



# DUSTY STORIES

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*Embracing the narratives at Remfabriken through a Visual language*

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Summary/Abstract

Dusty Stories is a project focusing on working with narratives when implementing graphical material towards a client. The receivers of the material is in this case the people working with the museum Remfabriken, an old textile industry situated in the central parts of Gothenburg. The thesis will discuss the process of trying to work together with a client when using a narrative approach. It will discuss the possible challenges when working within a narrative approach but it will also talk about the positive and negative learning outcomes concerning this way of working.

*Keywords:* Narratives, Remfabriken, Frottage, Handsketch.

## *List of Content*

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The Design Issue .....	p. 4-5
Methods .....	p. 6-21
<i>Remfabriken and its context</i> .....	p. 6-7
<i>The process of the artistic and practical work</i> .....	p. 8-21
<b>Result and Discussion</b>	
<i>The result of the investigation</i> .....	p. 22
<i>Description of how the result is expressed in an artistic manifestation</i> .....	p. 22-23
<i>The communication between designers and other professionals</i> .....	p. 24
<i>The designer as an infiltrator</i> .....	p. 25
<i>The cultural heritage</i> .....	p. 25
<i>Conclusion of the discussion</i> .....	p. 26
Reference List .....	p. 27

## The Design Issue

In this project the aim has been to investigate how we as designers can work with a narrative approach when implementing graphical material towards a client. The term narrative is constantly used in the field of art and design and can have multiple meanings. What I define as a narrative approach in this project are two aspects:

- 1. Working with a narrative approach being physically situated at place at Remfabriken and work from there.*
- 2. Trying to translate the stories from Remfabriken in the final visual material.*

In this case one part of the narrative approach has been about working on a specific place together with the people who are the receivers of the final material. The place for working with these narratives has been the old industrial museum Remfabriken, an old textile industry situated in the central parts of Gothenburg.

### *Background*

Remfabriken is a cultural memory situated in the city of Gothenburg. It is an old industry where they used to make textile materials to different actors in the industry. In 1977 the place was shut down. The interior and the building is from the early 1900 and hasn't been touched since this century. When the place shut down the workers simply just left the building and interior as it was and since then the place has remained untouched. Nowadays it's a cultural memory driven by volunteers. It is of high value to keep this place for the future and in this project the aim is to highlight the stories being told in the industry and to give form to them when designing an inspirational material to Remfabriken.

### *Why Remfabriken and this issue?*

As long as I can remember I have never been interested as a designer in inventing something brand new. The interest has always sprung from the items loaded with a history, the objects that are clearly witnessing about the presence of the hand. Remfabriken is a place loaded with stories and attributes that are communicating narratives in a strong visual way. It is a place loaded with stories and narratives so it's a suitable place when working with narratives that this project has been focusing on.

### *The issue and its relation to the design project*

One main reason why this issue has been chosen is because I have felt a need in developing this narrative approach as a way for me to work with when designing in the future. During the years at different art and design schools there has been a lack of investigating this subject so the urge of doing this has been central in this project. The issue has been about investigating how designers can work with narratives when implementing graphical material towards a client. The client in this case is Remfabriken and the graphical material that has been designed should be seen as an *inspirational material* towards them with the aim to encourage them in working with narratives. The thesis will not focus on explaining a final product that has been developed for Remfabriken. It will focus on discussing about the narrative approach that has been implemented during this project and the material that has been developed when working in this way.

### *The relevance of the issue to the field of design*

The narrative way of looking at things could be of high relevance for designers to work with when implementing material towards clients. A way of trying to meet the needs but at the same time getting your artistic skills to shine through. It is of course a trend arising in the design field but it could be an important one because of the need for us to become more aware of the roots and background stories of products. To meet people and show our concern about environments and stories is something that I think is essential if you should work with designing. To not only stay at the office in front of the computer designing but also to show your engagement in the physical stories and places. It is a way to lift the design process and to broaden the possible job opportunities. One could also argue that working with narratives is a way for designers to become more transparent in the design process. The winning aspect from this could be that we let the work behind a product shine through, we reveal the big working effort behind the final polished result. That is of course a way to become more reliable and in the long run hopefully contribute to arising the status of designers work.

## Methods

### Remfabriken and its context

#### *Site specific research*

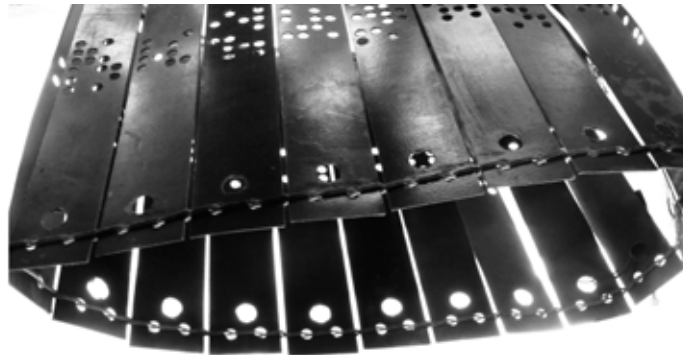
*In order to try to achieve this narrative way of working within the design process one of the methods of doing this has been to try to be situated at Remfabriken. This has been the core of the project, to try to spend time at the place and investigate how this affects the final result of the design. This method has been divided into two parts, one part of the time when I have been at the industry with the purpose of visual inspiration and trying to understand the place. The other part has been focused on trying to work with the artistic and practical work while being situated at Remfabriken.*

#### *Which narrative?*

After studying the specific place and the items at Remfabriken I decided to work with one specific spot in the industry, *the office*. The office is a place loaded with stories from the workers who worked at the industry. There are also examples of artists and designers that has been working with the narrative at Remfabriken such as photographers documenting stories from workers and the environment of the industry. One of these photographers is Trad Wriggelsworth that has made a series of pictures capturing the daily life at the industry. What was the main focus in this project concerning highlighting the stories at Remfabriken was to work with the handsketch and to communicate a more abstract narrative from the industry. The figurative and representatively language is already a big part of Remfabriken so what was wanted from this project was the more abstract expression of a narrative. The book *Röster från Remfabriken* (Bjerrome & Sjölin, 2003) contains stories and interviews from the workers at the industry. These stories are already documented, to document them again felt uninteresting both to Remfabriken and for me as a designer.

### *Items from the office*

The process changed early in the project to be about telling the stories from the workers at the industry to become more focused on *communicating a feeling of the physical items one could find at the industry*. The different physical artefacts at the office seemed to be important when trying to communicate the stories from the industry. One of the interesting physical findings at the office at Remfabriken was two punch-cards and a cog-wheel that really witnessed about the history of the industry. These items seemed to be the core of the industry and they witnessed about a narrative in their way of looking. Creaky items that had been used for several years and for several weaving machines. Why these were chosen to represent the industry was because of their way of functioning at the time they were used. They are also still used in textile industries all over the world so these items could be seen as something that could repeat the story in a modern time because of its function. They are also communicating a graphical, raw expression which was one of the aims with the final inspirational material.



## The process of the artistic and practical work

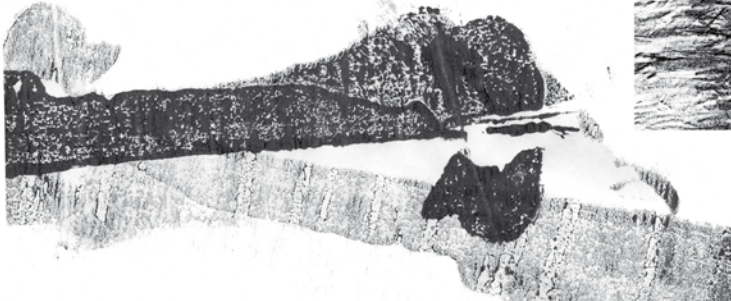
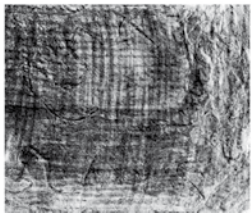
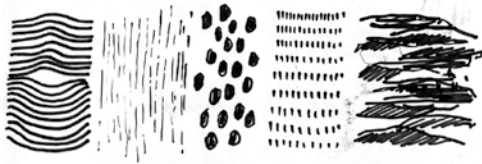
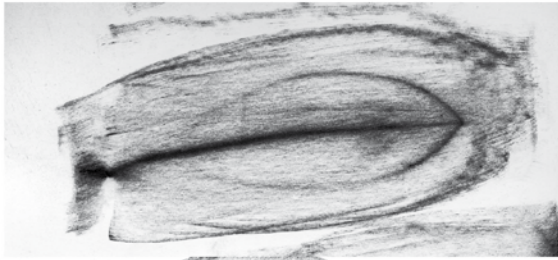
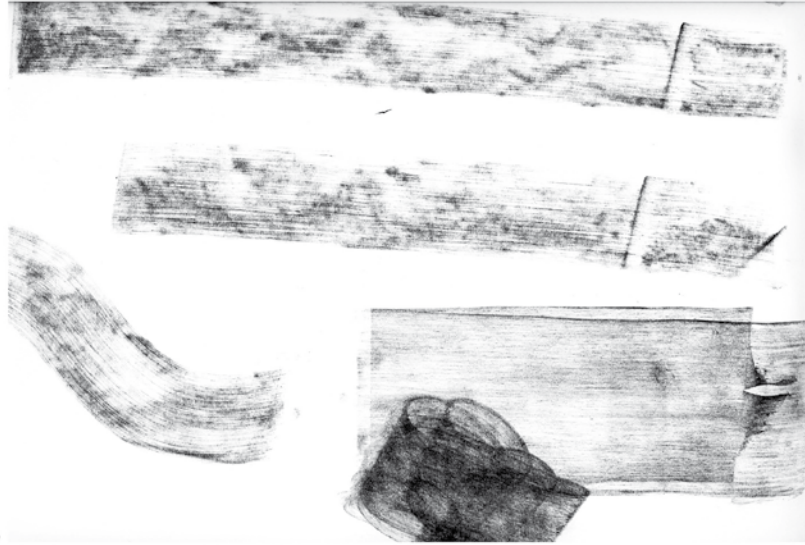
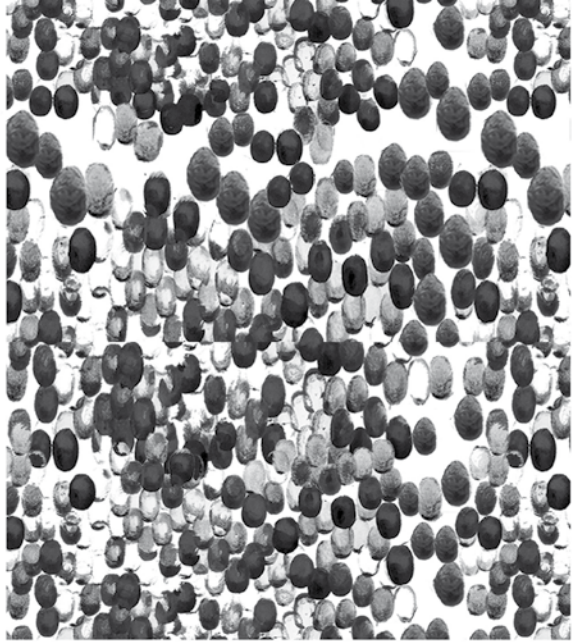
*The practical work in this process has been focused on trying to work with the hand sketch as the main technique of this project. In order to try to highlight the stories at Remfabriken the process of trying to find the result suitable for this has been broad with diverse expressions. To make this process become clear and to reveal the practical working effort behind it I will try to explain in three parts in text complemented with pictures how this process has been worked through.*

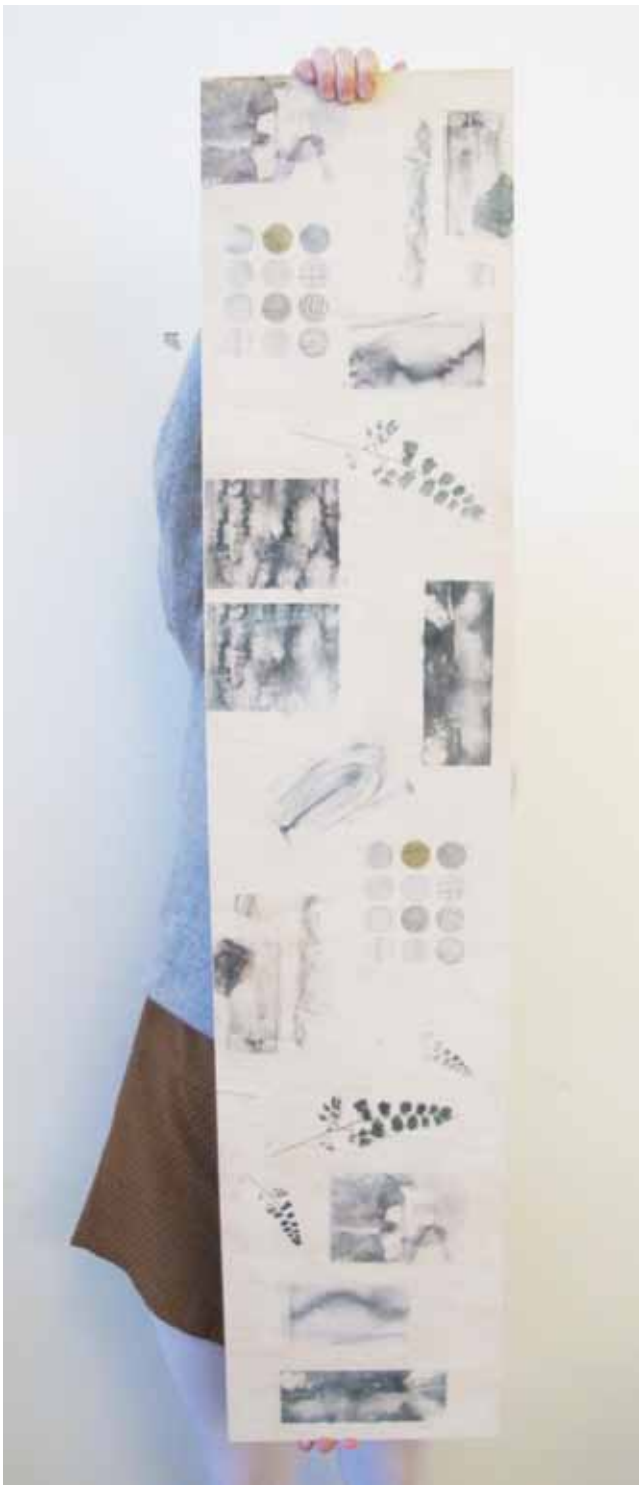
### *Part one - the frottage technique*

From the early beginning the idea of working with a more abstract expression was present. One method of trying to achieve this abstract expression combined with a narrative was to use the frottage technique. To try to stay true to the issue in this project, trying to work with a narrative approach, this technique became suitable for a first try out on this issue. The frottage sketches were produced from artefacts at the industry. It became an attempt to try to directly translate the narrative through an artistic technique. This expression became discarded later because of its unclear way of communicating. The process of trying to use text complemented with these pictures later became a big part of the research face. The printing studio with its possibilities became a method for trying to find out if the expression could be placed on different materials in order to make something more communicative appear. Looking at the pictures below one could see an attempt in the practical process to try to talk in different languages when designing for this project. An example of that is the try outs on different materials such as wood, paper, textile and ceramics. The practical hands on work has been the most important method concerning this work. To try to work with the practical work combined with the theoretical one has been one of the aims in this project. In order to try to reveal a more transparent design process one also has to be able to show on some practical working efforts when doing this.

*On the following pages there will be photographs communicating the practical process of working with the frottage technique.*







*Different try outs with transfer printing on wood and textile.  
The different pictures are communicating frottage sketches  
from the industry.*







*Experiments with screen printing. Printing in big format for trying to directly translate the frottage techniques.*





*Examples on different try outs using the screen printing technique on different papers but also using the foiling. The foiling was an attempt in trying to highlight the traces from the industry.*

*Part two - the figurative expression*

In order to become more convinced about the abstract expression the try outs of the figurative had to become a part of the process. As been said before, even if the figurative expression already is present at Remfabriken it could be of importance to try out this way of working before deciding for the abstract one. In the book *Expeditionen: en kärlekshistoria* Bea Uusma (2013) who is the author and the graphical designer of the book tells a story in an interesting way according to the narrative issue. This book and story is an example of a designer working in an artistic way when telling a story. Uusma's artistic translation of the story could be seen as a way of curating a part of an already existing material. The storytelling in Uusmas book is really physically interesting with material samples, photographs and handwritten notes. At Remfabriken one could work in a similar way, collecting the narrative that is already present and curate this material. This way of working was present in the process but was also something that I decided to not go further with. One of the reasons why not working in this way was because of that I wanted to work with the hands sketch as the main tool in order to reveal my skills as a designer. If working more as a curating designer this would have been hard according to this purpose.

On the following pages there are photographs representing the figurative method of this process. The pictures are mainly focusing on the hands sketch as the main tool for communicating the narratives.







*Sketches of portraits from the workers at the industry.*



*Realistic drawings of the environment from Remfabriken. Direct translation of a narrative that became excluded in the end process because of its lack of further development.*





1977

Personalen  
stängde av  
maskinerna  
och gick hem.



*Working with the figurative expression using different materials such as wood, textile, copper and ceramics. Trying to work with typography complementing the pictures.*

*Part three - the final outcome*

After making the abstract and the figurative expression the final conclusion of this became that the figurative one became a bit banal and artistically less interesting than the abstract one. In order to achieve the goal in working with narratives the figurative expression became uninteresting because of its direct translation of the stories. The abstract one was there for chosen but with the aim to work with this one in collaboration with text information. As mentioned earlier in the text, the three items from the office were in the end chosen to represent the narratives from the industry. The personal stories and narratives was something that was already well documented so the more poetic expression was required from this project.

As mentioned earlier, a big part of the process has been to work site specifically at Remfabriken. All of the sketches are made at *the office* in the industry with the purpose of trying to work with narratives.

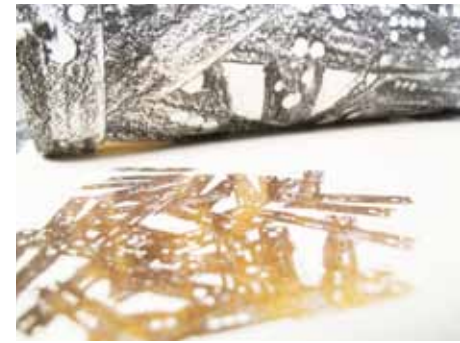
## Result and Discussion

### *The result of the investigation*

The result of this investigation shows on mostly positive learning outcomes when trying to work within this narrative approach. The narrative way of working in this case enables you to work creative together with the client. According to this the *transparency* through the process has been of importance when working together with Remfabriken. To work with this narrative approach the transparency is necessary if this method is going to be efficient. The way of finding the stories has in this case been by opening up the process and trying to be situated at place. When being in the place the narrative is constantly present compared to if you would have been working with the same project from another part of the world. To work with the transparency towards Remfabriken has influenced the design choices in many cases. The choice of physical items such as paper materials and colours has been influenced by the client as well as choice of typography. The other learning aspect from working with the transparency has been that it has influenced the design process a lot. By revealing the process of the practical work at an early stage the result of the investigation shows that the final expression has been developed a lot from the first sketch until the final expression. The winning aspect from working with the transparency has been that the people working at Remfabriken have been very helpful according to develop the design choices. To gain inputs from them concerning the communication of the material has been helpful to the final expression.

### *Description of how the result is expressed in an artistic manifestation*

The physical result of the project should be seen as an *inspirational material* towards Remfabriken with the aim to encourage them in working with narratives. The receivers of the material in this case are the people who works with the museum Remfabriken and the sketches has been made with inspiration from the environment and the stories from this place. The inspirational material consists of posters, invitation cards and graphical prints. All of the visual material is inspired by the three items from the office at Remfabriken, *the punch-cards* and *the cog-wheel*. Concerning choosing the abstract expression as the final result this has been an important part of the investigation. Before starting up this project I had a prejudice of what a narrative expression could be, the typical figurative drawings easy to attach to. This expression is something I have already done and realized early in the process that if going for this expression it would mean that the development of my artistic skills as a designer would have been less worked through. During this process the knowledge of narrative expressions and methods has been broaden and the narrative expression in this case is aiming for complementing the more figurative one at Remfabriken with its abstract expression.



*The final inspirational material consisting of posters, invitation cards, graphical prints and drawings.*

### *The communication between designers and other professionals*

When talking about the impact to the knowledge field of design this project is of importance when discussing the possible ways for designers to work with in the future. The main learning outcome of the project is that it is rewarding to work together with other people while being physically situated at the chosen place for the investigation. In this case, it has been of high value to spend the days at the office at Remfabriken for researching the narrative approach in an efficient way. Even though we can't always be physically present in design projects it could be of importance that we try it out from time to time. It is a way of broadening our knowledge and our professional fields as designers. As a designer you are always put into different contexts and environments, using narratives could be a way of working in these different contexts in an efficient and joyful way. If designers dare to work in new constellations I think it could help to broaden the understanding of the professional role for designers. If we dare to be more transparent when working with the practical process at the same time while we are working with clients this could help to inform others about the working effort that is put behind a design project. However, revealing too much and being too transparent could also have the opposite effect that you lose respect for the professional role. It is always a balancing act between these two but if choosing to be more transparent you also risk more and maybe the more you will win. To work with narratives is a way of trying to enable the communication between designers and other professionals. As been said before, as a designer you are always put to work into different contexts so to enable this communication between different working professions could be essential to the knowledge field of design. Concerning different ways of communicating narratives Darja Isaksson is a researcher focusing on discussing the different ways designers and artists could communicate stories. She highlights that we live in an age where there is an overload of stories and that we need to tell these stories in different formats for them to become alive (Isaksson, 2014). Concerning this project this research is of high value when working within this narrative approach. I really do believe that designers have a power in communicating stories in a non-written or non-spoken way. It is a tool for us to work with professionally and it is also what we are educated in doing.



### *The designer as an infiltrator*

Through this project the process has been more transparent towards Remfabriken and they have also been a big part of the artistic work. The winning aspect of this has been that the expression has been developed a lot from the first sketch until now. The harder part has been to try to explain some of the parts of the process and to communicate that the sketches aren't the final result. I really do believe that in the field of design an artist can learn in how to be the infiltrator at a company. Instead of being outside the context one could be inside of it and make statements while working. It could be of high value that designers dare to work in different contexts but still try to think of the contexts as an opportunity to make your opinion shine through. An artistic inspiration in this project has been the graphical designer Olle Eksell (1999). His way of working with companies but at the same time keep an integrity is interesting according to this subject. The drawings are full of narratives but still they are informative and artistically interesting. As a designer in this project I have learnt that I am more interested in this way of working. If we dare to work in contexts that we aren't always comfortable with I think we can contribute to a development of the industry in the long run.

### *The cultural heritage*

When working with narratives it could be of high value that we contribute to the cultural heritage of our time. Remfabriken is a place loaded with stories and memories from a certain time that is witnessing about an important aspect of the history. This place is also chosen because of this aspect. As been said before, as a designer I have never been interested in inventing something brand new, the interest has always been connected to the items loaded with a history. It is the same thing with Remfabriken. It is important that these stories live further on in the future and that designers and artists work within these contexts to help in highlighting these important places. What the designer could contribute to within this field is by telling these stories in another way than in the written or the spoken word. In 2012 the band *Shout out Louds* was going to drop a new record album. To get people interested in their new album they invented a type of disc that was made by ice (PSL-Sveriges Television, 2012). To take part of their new single you had to pour liquid into a form, place it in the freezer for six hours and after this process you could take part of the new single, completely made by ice. The single "Blue Ice" somehow is a pr-trick but also a way of telling a story in a non-spoken or written way. A way of only using a visual material to take part of their story. It could be important according to the field of design to know as designers how we choose to position ourselves as storytellers and how we choose to communicate stories. The visual and artistical language is something to compete with in a world full of stories and narratives. Looking at "Blue ice" by Shout out Louds its interesting how the message becomes clearer by using the visual language than it would have been by choosing the traditional language of a press release.

## Conclusion and summary of the discussion

*One could see after working with this narrative approach that the relevance of it could be of importance when working with implementing visual material towards different clients. It could be of high value that designers dare to work in different contexts and dare to be situated at place when working with developing a design project. The conclusion of working within this narrative approach is that it could be a tool for designers to work with in the future. A way of learning more about a possible working method to develop when working professionally within the design field. It could be a way of making the work more fun, more rewarding and more interesting. If designers dare to become more transparent within their working process, do they win more respect to the design field? And could we be better in communicating stories in more diverse expressions? The learning outcome from this project is that this narrative approach has been helpful when developing a design project with the main focus in communicating a narrative. This is the start for a future working tool for me as a designer, a way of making the design process more interesting and fun. If we dare to talk in different formats and in different languages it could also help in developing our design process in the long run.*

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*Einar is one of the volunteers that runs Remfabriken. He is giving inputs in stories from Remfabriken and how the place has been developed during the years.*

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Katrin Bjerrome

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