English summary

Interior and furniture design are both professions that are much concerned with sensual qualities and elements. Furniture and interior design engage and activate all the senses. There have long been well-developed methods and languages for investigating, developing and communicating the sensual aspects of these fields of interior architecture and furniture design. The academic institutions that work with text-based theory have, by default, the right of interpretation in educational contexts. This has contributed to a dichotomized understanding of knowledge which tends to rank text-based forms of knowledge above such fields of knowledge that, to a greater extent, develop knowledge in a practical manner by, for example, working physically and with the senses, with form rather than with text.

This dichotomous and hierarchical view of knowledge has also had an influence on the design field and, having established itself there, has contributed to the paradoxical situation that design and form aspects has become overshadowed, even among proponents of the design professions. The academization and text-based theorizing of a specific subject tends to lead to an impaired ability to understand and to value sensual and form aspects of the subject that has been academized. An increasing focus on theory in text form tends to reduce our ability to understand and develop other forms of theories that are not developed and communicated using written language.

There is no influential tradition of developing and communicating knowledge and theory in text form within the fields of interior architecture and furniture design. If one can speak of theory at all in connection with these craft skills this has seldom been expressed in writing and, frequently, not even in oral form but has, instead, been embedded in the practice itself: in furniture and rooms, in tools and machines, in these details and these objects. Throughout the ages the design professions have developed in precisely this way and it is difficult to see that there are any obstacles preventing this being successful in the future too. Up to the present, as far as I know, no new circumstances have presented themselves that would motivate one throwing out the tried and tested existing structures and methods in the design professions in favour of untried text-based knowledge production.

I am not suggesting that anyone really wants to throw out these tried and tested existing methods, however I believe that the effect of introducing various forms of textualized knowledge into an old field of knowledge often is that the text starts to dominate and over-shadows these other forms such as practical or artistic knowledge.

It is one thesis of this dissertation that there is, today, a tendency to academize design education through the use of an increasing quantity of text-based theory. The dissertation aims at giving visibility to a pattern. The method used for visualizing this pattern involves collecting and reproducing examples of situations in which professions and educational programmes within the design field risk being negatively influenced by the use of text-based practices and knowledge cultures. The result is a
patchwork in which the individual parts can sometimes seem irrelevant and taken from thin air, but where these, when they have been collected and ordered, can contribute to the realization of a pattern. That a tendency and a structure become visible, regardless of what one thinks of textual culture, motivates a critical, scientific view of the relation between design and text.

The dissertation is in two parts: One is text-based and the other part is presented in the form of an exhibition consisting of a bow lathe together with items of furniture that have been manufactured using a bow lathe. This part is also documented on film. In the exhibition I shall attempt to start up a dialogue with the visitors. I shall demonstrate the lathe and let visitors try their hand at it and I shall relate the experiences that I have had with it while using it to design furniture. The exhibited furniture, the bow lathe and trial pieces form the theory and the manuscript, or memory support, for such conversations. Since the manuscript is not linearly organized it is probable (and desirable) that one conversation will not be like another. I intend to try to let the manuscript and the visitor be present in, and influence, the conversations. Using this method I hope to achieve two goals: First, that new and different theories arise around the subject of form that would probably not have arisen in a textual situation and, second, that I am able to illustrate and give expression to the designer’s theory as it has traditionally been developed and handed on.

The question addressed in the textual part of my dissertation is as follows: Which negative effects might an increasing degree of textualized theory have on the design practices? The question addressed in the exhibition part of my dissertation is as follows: Can a large degree of physical participation in the design process, within which a sense-based and physical relationship between room, body, material, tools and machines is established, contribute impulses (primarily in interior architecture and furniture design) that counter possible negative effects of the current textualization of theory within the design field. The aim of the textual part of my dissertation is: Using critical analysis and interpretation of knowledge cultures that are strongly characterized by reading and writing in developing their theories, to make various problems visible when such means are used in the fields of design and architecture. The aim in the design part of the dissertation, the part dealing with the bow lathe, is to present methods and designed results that can give impulses for further development in the field of furniture design and interior architecture and related fields. The textual part of the dissertation is not intended to contribute to practical knowledge of design but should be regarded as a background declaration as to why I have got increasingly close to the view that artistic research in the field of interior architecture and furniture design would benefit from paying more attention to methods that are more closely related to the methods employed in the second part of my dissertation (the design part) – an investigative method in which development of the subject and theorizing develop out of work with cultivating physical materials and spatial entities in which the end result is furniture and spatial entities.
The chapters of the dissertation addresses the following subjects: In “THE OFFICE-CHAIR- FROM TOOL TO AID” I compare historical and contemporary techniques for design production. I also try putting these in a historic and epistemological context. In “PHILOSOPHY AND DESIGN” I problematize philosophy and philosophizing as means of designing. I speculate as to the existence of a sort of poetics for philosophy, about ugly and stylish thinking as well as my concept of flesh-spirit. In “TEXTUALIZING AND DESIGN” I reflect on text’s and textual culture’s relationship to concepts and phenomena like morals and control, self-censorship, form and content, time and economic considerations, volume and quantity, retrospection, reflection and power. In “DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS” there is a reflection on the contemporary field of artistic research and a concluding discussion. And finally, there is an “Appendix” in which I give further thought to the relationship between the textual part of my dissertation and the exhibition. The textualized theory-building of the dissertation rests mainly on the following books and articles: Walter J Ong: *Orality and Literacy*. Olga Sedakova, *Dikten är besläktad med barnets joller* (article). Marshall McLuhan: *The Gutenberg Galaxy*. Ludwik Fleck: *The Genesis and Development of a Scientific Fact*. Benjamin Farrington: *Greek Science*. Evelyn Fox Keller: *Gender and Science*. Richard Rorty: *Hope in place of knowledge*. All of these deal, more or less directly, with issues of form, though none of them uses a design perspective. Their main perspective on issues that can have relevance to the design professions, issues pertaining to the body, to style, form, power and spatiality are either historical (Farrington and Sedakova), epistemological (Fleck), philosophical (Rorty), gender and historical (Fox Keller), linguistic (Ong), or literary (McLuhan). All of them have a historical perspective and all of them are concerned with different aspects of the concept of knowledge. I have approached these from the point of view of the designer and have tried to establish parallels to the field of design with the aim of clarifying what consequences these written knowledge cultures have for the design field. Besides these theories one should also mention Ingela Josefson, Bernt Gustavsson and Mats Rosengren whose work has influenced me.

Within higher art and design education there seems to be a sometimes uncritical faith in academic qualifications and textual systems of knowledge. This has led to situations where institutions recruit staff that lack competence and professional experience in the subject itself. There are cases where the task of developing the field, acting as a thesis opponent and even examining students in design courses at university level have been given to people who have only a secondary knowledge of the field. There are examples of situations in which professors and lecturers with good academic qualifications are recruited to teach design courses in specific materials in spite of their lacking competence with regard to both the material and of design in general. It is probably an aspect of the textualization of our knowledge culture that so few people have reacted to the absurdity of such appointments. The absurdity can be illustrated by turning the situation round. It is difficult to imagine that an interior architect, a potter or a textile designer would be offered a post as lecturer or professor by a department of history or philosophy. That the reverse can actually take place is
explained by the fact that a practical understanding of form is valued lower than academic, textual learning and this leads to the suspicion that the artificial dichotomy between form and content and between theory and practice is maintained and reinforced by the academic tradition’s conservative domination of our thinking. One important conclusion of this dissertation is that the pedagogics, the theory-building, the methods, the means as well as the goals within the fields of arts and design are often very different from that of the academic and scientific traditions. Acknowledging these differences rather than erasing them could be one way of maintaining cultural as well as scientific diversity and thereby strengthening the ability to look at issues from different points of view.