

**Selection processes
in the design field:
the Netherlands at
Milan Design Week**

June 8th, 2016

Master Thesis Arts,
Culture and Society
Erasmus School of History,
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Foreword

Reaching the end of this journey and reflecting on how incredible this past year has been, I would like to spend some words to thank everyone that has been part of it.

First of all, I would like to thank my supervisor, Femke van Hest, for having encouraged me to not accept compromises for my project and for having helped me to give it the shape that it has now.

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1. Introduction

Milan, April 12th, 2016. The exhibition space is very small but very crowded of people of different nationalities and age. Everyone seems very curious about the functioning of the piece presented by the designer, and also a bit sceptical. The designer is present and is very friendly with the public, receiving compliments with a smile and answering questions of perplexed visitors. The work he presents, he says, is a reflection about how private data are being abused, losing their private identity on the internet. His aim is, with his work, to provoke reflection in the viewer and to create a personalised experience based on the visitor's personal data. It is indeed not the usual work you would expect to find at a design fair. A spontaneous question emerges: how did this work ended up here and not at an art fair? Who selected it? And why?

These and other questions have not yet found an answer in the field of design, as it still represents an unexplored realm in academic research. Compared to art, the field of design has been ignored for a long time in sociological analysis, even if the impact of design on everyday life is very important. Almost every object of use is the result of the project of a designer. The field of design shares several characteristics with the art world but at the same time presents some peculiarities that make this discipline worthy of being studied by the academic world. The concept of design is strictly connected with the process of industrial production, from which it derives (Sparke, 2013). This strong commercial identity of design is balanced by an equally important artistic side: since its birth design has always been characterised by the harmony between these two elements. The birth of the profession of the designer is relatively recent, even if the concept of design can be traced back to the idea of applied arts (De Fusco, 1985). Maybe this recent birth of the profession of designers, maybe other factors, contributed to the long neglect of design in the academic research. However, in the recent years, a new attention has been dedicated to the study of this interesting field. It is in this new trend that the present research is inserted.

Studying a field in sociology means first of all understanding what the concept of field, or world, means. The idea that the values supporting the world and the products of that world are socially constructed is a central concept in all sociological approaches to the study of a specific world. In particular, the art world has been object of extensive research and explanations of how these values are constructed and the relations within that world determine the shape of the field itself (Becker, 1982; Bourdieu, 1983). Several good metaphors have been employed to describe the world itself, making easier the understanding of this complicated mechanism. One of these metaphors is the one employed by Giuffrè in her study of the photographic world

(1999). She describes the art world as a sandpile in which the movements of actors within the field in attempt to reach the top, change the shape of the field itself. However, in this extensive research of the art world, there are still some black holes that need to be explored. A very important process for the construction of values of every field is the selection process. Important actors in the processes of selection for a field are gatekeepers. Much has been said about the fundamental role of gatekeepers in a world and their crucial role in the construction of values for the world (Foster, Borgatti, & Jones, 2011). However, the research about selection processes still lacks a deeper investigation of what are the motivations of selection. If understanding who selects actors for a field is determinant in order to understand the shape of the field, as much important is understanding why certain actors are selected instead of others. This leads also to the comprehension of the values influencing a particular field and of the mechanisms of creation of these values. Nevertheless, the opaqueness surrounding the motivations of selection is still significant. It is in this gap that this research takes place.

Considering the importance of selection processes and motivations in the understanding of a field, this research will be directed to analysing selection mechanisms and criteria in the design field. Two gaps in academic research will then be addressed: the unexplored field of design and the opaqueness of selection criteria. This analysis will be developed through a case study. The perfect case study for this research of the selection processes was offered by one of the most important design fairs in the world: the Salone Internazionale del Mobile, which takes place every year in the middle of April in Milan. The definition Salone Internazionale del Mobile is not enough anymore because the fair gained so much importance in the decades that gave birth to an off-site fair that is now almost bigger than the fair itself. These two phenomena together take the name of Milan Design Week. The importance of this event is such that every designer who aims to expand his network at an international level aims to expose during the fair (Sedini, 2011).

The Dutch design sector is not an exception to this rule. As a country with one of the oldest design traditions internationally, the Netherlands maintains its privileged position in the international design market. Therefore, the Dutch participation to the Milan Design Week is significant. The importance of the Dutch design tradition and its important participation to the fair made the Netherlands the right case study for my research.

In order to study the selection process in the Netherlands for Milan Design Week a research question has been formulated: which criteria emerge from the selection of Dutch designers for Milan Design Week and how do they influence the selection process? There is only one selection process in the Netherlands that aims to send designers to the fair and is organised

by the Stimuleringsfonds Creatieve Industrie. It is a government fund which, through an open call, gives grants to designers to participate to the fair. The analysis was concentrated on this year's (2016) open call, analysing the minutes of the meeting and the applications submitted. Two subquestions were formulated to guide the research of the selection's criteria.

The first subquestion is: which are the pre-determined criteria? In every selection process there are some obligations to follow, connected to the nature of the selection and the desired outcomes. As Yogev and Grund (2012) explain in their article about art fairs, the selection process for art fairs is done by a committee of experts, usually gallery owners and curators, who select that year's participants on the basis of the direction they want the fair to take that year. This has some implications on the selection process itself, meaning that there are already some directions to take for the selection. Although the case of the Stimuleringsfonds Creatieve Industrie is not the same of the selection for an art fair, the fair is publicly funded so there will probably be some guidelines to follow from the government. This will most likely also have a reflection on the direction the selection needs to have, in line with the policy of the Netherlands.

However, the pre-determined criteria will represent only part of the selection criteria. The nature of such criteria is often only of guidelines, that need to be interpreted by the selection committee. This interpretation leaves space to the formation of other criteria depending on the specific situation of the selection but also on some elements preceding the selection. All these factors will influence the formation of underlying criteria, that will be detected with this research. Therefore, the second subquestion is: which are the underlying criteria that emerge from the selection process?

The method chosen for this analysis is qualitative content analysis. Qualitative research was chosen because it allows more freedom in the analysis of the data, while a quantitative research is not the right method to analyse the selection process from the perspective that this research adopts. In the realm of qualitative methods, content analysis seemed the most appropriate, in order to maintain the higher possible level of objectivity and reliability for this research.

I do not expect to draw a complete research about the selection process. In fact, there are some limitations to my method that do not allow me to observe some aspects of the selection. As Heinich (2009) observed after her research about selection criteria in contemporary art, the most important part of the selection was the non said. All that part of the selection made of relations between the selectors, previous opinions and implicit agreement between the selectors is impossible to determine without being present to the meeting. Therefore, I do not

expect my findings to be complete but to be a first step towards this unexplored realm. The aim of my research, in fact, is to start to shed light on the interesting field of design and to contribute to fill the academic gap in the research about selection processes.

2. Theoretical Framework

The concepts of field and world are leading in the sociological analysis of every science. But how are they defined and what is the difference between them? The first section of this chapter will analyse the two concepts and their differences, taking into consideration the aspects that are relevant for the purpose of this research. A reflection on the state of research of selection processes in sociology will follow, taking into consideration their importance and their opaqueness in academic research. The analysis of this processes of selection will be applied to the research of another gap in academic research: the field of design is still unexplored in sociological research and it will be the focus of the present research. A definition of the concept of design and of its development will precede the analysis of the field of design, taking as a model previous research in the art world. For the purpose of this research therefore, a particular stage of the field will be examined, namely the one of fairs and of their selection processes. The theoretical framework will be concluded by the exposition of the research question and subquestions that will guide this research.

2.1. The concepts of world and field

The concept of field or world is crucial for a sociological analysis of every discipline. Studying the field of a discipline usually means to study its dynamics and the positions of all the different actors of that world. The cultural field has been the object of extensive academic research in past decades. This research extended between different subfields of the art world: it is not limited to the visual arts but is inclusive of all its different subfields, as exemplified by the examples of Bourdieu's study of the literary field (1983) and that of Giuffrè (1999) of the photographic world. Different approaches have been taken but they all share the common vision that the value of that particular world is not based on the intrinsic values of its products but rather it is socially constructed (Becker, 1982; Bourdieu, 1983).

However, significant differences are connected to the different approaches to the cultural field. More specifically, the difference between the use of the terms world and field states also the difference between two different approaches to the study of this concept. The concept of field is connected to Bourdieu's study of the cultural field (1983), but the concept itself can be applied to other fields as well. A field is defined as the frame where agents and their social positions interact. The shape of the field is defined by the power relations between the different agents, that struggle to obtain certain forms of capital. The word capital is employed to identify what is recognised as significant by the agents and is divided by Bourdieu into three forms of capital: social, economic and cultural.

On the other hand, the concept of world is connected to Becker's work on the art worlds (1982). Becker's definition of art world shares with Bourdieu the idea that the values of that specific world are not intrinsic but are socially constructed by the relations within the field itself. However, in Becker's work, these relations between the different agents of the world are not defined as power relations but as networks of cooperating agents. So, while on one hand Bourdieu with the definition of power relations, stresses the conflicting nature of these relations, on the other hand Becker underlines the cooperative relations between the actors. This concept of network is broader than Bourdieu's definition of power relations: the boundaries of the art world are hardly traceable because of their overlapping with all the other worlds contributing to the final result of what is commonly defined as "art work". This is how Becker describes these different networks and the difficulty of attributing boundaries to all these cooperating worlds:

"In some sense, art worlds and worlds of commercial, craft, and folk art are parts of a larger social organization. So, even though everyone involved understands and respects the distinctions which keep them separate, a sociological analysis should take account of how they are not so separate after all." (Becker, 1982, p. 36).

Although these differences between the definitions of world and field are substantial, they also share the idea that the social relations and the position of the agents within the field or world are determining for the values and the shape of the field itself. This movements and networks within the field influence and determine also the success of actors within the field (Giuffre, 1999; De Nooy, 2002). The expertise of the artist is not enough to influence its career because network structures are more influential than everything else (Bourdieu, 1994; Giuffre, 1999).

For the object of this research it is not crucial to determine how these relations are constructed or whether they are more inclusive or exclusive, but to underline how they influence the shape of the field itself and the values underlying it. Therefore, I will equally use both terms to indicate the social system they represent.

2.2. Selection processes and criteria

Different mechanisms are present in the cultural field that represent these relations. They can generally be described as the actions executed by the different actors, which influence the status of other actors and their position in the field. One of these mechanisms, which involves the presence of actors on different levels, can be found in the selection process within

the cultural field. Within the term selection process a multiplicity of different levels is included. The principal role of actors involved in selecting and admitting other actors to a specific world, is that of gatekeepers (Foster et al., 2011; Rodner and Thomson, 2013). Since the first stages of entering a field, there are always selections done to enter the field itself and to progress within that world. Gatekeepers are the ones who impact this particular process. The role of gatekeepers, in fact, is to determine who is worthy of being a member of that particular world or not (Foster et al., 2011). Therefore, they influence not only the population of a particular world, but also the social values that lie behind it.

Selection processes are operating always, in every layer of a field. In the case of the art world, the first selections start from being admitted to art schools and go on until the end of the career of an artist. But artists are not the only subject of selection. The selectors themselves have been object of selection to become selectors. They are also being evaluated for their selecting criteria and decisions, so there are always selections and evaluations going on at every level of a field (Wijnberg, 2011). These selection processes are also contributors to the network of a field: they determine the relationships between the members of the field and they also admit new members to a particular world, changing the shape of the field itself.

Although selection processes are so crucial in the cultural field, the lack of academic research about them is still relevant. Some aspects of selection have been mentioned and analysed but the mechanisms structuring the selection processes are still unclear. The most relevant gap in the academic research about methods of selection is regarding the criteria of selection and how they are applied during the process itself. As we have previously seen, in the social system of the cultural field, values are determined through the relationships between the actors of the field itself. Selection criteria are determinant in the formation of the values that will influence the world. Therefore, the research into these mechanisms of selection and of how these criteria are employed to influence the position of actors into the cultural field is fundamental to understand the functioning and values of the world itself.

One of the most interesting research, and also one of the few, about selection criteria and their application has been pursued by Nathalie Heinich (2009). The aim of her research was to analyse the mechanisms of selection of contemporary artworks for a French municipality (FRAC). In order to do that, she participated in the meeting where the selection was done. Several criteria emerged from her research, but the most interesting element is how the selection process itself is influenced by implicit and underlying elements. The relationships between the selectors, their capital of information and their pre-existing opinions are imperative in the formation of criteria during the selection. However, as Heinich underlines, these implicit

elements make also the identification of criteria sometimes hardly possible, as they often result in superficial comments and deeper opinions left unsaid. The result is that, although Heinrich's work about selection criteria and their applicability is fundamental in opening the research into this obscure process, the opaqueness of selection criteria is still predominant.

This research aims precisely at continuing to lighten up this opaqueness. However, the field to which it is directed also represents a gap in academic research. The world of design has remained almost academically unexplored in the past decades but it represents a very interesting object because of its union between the art field and the commercial world. Before looking at the values and actors of the field of design, a look into the concept of design is necessary.

2.3. The concept of design

Intrinsic in the concept of design is the history of its development, which brings with it the birth and growth of the profession of design itself. The concept itself is very broad and is used to indicate both the profession and the field of design but is also attributed to the physical product. A very common use of the term is "of design", related to physical objects which assume a higher value by being defined as design objects (Trabucco, 2015). Beside this terminological aspect, the concept of design is also representative of the field, which includes several disciplines. Graphic design, interior design, industrial design are only some of the examples of the variety of practices that fall under the general definition of design. However, the birth of the concept of design is predominantly connected to one of these practices: the birth of the contemporary profession of design is strictly connected to the industrial revolution, hence the name of industrial design. Behind this contemporary idea is the concept of design as a project. The profession of design, as conceived nowadays, is the project of an object that can be reproduced. The first conceptualisation of design is generally attributed to the Bauhaus, but there was a general tendency in the design practices of that decade to reflect on their role in society and on their relationship with the new technologies, which all together lead to the theorisation of design as a profession (Sparke, 2013).

However, this essential connection between design and the industrial world did not limit the romantic idea of beautification of objects of daily use that always characterised the activity of design, even before its theorisation. The core concept behind this romantic view of the mission of design is that it represents the ability of men "to serve our needs and give meaning to our lives" (Heskett, 2005, p. 5). This concept of design is not necessarily connected with the modern development of the industrial revolution. In this order of mind, every form of project

behind an object can be defined as design, not necessarily connected to the idea of reproducibility of the object. This way, it is possible to define design an Etruscan vase, which was created by a designer of that time to beautify and enhance the daily life of objects (Munari, 2008). Releasing the concept of design from its contemporary meaning and limiting it to its purpose of beautification of everyday life, precursors of design can be searched in all the disciplines that were defined as applied arts or crafts. This definition was still in use at the time of the Jugendstil and Liberty style, since the modern professionalisation of the concept of design came only after the first world war.

This theoretical and romantic view of design has not been lost through the years, but it is not determinant to identify the modern profession of design. This is strictly connected to the period in which it took place, modernism (Sparke, 2013). At the same time that the autonomy of the field of design was being defined by its theorisation and professionalisation, its heteronomy was also being highlighted. If, on one side, the Bauhaus stressed the independence of the profession of design, its identity was also strongly dependent on the latest technological improvements and by the newly born commercialisation of industry. So, implicit in the definition of design is its strict connection with the world of industry and of technology, which characterised its history from the beginning. However, these are not the only elements that characterised the heteronomy of the field of design. The years that saw the birth of the profession of design were also the years between the two world wars. This new and modern profession was seen by nations as the perfect vehicle to transmit and develop their image as a strong nation and to strengthen their identities (Sparke, 2013). After the second world war this tendency was even stronger, especially with countries who experienced totalitarian regimes, like Germany, Italy and Japan, and were willing to move forward through redefining their identity. Therefore, beside the strict connection with the commercial and technological world, design has always been employed as a tool to reflect and spread societal meanings.

Another important connection of the field of design derives from the strong artistic inspiration that always characterised it and still plays an important role in contemporary design. The relationship between art and design is present from the dawn of design, together with the tendency of crossing the line between the two fields (De Fusco, 1985). There has been an inclination to consider the connection between the two disciplines for over a century: Oscar Wilde, together with John Ruskin and William Morris, are only some of the famous supporters of the abandonment of the distinction between the art of the “intellect”, as in this case art, and those of the “decorative”, like interior architecture and crafts (Coles, 2005). This was long before the concept of design was even defined, but since its definition, the theoretical concept on the

basis of the definition of designer was the idea to create a new kind of artist, as the prospectus of the Bauhaus school reveals:

“Thus our task is to make a new kind of artist, a creator capable of understanding every kind of need: not because he is a prodigy, but because he knows how to approach human needs according to a precise method. We wish to make him conscious of his creative power, not scared of new facts, and independent of formulas in his own work.”

[Prospectus of the Bauhaus school, as cited by Munari, 2008, p. 29]

So, beside the strict connection with industrial production and a very strong commercial attitude, the soul of this newly created profession was highly artistic. This artistic inspiration is still present in contemporary trends. An example can be found in the theoretical ideas of the postmodernists emerging in the 1980s. In their view it is more the meaning of a product than its use that is the primary criterion for its creation. What is emphasised here is the semantic value of design, not its utilitarian qualities (Heskett, 2005). The most famous example of this group is probably the lemon squeezer named “Juicy Salif” designed by Phillippe Starck for the Italian company Alessi. With the aesthetic of the object strongly prevailing on its functionality, this lemon squeezer is the perfect example of the strong artistic influence on design. The beautification of the object is more important in this case than its actual use, raising the piece of design as a piece of art.

This connection between art and design can also be observed from the shape of the two fields.

2.4. The Field of Design

As we have seen at the beginning of this chapter, the configuration of the cultural field is dependent mostly on the relational nature of the art world (Becker, 1982; Bourdieu, 1983; Giuffre, 1999; De Nooy, 2002; Yogeve, 2010; Rodner & Thomson, 2013). This relational aspect influences the shape and position of the different gatekeepers in the field, which also determine the success of actors within the field. This same field configuration can be applied to the field of design, which is quite similar to the art world and its actors. The description of the “art machine” in Rodner and Thomson’s (2013) view can help us to identify and apply these different gatekeepers to the world of design. The two authors develop the relational nature of the art world into a description of the field of contemporary art as a mechanical network (art machine) composed by art professionals and institutions. In this mechanism both benefit from the

symbolic and financial values created by the network of interlocking mechanisms which connect all the elements of this machine together. Since the design field is very similar in its structure and operation to the art field, the model of Rodner and Thomson will be used to explain the different stages in the design field.

The first stage of this mechanism is the school. A good design academy affects the entrance of designers in the design field and can attract interest from the other actors of the machine (Martin, 2007).

The second stage in the design world is connecting with companies and labels. As designers exit the design academy, their aim is to find a company or an industry that is willing to realise in a mass production the prototype of their design. This is connected to the specificity of industrial design, where the design process is separated from the manufacture of the final object. However, there are more and more galleries directed to display the work of designers and at the same time, designers searching for galleries instead of companies and labels. This might be the sign of a tendency of design to go more towards the world of art than that of commerce. This is hardly determinable at the present moment, since it might also represent a parallel step of designers, willing to search for galleries and for companies and labels at the same time. We can anyway say that companies and labels in the field of design have the same role of galleries and dealers in the art world. According to Becker (1982) “Dealers [...] integrate the artist into the society’s economy by transforming the aesthetic value into economic value, thus making it possible for artists to live by their art work” (Becker, 1982, p. 109).

The third stage is the critics phase. After a designer has obtained a place to showcase its work, be it a gallery or an industry who produces its work, the next important step is to obtain visibility to the public. Critics are fundamental because they help to give visibility but also to increase the possibility to sell their work and conquer a position in the field. At the same time, they have the chance to damage or ruin the career of a designer. As DiMaggio (1987) underlines, the role of critics is crucial as, within their world, they help to maintain or change what is perceived to be authentic in that specific world.

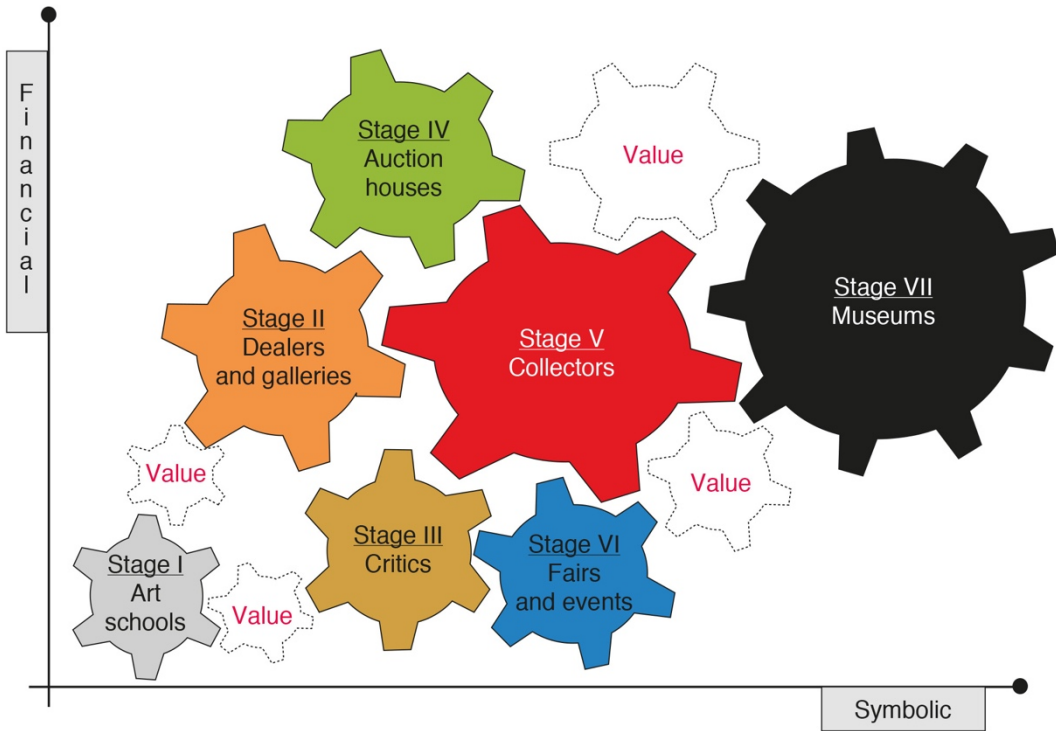
The fourth and fifth stage of the art machine, namely auction houses and collectors are less determinant in the contemporary design world. In the case of design there might be some rare pieces of a collection in auction houses or purchased by private collectors, but they may more likely be masterpieces of design or that which went out of production, not contemporary pieces. This is because in design the characteristic of reproducibility of the objects is determinant in their positioning in the market, while for artworks, it is more likely that they are unique pieces. For the art world, however, auction houses are fundamental in the commercialisation of art,

especially as they are price determinants. As Heath and Luff (2007) explain: “Auctions provide an institutional solution to a social problem; they enable the legitimate pricing and exchange of goods where those goods are of uncertain value” (p. 63).

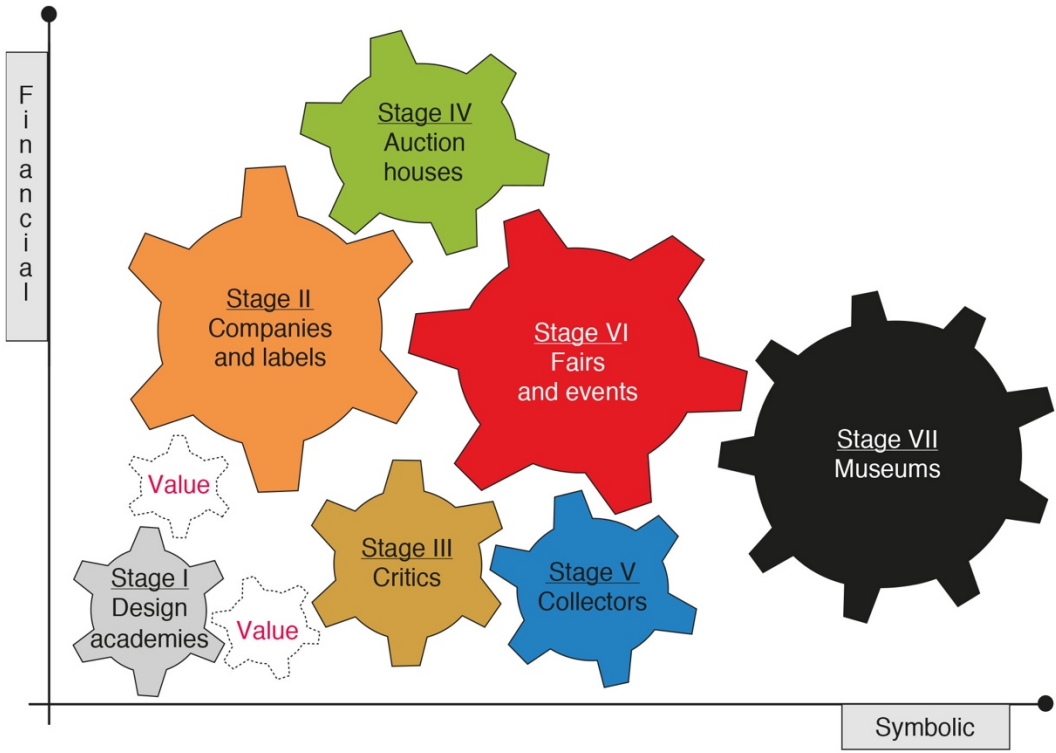
The sixth stage is crucial in the design field. It is the stage of art fairs. These are usually the place where both companies and single designers obtain visibility and exposure of their products. Fairs are also the place where commercial and artistic side of the art world and of the design world coexist. But a more detailed explanation about the role and the importance of fairs will be given later.

The seventh and last stage is the stage of museums. The relationship between design and museums is still in development and it shows that the position and importance of museums in the design field is significantly increasing. Contemporary design, intended as industrial design, has only recently gained a place in the collection of museums, separated from the applied arts and crafts from the previous centuries. This increasing importance of contemporary design in museums is slowly replacing the previous tendency of museums, when the design collections were often depicted as celebration of the past decades, of the “masterpieces of design”. Contemporary design is gaining a more prominent place in the collections of museums and may be sometimes even used as a way to distinguish themselves from other museums.

Although the model developed by the two authors is interesting in order to understand the different stages of the art field and can be applied almost without changes to the design field, the way of presenting it can result in being too static. The different stages in the design field are more dynamic and is hard to determine which one is more prestigious than the others. Therefore, placing them in a specific order can sometimes not be applicable to the reality of the field itself. The case which is more relevant for the purpose of this research is the one of fairs. Their role cannot be limited to one single moment of the career of a designer or of the development of a label, which is the reason why it is so difficult to place them on one single stage of the field.



The "art machine" in Rodner & Thomson (2013)



The design field, based on Rodner & Thomson (2013)

2.5. Fairs

The phenomenon of fairs and their role in the design field is worthy of a deeper analysis. The main reasons for participation in a fair for a designer or a label are quite similar to the ones moving an artist or a gallery to participate to an art fair.

The importance that fairs have gained in the last five decades is such that the participation to a fair is determinant for the reputation of a designer or a label. This means that if a designer or a label wants to be perceived as important, it is mandatory to attend at least one of the most important fairs (Thompson, 2011). Fairs are an indicator of the prestige and importance of the designer and label. As much as they are indicator of the pre-existing prestige of the participants, they are also the moment when their prestige can be increased. This can be obtained because of the international visibility that a fair brings to its participants, which also has a strong impact on the development of their network (Sedini, 2011). Fairs are the occasion where brands expose their products in search of new clients and designers expose their work in search of new dealers and brands. This element of networking is one of the keys of the success of fairs: the occasion of the fair is often the moment where the most important people of that world gather together and therefore represents the perfect occasion to make new contacts. Network is a key element for the success of an entrepreneur (Aldrich & Zimmer, 1986) and it is even more important for connecting people who work within the same field but are normally geographically very distant.

Although the commercial side of design fairs is very strong, the artistic element is also determinant: companies and labels would not be there without the project of the designer so very often the name of the designer is highlighted. This duality of commercial and artistic side of fairs is a phenomenon that characterises both design and art fairs. As Kapferer (2010) clearly explains:

“Such is the Frieze Art Fair, where what Habermas (1989) calls the ‘culture-debating public’ (of students, connoisseurs, artists and critics) comes face to face with the culture-consuming society of Horkheimer and Adorno’s ([1944]1972) despised culture industry—the buyers and sellers of cultural products. Frieze, like all other fairs of its type (e.g. Basel, Miami Beach, Berlin, Cologne, Turin, Venice), cuts to the heart of the relations between art, economics, and aesthetics.” (Kapferer, 2010, p. 10)

As well expressed by this quote, fairs are the commercial side of the art world, where prices are created and agreements between dealers are made (Morgner, 2014). In this sense, art

fairs are not different from other types of fairs. As Baia Curioni (2012) explains, fairs' are profit-driven events, where the organisers work as intermediaries and rent spaces and "the way art is being displayed is not very different from the type available for other commodities" (Baia Curioni, 2012, p. 127). The occasion of fairs connects even more the design world with the art world, however the case of design fairs is almost the other way around of art fairs. While in the art world is normally the artistic side that prevails, which meets with the commercial side at fairs, in the design field is normally the commercial side that prevails and is connected with the artistic side at fairs. An important platform where the artistic side of design emerges are off-site fairs. Their spontaneous birth is often connected to a major freedom also in the showcase of works of designers. The case study that will be presented in this research is also symbolic of this increasing direction towards art that design fairs have taken. Salone Internazionale del Mobile, besides being the most important design fair internationally, is also renowned for the off-site fair that spontaneously grew in the whole city of Milan. The off-site fair has become the place where the artistic side of design found more freedom to express itself, as opposed to the very commercial nature of the fair itself (Sedini, 2011). More about this particular fair will be explained in the next chapter.

Fairs represent also an important occasion of access to a field. With their layering of selection processes, they involve several levels of gatekeepers, that influence the shape of the fair but also of the field itself. Design and art fairs' selection work on the principle of expert and peer selection (Wijnberg, 1995). For art fairs the process is more explicit than for design fairs: a committee of experts is appointed, generally composed by gallery owners and curators appointed by the fair organisers. The selection is usually determined by the character of that year's fair, which is attributed by the fair committee (Yogev & Grund, 2012). In the case of design fairs, for their prevalence of commercial elements, selection processes are not so common yet. However, as we have seen in the structure of the field of design, the influence of some elements typical of the art world is growing (as is the case of galleries and museums). This trend can be researched also in fairs, where selection processes are slowly growing and taking design fairs to an increasing similarity with art fairs. One important element that characterises fairs is that, both in the case of art fairs and of design fairs, the criteria which are used to operate the selection determine the nature of the fair of that year. For the great importance that fairs exercise on their field, the criteria that influence the selection for the fair will also influence the values of the field itself.

2.6. Research question, subquestions and expectations

Given what we have seen regarding the concept of field and world, the importance of the process of selection in determining the values at stake for a specific world and the lack of academic knowledge about the world of design, the aim of this thesis is to start to shed light on that world and I formulated a research question that will guide my research in the field of design, taking into consideration a particular angle of that same field. The guiding question will therefore be: which criteria emerge from the selection of Dutch designers for Milan Design Week and how do they influence the selection process?

My expectation with this research is to start to bring light to a world that has inexplicably attracted very little attention from academic researchers so far, but it's starting now to be more and more considered. This question will allow the research to take the perspective of the mechanisms of selection. The Milan Design Week has been chosen as a case study to examine this selection process and more about this choice will be explained in the following chapter. Taking into consideration the mechanisms of selection implies different elements, therefore I formulated two subquestions that will help me to analyse the data in order to organise the research. Taking as a model the research of Nathalie Heinich (2009), the two subquestions will be directed to research the criteria that emerge from the selection.

The first subquestion is: which are the pre-determined criteria? As Heinich suggests (2009), every selection process is influenced by a number of external elements, some of them may be criteria pre-determined in order to obtain certain outcomes from the selection. The selection process that is object of this research is from a public fund, as will be explained soon, therefore the chance that there will be some criteria to be met in order to represent the fund is high. However, the pre-determined criteria will probably be influenced by different elements emerging from the moment of the selection. This is what the second subquestion will help to detect.

Therefore, the second subquestion is: which are the underlying criteria that emerge from the selection process? The pre-determined criteria are often employed as guidelines for the selectors and for the applicants, but are then influenced by the situation of the selection itself. During the meeting for the selection several elements emerge, as Heinich highlights (2009). These elements might be of very different nature and be influenced by the present situation of the field, as well as by pre-existing opinions of the selectors or from their amount of capital. I expect to be able to detect some of these elements with this research, analysing the applications for the selection and the minutes of the meeting where the selection was done.

While these two subquestions will be used to research the specific criteria, the aim of this research is not simply to list the criteria but also to analyse how they are employed in relation to each other and to determine the outcomes of the selection from the use of criteria.

3. Method

This chapter will explain the method chosen for this research and the process of data gathering, selection and analysis. The first two sections will include the justification of the method employed and of the case study examined. The last part of the chapter will be dedicated to the data examined. First, the process of gathering and selection will be explained and the limitations encountered with the data. Then, their operationalisation will be exposed and the process of data analysis examined.

3.1. Qualitative content analysis

To answer my research question I chose to use a qualitative method. This choice was made for several reasons. First of all, the academic research about design, and more specifically in the case of design fairs, is still taking its first small steps. Therefore, there are no previous studies on which I can base my research on or to which I can compare it. Because the research I am conducting has an exploratory nature, quantitative research did not seem the right method for my research. The aim of quantitative research is usually to prove some theories and concepts with empirical data (Bryman, 2012). The state of research in the field of design is still too exploratory to permit a quantitative research of its selection processes. On the other side, qualitative research is employed to draw theory and categories from the analysis of empirical data (Bryman, 2012). It is this research method category that my analysis falls into regarding the selection process in the design field, which aims to reveal the underlying mechanisms influencing the selection process. Also, defining the criteria of a selection process is not a research that can be defined by numbers and statistical analysis but rather with the analysis of texts and words and one of the most important characteristics of qualitative research is that it is based on the analysis of words and not of numbers (Kuckartz, 2014). Therefore, qualitative research seemed the most suitable method for my research.

Within the realm of qualitative research, the method I chose to employ is content analysis. This choice is justified by several reasons. The first one relates to the case study I chose for my research. I analysed two types of documents for an open call for the Salone Internazionale del Mobile held by the Stimuleringsfonds Creatieve Industrie (Creative Industries Fund), the Dutch governmental fund for the creative industries. These were the applications received for the open call and the minutes of the meeting where the selection took place. Analysing these documents was a closer way of analysing the selection process, second only to being present at the meeting itself.

Another fundamental reason for the choice of content analysis regards the objectivity and reliability of the research. Another possibility for doing this research was to interview the selectors and draw from them the information about the meeting and the criteria. However, this did not seem to be the most appropriate method for two main reasons. The first one is that the committee members would have probably been influenced by what happened at the meeting or by previous opinions, therefore their statements might have not been truthful. Second, the meeting was held in December and the time I would have dedicated to the interviews would have been between March and April, therefore they might have not been able to remember everything from the meeting. Therefore, for all these reasons qualitative content analysis seemed the most appropriate reason to conduct this research.

Content analysis, in fact, is a method applicable both in quantitative and in qualitative research. As we have previously seen, the approach of quantitative and qualitative analysis is significantly different: while quantitative analysis would confirm theories and categories with the empirical research, qualitative research would draw theories and categories from the empirical research (Bryman, 2012). This process applies as well in content analysis. Qualitative content analysis allows the researcher to systematically analyse a text and to draw categories from it (Schreier, 2012; Kuckartz, 2014). In the case of the present research, qualitative content analysis is applied to analyse the selection process through the written documents of the selection itself. The text is coded in a series of steps that allow the major themes emerging from the text to be highlighted. This process will be explained more extensively later.

Although qualitative research represents the most suitable method for this research, it implies some reflections about the validity and reliability of the results of the research. In qualitative research the role of the researcher is more determinant than in quantitative research. While in the latter the researcher is more tied by the application of statistics to analyse the data, in qualitative research the objectivity of the analysis is less guaranteed than by the use of statistical methods and more is determined by the social conditions of the research (Bryman, 2012). This affects the reliability of the research because more is left to the interpretation of the researcher. Also to best preserve the validity and reliability of the present research, content analysis seemed the best method to conduct the research. In content analysis, in fact, the data are less influenced by external factors, as they could be in the case of interviews. This increases the reliability of the results of the research. Concerning the validity of the research, the same kind of method and research can be applied to similar case studies in the field of design or in other fields.

3.2. Justification of case study

Since the main focus of my research regards the selection processes in the design field and the criteria that influence these processes, the best way to approach this still unexplored field is through a case study. A case study, in fact, represents a good starting point for the start of an empirical research in a field. As we have seen in the previous chapter, in the organisation of the field of design fairs represent a fundamental step for designers and companies because of their high level of symbolic and financial value. The most important fair in the field of design is considered to be Salone Internazionale del Mobile, which is part of the Milan Design Week (Sedini, 2011). For this importance of the fair in the field of design, it represented the perfect case study for the present research.

The case of Salone Internazionale del Mobile is quite peculiar in its organisation. The first edition of the fair was in 1961 and it was designed as a fair to expose the best of Italian furniture. The name, in fact, can be literally translated as “Furniture Fair”. Only from the 1990s has it opened its doors to international participations, rapidly obtaining a leader position in the sector. Parallel to the growth of the fair, the whole city of Milano flourished with a number of events during the week of the fair, giving birth to the phenomenon called “Fuorisalone”, which can be literally translated as “Outside the fair”. The two events together are now commonly defined as “Milan Design Week”. The Milan Design Week takes place every year during one week in the middle of April and consists of the combination of these two events: the fair (Salone Internazionale del Mobile) and the off-site fair (Fuorisalone). The fair takes place in the specific place appointed for fairs in Milano-Rho, an exhibition space outside the city centre of Milano, while the off-site fair is spread all over the city in a number of different events and exhibitions during the whole week. An important element to underline is that the off-site does not have a central organisation as the fair itself but it maintains the spontaneous element that characterised it from the beginning (Sedini, 2011).

A terminological specification needs to be done. The way of calling the whole event is not crystal clear. Although the correct way of naming it should be “Milan Design Week”, because under this name are included both the fair (Salone Internazionale del Mobile) and the off-site fair (Fuorisalone), it is common use to call it only “Salone del Mobile”, losing also the word “internazionale” (which means international). The most probable explanation of this fact can be found in the prestige associated with the name Salone del Mobile, which is significantly more than the one associated to the name Milan Design Week. Due to its long history, in fact, the name “Salone del Mobile” is immediately associated with the history of the fair and with its international imprint. On the other side, the name “Milan Design Week” is only a recent

contribution in order to include both events under the same name, but it is not associated to the historical importance of the fair. An example of this fact is the case of the selection process object of this research, which is described as a grant for the participation to Salone del Mobile, while it actually is mainly directed to the Fuorisalone (off-site fair). Therefore, to avoid confusion I will use the name Milan Design Week throughout this research, since under this name are included both the fair (Salone Internazionale del Mobile) and the off-site fair (Fuorisalone).

I chose to analyse the case of this renowned fair because, besides being considered the most important design fair at an international level (Sedini, 2011), it is interesting as a case study to examine the overlapping between design and other disciplines, in particular art, and the relationship between the two sides of design, artistic and commercial. The phenomenon of the off-site fair, in fact, gave also the space to more freedom in the creation of objects from designers. The strict commercial structure of the fair (Salone Internazionale del Mobile) is balanced by an artistic freedom in the events and exhibitions in the off-site fair (Fuorisalone). This commercial nature of the fair itself (Salone Internazionale del Mobile) is reflected also on the fact that it has no selection process to be admitted to the fair. The off-site fair, on the other side, is a complicated phenomenon. Since it has no central organisation, there is also no central selection to participate. Every designer can get in contact with the organisations renting spaces dedicated to the design events and display their work. However, there are some exceptions to this situation, as we are going to examine with this thesis.

Even if choosing a case study already means limiting the study to a particular part of a field, the case of Milan Design Week is still too wide to be examined in its totality with a master thesis. As an example of the proportion of the fair, the amount of nations participating in the 2015 edition was 166, with more than 2000 exhibitors only at the fair (Salone Internazionale del Mobile, 2015). Therefore, it was necessary to focus only on one national participation to the fair. The choice fell on the Netherlands, for two main reasons. From a theoretical perspective, Dutch design in the history of design has always had an important role and the Netherlands is still nowadays one of the most valued nations for its design tradition. As we have seen earlier in the development of the concept of design, in the 1920s several European trends were pushing the reflection about design towards a theoretical basis of the new profession. One of these trends, and also one of the most important cultural trends in the history of art and design, was De Stijl. Its relevance in an international perspective is understandable even only mentioning some of the members of this school: Piet Mondriaan, Gerrit Rietveld and Theo van Doesburg are, among the others, the most famous members of this school and also among the most famous artists and designers of all times. The movement De Stijl (which can be translated as “The Style”) was also

determinant in the definition of the boundaries of design at that time: according to the theoretical basis of De Stijl, social, artistic and technological aspects were all intertwined in the birth of this new profession of the designer (Thomas, 2008; Sparke, 2013). Another fundamental step in the history of Dutch design, and of design in general, is the process of professionalisation of design in the 1950s. Dutch designers had a fundamental role in this process, bringing industrial design to a profession of social importance and relevance (Thomas, 2008). Still nowadays design plays a fundamental role in the economy of the country, as proved by a study of 2005, where the profits obtained from Dutch design resulted as important to the national economy as the ones from the air transport and the petroleum industry (Paul Rutten et al. 2005, as cited by Thomas, 2008).

The second reason is practical and is a consequence of the first reason. This strong importance of design in the Netherlands influences also the presence of Dutch participants to the Milan Design Week, that is very high. This made my research more doable compared to researching countries with less participants. Also, due to the limited amount of time that a research for a master thesis requires, I could more easily conduct a research in the country where I live, compared to choosing a random country and facing high costs for travel and a greater waste of time.

Since my focus in this thesis is on Dutch designers participating to the Milan Design Week, I looked for organisations in the Netherlands helping designers to go to the fair. What emerged is that, except for one organisation, all the others are not selecting but only working as intermediaries and renting spaces for the designers. However, there is one organisation operating a selection process and is also the only one giving grants for the participation to the fair. This fund is the Stimuleringsfonds Creatieve Industrie (Creative Industrie Fund NL). It is a government fund whose aim is to promote and strengthen the position of the Dutch creative industries nationally and internationally. In order to do that they have several open calls every year to support the participation of Dutch creatives to several important international events. Their main focus is on architecture, design and e-culture, with an eye to all their crossovers. Regarding design, since 2014 they have an open call to support designers willing to participate to the Salone Internazionale del Mobile. The open call is open from September to November of the year preceding the fair and all the applications are then subject to a selection process. This selection process is made through a meeting which sees the presence of two employees of the fund and three external advisors.

Therefore, being selection processes and criteria the focus of my research and Dutch designers at Milan Design Week the case of my research, studying the documents of the selection process of the Stimuleringsfonds Creatieve Industrie is the only way to study this

phenomenon, since it is the only selection process active at the moment for the participation of Dutch designers to the Milan Design Week.

3.3. Data gathering, selection and limitations

As we have seen also from the lack of academic research about selection processes and criteria of selection, the opaqueness of the whole process is reflected also in a practical way. For this reason, the data collection process was not easy at the beginning. Since there is no extensive research about the design field yet and more specifically about this fair, I could not find any information about the selection process of the fair and of the off-site fair in any academic source. Therefore, I had to rely only on the websites of the fair itself and of the off-site fair to search for the selection processes. From what can be retrieved from the information in the official website of the fair (<http://www.salonemilano.it>), there is no selection process to participate to the fair. The off-site fair, on the other side, is a very complicated phenomenon. As we have seen earlier, it has no central organisation and this means that it also does not have an official selection process. Every designer can, in theory, apply and rent a space to participate to the fair, as I could confirm with the case of the Netherlands. This lack of central organisation is also reflected in the Dutch participation to the fair: even within the single nations there is no coordination between the different organisations participating to the fair. This lack of coordination made the data gathering more complicated since only by talking with people directly involved in the fair I could obtain some more information about which are the Dutch organisations involved in the Milan Design Week. However, after the first weeks of struggling with this confused organisation, I could finally understand that, except for the selection process of the Stimuleringsfonds Creatieve Industrie, there are no selection processes also for the off-site fair.

I chose to analyse the applications the Stimuleringsfonds Creatieve Industrie received for the open call of the current year (2016). Furthermore, I also had the possibility to analyse the minutes of the meeting they had to select the applications. The applications were in total eighty-eight this year, of which twenty-six were selected and sixty-two rejected. Every application consisted of several parts: a motivation letter, a motivation of why the project presented was representative of the Dutch design scene, the extent to which the project presented contributed to strengthen the image of the Dutch design scene, the extent to which the project distinguished itself in artistic quality and presentation form and a budget for the exhibition, specifying the amount requested to the fund. To this were attached several pictures of the project itself (or of the prototype of the project) and the curriculum vitae of the designer or the portfolio of the

studio in case the applicant was a design studio. The average length of the application was ten pages, of which three of text. I concentrated my analysis on the three pages of text, which contained the explanation of the project and of the research of the designer in an extensive way.

Of the eighty-eight applications, I analysed the twenty-six selected and twenty-six of the non-selected. For the choice of the non-selected applications I followed an internal classification of the fund. Before the meeting the three external advisors were requested to analyse and evaluate the applications on their own and to send an opinion to the person responsible for the open call for the fund before the meeting. Therefore, the applications were divided on the basis of the opinion of the advisors before the meeting, in order to organise the meeting. Five groups emerged from this division: applications considered unanimously good, the ones considered unanimously bad, the ones considered in doubt but more positive than negative, the ones in doubt neither positive nor negative, the ones in doubt but more negative than positive. During the meeting not all the applications were discussed: all the ones considered unanimously bad were not discussed and of the ones in doubt but more negative than positive, only three were discussed. Therefore, in my analysis I analysed some applications of every group, also some of the ones not discussed during the meeting. More specifically, I analysed all the applications unanimously considered good (four), twelve of the ones in doubt but more positive than negative, twenty-two of the ones in doubt neither negative nor positive, six of the ones in doubt but more negative than positive and eight of the ones unanimously considered bad. I did not follow a criterion in the choice of the applications from every group.

Beside the applications I also analysed the minutes of the meeting the committee members had to select the participants. These consisted of nineteen pages of hand written notes taken by one of the two members of the Stimuleringsfonds present at the meeting. I was able to analyse the applications in an extensive way, however without the analysis of the minutes as well, the research would have not been fruitful because it was impossible to determine a great amount of the criteria only from the applications. During the analysis it happened quite often that an application selected was very similar to one non selected. In these cases, only with the analysis of the applications it would have been impossible to determine why one was selected and the other rejected, while this emerged from the notes. At the same time, only the analysis of the minutes would have not been fruitful as well, because most of the times they were quite cryptic to understand without knowing the application that was under discussion. Therefore, only with the simultaneous analysis of the applications and the minutes I was able to draw the criteria that influenced the selection process. In the results chapter, when not specifically mentioned, the findings emerged from the analysis of the minutes combined with the applications.

Even if the validity of the present research is preserved in comparison to other methods of research, as previously examined, there are some limitations to the data. Most of the limitations are practical, except for the first limitation, that slightly reduces the reliability of the research.

The main limitation regards the minutes of the meeting. The selection process the Stimuleringsfonds Creatieve Industrie had for the open call only consisted of one meeting. As explained earlier, to simplify the work during that meeting and to use the time in the wisest way, the three external advisors were provided with copies of the applications in advance and they were requested to send their opinions before the meeting. The applications were then classified on the basis of the opinions of the advisors and divided in five groups (unanimously considered good, in doubt but considered more positive than negative, in doubt neither negative nor positive, in doubt but more negative than positive, unanimously considered bad). This meant that during the meeting some applications were not discussed. More specifically, the applications not discussed were the ones considered unanimously bad and the most of the ones considered in doubt but more negative than positive (only three of this group were discussed). This made the minutes of the meeting incomplete and also my choice of the applications more limited because of the applications unanimously considered bad there were no single opinions but only general considerations of what made bad those applications. However, even if not all the applications were discussed, even analysing some of the applications not present in the minutes I could draw some criteria from the comparison of the selected applications and of the non-selected.

There was then also a logistical limitation to the data. Since I worked with the documents of a public organisation I could have access to the documents without particular restrictions. However, because the information contained in them were confidential I was not able to bring the documents out of the office and also not to make copies of the documents. This meant that all my work of content analysis had to be done in the office within office hours. So, I was not able to work every day or in the evening and there were some holidays during my period of analysis, so I had to submit to those time limitations. This made my research more fragmented. Moreover, because they were public documents and proof of the fund's open call and of the selection process, I was not allowed to write anything on the documents themselves and I had to make use of other systems for the coding process (like post-its and reporting on my laptop of significant sentences).

The last limitation was linguistic. Almost all the documents were in Dutch (except for only a few applications). Although I can read Dutch, I am less proficient than in English. As a consequence, the process of getting acquainted with the content of the documents went slowly

than if they would have been in English. For what concerns the minutes, in addition to being in Dutch, they were also handwritten, so regarding the minutes the process went slowly also for this reason.

3.4. Operationalisation

To answer my research question and subquestions I needed to operationalise the concepts defined in the theory. The analysis of the applications and of the minutes was done simultaneously. I looked at the applications and at the same time at the related notes. Whether this was not possible because of the missing notes, I looked only at the applications. The analysis of the applications was based also on a comparison between the selected and the non-selected applications. Such a comparison allowed me to draw common lines between the selected applications and the non-selected and to reveal possible oppositions between them.

Following the two subquestions I formulated, I started the analysis examining the pre-determined criteria contained in the open call. I did not limit the analysis to a mere consideration of which were the pre-determined criteria but I looked at how these pre-determined criteria have been employed during the selection and to what made them decisive during the selection. This first step helped me to get acquainted with the documents and with the structure of the selection. I also used the analysis of how the criteria were developed during the selection to understand how the dynamics of selections worked during the meeting and what values emerged from the selection.

The second part of my research, as stated by the second subquestion, is focused on highlighting what is not pre-determined in the selection process. I used as a model for my research, the research of Nathalie Heinich (2009). She studied the selection process of contemporary artworks for a French municipality. The method she used is different from mine because she participated in the meeting where the selection was made. However, the outcomes of her research are what I aim to obtain as well, that is the selection's criteria. With her research she highlighted the criteria that emerged from the discussion between the selectors, that is what I aim to do with the analysis of the minutes of the meeting and complementing it with the analysis of the applications. Through the analysis of the selection process she highlighted the criteria underlying the selection and a series of mechanisms regulating the selection itself. The aim of my research is the same, to highlight what emerged to be regulating the selection itself, that will mainly be criteria and the relationship between them. In fact, the main difference between Heinich's method and the present method is that she participated in the selection's meeting, so she could highlight also the silent criteria and mechanisms of selection. The majority of this part

of the selection will be lost in my research, however some considerations about the mechanisms can still be derived from the treatment of the criteria.

3.5. Data analysis

For the coding of the data I used the approach of thematic analysis. I followed the three steps of thematic analysis, open coding, axial coding and selective coding, although the last step in my case consisted not in bundling together all the codes but in bundling different families of codes to research for the categories (Aronson, 1995; Attide-Stirling, 2001). My application of thematic analysis was partially influenced by pre-defined codes and partially not. To be more specific, I started looking at some pre-determined codes (the pre-determined criteria) but also looking for new categories emerging from the text. In appendix B can be found the coding scheme, which exemplifies the steps of coding with some examples. In the coding scheme will be presented both extracts of the minutes and of the applications, depending on which were more influential in highlighting the singular criterion.

The first step, the open coding, consisted in the first reading of all the documents and division of text in segments and applying to the segments a code (Attide-Stirling, 2001). To every relevant segment was associated a code, which helped me in the next steps of the analysis.

For the second step, the axial coding, I went through all the first process of coding again and searched for common themes and categories and renamed them under more general concepts. The pre-determined criteria emerged quite clearly from the text, while some other codes were seen emerging already from this second step.

The last step, the selective coding, consisted of double checking the categories, bundling them in groups and renaming them (Attide-Stirling, 2001). The final step confirmed the pre-defined categories, although with some little changes. These categories were: the first, motivation for participation; the second and third were almost always synthesised in one, representative of the Dutch scene; the fourth, artistic quality and presentational form. There were two additional criteria, unusual forms of collaboration of group presentations and realistic budget. In addition to these categories, there were four underlying categories that emerged directly from the bundling of themes in this last step. These are: research underneath the work, inspired by other disciplines; commercial attitude; innovation and experimentation; fame.

For the storing and coding of data, I did not use any software. Although now it is more common to use software to perform the coding, my case was different because I did not have digital copies of the documents, nor I was allowed to make them. So, I performed the first step of the coding directly on the documents with the use of post-its, as I explained earlier in this

chapter. For the second and third steps of the coding I added the use of the laptop to report the codes on a Word document so as to make the process of bundling them in themes easier. However, all the steps of this thematic analysis were always made on paper and with the support of a Word document to summarise the coding process.

4. Results

The following chapter will present the findings of my research. These are presented divided into three main groups: the pre-determined criteria, the underlying criteria and the invisible criteria. This division is thought of as a way to present them with the clearest view for the reader, however, most of the criteria are related to other criteria belonging to another group. In these cases, the connections will be highlighted. Especially in the case of the underlying criteria, two of them derive or support the pre-determined criteria, which are usually very general and do not stand on their own. The presentation of all the criteria will be supported by direct examples from the data, citing applications that met those criteria or parts of the minutes that supported the application of the criteria. However, in some cases, the applications do not seem to meet all the criteria and they were selected anyway. Examples of this will be presented in the exposition of the results, since it represents an interesting outcome.

4.1 Pre-determined criteria

Both the public announcement of the open call and the assessment form given to every advisor included several criteria to take into consideration when filling out and assessing the applications. Therefore, it did not come as a surprise to find some pre-determined criteria as guidelines for the selection process, when analysing the applications and minutes. However, in addition to the four pre-determined criteria two other highly recommended suggestions were provided, which could equally be considered criteria since they were given particular attention in the evaluation of the applications. As specified before, these six criteria were publicly announced to the applicants and to the selectors. The nature of these criteria is very general since they are indications for the advisors and the applicants of what to evaluate in the applications. In addition, they are also fixed criteria so they leave space for interpretations from both parts. Analysing the interpretation of these criteria helps to reveal fundamental elements of the functioning of the selection process. Their application to the selection, in fact, reveals how they are connected to the underlying criteria and the combination of the two groups of criteria constitutes the mechanism of selection and allows the understanding of why some designers were selected and some others not. In the following, every criterion will be discussed, highlighting them with some examples of the applications and the minutes.

4.1.1 Intrinsic motivation

The first criterion in the application refers to the motivation for the participation at the fair. The open call states that the first element of the project proposal should be “a

motivation for participation and a description of the long-term strategy for the development of your own design practice and how participation in the Salone relates to this” (Stimuleringsfonds Creatieve Industrie, 2015). This first criterion is the most general of the four pre-determined. There are no indications in the open call of what are the characteristics that make a motivation good enough to be selected so the interpretation is left open to the judgement of the selectors. There are very few comments in the minutes about the motivation, and only three applications are labelled as having a good motivation. The common element between those three applications is that they already had participated in the fair so their motivation for going there is strictly connected to what they expect from it. They all have realistic expectations, connected to the will to get in touch with a specific audience targeted to their products.

For example, application number 3 refers to their course as a design studio and to their collaborations with galleries that left them more freedom than cooperating with an industry. However, for the development of their practice, they felt the need to incorporate more professional collaborations with industries in their production, in order also to professionalise their own design studio. That’s why the participation to Salone can allow them to direct their presentations to a more targeted professional audience. This is exemplified by this quote:

“As we see our future today as a design studio, where as already said are central professional collaborations with the industry, it is important that we present our work more targeted in that direction. [...] The realisation that network and targeted search of your target group (in our case the industry) are very important exists in our course for some time, it's time to act accordingly by literally going to our audience”¹

Similar to this application also the other two are willing to target a specific audience towards their products. Another common element is that all three of them, although focused on searching for international labels and industries, are also not willing to give up with their artistic side of the production, as can be read in this quote from application number 20:

“Together with further enhancing its own collection, one of the ambitions of [name of the applicant] is also exploring collaborations with existing brands and the incorporation of some of the designs by established labels. This allows to strengthen the basis for a professional

¹ “Met de huidige inzichten over hoe wij onze toekomst als ontwerpstudio zien, waar zoals gezegd professionele samenwerkingen met de industrie centraal staan, is het echter van belang dat we veel gericht ons werk presenteren.”

All translation from the Dutch are mine except for the translations of the names of the criteria, which are reported as found in the English version of the open call.

design practice and to create space for long-term “free work”. This could include gallery pieces and installations.”²

Beyond the realistic expectations that all three applications show, what they also have in common is their will to participate in the fair with specific intentions that match with their strategy for their design studio. What appears essential for the selectors is the need for an intrinsic motivation for the participation, that has to be justified by the long-term strategy of the applicants. As a confirmation of this, in some of the rejected applications, the motivation to go to the fair was found in the importance of the fair itself and in the essential presence of a designer at the fair. This might also be true but the importance of the fair needed to be justified by the relevance of the participation in the fair in order to achieve specific objectives for the designer/design studio, that should have been independent of the importance of the fair in itself.

An interesting outcome, evident already from this first criterion, is that applicants did not need to meet all the criteria to be accepted. Related to this first criterion, the most interesting case is the one of application 14. As opposed to the targeting and the plan to improve the design practice in the studio that we found in the three applications with a good motivation, in this application what makes the motivation not good is exactly the lack of target and of a long-term strategy for the design practice. In the notes we read, in the opinion of one of the selectors: “motivation & target missing: there is no long-term strategy”³.

4.1.2 Representative of the Dutch scene

The second and third criteria can be associated under the same major concept of being representative of the Dutch scene. The second criterion, in fact, says “the degree to which the selection of projects represents the Dutch design sector”, while the third says “the degree to which the project contributes to strengthening the image of the Dutch creative industries abroad” (Stimuleringsfonds Creatieve Industrie, 2015). Interestingly, there is little to no reference regarding how the projects may improve the image of the Dutch creative industries, either in the applications or in the notes. On the contrary, being representative of the Dutch design sector has regularly been referred to in the applications and stirred discussion amongst the selectors, for instance in the case of number 11, which was selected. Two of the three external advisors agreed on the fact that the project in itself was neither distinctive nor per se representative. However,

² “Naast het verder uitbreiden van de eigen collectie is het onderzoeken van samenwerkingen mét bestaande merken en het onderbrengen van een deel van de ontwerpen bij gevestigde labels één van de ambities van [naam van de ontwerper]. Hiermee kan de basis voor een professionele ontwerppraktijk worden versterkt en kan op lange termijn ook weer ruimte worden gecreëerd voor "vrij werk". Hierbij kan gedacht worden aan galeriestukken en installaties.”

³ “Maar motivatie & doel ontbreekt: langetermijndoelstelling is er niet”.

one of them added “In cluster with [name of the applicant] and [name of the applicant], then important”⁴. The two applications mentioned in cluster with number 11 are completely different from it. While application number 11 is focused on textile and natural inspiration, the other two applications have a strong technological prevalence. This observation underlines how the concept of being representative of the Netherlands is not fixed and that the aim was also to fund and represent a variety of different practices, as representative of the diversity of the Dutch design sector.

This observation couples with the case of another application, number 26. This application was one of the most discussed because it was a very different proposal on average in relation to the others. The determinant element that made the selectors approve this application was precisely its being representative of the Dutch design sector. Interesting fact, the project is described as representative because it is different. In the notes we can find this description of the application: “completely different from what there is to see [in Milan] —> NL represented because it is different”⁵. Then, another characteristic that can be ascribed to the representativeness is then the originality of the project, its being diverse from the average exhibitions at the fair.

Another example of this diversity can be found in application number 21. The degree of being representative in this case is their having studied in the Netherlands. Except for one, in fact, all the members of this collective are of foreign origins who studied and still reside in the Netherlands. In the notes there is an observation of one of the selectors that says that “Dutch design is becoming limitless but this had to be drawn wider”⁶. This quite obscure statement is connected to the observation made immediately before by the same selector about the great amount of foreign students studying in the Netherlands. What is representative of Dutch design nowadays is also the great variety of influences from foreign designers studying and living in the Netherlands, which became a typical Dutch characteristic.

Interestingly enough in respect of this criterion is also application number 51, which was not selected. This project presented itself with a nationalist appeal, as being the representative exhibition of Dutch designers in Milan, presenting a collection of the best young and established designers. The selectors agreed that there was no need to present a nationalist exhibition of Dutch designers.

What emerged from the analysis of these cases is that representativeness is not conceived in a nationalist way by the selectors. The refusal of a nationalist approach is

⁴ “Wel in cluster met [naam van de ontwerp] & [naam van de ontwerp] dus belangrijk”.

⁵ “Compleet anders van wat er te zien is —> vertegenwoordigd NL want het is anders”.

⁶ “Dutch Design wordt steeds grenzelezer maar had dit breder getrokken moeten worden”.

counterbalanced by the consideration of representativeness in a more implicit way, as in the case of designers of foreign origins or of a diversity of forms and projects presented.

4.1.3 Artistic quality and presentational form

The fourth criterion regards the artistic quality and presentational form of the project. The text of the application says “the degree to which the project is distinctive in its artistic quality and presentational form” (Stimuleringsfonds Creatieve Industrie, 2015). In the notes, the artistic quality is always simply defined by the selectors as describing the work as good or not. Determining what is understood by quality is impossible because the discussion between the selectors remains on a really superficial level for all the applications, limiting the description to vague and undeveloped terms. The reason of this lack of concreteness regarding the terms of quality can be researched in what Heinich (2009) describes as the implicit elements of the selection. These hidden elements, belonging to the sphere of pre-knowledge and of “goes without saying” inherent to the situation, result in superficial comments and a substantial lack of development in the definition of quality.

In all the selected applications only in two cases were the works perceived by some of the advisors as not good or of a varying quality depending on the pieces. The case of application number 25 is particularly interesting because the selectors did not agree on the quality of the work. Two were positive about the work (“good quality of the work”⁷ and “very intriguing and stimulating”⁸) while the other had a completely opposite opinion, stating that the quality of the work was not good. Except for this case of disagreement or of varying quality, as in the case of application number 23, it appears that the selection committee selected mainly the applications with an evident artistic quality. However, the artistic quality of the project in itself was not enough, as can be seen from rejected applications whose quality was judged good but for a sum of reasons they were considered not good enough to be selected.

The consideration of the second part of this criterion, related to the presentation form⁹ of the project, had roughly the same outcome as the first part. Almost all the selected applications were judged to have a good presentational form, in some cases defined as professional (application number 4), in some others distinctive (application number 5). In general, they all had a good perception of the presentational form, except for one application, whose work was described as beautiful but inscrutable and impossible to understand how their ideas would be translated into space (application number 24). Regarding the unselected

⁷ “Goed werk kwaliteit”.

⁸ “Heel intrigerend & prikkelend”.

⁹ For presentational form is intended the physical presentation in the booth.

applications, the majority of them were either considered as normal presentational forms, neither good nor bad, or bad. The most interesting cases are both connected to a project that took the shape more of an artistic exhibition than of a design exhibition. In the case of application number 45, the presentational form was considered not suitable for Milan because it was not yet ready, it was still too premature in its presentational form, and also it was connected to a more artistic consideration of an exhibition, while the fair of Milan is more design than art oriented. The case of application number 51 is also connected to a strong artistic influence. In this case, the project was more strongly criticised because of its exhibition structure. The selectors first observed that the concept of fair and of exhibition do not go together and the application is not presented as an exhibition but it was sometimes described as such. To connect this with the first part of the criterion, the application was considered missing the concept and the vision for its project, and this was also reflected in its presentational form.

In short, both parts of this criterion were followed quite strictly in their application to the selection process. Except for a few cases, all the selected applications were believed to have both artistic quality and good presentational form, or at least one of the two, while all the unselected were considered not artistically good enough or not with a good presentational form.

4.1.4 Additional criteria

In addition to the four criteria just examined, the open call includes two strongly recommended suggestions, which, although not defined as criteria, actually work as such. In the open call, after the criteria just mentioned, there are two suggestions for the advisors and for the applicants on two elements that add value to the application. The first one regards “projects that involve unusual forms of collaboration or are focused on a group presentation” and the second one regards “proposals with a realistic budget, where possible justified by valid quotations” (Stimuleringsfonds Creatieve Industrie, 2015). Although they are not defined as criteria in the application, they have been treated as such in the selection process, as can be understood from the minutes of the meeting and from an analysis of the group presentations selected or not.

Regarding the first preference, the concept of group presentation is not straightforward. It is not specified if in the definition of group presentations are included also a duo of designers or not. This is important to underline because duo of designers who have a fixed collaboration as a studio are not to be considered the same as group presentations prepared especially for this fair. The data is not conclusive on this point. However, if by the term ‘group’ it is considered more than one designer, then the selected applications present a larger amount of group presentations compared to the single designers selected, while the situation is reversed in

the case of those not selected. In fact, the selected applications which present a group presentation are 17, as opposed to 9 single designers. Those not selected, on the contrary, are 11 group presentations and 15 single designers.

The analysis of the observations made regarding the budget is interesting. Only seven applications have observations from the selectors about their budget and of these seven, six of them are negative. However, it is interesting to observe that five of these six applications that were considered not good in their budget were selected, while only one of them was not selected. This is related again to the finding that selected applications did not need to meet all the criteria to be selected. Even if these applications were considered not to have a realistic budget, they were selected. Unfortunately, because of the limitation of the minutes, regarding this specific criterion, it is not possible to develop a further comprehension of the data. For this specific criterion, the minutes are misleading because it is strictly dependent on the opinion of the selectors of the management of the budget, which is not possible to determine only from the applications.

4.2 Underlying criteria

In addition to the pre-determined criteria, other criteria emerged from the analysis of the notes and of the applications that help us to shed some light on how the pre-determined criteria were applied, or not. In fact, even if they were applied quite extensively, some selections cannot be explained by looking only at the pre-determined criteria. This is because there are some other, implicit aspects that influenced the selection: some criteria emerged from the words of the selectors themselves and some others emerged from identifying common patterns between the applications. In particular, two of the four criteria that emerged can appear to be similar to the pre-determined criteria. As explained in the general considerations about the pre-determined criteria, their nature is of fixed indications for the selection process, which leaves space for interpretation during the process. Some of the underlying criteria have a role in the application of the pre-determined criteria, as I will explain, but their role in the selection process is significantly broader than as a mere interpretation of the pre-determined criteria. They assume the role of criteria themselves, influencing the selection process as much as the pre-determined criteria.

The criteria will be presented in order of importance in the selection.

4.2.1 Research underneath the work inspired by other disciplines

The first criterion that emerges from the analysis of the applications and the comparison between the selected and the non-selected is the presence of a research underneath

the work of the designer or design studio. The main characteristic of the selected applications is that all of them present a project that is guided by a specific research, which is also in line with a long-term research of their design practice. This project most of the times has also a practical outcome, connected to the professionalisation of their design practice. This research is always funded on an inspiration, which comes from multiple other disciplines. This element of constructive dialogue with other disciplines was also expressed by the selectors at the beginning of the meeting when they explained what they were looking at in the applications. One of these elements was described as “a trend of being influenced by other disciplines but the project should have a dialogue with those disciplines”¹⁰. An example of this idea is application number 28. The inspiration for the work of the designer is science, and more generally nature, but without a real knowledge of the topic, which results as being nothing more than an inspiration for the work. That is why in the notes about this application we find these comments: “Science without science. It is staged but not more than inspiration. No proper job description. No strong presentation. Mere technical quality”¹¹. These words are clear enough to explain how a design work cannot be in dialogue with another discipline.

What emerged spontaneously from the data are four main patterns, with the corresponding disciplines. These patterns confirm what is highlighted in the theoretical section about the concept of design and its being influenced by other disciplines (Sparke, 2013). Of these disciplines, art has always been the most influential and this emerges also from this selection process. Also, in this case, analysing the applications, art has confirmed itself as the most influential discipline in the design field. More than half of the totality of applications examined claimed to have an artistic inspiration or orientation, being by far the most influential discipline compared to the other patterns. Moreover, of the selected applications more than half had an artistic inspiration (the selected were in total twenty-six). Some of them had an artistic inspiration for their work, like applications number 2 and 5, while others were aiming to be inserted in the art world more than in the commercial world, or in both, like application number 6.

Apart from art, other disciplines also showed to have an important influence. Two of them are disciplines influencing the art world since its birth: the social commitment of design, in fact, is part of its history since the beginning, as well as the technological progress, which has influenced the development of design since the beginning and is still doing so (Sparke, 2013). Regarding the social commitment found in the applications, thirteen of them showed an interest in researching the role of design in society, ranging from the role of women in society

¹⁰ “Tendens: andere disciplines maar dan wel dialoog aan moeten geven met”.

¹¹ “Science without science. Wordt opgevoerd maar is niet meer dan inspiratie. Geen goede werkomschrijving opgetuigd. Geen sterke presentatievorm. Bij mere zit technische kwaliteit”.

(application number 5), to the relationship between the city and the human beings inhabiting them (application number 7). Of these thirteen applications, nine of them were selected.

Regarding the technological patterns, they were found in thirteen applications as well, but of these eleven were selected.

The last pattern found is the inspiration from the environment, intended in its natural elements. In fact, seventeen applications declared as a source of inspiration the natural world. However, of these seventeen applications, ten were selected and seven were rejected. So, compared to the other disciplines influencing the design field, science intended as natural inspiration in a broader sense, is, in percentage terms, less valued than sociology or technology.

There is one more pattern of influence found in the applications, but it reflects what is believed to be too far from the world of industrial design. Three applications claimed to have been inspired by fashion or to have connections with the fashion industry, and none of them was selected. Fashion was described as a world too far from the one of the fair, which is predominantly showcasing industrial design.

It is important to underline that these different influences on the design work coexist in most applications. As an example of this tendency, the application that was believed to be the best work showcasing in Milan, contains three of the four patterns found in this analysis. Application number 1, in fact, contains social, technological and artistic elements, all intertwined in a reflection of what is the role of design in this specific historical moment.

Another important consideration is that some of these patterns were found also in the not selected applications, although in a smaller amount. However, what made the difference between the selected applications and the non-selected, with respect to the research underneath the work, is the development of this research and its being present in a long-term strategy. This element of the development of the research is also what was believed to be a good motivation for the participation at the fair. Considering what emerged from the first pre-determined criteria, the participation at the fair in order to present a project inserted in a long-term research of the design practice was often considered an intrinsic motivation. However, the intrinsic motivation represents only a small part of the consideration that was given to the research underneath the projects. A fundamental part of this criterion is represented by the development of this research: a great importance was given to the ability to develop the project in the long-term.

A good example to show the interest of the selectors in terms of development is the case of application number 18. This is how the applicants present their work:

“We are very critical and strive to present works that not only have strong aesthetic qualities but also a well thought out concept as the core.”¹²

So, the aim of the designers is to have both artistic quality and a research concept underneath the work. They partly achieved this as the selectors judged the work to be good and one of the more interesting projects for development. However, they also noticed that in the previous year the designers proposed a theme that was promised to have important future development and one year after they were presenting the same work, with no signs of development. At the end of the comments, one selector stated that maybe they only need to develop, because now their long term strategy is not clear, even if they aim to show their development in Milan for ten years.

The interest towards the development of the design practice seems fundamental, but not as development in itself but as a development of the research. However, in some cases, this importance given to the research from designers is believed to be taken too far, to the detriment of the physical design work in itself. This is the case of application number 30, whose aim is stated as such in the application:

“[Name of the applicant] functions as a platform that unites designers and writers and gives them an inspiring space to record their thoughts, concepts and notions around a particular theme. Guided by a quote relating to the theme, the designers express and present their interpretation of the chosen theme through their products and texts. The writings of poets, thinkers and design critics will be presented in exhibitions as integrated projects of cooperation between two or more groups that joined efforts under one framework. [...] The objective is to inspire the designers to realise the strong connection between design and language, and to benefit from the use of words to strengthen their concepts.”

This application was considered too vague by the selectors and inscrutable. What is interesting is that they defined the project as “over-theorised”, going too far from the concept of industrial design of the fair. This helps us to bridge from the first criterion to the second, which can be placed on the same level of importance of the first.

¹² “Wij zijn heel kritisch en streven ernaar om werk te presenteren die niet alleen sterke esthetische kwaliteiten heeft maar ook een goed nagedacht concept als kern.”

4.2.2 Commercial attitude

The second criterion, which has the same level of importance of the first one, is related to the commercial attitude of the applicants. Several elements contribute to influence the commercial attitude of the applications. The will to professionalise their design practice is the first one. Several applications received positive remarks in front of their will to professionalise their practice. One of the characteristics of this professionalisation is the ability to commercialise their work and to reach producers and labels. One application which was unanimously considered good is application number 4. This is the aim of their practice:

“We are not a label with a style dogma, we are not looking for a repeat of the work of a designer. We are just looking for inspiration and potency in the assembly of machine, manufacturer and designer”¹³

At the core of the activity of the applicants is the will to connect designers with producers and labels. So, they are not properly a design practice but a label that connects designers with the industry. This is why the selectors agreed in saying that their activity fills a gap in the market and that their practice is very important for designers because they show them the steps towards industry. Their structure, then, is predominantly commercial. The great value given to this application by the selectors is also in line with what we saw in the theory with regards to the double nature of design: on one side a strong artistic inspiration, on the other an intrinsic connection with the industrial world (Sparke, 2013). If we have seen from the previous criterion that art still has a great influence towards design, the same importance is given to the commercial aspect of design. And this particular fair is also an example of the importance given to the commercial aspect of the design practice, as shows the selection of this application (number 4) that is predominantly commercial and is believed to fill a gap in the market.

This commercial attitude can be found also in the minutes with the recurrence of expressions referring to the business approach of the applications. Application number 19 is an example of a commercial direction followed by the design studio, which was valued by the selectors and selected because of its urgency to connect with the industry. The applicant developed a line of products specifically aimed at being inserted into the collections of furniture and accessory brands, leaving out on purpose the more experimental products. The selectors

¹³ “We zijn geen label met een stijldogma, wij zijn niet op zoek naar een herhaling van het oeuvre van een ontwerper. Wij zijn juist op zoek naar de inspiratie en potentie in de samenkomst van machine, producent en de ontwerper.”

approved this clear commercial output of the applicant, which was the determinant factor in its selection.

4.2.3 Innovation and experimentation

Another criterion that had a percentage of influence was the factor of innovation. As stated by the open call “preferences will be given to projects that involve unusual forms of collaboration or are focused on a group presentation” (Stimuleringsfonds Creatieve Industrie, 2015). This criterion, besides talking about group presentations, it also involves the element of diversity, with the term “unusual”. However, the importance given to the element of innovation and diversity is much more extended than only to the innovation in group presentations and collaborations. At the beginning of the meeting, the selectors discussed which were the elements that they wanted to highlight with this selection process and one of those was “support technical innovation and something at the margins of the field”¹⁴. This characteristic of something at the margins of the field was found in unusual and innovative projects, that were not afraid of experimenting. An example of this appreciating experimentation and not ordinary projects is represented by the expression “another sound”, which can be found in five different selected applications. In one case, in application number 5, the expression is referred to the presentation, which is defined as “distinctive” and “different sound”. In the case of applications number 12 and 13 the expression “other sound” is referred to the concept of the idea, which is defined as “innovative” in application 12, while in application 13 the concept is more connected to the idea of the group presentation combining visual artists and designers. The same goes for application number 17, which is also appreciated for the combination of the group presentation, which is defined “in bizarreness funny”.

Two cases are particularly interesting regarding this element of novelty and experimentation, which made them also be the most discussed cases during the meeting. The works are described with the following words. Application number 10:

“[Name of the project] is a new project of [name of the applicants] with the actual topic of privacy and sharing personal data on the internet. [...]

¹⁴ “Technisch innovatie ondersteunen: iets in de marge”

Two examples to clarify the applicability.

A museum. An artistic installation in which the social issues that our work raises are put forward.
A car brand. An (electronic) car key shows the data, the car will be the object that plays them.”¹⁵

Application number 13:

“A collaboration between artists and designers who explore the boundaries of the interior.”¹⁶

Application number 10 is innovative in the concept of the work presented, which also involves the direct participation of the audience, while application number 13 is innovative because the collaboration between artists and designers is solved in an unusual way, with the artists doing the work of the designers and vice versa.

Although the two cases are very different from each other, they are both defined as innovative and different from what is usually on display in Milan. In both cases, it is the installation itself that raises questions and perplexities but that also shows the potential of the applicants. The projects are also both strongly oriented towards art and very experimental, like in the case of application number 10 which makes the evaluators doubt about the final result of the project. However, they also consider the fact that the project can develop while getting in contact with the outside world and with the feedback of the public. The other application, instead, is in doubt for the evaluators more because of the experimental nature of the collaboration. In fact, it is a collective of designers and visual artists who experiment on the borders of the two disciplines. In both cases, however, considered the quality and the potential of the work and the interesting experimentation, the selectors decided to select these projects using the expression “benefit of the doubt”, which expresses fully the trust but also the investment of the evaluators in some new forms of experimentation in the field of design.

4.2.4 Fame

Last in influence in the selection but determinant for some cases, fame also had a part in the selection of some applications. As the selectors stated at the beginning of the meeting in underlying the elements that they wanted to take into consideration in the selection process,

¹⁵ “Twee voorbeelden om de toepasbaarheid inzichtelijk te maken: Een museum. Een artistiek installatie waarin het maatschappelijke thema dat we aankarten werk naar voren wordt gebracht. Een automerk. Een (elektronische) autosleutel geeft de data, de auto zal het te bespelen object zijn.”

¹⁶ “Een samenwerking tussen kunstenaars en ontwerpers die de grens van het interieur opzoeken.”

one of their aims was to select a combination of young and established designers. However, in this selection of established designers, sometimes it appeared that fame had an influence when the quality was not believed to be enough. It is interesting to give a closer look at some cases.

The most evident case is the one of application number 23. The work of the artist was defined as of varying quality, depending on what he shows, while another selector defined the work as average. However, he also added that “he is [name of the applicant]”. This expression was reported in the notes between quotation marks, as the exact words of the selector. This sentence seems to say that because he is that particular designer and he is famous he has to be selected.

Another case is the one of application number 26. This application was one of the most discussed because of the particular project it presented. In the opinion of the selectors, the project was still in progress and not strong enough and the application was chaotic. Also, the costs included in the budget were described as ineligible. The only two positive observations made were one referred to its being representative of the Dutch design sector because of its being completely different to the other projects usually presented at the fair, and the other observation is referred to the fact that it is dedicated to the celebration of a famous Dutch designer. The fact that it involved the vision of this famous designer made it worthy of being selected, despite the problematic application.

Besides these two cases there were no other particular applications of the criterion of fame, however it is still relevant to be considered because it was determinant in these two cases. Some other known designers were rejected, so fame was not valued as much as I expected during the selection, which shows a quite impartial attitude from the selectors, who valued the applications more for their intrinsic value than for external elements, like fame.

4.3 Invisible criteria

The criteria I have mentioned in my analysis are the visible criteria, the ones that are possible to find by an external researcher who did not participate in the selection process. However, there are some other criteria that are impossible to determine with the data I could analyse and that are explained by Nathalie Heinich (2009) in her analysis of the selection process of a French municipality. There are, in fact, some elements that remain silent during the meeting but that influence the selection process. This process is clearly stated by a sentence in her book, which says that “the most striking in this meeting is what is not said”¹⁷ (Heinich 2009, p. 99). What she means by this is that there is a whole series of information and opinions that precede

¹⁷ «Le plus frappant dans cette réunion est ce qui n'est pas dit»

the meeting and that are not said or are implicitly said during the meeting. All this kind of information are lost with the analysis I conducted because it is not possible to obtain them only from the minutes of the meeting. Therefore, in some cases, it is difficult to determine why a particular application was chosen instead of another, in front of equal characteristics and comments.

Another problematic element is the factor of agreement or disagreement between the evaluators. As Heinich (2009) also observed, the majority of criteria emerge in the presence of a disagreement between the selectors. This is because disagreement reveals more operative criteria that are not influenced by pre-knowledge or implicit elements and that are only the result of the discussion during the meeting. This distinction between agreement and disagreement is also observable from the minutes of the meeting. In my specific case, in the presence of an agreement most of the times the material in the notes was very brief and not always relevant, while in the presence of a disagreement between the selectors, the notes were also richer. The disagreement, in fact, is the moment when the opinions of the judges emerge and some underlying criteria are revealed. One of them, for example, is the criterion of fame, which was only revealed in cases of debate between the selectors. In cases of disagreement the relationships and the hierarchy between the selectors are also revealed, that influence the selection in terms of the importance of the opinion of one selector compared to the one of another one.

Unfortunately, all these implicit elements were impossible to determine for me because they do not emerge from the written transcription of the meeting. Therefore, in some cases, I was not able to determine why some applications were selected and others rejected.

5. Conclusions and discussion

The aim of this research was twofold: on one hand to bring light to the opaqueness of selection processes in academic research and on the other to apply this research to the field of design, that represents a hole in sociological analysis. This phenomenon was analysed through a case study, the Dutch participation to Milan Design Week, guided by a research question: which criteria emerge from the selection of Dutch designers for Milan Design Week and how do they influence the selection process? Two subquestions organised the research and resulted in the analysis of the criteria that guided this selection, divided in pre-determined criteria, underlying criteria and invisible criteria.

The pre-determined criteria are in fact fixed guidelines for the selectors and the applicants, that constitute the structure of how the selection should be done. They are: motivation for participation, the degree to which the selection of projects represents the Dutch design sector, the degree to which the project contributes to strengthening the image of the Dutch creative industries abroad, artistic quality and presentational form, unusual forms of collaboration of group presentations and realistic budget.

In addition to these criteria, some others emerged from the combined analysis of the applications and minutes of the meeting. These can be called underlying criteria and are four: research underneath the work, commercial attitude, innovation and experimentation and fame.

The third group of criteria has been called invisible criteria. This group of criteria is formed by all the elements that remain silent but influence the selection process anyway. Elements of this group are all the information and opinions that precede the meeting and are not expressed during it but influence the positions of the selectors. They are impossible to determine with the kind of analysis that has been pursued in this research.

What emerged is that all these criteria are not statically confined to their group of belonging, but they interact between each other, giving shape to the mechanism of selection as a whole. However, every selection presents different treatment of the criteria, as they are strictly dependant on the selection committee, which changes every year. This constant change of the selection committee modifies also the dynamics of selection, which are influenced by several internal and external factors. The external factors are represented by the constant development of the field of design, while the internal factors are represented by the amount of capital that every selector has and the relationships that exist between the selectors or that are established during the selection process. These constant changes in the selection mechanism can be seen in the selection's criteria.

The pre-determined criteria function mainly as guidelines for the selectors and the applicants, as they are fixed elements without a strong identity, because they characterise the selection of every year. They are then subject to the interpretation of the selectors, that give a specific meaning to every criterion. Therefore, being the selection committee different every year, there is no continuity in the interpretation of the criteria. So, the formula of the pre-determined criteria is fixed, but its interpretation is mobile.

The underlying criteria are the direct product of the selection process. Therefore, as the selection mechanism is modified every year, the underlying criteria are also different. They represent the character of each year's selection. They are used in some cases as the intrinsic principles guiding the pre-determined criteria but their employment is always deeper and broader. The underlying criteria then are used as interpretation of the pre-determined criteria but they are also criteria on their own, since they have deeper motivations than being only the justification of the pre-determined criteria. Determining a hierarchy of importance of the criteria in the selection process is nearly impossible, however some of them seem to have a stronger impact on it. In the following will be highlighted the most influencing elements of this selection.

One of the elements that emerges from this analysis is that there are no strong values or principles guiding the selection process. These constant changes in the selection process result in a lack of continuity in the outcomes of selection, that appear to be influenced mainly by the process itself than by some general principles. A conclusion that can be derived from the mechanisms of this selection is that the advisors did not have a clear idea of what they wanted to achieve with this selection before starting the meeting, but they were influenced by the process of the meeting itself. An example of this is that it is impossible to define what was understood as quality because every comment about the quality of the projects is very superficial and it is not possible to obtain an objective definition of it by comparing the applications. This might also be explained with the strong influence that design receives from other disciplines and makes difficult also to circumscribe the boundaries of the field.

This strong influence of other disciplines characterised design from its birth and, given the results of this research, is still a fundamental part of the field (Sparke, 2013). Its main influence is in the first underlying criterion, the concept and research underneath the projects, which has proved to have a strong influence on the selection process. What emerges is a tendency to go towards a theorisation of design, not an end in itself but connected to a development of the core idea of the practice. This theorisation, however, has to be always balanced by a commercial output of the practice, which also emerged as an important criterion from the analysis.

Another interesting element is the strong inclination of design towards art. As we have seen from the theory, art always exercised a strong influence on design, but this tendency is growing stronger nowadays. The amount of projects that were influenced by art was significantly greater compared to other disciplines. Important to notice is also the targeting of audience: beside focusing on companies and labels, a significant number of applicants were also willing to get in contact with galleries or museums. As explained in the theoretical framework in the structure of the field of design, galleries and museums are starting to gain increasing importance in the field of design: this is a sign of the “artistification” of the design field, that before was mainly focused on the commercial side while nowadays is slowly moving towards a more artistic organisation of the field. This artistic influence can also be found in the diffusion of selection processes in the design field. Although they are still not common, cases like the one object of this research are becoming more and more diffused. Their structure is also very similar to selection processes in the art world, as proved by the perfect application of Heinich’s theory (2009) to this research. The sociological analysis of the selection process that she conducted reflects the same mechanisms that emerged from the present research.

The method used to pursue this research is qualitative content analysis. It was chosen because it allowed to perform the research in the most objective and reliable way, compared to other methods of research. However, even if this method allowed me to conduct a quite deep research about this selection process, the results I obtained from my research are still partial. In fact, there are some elements that cannot be determined from the documents I analysed. The inspiration for this research was provided by Nathalie Heinich’s research of the selection process and criteria of selection (2009). The focus of her research was on the selection of artworks for a French municipality, however as I explained earlier, the outcome of her research are very similar to the outcome of this research. Although the outcomes are similar, Heinich’s method is different from the method used in this research. She performed a direct observation of the selection’s meeting, participating in person to the meeting. This way, she was able to observe also the silent and implicit behaviours during the meeting and the dynamics between the members of the committee. Unfortunately, I was not able to participate to the selection’s meeting and this influenced the results of my research: it is impossible to determine these elements only with the analysis of the minutes of the meeting and of the applications, which here have been defined invisible criteria. For these reasons the results I could obtain from the analysis are only partial and do not exhaust completely the research regarding the selection criteria.

One last limitation, which also opens up to future research, is the attendance to the fair itself. The Milan Design Week is an intense week in the middle of April, which gathers an

incredible amount of participants from several countries. I participated to the 2016 edition of the fair, to observe the final products of the applications. Interesting fact to observe, some of them were completely changed from the applications. Conducting a different type of research, it would be interesting to observe also this side of the selection process, from the first stages of the project in the application to the final product exhibited at the fair. A limitation concerning the present research is represented by the impossibility of using the notes I took during my visit to the Milan design Week, because too far from the object of the research.

Regarding further research, a lot of possibilities are still open in the realm of academic research about design. Talking specifically about my research, it would be interesting to complete what I started with a deeper analysis of the selection methods, including participation to the selection meeting but also interviewing the various selectors. This way, the look into the selection processes would be more deep and complete. Also, applying the same type of research that I conducted on the design field on another field, would also help to understand more the selection processes in other fields.

Staying in the research about this particular fair, but moving towards another type of research, another interesting topic of research would be to explore the difference in the role and position of designers in the fair and in the off-site fair. The fair and the off-site fair are very different in their approach, the first being very commercially oriented and structured as a furniture shop would be, while the off-site fair is more focused on experimentation and art, with the concept of furniture brought to its limits. I often wondered while I was there, if there would be any difference in exposing some of the pieces at an art fair or biennial. This implies also a very different approach towards the work and the role of designers. This kind of research would also help to shed light on the two different sides of design, the artistic and the commercial, seeing what is the direction of design nowadays.

But since the field of design is still an almost unexplored terrain in academic research, several other possibilities are open. For example, another very interesting research would be how designers reach success, taking as an example the multiple research that has been done in the art field. The field of design in general is still an open question. Its construction is very similar to the one of the art world, as I explained in the theoretical section, but the values and relations that regulate it are still hidden.

The aim of my research was not to say the final word about the selection criteria in the field of design. Actually, it is very far from it. The aim of my research was to start an academic research in the field of design, with the particular focus on selection processes and criteria. This study of the selection processes could be applied to any other country participating

to the fair or to any other field. In fact, selection processes are determinant in every field for their role of gatekeepers and value creation. However, they have not been object of extensive research from academics. The main focus on selection processes in academic research is not on their mechanisms and criteria but on the importance of gatekeepers' role in selection processes for a field. Therefore, my aim with this research was to contribute to fill the gap in the academic research about selection processes and criteria and also to bring the attention to the field of design, an interesting field that has been ignored for too long from the academic world. To conclude, I hope this thesis inspires future research to continue exploring this fascinating field of design.

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Appendix A

Table B1 includes the number of pages of every application that has been analysed for this research. The pages included are not the total pages of the application but only the pages examined for this research, which included the following elements: a motivation letter, a motivation of why the project presented was representative of the Dutch design scene, the extent to which the project presented contributed to strengthen the image of the Dutch design scene, the extent to which the project distinguished itself in artistic quality and presentation form and a budget for the exhibition, with specified the amount requested to the fund.

Table B1

Application's number	Amount of pages
1	3
2	1.5
3	2
4	3
5	2.5
6	2
7	2
8	3.5
9	2
10	4
11	2
12	2
13	3
14	2
15	2
16	3
17	5
18	3
19	3
20	3

Application's number	Amount of pages
21	5
22	5
23	1
24	2
25	3
26	2
27	3
28	3
29	1
30	5
31	4
32	1.5
33	3
34	1.5
35	6
36	2
37	4
38	1.5
39	1.5
40	0.5
41	2
42	2.5
43	2.5
44	3
45	1.5
46	3
47	3
48	2
49	2.5

Application's number	Amount of pages
50	2.5
51	2
52	2.5
	Total: 110

Appendix B

Table B2 includes the coding scheme. Two examples of text are presented for every criterion. At the end of the fragment is specified whether it is an extract of the notes or of the application.

Table B2

Example of text	Open coding	Axial coding	Selective coding
<p>“Together with further enhancing its own collection, one of the ambitions of [name of the applicant] is also exploring collaborations with existing brands and the incorporation of some of the designs by established labels. This allows to strengthen the basis for a professional design practice and to create space for long-term “free work”. This could include gallery pieces and installations.”</p> <p>Application number 20</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ambition of the applicant • Collaborations with brands and established labels • Strengthen position as professional design practice • Long term “free work” • Commercial direction • Artistic identity • Target audience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ambition of the applicant for Milan: commercial and artistic identity towards a targeted audience 	<p>Intrinsic motivation</p>

<p>“The realisation that network and targeted search of your target group (in our case the industry) is very important exists in our course for some time, it's time to act accordingly by literally going to our audience.” Application number 3</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted search of the audience • Industry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ambition of the applicant for Milan: target audience towards the industry 	<p>Intrinsic motivation</p>
<p>“Completely different from what there is to see [in Milan] —> NL represented because it is different.” Notes referring to application number 26</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different from what is normally in Milan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversity and originality of the project 	<p>Representative of the Dutch scene</p>
<p>“So many foreign students -> Dutch design is becoming limitless but this had to be drawn wider. -> That's a very interesting approach and research.” Notes referring to application number 21</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High amount of foreign design students in the Netherlands • Dutch design is becoming limitless • Designers of foreign origins as an important part of Dutch design scene 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Great variety of influences on Dutch design 	<p>Representative of the Dutch scene</p>
<p>“Good maker. Enthusiastic. Does good things.” Notes referring to application number 15</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good level of the designer • Good quality of the works 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality of the project defined good 	<p>Artistic quality and presentational form</p>

<p>“Good, professional presentation, by development.”</p> <p>Notes referring to application number 4</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good presentation • Professional • Development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation valued because professional 	<p>Artistic quality and presentational form</p>
<p>“Good group composition. Another interesting approach.”</p> <p>Notes referring to application number 13</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appreciation for the assortment of members of the group • Interesting approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unusual but interesting collaboration 	<p>Collaborations or group presentations</p>
<p>“Beautiful project & good participants.”</p> <p>Notes referring to application number 15</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interesting project • Good group members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interesting group presentation 	<p>Collaborations or group presentations</p>
<p>“Also not good in the budget. Will it be a collective presentation? Because budget is only for their own work.”</p> <p>Notes referring to application number 24</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not good budget • Collective presentation but budget referred only to the work of the applicants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not clear budget 	<p>Budget</p>
<p>“Unreal budget: why pay rent? Because it is a container.”</p> <p>Notes referring to application number 14</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unrealistic budget • Presentation in a container so not clear why there is a rent in the budget 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not realistic budget 	<p>Budget</p>

<p>“Therefore, not design as product but design as reflection of our identity as human beings regardless of our origin, religion or position. The exhibition is an excellent example of how contemporary Dutch design is more than the production of commercially attractive products.” Application number 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design as reflection of human’s identity • More than the simple production of objects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Core concept guiding the research of design as a reflection on other disciplines 	<p>Research underneath the project, inspired by other disciplines</p>
<p>“We distinguish ourselves by showing only the beauty and value of research. Because our designers do not design from a commercial demand for this exhibition, there is room for deepening within the research which creates unexpected and innovative discoveries.” Application number 15</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beauty and value of the research • No commercial demand • Focus on their specific research in design 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research as fundamental step in the process of design 	<p>Research underneath the project, inspired by other disciplines</p>

<p>“The projects that I want to present are specific options selected for inclusion in the collections of furniture and accessory brands. It was therefore decided to design specific and well-producible designs. The more inquisitive and experimental projects are expressly excluded from the selection.”</p> <p>Application number 19</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designed for being included in collections of furniture and accessory brands • No experimental and artistic projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commercial focus for the participation to the fair 	<p>Commercial attitude</p>
<p>“Increasing awareness among the international public offering possibilities for new opportunities in the business area in which a new market can be discovered and new partners can be found. They want to claim the professional market and expand their audience reach by showing their work in a broader spectrum and from a more autonomous position.”</p> <p>Application number 22</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offering possibilities for new opportunities in the business area • New market and new partners • Claim the professional market • Expand the audience • Autonomous position 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professionalisation of the design practice as a way to affirm their identity 	<p>Commercial attitude</p>

<p>“Interesting as new line in the field. Experiment and explore. Benefit of the doubt.” Notes referring to application number 10</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New practice • Appreciation of the experimental nature • Risk in selecting it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selection of an experimental project 	<p>Innovation and experimentation</p>
<p>“Other sound. Encouraging innovative slicing.” Notes referring to application number 12</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different sound • Innovative part of the market 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting an innovative approach 	<p>Innovation and experimentation</p>
<p>“Work is medium. But “It is [name of the applicant]”.” Notes referring to application number 23</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality of the work not remarkable • Importance of the name 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fame of the artist justifies his choice 	<p>Fame</p>
<p>“Involves vision of [name of the designer].” Notes referring to application number 26</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About the vision of a famous designer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presence of a famous designer valued as a positive element 	<p>Fame</p>

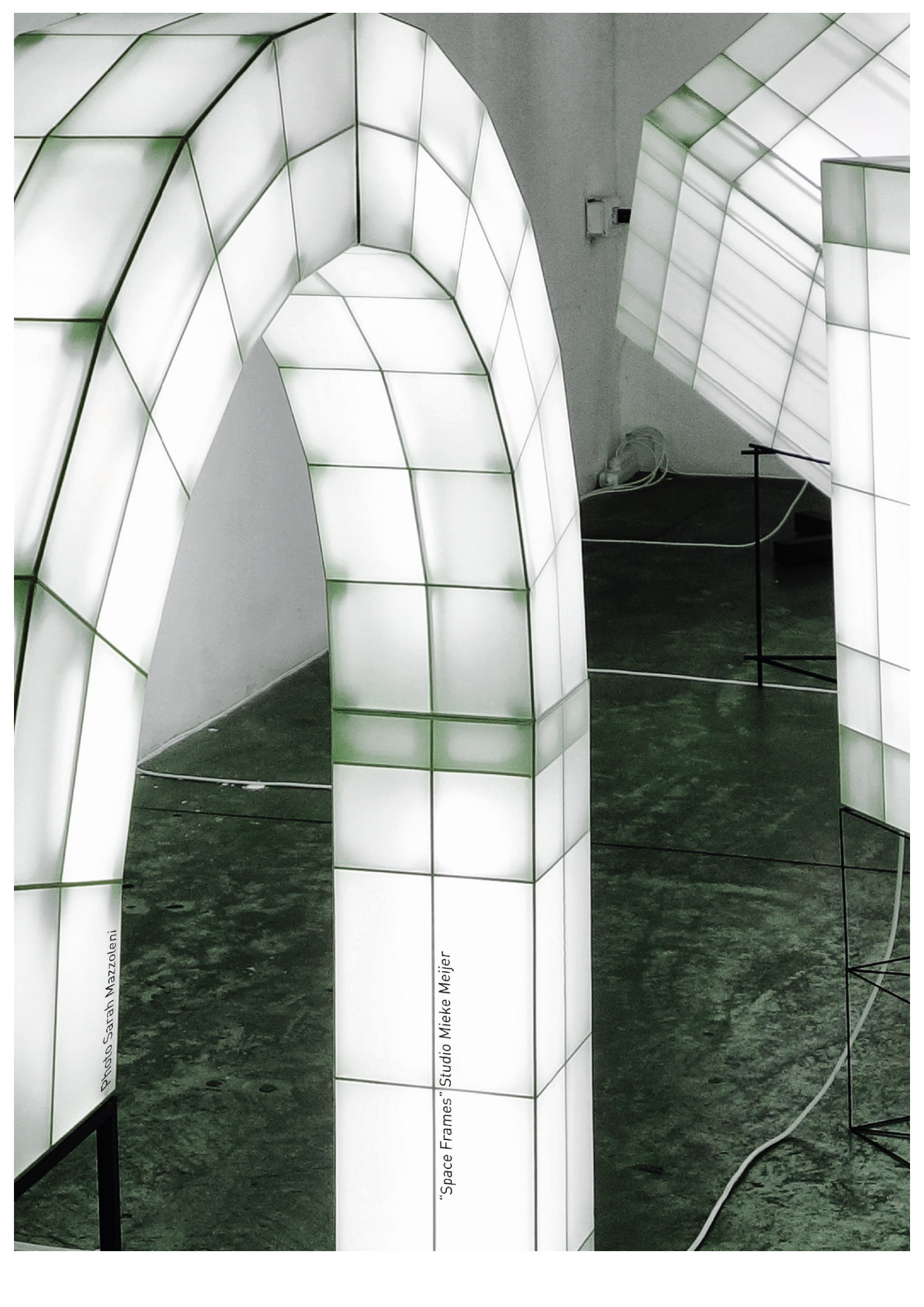


Photo Sarah Mazzoleni

"Space Frames" Studio Mieke Meijer