GENDER
OPEN
REPOSITORIUM

The values of being in design: Towards a feminist design ontology

Levick-Parkin, Melanie

2017

https://doi.org/10.25595/2736

Veröffentlichungsversion / published version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Levick-Parkin, Melanie: *The values of being in design: Towards a feminist design ontology*, in: Gender : Zeitschrift für Geschlecht, Kultur und Gesellschaft, Jg. 9 (2017) Nr: 3, 11–25. DOI: https://doi.org/10.25595/2736.

Erstmalig hier erschienen / Initial publication here: https://doi.org/10.3224/gender.v9i3.02

GenderOpen – Repositorium für die Geschlechterforschung: www.genderopen.de

FREIE
UNIVERSITÄT
BERLIN

HUMBOLDT-UNIVERSITÄT ZU BERLIN

Schwerpunkt

Melanie Levick-Parkin

The values of being in design: Towards a feminist design ontology

Zusammenfassung

The values of being in design: auf dem Weg zu einer feministischen Ontologie des Designs

Der Beitrag kritisiert die Art und Weise, in der die gegenwärtige, westliche Ontologie des Designs konstruiert ist, und lotet dabei aus, wie diese das Verständnis von weiblicher Kreativität formt und auf diese Weise das Leben von Frauen beeinflusst. Ausgehend von der persönlichen Erfahrung, Designstudentinnen auszubilden, zielt der Beitrag darauf, die vielfältigen Formen eines seinem Wesen nach unsichtbaren patriarchalen und zugleich kapitalistischen Wertesystems aufzudecken und aufzuzeigen, wie dieses uns – mithilfe von für die Designpraxis essentiellen Prozessen der Verkörperung – als Designer*innen prägt. Zugleich zielt der Beitrag auf eine „De-Designation" (de-design) unserer Ontologie als Designer*innen mithilfe feministischer Epistemologien und Praxen, die Fragen des durch Design initiierten Wandels in einem Stadium der kritischen Plastizität enthalten, nicht zuletzt durch die Bezugnahme auf soziopolitische, sozioökonomische und ökologische Ethiken, in denen das Problem vergeschlechtlichter Ausschlüsse zentral verhandelt wird.

Schlüsselwörter
Verkörperte Werte, Design, Kritik, patriarchaler Kapitalismus, feministische Ontologie des Designs

Summary

This article critiques the way in which contemporary western design ontology is constructed, why this affects conceptions of female creative practice and how this impacts on women's lives. Starting with a personal account of educating female designers, the article aims to unpack the different ways in which ontologically invisible patriarchal and capitalist value systems act on us as designers, aided by processes of embodiment which are essential to design practice. It calls for the "de-designing" of our ontology as designers through feminist epistemologies and practices which keep questions about transformations, futured by design, in a state of critical plasticity by attending to socio-political, socio-economical and ecological ethics whilst keeping issues of gender exclusion at its core.

Keywords
embodied values in design, critiques of patriarchal capitalism, feminist design ontology

1 On asking for "more"

Asking for a feminist design ontology may be considered by some as a bit preposterous. Why not just a feminist design methodology or approach? But if we consider ontology as a theory of being and of reality: the nature of existence, – the need to re-shape

this existence through radical epistemologies becomes more apparent, considering the central tenet of my critique: That design's situatedness in contemporary western design ontology, governed by patriarchy and capitalism, presents an entrapment which curtails our very ways of knowing in design. I thus construct my arguments on the basis of Stanley's and Wise's feminist position that "the relationship between feminist epistemology and feminist ontology is one which positions ontology as the foundation: being or ontology is the seat of experience and of theory and knowledge" (Stanley/Wise 1993: 192) and envelope my discussion in the call to move towards a feminist design ontology which puts into service the plasticity of feminist epistemological contestations.

2 Is it war? I felt like I kept sending them "over the top"

I will start this article with my own, personal account of how it feels, as a female design educator, to prepare female students for the creative industry. As a feminist design researcher I place importance on situated, lived experience, which includes positioning myself in my writing. It is a partial reality and it is not neutral:

I entered academia after spending a number of years in the creative industry as an art director, having studied visual communication design at university. As I started to teach I wanted to make sure that my female students were well equipped to deal with the gender biases they might face once they enter the industry and that my male students would have an understanding of these biases and would hopefully not become part of reproducing them. Over the years I ended up with a broad network of alumni in the industry, and with each new cohort we would go and find the ones who had "made it" in various places. I never exposed them to the ones who "didn't make it", even though some of them were friends. I am ashamed of that. The ones we visited would talk to students about their journey into industry, the hardships and the joys of being young creatives, and they would give tips on how to "become" a designer. This is common practice within design education and is seen as a vital component when it comes to initiating students into the discipline. I was particularly proud of the female students who had "made it". I would often meet former students later for lunch or dinner, to catch up and get a more intimate update on how they were doing.

And I started to get particular stories from particular former students. Female former students.

- How a female who was part of a male/female creative team was in a design pitch and was the only woman in the room. The client handed her his coat and told her what he wanted to drink, assuming she was a PA. This happened in the last decade, not in the 1950s.
- How an award-winning female/female creative team were earning so little as a junior team that with the high rents in the capital they barely had enough money left to eat each month. Remembering my lectures on the importance of "being brave" as women to ask for more money for your work, they went to their creative director to ask to be paid the same amount as the male junior teams. They were told that it wasn't a case of gender discrimination, but that they just didn't seem as "hungry"

as the other junior teams and, no, they were not getting a rise and in any case they shouldn't have been discussing their wages with other people.
- How after having presented a professional, enthusiastic front to visiting students, afterwards in the pub a female designer broke down and sobbed, saying: "I can't live like this anymore!" She went on to say how the few senior women at the agency were either complete bitches or lonely alcoholics, sometimes both, and she could not see herself *being* in the industry in the future.

Is it war? I felt like I kept sending them "over the top". Some of these women stayed in the industry and changed jobs; some of them left altogether. These are the more extreme examples, which is why they stick in my mind, but over the years they were supported and supplemented by less dramatic accounts of what it is like to be a woman in the creative industry. What I find strange in hindsight is that it took me ages to fully acknowledge that these were not isolated instances of people being horrible or agencies being a bit male dominated, but that it is systemic and structural. I think I was in denial, because after all I had been taught by, and worked with, lots of lovely, creative, sensitive and supportive men and it also went against my deep-held belief that a woman could do whatever a man could if she tried hard enough. And then there were always also examples of women who did very well, which made the whole thing more opaque and difficult to untangle.

But these young women's experiences also meant that I had to confront my own darker experiences of being in the industry as a young female creative:
- Like the time I and my male copywriter won an important pitch and the agency team gathered around him afterwards, and there was much backslapping and congratulating of him on his brilliant work. He never let on that I had come up with the concept, and I felt it would be rude to point it out and that knowing myself that I had done well should be enough.
- And the time my creative director told me, when I was pregnant, that he thought women with babies shouldn't work. He's entitled to his opinion, I thought, and hoped it implied he was criticising maternity leave, which at the time was very short.
- That time when, having had to return to work when my son was only five months old, an account handler wrote an email to my line manager complaining that I hadn't shown enough enthusiasm for an A5 fold-over flyer he was briefing me on.
- That time when I was included in a round of redundancies, just after I had applied to go part-time under new legislation for parents which had just come into force.

I have always felt that these things happened to me because I hadn't proven myself enough, that I hadn't been my best. Deep down I still feel like that.
Failure individualized and accepted.

What forces me to view it differently, at least intellectually, is witnessing what so many of my female students had to go through.

I knew them to be brilliant, smart, talented and hard-working. They had excelled academically, won international student competitions and got desirable placements based on their creative portfolios. Who they were as people did not change when they entered the industry, but they entered an environment in which many of them could not

thrive. And I had helped put them there. I thought it couldn't possibly happen to them, just as I had once thought it couldn't possibly happen to me. What is *it*?

It also forced me to think about those many students, both female and male, who had never made it into the industry – how we don't talk about them to current students, don't invite them to come and talk about their experience of being a creative. There's a big, fat silence around them. What about the ones who did well at university but at some point simply had to take another non-creative job in order to survive? The ones who couldn't afford to do endless rounds of unpaid internships in the hope of getting a "proper" design job? The thing is, I still believe that having had a design education was a good thing for them, no matter what they ended up being. I saw them applying many of the transferable skills we so often talk about in all kinds of ways and I also get the impression that while they were studying they did feel like they were given equal status. But I think the way we transmit what being a designer is all about is entirely limited to whether they can "make it". They embody that, and their personal sense of failure is theirs to deal with if they don't "make it".

On a study trip whilst still a student myself, I remember having a drunken argument with one of my tutors about how I felt that "they" constantly transmitted that the only way "they" would consider us to be a success would be if we ended up as practising designers. How I felt that our creative and human worth was measured solely against our potential to "make it". I vaguely recall the tutor arguing that this was not the case at all, but that ultimately that's what they were educating us for: to be designers.

"What is a designer?" – "Someone who works in the design industry."

"What is design education?" – "Teaching someone to work in the design industry."

I had no adequate comebacks to that, became part of the transmission of it, and over the years when we discussed it as members of staff we went around in circles. "It's just the way it is," we said.

It's like we collectively lack the language to talk about other ways of being in design.

And therein lies the ontological entrapment.

3 Women in design

Many feminist scholars have put their life force into highlighting and criticising how the lack of famous female artist and designers over the centuries can be traced back to a history made and written by patriarchal systems, rather than to the lack of or lack of quality female creative labour (Parker/Pollock 1981; Buckley 1986; Ettinger 2004; de Beauvoir 1979).

Yet after decades of feminist critique and attempts to address equal opportunities issues, and despite female graduates having accounted for 70 % of art & design cohorts in most western countries over the last three decades, these numbers continue to be reversed when one seeks out those female design graduates a decade later. In addition, their track record when it comes to holding high-profile positions in the creative and cultural industries, which are dominated by male practitioners, is even more imbalanced (Mindiola 2010; Maness 2015; Higher Education Statistics Agency 2013; Siddall 2014; Burgoyne 2010).

It should, therefore, come as no surprise that when it comes to the status of women in the field of design the international Gender Design Network (iGDN) states that:

> "Female designers do not yet enjoy equal participation in all areas of design: 'female' and 'male' responsibilities are distributed unequally (following societal clichés) and this means that the potential of the different genders is neither taken into account nor honored appropriately" (International Gender Design Network 2017).

This gender imbalance is by no means restricted to the discipline of design. Micus-Loos et al. (2014) highlight the fact that even in highly developed countries such as Germany and although barriers to educational attainment have been removed, the labour market is divided by gender, both vertically and horizontally: Vertically by the male dominance in upper management positions and horizontally on account of jobs being perceived as female jobs which offer less economic reward and career progression potential (Micus-Loos et al. 2014).

The 2017 European Academy of Design Conference's keynote speaker line-up was felt by some to be that unbalanced in its representation of citizenship, class, race, sexual orientation, sex, ability and gender identity ("An Open Letter to EAD" 2017) that it inspired an open letter to the chairs and scientific committee, which politely asked that: "The additional barriers and challenges ordinarily faced by practitioners who are not male, white and able should not be perpetuated here, however unintentionally, through lack of foresight when appointing keynote speakers" ("An Open Letter to EAD" 2017). The conference theme for was "Design for Next" and aimed to highlight the importance of "investigating through design research and practice in order to tackle the societal, technological and industrial shifts of the future" ("EAD12|2017 Design for Next" 2017). Who's "next" will we be using design research for? The conference track themes *did* highlight the need to ask questions about power, diversity and ethics in design. Three out of nine of the tracks were chaired by women, and female names appeared to outnumber male names on the list of speakers, which of course says nothing about people's gender identity or the diversity of their backgrounds. It is also important to stress here that although visible diverse representation is an important social signal, it does not mean that female speakers should be assumed to be more likely to be raising issues of exclusion in design based on the virtue of their gender. The opposite may very well be the case, as women might be wary of being perceived as "feminist killjoys" (Ahmed 2016) which can make their own professional position more precarious (Foster 2016).

And although there are now a growing number of organisations and practices within design which problematise the role of design in propagating exclusion and oppression (Prado 2014), systemic exclusions are difficult to grasp as they are complex and messy. There is a growing awareness of the lack of visibility of female designers, but this is not just a matter of the invisibility of broad swathes of practising designers. As Julier (2017) points out, we hear even less of those who leave the practice of design altogether to do something else. We hear even less because those who are not included in the discipline of design are "ontologically dead" to the discipline as practitioners.

4 Women "outside" of design

If women who have left the discipline are "ontologically dead" to it, women who have never officially been part of it are even more so. Any material practice which they might have is largely irrelevant in the disciplinary context, even if it culminates in artefact – more so if is it is process-focused. If they are lucky, these women might be identified as belonging to craft, but there is a subtle, value-laden difference between *that kind of craft* and the kind of craft designers hold dear. If you are in design you know this, because of the tone of voice we use when we talk about *that kind of craft*.

In broader societal terms, Papanek's (1971) critique that the over-specialised, expert-driven and consumption-oriented nature of western society excludes the majority of people from even the most basic forms of creative activity to the detriment of their wellbeing and sensory and intellectual faculties still holds to a large extent. This is reflected in the increasingly sidelined and under-valued nature of creative subjects in many contemporary school systems (Robinson 2011). Whilst Sennett (2008) points out that craft, in the sense of form-giving, can be pursued in a very wide variety of pursuits, many others see our predominant situatedness as consumers or users as curtailing our most basic desire to be producers in our own lives (Milev 2013; Ingold 2012; Kjærsgaard/Otto 2012).

Reiterating Papanek's (1971) critique, Milev (2013) proposes that the very way in which contemporary western design ontology is constructed means that many are excluded from engaging in the process of basic form-giving and meaning-making activities. Importantly, she further highlights the fact that many forms of engagement with production are considered meaningless in disciplinary terms, because the resulting artefacts are considered materially or aesthetically worthless (Milev 2013). These exclusions and de-valuations are not, as such, confined by sex or gender, but they are particularly pertinent to it, because female cultural production and lived experience has been traditionally under-documented because women's often *process*- rather than *artefact*-focused making-practices are difficult to materialise into established cultural artefacts and are traditionally less valued (Parker/Pollock 1981).

Sennett (2008) and Crawford (2009) provide a theoretical framework for the refusal to leave fundamental human creative making practices to the professionally initiated, by stressing that the desire to participate in meaning-making and form-giving activities is a central aspect of our humanity. This centrality means that people *do* participate in making practices in all kinds of ways (Hackney 2013; Grace/Gandolfo 2014) with or without any knowledge of, or acknowledgement by, the design discipline. But this does not answer questions about the lack of visibility of this cultural production and how it is valued. And if it is neither visible nor valued it will lack power and, with that, true agency within the wider socio-economic sphere. So if women leave the design discipline or do not enter it in the first place, they lose their place at the table, so to speak. Because contemporary western design ontology was raised and resides in, as well as reproduces, patriarchal neoliberal capitalist values and practices (Souleles 2013; Escobar 2013), we need to move towards a feminist design ontology which questions *who designs*, *who produces* and *who consumes* (Manzini 2015), as well as the *how* and *why*, with the explicit aim of addressing issues of gender, privilege and oppression.

5 On "becoming" a designer

Design is the practice of "becoming", where individuals are cultured into ways of being, seeing and creating which are congruent with the values and practices of contemporary design (Sims/Shreeve 2012; Danvers 2003; Orr/Yorke/Blair 2014). Knowledge in design is traditionally acquired through practise; procedural knowledge is a central and extremely effective component of learning in design (Niedderer 2013). Its effectiveness in this context is not impaired by remaining largely tacit and experiential, and many scholars have highlighted the fact that procedural knowledge has to become "embodied" in order to be mastered at all (Dewey 1934; Merleau-Ponty 1964; Polanyi 1958). Once this knowledge is embodied through the acquisition of procedural knowledge and experiential learning (Polanyi 1958; Niedderer 2013; Dewey 1934), its values and practices are reproduced based on complex systems of aesthetic rules, both visual and functional. It is through this production and reproduction that designers gain their agency within the disciplinary context and, with that, within the wider world. This agency is situated within an aesthetic–economic value system which is reproduced by western design education (Fry 2015). Most students of design will be exposed to art and design history in which aesthetic value systems are discussed and reflected upon as being changeable, socially constructed and fluid in time. Yet it is in the present that such knowledge of (design) history seems to hide itself, as it is here that our own historicity becomes difficult to recover or reflect upon.

According to Heidegger, "being" withdraws. It withdraws itself from the sight and perception of those "being". But this forgetfulness of "being" has its costs, in that it declines any historical narrative or construction of truths. It denies its own "constructedness", appears as a law bound by the natural order of things. Fry points to a general lack of structural awareness of design in the wider context, which he describes as a gap "between the agency of the object of experience and knowledge of experience, not at least by designers" (Fry 2015: 14). Reminiscent of McLuhan's idea of *We become what we behold. We shape our tools and then our tools shape us* (Culkin 2017 [1967]), Fry proposes that "the animal that we were was ontologically designed by the use of basic (stone) tools to become the human-animal that we now are" (Fry 2015: 14). In that sense, I would argue that our embodied design knowledge and values become the tool/technology which ontologically designs us as designers and determines design "being". For both male and female designers this means that the very way in which we are ontologically constructed becomes invisible to us and with that circumscribes any potential for transformation.

Irigaray writes that: "Up until now the form-giving subject has always been male. And this structure has, unbeknownst to itself, clearly given form to culture, and to the history of ideas. They are not neuter" (Irigaray 2002: 3). In order to be able to fully explore issues of gender in design, a difficult archaeology of how we are ontologically designed is necessary in order to be able to think "of futures yet unthought" (Grosz 1999) and to try to "disembody" the embodied value systems of patriarchal and neoliberal capitalisms. A feminist design ontology would by its very nature require us to work towards dismantling boundaries of "realities" which are perceived to be "neutral" because feminist epistemology concerns itself with the dismantling of existing ontological war-

rants (Ahmed et al. 2000; Hawkesworth 2006; Malabou 2016). The issues we are faced with range from gendered design, to gender imbalance in design, to exclusion from design based on gender to a gendered understanding of "being" in design. Ontological warrants need deconstructing because they limit the scope of how our disciplinary discourses around these issues are constructed and reproduced.

6 Asking for inclusion?

So how do we as design practitioners, educators and researchers account for gender exclusion and what, if anything, would we like to change? Predominant responses, which entail thinking of ways in which we can make numbers more equal through pedagogies; graduate schemes, female design awards; and in some very progressive countries even through legislation, may comfort us because of their obvious alignment with our oft assumed liberal values. These responses also sit well with the ever-increasing neoliberal ideological focus on "employability" which universities are having to respond to. So maybe the time might finally come when male and female designers are equally represented in industry? But what if our longing and working towards such a future misses a small but important question which begs to be asked: *Why* should female design graduates be equally represented in the design industry? And what if the vast majority of our answers are based on a belief that merely materialises our own ontological entrapment within contemporary western design? The belief that: *Participation in the design industry is the only way in which our creative labour as designers has meaning and value*.

And what if the withholding or withdrawal of our creative labour from this value system is a more radical and empowering act than achieving equal status within it? Feminist scholars such as Sheila Rowbotham (1973) have long thought that women more naturally maintained traces of pre-capitalist attitudes because their responsibility for production was focused in the family and the fruit of their labour would often be for immediate consumption within the family or community rather than culminating in a commodifiable artefact. Contemporary western design practice is by its very nature closely entwined with capitalist modes of commodity and value production (Fry 2015; Hunt 2011; Papanek 1971) and design's self-understanding is axiologically that determined by the industrial, now neoliberal, capitalist system that we urgently need to find ways to envisage design practice existing outside of it, because on its current trajectory this system is leading us to social, economical and ecological ruin.

Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock call our attention to the fact that "women artists have not acted outside cultural history, as many commentators seem to believe, but rather have been compelled to act within it from a place other than that occupied by men" (Parker/Pollock 1981: 14). I would argue that female designers are still compelled to act from a place other than that occupied by men, but that we should make these places empowered spaces for ontological reinvention through feminist practices.

A feminist design ontology would need to take account of a feminist economic perspective. Bauhardt (2013) stresses that even critical discourses around alternatives to the growth economy – such as a post-growth society and solidarity economy – often fail to acknowledge how central questions of gender equality are to social and environ-

mental justice. Feminist economics were among the first to start raising doubts as to the adequacy of neoclassical economic analysis, in particular because of its lack of attention to women's experience of the labour market and within the family, but also because of the levels of destruction it thrives upon (Nelson 2008). This ontological blindness is also rampant in certain parts of the most critically active research in the design discipline. Prado (2014) points out the value of critical and speculative design in discussing the cultural and cultural role of design, but vigorously critiques both practices' lack of theory or praxis which is aimed at questioning gender oppression. This is significant, because Escobar (2013) points to the field of critical design studies (CDS) as a potential candidate for an approach from which the transcendence from contemporary design ontology may emerge. He also suggests that CDS, being a panoply of different critical practices, is still in its infancy as it is limited by the capacity of western social theory to generate these critical fields whilst residing in the contemporary conjuncture (Escobar 2013). When these emergent critical fields start to talk about redesigning design ontology, we need to ensure that feminist perspectives and epistemologies are central to the debate. If we don't, like feminist abolitionists sidelined after the cause was achieved (Donovan 1998), gender inequality and its detrimental impact on women's lives across the board will still be considered a largely irrelevant sideshow by those constructing the discourse even if we have given our life force to the various causes.

What we choose to give or withhold our life force to or from is deeply political. Rowbotham (1973) spoke of women historically being perceived by industry as weak and unreliable, and I would argue that it is this still active perception which still leads to women being excluded from design labour markets. But what if part of this exclusion is a deliberate, if maybe unreflexive, withholding by women themselves? When analysing the causes of these perceptions of women withholding and withdrawing themselves from labour markets, Rowbotham came to the conclusion that "Absenteeism in both cases is an individual act of rebellion against capitalism's extraction of labour at the expense of personal life" (Rowbotham 1973: 92). Withdrawing and withholding brings with it its own potential for agency. Whilst being excluded is an experience which is steeped in pain, it also has the potential to be transformative and to create spaces which are privileged *because* they reside outside of dominant structures. And rather than forcing young female designers being accepted into value systems which do not value them, maybe we should strengthen and empower their space and urge young designers, no matter what sex or gender identity, to join them in questioning and exploring other ways of "being" in design.

A feminist design ontology would also have to seriously question the way in which people predominantly enter the discipline. The vast majority of designers come to the discipline via higher education. This essentially makes design a middle-class pursuit, as access to higher education for the working class is still full of barriers. That in itself is structurally problematic when reports show that higher education has a significant impact on increasing pay and quality of life for women (Foster 2016). Design culture primarily operates to support dominant systems and interests and does not generally concern itself with creative making practice which does not fall into or serve existing professional design practice (Julier 2013).

A feminist design ontology *would* need to concern itself with people's creative making practices which do not fall into or serve existing professional design practice as well

as with how those people's design agency can be fortified by acknowledging the immanence of design in material practice which does not materialise into commodifiable artefacts or systems.

7 Inclusion in what?

We need to confront our own entrapment within contemporary design ontology and be beware of "corporate" feminism in particular, as exemplified by Sandberg's (2013) "Lean In", which sprang from her 2011 TED talk entitled "Why we have so few female leaders". Sandberg proposes that women don't rise to the top because of a lack of assertiveness, an unwillingness to put themselves forward, negotiate salaries – an "ambition gap". Foster's "Lean out" critiques Sandberg's diagnostics and remedies, pointing out that: "'Lean In' points all the blame inward, and ignores structural in-equality" (Foster 2016: 12). This makes it a palatable kind of "feminism" in the context of neoliberal capitalism, because it individualises the problem as much as any solution by telling us that "aspiration and success is within everyone's reach if they endeavour to try hard enough" (Foster 2016: 11). It is non-threatening to the prevailing system because it doesn't seek to antagonise over sexism – it is non-confrontational of the status quo (Foster 2016). This in many ways sounds familiar to the ways in which we talk about "making it" in the design industry to our female and male students – it's the old lie of meritocracy, that true talent and ambition will rise – believed, embodied and reproduced. Foster points out that the tempering of ambition is not just an internal process but is made up of codes and messages relating to gender, class, race, sexuality and levels of disability which leave the individual with a fairly realistic idea of what is achievable for them in their individual societal context. But the story that women are being told is that "it is individual failure, not a structure designed to keep business homogenous, that keeps the gender pay-gap in place and forces an earnings cut to women who have the audacity to have children" (Foster 2016: 20). I would argue that contemporary western design ontology, through design education, tells similar corporate feminist stories to their young – stories which are convenient to capitalism (Foster 2016). We need to seriously consider that many of the "missing" female design graduates, reading design's patriarchal codes and messages, may have decided that inclusion in the system is not worth the price it demands they pay for it. At the very least we owe it to them not to let them internalise their withdrawal as individual failure.

Foster warns against putting any faith in "trickle-down" feminism, where a 1 % feminism, as it were, argues that getting some women into higher positions will become the norm and eventually trickle down. The reason why any faith we may place in this and other guises of feminism is misplaced is because, as previously discussed, it does not take into account the neoliberal capitalist structure in which design resides, where the wealth hoarding of the few is to the detriment of everyone further down the chain, especially women (Foster 2016). Falling into the traps of corporate or trickle-down feminism will only divert our attention and sap our energy. Foster points out that moving the critical lens from women's collective position in society to an individualistic level, by focusing on individual women's choices within consumer and corporate culture, re-

packages feminism as a lifestyle. And she puts design right at the heart of this repackaging, by critiquing the way in which companies decide that their brands are to appear liberal in liberal markets, citing Dove's "real women" campaign as an example. Rather than having suddenly developed a conscience, companies spot new avenues for selling and exploit them (Foster 2016). In design we call this technique "the differentiation of your product in the marketplace", but we often frame these examples as feminist or ethical design.

And what of inclusion in relation to neo-liberal capitalist structures? Papanek (1971) stresses how design facilitates the public's acceptance of anything new or different so that the capitalist economy can benefit from artificially accelerated consumption, aided by styling and inbuilt obsolescence. Hunt calls this an "ontology of prefigurement that destroys while it creates" (Hunt 2011: 35). He also describes design as operating primarily in the name of general commercial opportunism, mostly driven forward by either marketing opportunities or innovation for innovation's sake, and that even if a percentage of design is sustainable and socially beneficial, the overall thrust of its nature means that it produces "vast amounts of dreck" (Hunt 2011: 39). If we are striving for equal status within this, we need to think carefully about the kind of futures we are asking to be included in through critical feminist practise. "Design is always future making" (Yelavich 2014: 12), but in this process of "futuring", design also "defutures" (Fry 2015: 9). Fry's examples of how design "defutures" through having brought into being anything from herbicides to cluster bombs are as such easily identifiable as defuturing things. We need a feminist design ontology which retains a critical plasticity in theory, practice and ethics in order to respond to design's ever-changing structural and material futuring and defuturing.

8 Towards a feminist design ontology

Catherine Malabou writes that: "Still today the professional or personal achievements of a woman cannot be seen as anything other than an act of emancipation. Whether or not this achievement is accompanied by activist demands, it is always political" (Malabou 2016: 92). Whilst this article may be akin to an activist demand, I acknowledge that women absolutely need to continue striving to achieve within existing power structures, because otherwise they remain in spaces in which they are lacking in power and agency. But the extent to which fundamentally hostile environments can be changed merely on account of the always partial and compromised participation of the few needs to be viewed critically in relation to the corporate feminist stories we tell in design.

Malabou highlights the fact that the specific type of violence "woman" is overexposed to is a "dual constraint or schizoid pressure: the pressure of work in society and at home" (Malabou 2016: 93), exposing the dual exploitation of the system. This dual exploitation is not only a threat to women, it needs to be unpacked much further in terms of how men suffer from their own ontology which constructs them through patriarchy within narrow confines. A feminist design ontology would need to be an ontology, epistemology and ethic in design which "underpins all knowledge-production and no matter by whom produced" (Stanley/Wise 1993: 232) and would need to attend

to the complexities of privilege and oppression. Prado proposes feminist speculative design "as a strategic approach to addressing issues of systemic gender violence and discrimination within speculative and critical design practices" (Prado 2014: 81). She foregrounds intersectionality, a feminist theoretical stance or approach to feminist activism. An intersectional perspective makes explicit that different forms of oppression cannot be understood separately from one another. Intersectionality would make an excellent heuristic within a feminist design ontology. However, I believe that rather than any specific approach it is the very nature of feminist ontology and epistemology which can offer us new ways of being in design. Ahmed et al. remind us that feminist practice is animated by a desire for transformation, a politic seeking radical redress, driven by an imperative for change (Ahmed et al. 2000). Yet what transformations are called for, as well as how the "it" we are seeking to transform is understood, is a source of conflict and differences not just within feminism, but also between feminisms (Ahmed et al. 2000). I believe it is this very conflict and difference, a perpetual contestation which is central to and immanent in feminist practice which can offer design a way of constantly "hacking" its own propensity to create certain possibilities of being in the world by destroying or backgrounding other experiences of it (Tonkinwise 2014).

A feminist design ontology would insist on design anthropological approaches which "challenge the status quo by facilitating other types of encounters, conversations, and imaginaries, and giving voice to people, things, and animals otherwise marginalized" (Kjærsgaard et al. 2016) and would strive to broaden the discourse about human-making and its socio-political, socio-economical and ecological contexts, and women's position within those contexts. As Escobar (2013) put it, we need to move at the very frontiers of the western social theory episteme so that the semantics, materialities, immaterialities and relationships of design can become "futures yet unthought" (Grosz 1999).

References

Ahmed, Sara (2016). *Living a feminist life* (1st ed.). Durham: Duke University Press Books.

Ahmed, Sara; Kilby, Jane; Lury, Celia; McNeil, Maureen & Skeggs, Beverly (eds). (2000). *Transformations: Thinking Through Feminism* (1st ed.). Abington: Routledge.

An Open Letter to EAD (2017). Date of access: 9 April 2017 at https://docs.google.com/a/sheffield.ac.uk/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScFW_ANVWoZrKpHXYD6xQKp6xprHIdicq4SqWrVMqYyblf-g/viewform?c=0&w=1.

Bauhardt, Christine (2013). Wege aus der Krise? Green New Deal – Postwachstumsgesellschaft – Solidarische Ökonomie: Alternativen zur Wachstumsökonomie aus feministischer Sicht. *GENDER*, *5*(2), 9–26.

de Beauvoir, Simone (1979). Women and Creativity. In Toril Moi (ed), *French Feminist Thought* (1st ed., pp. 155–170). Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Buckley, Cheryl (1986). Made in Patriarchy: Toward a Feminist Analysis of Women and Design. *Design Issues*, *3*(2), 3. http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/1511480

Burgoyne, Patrick (2010). UK designers: white, (mostly) male, 38 and multiplying. *Creative Review.* Date of access: 30 August 2015 at www.creativereview.co.uk/cr-blog/2010/march/uk-design-survey.

Crawford, Matthew (2009). *The case for working with your hands, or, Why office work is bad for us and fixing things feels good*. London: Viking.

Culkin, John M. (2017 [1967]). A Schoolman's Guide to Marshall McLuhan. *The Saturday Review* (March 18th, 1967). Date of access: 10 April 2017 at www.unz.org/Pub/SaturdayRev-1967mar18-00051.

Danvers, John (2003). Towards a Radical Pedagogy: Provisional notes on Learning and Teaching in Art & Design. *Ijade*, *22*(1), 47–57.

Dewey, John (1934). *Art as experience*. New York: Minton, Balch & Company.

Donovan, Josephine (1998). *Feminist theory*. New York: Continuum.

EAD12|2017 Design for Next (2017). Date of access: 11 April 2017 at www.designfornext.org/.

Escobar, Arturo (2013). *Notes on the Ontology of Design* (1st ed.). University of North Carolina. Date of access: 23 August 2017 at http://sawyerseminar.ucdavis.edu/files/2012/12/ESCOBAR_Notes-on-the-Ontology-of-Design-Parts-I-II-_-III.pdf.

Ettinger, Bracha L. (2004). Weaving a Woman Artist within the Matrixial Encounter-Event. *Theory, Culture & Society*, *21*(1), 69–94. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0263276404040480

Foster, Dawn (2016). *Lean Out* (1st ed.). London: Watkins Pub Ltd.

Fry, Tony (2015). Whether Design/Whether History. In Tony Fry, Clive Dilnot & Susan Stewart, *Design and the Question of History* (1st ed., pp. 1–135). London: Bloomsbury.

Grace, Marty & Gandolfo, Enza (2014). Narrating complex identities: Contemporary women and craft. *Women's Studies International Forum*, *47*, 56–62. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2014.07.010

Grosz, Elizabeth A. (1999). *Becomings* (1st ed.). Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Hackney, Fiona (2013). Quiet Activism and the New Amateur: The Power of Home and Hobby Crafts. *Design And Culture*, *5*(2), 169–193. http://dx.doi.org/10.2752/175470813x13638640370733

Hawkesworth, Mary (2006). *Feminist Inquiry – From Political Conviction to Methodological Innovation* (1st ed.). Piscataway: Rutgers University Press.

Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) (2013). *Higher Education in Facts and Figures* (1st ed.). London: Universities UK. Date of access: 23 August 2017 at www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2013/higher-education-in-facts-and-figures-summer-2013.pdf.

Hunt, Jamer (2011). Prototyping the Social: Temporality and Speculative Futures at the Intersection of Design And Culture. In Alison J. Clarke (ed), *Design Anthropology* (1st ed., pp. 33–44). Vienna: Springer.

Ingold, Tim (2012). The Perception of the User-Producer. In Wendy Gunn & Jared Donovan (eds), *Design and Anthropology* (pp. 19–33). Farnham: Ashgate.

Irigaray, Luce (2002). *To speak is never neutral*. New York: Routledge.

Julier, Guy (2013). From Design Culture to Design Activism. *Design And Culture*, *5*(2), 215–236. http://dx.doi.org/10.2752/175470813x13638640370814

Julier, Guy (2017). *Economies of design* (1st ed.). London: Sage Publications.

Kjærsgaard, Mette & Otto, Ton (2012). Anthropological Fieldwork and Designing Potential. In Wendy Gunn & Jared Donovan (eds), *Design and Anthropology* (1st ed., pp. 177–191). Farnham: Ashgate.

Kjærsgaard, Mette Gislev; Halse, Joachim; Smith, Rachel Charlotte; Vangkilde, Kasper Tang; Binder, Thomas & Otto, Ton (2016). Introduction: Design Anthropological Futures. In Rachel Charlotte Smith, Kasper Tang Vangkilde, Mette Gislev Kjærsgaard, Ton Otto, Joachim Halse & Thomas Binder (eds), *Design Anthropological Futures* (1st ed., pp. 1–19). London: Bloomsbury.

Malabou, Catherine (2016). *Changing difference* (1st ed.). Cambridge: Polity.

Maness, Christina (2015). *How Su Mathews Hale is designing the future for women*. Date of access: 30 August 2015 at www.aiga.org/how-su-mathews-hale-is-designing-future-for-women/.

Manzini, Ezio (2015). *Design, when everybody designs*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
Merleau-Ponty, Maurice (1964). Eye and Mind. In James Edie (ed), *The Primacy of Perception* (1st ed., pp. 159–190). Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
Micus-Loos, Christiane; Plößer, Melanie; Geipel, Karen & Schmeck, Marike (2014). „… für mich gibt es dann entweder die Familienschiene oder die Karriereschiene …" – Zur Bedeutung normativer Anforderungen in beruflichen Orientierungen junger Frauen. *GENDER*, *6*(3), 94–109. http://dx.doi.org/10.3224/gender.v6i3.18548
Milev, Yana (2013). *D.A. Design Anthropology*. Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang.
Mindiola, John (2010). Gender Disparities in the Design Field. *Smashing Magazine*. Date of access: 30 August 2015 at www.smashingmagazine.com/2010/11/gender-disparities-in-the-design-field/.
Nelson, Julie A. (2008). Economists, value judgments, and climate change: A view from feminist economics. *Ecological Economics*, *65*(3), 441–447. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2008.01.001
Niedderer, Kristina (2013). Explorative Materiality and Knowledge. The Role of Creative Exploration and Artefacts in Design Research. *Formakademisk*, *6*(2), Art. 1, 1–20. http://dx.doi.org/10.7577/formakademisk.651
Orr, Susan; Yorke, Mantz & Blair, Bernadette (2014). The answer is brought about from within you: A Student-Centred Perspective on Pedagogy in Art and Design. *International Journal Of Art & Design Education*, *33*(1), 32–45. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1476-8070.2014.12008.x
Papanek, Victor (1971). *Design for the real world*. New York: Pantheon Books.
Parker, Rozsika & Pollock, Griselda (1981). *Old mistresses*. London: Pandora.
Polanyi, Michael (1958). *Personal knowledge*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Prado, Luiza (2014). *Privilege and Oppression: Towards a Feminist Speculative Design*. Date of access: 23 August 2017 at www.drs2014.org/media/654480/0350-file1.pdf.
Robinson, Ken (2011). *Out of our minds*. Oxford: Capstone.
Rowbotham, Sheila (1973). *Woman's consciousness, man's world* (1st ed.). London: Verso.
Sandberg, Sheryl (2013). *Lean In* (1st ed.). London: WH Allen Random House.
Sennett, Richard (2008). *The craftsman*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
Siddall, Liv (2014). Rebecca Wright on the ratio of girls with design degrees vs. those in the industry. *It's Nice That*. Date of access: 30 August 2015 at www.itsnicethat.com/articles/rebecca-wright.
Sims, Ellen & Shreeve, Alison (2012). Signature Pedagogies in Art and Design. In Nancy Chick, Aeron Haynie & Regan Gurung (eds), *Exploring More Signature Pedagogies: Approaches to Teaching Disciplinary Habits of Mind* (1st ed., pp. 55–67). Virginia: Stylus.
Souleles, Nicos (2013). The Evolution of Art and Design Pedagogies in England: Influences of the Past, Challenges for the Future. *International Journal Of Art & Design Education*, *32*(2), 243–255. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1476-8070.2013.01753.x
Stanley, Liz & Wise, Sue (1993). *Breaking out again* (2nd ed.). London: New York.
Tonkinwise, Cameron (2014). Design Away. In Susan Yelavich & Barbara Adams (eds), *Design as Future-Making* (1st ed., pp. 198–213). London: Bloomsbury.
International Gender Design Network (2017). *Why iGDN?* Date of access: 9 April 2017 at http://genderdesign.org/about-igdn/why-we-need-the-international-gender-design-network-igdn/.
Yelavich, Susan (2014). Introduction. In Susan Yelavich & Barbara Adams (eds), *Design as Future-Making* (1st ed., pp. 12–17). London: Bloomsbury.

Author's details

Melanie Levick-Parkin, *1974, Senior Lecturer in Visual Communication Design at Sheffield Institute of Arts. Research focus: Design Anthropology, feminist theory and design, agency in design, Intangible Cultural Heritage and Archaeology.
Contact: Sheffield Hallam University, Sheffield Institute of Arts, Fitzalan Square, Sheffield S1 2AY, UK
Email: m.levick-parkin@shu.ac.uk