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Making and Unmaking the Ephemeral Object: Design, Consumption, and the Importance of Everyday Life in Understanding Design beyond the Studio

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ABSTRACT A definition of design under everyday conditions often falls under the conventions of craft, placing emphasis on tangible objects resulting from personal design practices. Design also occurs as part of a routine process, found in sometimes banal, repetitive activities of everyday life. In order to understand how design operates as a productive practice in the everyday, this article looks at cooking as a type of design and, by extension, designers as cooks. As a "wild" practice of design – one that defies the division between production and consumption – this study on cooking articulates an alternative meaning of design that specifically looks at practices of engagement with ephemeral materiality in relation to design. This approach to design

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operates through processes of distributed agency rather than a traditional object-centered approach.

KEYWORDS: ephemeral materiality, wildness, everyday life, practice, consumption, iterative design, designer-user, ephemeral objects

Theorists of design and culture understand the role of the everyday from the point of view of consumption, in which products are used and appropriated to fit the tastes of the consumer and the limitations of everyday life. But production, too, plays a critical role in the realm of the everyday, within a space or set of material conditions that people with different skills or interests interact with in the conceptualization and execution of things and experiences. This paper is written for the design studies community, including scholars and practitioners concerned with the implications of design beyond a commercial framework or a literal, object-centered discourse focused on the results of a design process. My goal in writing this article is to change the way we look at design in hopes of opening conversation on the role of personal design practice, which perhaps lacks the awareness, but not the intentionality or enthusiasm, of "capital-D" Design. Though design is certainly an expansive professional field associated with institutional education and professional training, modes of critique largely focus on design as a final object, leaving room for a serious exploration of practice. Yet this type of inquiry seems less suited to design history than, perhaps, to the disciplines of sociology or anthropology.

If design is characterized by a type of helical thinking that gradually narrows in from an idea to a material artifact, we need to also consider that this process is different for each practitioner and takes into consideration space (such as whether design happens in the informal boundaries of someone's home or in a professional setting such as a studio or workshop) as well as the availability of materials and tools, individual taste, preference, and contingencies. Design is more than problem solving; it is a process of iterative configuration. Before the final object that we associate with its design (as in *disegno*) is produced, many versions of that object appear and disappear in the realm of the everyday or the studio. In professional practice, we may call these "prototypes," but in everyday life, these versions of things – such as recipes or makeup looks – disappear shortly after they materialize.

In 1971, Victor Papanek wrote about design, describing it as "the primary underlying matrix of life," found in activities as mundane as "cleaning and reorganizing a desk drawer, pulling an impacted tooth, baking an apple pie" (Papanek 1971, 3). And although there has been a general acceptance of the universality of design, there has been less focus on how the everyday actually affects design practice without this research acting in service of design industries. There is

evidence, for instance, on how consumer research on everyday life may lead to better-designed products, as in the case of human-centered design. There is also significant published work on the intersection of design and everyday life, including Judy Attfield's *Wild Things* (Attfield 2000) and Elizabeth Shove et al., *The Design of Everyday Life* (2007). But these works consider design as it is appropriated and given meaning by consumers.

The association between design, everyday life, and ordinary objects emerged when interdisciplinary researchers expanded the definition of design to include the role of the user who lives through objects. Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi asserted that, "by actively appreciating the object, the owner joins in the act of creation, and it is this participation, rather than the artist's creative effort, that makes the artifact important in his or her life" (Csikszentmihalyi 1991, 28). This relates to Attfield's (2000) approach, which shows how the user is active in the production of meaning on "designed objects." But *designing* has not yet been examined as a practice intrinsic to everyday life.[1]

By experimenting with the idea of design being in common with cooking – as an everyday practice – we can see how the habitual practice of cooking reveals certain aspects of the design process previously unexplored, such as the role of sensing and contingency in design, or how an individual develops a non-linear process of ideation beyond industry-driven models of "design thinking." This kind of practice allows the designer, who is also the user, to build on their material knowledge and relationship to the world in a distinct way. Aspects of professionalism in design are less important in everyday life and are replaced with intentionality and awareness of the material world as it appears and dissolves around us. I assert that, to understand a figure like the home cook or other bricoleurs as *designers* in everyday life, we must understand their relationship with consumption as *designer-users*. This term serves to highlight the relationship of people who make things constantly (food, outfits, plans) as a part of everyday living, and to represent a loss of control of the design process to the flux and variables of daily life. By extension, this also means that all "capital-D" Designers are, in fact, designer-users in conversation with materials, histories, and trends.

The Ephemeral Object: "Things" of Everyday Design

To assert that cooked objects are "designed" products despite their ephemerality, it is important to acknowledge their transformation into *things* as an effect of their inherent materiality, which leads to their intertwined production and consumption. The use of the term "things" in this paper is intentional: It describes a resistance to the categorization of ephemeral objects as existing only between states of material and artifact, and a resistance to the hegemony of "capital-D" Design products. It is inspired both by Judy Attfield's *Wild Things* (Attfield 2000) and Jane Bennett's "thing-power" (Bennett

2010, 2). An even more direct explanation for "things" comes from Heidegger (1971, 167) when he states that "the thingly character of the thing does not consist in its being a represented object, nor can it be defined in any way in terms of the objectness, the over-againstness, of the object." In this study, therefore, cooked objects will be called "ephemeral objects," to make the distinction between them and more lasting products of a formal (and often commercial) design process.

Ephemerality is a condition tied to use and consumption. Ephemeral materiality – which we sometimes consume as a final design and also use as raw materials in the design of other ephemeral objects – complicates our ability to recognize practices like cooking as engaging primarily in *design* and not simply as an art or life-sustaining practice alone. Significantly, the question of "art" would not always be relevant to a design theorist, but it would for those who study materiality foremost. Casually, practices like cooking and applying makeup are everyday activities likened to artistic practices of expression, but they are, in fact, more like design because there is a level of negotiation and iterative configuration in their practices. There is also a subjective link between expression and functionality in these habitual or life-sustaining practices.

The end result of these practices constitutes a new materiality through the transformation of materials into a novel object that then disappears as a condition of being part of everyday life. In practice, these materials transcend their status as objects and become *things*.

What Does Cooking Have to Do with Design?

Ephemeral objects, especially cooked food, are more like *things* than commercial objects of design because their production and consumption transcend objectification and, oftentimes, a consistent formal/material description. If you follow a recipe, the end-product can be visualized and categorized as a "type" of food. But its consumption goes beyond visual objectification. Food is experienced through the important step of eating, which inevitably makes it disappear, and in this process a dish is transformed from a conceivable *thing* into a *thing* of memory (a quasi-object). In such a way, we can begin to understand how the same food object tastes different on certain holidays or if made by certain family members. This paper will look at *flan* – a custard dessert – as an object of a design process (cooking).

What exactly is flan when it is eaten? How can we objectify its value as design if it is no longer physically available to critique? Jane Bennett comes to her definition of "thing-power" through the ideas of Spinoza, Thoreau, de Vries, and W. J. T. Mitchell. She quotes Mitchell that objects are distinguished as "the way things appear to a subject – that is with a name, an identity, a gestalt or stereotypical template [...] Things on the other hand, [...] signal the moment when the object becomes the Other" (Bennett 2010, 2). Bennett's aim is to identify "the moment of independence (from subjectivity) possessed

by things" (Bennett 2010, 3). Using the example of cooking, flan becomes a thing when it undergoes a chemical transformation from a liquid mix of disparate ingredients to a solid *flan*. Despite the fact that other desserts contain the same ingredients, flan is *other*.

Thing-status seems to exist in the making and unmaking of an object; Bennett also considers the thing-ness of edible matter by way of Emma Roe's phenomenological study of eating, to delineate how "a carrot as it first enters the eater's mouth is a full-blown entity [...] once swallowed, however, its coherence gradually dissipates until [...] the difference between carrot and eater vanishes altogether" (Bennett 2010, 49). This difficulty in defining what the ephemeral object is in on a spectrum of intentional design is characteristic of things. The separation from subjectivity is found in the *practice* of transforming it, in designing and consuming, hence the term designer-users.

By acknowledging the short-lived, object-side of ephemeral materiality, we can acknowledge the relevance of material culture studies to design in the everyday, especially in the role of consumption. Judy Attfield dedicated a significant part of her research and writing to bridging the connections between design and anthropology. For Attfield, design can inform an anthropological concern for material culture as a way to enhance the knowledge of things and their relationships to humans. Her book *Wild Things* (Attfield 2000) is primarily concerned with the individual production of meaning in objects.

The types of questions I ask cannot exist without Attfield's contribution to expanding the definition of design; however, in this particular inquiry, the fixity of "material culture" is limited by ephemerality. Previous studies on ephemeral materiality have been concerned with the preservation and study of traditional objects made with ephemeral materials like food, soap, dirt, etc. (Sandino 2004, 290). This approach to design studies gives primacy to the object of design, whereas I am primarily concerned with the practice. Understanding design in the work of a designer-user crafting a traditionally non-ephemeral object – like a necklace made with ice – is straightforward because we understand jewelry to be an object outside of ourselves. Importantly, ephemeral materiality in the context of everyday life also relates to bodily consumption: the things we make to sustain habitual life are constantly materialized and then consumed or profoundly altered. In these practices, we aren't necessarily aware that we are habitually "designing," and so this article challenges the object-centered focus common in design studies discourse.

Related to the ephemeral object, recent scholarship on the philosophy of design has defined the design prototype (often ephemeral itself) as "not only a representation of what already exists but a presentation of what could exist" (Franke 2016, 139). Within the realm of the everyday, however, prototypes disappear as frequently as they appear. Ephemeral design practices like cooking are also prone to a

"perpetual beta/never-finished quality," writes Michael Schrage about the interactive, formless products of design, such as software prototypes. Like recipe testing, these prototypes "iteratively evolve as a function of use" (Schrage 2013, 24).

Producing multiple versions, or prototypes, of flan, therefore, negotiates what flan can be. In this project, I question whether I can make flan vegan; I am thus negotiating the materiality of ingredients that are not characteristic of the taste or traditional makeup of this dessert. By recipe testing – learning how to make flan by following instructions from existing recipes – creating a vegan flan is prototyping for a future need. I make hypotheses of what flan can be under different circumstances or constraints, such as when ingredients are unavailable or someone has an allergy or dietary preference.

We can hypothesize that in everyday design practice, such as cooking (and exclusive of DIY applied arts or crafts, which create "final" products), there are *only* prototypes, because we are constantly referencing, testing, and living through materiality as we design. Ephemeral materiality's relationship to prototyping reveals new ways of talking about models as objects. These appear and disappear along the design process in order for makers to "think through" the materials. A designer who is primarily concerned with plasticity, for example, also encounters the ephemeral through making a series of prototypes; although these items can be stored and brought out for reference, they ultimately exist in the shadow of the final object.[2]

While generative creative activity cannot be easily organized into steps, we can observe that the design process begins with an idea (even if vague) and ends with a material form of that idea. In between the beginning and end, there is likely to be a process of prototyping, producing multiple ideas about what the object can be until enough sensing and failing leads the designer-user to an object that satisfies them. Attention to ephemeral materiality can illuminate certain aspects of the design process to question how design works in the everyday and how designers can benefit from this knowledge.

Ephemeral materiality does, however, present a problem to design discourse because of the invisibility of its products that exist in the transition from tangible *objects* to abstract *things* (the ephemeral object). This brings up questions of material relativity within design that views some everyday practices as design but excludes others. Daniel Miller acknowledges the ability of materiality to divide things into a conceptual hierarchy in which "some things and some people are seen as more material than others" (Miller 2005, 3). The state of a designer's engagement with materials before an object materializes – when the object is not yet shaped, but it is in the malleable, incomprehensible form of its original material – is worth examining as a sensory touchpoint in the design process. Such a study, according to Lambros Malafouris,[3] involves "the interaction between cognition and material culture" and would ultimately expand the knowledge of

both fields to go beyond "the sphere of isolated and fixed categories (objects, artefacts, etc.) to the sphere of the fluid and relational transactions between people and things" (Malafouris 2014, 141, 143).

In a related way, a material perspective of "use" has been studied by consumption scholars to uncover how a practice can only be sustained through the use and familiarity of objects (Shove and Pantzar 2005, 44).[4] Design, seen as just one of many everyday practices, can therefore only be sustained through the material knowledge and consumption (use) of other designed objects and materials.

As a practice associated with ideation and making, designers and users are often separated into two separate realms of activity – production and consumption – and, yet, the two practices are actually interconnected. Michel de Certeau views consumption as "an entirely different kind of production," in contrast to the "rationalized, expansionist, centralized" type we see in a design studio or on the manufacturing floor. The spaces of the everyday are less fixed in terms of which practices should take place within them; they are locales of both production and consumption. Although de Certeau is not specifically speaking about design, by applying his work we can observe that everyday design possesses the same "quasi-invisibility" of the type of consumption to which he refers, "since it shows itself not in its own products […] but in an art of using those imposed on it" (de Certeau 1988, 31).

Design as Cooking

Cooking is a practice in an everyday, designer-user space that requires both designerly knowledge[5] and ways of sensing materiality to imagine what is possible on a representational plane. Design discourse has recently expanded to the realm of food and cooking. So-called "technical foods," which are products of design in their own right, like M&Ms and jellybeans, are archived in the Museum of Modern Art's permanent collection (Antonelli 2014; Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) 2019). Speculative designers like Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby have considered how food will be eaten in the future with their project "Foragers" (Dunne and Raby 2009). With their designs for half-realized tableware attached to mirrors "to trick our perception of fullness, thus reducing the amount we eat," product designers like Saki Maruyama and Daniel Coppen have examined how the food vessels can psychologically affect feelings of satiety (Studio Playfool n.d.). Food design researcher Francesca Zampollo considers the designerly relationship between food and design in eight categories, including food product design, design for food (the products designed to prepare, cook, and serve food), design with food (as the primary material), food space design, eating design, food service design, critical food design, and food system design (Zampollo 2016).

This article aims to shed a different light on cooking as design by examining practice foremost, rather than on the final product.

Expanding from the established acceptance of cooking as design, I ask whether design can be seen as cooking: another iterative form-giving process not bound to permanence. This inquiry focuses on prototyping within the design process and plays with the idea of "cooking" as both a form of sensing materiality, which is fundamental in design, and as engagement with materiality, which has the creation of an object (albeit an ephemeral, edible one) as an end goal. In industry, design can be considered an orderly process, even when considering the ideas of "design thinking" and "design strategies" as methods for creative work.[6] Through studies of what it means to design, however, we now also understand design to be much more of an entangled, gradual process. For example, Albena Yaneva's design ethnography research recently substantiated that design "does not require grand gestures of radical departure from the past, but small operations of re-collecting existing bits of projects and concepts, reusing, recycling, reinterpreting, rethinking" (Yaneva 2009, 103).

Understanding cooking, too, as a series of small changes that inform and build onto personal practice allows for an avenue of comparison with design. Both design and cooking begin with conceptualization, a creative process, and result in materialization of an object.

Flan is a type of custard made of eggs, milk, and sugar. A version of this egg custard can be found multiple food cultures. It is typically made in a circular mold and inverted once set. The combination of milk, sugar, and eggs, once cooked, becomes "other"; an object understood beyond its ingredients. Unlike pottery, which transforms malleable clay and/or other materials into a permanent ceramic object, cooking – and in this case, baking – also gives unmixed ingredients a new shape, but its objectification is limited in experiential time because the object is ultimately eaten.

What drew me to flan for this study were the various interpretations and methods for making it. Although this simple dessert is composed of only three main ingredients, there are dozens of recipes, which call for various quantities of whole eggs, egg yolks, different types of milks, additives, and different techniques for transforming the ingredients into a final product. In 2017, I conducted an autoethnography of cooking using my grandmother's handmade cookbook of her favorite recipes as the primary source for recipe testing.[7] In this collaged cookbook of recipes cut out from newspapers, there were twenty recipes for flan. Each recipe acted as a hypothesis of what flan is and how to make it. This autoethnography was a design exercise in materiality, structured in two conceptual phases. The first was to follow three recipes for flan, which were chosen for their different ingredients and techniques. Then, learning from these recipes and discerning how different combinations of ingredients and methods affected its texture or taste, I would begin phase two, designing prototypes for a vegan flan that would

"Flan de Caramelo"
3/4 tazas de azucar
3 huevos mas 2 yemas
2 tazas de leche
1 cdta de vainilla
En un molde se prepara el caramelo. La leche se hierve con la vainilla durante unos minutos, luego se deja enfriar. Se baten los huevos con el azucar y cuando esten bien batidos se le añade la leche. Se cuela y se pone en el molde bañado de caramelo. Se hace a baño de maría en el horno o en la olla de presion.

Flan de Calabaza

1 1/2 lb. de calabaza
1 lta. leche condensada
2 tazas de agua
1 ramita de canela
1/4 cdta. de sal
6 cdas de maicena
3/4 tazas de azúcar
1 cda de vainilla

Hervir la calabaza hasta que se ablande. Mezcle la leche condensada con agua, y la mitad póngala a hervir con la canela. Mezcle el resto con la maicena, azúcar y la calabaza reducida a puré en la licuadora, y póngalo a cocinar hasta junto a la otra mitad hasta que espese. Viértalo en moldes bañados con caramelo y déjelo enfriar antes de desmoldarlo. Dá 8 raciones.

Angela M. Pérez

FLAN CAMPESINO

Este flan está hecho al gusto cubano, usando leche condensada y evaporada, y es muy fácil de hacer.

Ingredientes:
Para el caramelo:
¾ de taza de azúcar
¼ de taza de agua
Para el flan:
1 lata de leche condensada
1 lata de leche evaporada
4 huevos
1 cucharadita de vainilla

Preparación:
Caliente el horno a 325°.
Ponga el azúcar y el agua en un caldero y haga hervir hasta que se vuelva un caramelo de color oro claro. Echelo en un molde de 9x5x3⅓ pulgadas y agítelo de un lado a otro para que cubra bien el fondo y los lados del molde. Guárdelo.
Ponga el resto de los ingredientes en la procesadora y mézclelos. Póngalo todo en el molde con caramelo.
Ponga el molde al Baño de María y déjelo en el horno durante 1 hora y 15 minutos. Sáquelo del horno y del baño antes de meterlo en el refrigerador. Sáquelo del molde antes de servir.
Rinde de 6 a 8 porciones.

Figure 1
Digital scan of original recipes used in the autoethnography taken from the author's grandmother's cookbook of collaged recipes. Counter-clockwise from top-left: Flan 1 (Flan de Caramelo), Flan 2 (Flan Campesino), Flan 3 (Flan de Calabaza). Author's image.

ultimately lead to the production of an ephemeral object that looks, feels, and tastes like a traditional flan.

Relevant to my process and desired outcome, Stephen Knott developed a three-tiered definition of "prosumption" that recognizes the prosumer's ability to follow, adapt, and eventually reject instructions for consumption, which in some cases lead to a secondary production of a new object (Knott 2013). Thus prosumption, a concept describing conjoined production and consumption, becomes a type of design practice when material knowledge and experience over time allows the user to make the distinction between simply following instructions and thinking like a designer. A cookbook could be seen as an instructional object that encourages following (Knott 2013, 51). In a cookbook, the designer is the producer of the recipes inside of the cookbook. The person following the recipe is carrying out another person's design in the role of a "manufacturer" of a recipe's

Figure 2
(Left to right) Textures of Flan 1, Flan 2, and Flan 3 using different techniques and ingredients to stabilize a liquid mixture. Photo: Tom Newton.

suggested product. However, following instructions is also an effective introduction for teaching users how to engage with cooking materials. Cookbooks demonstrate steps and techniques that a person can adapt when making a recipe for the second, third, or fourth time. According to Knott, "consumers have long 'played the game' of design when provided with tools and materials, and have responded to established rules of making with new combinations that derive from their playing" (Knott 2013, 63). Once the prosumer knows how to engage with the materials, they can then choose to reject or adapt the recipe instructions to their liking.

The first three flans in my study were produced from existing recipes and were chosen for their diversity in materiality and technique (Figure 1). Flan 1 ("Flan de Caramelo") was a hand-written recipe developed by my grandmother. This flan was the most "classic" in terms of ingredients (whole milk, a variation of eggs and egg yolks, sugar, and vanilla extract) and its manufacturing (whisking and heating the ingredients on the stovetop before pouring the liquid mixture into a mold, in which it would bake in a water bath). Flan 2 ("Flan Campesino") was chosen, in part, because of its description, translated as "this flan is made the Cuban way, using condensed and evaporated milk and is very easy to make" (Marina 2017). Its easiness is a reference to its technique of mixing the aforementioned ingredients with whole eggs in a blender or food processor and pouring this mixture straight into the flan molds, in which it would also bake in a water bath. Flan 3 ("Flan de Calabaza") is a popular variation of flan that uses pumpkin for flavoring. I chose this flan recipe because I noticed there were no eggs or baking involved. Instead, the flan gets its solid texture from cooking down pureed pumpkin, condensed milk, water, sugar, and cornstarch until the mixture has reduced in volume.

Cooking the three flans produced distinct textures (Figure 2). Flan 1 was the most delicate. Its structure was mostly the result of the

egg-to-yolk ratio, but whisking the mixture over gentle heat also provided a lighter texture than using a blender to evenly mix denser milks, such as condensed and evaporated milks with whole eggs, as in Flan 2. The speed of the blender and density of the two milks directly contributed to the sponge-like density of the final flan. Flan 2 cooked with air bubbles on its surface due to the aeration from the speed of the blender.

Flan 3 was the least recognizable as flan. The recipe does not require eggs. Rather, heat is an essential element, which is not emphasized in the instructions. The part of the recipe which instructs the home cook to heat the ingredients over the stove "until thickened" (*hasta que espese*) requires the cook to sense the material until it seems just right, because no other time or visual markers are provided. This lack of information is not necessarily a flaw in the recipe, but highlights the role of sensing in the design process, and the possibility for multiple models to emerge in the ideation of an object. The first time I made this recipe, in 2017, I did not cook the mixture long enough. Although I perceived the matter as thick, it was only by trial and error that I realized it was not thick enough to hold its shape to appear anything like a flan (Figure 3). This was a critical moment in learning from mistakes, which is not always explicit in design, as mistakes are not shown in the final product of a "capital-D" Design process.

This moment in prosumption highlighted Gilbert Simondon's (1964) idea of *individuation*, which was interpreted by Tim Ingold to explain how material culture cannot be examined in a context outside of its making (Ingold 2012, 433).[8] This anthropological view of designed objects shifts the focus to design primarily as a practice "in which form is ever emergent rather than given in advance" (Ingold 2012, 433). Before I analyze phase two of my experiment (the design of vegan flan), an examination of the "ever emergent" form through the concept of "wildness" is necessary in order to understand what or who decides what an object is.

Everyday Design as Wild Practice

"Wildness" comes at the object in two directions during design processes, with both acting on principles of agency. I use the term "wildness," which I have conceptually derived from Judy Attfield's *Wild Things* (Attfield 2000), to describe a material unruliness outside of complete control, despite a designer-user's best efforts.[9] One direction from which wildness affects the prototype comes from the designer, who possesses agency in deciding what they will make out of a material. Attfield (2000, 41) argues that design is a self-conscious activity and situates agency in the designer, who can manipulate certain "irrefutable characteristics" of materials, such as wood, which can't melt. From this perspective, the designer wishing to challenge a fixed idea of wood has the agency to design an object with appearance of wood melting (Alm 2019) or even to change

Figure 3
Left: Polaroid of Flan 3 (Flan de Calabaza) taken in 2017. Right: Re-test of the same recipe in 2019 in which the mixture held its shape due to cooking it longer on the stovetop. Polaroid: Claudia Marina. Photo: Tom Newton.

other fixed concepts of the material – such as its opacity – by manipulating its properties so that it becomes transparent (Alexa 2019).

Situating agency in the designer (or designer-user) alone illustrates what Malafouris (2008, 21) calls "the agency problem," which follows an "anthropocentric 'I did it-stance'" and overlooks a material's own agency as a way of informing the object (or series of objects). Material agency (what, we can argue, a material *wants* to be transformed into, its limits, and possibilities) presents the second direction of wildness coming "at" an object in the design process. Designing with ephemeral materiality, such as food, heightens our awareness of materials' agency. I gravitated to food as a particular kind of ephemeral material because of its relationship with the body. Political theorist Jane Bennett considers food an actant in a network of distributed agency between humans and nonhuman forces, writing: "food will appear as an actant inside and alongside intention-forming, morality-(dis)obeying, language-using, reflexivity-wielding, and culture-making humans." When seen through the lens of the everyday and not just in consumption and identity politics, food's role as an actant can thus expand into the productive capacity of design, which Bennett considers for her own work (Bennett 2010, 39).[10] Bennett positions agency beyond the human actant and describes human and nonhuman actants activating agency "across an ontologically heterogeneous field, rather than being a capacity localized in a human body or in a collective produced (only) by human efforts" (Bennett 2010, 23). To examine these assemblages (or fields) of distributed agency, which arrive at the object from multiple directions, it helps to apply Bruno Latour's Actor Network Theory. Latour's (1996) theory is a way to look beyond the surface of things – as in the literal 2D and 3D configuration of an object, with which material culture

analysis is concerned (Prown 1982)[11] – and instead to consider the object as a series of multi-dimensional nodes having many connections, thus forming a network (Latour 1996, 369).[12]

In this study, wildness does not describe the relative strengths of material or human influences on design. Instead, and through cooking, it serves to highlight the entangled, messy nature of connections between ephemeral materiality, people, and ideas about what an object should be that is concealed in most design processes. In the process of following instructions and understanding the changes that affected the texture and taste of flan, wildness certainly appeared in the ingredients themselves, such as when recipes failed (the first version of Flan 3, which did not hold its shape; Figure 3), but it also appeared in wild practices of design itself.

Cooking is a wild practice because it negotiates with materiality: the materials are ephemeral, often bouncing agency from ingredient to the cook trying different techniques, such as how long an egg substitute like cornstarch needs to cook to allow a liquid mixture to retain the shape of a mold, or what the differences between mechanically blending and manually whisking eggs does to the surface and density of flan. These conversations with ephemeral materiality occur very quickly, despite planning ahead and reading a recipe. Because mistakes happen, I continually touched the surfaces of Flan 1 and 2 in the oven in order to self-correct. Although this was an "unprofessional" design approach in the prototyping phase, because Flan 2 cooked much faster than Flan 1, feeling with my fingers and sticking a knife in the center of each flan until it ran out clean were haptic techniques that made sense in the everyday. To know a material in cooking, as in design, the designer-user must work with – and through – materiality.

Jennifer Brady's ethnographic research method, called "Cooking as Inquiry," intentionally avoids participant observation and instead engages in "embodied epistemology" that can explore questions of "the creation of Otherness"; that which is outside of us, and that which is designed (Brady 2011, 323). Material knowledge is only gained over time and in the process of modeling many versions of the object, flan in this case, to understand what flan is beyond its surface and taste. Only then can the cook be comfortable with rejecting (see Knott 2013) a design and will the designer-user be able to answer deeper questions that arise from the object. This cumulative learning process eventually allows a cook to create flan without any of the ingredients standardly associated with it.

Notes on a Design Process

Materially, eggs are the main structural component of flan and the fat in whole milk is necessary to give the dessert its taste. From following previous recipes, I learned that cornstarch did not work as well in mimicking the texture of flan and adding an extra ingredient like pureed pumpkin significantly changed the experience of eating it. At

Figure 4
Flan 4 with agar agar (top) and Flan 5 with agar agar and tofu (bottom). Photo: Tom Newton.

this stage, thinking like a designer, I researched vegan stabilizers and discovered that, among many blogs and YouTube videos, home cooks were using agar agar, a seaweed derivative that stabilizes liquids into solid, jelly-like textures.

I decided to try two versions of a new flan. The first of the vegan flans (Flan 4) was inspired by Flan 1 for its simplicity. I developed a recipe adapted from the ingredients in Flan 1 but replaced the whole milk with half almond and half coconut milks. I knew from tasting coconut milk that its flavor would overpower a vegan flan, and instead of tasting like custard, it could taste like coconut gelatin. According to Malafouris (2014, 150), “creativity often happens when there is an increased mismatch between experience and prior expectations.” This demonstrated the agency of the coconut and almond milks to decide – beyond my own agency – what the object would be.

Agar agar requires boiling and solidifies only when cool, so I knew the recipe would have to activate the ingredients on the stovetop like in Flan 1, but follow the pour-and-set technique of Flan 3. This knowledge required levels of sensory engagement and agency on my part as well as collaboration with a material that I had no previous

Figure 5
Flan textures. Left to right: Flan 3 (Flan de Calabaza), Flan 2 (Flan Campesino), Flan 5 (Vegan Agar Agar with Tofu), Flan 4 (Vegan Agar Agar), Flan 1 (Flan de Caramelo). Photo: Tom Newton.

experience with. Failure proved to be a necessary part of the design process. Without instructions to follow, I worked on intuition, adding more agar agar than necessary in the first tests, which produced a rubbery flan. As a result of failure, I experimented and learned that agar agar needs to boil for at least five minutes, which evaporates some of the liquid, producing a thicker mixture, similar to Flan 1, before it was baked.

In Flan 5, I repeated this recipe and blended it with medium-firm tofu, using the food processor technique learned from the recipe for Flan 2 and Flan 3. I also wondered whether this more neutral-tasting ingredient would produce a more “authentic” tasting version of flan while giving it body and whether incorporating an ingredient like this wouldn’t be so far from incorporating an ingredient like pumpkin. Flan 5 with tofu produced an opaque, more voluminous flan, like Flan 2, because of the air incorporated when blending, while Flan 4 had qualities of a more classic flan, like Flan 1 (Figures 4, 5).

Although Flan 5 with tofu produced the most recognizable flan in terms of form and texture, the addition of the tofu was overpowering, making the entire dessert taste of soy. The taste of Flan 4 was the most similar to flan, which I took to be a success in this limited experiment, without the resources of a test kitchen or experience of professionals. It functioned as a vegan flan because it achieved a correct texture without compromising taste. The process of making five prototypes of flan questioned the creative limits that an object could take.

Cooks as Designers and Designers as Cooks

In the realm of the everyday, the continual sensing of materiality, as it is being negotiated to meet the idea of what the designer-user wants to make, is tantamount to formal modeling. Everyday spaces blur the lines between production and consumption, thus traditionally

excluding them from serious inquiry in design studies. My focus on ephemeral materiality comes from a realization that "Design" values permanence in order to objectively critique objects; but design activity occurs habitually and subjectively in everyday life, and without the advantage of a final product. The products of ephemeral design practices are ever-changing. By illustrating these ideas through experiments and notes on cooking, I hope that this paper illuminates some aspects of design that cannot be explained through theory alone.

The parallels between cooking and design continue to be made by designers and non-designers alike because of the similarities between the practices, which are both engaged in a form-giving process, but with varying objectives. In the realm of the everyday, particular attention should be paid to the amateur and the consumer (described through the use of the encapsulating term "designer-user"), who we know practices design without necessarily being aware of it. This type of inquiry into unaware processes of design, however, is necessary to expand and diversify our knowledge of design beyond the agency of the traditional designer alone. Paul Hazell and Kjetil Fallan (Hazell and Fallan 2015, 110) have addressed the scholarly "fear of amateurism" when studying design as a practice, but the enthusiast/amateur (depending on the context) can encourage the design scholar to "re-evaluate the significance of certain artefacts" (Hazell and Fallan 2015, 118). Since my research commenced in 2017, *Bon Appetit* began producing YouTube videos exploring design in cooking. Although the term "design" is never explicitly discussed or acts as the frame of reference, the premise of their series *Gourmet Makes* is to reverse-engineer designed food products such as Oreos, Cheetos, and M&Ms. Claire Saffitz (a professional in her field, but an amateur/enthusiast from the perspective of the design world) goes through each episode with the question of "what is the thing?" followed by an examination of the ingredients, research, and a multi-day trial and error phase producing prototypes. Once she has achieved the taste and texture, she often touches the models in progress, measuring qualities like crunch, absorption, stickiness, and smoothness to assess how close she is to finalizing the form.

Designers have also examined their own practices through the lens of cooking. Martino Gamper designed and exhibited a total dining experience through the furniture, product, lighting, and food design of *Total Trattoria*. The project description on the Aram Gallery's website specifically states that the designer "works with ingredients," implying traditional non-ephemeral materials like glass and wood, "in a way that is reminiscent of cooking methods." By thinking of his designs less like products and more like dishes, "new recipes emerge and the results evolve" (The Aram Gallery 2009). By viewing design as cooking, new ways of conceiving and practicing design can emerge. Applying what has already been established in

the field with ideas of prosumption and agency, this type of examination of design introduces the qualities of ephemerality and wildness, which have previously only been examined from an object perspective (Attfield 2000) rather than from the perspective of practice.

Cooking is a wild practice because factors outside of human control affect the quality, shape, and function of a dish. Only in the negotiation between ephemeral materiality and knowledge of techniques can we conceive of a functional (as opposed to merely expressive) ephemeral object of daily life. A similar contingency is found in design practice, as designers never truly know whether a design will fail or succeed until it is released to the everyday. Jeremy Till (2009, 1) writes that “architecture is […] shaped more by external conditions than by the internal processes of the architect.” Coupled with Yaneva’s ethnography of architectural design processes, we know that the conversation articulated through sensing between designers and materiality in lesser-defined spaces of everyday life is important for designers to keep in mind when responding to their own work. Both in design and everyday life, prototyping/testing/modeling is important. Henry Petroski (2009, 91) claims that “failures always teach us more than the successes about the design of things.” Although “failures” happen in professional design, they are not highlighted in design processes as much as they are in reaction to consumption, in which consumers let designers know whether a design has failed or not. By looking at design as it operates in the everyday, designer-users sense and collaborate with materiality and work on closing the gap between design and everyday life, which Till (2009, 138) claims “is sustained by wrongly perpetuating the binary of high and low.”

Cooking as a model for design gives us a new frame of reference for a designer’s relationship with materiality and their own consumption as an inherent part of the design process. This view embraces design as a wild practice that evades systematization and allows for nonscientific modes of inquiry and production. This understanding of design, in addition to the normative methods followed by professional designers and taught in design schools, acknowledges the contribution of designer-users to our understanding of how design works. Following this line of inquiry would open up further possibilities of studying the role of the senses, memory, failure, and contingency presented by ephemeral materiality that both designers and designer-users encounter during their design processes.

Notes

1. Most of the research that examines everyday life as a productive practice comes from theories of practice such as those by Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (de Certeau 1988) and Henri Lefebvre’s *Critique of Everyday Life* (1991), which are not bound to design, although they have now been adopted into design studies.
2. Such as the foam models Albena Yaneva wrote about in *Made by the Office for Metropolitan Architecture: An Ethnography of Design* (Yaneva 2009).

3. Malafouris considers the haptic qualities of clay in pottery making as an integral part of the design process, whereby the material informs the possibilities of the final object and “design is no longer a process by which the mind imposes forms on matter” (Malafouris 2014, 152).
4. Elizabeth Shove and Mika Pantzar examine the development of a new practice through the marketing, instruction, and adaptability of Nordic Walking sticks, which allow the user to perform a new way “do walking” (Shove and Pantzar 2005).
5. Nigel Cross wrote extensively on designerly ways of knowing, which implies that the knowledge needed to perform design is different than scientific or scholarly knowledge (Cross 1982; 2011).
6. See Stanford’s D School’s literature for Design Thinking, which attempts to categorize the design process into steps including “Empathize, Define, Ideate, Prototype, and Test” (Doorley et al. 2018).
7. This research began in 2017 as a part of my MA Design Studies thesis at Parsons School of Design (Marina 2017). I continued to research and develop the project in 2019.
8. Simondon’s definition of *individuation* is interpreted from the anthropological focus of Tim Ingold, who finds value in this idea to challenge the contention between material culture and ecological anthropology in the field. Ingold writes about “materials and materiality” in his 2012 paper to position his anthropological stance on making against a hylomorphic model, in which “form came to be seen as actively imposed” and matter “that which was imposed upon” (Ingold 2012, 432). By rhetorically positioning Simondon as an influence to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s thinking on the topic, Ingold explains how these theorists have shaped contemporary anthropological considerations of materiality. Ingold builds on these ideas to claim that “production [...] is a process of correspondence: not the imposition of preconceived form on raw material substance, but the drawing out or bringing forth of potentials immanent in a world of becoming” (Ingold 2012, 435).
9. Attfield does not use the exact term “wildness” to qualify her object-focused study of design, but prefers the definition “things with attitude” (Attfield 2000, 34).
10. Jane Bennett shapes her ideas of assemblages from the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Bennett 2010, 23).
11. I interject Latour’s description of ANT “as a change of topology. Instead of thinking in terms of surfaces – two dimensions – or spheres – three dimensions” (Latour 1996, 370) with the focus of another popular methodology adopted in design studies for understanding objects/materiality, which is that of Jules D. Prown’s material culture analysis. Prown describes that during the Description phase of his proposed method, “it is useful to begin by describing the two-dimensional organization... next comes the three-dimensional organization... ” (Prown 1982, 8). The two are positioned in conversation with each other to reveal popular competing narratives of analysis relating to materiality and objects as adopted in design studies.
12. Latour’s full theory of ANT is not a central part of this work, but it is necessary to acknowledge the significance of this theory in relation to discussions of materials and nonhuman agency. The reference is included in this piece as a counterpoint to more traditional methods of design analysis, which focus on objectification as a means of knowledge production.

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