

Akademický rok 2019/2020

## Bakalářská práce – posudek oponenta

**Jméno a příjmení studenta:** Magdalena Prudíková

**Název práce:** Design System

### Slovní hodnocení:

The project draws from the current trend of design systems coming from the digital product design scene, and suggests an unusual take on how to employ its principles to organizing design work as a collective practice, and towards specific goals. The quality of ideas are good, the way they are expressed sufficiently clear but sometimes lacking in depth. Overall, an excellent project that moves away from navel-gazing design system 'best-practices', and paints more interesting and long-term scenarios.

In the project 'DPS Design System', Magdalena Prudíková describes a whole-encompassing framework to work on design projects as a group.

At its core, the \*ritual\* is the device used to create, iterate and discard any possible part of the system in use. The ritual facilitates a multi-player approach to organize the design system, which fosters a series of ethical principles described in the DPS project. Focusing on ethics and not moral laws, grounds DPS members on preferring collective action and its consequences, over absolute defined good or evil behaviours. This creates strong feedback loops based on DPS's own functioning across all its members, and in turn it helps with a practice of group self-reflection and the continual evaluation of how well these rituals work.

Following, I will outline my impressions over the project as an external figure both in reference to the school environment where this work has been developed, as well as in relation to the DPS project itself. I'm going to focus on (1) topicality, (2) a few technical elements, (3) and a general contribution to this area of work.

(1)

In the past 5 years, design systems have risen as a topic in the context of digital product design. Often, the reason for this is to facilitate a big company to organize work across many different departments — let's imagine, for example, the collaboration between ux designers and frontend developers in a firm with hundreds of people in each department. While this is often useful in specific contexts, nonetheless these design systems have become a trend and a "new way to work", applied to many other places where it might feel unnecessary when used as-is: small design studios, freelancer designers, etc. The main outcome is

unwanted, overflowing complexity in work practices that were doing good beforehand even without a top-down new organizing system.

Due to these reasons, proposing a new design system is a hard task, and if it's not created from within a specific context with particular needs, it might simply turn into yet another generic visual framework targeted to "copy and paste" startup companies.

It's important to say that design systems are not a new thing, as one could think about graphic design corporate identities as another form of it. Or again, the internal work protocols and delivery standards used in corporate design studios.

The DPS project takes a different approach to it, going more "organizational" — so more akin to the internal protocols of a big design office —, but pushing even further and breaking away with office culture altogether. The DPS design system in fact, feels more close to what might have been Johannes Itten's pedagogic approach at the Bauhaus: the design work produced is in direct connection with the well-being of the person doing it. And in fact, as described in the thesis, a few rituals are explicitly focused on physical activities to maintain a certain internal equilibrium between members of the group (`meditation.dps`, and `run.dps`).

The capacity to move away from existing form of work and power organization and imagining a vastly different approach to how to do things, puts the project in a very interesting space. While there are many other existing examples of similar practices built around values shared by DPS, they usually do not try to include other aspects of a member's social life into it, while avoid to become a cultish phenomenon. DPS has the potential to do it.

(2)

On a more 'technical' level, there are often propositions in the text that stay a bit too vague in their statement. This could be due to the fact that, as written towards the end of the thesis, one of the rituals of DPS is that of \*collective writing\* through a synthesis process. This could create a gap between the internal discourse active among the DPS members, and the act of giving for granted many shared values, ways of understanding, and so forth. The result is a possible layer of misunderstanding between a non-DPS member reader and the text, as there are no strong affordances given to create a shared language.

Two terms are used throughout the text, that seems to define the collective operative process of DPS: \*synthesis\*, and what I would define \*common knowledge\*. More precise explanation of these terms is necessary to better contribute to the ideas outlined in text, and while there are some good examples, in my

opinion they keep things still a bit too on a 'general level', which makes it hard to grasp for real how they are understood by DPS members.

\*Synthesis\* works by way of averaging a set of information into the most 'normal' form it can take. Another way it works is by taking into account the opinion of each member on a topic, and transforming them into a new synthesis of the text. As these two are in fact different processes (one might be seen as quantitative, the other qualitative), it's helpful to know how the synthesis process would work in details, especially when the dataset is produced by sharing opinions and creating new values to add to the DPS ethical framework.

In general, the synthesis process might produce problems during the operation of averaging values from different datasets, in order to create a 'universal form'. Universal design comes with a series of assumptions about what constitute a 'default' user, whether that's the user of a chair, clothing, a website, or a computer program. Creating universal forms by data-averaging, means also creating default, averaged-bodies; the history of design is plagued by the ideal, average user. Realistically, only a tiny subset of existing, real bodies part of the world does fit in this default user body, and everyone else needs to adapt at best. Even though I can see why this might make sense for big companies which works by way of mass-producing objects — including computer user interfaces —, it feels completely foreign to the principles stated by the DPS ethical framework (eg, rejecting connections to marketing), to follow this approach. This might be in line with refusing originality and the ego, and therefore by creating a tendency to lean more towards a certain 'basicness' of the form: still, form influences function too.

Common knowledge seems to be the other persistent thread in this design system, specifically in relation to the 'no experts or specializations' rule. I find this an interesting topic, as it can be seen even as the basis of what 'design' is: a generalist-type worker who knows enough to be able to speak with specialists about this or that idea. Given this is not explored in depth, I genuinely wonder whether DPS allows users of these tools to access a deeper layer of knowledge in the case they want to understand 'how it works', or whether this is prevented upfront, in order to keep "thing simple" for the end-user.

These two terms share the 'average' as a form of outcome derived from following these technique-principles. While I understand 'super-normal' as an attempt to refuse 'originality' and taking distance from the ongoing advertising-heavy campaign of (consumer) "uniqueness", the reality is that generally most things nowadays are actually of average-quality. Due to the lack of rationale provided in the text about this aspect, I am perplexed whether following this value as a driving principle when producing work might bring opposite outcomes — eg, more refined average products.

(3)

It's particularly telling how way different the DPS design system is compared to, for example, the lifestyle 'provided' by Google to its employees: where they see human needs as a series of services to fulfil, DPS understands these as areas of life to actively engage with.

In a working environment where the two main options seems to be: 1. design studio, 2. freelance designer, DPS draws a different conclusion and tries to collectivize networks of freelance designers together.

Because of this, DPS looks like a possible formalization over how to organize collective design work: fully embracing the internet as a tangible paradigm — members are distributed across geographies, no central authority taken by any specific individual in the group —, embracing cooperative-like form of work organization — collective decision making, composable area of activities, ongoing discussion over shared ethical values (how to make things and why) —, and moving towards service-based design production, maybe closer to the open-source paradigm than acting as a typical, private design firm.

Aware that this text was more focused on outlining theoretical aspects of the functioning of the system, rather than providing in-depth examples of how these tools do actually work, I find the project engaging in many areas of critical importance for the life of a designer nowadays, and an excellent response to the current available scenarios of work fragmentation and life atomization that many of use live within.

**Otázky k rozpravě:**

As mentioned in the evaluation: how does the synthesis process work? How do you define the tension between 'no expert knowledge' and the need to deepen one's understanding over a topic as a designer? And finally: how important is the process of averaging datasets in the DPS design system?

**Závěrečné hodnocení:**

I recommend the thesis for defense.

**Návrh klasifikace:**

A

**Posudek vypracoval(a):**

MA André Fincato

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14/08/2020

(Podpis oponenta)