On design as liberal art: The art of advancements
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Second Controversy: Beyond Design Thinking - Design Taste Making

Designers working in wicked situations, engaging in designing without a product, share many similarities with choreographers (Beiswanger 1962). They both work towards composing new arrangements of people and objects. Choreographers, like designers, deal with both the intention and the unexpected, with the planned and the uncalculated. Defined aims for future compositions bring together people and objects in configurations that cannot be predicted beforehand. As Beiswanger (1962: 13) argued “form springs” out of this “rich interplay between the planned and the unexpected”. Their work is emergent, meaning that the composition of a dance, or of a collective of people and objects, are only achieved in the process of making them. Just like “the curtain may never actually descend, once and for all, on the continued making and remaking of a dance classic” (Beiswanger 1962: 14), so the doors may never be closed for the designing and advancing of living assemblages in a museum or any other organization for that matter.

Current approaches in design literature have portrayed designers either as calculative agents, as decision makers (Simon 1969, Lawson 2006) or as genius minds who possess unique intellectual skills and abilities (Dorst 2010, Cross 2011). Simon (1969) in his Sciences of the Artificial attracted the attention to ‘designers’ ways of thinking’ as different from those of scientists. The difference lies, according to Simon (1969), in that scientists are concerned with the analysis of what is, while designers are concerned with the synthesis of what ought to be. Following Simon (1969), many researchers have engaged in exploring the unique nature of design thinking (as different from scientific thinking), with the aim of theorizing about the strategies, techniques and tactics designers employ in their work. Peter Rowe introduced the term of design thinking in design studies in 1987. Most prolific and influential work has come from the group of researchers engaged in the Design Thinking Research Symposia (Cross et al. 1992). Writing from within the design as problem solving paradigm, design thinking was conceptualized as the cognitive ability of solving ill-defined problems by means of abductive

Such theories of design thinking have been very insightful in understanding how designers go about dealing with ill-defined problems in product design. However, as the notion of design thinking has received more and more attention outside the field of product design, particularly in management and organization studies (Brown 2008, Martin 2009), the existing theories have attracted criticism too. Ewenstein and Whyte (2009) criticized the attention given to individual designers as master minds at the detriment of the collective practice of designing. Kimbell (2009, 2011) also lamented the focus on theories of cognition to explain how designers think, as they separate thinking from doing.

The same shortcomings of the focus on design thinking are visible when we look at designing without a product at the Amsterdam Museum. I have illustrated in the previous chapter that the designers at the Amsterdam Museum are not engaging in designing a product, or in ‘initiating change in man-made things’ (Jones 1980). Rather like choreographers, they work towards advancing assemblages of people, technologies, works of art, public’s stories, pictures and so on; they engage in initiating change in ‘constitutive entanglements’ (Orlikowski 2007) between people and the things they work and live with. Their work situation is too wicked, uncertain and serendipitous to be manageable by one or two designers as master minds. And, it cannot render itself to calculations and predictions either, as the elements making up the design situation – both humans and non-humans - are themselves evolving in the design practice.

New, helpful insights come from practice based studies. Practice based theories focus attention on work as a situated, collective activity where thinking is not separated from doing (Schatzki et al. 2001, Orlikowski 2007, Gherardi 2010, 2012, Kimbell 2009, 2011). Conceptualizing thinking as inherent in doing offers a unique advantage for theorizing in a new way about the ‘designerly ways of knowing’ (Cross 2007) in wicked situations, where designers engage in designing without a product. Following Hennion (2001, 2004), Gherardi (2009) introduced the notion of ‘taste making’ as what practitioners do when they engage reflexively in their practice. Taste making is “a collective achievement that allows practitioners to appraise the various performances of their working practices that, in being appraised and contested, are constantly refined” (Gherardi 2009: 536).
Gherardi (2009) argued that taste making is performed through three processes. One process is that of sharing a vocabulary for appraisal. While engaging in practice, practitioners collectively develop and negotiate a lexicon for talking about and appraising the performance of their practice. This vocabulary for appraisal is developed based on the practitioners’ sensible knowledge (Strati 2007), knowledge acquired through the senses rather than through rational thought. Central to the act of appraisal is the making of aesthetic judgments of what is a good and beautiful practice. A second process is that of crafting identities within epistemic communities. A practitioner’s attachment to the object of practice sustains his/her identity. Different ways of relating to the object of the practice upholds different identities and different tastes. A third process is that of refining practices. Practices are refined through taste making, through continuous negotiations and appraisals by means of aesthetic judgments.

The notion of taste making allows us to move away from the creative genius individual to the creative collective, from calculation to appraisal, from rational judgments to aesthetic judgments and from objective knowledge to sensible knowledge (cf. Maris and Huizing 2012). These moves could be beneficial if we are to understand how the designers at the Amsterdam Museum engage in advancing the museum towards an interactive online and offline meeting place for those interested in the story and history of Amsterdam.

The aim of this chapter is to explore this uncertainty in designing without a product: is designing without a product a matter of rational calculations, or of creative insights, or a matter of collective taste making? The structure of the chapter is as follows. In section 2, I follow the traces left behind as researchers and the designers in this study tried to come to grips with the nature of design thinking. I describe the museum employees as amateur designers (Gherardi 2009) and illustrate that their work is not so much governed by rational calculations as much as by collective appraisals based on sensible knowledge (Strati 2007). In section 3, I follow the traces left behind in the attempt to understand the designers’ particular ‘thinking and working styles’. I illustrate how the museum employees collectively engage in developing their own style or taste for designing, which springs from a relational, rather than individual, creativity (Suchman 2002, Yaneva 2009, Kimbell 2009, 2011). In section 4, I illustrate how the museum employees perform and refine their practice over time. I argue that what keeps designing without a product going as continuous advancing is the collective designers’ shared ambition to improve things, working ‘towards a never-achieved perfection’ (Gherardi 2009). I reinforce the argument that designing as advancing is a ‘shared imaginative
living’ (Jones 1980) in which the designers, the designed and the practice of designing are constantly enriching each other. I end this chapter with the conclusions drawn from exploring this uncertainty.

**Design thinking and its discontent: calculation, imagination, appraisal**

**Design thinking and professional designers**

Broadly defined as purposeful thinking towards achieving an end goal, design thinking has fascinated many researchers writing both in the design literature, as well as outside of it (Brown 2008, Martin 2009). This fascination springs from the perceived unique nature of design thinking (Simon 1969, Cross 1982). However, the term has remained elusive to this date. Design thinking cannot be observed in practice as such. Designers too have difficulties explaining what for them is at times an unconscious, intuitive process. Consequently, the notion remains much discussed and debated in the literature. This debate seems to be carried out between those who take a structural, computational approach (Simon 1969, Friedman 2003), and those who take an agentic, cognitive approach (Lawson 2006, Cross 2007, Dorst 2010) to design thinking. This debate has been carried out from the perspective of designing products. A new side to the debate is developed by those who examine designing without a product. They argue for a move away from the notion of design thinking, towards exploring design knowing (Kimbell 2009, 2011) and taste making in practice.

Ultimately aspiring for the development of a ‘science of the artificial’, Simon (1969) took a scientific if not computational approach to design. While Simon did not use the notion of design thinking, his writings do indicate an interest in how designers approach their work. His theorizing about design thinking has been highly influenced by the modernist, scientific call of the time, in which rationality and objectivity were given central stage (at the detriment of creativity and intuition). Inspired by computer science, Simon and Newell (1962) and Simon (1969) brought forward the idea of simulation as a thought experiment in design. As a “technique for achieving understanding and predicting the behaviour of systems” (Simon 1996 [1969]: 13), simulation can be a great source of objective knowledge in design. Besides simulation, the theory of the general problem solver (Simon and Newell 1962) underlines the
importance of a designer’s information processing abilities. Simon’s ideas are on par with computational theories of the mind (Fodor 1975), popular at that time, that support the view that thought can be reduced to a computational process (Lawson 2006).

Simon (1969) took a structural, objectivist stance to knowledge and thinking. For Simon, design knowledge and thinking are outside the real world situation, abstracted in formulas, computations, principles and theories. Rowe (1987), following his study of architects and urban planners, presented a similar account by offering descriptions of ‘procedural aspects of design’ and introducing generalized principles that are shared among designers working in different domains. Friedman (2003) supported this objectivist approach too. Friedman (2003: 515) argued that such design formulas and principles, “enable the designer to move from an endless succession of unique cases to broad explanatory principles that can help to solve many kinds of problems.”

While remaining inspired by Simon to a certain extent, Lawson (1979, 2006) turned the conversation on the nature of design thinking towards the cognitive side of individual expert designers. The researchers engaged in the Design Thinking Research Symposia made a similar turn (cf. Cross 1990, 2007, 2011, Cross et al. 1992). For Cross (1990) and Dorst (2010) design thinking is a “specific and deliberate way of reasoning” (Dorst 2010: 138), characterized by abductive processes, in other words by synthesis. This kind of reasoning is specific to professional designers, who are trained in the ‘techniques of the artificial’ (Cross 2001) and have built a long term experience in design. In their work, designers draw on this internalized body of knowledge and experience to make sense of new design situations. Cross (2011) explained that abductive thinking is different from deductive and inductive thinking in that it is about hypothesizing about what may be (see also Simon 1969). Abductive thinking, Cross (2011:10) argued, is “the logic of design that provides the means to shift and transfer thought between the required purpose or function of some activity and appropriate forms for an object to satisfy that purpose.”

Lawson (2006) made the distinction between reflective thought, or reasoning and imaginative thought or creativity. He argued that the two types of thought are not exclusive, yet, they are applied at different occasions. For Lawson (2006), reflective or rational though is directed towards external needs of a particular situation. The designer him/herself is not seen as part of that design situation, his/her task is to solve a design problem brought to him/her by a client.
Imaginative or creative thought, such as scenario-making, is directed towards an internal need of the designer. For Lawson (2006) reflective, rational though is quintessential to designing. As such, he argued, the products of imaginative thought “would always need evaluation by rational thought in order that the designer’s work should be relevant to the real-world problem” (Lawson 2006: 138). In reflective thought, designers employ solution focused strategies (Cross and Dorst 1998), such as focusing attention on identifying a ‘primary generator’ (Drake 1979) through which designers narrow down, examine and analyze the possible range of solutions. Another solution focused strategy is that of pattern-formation (Alexander 1964, Cross 1982) in which “the abstract patterns of the user requirements are turned into the concrete patterns of an actual object” (Cross 2007: 25).

Design taste making and amateur designers

At the Amsterdam Museum, where we see designing without a product, the design situation is very different from those described by Simon (1969), Cross et al. (1992) and Lawson (2006). First, the designers engaged in the project are not professional designers, like the architects and industrial designers Lawson and Cross worked with. They are museum employees doing design work in that they are hypothesizing (Buchanan 1992) about the possible future of the museum. They are initiating change (Jones 1980) in the ways in which the museum is functioning, in relation to its public, employees and collection. Second, they do not have the body of design knowledge that professional designers have, acquired through education and work experience. They do not know established theories of design, nor are they trained in using abductive thinking. Third, they are not separated from their design situation, like professional designers working for a client. The museum employees, working like designers, are part and parcel of their design situation (cf. Jones 1980). They hypothesize about the possible future of the museum which includes them too. Change is directed towards their ways of working, their relationship with the public and their perceptions of the importance of historical objects and personal stories in telling the story of Amsterdam.

The museum employees at the Amsterdam Museum are amateur designers. An amateur, Gherardi (2009) argued, is somebody who engages in a practice for the love of what s/he is doing, meaning in a non-professional, non-instrumental way. Amateur practices, such as listening to music or wine tasting (Hennion 2004) have been studied in terms of the passionate
attachment of amateurs to the object of their practice. This is in contrast to the study of professional practices, such as professional design, where the focus is on the instrumental logic of the practice (like design as problem solving), examined in terms of the cognitive processes employed (inductive, deductive, abductive thinking), the utility and efficiency of such processes and in terms of the specialized body of knowledge (design principles and theories) used in such work.

As amateur designers, the museum employees are fascinated by the idea that their museum “can be different, more open, personal and interactive” as one employee put it. Another employee expressed the same fascination when she argued that what attracts her most in her design work is that:

“...it is really new, that we have to invent new ways of doing things, not only in the technical but also organizational perspective. I am most motivated if I can experiment with new ways... it doesn’t have to be really spectacular.”

As amateur designers, the Amsterdam Museum employees do not possess the specialized knowledge professional designers do. Rather, they develop sensible knowledge (Strati 2007) in doing, by engaging in practice with other museum employees, web designers, members of the public, online communities and historical objects (Maris and Huizing 2012). One employee explained that the difference between her professional work at the museum and the work she is doing for the redesign project is that for the latter everything is so new that ‘you almost need to feel what is necessary’, ‘we learn by doing’. This sensible knowledge is at the basis of taste making, the collective process through which the museum employees appraise and refine their practice. Central to their practice of designing therefore is not so much an evaluation of their work in terms of efficiency or fit (Lawson 2006). Rather, it is a valuation, an appraisal in terms of whether the changes they propose are appropriate for the museum and meaningful to the employees and the rest of the people that would participate in them.

‘Working like pioneers’ as the museum director put it, the museum employees were collectively developing and negotiating a common vocabulary for talking about and appraising their work. This vocabulary was composed of words the employees used in their museum practice, others that they learned from their collaboration with web designers and others that they read about in museum related and other literature. The process of appraisal,
valuating was directed at three aspects of their work, namely at the current practice of the Amsterdam Museum (as we have seen in the previous chapter); at the ways of working towards creating an online and offline interactive museum environment and at the qualities of the changes they proposed for the new museum.

Appraising the current way the museum is functioning, some employees argue that it is ‘inward focused’ (cf. Odding 2011), meaning that it presents the exhibitions the program managers think are interesting, using objects they consider relevant and that the employees work too much ‘from behind their desks’ rather than talking to the public. It is argued that this ‘inward focus’ is not appropriate in the current age when the general public is more and more interested in taking part in public discussions, including in museums. The new Amsterdam Museum would need to be ‘participative’, a term made popular in the museum literature by Simon (2010) and her book ‘The Participative Museum’. At the moment, the museum is ‘not participative enough, we are doing quite poorly on that’, as one employee explained. A participative museum is one that makes the public’s participation and interaction with the employees its ‘raison d’être’, one that invites the public to contribute their stories, share their opinions and actively participate in events both online and offline.

Other museum employees argued that for the museum to become participative, its exhibitions and events would need to be organized in a different way than before. At the moment, it was argued, the work is done too much in a ‘project based manner’ in which curators, project managers and other employees work on an exhibition as a self-contained event. Their work ends when the exhibition opens. In designing for participation and collaboration, the museum employees would need to remain ‘involved’, ‘connected’ and ‘present’ to encourage discussions and interactions. Their approach to preparing exhibitions, characterized as ‘designing in steps’ (planning, assembling, testing, displaying and marketing) would need to be replaced with a ‘designing over time’, in which exhibitions are allowed to change and grow following the public’s reactions and contributions. The manager of the e-culture department explained this challenge they experience in the museum:

“In a museum people are used to making exhibitions, and their work kind of stops at the moment the exhibition opens. But if you make an exhibition that wants people to interact then the work is almost just starting when the exhibition opens and it’s ending when the exhibition is closed or even later if the community stays alive as in the
Neighborhood Shop community. So it’s a whole new way for people to be involved in the process. [...] And that’s what is really different if you design for interaction, the real difference is that it is designing over time, so you cannot sit at your desktop, make a plan and implement it and then maybe test it and improve it, no, you have to be involved and you have to design...well, it is more like travelling than it’s like designing in steps.”

‘Designing over time’ is a matter of remaining involved with the designed (an exhibition or an event), as well as remaining alert and responding to people’s needs and wishes as they engage with the designed. As such, many museum employees acknowledged that the exhibitions they prepare would need to be ‘attractive’, ‘approachable’, ‘transparent’, ‘smooth’ and ‘easy to join’ for all types of audiences, terms they learned from web designers.

The same qualities were wished for in the online environment too. At the moment, they argued, the museum’s two main online communities – Neighborhood Shops and Memories from the East – are not transparent or approachable for everybody as people have the feeling that they are ‘closed communities’, only for those who participated in the projects from the beginning. The museum employees would need to overcome this challenge in the new online community, The Heart, such as by making clear on the home page that this is a community for everybody interested in the story of Amsterdam.

It was argued as well that attention needs to be given to the ‘tone of voice’ with which the museum communicates with the public, both online and offline. It is argued that at the moment, the museum’s voice is ‘too authoritative’, and that would need to be replaced with a friendlier and even ‘personal voice’, with the employees and the public addressing each other with the colloquial ‘je’ instead of the polite ‘u’. The new museum as an online and offline meeting place would need to be a space where the employees and the public can relate to each other like ‘partners’ in storytelling about Amsterdam.

This vocabulary for appraising the practice has been negotiated times and again during meetings at the Amsterdam Museum. For instance, different employees had different understandings of what a ‘participative museum’ means, and a different view on the ‘degree of public participation’ that would be appropriate for the museum: should the public be encouraged to participate by sharing their stories online or taking it a step further and invite
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the public to participate in curating exhibitions built around their stories? Similarly, what the appropriate degree of participation is of museum employees themselves was debated too. Should it be their job to go out into the neighborhoods and talk to people there, or only engage with the public in the museum? Taken together, these collective negotiations of a shared vocabulary to talk about and appraise the practice express the aesthetic judgments of what a museum as an online and offline meeting place could entail and what needs to be done to achieve it. These negotiations lay at the basis of the formation of a particular taste for designing an open and interactive museum, which I will elaborate on in the following section.

Thinking (through) styles, constituting identities

This vocabulary for appraising the practice has been developed by the museum employees over a long period of time. It did not spring from this project alone. Change and innovation have been the museum’s modus operandi for many years. Organizationally, the museum has been changing considerably in the last decade towards a project based organization, working with volunteers and towards what the director calls ‘cultural entrepreneurship’ – combining profit generating activities such as cultural events or presentations with community support and education activities such as free neighborhood events or workshops. Technologically, the Amsterdam Museum, together with the web designers of Mediamatic have been engaged in developing and maintaining online communities even before Facebook was launched. In 2003, the museum launched Memories from the East, followed by the Neighborhood Shops community launched in 2009.

In all these years of engaging in design work, working either on their own or collectively with web designers on new organizational forms, the Amsterdam Museum employees have developed their own style of working. They developed their own distinctive taste for designing for interaction and collaboration, different from that of other museums that do similar work, such as the Jewish Museum in Amsterdam, the Brooklyn Museum or Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History. Examining the events they prepare and the online communities they develop and maintain we can easily see ‘the Amsterdam Museum signature’. The shared vocabulary for appraising the practice the museum employees develop and negotiate not only sustains the practice, but also constitutes it (Gherardi 2009).
There are sporadic studies in the design literature that we can draw on, that examine how a design company or a design school develops its own style or identity in the field and how that identity is negotiated and sustained in practice through the projects that company engages in (an exception is Yoo et al. 2006). Following cognitive theories or abilities theories, most studies have concentrated on the individual ‘thinking and working styles’ of famous designers, such as Gordon Murray, Mike Borrows or Kenneth Grange (Cross 2011). Their style of designing, their unique professional identity in the field has been seen as springing from their creative personalities (Meneely and Portillo 2005), their ‘I can do it’ and risk-taking attitudes (Cross 2011) and personal ways of working such as the use of drawing or software, alternating intensive thinking with relaxation or building a collection of precedents (Lawson 2006).

Yet, we know little of how individual thinking and working styles are translated and negotiated into a practice, shared by all the other designers, technicians, projects managers and so on working with the famous designers. Focusing only on the individual thinking and working styles, we forget that designing is a collective activity, performed collectively in or across a design company by employees with different skills and abilities (Bucciarelli 1994, Alexiou and Zamenopoulos 2008). Many looking at Peter B. Lewis Building at Weatherhead School of Management see it as the work of Frank Gehry, while in fact it is the work of a multitude of people and technologies working at Gehry’s firm, Gehry Partners LLP, as well as outside of it (Gehry 2004). Also, by examining individual thinking styles we are made to think that creativity is an individual personality trait (cf. Boden 2004). Exploring the close work at such a design firm as that of Gehry Partners LLP, or at the Amsterdam Museum, we obtain a view of creativity as relational, springing from the spontaneous associations of designers and the objects they work with (Suchman 2002, Yaneva 2009, Kimbell 2009, 2011).

It is through engaging in a collective practice that the famous designer and his team together develop their particular style of working, their own distinctive identify in the field, their own specific taste for designing. This taste for designing is specific to that group of designers and is recognizable in all the projects they undertake. Tonkinwise (2011) called this shared way of working the ‘style of practice’ and argues that designers create new products or processes by ‘innovating within their style’. Designers are ‘thinking through styles’, meaning that even when they create a very new product, it is still recognizable as belonging to a firm of designers. Yoo et al. (2006: 215), in their study of the design practice of Gehry Partners LLP,
used the term ‘gestalt’ to refer to “an organisation’s ability to approach its design problems creatively and individually, yet maintain unity across design outcomes”. Yoo et al. (2006) examined how Frank Gehry’s architectural vision and ways of working are translated and negotiated with each project into a companywide gestalt. This shared gestalt functions as their organizing pattern in the buildings they create – which makes them recognizable as Gehry buildings - as well as in the organizational forms they develop around each project. While each project is organized in a different way, depending on the available resources and the goals (ranging from the Fish Sculpture in Barcelona to the Peter B. Lewis Building), they all carry the company’s gestalt forward through negotiations and adjustments.

Similar processes as those described by Yoo et al. (2006) and Tonkinwise (2011) are seen at the Amsterdam Museum. Throughout the years of design work, the Amsterdam Museum employees have been collectively developing their own style or taste for designing. Their taste for designing is specific to their museum and is visible in everything they do, from preparing exhibitions, to relating to history, to developing the new online community platform, The Heart. It is a style of working through which the museum distinguishes itself (Bourdieu 1984) from other museums in Amsterdam, the Netherlands and the world. The museum employees have been developing their collective taste for designing by means of a relational creativity (Suchman 2002, Yaneva 2009, Kimbell 2009, 2011). Throughout the years, the employees drew inspiration for their practice from the museum’s collection, from the nature of the museum as a city museum, from other museums in the Netherlands and abroad, and so on. In comparing their practice to that of other museums, the Amsterdam Museum employees not only appraise their own practice but they also delineate and constitute their professional identity (Bourdieu 1984) in the national and international museum world.

The Amsterdam Museum sets to tell the story of Amsterdam and of its people, with exhibitions on subjects such as migration, prostitution, football or fashion. The collection the museum has is not composed of famous paintings or famous historical objects, but of things laden with historical or personal value, such as letters from the war. These objects engage the visitor in a personal way, making him/her think of similar past and present events. This is different from an art museum, whose purpose is to display art and historical objects for people to see. The Amsterdam Museum’s employees draw inspiration from this particular nature of their museum and its collection to design a storytelling environment in their museum. Two employees explained:
“If you look at our mission statement, then you see that our collection is not central. Central is the story of Amsterdam and the way in which people can engage with it. And that is crucial because it is different from saying ‘we want to tell this story and here is our collection’. Now we say ‘if we don’t have objects, we still tell the story’ and that is the world upside down for a museum.”

“Most museums until last century told their stories via objects and the better their objects, the better their museum. The Rijksmuseum, they have 2 million visitors, that’s because they have the Night Watch. But in our museum it is different. People are more interested in personal stories and oral history. The way to tell oral history in more interesting ways is also changing via recording, internet, and other multimedia. And that means that it would be stupid to neglect these aspects because our target audience is doing this, they are using media to tell stories to each other, that’s why YouTube, Facebook and Flickr are popular, because people want to tell stories.”

Their style of designing online and offline activities in which participation and collective storytelling is wished for indicates a taste for facilitating and inspiring ‘so that you almost invite interaction to happen’ as one manager explained. This is clearly visible in some of the exhibitions they prepared, such as ‘Johan and I’, centred on the fans’ encounter with the football player Johan Cruijff. The visitors are inspired to contribute their stories both online on the community page and offline in the actual exhibition by being presented with other people’s encounter with their football legend.

In making their taste for designing, the Amsterdam Museum employees also draw inspiration from and compare their practice to that of other museums in the Netherlands and abroad. The most mentioned one is the Brooklyn Museum in New York which is acclaimed for inviting the local public to share online their videos and pictures about their neighborhood. From the Brooklyn Museum, the Amsterdam Museum has borrowed ideas of activities to organize and ways to inspire the public to contribute their stories. Yet, the Amsterdam Museum employees argue that their style of working is different from that of the Brooklyn Museum in that they do not aim only for online interaction, but that they develop ways in which the online content can make its way into the actual museum, in exhibitions that bridge the online and offline environments, like ‘Johan and I’.
Similarly, the Jewish Historical Museum in Amsterdam, which also developed an online community for its public, represents another source of inspiration, especially for designing simple and intuitive community pages. Yet, the Amsterdam Museum employees differentiate themselves from the Jewish Historical Museum. They argue that their aim is to create a fun online environment, seen in the bright red colors of the pages, in the personal tone of voice in which members communicate and in the freedom the members have to organize themselves and monitor their own content. The Jewish Historical Museum approach is one guided by the seriousness of their topic, namely remembering the victims of the Holocaust, seen in the light colors of the pages, the simplicity of the layout, type of pictures presented, such as old family portraits and in the close monitoring by the museum of all the content posted, so that any incorrect information or inappropriate content is filtered out before appearing online.

The taste for facilitating and inviting is directed not only towards designing the new online and offline interactive museum, but also towards organizing the practice of designing itself. Like Gehry Partners’ gestalt is visible in both the buildings they create and in the organizational forms they develop when designing those buildings (Yoo et al. 2006), so is the Amsterdam Museum’s taste for facilitating and inviting visible in both the online and offline activities they design and in the practice of designing them. The e-culture department manager argued that for her it is of outmost importance that the museum facilitates that all the employees, but also members of the public and web designers can express their ideas and ‘participate as equal partners’ in designing. They are all touched by the design in one way or another, so their input is very valuable for the quality of the design. But, she argues, people will only contribute their ideas and will take responsibility for their actions if they feel that their ideas are appreciated as those of equal partners. In her own words:

“Equality doesn’t work if you are not consistent. You cannot preach equality on the online community and not do it in all the parts of the project because I see everybody, my colleagues, the web designers, the volunteers as part of the bigger project. So if I’m equal with the volunteers but not with my colleagues then it will not work. I don’t think it will work.”

Frequent meetings are organized between museum employees and members of the public to discuss ideas for the new museum. An insightful example was a meeting between employees working on the development of the new online community The Heart and the members of the
Memories from the East sub-community. In this meeting, the employees explained the museum’s plans for the new community, that in contrast to Memories from the East the community would be opened for everybody to contribute, that the content will be organized in themes of interest and that the museum employees would contribute daily with news and information on ‘the object of the day’. The members of the sub-community were then invited to provide feedback on these propositions and to indicate what they would like to have in the new community. Through discussions and negotiations, agreements were then made that the new members would be required to build an account and a profile, that there would be possibilities to communicate privately on the community and that the editorial board of the community would be formed not of museum employees, but exclusively of interested members. These meetings illustrate how the employees and the members of the public engage collectively in appraising their practice and that through appraising it, they are also refining it.

Refining practices and practitioners through taste making

Taste making is a continuous process of appraisal and negotiation. As practices are constantly appraised and negotiated, they are also constantly refined (Gherardi 2009). Each project that is undertaken, such as an exhibition, an event or a new online community, represents an opportunity to collectively reflect on the practice, to negotiate together what can stay the same and most importantly what can be improved in the ways in which they do their work. It is the employees’ ambition to make their museum better, more interactive, more participative, that fuels their work in each new project they engage in. It is this ‘repetition without repetition’ (Gherardi 2010) that carries the practice further, while constantly refining it ‘towards a never-achieved perfection’ (Gherardi 2009, see also Yoo et al. 2006).

All the online and offline activities, events and exhibitions that the employees of the Amsterdam Museum design carry the museum’s signature (Bourdieu 1984), seen in the focus on storytelling, in presenting different perspectives on the same topic and in the use of interactive technologies. Yet, each activity, event or exhibition is unique in its combinations of stories and storytellers (be they historical objects, people or technologies). Each activity, event or exhibition that was designed before is used as a starting point for the next ones, just like professional designers use sketches or precedents to develop new ideas or explore new venues (Lawson 2006). As an employee explained:
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“We try to make each project a part of the ongoing design project, maybe how to make more interactive environments. We try to learn from each project and improve and always immediately ask ‘ah this improvement here, which is maybe a local improvement, can we also generalize it into a global improvement?’ or at least share this improvement with other projects. So this is something that is continuous so you are never actually focused on just one project.”

The museum’s existing online communities Memories from the East and Neighborhood Shops act as such precedents for the new overarching online community, The Heart. By means of appraising these two communities, in terms of how they function, how easy it is for their members to interact with each other or how clear their aims are for the rest the public, the employees are reconsidering the choices made before in light of new ideas for the new community. In designing the new online community The Heart, the employees are maintaining some elements that are seen to work for the people participating in Memories from the East and Neighborhood Shops, while imagining new possibilities to overcome the shortcomings of these existing communities. While the essence of the new community would be similar to the existing ones, in that it will also be centred on sharing stories about Amsterdam, its form would be refined and advanced. A museum employee working with the online communities illustrated this entangled process of appraisal and refinement, when she explained that:

“In Memories from the East, there are small incentives to take part, you can comment, you can ask questions. There is a group of volunteers that go to the people in the neighborhoods and help them write their story. These are small things but I think they make Memories from the East a success. In Neighborhood Shops we are still ignoring people’s needs. It misses some ways in which you can really start slowly, to get used to the site and later on do something for yourself. We need to change this in the new community, maybe organize trainings for new members in how to use the site, or add some more incentives to participate, like a free entry ticket to an exhibition for the most active participants.”

The refinement of the practice consists not only of a refinement of how things are done. It also consists of a refinement of its own practitioners (Jones 1980). All the elements making up the design situation – both humans and non-humans - are themselves evolving in the
design practice. The practice, with its object of practice and its practitioners are ‘constitutively entangled’ (Orlikowski 2007) in such a way that a change in practice will bring about a change in its practitioners and vice versa. This constitutive entanglement is difficult to see if we examine practitioners in terms of their individual thinking styles or creativity. From these perspectives, change is seen as internal to the individual designer, as he learns by studying, by doing, by creative insight (Lawson 2006, Cross 2011). Yet, how new lessons are translated into a refined collective practice is not that clear.

The idea that a refinement of the practice of designing is constitutively entangled with a refinement of its designers is not new. Jones (1980) mentioned it too, in his thesis of designing without a product, when he talked about ‘designing as learning’. Jones (1980: xxvii) argued: “if the main purpose of ‘the design process’ is collective learning, the deliberate seeking of new ways of living, then we must expect to make changes in our processes and procedures”. Designers change through their designs, as the things designed in designing without a product include, not exclude, the designer. This perspective, Jones (1980: xxxiv) argues, requires a new conception of the self not as an individual, but “as relations, able to develop”, in other words, as a practitioner entangled in a material, epistemic practice (Orlikowski 2007, Knorr Cetina 2001).

The key mechanism for this double refinement is therefore learning in practice (Knorr Cetina 2001, Gherardi and Strati 2012). The Amsterdam Museum employees, together with the public and other partners, learn in practice by engaging collectively with an open-ended epistemic object (Knorr Cetina 2001). This epistemic object is the museum as an online and offline meeting place, in all its epistemic states: as exhibitions, activities, the online communities and even the employees themselves.

Knorr Cetina (2001) characterized epistemic objects as ‘lacking in completeness of being’, like exhibitions that are ‘not interactive enough’, online communities that are ‘not approachable enough’, the museum which is ‘not participative enough’ or other colleagues who are ‘not open enough towards the public’. This lack attracts the practitioners’ collective interest and nurtures their ‘wanting’ to overcome it (Knorr Cetina 2001). This collective interest is seen across the museum when various employees ask each other questions like: how can we make our exhibitions more interactive? How can we make the new online
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community more approachable to the public? Or how can we convince our colleagues about the value of personal stories in telling the story of Amsterdam?

The employees are part and parcel of their object of design as they hypothesize about the possible future of the museum which includes them too. Change is directed also towards their ways of preparing exhibitions, their relationship with the public online and offline and their perceptions of the importance of historical objects and personal stories in telling the story of Amsterdam.

By appraising the current practice, the museum employees are learning about what is lacking both in their practice and in their objects of practice, including themselves as practitioners. And this is a different type of knowledge than is obtained through calculations, through rational through or through cognitive processes (Lawson 2004, 2006, Cross 2007, 2011). It is a relational knowledge, obtained by engaging in practice with other human and non-humans. It is obtained by doing and by valuating the practice and the self. It is a sensible knowledge (Strati 2007: 62) that “accounts for the subject’s intimate, personal, corporeal relation with the experience of the world”. The development of such sensible knowledge indicates once again that the designers are as much part of their design situation as the rest of the assemblage they engage in designing.

In meetings like the one mentioned above between the museum employees and members of the Memories from the East sub-community, the employees and the community members are discussing their plans and ideas for changing their museum into an online and offline meeting place. Through these discussions and appraisals, they are not only refining their practice, but they are also refining themselves by discussing the quality of their previous decisions, the potential of their new ideas and suggestions and by questioning the value of their taken for granted assumptions of what they thought would make their museum interactive online and offline.

With every refinement, the museum employees are taking their practice further, gaining more understanding of what it means to design. As one employee explained: “it is really a matter of experience and growing together in learning just what it is, how things work and how people will react.” Designing without a product, as designing for advancing constitutive entanglements implies also a refinement and advancement of the practice of designing itself.
Conclusions

In this chapter, I illustrated how taste making, as the collective process of appraising and negotiating the performances of a practice, is quintessential to designing without a product, as observed at the Amsterdam Museum. I argued that the value of examining taste making in designing is that it allows us to move away from the creative genius individual to the creative collective, from calculation to appraisal, from rational judgments to aesthetic judgments and from objective knowledge to sensible knowledge. Making these moves is vital if we are to do justice to the daily practice of designing as experienced by designers themselves, which is much more personal, passionate and collective than the current theories of design thinking allow us to see.

I illustrated how the museum employees engage in advancing assemblages of people and the things they work and live with by means of constantly appraising and refining their practice. Working like choreographers, the museum employees have developed a shared vocabulary for appraising their practice, not in terms of rational calculations or evaluations of efficiency or fit, but in terms of aesthetic judgements of what makes their practice appropriate.

Also, I illustrated how the museum employees’ creativity is a relational property of an assemblage rather than a characteristic of individual employees. By borrowing ideas from different material and non-material sources and translating them to their own situation, the Amsterdam Museum employees have developed and continue to develop their own taste for designing. It is this taste that carries their signature in everything they do, and that sustains and evolves their professional identity in the national and international museum world.

Their object of design, the museum as an online and offline meeting place, is still a work in progress. As the employees appraise and refine their practice and themselves as practitioners, they are taking a step further in understanding what it means to advance collectives, what it means to make things work. And as one employee argued above, this is not a matter of ‘designing in steps’ by applying rational design methods to create an interactive environment. Rather, it is a matter of ‘designing over time’, in which not methods, but a methodology ‘as a shared imaginative living’ (Jones 1980) takes central place. I turn to this argument in the following chapter.