

Social Design:

It's NOT about the Process

Ideas about creating

from a contextual & theoretical perspective on creativity & design

to understand social design as a profession

Willemijn Brouwer

Social designer at a party

'Hey, what do you do for a living?'

'I'm a social designer.'

'Okay, cool. What's that?'

'Uh, it's like using design principles to address social challenges.'

'What do you mean?'

'Well, it's about applying a design approach to complex issues, so it involves creativity.'

'Oh, do you mean Design Thinking?'

'Yeah, something like that. I use Design Thinking in my work.'

'Oh, cool. We recently had a Design Thinking course.'

'It's about talking to the customer first, right?'

'Uh, yeah, that's right. Hey, I need to use the restroom; talk to you later...'

It's tricky, isn't it? Talking about your work as a social designer at a party. What you do in your daily job is challenging to express in words. That's why you brush it off as an approach, process, or even worse: as Design Thinking. You're selling yourself short.

Opening your backpack

Your backpack of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and experience is difficult to open. Not only for others, but also for yourself. On the outside there's a 'design approach,' and there are 'techniques for creativity.' Inside the backpack are the implicit assumptions about creativity and design stemming from theories created in the context of Western history. Let's open that backpack to better grasp what is in there. Because, as you know: understanding assumptions and context is the first step to insight. And a first step to small talk about your work.

Four compartments

I make use of four topics or contexts on human creating, four compartments in our backpack. We start at the bottom, so we can make sense on what is on top of that. The four compartments are framed by representing persons: The Genius, Everybody, Industrial Product Design Engineer, and Social Designer. See figure xx for an overview. Each of these for compartments exists out of multiple chapters.

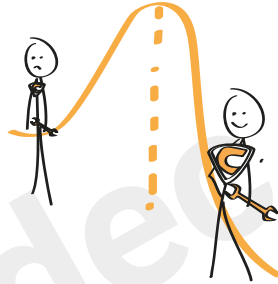
Four creators representing four (theoretical) compartments

The genius



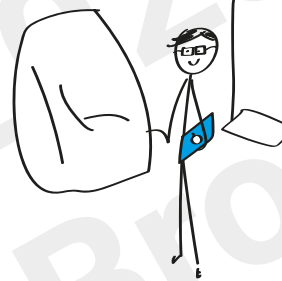
The Artist or Intellect that have created Art or Science, impacting society. The genius gives us an introduction to our understanding of human creating.

Everybody



Everybody is creative! Or at least everybody has the potential to be creative. Theories provide us with assumptions and techniques we still use.

Industrial Product Design Engineer



Creator of plans for mass produceable products. Theories and methods provide us with principles we take with us to the public domain.

Social Designer



(Co-)creator of plans for interventions in the public domain, using IDPE principles. Context and theories give insight on what you are trying to achieve.

| | | | | | | |
|---------------|---------------------|------------------------------|------------------|------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| Acient Greece | 1550s > Renaissance | 1850s> Industrial Revolution | 1945 > Post-WWII | 1960s Mass-consumption | 1980s Neo-liberalism | 2008 (Financial) crisis |
|---------------|---------------------|------------------------------|------------------|------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|

Six questions

I will end each chapter with a conclusion structured in six questions about creating:

- Who is involved?
- What is the outcome?
- Where and when?
- Is the focus on thinking, doing, feeling and/or fabricating?
- is the focus on the beginning, middle or end?
- How: what is in the proces?

See figure xx for an overview of these question. By using these questions we make sure we compare theories and ideas honestly. As some ideas may seem contradictory but are actually complementary as they focus on different elements.

In the final conclusion I'll zoom out and see if we can find some general insights on these questions based on everything we have found in our backpack.

Research based

This book is a synthesis based mainly on academic research literature from the creativity and design. This synthesis was not created through the use of scientific

methodologies. What you read you see through my perspective which is colored by me as:

- Strategic Product Design Engineer
- Lecturer of Creativity theory
- Facilitator of workshops
- Hobbyist philosopher
- Dutch world-citizen, valuing green society
- Mother, Wife, Sister, Daughter, Friend
- Human being (not resource)
- Author of this book

Yours truly,

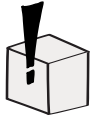
Willemijn Brouwer

Six questions



Who's involved?

From many Gods, to a single God, to a genius as an artist, to a genius as an intellectual creator and scientist, to any person that can be sole creator, to inspiration from experts, to a completely network of people that are involved in creating.



What's the outcome?

Creativity theory emerged in psychology, and the focusses is on ideas. Though sometimes measured through tangible products as paintings. Entering design and specifically product design, tangible and useable products are results of creating. For social designers the outcomes can be quite tedious to determine.



Where and when?

In the beginning of our Western civilisation the where and when of creating is unspoken of. However, as we move towards present times, especially when we transfer IDPE principles in the public domain, the where and when becomes more influential.



Focus on doing, thinking, feeling and/or non-human fabricating?

As we will learn, some theories are more focused on creating and design as a thinking process. Others ideas focus on making, feeling or fabricating. This division helps to understand perspectives but also showcases the basic assumptions in theories.



Focus on the beginning, middle or end?

Roughly dividing creating in three parts: the main idea, the development, the realisation, helps in positioning theories and perspectives. It clarifies why some theories may seem opposite but actually focus on different areas.



How: what is in the process?

What is *in* the process? Not what *is* the process. A process implies steps taken in time. We can only be abstract and superficial about the steps taken in time, since we are speaking of human behavior. And theory is never truly objective.

The Genius



Ch 1: Oude Grieken

Ch 2: Middeleeuwen,

Ch 3: Renaissance,

Ch 4: Verlichting

Ch 5: Romantiek

Ch 6: Industrial Revolution

Ch 7: Creating as a thinking proces in four stages

Ch8: Creating as a thinking proces of restructuring

Ch9: The individual genius in the 21st Centuryv

Compartment 1: The Genius

General Western history provides us with foundational ideas that form some of the basic ideas in creativity and later design theory. They also opened the door for the idea that everyone can be creative. The focus is on general understand of our ideas of human creating.

We start in Ancient Greece, as starting point of Western Civilization. The idea that people (not only God) can create emerges in the Renaissance, and becomes mainstream in the period of Enlightenment. It begins when painters start signing their paintings and receive credit for something they have created. These ideas partly revive Ancient Greek concepts such as the idea of the Genius.

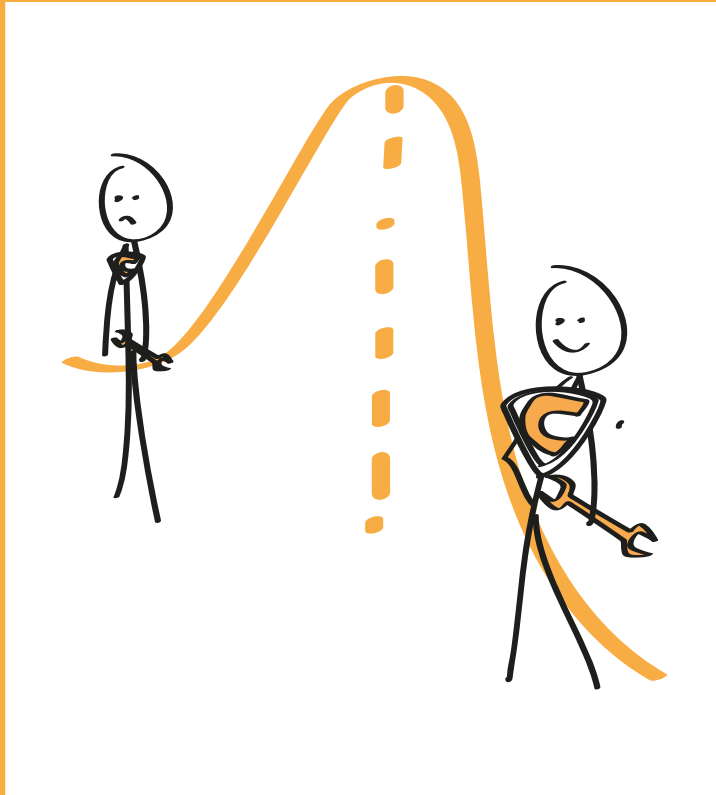
In the Enlightenment scientists instead of artists get credit for geniuses. Rational reasoning becomes paramount in creation, and despite artists wanting to reclaim their special creative status they had in the Renaissance, it is Enlightenment and not Romantic ideas that lead us into the Industrial Revolution.

The term “creativity” enters the English language in

1875, when the industrial progress was increasing drastically. The word itself described progress in art and science, which we would likely call innovation today.

The discipline of psychology emerged, along with the first version of the IQ test. Interest grew in understanding what goes on in the minds of geniuses. Foundational theories on how geniuses think were created that form the basis for our creative thinking methods but also for social design methods.

Everybody



Ch 1: Capitalizing Creativity

Ch 2: Measuring creative potential

Ch 3: Brainstorming

Ch 4: Creative Problem Solving

Ch 5: The role of domain specific knowledge and skills

Ch 6: Deliberate creativity in the 2020's

Compartment 2: Everybody

In this compartment we find our current ideas about creativity take shape, and there are techniques and principles still used today to foster creativity. The main assumptions are that creativity is a human trait and independent of what you create.

The run up to and WWII itself prompts European scientists to move to America, shifting the Western center of knowledge across the ocean. WWII demonstrates the (destructive) power of human creation, and with the Cold War looming, Americans need the creative power of their people.

In this context, 1950 marks the beginning of creativity research in psychology, initially focusing on measuring the creative potential of the people to nurture it. The assumption is that your Creative Quotient (CQ) is different from your IQ.

The 1950s in the US witness both technological advancements enabling war and mass consumption and the advertising business. Methods and techniques

emerge to consciously tap into our creativity. The belief that everyone can be creative becomes the new truth.

Creative Problem Solving emerges as ultimate combination of theory and practice, and influencing both creativity and design methods. The research field of creativity matures and the role of context and the role of knowledge and skills of the creation domain is debated.

Industrial Product Design Engineer



Ch 1: Emergence of Research on Design Methods

Ch 2: Industrial Product Design engineering

Ch 3: Design as formgiving

Ch 4: Design as a reflective activity

Ch 5: Design as way to give meaning

Ch 5: Design Thinking

Ch 6: The (Industrial) Product(less) Design Engineer in the 2020's

Compartment 3:

Industrial Product Design Engineer

In compartment 3 we will explore the different ideas about design, and differences between design science and industrial product design engineering as a discipline. What are design principles that are specific for IDPE?

In the face of mass-consumption and technological progress, a scientific discipline on design and a field of Industrial Product Design emerged in the 1960s. The first methods and training for what we now call Industrial Product Design Engineering emerge. These individuals are trained as creators in a specific field.

The science of design is the science of the 'human-created', the artificial. Researching human creation cannot be investigated with social sciences and natural sciences, therefore design science. Where creativity has psychological origins, design science is interdisciplinary in nature from its genesis.

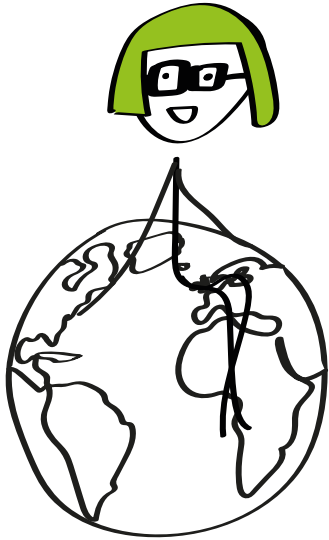
Design science developed in waves, from the idea of

designing as a rational activity, to a form giving activity and a reflective activity, a way of thinking or a way to give meaning to human creation.

Generally, the focus on cognition in research grows. Researching what and how designers think increases in popularity. Design Cognition, or Design Thinking emerges.

At the same time, from the specific domain of product design, methods are being developed that describe product design processes. The triangle of human-centeredness, technological feasibility and organization viability survived remain the pillars of industrial product design engineering.

Social Designer



Ch 1: Wicked problems & uprising of Neo-liberalism

Ch 2: Again, Design Thinking

Ch 3: The (im)possibility of using IPDE principles in the context of the public domain

Ch 4: Social Designers professional values, knowledge, skills and attitudes

Compartment 4: Social Designer

In compartment four, we find an explanation for the emergence of social design and the popularity of the managerial version of Design Thinking. Theory and ideas in this compartment are in full development. Social design is a relatively new discipline and theory is evolving.

Early 1970s, America is in recession. In this context, two policy scientists write a seminal article that social problems are not “rational” design problems but Wicked Problems. Problems that require a different way of designing. This article is embraced in design science and in IPDE, less so in other disciplines of design in which rationality and objectivity remain leading principles.

The American recession grassroots the opportunity for the rise of Neo-Liberalism. Reagan comes to power early 1980s with the recognizable rhetoric: Making America Great Again. Thatcher comes to power in a similar way in the UK and the era of neo-liberalism begins.

Privatization of social creates a new kind of semi-market: the public domain. For a decade the fast Wallstreet-money-making-machine seem great. MBA's are booming and designing emerges as a business activity. The management consultant version of Design Thinking takes off.

Lurking in the background is the realization that short term economic growth also has negative consequences on society and nature.

With rapidly developing technologies, dependencies of technologies, increasing interconnectedness our society has dramatically increased in complexity the past decades. IPDE-ers as complex problem solvers gain popularity. And the IPDE-ers themselves the realization that throwing products into the world has negative impact grows.

After the 2008 financial crisis a generation of designers that wants to make an impact with their designs grows. The population of product designers engaging in the public domain call themselves Social Designers.