ABOUT THE RADICAL COLLABORATION LABS

On 6 December 2019, 200+ interdisciplinary participants came together in the Nemo museum in Amsterdam for a pilot program, titled ‘Radical Collaboration’. The Labs are intensive full-day R&D workshops in which creatives and multidisciplinary experts join forces to collectively address issues that are too complex for individuals or a single organisation to tackle on their own. The labs are a hands-on application of research through design, focused on gaining a deep understanding of a wicked problem and co-creating new perspectives on it.

COLLABORATIVE AND OPEN PROCESS

The programme took place in two blocks: a morning and an afternoon session, in which we rolled up our sleeves and got deep into the key issues raised and prepared in collaboration with different partners.

Though each lab had a tailored programme with a very different focus, the outline of the process was comparable.

The results of the labs not only inspire and connect the participants, but by openly sharing they hopefully also inspire others. This collaborative and creative R&D approach can provide essential connections between key stakeholders related to each topic, and open doors for new partnerships, projects, challenges and further events.

PROCESS DURING THE RADICAL COLLABORATION LABS

Unpacking key issues

Exploring & mapping the topic

Reflecting on design opportunities

Using mapping exercises to explore the problem from different angles and create a better collaborative understanding.

Unpacking the key issues that were identified, reframing the problem, and creating new perspectives on topic.

Reflecting on the role of the creative sector and defining design opportunities to take part in making a difference.
WHAT CAN DESIGN DO

What Design Can Do believes that design is more than making pretty things. Design and creativity can play an important role in transforming society. We need design and creativity to come up with fresh ideas, alternative strategies and provocative thoughts to address the urgent issues we are currently facing. What Design Can Do connects creative communities with public and private sectors, to utilise design as a tool for social change.

EVENTS

WDCD events are a vital tool for people to meet live, exchange knowledge and ideas, share stories (as they are so important), get inspired, connect different nationalities, cultures and sectors, and start collaborations. The WDCD events are organised in Amsterdam, São Paulo, Mexico City, Nairobi and Delhi and are important moments in time to do research, develop and accelerate ideas.

CHALLENGES

The objective of the challenges is to actively call upon creative makers to use the power of design to come up with innovative solutions to global problems. The aim is to demonstrate the potential impact that design can have on society, and to activate designers and creative entrepreneurs to use their skills in addressing pressing issues. We help to develop and accelerate the winning projects to make their ideas reality and create real impact.

RADICAL COLLABORATION LABS

The Radical Collaboration Labs is a first step to explore and develop new design challenges. Through formulating questions such as ‘How might we ..’ the aim to pinpoint the issues that are raised by our partners. Moving forward we can continue with the research and narrow down real opportunities for design. The questions, discussions and insights of today will be summarized and shared with everyone who contributed.
INTRODUCTION

COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH LAB WITH EXPERTS AND CREATIVES
The No Waste Lab was part of a full day with five Radical Collaboration Labs, organized by What Design Can Do on 6 December 2019 in Amsterdam. During this day, interdisciplinary experts and creatives came together to create a shared understanding of and new perspectives on the challenge of waste, in relation to Amsterdam.

The lab was prepared and moderated by STBY, the research partner of WDCD.

EXPLORING AND REFRAMING A WICKED PROBLEM
This lab builds on extended global research led by WDCD and STBY into the challenge of waste and consumerism. The goal of this hands-on design research event was to gain a deeper understanding of a problem and, at the same time, develop new perspectives on it. We started the day with exploring the problem: using mapping exercises and causes definition, we created a collaborative understanding of the subject. This led us to reframing the problem: with the help of a few exercises, we redefined the problem, placing it in the local context of Amsterdam. Reframing the problem provided a stepping stone to creating fresh design opportunities.

The next page provides an overview of issues and desirable futures that were explored and discussed. This was our first step toward unpacking the waste problem and identifying key issues.

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MIND MAP - ISSUES AND DESIRABLE FUTURES

ISSUE
We got used to more being better, abundance & convenience.

ISSUE
Lack of responsibility, for producers and consumers. Not enough legislation.

ISSUE
Lack of conscience on one-use materials for packaging.

ISSUE
Creating profit all the time.

ISSUE
Economic inequality.

ISSUE
We got used to more being better, abundance & convenience.

ISSUE
Lack of skills around repairing and restoring artefacts.

ISSUE
Lack of emotional attachment with objects and waste.

ISSUE
Lack of skills around repairing and restoring artefacts.

ISSUE
Lack of emotional attachment with objects and waste.

ISSUE
Lack of emotional attachment with objects and waste.

ISSUE
Lack of emotional attachment with objects and waste.

FUTURE
Slow life full of opportunities.

FUTURE
Zero waste society (GWP accountable), measurable actions, shared responsibility, performance & awareness.

FUTURE
A future where linear chains are broken including their economic models.

FUTURE
Network of scaled, self-sufficient production systems.

FUTURE
Emotional durability, long-life ownership of things that last, like in nature.

A NEW SYSTEM DESIGNED FROM PLANETARY AND HUMAN BOUNDARIES

PRODUCTION-CONSUMPTION CYCLE

RAW MATERIALS

MATERIALS

DESIGN

PRODUCE

DISTRIBUTE

USE / REUSE

REPAIR

COLLECT & SORT

PROCESS & RECYCLE

LANDFILL

INCINERATION

Exploring & mapping the topic
Unpacking key issues
Reflecting on design opportunities

6

RADICAL COLLABORATION LABS - NO WASTE LAB REPORT
COLLECTIVELY UNDERSTANDING THE WICKED PROBLEM OF WASTE & CONSUMERISM

The themes listed below highlight the key problems we collectively identified during the lab. These issues and problem areas summarize a common understanding of the problem of waste co-created during the lab using different exercises. This new collective understanding of the problem brings together different voices and perspectives from the lab.

KEY ISSUES IDENTIFIED DURING THE LAB:
• Who is responsible?
• We need new role models
• Lack of VALUE for resources, products and eventually waste
• Production-Consumption model, even when drawn circular, is not good enough
KEY ISSUE
WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?

One of the key issues deriving from the lab, while unpacking waste and consumerism, is lack of responsibility. There is no one clear problem owner or responsible party in this wicked problem. The discourse at the moment often goes back and forth in search of the main responsible stakeholders.

Is it the consumer who should change to alter demand? Is it the industry that should change to affect supply? Is it the local/national/international government that should create restrictions and enablers for both consumers and industry?

A discourse that is focused on pointing fingers restrains us from thinking about current systems. All actors should play a role in transforming current systems of production and consumption:

- **Consumerism** as a definition of the problem suggests that full responsibility lies in the hands of the consumer. This approach is not in line with systemic thinking and does not call for actions that take us far enough in solving this problem.

- In our current production-consumption system, when **producers sell products** and goods they also sell **full responsibility for those products** to consumers. At present, producers are not held responsible for their products once they are sold. However, consumers are usually not skilled and knowledgeable enough to handle that responsibility, which means that products have a very short life cycle. This gap generates more and more waste and drives over-consumption.

- **Lack of legislation or taxation on environmental externalities** under the influence of lobbyists. (uncompensated environmental effects of production and consumption that affect consumer utility and enterprise cost outside the market mechanism). As a consequence of negative externalities the private costs of production tend to be lower than its “social” cost.

- **Designers play an important role in contributing to the problem of waste.** Designers extract raw materials and add value to them through the act of design. Designers make things desirable and contribute to the quest for novelty.
KEY ISSUE
WE NEED NEW ROLE MODELS

An understanding of the problem of waste created during the lab is that our perception of consumption and waste is rooted in our role models as a modern society.

“There are two American heroes that have shaped our narrative around living in a modern society.

The first is Donald Duck: a total loser in everything he does but he has it all. A car, a big house, a full fridge. From Donald Duck we learned over decades, and keep on learning, that everybody has the right to own everything.

The second hero is John F. Kennedy, who committed the American nation to landing a man on the moon. We learned from this hero that as long as we can send a man to the moon and bring him back, everything is possible. Our collective narrative has been formed around the confidence in technology. But technology is not enough to deal with the climate urgency we are in.” - Douwe Jan Joustra, C&A Foundation

If we consider the problem of waste as a lack of role models, we could start thinking about what role models could inspire society to embrace responsible transformation?

Who can lead society into thinking of new narratives that go beyond mass production and consumption?

Furthermore, during the lab we discussed how sessions of this kind should include economists, philosophers, psychologists and spiritual thinkers to help imagine future narratives.
KEY ISSUE
LACK OF VALUE FOR RESOURCES, PRODUCTS AND WASTE

Another core problem area is the lack of value we attach to products and resources, and to waste generated after extracting them. This lack of value is shared by industry, which continues to produce new things for profit and stimulates demand. And it is shared by consumers who easily dispose of things and replace them with new ones.

“We are materialistic, but not enough”

• The problem we have as consumers is that we are materialistic, so we crave more things, especially new things. But we are not materialistic enough to take care of the stuff we buy, our belongings. We have no emotional attachment to artefacts and goods, or to the waste they become.

• This issue relates to upbringing and education. What is the message we tell our children?

• The value of raw materials is higher than the value of waste. In the current capitalistic ecosystem of production and consumption, the value of waste is always lower than that of raw materials. That makes it nearly impossible to create business models that give value to waste and can survive in this economy.

• The underlying symptom of this problem is the disappearance of skills for reusing, repairing and restoring artefacts - simple actions that used to be part of our household routine have slowly disappeared. Today, people rarely repair things; they throw them away and buy new things. This is not only easier but also cheaper. Buying a spare part or repairing a product costs more than the price of the product itself. That relates to the root problem of the lack of value accorded to resources and products. We do not pay the true cost for the products we consume.
KEY ISSUE

SYSTEMIC VIEW OF CONSUMERISM

The circular model of production and consumption as used in the lab is a step, but not the solution because it preserves the current linear economy principles in a circular model. This model does not take into account the values that are at the base of society and shape the system as we know it today. It still maintains the same mental model of the planet as an endless resource for people to use and the craving for novelty that drives our consumerist society. During the lab we discussed the need to redefine those values, and from that perspective, to design new systems that are much more in sync with nature and all life on earth.

The planet is not considered as a stakeholder at the moment. When designing new solutions we do not take into account the boundaries of our planet and its needs. Nature can no longer be an inert thing from which resources are extracted for human activity. Rather, it has to be seen as an active agent in the fate of our common future.

A basic model of circular economy, used in the lab for a problem mapping exercise
During the discussion about how we perceive the world around us, and our relation to resources and other beings on earth. A desirable future was shared where humans would be much more in sync with nature, connected and equal to all beings.
REFRAMING: NEW GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES ON WASTE THAT INSPIRE DESIGN ACTION

After collectively understanding the problem, we followed a few steps to reframe it and create new perspectives on the challenge. These perspectives offer a different point of view on the topic and inspire designers to take action.

The following three perspectives presented on pages 10-11 relate to the more global aspects of the challenge, while pages 12-17 focus specifically on Amsterdam.

“Nature does not produce or waste things. It has a cycle of becoming”

WHAT IF ‘WASTE AND CONSUMERISM’ WERE SEEN AS A ‘PRODUCTION-CONSUMPTION’ PROBLEM?
Defining this wicked problem as a problem of waste narrows the point of view of looking at waste as a by-product, the end result of a process. We should be unpacking the entire system that creates so much waste on our planet. Furthermore, by defining the problem as a problem of consumerism, we place the responsibility exclusively in the hands of consumers, and that does not allow for a systemic view. Approaching the problem as a problem of the entire production-consumption system allows us to approach this challenge as a holistic system. Only then we can design for a complete new system.

(see next page for two more reframing perspectives)
REFRAMING
WHAT IF THE PROBLEM OF WASTE WAS SEEN AS A LACK OF CONNECTION WITH EARTH AND NATURE?

At the base of our production-consumption system lies the concept of modern society where earth is there for man to use as an endless resource. Furthermore, modern society has increasingly disconnected us from nature, earth and the source of things. Man has been positioned as separate from nature. During the lab we discussed how nature is rising as a force that can jeopardize our existence on earth, calling us to change our relationship with all things on earth. This perspective expresses a philosophical shift that has implications for every aspect of our lives. However, when we bring it back to the topic of waste and consumerism, we can start thinking of exciting design opportunities. Could designers enhance the connection between man, nature and all beings? How could designers change the emotional value we accord to products and resources and create products that can evolve and stay with us?

WHAT IF WASTE OF HUMAN TALENT WAS ALSO SEEN AS A TYPE OF WASTE?
This perspective demands that we grasp unemployment and distance to the job market as social pollution. If we were to consider a waste of talent as social pollution, we could create new structures that nurture human talent that is now wasted. These structures could play a role in preventing waste, repairing, restoring products, and so on.

“From Fomo to Jomo - the joy of missing out”
OPPORTUNITIES FOR DESIGNERS TO MAKE A CHANGE IN AMSTERDAM

In the last part of the lab we discussed the issue of waste and consumerism within the context of Amsterdam. From mapping the global issue, we proceeded to analyse local aspects that shape the problem. As a group we identified key insights that guided us towards creating new local perspectives on the topic of waste described on the following pages.

These new perspectives are stepping stones to creating intriguing, inspiring and fresh design questions. They are relevant to the city of Amsterdam. However, since many cities face similar problems, they are interesting for other contexts as well.
AMSTERDAM PERSPECTIVES

PRODUCTION TAKES PLACE FAR FROM (MASS) CONSUMPTION

Amsterdam, a popular tourist destination, is also a massive shopping area. In today’s society, people shop as a way to spend leisure time. Amsterdam attracted 19 million tourists in 2018. Tourism is an industry characterized by temporary, single-use and fast consumption, which generates enormous amounts of waste. Furthermore, during the lab we discussed that many of the products consumed in Amsterdam are produced overseas. Due to the linear economic system we have almost no production in Amsterdam (or NL in general), but plenty of waste. It is very difficult to buy local, since most industry has left the city. This means that consumption by default contributes to pollution, because transport is required.

WHAT IF THE PROBLEM OF WASTE WAS SEEN AS A LACK OF THE PRODUCTION OF SUSTAINABLE GOODS IN AMSTERDAM?

This perspective involves looking at the problem of waste and consumerism as a problem of non-local production. This framing creates a design opportunity to envision new, small scale, on-demand production circles.

POSSIBLE PARTICIPANTS:
- Local business owners
- Unemployed people in Amsterdam
- Designers, workshops and makers spaces
- Tourist industry

THIS PERSPECTIVE TRIGGERED NEW DESIGN QUESTIONS:

How can we create production on demand in order to create local products and pride by involving unemployed people in Amsterdam?

How might we use circular thinking in order to forge new community dynamics in Amsterdam between locals and visitors?

How might we make the resources used to manufacture a product visible in order to reduce waste in a playful way by involving corporate production companies in Amsterdam?
Another local perspective we reframed deals with the highly efficient and productive waste management system in Amsterdam and the effect it has on our relationship with waste:

- Throwing things away is too cheap and too easy in Amsterdam. There is not enough tax put on waste.
- People are not incentivized to reduce waste or to recycle more. Also, there are no consequences for generating a lot of waste or for not recycling.
- Scepticism regarding separation and recycling of waste. Many people ask themselves if it makes sense to recycle, if they really have an impact as individuals.
- Waste management occurs at a city level. The individual and the community do not have to ‘deal’ with waste and do not experience the consequences of processing and treating their own waste.
- An underlying thought is that there is a lack of trust in the system. People feel lost in vast amounts of information.

A contributing factor is that as consumers or citizens we do not see how much waste we throw away. There is a lack of feedback and transparent data.

“Our society has become obsessed with cleaning and hygiene. Our image of what is considered clean and healthy is almost sterile”
AMSTERDAM PERSPECTIVES
‘TOO GOOD’ WASTE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM ON A CITY LEVEL

WHAT IF THE PROBLEM OF WASTE IN AMSTERDAM IS SEEN A PROBLEM OF THE ‘INVISIBILITY OF WASTE’?
Waste management systems have been streamlined and made so efficient in the Netherlands and Amsterdam that we no longer see waste in our lives. Waste is invisible and we cannot grasp it. The city is so clean that we are unaware of the amount of waste generated every day. This reframing makes waste visible again as part of our urban life. Rather than removing waste from our streets and city, we should look for creative ways to create transparency and clarity about the role that waste plays and could play in our daily lives. Designers have an opportunity to rethink our relationship with household waste. Can we think of new ways to reward reducing waste generation and recycling?

THIS PERSPECTIVE GENERATED A FEW DESIGN QUESTIONS THAT COULD BE SEEN AS A STARTING POINT FOR A DESIGN EXPLORATION:
How could we change the whole waste management system so that it rewards the production of less waste or the separation and recycling of it?

How might we make people’s impact on the waste journey visible in order to create trust and confidence in the recycling system involving the homeless community in Amsterdam?

POSSIBLE PARTICIPANTS
• City of Amsterdam and local districts
• Education programmes
• Waste management companies
• Retailers on shopping streets
• Homeless communities (who are often in close contact with waste and even depend on it)
For many people, individualism and anonymity are general characteristics of daily life in Amsterdam. During the lab we discussed how they relate to waste and consumerism:

- Lack of community engagement with waste contributes to pollution. This manifests itself in the lack of exchange of goods and waste, lack of sharing of infrastructure and household goods, and the number of times a delivery man delivers to the same building on the same evening.

- No ownership of products as a strategy for lowering consumption and waste is very important and already making waves in Amsterdam, with services such as Swapfiets. However, lack of ownership also leads to lack of attachment and care for products, reducing the repair culture even further. How can we find a balance between the two? During the lab the transition from No Ownership - Community Ownership was discussed.

**WHAT IF THE PROBLEM OF WASTE IS SEEN AS A LACK OF COMMUNITY RESILIENCE?**

When approaching waste from a community perspective, we can start thinking about how strengthening local communities and networks could help reduce waste. Could we think of new ways to organize communities around waste, with energy corporations or food corporations as sources of inspiration? Design has the power to connect different areas of expertise and actors by creating new systems and services. How can we build on that power when it comes to No Waste in Amsterdam?
THIS PERSPECTIVE TRIGGERED A FEW DESIGN QUESTIONS:
How can designers think of ways to design local, self-sustainable communities that are resilient and connected, where the value of waste is elevated into a community commodity?

How might we use (household) waste to make housing more affordable by involving the multinationals in Amsterdam in growing neighbourhoods?

How might we create community models to reduce household waste by involving waste companies and neighbourhoods in Amsterdam?

How might we extend the lifespan of home appliances in order to avoid waste by involving local communities in creating new economic structures?

POSSIBLE STAKEHOLDERS:
• Community centres and grassroots initiatives
• Large corporates in Amsterdam
• Housing corporations
• Local associations or cooperatives
• Municipality and city districts
FINAL THOUGHTS

The discussions we had during the lab were on a philosophical level. Throughout the day a sense of urgency was expressed to rethink the values rooted in the current production-consumption systems. These discussions led us to a deeper societal rethink. We obviously didn’t come with solutions, and that was not the goal of the day, but we did open up perspectives for further creativity.

Such collaborative research is only possible when experienced professionals come together and share a sense of trust in the process and in the group. We found it unique to be able to spend time creating common knowledge with this group of creative experts.

It is important to acknowledge that a lot is already being done in the field of sustainable, circular design. In recent years many great design projects offering smart solutions for recycling materials have proven to be successful. We see more and more innovative circular economy initiatives being realized locally.

However, forecasts of the growth of waste and population growth paint a worrisome picture. For the scale and urgency of climate change, current efforts do not seem to be moving fast enough towards systemic change.

As designers, we want clear, graspable briefs that lead to tangible solutions. The key issues and reframing described in this document are more conceptual and philosophical. The next step would be to translate these perspectives into clear briefs that are in line with local possibilities and limitations, while still calling on designers to join the efforts of not only imagining great solutions that can function within current systems but imagining completely new systems. What seems clear is that these conversations should be done with a larger group of experts. Contributions from philosophers, economists and physiologists could enhance the conversations. All hands need to be on deck if we are to collaboratively imagine futures beyond the current system, designed within planetary and human boundaries.

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