Remarks by Klaus Krippendorff, Ph.D.  
Banquet speech at Kalmar Castle  
May 25, 2012

I want to thank the Faculty Board for Business, Economics, and Design for awarding me the title of Honorary Doctor of Philosophy at Linnaeus University.

I am humbled by this honor and in the presence of the other honorees and hope I can continue contributing to the academic mission of this young and exciting University.

I realize that academic degrees are awarded to individuals for their visible achievements. While I would not know how to deviate from this tradition, I am nevertheless uncomfortable with this individualized attention and thus want to put my award into a larger context.

Firstly, it is Linnaeus University that deserves credit for awarding an honorary doctorate in the area of design/communication. It would have been so much easier to pick a renowned natural scientist, a physicist, biologist, or an economist for this honor. Selecting scholars for their contributions to design, nursing, education, cultural sociology, and bio-technology attests to this University’s attention to academic achievements that make a difference in society.

Therefore, I proudly accept this award not as an individual but as a member of the community of designers. But what is so special about design?

Note that the natural sciences seek to explain what exists and the social sciences seek to predict what follows in the footsteps of the past. Design has a radically different agenda. It does not explain anything, least of all why things are the way they are. It explores ways to undo such explanations and it creatively deviates from following in the footsteps of the past.

Designers innovate, intervene in contemporary practices of living, and improve on the past. This makes our material culture inherently unpredictable. Design is the reason for why cultural and technological developments are always ahead of our understanding them. Think of how little we can confidently say about the digitized and networked society we live in. By creating possibilities for change and introducing innovations, designers effectively disarm the methods of the natural sciences, calling for a new way of understanding our world. I am happy to note that designers are starting to theorize their own competencies, develop their own research methods, and take responsibilities
for their interventions, but I am most pleased that Linnaeus University is embracing these challenges whole heartedly.

Secondly, I am delighted that this honorary doctorate is awarded by a Swedish university. Swedish designers are at the forefront of democratizing the design process, becoming increasingly known for collaborative design methods, human-centered design concepts, and community-sensitive practices. They make that process the signature of Swedish design – no longer a particular style. As an advocate of human-centered design, this makes the award particularly meaningful for me.

Finally, I wish to recognize that we all merely elaborate on the voices of our past. I stand on the shoulders of giants. I can’t name all of them but want to mention a few without whom I probably would not be here.

My most important teacher at the Ulm School of Design was Horst Rittel. Some of you may know him from his later conception of wicked problems, which are wicked because they involve what we now call stakeholders. He pursued the idea of planning as making plausible arguments, thus shifting attention to the role of language in design.

Another giant was Herbert Simon, Nobel laureate in economics, who in 1969 proposed a *Science of the Artificial*, spanning numerous previously underprivileged practical disciplines from engineering to management. His was the first systematic theory for design.

I could enumerate many scholars that have populated my world, but want to name one preceding me by far: Giambattista Vico, an 18-century philosopher in Naples, obscure at his time but recently rediscovered. He opposed Descartes’ enlightenment fascination with verifying knowledge by observation, and suggesting instead that only God can know what exists. We humans verify truths through creation or invention. His *verum factum* principle is at the heart of any contemporary science for design. For him, this science included not only the production of material artifacts and the writing of poetry, but also mathematics, civic laws, and government.

Accordingly, we know only what we have made, including our models and modifications of nature.

With this proposition, I feel compelled to mention the many researchers and practical designers who have invited me into their interdisciplinary projects and allowed me to experiment with redesigning and teaching design. They all are present in what I just said.
Thank you.