivity to personal space
- Gender of the researcher and research assistant
- Complex net of gazes



## Practical considerations

- The designer as a researcher
  - Shared professional experiences and understanding
  - Difficult to be aware of my own preconceptions, values, norms and experiences
  - Difficulties to re-enter the field of design after making critical remarks

## Practical considerations

- Research ethics: anonymity
- Usually full anonymity is provided
- Problematic when studying visual data
- Visual data needs to be visualised in the report!
- The interviewed decided the level of anonymity
- A written form of informed consent

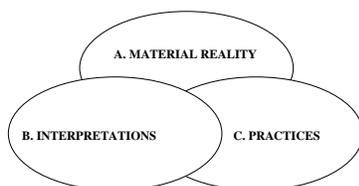
## Results

### Constructing social age by clothes

- the case of mainstream fashion and women at the age of 50-60 years -



## Social construction of age (Iltanen 2007)



## A. Material reality

- The age-related changes in the body
- Solutions by design

## B. Interpretations

- The evaluative gaze
- Normative speech
- Age-bound images of clothing
- Attitudes towards ageing



### Too young

- Showing the signs of ageing is disapproved and seen as ridiculous
- Not trying to look like the next generation



Photo: www-pages of Aina Samulin

**MAIJA:** Maybe not too youthful either.

**ELLA:** No, no.

**MAIJA:** You shouldn't dress like that.

**ELLA:** No. For example, too short a skirt on a woman with bumpy knees and varices...

**MARJA-LIISA:** Lumpy.

**ELLA:** ... is ugly.



### Too old

- Looking "too old" is disapproved and seen as ridiculous
- Not looking like the previous generation



Photo: Gatis Rozenfelds / The pureculture, Riga Fashions - project, Latvia

**ELLA:** We are not so old that we should were clothes of the grannies.

**MARJA-LIISA:** Yes, frumpy dresses. [laughs] Straight-shaped. [laughs]

**ELLA:** Yeah, one would like have youthful clothes at least. Even though we don't look young otherwise.

**MALLA:** *This is for eighty-year-olds.*

**MIA:** *That's so terrible. What's it made of?*

**SONJA:** *Cotton, modal and wool.*

**MAARIT:** *[joking] Wool is good when you grow old, with all the pain you get [in your joints]. [...] I begin to feel like I'm between fifty and death. Closer to the death than fifty.*

**MIA:** *Do the designers really see us who at fifties and sixties to be like this?*



## C. Practices

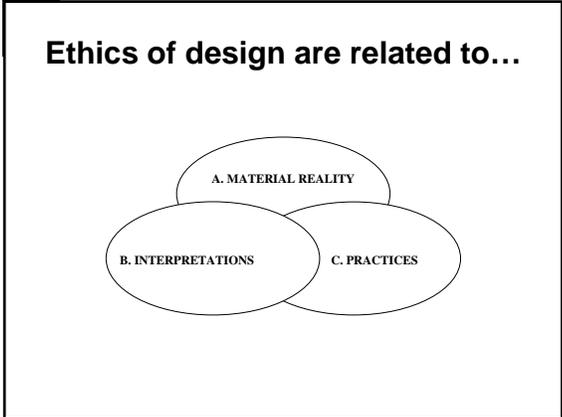
- The skills and knowledge related to constructing the appearance
- Practices related to industrial design
- Visual order
- Details in dress that build social age
- Power relations

### Jeans and blazer

- Belonging to the generation of baby boomers
- Resisting the clothing norms and practices of the previous generation
- Resisting the cultural stereotypes of ageing women
- Resisting the norms that over-value youth



Maarit (b. 1946), 1993 Helsinki



### What is the material reality like?

- The environment of use
- The users
- The clothes

### Care environment

- **Acute care**
  - A short time
  - Users are of all ages and abilities
  - Mainly standardized patient clothing
- **Long-term care**
  - Often the last home of an old person, even for years
  - Patient clothing may be the patients' only wardrobe
  - Users' cognitive, mental, physical and social functioning are low
  - Combination of mainstream clothes, standardized patient clothes and clothes designed for long-term care



### The users

- Majority of users are female
- Majority of the target group is old
- A wide variety of body sizes
- A wide variety of physical abilities
  - Stiffness, pain, restricted movements, poor coordination...
- Cognitive disorders are common among people receiving care

### The clothes

- A narrow range of aesthetics
- Most products are unisex or not referring to gender
- Making room for all sizes and shapes, adult diapers and medical devices
- Standardization
  - Defines materials, sizes, details, colors etc.
  - Cost-efficient to manufacture
  - Standard quality
  - easier to buy



## Who are the actors, and what are the practices related to patient clothing?



## Design and industrial manufacture

- A slow design process
- An iterative design process
- Multiprofessional team work
- Other tasks than design are often prioritized
- Patients views are usually filtered through the experts working within the system of patient clothing



## Design

- Visual elements are seldom chosen because of aesthetic intentions
- Visual elements are due to
  - Complicated technical and economical factors  
"Between a rock and a hard place"  
Choosing the least harmful solution
  - Lack of professional designers and expertise in visual design
  - Slow process of design and slow changes in stock  
Aesthetics have to be usable for up to 20 years



## Care staff

- Care staff takes part in
  - Purchases
  - Choosing clothes for end-users
  - Assisting with dressing and undressing
  - Mediating the end-users' needs to the designers and manufacturers
- Physically and emotionally straining work
- Fixed practices of care work



## Industrial laundry

- A strictly organized and rationalized process
- Economical pressures
- Demands for hygienia
  - Very high temperatures for washing and drying
  - Easy sorting & folding
  - Logistics

## Purchases



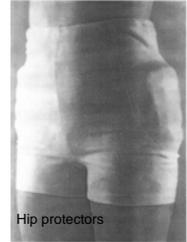
- **Purchases by professional buyers, care staff or family caregivers, NOT by users**
  - Users' views become less important in the processes of marketing and design
- **Competitive bidding**
  - Economical consequences of design decisions are carefully considered
  - Cheap materials
  - Simple details that are cheap to manufacture and maintain
  - Unisex products to avoid obtaining a stock of gender-specific products

## What kind of interpretations are made of patient clothing?

## Interpretations made of patient clothing

- **Hip protectors**

- Used by old people in danger of hip fracture due to falling down
- Users dislike the feel, usability and aesthetics of hip protectors
- The designer: Users should not care about these "trivial" feelings because of the medical efficiency



## Interpretations made of patient clothing

- **Dress for a wheel-chair user**

- Open at the back to facilitate dressing and undressing
- Provides a possibility to express oneself as an old lady of a certain generation
- A visually similar "granny dress" is discussed negatively in another context (Iltanen 2007)
- Need to be sensitive to the changing norms



Dress for a wheel-chair user

## Interpretations made of patient clothing

- **Sweat suits with pants**

- A reaction to changing habitual norms
- Old womens' gradual shift from wearing dresses to wearing pants in and out of care environments



Sweat suit

## Interpretations made of patient clothing

- **Hygiene overalls**

- Zipper at the back and long legs to make independent undressing impossible
- Users have to use incontinence diapers, but undress in inappropriate situations
- Reduces work-load of staff
- Justification: Prevents from embarrassing situations
- Critique: Not socially acceptable for an adult user



Hygiene overalls

## Interpretations made of patient clothing

- **Safety vest**

- Closes at the back, long straps to tie the user to a chair or wheel-chair
- Users
  - a. Aggressive people
  - b. Frail people in need of support
- Makes the care work easier and reduces costs of care
- Justification: Better than medical sedatives
- Critique: There should be more staff



## Interpretations

- **The aim is to do good**
- **The reality is interpreted as the opposite**
  - Lack of privacy
  - Lack of autonomy
  - Patients' needs are in conflict with the emphasis on efficiency and economical pressure
- **Designers find no way out**
  - "We are between a rock and a hard place"



## Interpretations

- **An all-inclusive approach**
  - NOT used to serve the needs of end-users
  - Used to improve sales and to make the process more efficient
  - Unisex products prioritize the aesthetics and dressing habits of male users
  - Construction of social age is not succeeded if the target group includes all ages
  - One-size-fits-all – or does not properly fit anyone
  - Visual references to functional and cognitive disabilities are considered as upsetting and stigmatizing



## In future, I argue that we need...

- A) Studies of the real-world industrial design processes
- B) Studies on design that are based on empirical data and thorough visual analysis
- C) Studies that question the aims and results of design, but in a constructive manner
- D) Studies that help designers

# Thank you!

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