DESIGNABILITIES

Design Equity

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Design Research Journal

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Equity by Design?

For some time now, things have certainly changed: the discourse has gained momentum to include marginal positions in design and in design research as a substantial and self-evident category. It is particularly noteworthy that gender and, altogether, diversity in design, in all its facets of pluriversality and diversity, has long since ceased to be confined to European and North American design worlds. Not so long ago, the gender perspective in and for design was met with widespread incomprehension: Design really had nothing to do with gender (identities), after all, design addressed issues such as functionality, sustainability, internationality, aesthetic appeal and whatever else such constantly repeated ideological *theses of good design* entailed. But gender? Diversity? Cultural differences? These might have been questions that social and cultural sciences had to deal with, but *good design*, however, was considered *objective.* Such ignorant (and arrogant) ideologems still do not seem to have been completely overcome, but they are becoming rarer. Not least thanks to the increasing commitment and expertise of design researchers from all over the world, who convincingly take these arguments ad absurdum.

The two editors are proud and enthusiastic that we have been able to attract extraordinarily qualified people from the

field of gender and design for this issue – and not only enormously knowledgeable experts, but also from very different cultural and content-related contexts.

The contributions span a wide range of topics and research methodologies. From equity vs. equality, to gender-disrespecting forensic definitions of body representations, design historiography that excludes women, or the work with *provotypes* in Brazilian maroon communities, to forgotten typeface designs by women and queer people, or the design for dying, to name but a few.

Of course, we can only show a tiny part of this new design research here, but we think that the present texts demonstrate the width of equity, gender and diversity in design that no one can deny from now on. Design, we optimistically claim, is in the process of liberating itself from its geopolitical, gender-limiting and content-related short-sightedness as a whole.

To revitalise an old (albeit still and again up-to-date) half-sentence familiar from Paris in May 1968: Ce n'est qu'un début …, this is just the beginning.

It should not go unmentioned at this point that the concept of equity is not only seen in a positive light. Renata Leitão[01], for instance, points out that equity and pluriversality are distinct concepts with different goals, theories, and strategies. While both are important, pluriversality focuses more on societal transformation and the recognition that all life on earth is interconnected.

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01   Renata Leitão is Assistant Professor at the Department of Human Centered Design, and Director of the Pluriversal Futures Design Lab at the College of Human Ecology, Cornell University. We are grateful for her valuable advice and support during the planning phase of this issue. The references provided here relate to an email dialogue with her in August 2024.

Equity though is fundamentally rooted in the idea of fairness and justice, particularly in the context of addressing structural inequalities. In contrast, pluriversality emphasises the coexistence of multiple perspectives, values, and ways of understanding the world. It advocates for recognising and respecting diverse cultural, social, and epistemological frameworks, suggesting that there is no singular path to knowledge or truth. Pluriversality challenges the dominance of a single worldview, promoting the idea that multiple realities and interpretations can exist simultaneously and should be acknowledged and valued. This concept is particularly relevant in discussions about globalisation and cultural imperialism, where dominant narratives often overshadow local knowledge systems.

While equity seeks to create fairness within a framework that acknowledges existing inequalities, pluriversality promotes a more expansive view that celebrates diversity and the legitimacy of different perspectives. Together, they offer complementary approaches to understanding and addressing social justice, but they operate from fundamentally different conceptual foundations.

Leitão emphasizes that both terms are often used interchangeably – "particularly due to the intense backlash that the terms equity and DEI[02] are receiving in the USA" (Leitão). Pluriversality however, emerged from indigenous and local communities' efforts to defend their ecosystems, which are essential for sustaining human life. It is a "response to the Anthropocene crisis and the environmental collapse" and has been central to

02   Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

grassroots movements for years. When pluriversality is reduced to the inclusion of diverse voices, as in equity, it overlooks the long-standing struggles of these communities to protect their ecosystems, which are vital for the survival of all humans (ibid.).

If we nevertheless call this issue *Design Equity*, it is based on the assumption that this term must also be understood and analysed in its ambivalence and ambiguity. Much of what is negotiated under the labels of social design, social innovation, inclusive design, social justice and the like is based on the principle of understanding justice, equity and equality as central values. However, the complexity of these concepts often remain unconsidered. With regard to its current societal positioning, the distinction between the liberal understanding of justice (*Justice is when everyone has the same opportunities*) and the socialist understanding of justice (*Justice is when everyone gets the same*) should be emphasised. It seems that most concepts of justice in our time (try to) negotiate between these two poles. The criteria for what is just and what is unjust are ultimately different for each individual and each group.

Well aware that this is by no means the end of the discussion, we hope to illuminate the complexities involved here and to be able to take a more differentiated look at them in the following contributions.

In her introducing piece, Lesley-Ann Noel clarifies the differences between equity and equality. She contrasts equality, which treats everyone the same, with equity, which aims for fairness by addressing individuals' specific needs. While both equality and equity are rooted in the idea of fairness, one treats everyone as identical and remains neutral, while

the other acknowledges and addresses individual differences. Noel identifies the challenges for design(ers) and argues for a more conscious design practice.

Valeria Durán, Griselda Flesler and Celeste Moretti explore how traditional forensic and biomedical body representations often default to binary and male norms, failing to accurately represent diverse gender identities. Using the murder of activist Amancay Diana Sacayán as a case study, they critique how outdated and discriminating body diagrams and biased practices obstruct justice for transgender and non-binary individuals. The authors advocate for redesigning these diagrams to reflect gender diversity and argue that such changes must be accompanied by a broader shift in understanding and addressing systemic biases in forensic and medical contexts. This approach aims to improve both the accuracy of body representations and the fairness of legal outcomes.

The exhibition *Same Bold Stories* at the Klingspor Museum (Offenbach, Germany) explores the contributions of FLINTA* (Female, Lesbian, Inter*, Non-binary, Trans*, Agender) designers to the field, highlighting the gaps and biases in historical narratives and archival collections. Two of the exhibition's curators Dorothee Ader and Naomi Rado address the underrepresentation of women and queer individuals in type design, particularly in the historiography of the 20th and 21st centuries. The essay advocates for a more inclusive and equitable approach to collecting, curating, and archiving design work, aiming to challenge traditional gender hierarchies and promote diversity in the type design industry.

Ana Julia Melo Almeida explores how gender serves as a lens for analysing the historiography of design, focusing on the inclusion and exclusion of certain figures and their work. It introduces Teresa de Lauretis' concept of *stories outside the frame,* examining how design history is selectively documented. Marta Erps-Breuer's career, from her beginnings at the Bauhaus to her pioneering work in genetics in Brazil, is used as a case study to highlight the gaps in historiography. The text emphasizes the need to rethink design history with a focus on equity and the overlooked contributions of women and marginalised figures.

In her text, Raquel Noronha discusses the critique of participatory design practices through a decolonial feminist lens, focusing on the importance of achieving equity in participation, instead of reinforcing colonial or capitalist hierarchies. She emphasises the role of *provotypes* (provocative prototypes) as tools for creating inclusive, diverse dialogues that address socio-material realities, such as racism and sexism, while engaging with decolonial feminist thoughts to challenge dominant paradigms in design and foster more equitable, context-specific solutions. Overall she highlights the challenges of applying universal empowerment metrics, such as those from the World Economic Forum, in marginalized Afro-Brazilian maroon communities. Through research with women artisans, she suggests that instead of *empowerment,* the concept of *autonomy* better reflects their realities, advocating for design processes that consider local, socio-cultural contexts and resist colonial, capitalist, and patriarchal paradigms.

Felix Kosok examines how queer masculinities in design can challenge and reshape traditional gender norms. Drawing

on personal experiences, he explores how the concept of masculinity is socially constructed and reinforced through design. While queer masculinities may not exist entirely outside societal and capitalist structures, they offer the potential to create more fluid, diverse, and inclusive expressions of masculinity. Design, in this sense, becomes a means of reimagining masculinity and fostering equality and agency for all men.

Leyla Acaroglu's text explores how societal structures, particularly through language and design, shape gender roles and power dynamics. She discusses how *frames* – mental structures shaped by language – influence our perceptions and actions, especially regarding gender and leadership. Women are often constrained by stereotypes reinforced by language and cultural norms, limiting their progression into leadership roles. Acaroglu argues for the need to actively challenge and disrupt these frames through creative interventions, thereby enabling greater equity and opportunities for women in leadership and society.

Bitten Stetter presents a highly sensitive research project and design initiative that focuses on the overlooked aspects of end-of-life care, particularly the material culture surrounding death and dying, with an emphasis on dying. It critiques how society designs for life's milestones like birth and aging but neglects the needs of those nearing the end of life, often leading to a lack of dignity and personalization in care settings. Stetter's research highlights the emotional and practical impacts of design on this phase and explores well-thought, human-centered products to better support patients and families, aiming to shift societal attitudes towards dying as a natural, communal part of life.

Lesley-Ann Noel

Focus on Equity

Equity is a word we often hear these days. It refers to fairness and justice. As a child, I was trained to think that things were fair if everyone got the same. Early on in life, we learn it is important to treat people equally. Sometimes, however, it's necessary to distinguish equity from equality. Whereas equality generally means providing the same to all, equity means recognising that we do not all start at the same place and therefore have different needs. Equity is focused on ensuring that people have equal outcomes, even if they need different inputs.

When working towards equity, we need to hold onto our critical awareness so we can see the obstacles that block our progress. There are historical, political, economic, and cultural obstacles in society. While equality and equity are both grounded in the same concept of fairness, one concept sees all of us as the same and allegedly is value-neutral, whereas the other concept acknowledges difference. Equity recognises the unique lived experience of each individual with regard to their historical, political, and economic context. So, if we want equitable outcomes, we must begin by admitting that we are not all the same and that different obstacles and barriers may prevent us from success. A third element of this discussion is a

variation of the concept of equality that concedes that individuals within the same category should be treated the same but also recognizes that there may be differences across categories. The South African constitution is based on this type of equality, as it seeks to right decades of apartheid through differential treatment for different groups within its population.

This difference in perspective leads to different kinds of questions, asking How might we give people what they need to thrive rather than? How might we give everyone the same tools?

For example, instead of designing and creating programs about distributing textbooks or computers to all students, someone in education seeking to ensure the opportunity for equal outcomes for all students might create programs that offer more face-to-face tutoring rather than just distributing textbooks. Some students may need different types of support to thrive.

Here's another example. My friend is looking forward to retirement in the United Kingdom, where she is a citizen. In some parts of the country, the life expectancy is in the eighties and as high as the nineties. However, life expectancy in her part of the country is lower than the retirement age of sixty-six. She is sixty-one and worries that she won't have equitable access to a post-retirement life and pension simply because of where she was born and has lived her life.

An equitable approach to retirement could mean that the retirement age would be adjusted so that people from the working class and people in poor health, with prison records, and from other sections of the population with considerably lower life expectancies would be able to receive a pension for a reasonable length of time.

Another approach to this problem would require understanding about what is causing the difference in life spans between the neighbourhoods with high life expectancy and those with low life expectancy, then working on programs to increase the life expectancy of the latter group.

My friend put it this way:

> That's not actually any version of equality. What I want is equity, where people actually have a chance to live lives and get a pension for a reasonable amount of time. In many communities, people never make it to that age. People who've been in prison, for example, tend to die in their fifties. They're not going to make it to pension age when they get out.

To better understand gaps, inequity, and people's needs, to be a better designer, we have to learn more about their journeys, struggles, and joys. We need to find out what makes them tick, what will make them thrive. To do this, we need lots of empathy for the stakeholders, our teammates, and ourselves.

To transform society and create change, we sometimes need to treat people differently. We sometimes need to use *fair discrimination,* whereby we give preferential treatment to the groups that need more support to be able to thrive, making up for years of systemic injustice. We do this, for example, through affirmative action laws, intentional allocation of resources to underserved communities, and doing businesses with minority business owners. In seeking to create equity, we have to be

discriminatory and reallocate resources to those who did not traditionally have access. By paying attention to gaps across differences, we will eventually achieve a level of sameness that is better for everyone. Achieving equity requires recognition that because some people have been denied access and benefits, they deserve greater accommodations in order to achieve equity and both bold goals and bold steps to reach them.

Achieving equity requires recognizing that some people, having been denied access and benefits, deserve greater accommodations, as well as bold goals and steps to reach equity.

Valeria Durán, Griselda Flesler & Celeste Moretti

Gender – Design – Justice: The Challenge of Body Representations

In October 2015, *travesti* activist[01] Amancay Diana Sacayán[02] was brutally murdered. A few months earlier, she had accompanied fellow activists to the first *Ni una Menos* march.[03] "We made our own sign *#Niunamenos – No more travesticides.* Basically, we appropriated the political category of femicide but with the idea that society should also start reflecting on the discrimination we face as *travestis*" (Berkins 2015). As Lohana Berkins has noted, at the beginning of what has been referred to as the fourth wave of feminism in Argentina, gender violence

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01   While *travesti* refers to artistic expressions in many Spanish-speaking countries, in Argentina the term evokes a political identity outside the man-woman binary. It is linked to a collective gender identity with a long history of political mobilization. *Travesti* is associated with a resistance to binary policies and heteronormative .

02   Amancay Diana Sacayán was a *travesti* human rights activist. On July 2, 2012, she became the first transgender Argentine woman to get a national identity document stating her self-identified gender.

03   In 2015, a group of women planned *Ni una menos* in response to the femicide of Chiara Páez, a 14-year-old who was pregnant at the time she was murdered by her boyfriend. *Ni una menos* brought women out on the streets across the country, though the largest protest took place in the city of Buenos Aires across from Congress. More information is available at *https://niunamenos.org.ar/.*

Image 1: March for justice for the transvesticide of Diana Sacayán, Buenos Aires, 2015.
Picture: Florencia Guimaraes García

Image 2. The all gender bathroom sign at FADU-UBA. An optical illusion creates movement in a graphic
alteration of the gender binary that suggests the transmutability of the sex-gender system.
Ismael Menegolla, at the time FADU student and trans activist, designed the sign. Source: the authors.

was no longer exclusive to cis-women and required the use of more specific terms (see image 1).

Several aspects of the murder trial that took place three years later merit consideration. On the one hand, it was the first time in Argentina that the crime scene procedures specific to femicide were used in the murder investigation of a trans person. Throughout the trial, feminine pronouns were used to refer to Diana and the death certificate identified her as female as stated on her national identity card. Diana had successfully changed her gender identity on the card in 2012, the same year Argentina passed the Gender Identity Act. However, during the trial, a forensic expert used two body diagrams – one of a woman, the other of a man – to show the injuries Diana suffered. "Neither corresponded to the victim's actual body," noted Diana Maffia and Alba Rueda in a groundbreaking article on the concepts of travesticide and transfemicide (2019, 181).

The team of professors of Gender Design and Studies at the School of Architecture, Design, and Urbanism at Universidad de Buenos Aires (FADU-UBA)[04] homed in on this inaccuracy, which the media largely overlooked despite their ample coverage of the trial. The academic team decided to analyse the issue of non-binary body representation in the diagrams used by the forensic experts. As the first all-gender bathroom was being designed for the School of Architecture (see Image 2), an

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04   Taught by an interdisciplinary team of professors led by Griselda Flesler, the Gender Design and Studies class was introduced in 2017 for all students at the School of Architecture. To date, more than 1.500 students have taken the class. It is the first university class on this subject in Latin America and one of the first worldwide. For more information, visit the website on the class: *https://dyegblog.wordpress.com/* or its Instagram account: @dyeg.fadu

entirely different issue surrounding body representations caught our attention. In 2020, we published an article (Durán, Flesler, Moretti 2020) on the way in which bodies are depicted in forensic evidence during travesticide and transfemicide trials in order to reflect on the ways in which design practices build and reproduce patriarchal and cis-heteronormative values.

Given the interest sparked by the article and the questions it posed, the project *Experiences in Forensic Investigation with Gender Perspectives* was launched in August 2020 in partnership with the Gender Observatory at the Ministry of Justice of the City of Buenos Aires.[05] The aim of the project is to propose changes to the body diagrams used for administrative and legal investigations in order to recognize gender diversity, depict violence in a sensitive and inclusive way, and guarantee access to justice for *travesti*, trans, and non-binary people.

This article presents some thoughts stemming from this work. After addressing the particular significance of body outlines in Argentina, the article explores the lack of adequate body representations for non-binary people in the investigation protocols used in wrongful death investigations. It then turns to the matrix of cultural intelligibility through which professionals interpret *travesti* and trans bodies before homing in on the limitations associated with assuming a person's identity

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05   *https://consejo.jusbaires.gob.ar/institucional/organigrama/observatorio-de-genero-en-la-justicia/*
As part of the project, we organized meetings and workshops with relevant actors from different public spheres. In addition to trans, *travesti*, and non-binary activists, forensic experts from the courts and police were invited to explore the challenges inclusion entails. We also did in-depth interviews with a range of actors and participated in a revision of the investigation protocols currently in use. In 2023, we offered a class for forensic professionals from across Argentina.

based exclusively on their physical traits. As part of the analysis, novel and indispensable questions are posed for the design of suitable procedures and tools.[06]

Body Semantics

In Argentina, a country where disappearances were a tragic emblem of the last military dictatorship (1976–83), body diagrams jog the collective memory. In 1983, as the dictatorship was about to cede power to a democratically elected president, a group of visual artists – Rodolfo Aguerreberry, Julio Flores, and Guillermo Kexel – developed an aesthetic and political street intervention they called the *Siluetazo* to draw attention to the missing.

The project was to sketch by hand 30,000 body outlines – the quantity of those disappeared in Argentina, and a number that has become a rallying cry – and hang them up on the walls of Buenos Aires. When the artists realised it was simply impossible for them to do that many body outlines, they adapted the project and invited activists to participate. These volunteers "put their body on the line", lying on the floor so that someone else could sketch their body. During the art intervention, "in a hostile city of repression, a (temporary) space for collective creation was liberated – a space that redefined both artistic practice and political practice" (Longoni and Bruzzone 2008).

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06   At the time this article was written, a project for the design of prototypes for body representation tools in travesticides had just begun. This project is part of the PII program of the Research Department at the School of Architecture, Design, and Urbanism at Universidad de Buenos Aires and involves professors and students from the Gender Design and Studies course.

The body outlines of the *Siluetazo* thus became a recognisable, effective way to evoke the disappeared; even "freed from the original intervention, [body outlines] are now entwined in Argentina's language of memory" (Schindel 2008).

Like the artistic intervention of the *Siluetazo*, the body outlines used in forensics bring absence to the fore. In the case of the dictatorship, the body outlines made the disappearances visible, materializing the victims whose bodies the military made disappeared in an attempt to erase their identities. In the case of Diana's murder trial, the body outlines presented – one of a man and one of a woman – point to an absence of representations outside the binary that could account for diversity and difference.

In an essay entitled *The Kitchen of Meaning,* Roland Barthes suggests that humans are surrounded by signs and therefore, spend all their time reading. The world is filled with complex and subtle signs that provide humans with "natural" information. However, "to decipher the world's signs always means to struggle with a certain innocence of objects" (Barthes 1994, 158). In other words, it involves recognising that the meanings of these signs are anything but natural, drawing attention to the fact that all meaning is culturally produced. Just as the semantics of an object rely on the way in which it is produced and consumed, human body graphics become meaningful in the way in which they are designed, appropriated, and used. Heteronormativity figures strongly into the construction of these meanings. Thus, introducing a gender perspective when designing body outlines can bring visibility to heteronormative assumptions and contribute new signifiers outside these gender norms.
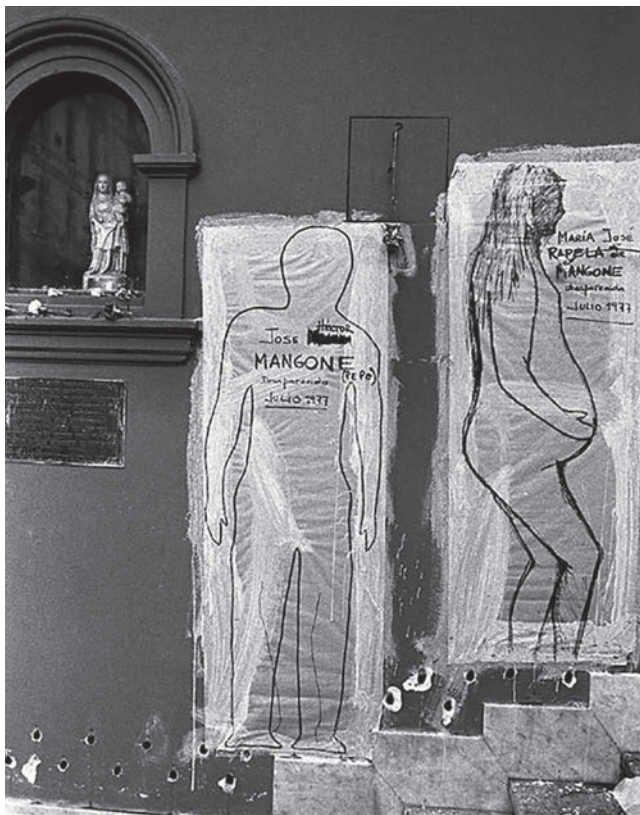
Image 3. Body outlines drawn on paper and plastered on the Buenos Aires Cathedral on Plaza de Mayo. The first *Siluetazo* took place on September 21, 1983, during the III Resistance March organized by human rights organizations. Source: Photo collection Daniel García. Archivo Memoria Abierta

Both the diagrams and the outlines are signs produced by and directed toward people and their meanings thus exceed whatever information they attempt to convey. Beyond the circumstances that could shed light on Diana's murder, another question remains: how can the figured used to represent Diana be interpreted? In addition, though two diagrams instead of one were used to represent Diana, how does society interpret the fact that she was still represented in a fragmentary, imperfect way?

From Binary to Neutral

The starting point for both this article and the academic project was the lack of adequate body representations for non-binary people in general but also, more broadly, for non-hegemonic bodies. However, as the project advanced, it revealed something much more complex than inadequate body representations: when the entire system for evidence gathering is biased, it hinders – and can even obstruct – a legal investigation.[07]

    During the interviews and workshops held as part of the project, these issues surfaced time and again. Activists from the *travesti* and trans community frequently mentioned how body representations fell short, especially in view of the Gender Identity Act. "The refusal to acknowledge our bodies means that the Gender Identity Act is not fully in force. Historically, institutions have pathologised our body expressions, identifying us

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07   These issues exceed both the aim of this article and the articulation of design, gender, and body representations. However, they are of the essence when exploring possible solutions.

with insanity, with AIDS," said one *travesti* activist, an employee with the municipal courts of Buenos Aires. "This has to do with a total, historical denial and repudiation of our identities, leaving us to be consumed in the shadows." In the words of one of her colleagues at the courts and another *travesti* activist, "Regardless of whether we have a law on gender identity or are able to change the gender on our IDs, the approach at police stations and on forensic teams is a biological one where sex and genitalia are always associated with gender. Not to mention the gender expressions and stereotypes that come with them – and all because of a lack of education." In this regard, both of the court employees agreed that "binarism limits and excludes those of us who don't fit. We have to break down the biases that affect our bodies and our identities. In the courts, in forensics, in medicine in general – all insist on binarism and pathologise us, despite what progress has been made."

When asked what protocol was used in forensic procedures, a group of forensic doctors and investigators responded that the body diagrams they used were taken from the *Istanbul Protocol on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment* (2022). This manual presents binary anatomical drawings (male/female)[08] (see Image 4). A male head is depicted in the anatomical drawings of the head.

Another group of professionals responded that they rely on *The Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Death* (2016), which, according to some of the experts

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[08]   In the version of the protocol used in Argentina, from 2004, see pages 89 and 90 in: *https://www.argentina.gob.ar/sites/default/files/protocolo_de_estambul_2019.pdf*
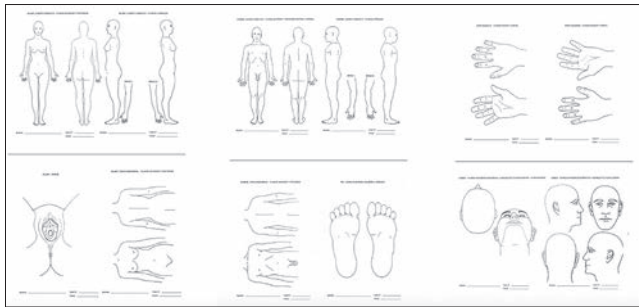
Image 4: Anatomical drawings for the documentation of torture and ill-treatment with binary options (male/female). Source: *Istanbul Protocol*.
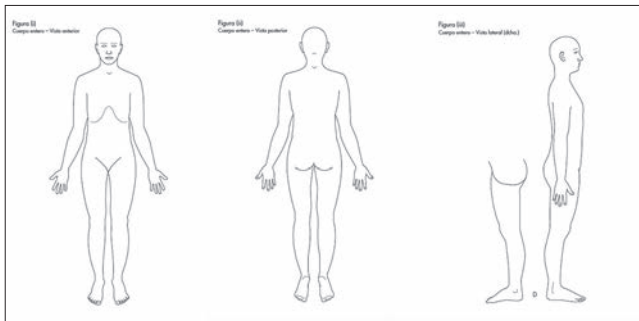

Image 5: Anatomical drawings for the documentation of torture and ill-treatment with a *gender-neutral* figure. Source: *The Minnesota Protocol*.

interviewed, represented a step forward in terms of binary representations. As can be observed in Image 4, the anatomical sketches are asexual and depict a gender-neutral body.

In some cases, the body representations used in autopsies are photocopies of body diagrams taken from forensic medicine manuals. The poor conditions at some of the morgues across Argentina also limit the potential for creating new instruments that rely, for example, on technology. In this regard, the challenge is to come up with a tool that not only facilitates the work of professionals but is also realistic and suitable for different contexts.

What do we see when we see a Body?

As different feminist authors have argued, the ideals of *neutralm* and *universal* always suppose a person with privilege, free from any marker of sex-gender, class, or race. Yet the aim here is to identify the matrix of cultural intelligibility with which this supposedly universal individual is interpreted. Thus, as in the case of the Minnesota Protocol, along with a plethora of other cases (in law, medicine, architecture, and language, among others), the masculine figure – a false neutral – represents the universal. In other words, *neutral* – in this case, a neutral human figure – disguises how the male is universalised as the absolute representative of human beings, blotting out other sex and gender identities and their potential for representation. According to Jos Boys (2017), a specialist in the design of built space, architecture, and disability, this universal representation erases all

social embodiment and any indicator outside the *bodiless uni-versality* that generally translates into a hegemonic masculinity and hegemonic bodies (see Image 6).

What do we see when we see a body? How does visibility condition what we see? In contemporary Western society, bio-medical representations of the body predominate in scientific studies. Pamela Geller (2009) has noted how segmented, sterile bodies proliferate in medical manuals. The author argues that a more detailed look at biomedical representations reveals several other messages about sex and gender. In the first place, since Aristotle and Galen, the masculine body has been the standard body. "We're coming from a forensic medicine written by men who studied men, meaning that women, LGBTIQ+ collectives, and children, their experiences, their realities, their suffering – all excluded," noted one forensic doctor at the first meeting. In second place, sex is viewed as dichotomous and steadfast and in the third, the discourse and practice of modern medical science inevitably fragment the female body, prioritising the reproductive organs and thus implying that the ideal, normal female body is reproductive. Here it is useful to point out that, as Berkins (2007) has noted, *travesti* and trans bodies continue to be an icon of uniqueness.

Though the Minnesota Protocol presents a *neutral* figure, the logic remains binary in the way the different parts of the hu-man body are sketched. Two options appear – male and female genitalia – and a footnote clarifies: "Trans people who have had genital surgery, and intersex people with certain sex characteristic variations, will often have genitals that are not easily categorized into male or female genitalia. The examiner should accurately
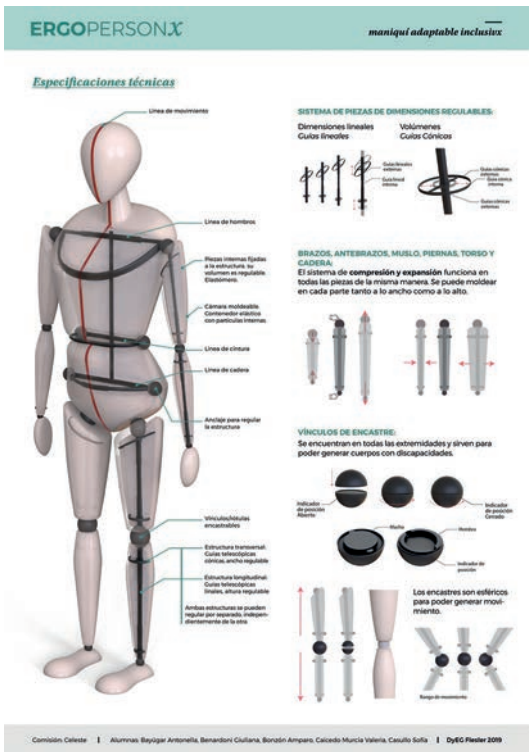
Image 6: As part of the final class project for the Gender Design and Studies course in the first semester of 2019, a prototype for a mannequin that could be adapted to different bodies was presented. These proposals arose as a response to the difficulties students encountered when, in their respective majors (clothing design, industrial design, architecture), they had to come up with designs that presumed to be universal by relying on *ideally* proportionate and binary models. Students: Antonella Bayúgar, Giulana Bernardoni, Amparo Bonzón, Valeria Murcia Caicedo y Sofía Casullo.

depict the bodies of trans and intersex persons that do not match typical male or female diagrams" (UNHRO 2016, 57, authors' emphasis). Thus, the way in which bodies are interpreted for their subsequent depiction on paper depends on the gaze of the forensic professionals.

This gaze does not occur in a vacuum, nor is it neutral: it is formed by personal knowledge but also biases. A doctor from the forensic medical team of Argentina's Supreme Court explained this during one of the workshops:

> Justices make decisions based on the dictates of the laws and the facts of a case but – and this is critical – their own cultural baggage and idiosyncrasy also come into play, their common sense. And this is an obstacle to justice because it overlooks all the gender biases and stereotypes that are part of this common sense and which operate, consciously or unconsciously, under a patriarchal model that naturalises and continues to justify models of domination of heterosexuals, adults, and men over women, children, and the sexually diverse community.

In the interviews and workshops, and as laid out in Argentina's Gender Identity Act,[09] self-identification and the issue of how to incorporate it, especially in the case of a deceased victim, were debated at length. One member of the National Gender Policy Department at Argentina's Security Ministry noted how difficult it is to include this dimension: "It might not be possible to include the victim's self-identification but we can transform the body into a map of [the perpetrator's] ruthlessness." One *travesti* activist emphasised the need to incorporate context and the historical dimension of these bodies in order to approach such identities:

> There is a hermeneutic violence inherent to interpreting the body from one's own concepts as opposed to relying on situated knowledge. In order to have a trial, it is essential to hear the voices of those who have known those bodies, those who rubbed elbows with those bodies when they were alive. Because the non-binarism of those bodies becomes evidenced in the way they walk, in how they talk, in how they dress. Because if she's young or poor, she might not have had any [medical] interventions, but the way she walks provides insight into how she defined herself.

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09   See: *https://www.argentina.gob.ar/sites/default/files/ley-26.743-identidad-de-genero_0.pdf*

Designing the (Im)possible

Over the course of this project, different participants agreed on the need to rethink body figurations. Participants agreed that "including a third body outline could be limiting and lead to a new and restrictive classification. One option could be a featureless or to some degree unfinished body outline that could be completed by whoever does the autopsy. External and internal genitalia could be added, along with breast implants, operations. There are medical aspects to the symbolic ones and the autopsy should contemplate them. It's an instrument with loads of symbolism but it must have forensic and medical value." A photograph of the body could also be used to do the body outline. There are currently different devices ranging from cell phone apps to body scanners and different image diagnosis technologies that could be adapted to this demand.

However, as noted earlier, it is evident that an instrument of this kind would only be effective if those who are completing the report and conducting the autopsy are trained to see not just the body but the life story of the person. On the other hand, beyond these lofty aims, understanding different contexts and material conditions is of the essence.

In summary, and returning to the words of one of the activists cited here, interpreting a body from one's own concepts and not using situated knowledge poses a problem. Though the question about body representations was explored from the field of design, the solution must be interdisciplinary and adapted to the context. Any design must consider the conditions in which it will be used, read, inhabited.

Doing away with bias and pathologising classifications is key to approaching identities. "We must bear in mind that the forensic sciences are a political translation of many social spaces," notes a member of the Diversity Policies Department of Argentina's Ministry of Women, Genders, and Diversity. That is why, in order to move away from binarism, the discourses upon which it rests must be deconstructed. "I always remember that image of Lady Justice, her eyes blindfolded," said one member of the forensic medical team of Argentina's Supreme Court. "Justices should spend less time looking and more time listening."

As Sabine Oertelt-Prigione *et al.* have argued, "the implementation of gender-sensitive approaches in public health requires more significant communication efforts than in many other domains" (2017, 6). Similarly, as work on the project advanced, we realised that the question of body representations was just the tip of a much more complex iceberg. The aim is not just to design a better instrument but to rethink how bodies are interpreted. It's about trying to design the possible in order to achieve what today seems impossible.

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Dorothee Ader & Naomi Rado

Bold Revisions: Gender Equity in Type Design Research and Practice

The Klingspor Museum in Offenbach collects modern and contemporary book and type art. It is also home to a large estate from the former type foundry Gebr. Klingspor in Offenbach. In July 2024, the exhibition *Same Bold Stories: Type Design by Women and Queers in the 20th and 21st Centuries* opened at the Klingspor Museum, bridging historical and contemporary positions in type design. *Same Bold Stories* offers an opportunity to reflect the contributions of FLINTA* (Female, Lesbian, Inter*, Non-binary, Trans* and Agender) designers to history and practice, as well as institutional processes of collecting. Written from the perspectives of two of the exhibition's curators, this essay aims to present and reflect on central motifs and problems of *Same Bold Stories*, especially with regard to practices of collecting and history writing, and to provide an outlook on possible future approaches to collecting and curating design.

Exhibition view 2, *Same Bold Stories*, Foto: _turbo type

Canons, Collections, and Critique:
Re-evaluating Type Historiography

Academic disciplines and their established canons are informed by normative standards that determine what is considered valuable and worthy of preservation. Thus, archives and collections are rarely neutral; they reflect deliberate choices, and reveal just one (his)story among many possible narratives – yet they often masquerade as a representative whole. It is also important to acknowledge the blind spots and gaps that remain while individual oeuvres are highlighted within the canon of design historiography. What and who was excluded from being researched? Are museum's archives equitable or are they shaped by historical biases that reproduce in present-day curatorial practices? Women and queer identities, in particular, remain underrepresented in most major exhibitions and also in design historiography (cf. Eisele/Naegele 2024). A more equitable approach to collection and exhibition development for all (regardless of class, gender, cultural or religious background) would not only grant equal opportunity to those positions who were historically othered.[01] It would instead actively address the systemic disadvantages that certain groups still face, and provide them with the support they need to thrive. Based on this, if the ideal of *equity* is taken seriously, it requires more

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01   Originating from Simone de Beauvoir's analysis in *The Second Sex* (Le Deuxième Sexe), *othering* refers to how women, and by extension marginalised groups, are cast as the *Other* (l'Autre) in contrast to a normative *Self* (typically a white, heterosexual male). This process alienates and dehumanises the *Other,* denying them full subjectivity, agency, and inclusion in societal narratives. While the original French term centres on *l'altérité* (otherness) and *l'Autre* to capture this dynamic of marginalisation, the specific verb form *othering* is more commonly used in English-language feminist discourse.

than just a call for parity: such demands need to be grounded in the fundamental principle that labour as well as resources are distributed to each individual according to their abilities, and according to their needs.[02]

Absent, Erased, Unmentioned? Women's Invisibility

While many historical accounts quickly assert that there almost were no female type designers in the first half of the 20th century, a closer examination suggests that women participated in many areas of type production. Their contributions are largely invisible today due to a lack of acknowledgement and documentation during their lifetimes. This situation underscores the selective nature of historiography.

       In 1971, art historian Linda Nochlin posed the question "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" According to Nochlin, it is the systemic and institutional barriers that have historically excluded women from achieving success and rec-ognition, thereby contributing to their invisibility in the arts (cf. Nochlin 1988, 150 – 152). More than 50 years later, her question is just as relevant. Because one might be tempted to believe that there simply have not been enough talented women artists or that they were not as *great* as their male counterparts – an obviously false conclusion. It is crucial to explain why women were not acknowledged **1**) to demonstrate that visibility does

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02   This principle is based on Karl Marx's ideas expressed in
      Critique of the Gotha Programme (1875).

not necessarily reflect the quality of a work of art or design, but rather indicates *gatekeeping*, and 2) to understand the complex processes involved in the formation and establishment of canons. *Gatekeeping*, a practice that excludes certain individuals from institutions, also has a significant economic component (cf. Del Prete/Rado/Sanoh 2020), while canons enhance and consolidate symbolic value. Structurally these notions – in an almost reversed-intersectional manner – accumulate privilege.

Another feminist approach focused on design and its historiography is Martha Scotford's concept of a *Messy History* (cf. Scotford 1994). Rather than presenting a singular narrative, Scotford advocates for acknowledging diverse and marginalised voices which have received little attention historically. *Messy History* is essential not only for re-evaluating the role of women in type design but also for engaging with postcolonial approaches to historiography. By applying a *Messy History* approach, the multi-layered nature of history is revealed. It helps dismantle hegemonic narratives and supports a more inclusive and non-linear understanding of (design) history.

Type design is certainly one of the least permeable design sectors in the 20th century and to this day. Training locations and technical conditions favour the Latin writing system, thus European and North American type designers get more attention on a quantitative level (cf. Ben Ayed 2023; cf. Chahine/Meseguer/Rado 2024, 194–195, 200). The research into typefaces designed by women and queers in the 20th and 21st centuries in the Klingspor Museum's collection has further shown that there were indeed several notable positions such as Editha (Dita) Moser, Erika Giovanna Klien, Anna Simons, Hertha Larisch-Ramsauer or

Exhibition view 1, *Same Bold Stories*, Foto: _turbo type

Elisabeth Friedländer present already in the first half of the 20th century (cf. Ader/Ledenev/Prenzel 2024, 114 – 151). Although they were not included in historical records these female designers are probably just the tip of an iceberg yet to be explored. Similarities can also be observed with regard to other countries: Despite their important contributions, the involvement of women has been overlooked or ignored in favour of linear historical narratives. By examining their roles, academic research can provide a more nuanced and accurate account of history, challenging the dominant narratives that emphasise individual genius.

The Klingspor Museum's collection offers valuable insight into the working processes of the Gebr. Klingspor type foundry in the early 20th century. While the type designers were indeed all

Exhibition view 3, *Same Bold Stories*, Foto: _turbo type

male, the production process still relied on the contributions of many female workers. The museum's collection features a typescript by Hans Halbey summarising the type foundry's employee index from 1894 to 1956. In the introduction, the author notes that he documented only employees who had worked at the foundry for over five years and that individuals "were not included if they were not involved in special tasks over a longer period of time, for example as type sorters." (Halbey cited in Ader/Ledenev/Prenzel 2024, 105) Of 493 names recorded, only 64 are female, indicating that the typescript is particularly incomplete concerning female employees at Klingspor: women's careers often ended due to marriage, pregnancy, and similar factors, leading to shorter work periods (cf. Ader/Ledenev/Prenzel 2024, 105).

Photographs from the Klingspor foundry show female employees in many different places, and the job of type sorter seems to have been a purely female occupation (cf. Ader/Ledenev/Prenzel 2024, 106–107). In the publication *Schriftgießerei im Schattenbild (Type foundry in Paper Cut)*, Rudolf Koch describes the work of the type sorter with the remarkable words "underneath, full of verve, she boldly places her own name, like the artist does." (Koch cited in Ader/Ledenev/Prenzel 2024, 107) The recognition of the type sorter in Koch's text is a rare example of acknowledging women's contributions to type production in the early 20th century. According to Cheryl Buckley, the silence about women's work is a "direct consequence of specific historiographic methods. These methods, which involve the selection, classification, and prioritization of types of design [...] are inherently biased against women and, in effect, serve to exclude them from history." (Buckley 1986, 3) As a result, much of women's involvement remains undocumented, often leaving only names, if anything at all, and making reconstruction nearly impossible.

Font *Gupper* by Giulia Boggio

Font *Violet* by Carmen Nacher
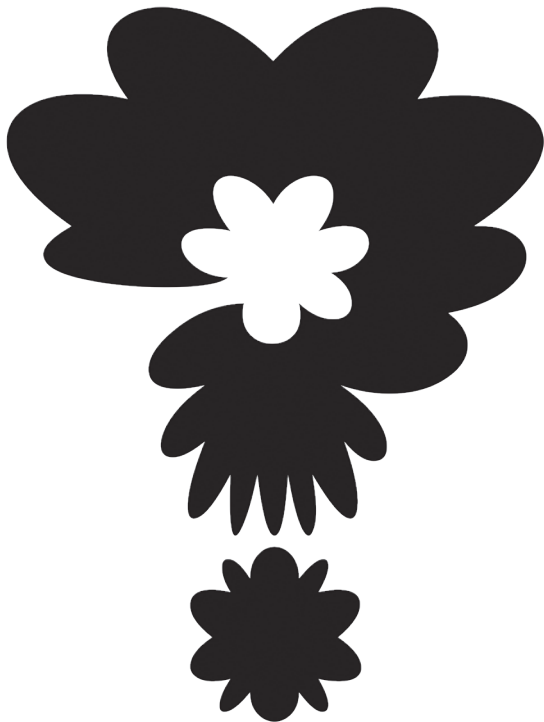
The Politics of Preservation: Power Relations in Archive and Collection Development

Archives require significant maintenance and care, as their preservation demands continuous attention and safeguarding. Even though more FLINTA* individuals now occupy archival and curatorial positions, the artefacts considered worthy of preservation are still predominantly those attributed to men's legacies and genius, reinforcing a gendered hierarchy. This divide exemplifies how gendered divisions of labour and recognition continue to influence both, archival and curatorial, practices.

The Klingspor archive holds an extensive type-related collection, in which names of well-known, and exclusively male idols dominate together with the narrative of heroes and exceptional talents who wrote type history in the 20th century. A fundamental aspect of a museum's responsibilities lies in its *collection concepts,* which define how a collection is structured and expanded. This process involves countless decisions, determining which contexts are significant and how these are reflected in a collection. Unfortunately, within an institution, particularly one with a long tradition of collecting, decision-makers are never entirely independent; structures and thought patterns change slowly.

This one-sided approach to collecting has multiple underlying reasons, but one in particular places female contributions at a significant disadvantage. Many collection concepts continue to adhere to a narrow definition of what constitutes valuable works, primarily focusing on individuals whose lifetime achievements are characterised as *oeuvres.* Especially when

examining earlier periods, fewer bodies of work by women
are found to align with this criterion. The Klingspor Museum's
cataloguing of female type designers has revealed numerous
working biographies from the early 20th century, often marked
by brief, intense creative periods that were abruptly ended due
to marriage, motherhood, displacement, or economic chal-
lenges. The inclusion of these positions in the collection is often
coincidental. As a result, the collection largely reproduces a
one-sided, linear narrative, reflecting the concept described
by Scotford as *a Neat History* (in contrast to a *Messy History*).

In type design, a fundamental re-evaluation is necessary
to provide a more comprehensive framework for future research.
Addressing the gaps, parallels, and collective developments is
essential for representing type as a social phenomenon. However,
it is important to address how the principles of *Messy History*
can be integrated into collection concepts. Naïma Ben Ayed
provides instructions for a change in the practice of archiving:
"Working collectively and collaboratively, commence an archive
of multi-script letters, looking for lettering, calligraphy and writ-
ings more than type specimens. Research periodicals, ephemera,
street signs, packaging, political leaflets, family letters, etc." (Ben
Ayed 2023). Re-thinking the tasks of an archive can lead to new
possibilities for understanding its function and role. By viewing
the archive as an evolving entity or a process-driven development,
it can re-engage with past discourses and connect them to con-
temporary issues, opening it to a more emancipatory approach
to archival practice. Teal Triggs, professor at the Royal College
of Art in London and a founding member of the Women's Design
and Research Unit, also suggests that archiving should serve as

an active, dynamic resource that enlivens debates and facilitates critical engagement (cf. Rado/Triggs 2024, 93–94). In this way, archives transcend their traditional role and become a method for re-contextualising knowledge, establishing new connections, and bridging the gaps caused by generational and disciplinary divides. This transformative potential demonstrates how archives function as both, repositories of memory and spaces of active inquiry.

Archives and collections are increasingly central to design history research, serving as foundational resources for historiography while also offering a rich array of possibilities, models, and inspiration. This growing focus on archival resources arises, in part, from the inadequate representation found in mainstream institutions. As a result, smaller or independent organisations often take the initiative to actively showcase contributions that are overlooked (cf. Rado 2021, 18–19). Platforms such as FLINT*ype, a database that showcases global FLINTA* typefaces in different scripts, ensure that the diversity and variety within the field are documented, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the international scene.

On Visibility I: Unveiling the Hidden Narratives

Strategies of visibility involve processes such as naming, speaking, publishing, and exhibiting. Engaging with and sustaining these platforms requires networks, time, and energy. Even today, these factors continue to disproportionately disadvantage FLINTA* individuals. This inequality is particularly evident in various roles within the museum's historical collection of type

design, reinforcing the prevailing mechanisms of *gatekeeping* that influence museum collections.

With regard to the historic type design collection, numerous female names appear in the estates of Rudolf von Larisch's type classes in Vienna from 1902 and Rudolf Koch's type classes in Offenbach from 1906. The most notable names in these collections are Anna Simons, Hertha Larisch-Ramsauer, Gudrun Zapf-von Hesse, Elisabeth Friedländer, Dita Moser and Erika Giovanna Klien. The museum's inventory provides several insights into the visibility of women in early 20th-century type design:

> 1) Compilations of works, which came to the museum unfiltered by archivists or collectors, feature numerous female names. Women who studied in writing classes in Vienna and Offenbach in the early 20th century are likely to have worked in the relevant field as well. Their works were not specifically collected but rather entered the museum's collection by chance.

> 2) Dita Moser, Hertha Larisch-Ramsauer and Gudrun Zapf-von Hesse are three better-known figures whose husbands worked in the same field. They therefore had access to networks. Dita Moser, whose calendar works from 1908 and 1910 are included in the collection, was also part of the Wiener Werkstätte, which her wealthy family supported financially (cf. Ader/Ledenev/Prenzel 2024, 128–129).

3) More prominently collected items correspond to the *collection-worthy* concept of work. Anna Simons' or Erika Giovanna Klien's works, in addition to a lifelong artistic activity, were considered innovative, fitting the role of pioneers, and therefore fit into the concept of *Neat History* (Scotford 1994, 369).

On Visibility II: Collectivity, Empowerment, and Innovation

The historical absence of FLINTA* individuals in type design, a practice at the intersection of industrial production and artistic expression, also reflects broader issues such as authorship and ownership. However, recent developments within the type design industry signal a shift toward greater inclusivity. Today, FLINTA* designers not only confidently create typefaces, but they also shape the contemporary international type scene. This increase in visibility can be attributed to multiple factors, including technological advancements (cf. Chahine/Meseguer/Rado 2024, 200).

The democratisation of design through user-friendly software has made it easier for individuals to engage with type design independently, without the need for traditional educational or institutional backing. Through digital accessibility designers now have the freedom to work from anywhere, and to market their work directly through personal websites and new platforms dedicated to publishing, bypassing conventional gatekeepers and providing alternative routes to visibility. In new forms of cooperation and collective approaches FLINTA* individuals often

adopt work practices that emphasise shared authorship (cf. Kliefoth 2018) and mutual support, thus challenging traditional hierarchies. Examples for such networks are associations and opportunities tailored specifically toward FLINTA* designers, such as *Alphabettes*, and the Malee Scholarship (for further reading see Chahine/Meseguer/Rado 2024, 193, 200–201). An example of collaborative work featured in the exhibition is Flavia Zimbardi, who creates type families in joint authorship with fellow type designers, Ayaka B. Ito, Inga Plönnings, and Tida Tep (Type Electives 2024).

        Inclusivity has become a central concern in the design field, particularly in relation to accessibility and diversity. By integrating these elements into type design, significant barriers and gaps in representation and usability can be addressed. A notable approach is emerging that moves in two directions, giving equal consideration to both: 1) ensuring that typefaces are accessible to individuals with diverse abilities, and 2) making the type design industry itself more accessible to individuals with different abilities and from diverse backgrounds. In connection to more inclusive practices, allyship within the type industry is gaining importance as a means of accountability. Effective allyship involves advocacy and action: it means to use one's privileges to support the voices of those who are affected by systemic injustices. Such tendencies show that it is no longer just about creating functional or aesthetic letterforms; it is about rethinking who gets to participate in shaping the visual language of our world. The increasing visibilities of FLINTA* individuals and other marginalised groups mark a critical shift in the industry, one that challenges long-standing gendered

hierarchies and opens new possibilities for design as a socially
engaged practice.

Fostering inclusivity in type design, however, is not solely
the responsibility of designers and scholars: users must also
actively engage with and utilise typefaces beyond those tradi-
tionally deemed *high quality* according to established norms.
By intentionally widening their selections to encompass type-
faces from a more diverse range of designers, users can con-
tribute to challenging entrenched biases and promoting greater
equity within the field.
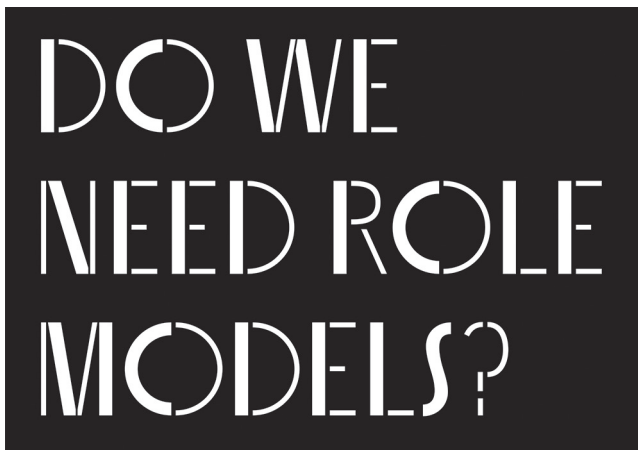
Font *Sisters Two* by Laura Meseguer

→   The unabridged version of the text is available in the digital publication:
    https://www.designforschung.org/2025/01/02/bold-revisions

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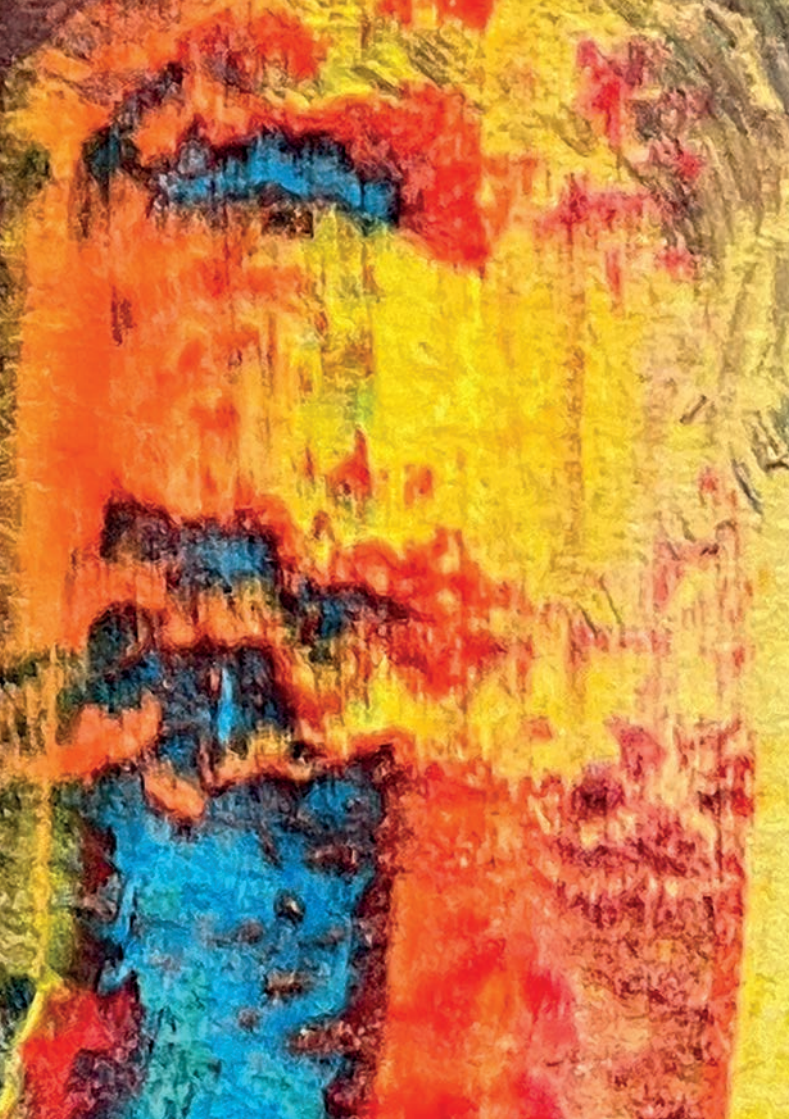
Ana Julia Melo Almeida

Stories outside the Frame: Gender as a Way of Reading and analysing Historiography

Marta Erps-Breuer was born in 1902 in Frankfurt, Germany. In the 1920s, she was a student at the Weimar Bauhaus and remained there informally for a few years during its Dessau period. In the early 1930s, she immigrated to Brazil and settled in the city of São Paulo where she worked as a science illustrator and designer for a group of researchers until 1935 when she was hired as a laboratory technician for the Department of Genetics and Evolutionary Biology at the recently created University of São Paulo. She remained in São Paulo until the end of her life in 1977.

By examining the journey of this designer's career[01], we

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01   The journey of the designer and scientist has been documented in previous research (Almeida 2022). In addition to the trajectory of Marta Erps-Breuer, this doctoral research has investigated the professional spaces occupied by five more women: Fayga Ostrower, Irene Ruchti, Klara Hartoch, Luisa Bernacchi Sambonet and Olly Reinheimer, all of whom worked in and around design throughout the 20th century in Brazil, especially between the 1950s and 1970s.

can reflect on the ways in which interpersonal gender relations are elaborated in historiography to better understand the presence, the absence and the erasure of certain people's achievements. From a socio-historical perspective, gender is regarded as a critical concept for analysing the mechanisms affecting certain professional trajectories in and around the design canon. This is done to interrogate the constitution of the canon, which, on the one hand, is selective in its inclusion and, on the other hand, political in its exclusion. With this we can more clearly see how the constitution of this canon guides historiographical practices.

Our journey uses an approach that situates women's work both inside and outside the documentation and the narratives created by the field of design through the case of Marta Erps-Breuer's professional career. To this end, the concept of "stories outside the frame" is used in the present study based on the work of feminist theorist Teresa de Lauretis (de Lauretis 1987) in order to present gender as a way of reading and analysing the history of design.

The History of Design in a Feminist Critique

The 1980s were an important period for both feminist and gender studies as well as for their application to design research. This decade marked a turning point when certain strains of feminist thoughts became anti-essentialist and favored situating speakers in a variety of positions and points of view. The comparative table below (Figure 1) shows a selection of research combining gender and design studies.

Gender studies
1980s anti-essentialist feminism

1980. Engendered individuals
Age, Race, Class and Sex, Audre Lorde

1981. Black women and feminism
Ain't I a Woman? Black Women and Feminism,
bell hooks

1984. Black women and feminism in Brazil
Racismo e sexismo na cultura brasileira
Lélia Gonzalez

1986. Gender as a category of historical analysis
Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,
Joan W. Scott

1987. Concept of technologie of gender
Technologies of gender, Teresa de Lauretis

1988. Concept of *americanidade*
A categoria político-cultural da americanidade,
Lélia Gonzalez

1989. Concept of intersectionality
Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex,
Kimberlé Crenshaw

Design studies
1980s feminist perspective

1984. Women in design
A Woman's Touch: Women in Design from 1680 to the
present day
Isabelle Anscombe

1986. Feminist analysis in the field of design
Toward a Feminist Analysis of Women and Design
Cheryl Buckley

1989. Feminism, women and design
View from the Interior: Feminism, Women and Design
Judy Attfield e Pat Kirkham

1989. Feminist critique towards the field of design
FORM/female FOLLOWS FUNCTION/male: Feminist
Critiques of Design
Judy Attfield

Figure 1. Comparative table of research conducted in the 1980s that merges gender studies and design studies. Source: Almeida 2022.

In the early 1980s, researcher Audre Lorde (Lorde 1980) presented the idea of gendered subjects to exemplify the ways in which the mechanisms that produced inequalities work in conjunction. Lorde writes that, in addition to gender, there are other markers that participate in the constitution of identities and social relations, such as race, class, sexuality, geographic location, etc. It is also in this decade that theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw (Crenshaw 1989) elaborated the concept of intersectionality, constructed from a perspective that allows for the establishment articulations regarding the inequalities experienced by social groups, and thereby placing the categories of gender, race and class into relation with each other.

In Brazil, the work of anthropologist Lélia Gonzalez provides fundamental contributions to understanding the social injustices present in the social and historical fabric based on the inequality and dependence in capitalist development. Gonzalez elaborates the concept of "americanidade" (Gonzalez 1988) to debate the reality of women's exclusion from Brazilian society. It is important to mention that Gonzalez's effort highlights the mechanisms of exclusion to reveal a process of naturalization and normalization that produces differences and inequalities in bodies. Gonzalez adds that such exclusion is related to a delegitimization of women's contribution to knowledge, especially that of black and indigenous women.

In illuminating a path through the history of women and gender relations in Brazil, researchers Joana Pedro and Rachel Soihet (Pedro and Soihet 2007) write that this field of study began as a dialogue with the history of people who have been excluded and those considered deviant. Articulating between the debates in Brazilian universities and political and social movements at that time, a feminist fringe began to rethink the history of minority groups and to examine the relationships between the margins and the centers of power.

It was also in the 1980s that feminist criticism emerged in the debates surrounding design research that highlighted the criteria and parameters structuring the field of hegemonic thinking. One of the authors that analysed the politically motivated omissions permeating the history of design is Cheryl Buckley (Buckley 1986). She finds that in conceptualising design practice there is a related set of factors that contribute to the exclusion of certain people and their work.

Through feminist studies, Buckley (ibid.) shows that this conception serves as a mechanism that, on the one hand, includes and elevates, and on the other, excludes. In other words, there is a list of rules that have been normalised and presented as objective, but in fact are products of a social construction. Based on these rules, the recognition of what is good versus bad design is not neutral, but socially approved and based on the criteria of a certain group and its canon that serves to universalise concepts drawn from historical, social and political perspectives.

Regarding such a set of rules that were established by a group, and the process of legitimizing these rules, art historian Griselda Pollock (Pollock 2007) writes that canon is a discursive form through which the objects and texts selected by it become products of artistic excellence that contribute to the validation of an exclusive category. Therefore, it is important to understand the existence of elements that structure and legitimize what is understood and validated by the canon and thus give it a cultural and political identity.

If we think through these findings, we arrive at a definitive structure of power and prestige surrounding the way that design practice is defined and the way in which the history of the field is told. Both of these actions are political, they are connected, and they can be mobilised in the debates concerning the exclusion of people, practices and artifacts, and especially concerning the work of women. In this way we can reflect on how such mechanisms are present in the fabrication of bodies, materialities and visualities which are based on social markers, and we can question the hierarchies and power relations that permeate the practice of design.

If these mechanisms of hierarchies, divisions and asymmetries permeate the entire field of design, then it is up to us to reflect on how they relate to the gaps and absences in the documentation of the work of certain female designers and certain artifacts produced by them. Would it be possible to correlate the trajectories, geographic locations, practices and artifacts to discuss the engenderings in the field historiography? Such engenderings are diverse and not solely derived from a gendered perspective.

Gender as a Mode of Reading and Analysis drawing from the Journey of Marta Erps-Breuer

Two aspects of Marta Erps-Breuer's professional career deserve to be highlighted and analysed through the ways of thinking outlined above. The first deals with routes of immigration, and the second with her professional development and work in design.

It should be noted here that Marta Erps-Breuer had design training prior to immigrating to Brazil, and, upon arriving in São Paulo, became part of a certain social group of European immigrants which led to opportunities and positions of prominence for her; or that at the very least, opened the country work spaces to her. Still, it is important to consider the opportunities that she herself made from these beginnings. In this case, gender can help us to understand how this career path developed and how various elements that became a part of her life had an impact in Brazil.

Regarding professional development and work, it is important to consider relationships in the design field that connected
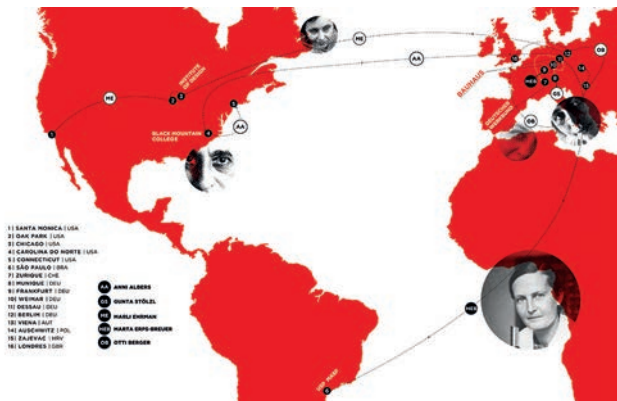
Figure 2. Mapping the immigration routes and movements of *Bauhaus* women as seen in the career path of Marta Erps-Breuer and as documented in the doctoral study *Women and Professionalization in Design* (Almeida 2022). Source: the author. Graphic design: Julia Contreiras.

Erps-Breuer to spaces where she could learn and to the practices she adopted in forging her career. For this, gender is an important analytical lens that helps to understand work relationships in professional practices at that time.

At around the age of 20, Marta Erps-Breuer enrolled in the Bauhaus, and, upon graduating, first came to know Brazil when she visited her brother Ludwig Erps who had immigrated to the country a few years before and was living in the state of São Paulo. Later, in 1926, she married architect and designer Marcel Breuer[02] who had recently become a young master in the Bauhaus carpentry workshop. The couple lived in Dessau,

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02   Regarding Marcel Breuer's career, see more in: Droste (1990).

and then moved to Berlin in 1928. Not long after, Erps-Breuer decided to return to Brazil. In one of the letters written to her former Bauhaus colleague Kurt Schmidt[03], the designer describes the process that led her to choose the city of São Paulo where she would come to live the rest of her life.

> The years 1929 and 1930 were also very bad and [Marcel] Breuer had almost nothing else to do in Berlin. The political situation was getting worse and worse, I simply had no money and no knowledge of the language and came here [to São Paulo]. First, I went to see my brother in the countryside, and then went to the city without knowing a living soul there. Through an advertisement, I went to work with a doctor to make microscope drawings and paintings. (Marta Erps-Breuer, November 5, 1967, author's translation).

Upon settling in the capital city, she got a job at the University of São Paulo (USP) where she was hired as a laboratory technician by professor André Dreyfus, head of the Biology department. In Brazil, Marta Erps-Breuer began her long career producing many articles, drawings and sculptures that illustrated her experiments. Drawing on her training at the Bauhaus weaving workshop, she appears to have found a capacity for experimentation which

03   Kurt Schmidt (1901-1991) was a student at the Bauhaus between 1920 and 1924. Schmidt worked alongside Georg Teltscher and FW Bogler in the conception of Mechanical Ballet. This work was projected onto a wall at the school's first exhibition in 1923. He also designed the dance game *The Man at the Switchboard*, performed on the fifth anniversary of the Weimar Bauhaus in 1924 (Droste, 1990).

Figure 3. Marta Erps-Breuer at the USP Biosciences Institute (on the left) and works that the designer created at USP from the 1930s to the 1970s: Marta's notebooks, c. 1937 (top right); wooden sculpture of the Drosophila fly, 1959 (bottom right). Source: IB-USP Collection.

may have helped her to observe and to systematise her research in the Department of Genetics and Evolutionary Biology at the University of São Paulo where she went on to a pioneering career in genetics (Figure 3). Her primary work focused on the study of two types of flies: *Rhynchosciara* and *Drosophila*.

Regarding her work at USP, Marta Erps-Breuer noted[04], "When I was lucky enough to be admitted to University, I was so excited and enchanted that I decided that I no longer wanted to be just the wife of a genius. I wanted, like you [Kurt Schmidt], to find myself". The beginning of Erps-Breuer's career at USP was an opportunity for her to use her Bauhaus education professionally. In 1940, after five years of working in the Biology Department, the designer became a naturalized Brazilian citizen. By examining the designer's journey from Germany to Brazil, we

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04   In correspondence dated January 1, 1968, written in São Paulo (Brazil).
        Author's translation.

can observe how work relations in collective production, such as in both design and science, contain gaps and absences in the documentation of certain people and their contributions. Next, we will locate the career arc of this designer and scientist within a broader movement and show how it is now both present and absent in the history of design.

Stories outside the Frame: the Historiography and Documentation of Women's Work in Design

Based on the notion of "space-off" from feminist theorist Teresa de Lauretis (de Lauretis 1987), the concept of "stories outside the frame" (Almeida 2022) was developed to interrogate the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion affecting the way design history is told, mechanisms that give rise to a dynamic which is not visible but is nevertheless present in the historiographic records.

Teresa de Lauretis elaborated the term "space-off" using cinematographic theory to explain, "the space not visible in the frame but which can be inferred from what the frame makes visible [...] the *space-off* exists concomitantly with and parallel to the represented space" (de Lauretis 1994, p. 237–238). The author writes about the representations present in scenes from films, implicit representations which are not explicitly part of the scenes but are inferred. This dynamic can be perceived between what can be seen and what cannot be seen in the frame. In other words, there is a space present, a representation, but it is located off the screen. It is part of the scene, but it is not framed within it. This concept elaborated by Teresa de Lauretis allows us to

understand movement that is present and, at the same time, absent in the career paths of the women documented in this study. In the case of the aforementioned research by Almeida (Almeida 2022), these career paths, including that of Marta Erps-Breuer, were not invisible in the design field. These women were present in training and teaching spaces, their work was shown in exhibitions and created in professional practices, and these led to several gaps in their work and at certain time periods. For this reason, the present study situates those career paths, but not as a homogeneous, invisible mass without particular contexts or a variety of subjectivities. It seeks to understand personal and professional trajectories both present and at the same time punctuated by a series of gaps.

Employing the theory of Teresa de Lauretis, the present subject of investigation can move from an invisibility to an existence outside the frame. To this end, the concept of "stories outside the frame" refers to a series of career paths, works and artifacts that contribute to the history of design, but that have been omitted from its historiography. They are both present and absent in a concomitant and parallel dynamic, as explained by De Lauretis (id.). The attempt to stitch together research with this understanding requires highlighting the framing and non-framing of historiography practices by examining personal and professional trajectories, making visible the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion that affect access to design practices, and by examining the way in which the resulting works are documented or left undocumented in design history.

It should be noted that such a study is intended to interrogate the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion involved in historiographical practices, specifically: which trajectories, artifacts and practices are of interest to the field of design? And how are these stories being written? Here, these questions are applied to the trajectory of Marta Erps-Breuer to understand how the hierarchies distinguish design activities and how this structuring impacts the documentation of practices. This is done to reflect on the impediments and obstacles to certain people and practices disregarded in historiographic records.

For a long time Erps-Breuer's professional career path was composed of two apparently disconnected periods. The first was linked to her experience at the Bauhaus, and the second to her work in the Department of Genetics and Evolutionary Biology at the USP Institute of Biosciences. To bridge this gap, a significant effort was made to gather materials scattered throughout various collections. Many of the works that Erps-Breuer created at USP (illustration, photography, ceramics, and sculpture) are drawn with some elements that she learned from the workshops the designer attended during her Bauhaus years.

It is noteworthy that Erps-Breuer's work in Brazil is almost completely unknown in the field of design. Upon starting my research in 2017, it appeared that her output was the work of two completely different people, and that she was not among the São Paulo artists who were putting Bauhaus principals into practice. Furthermore, she had left the conventional design field to work on scientific projects in genetics using her design training as a basis, but did not produce modern design in its more

recognisable forms. Despite this, the ways in which her design education revealed itself in her work at USP was fascinating, especially in her systematisation of observation processes and in representations of the animals she studied.

At the University of São Paulo, Marta Erps-Breuer played a pioneering role in her department's work by publishing a series of articles throughout her almost thirty-five years there. Her work focused primarily on the study of two types of flies: *Drosophila* and *Rhynchosciara*. At this time, USP pioneering genetics research centred on the analysing the genetic material of these flies. The *Drosophila* served as a model organism and the *Rhynchosciara* was chosen for its large chromosomes which facilitated the observation of genetic material called *chromosome puffs*. As both designer and scientist, Erps-Breuer participated in numerous publications, initially with André Dreyfus and later alongside Crodowaldo Pavan[05].

Marta Erps-Breuer's work became known in her department for systematising the two species of fly using illustrations and three-dimensional representations. These studies were fundamental to the institution's prominence in genetics research at that time, and they continued to influence later projects exploring the human genome, stem cells and cancer treatment.

Reflecting on Marta Erps-Breuer's path, two elements allow us to analyse her journey from Germany to Brazil while considering gender as a mode of reading and a critical concept for understanding the asymmetric relationships that permeate both design and its historiography. The first concerns work

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05   See more in: Vilela e Cunha 2006.

relationships in collective activities in both design and science. Using gender as a critical concept, we can regard the mechanisms of hierarchisation and work assignment and how they relate authorship with authority. Determining primary authorship and future documentation raises tensions that permit us to understand how this arrangement may or may not trigger social mechanisms intersecting with gender representation which may then lead to erasures. In Erps-Breuer's case, this concerns both her work at the Bauhaus as well as at the University of São Paulo.

The second element concerns the documentation of work: which parts were recorded and which parts were lost. In addition to Erps-Breuer's scientific work at USP, she continued to produce artworks in São Paulo. Throughout the 1960s, she corresponded with former Bauhaus colleagues to arrange sending her work to Germany for exhibition. Although her paintings and collages produced were never shown publicly, they were known to a limited group of friends and colleagues in Brazil. Corresponding with Kurt Schmidt in 1967, Erps-Breuer described the art she had produced in recent years and told him that she had sent 40 paintings together with drawings from her Bauhaus years to Germany with the aim of participating in the school's 50th anniversary exhibition which took place there the following year. Less than two months later, Erps-Breuer wrote to him again noting that the artworks had been sent via airplane, but that they had been immediately returned by the school. Faced with this rejection, she wrote to Ise Gropius:

> I can't understand it: writing a book [likely referring here to Hans M. Wingler's "The Bauhaus: Weimar, Dessau, Berlin, Chicago"] about former Bauhaus members during the American phase. This cannot be true. A minority is from the American phase. Gunta [Stölzl] wrote in her last letter correctly. We should write to find out what happened to the Bauhaus members. How these people's lives were massacred. How many wonderful things Gunta produces to this day. […] Not everyone had contacts. Not everyone found a [safe place to store their works] or had a patron. The very talented Rudi [Rudolf] Baschant passed away in misery, as a ticket seller in an art gallery. Does the Bauhaus book reflect what people do today? What was stolen from them in terms of ideas, could it be that in one of the books those who died miserably, those killed in combat, the missing, the lonely and sick and those from the eastern zone are remembered? (Marta Erps-Breuer, May 7, 1967, author's translation)

We consider this excerpt to be very important as it helps us to study the various inclusions and exclusions in fabricating the hegemonic history of design. It also allows us to reflect on a broad field of untold stories, not just of women, but of many Bauhaus alumni, and to question the power asymmetries permeating design practice and its historiography.

Based on Marta Erps-Breuer's professional journey and the elements discussed here, we can examine the gaps and absences in the documented work of certain people in the design field. Moreover, we can illuminate the very constitution of the field canon which is based on a language and on aesthetic elements that are supposedly neutral and universal, but which are in fact constructed through a mask, an ideology, of universality and neutrality. For us, Erps-Breuer's journey serves as an example in confronting challenges that continue to exist today, and it leads us in the necessary work of rethinking historiography framing and non-framing from a perspective of equity in the practice of documentation.

Final Considerations

This text explores a dynamic double function between, in Teresa de Lauretis' terms, what is visible and what is hidden. The concept employed here of "stories outside the frame" (Almeida 2022) is not exactly a re-use of the term "space-off" from de Lauretis (de Lauretis 1987), but rather an interpretation and elaboration of its own which situates and analyses the personal and professional trajectories of women in the design field, including that of Marta Erps-Breuer.

Erps-Breuer's career path allows us to reflect on the opportunities for professional growth in design, and also to examine the ways in which these paths are located both inside and outside of documentation and the hegemonic historical narrative. Concealment and legitimisation in this context reveal the

mechanisms impacting the ways in which the history of design is created and told, as well as those social groups included in it. Moreover, using gender as an analytical lens for reading the history of design helps us to understand the asymmetrical power relations that permeate historiography and in questioning the elements that participate in the consolidation of a collective memory of the design field.

There is no way to think about design practice and its narratives dissociated from social, economic and political perspectives. Design necessarily has to be understood as a process of collective representation in which artefacts and practices intersect with social relations. Therefore, it is essential for feminist criticism to question the discourse, narratives and representations that structure design and especially the alleged neutrality and universality which modern design purports to demonstrate.

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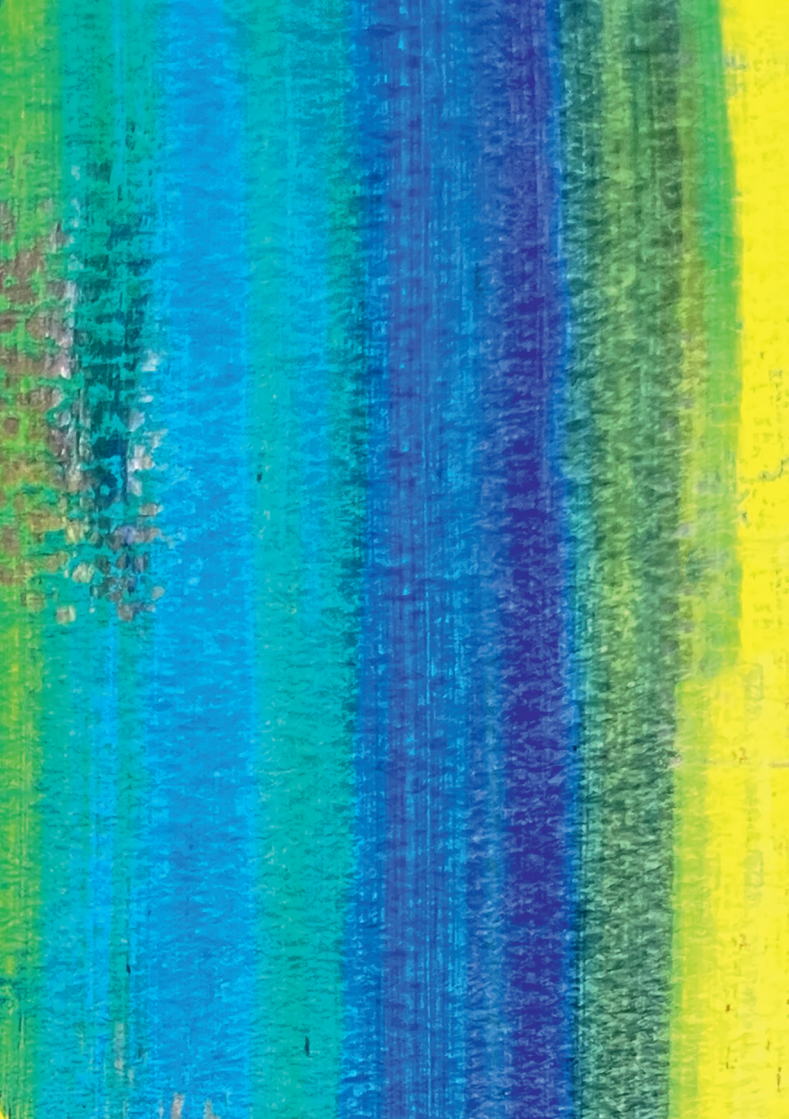
Raquel Noronha

Decolonising Things, Recreating Worlds: A Feminist Design Critique in Cannibalised Contexts

Provotype

In the context of participatory design, especially those approaches that engage with the socio-material reality of the world, as presented by Binder *et al.* (2015; 2011), it is urgent to reflect on *design things* (Binder *et al.* 2011; Björgvinsson, Ehn and Hillgren 2012) from a critical and speculative concerning the issue of participation itself: Do the tools we create for conducting design research actually promote equity in participation?

In design, socio-technical reality is a means for reflection and problematisation in dialogue with the fields of sociology, anthropology and philosophy since the early days of participatory design. Prototypes, or, as they are specifically called – *provotypes* – carry within them the assumptions and worldviews of those who design them. It is the point I would like to stress: based

on diversity, how do we establish communication and community involving the participants in this parliament of lines that establish things in the material world, dissenting and unequal worldviews, in the context of equity?

The idea of the *provotype* seeks to promote a provocation through an experience. It resembles the word prototype because of the connotation behind visualising an idea concretely. For Morgensen (1992), the *provotype* aims to promote investigation and analysis through practice and, from there, to develop new practices, solutions and paths through design.

A *provotype* becomes a powerful resource for elucidating memory because it can promote collaboration, participation and horizontalisation of power relations. It is a good way of connecting with materiality since it triggers the evocative process of remembrance and can project the future. In participatory design projects that adopt an anthropological approach, the socio-material reality represented by *provotypes* can create alternative worlds, highlighting dissent and exposing the issues of racism and sexism identified in our field research with maroon (quilombola) communities. From this perspective, I interweave dialogues about design practices and their methodological tools with the reflections of Latin American feminist intellectuals within the framework of decolonial feminism.

Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, a Bolivian anthropologist of Aymara origin, says that the context of coloniality constitutes new centres for the reproduction of power at the heart of the former colonies, based on learning about previous colonial domination. The author argues that when dominant discourses co-opt the struggles of subaltern populations, there is a process of

"conditioned inclusion, a cut-off and second-class citizenship that moulds subaltern imaginaries and identities into the role of ornaments or anonymous masses that theatricalise their own identity." (Rivera Cusicanqui 2010, 60). Moreover, under the aegis of multiculturalism, a smokescreen is created over an actual proposal for participation and a place to speak in society.

On this subject, Lélia Gonzalez (2020), a Brazilian historian, philosopher and activist, calls Brazilian social neurosis the condition that denies a place to black women based on racism and sexism, questioning feminisms that propose the emancipation of *all* women.

Within the framework of this decolonial critique, I propose a debate on how this idea of place can be an emancipatory path for designs that seek participation, and not its colonial staging, a possibility of conditioned participation that limits the recognition of differences and prevents the heart of the design process from being activated by people in vulnerable conditions.

In the research realities I encounter, living in Brazil's poorest state[01], Maranhão, I could collaborate with communities of black and maroon women who make their living from nature as gatherers and artisans. This experience allows for an in-depth dialogue with a time and space that differs from *mainstream* design realities, aligned with the capitalist and patriarchal paradigms.

In participatory design practices such as these, through a design-anthropology (Izidio, Farias and Noronha 2022) linked to a decolonial approach, I identify terms familiar to the participants. The research practice of building data does not only conceive

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01   Maranhão currently has 15% of its population living below the poverty line, which, according to the World Bank, represents a monthly income of less than R$168.00 in 2020.

craft-making as their material livelihood but, moreover, as an ontological construction, from a theoretical-methodological *locus* that I conceptualise as a common plan (Noronha 2018). The common plan is the space of the composition of communication, of the community, of the communal, characterised not by stability and agreement but by tension, by the border space of friction and clashes over narratives other than those pre-established by the dominant world system.

In her most recent work the American critical theorist Nancy Fraser reflects on the multidimensionality of the capitalist problem and its impact on our planet. In her argument she questions how capitalism cannibalises the planet, life, and care and how it is positioned far beyond the role of an economic system. However, according to the author, there is a "functional imbrication", which involves commodified and non-commodified elements and this, for her, "is part of capitalism's DNA" (Fraser 2024, 26).

Along with Fraser, I realise that we are experiencing a constitution of the world based on liberalism's principles that override other ways of being in the world. Therefore, the debate is how design practices can contribute to equity, understanding such practices from the materiality of this place of speech as a border.

Design, as both a discipline and a field of knowledge that shapes the material aspects of our world, serves as a science of making that gradually contributes to this cannibalistic ontology. Based on the problematisation of decolonial feminisms, which I define and contextualise in the next section, I will then debate how design research can approach participation that guarantees the status of participation, and not just the affirmation of

identities which, as Rivera Cusicanqui (2010) states, is a cate-
gory co-opted by capitalism. I therefore intend to discuss how
it is possible to imagine and realise equity in feminist design
processes based on situationality[02] and deep participation.

Decoloniality, Feminism and Design

This section presents the debate on decolonial feminisms and
their agendas and how I perceive the possibilities of impact of
this approach in the field of participatory design and design
anthropology that I have been proposing, based on overcoming
colonial traps (Noronha 2018; 2022; 2024).

Various authors such as Ochy Curiel (2020), María Lugones
(2008), Diana Gómez Correal (2014) and Adriana Guzmán (2019)
have built the conceptualisation of decolonial feminism. I will limit
myself to some of these lines without intending to simplify but
find the general stripes of the debate to establish the relationship
with the design field and its participatory practices.

The first one deals with overcoming discursive universality.
Adriana Guzmán, a Bolivian writer and activist of Aymara origin,
says that European and American feminisms are not capable
of contemplating the experiences of Abya Yala and that the
violence suffered as a result of colonisation generates bodies
and struggles that are different from those of countries in the

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02   I chose the term *situationality* in dialogue with Veysel Kiliç's (2007) approach
     to linguistics, which treats situationality as an element of language. I adopt this
     perspective, applying it to design. The term also resonates with Participatory
     Design authors such as Jesper and Robertson (2013) and Halse (2008), who
     use *situatedness* to emphasize the localized nature of the practices they discuss.

global north. The universality of such discourses is colonial and, therefore, not neutral. She also criticises the agenda of such universalising feminisms, which claim their origins in the French Revolution and their bourgeois origins. And she says: "Finally, thanks to transnational extractivist capitalism, the territory today called Bolivia has no sea, our feminism has no waves, we build ourselves from the land that sustains and feeds us" (Guzmán 2019, 9).

Along these lines, Ochy Curiel, an Afro-Dominican anthropologist, attacks the position of postcolonial feminists, who are generally positioned in academic spaces and have little involvement in social movements. The author starts from the differentiation between the concept of postcoloniality, which she alludes to as a different epistemological and geopolitical axis. Their origins are based in considerations of the United States and Europe as a reflection of the decolonisation of India and the Middle East. Curiel states that it is not possible to anchor the analyses produced in the material realities and concrete struggles that are waged in different places (Curiel, 2020).

In this way, we can observe another important line, which is situationality. This is an essential concept for participatory design, but it is rarely implemented as a practice due to the field's commitment of universalising practices and paradigms. The reproducibility of discourses and the coloniality of knowledge, a concept by Walter Mignolo (2017), highlights the epistemological submission of colonised peoples to Eurocentric knowledge and ways of constructing the world. Consequently, assumed as the only basis for an ontological constitution, the coloniality of being, is a fundamental reflection for the debate I am proposing here.

This condition of coloniality leads us to the observation, cited by various authors of decolonial feminisms, that modernity/coloniality is based on racism, sexism, and capitalism. The complex interweaving of elements that feed off each other and strengthen each other in constructing the dominant cosmology gives a certain group legitimacy in subjugating others through the hierarchisation of beings and knowledge. This condition is fundamental for discussing possible designs in territories of profound social inequalities.

The harmful effects of coloniality can be seen in the relationships that occur under the aegis of colonial difference. Rivera Cusicanqui (Rivera Cusicanqui 2010) tells us. about colonial co-optation. Identity, the body, participation, and the understanding of social wellbeing and sustainability are categories co-opted and domesticated to cater to capitalist extractivists.

Curiel takes the debate further by also criticising the co-opting of the concept of intersectionality, which, in her view, "tends towards a liberal multiculturalism that wants to recognise differences by including them in a different model, but which does not question the reasons for the need for this inclusion. In other words, it is defined from the Eurocentric Western paradigm." (Curiel 2020, 133).

The author goes deeper into the discussion, thinking about what a feminist methodology might look like. In the same vein, Gonzalez (2020) criticises the production of science and the motivations behind the identification of the colonised with the coloniser, even today, only now in the context of coloniality. To do this, she invites us to think about the notions of consciousness and memory:

> "Consciousness is the place of ignorance, conceal-
> ment, alienation, forgetfulness and even knowledge
> […]. On the other hand, we see memory as the not
> knowing that knows, this place of inscriptions that
> restore a history that has not been written, the
> place where truth emerges, this truth that is struc-
> tured as fiction. Consciousness excludes what
> memory includes. Hence, as the place of rejection,
> consciousness expresses itself as the dominant
> discourse (or effect of that discourse) in a given
> culture, concealing memory by imposing what it,
> consciousness, affirms as the truth." (ibid. 2020, 79).

Gonzalez continues in this dialectics between memory and
conscience, arguing that the former has its cunning and, there-
fore, speaks through the hesitations and gaps of the discourse
of conscience. It finds loopholes and emerges. When it comes
to the black population, conscience works to forget, but from
everyday experience, memory fortuitously appears in speak-
ing and positioning oneself in the world. Here, I emphasise the
importance of experience. It is fundamental as a decolonial
practice for designing others.

     Thus, using this framework woven from decolonial intel-
lectuals and (always) activists, I build the argument on the poli-
tics of recognition and redistribution and the need to overcome
dichotomies in order to achieve equity in design processes. To
this end, I review a classic text by Frazer (2001) to conceptualise
equity and its reflection in the design field.

Overcoming the Colonial Construction of Knowledge

In Fraser's critical theory, the author seeks to overcome the dichotomy between recognition and redistribution. In her celebrated text "Redistribution or Recognition? Class and Status in Contemporary Society" (Fraser 2001), the author articulates the impossibility of overcoming injustice based on the divorce between the cultural politics of difference and the social politics of economic equality. Throughout the essay, the philosopher argues that it is unsustainable to maintain this separation, which tends towards a polarisation of discourses between economicism on the one hand and culturalism on the other.

In her theorising, Fraser (op. cit) argues that incorporating discourses and practices of recognition based solely on identities is a trap; for her, recognition policies would be restricted to identity policies. She argues that recognition is not the identity itself of an individual or group but the status of individual members of groups that can interact socially.

Focusing on identity, Fraser fears the reification of identities in the sense of an exacerbated performatisation being visible and recognisable. Inappropriate recognition does not mean the depreciation and deformation of the group's identity. Instead, it means social subordination, in that inappropriately recognised individuals are prevented from *participating as equals in social life*. Repairing such injustice requires a politics of recognition, but this does not mean identity politics (Fraser 2002, 10).

This proposition of centralising *status* rather than identity in order to talk about recognition is of particular interest to my argument because of the need to talk about the situationality of design processes. In contemporary times, we can see the friction, but not yet the overcoming, of design paradigms that range from well-intentioned welfarism to Eurocentric developmentalism, which has underpinned the design and implementation processes of educational institutions in Brazil and various parts of the world. In an analysis of the virtuous scale of design (Figure 1) presented by Patrocinio (2015), these paradigms would be "design for" and "design in", in which there was little participation in design processes, all based on Eurocentric, white, patriarchal and Christian models.
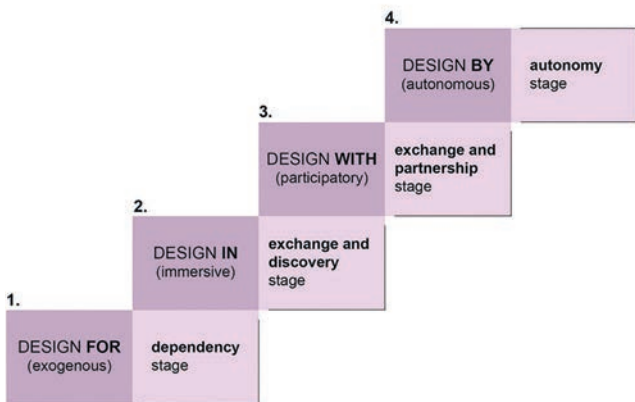
Figure 1: Adaptation of the virtuous design scale (Patrocinio 2015, 69).

"Design with" still refers to Figure 1, which follows the paradigmatic overcoming of modern design based on the colonial and positivist heritage of science, rationality, and objectivity. Although it's a glimmer of participation, and it can happen in a conditioned and illusory way, as Rivera Cusicanqui (2010) has argued, it is an opening so that a legitimate place for participation can be established.

When decolonial practices question the processes of co-opting categories that are important to struggles for recognition, such as identity and even intersectionality[03]. They call for the rupture of a discursive order grounded in the Western capitalist and patriarchal colonial imaginary.

Participatory design, which has aimed for democracy as the ultimate goal of the mediation process among the involved parties since its inception, reinforces the preservation of human centrality by utilising co-opted categories that enable limited participation in the design process.

In the tools we have built to enable participation, even a simple questionnaire can be enough to annihilate participation itself, making the status of those involved as participants in social interaction impossible, as Fraser argues. Thus, in her words, "the application of the status model requires an examination of institutionalised patterns of cultural value to ascertain their effects on the relative position of social actors" (Fraser 2001, 10).

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03   Orchy Curiel relates the concept of intersectionality, developed by African American Kimberlé Crenshaw, to a liberal and modern proposal. Her criticism is that the concept does little to problematise the production of differences in women's experiences, especially racialised and impoverished women, tending towards a liberal multiculturalism that desires recognition but does not question the reasons for the need for this inclusion (Curiel 2020, 132).

This proposition questions how design research processes, to a minor extent, and Western scientific research, to a greater extent, are thought of.

The critical and speculative approach, operating issues of gender, race, class, and sexuality as parameters to question the status of the participants, seems to be a suitable method for questioning categories and the socio-material reality of the world we live in, understanding this world as diverse and profoundly unequal.

Curiel (2020) proposes a decolonial feminist methodology, which gives us a clue to various questions that can be asked of our practices and tools and expands the discussion to the field of design, as I propose with my additions to her quote below:

> "What are the points of view in feminist [design] research? When are we imposing gender in [design] research and epistemological processes when we study racialised women, especially black and Indigenous women? How much are we reproducing the coloniality of power, knowledge and being when we turn race, class, and sexuality into mere analytical or descriptive categories so that we fail to establish a relationship between these realities and the modern-colonial capitalist world order [in our design processes]?" (Curiel 2020, 133, comments added by me).

In this sense, below I present experiences of building knowledge through design with maroon women who seek to displace

status, as proposed by Fraser (2001), and also denaturalise the place of black women, as proposed by Gonzalez (2020), and from a racial division of space, challenging geopolitics of knowledge, as proposed by Curiel (2020).

Building Equity in Design Processes

As mentioned earlier, I'm starting from a participatory, anthropologically oriented position, attentive to diversity and decoloniality, due to my position as a researcher in this field: a woman located in a peripheral university in the poorest state in Brazil, with the second largest population of (identifiably) recognised maroon communities, most of them without the land redistribution that comes from agrarian reform.

Under these conditions, it is inconceivable to carry out any design process without properly problematising this situation of profound social, economic and cultural differences in dialogue with the theorists mentioned in this paper.

The case I am presenting here was born out of concern after years of research with women artisans, mapping their production processes, ancestral relationships with the land, the territory, and the dialogue between them and development agencies and state policies. Throughout our research (Noronha 2011; 2020; Noronha and Guimarães 2017), we have identified a correlation between craft production and the analytical category of empowerment. The current discourse of development agencies and state bodies is that there is a character of empowerment in craft production, as it allows women emancipation,

access to education and productive inclusion, relating such production, of a situated and ancestral nature, to a growing tourist market in the state of Maranhão.

Based on my experiences in the field, as well as those of my undergraduate and master's students in participatory design and its related approaches – such as anthropological design and critical and speculative design – I have begun to question these hegemonic discourses. The region where these communities are located is a conflicted one, as it is a place of international greed. It is an excellent place for rocket launches due to its proximity to the equator. At the end of the 1970s, under the military regime in Brazil, a state discourse encouraged the installation of the Alcântara Launch Centre (CLA) due to the characterisation of this space as a *demographic void*. Alcântara, located 90 km from the capital, São Luís, is the municipality with the most significant number of maroon communities recognised by the Brazilian state as such. This vulnerable situation implies a game of visibility and invisibility of these populations in the territory in the face of colonial desires to implement and expand the CLA, as reported in my doctoral thesis (Noronha 2020).

To strengthen their hold on their territories, various maroon communities are using strategies to strengthen their identities, emphasising their craft practices, dances and religious manifestations as a means of making their identities more explicit to recognition policies, falling into the trap observed by Fraser (2001) as previously mentioned – the reification of identities and the subordination of struggles to the cultural sphere.

After this brief contextualization, in the context of territorial expropriation and the discourses surrounding the productive

inclusion of maroon women through craft production – within a capitalist logic of production that differs significantly in rhythms, temporalities, and objectives from ancestral craft production – we embark on an investigation that aims to problematise the categories and characteristics related to the concept of empowerment.

The starting point was to identify the UN's universalist measurement parameters based on Western, patriarchal and capitalist concepts of health and wellbeing, economic and political participation and access to education. We used the World Economic Forum Report (WEF, 2014) to relate these parameters and identify how they were characterised. Schools, hospitals, trade unions and formal jobs were all *loci* related to metrics for female empowerment.

Recognizing that the category of female empowerment is linked to the feminisms of the global North – which the authors I invited to contribute to this text critique – and that this perspective may render the cosmologies and worldviews of the very women involved in this issue unfeasible, we initiated the design experiment. In the tradition of participatory design, this experiment utilizes a socio-material apparatus that facilitates social conversation, co-creation, and the imagination of futures.

In the view of pioneering researchers (Binder *et al.* 2011) design things are assemblies in which decisions are made. In a previous study (Noronha 2018), I reflected on the pitfalls that the construction of design things can offer the production of autonomy in traditional communities – and here I include the traditional apparatus of participatory design, such as games, cards, co-creation, and role-playing tools, the use of materials

to stimulate creativity, among others, which here I choose to call *provotypes*.

So, starting with the construction of *provotypes*, our team of researchers began the process of discussion and initial identification of how the WEF categories were received by the women of Santa Maria, the first community where we researched. They work with traditional Buriti fibre weaving, from which yarn is extracted to produce bags, tablecloths, small necessities and cases. The first *provotype* was built on our questions: how do the artisans of Santa Maria perceive the WEF categories?

The *provotype* comprised 16 images for each category (economic participation, political participation, access to education and health and wellbeing). These images were based on references in the WEF report and on images we had previously collected in the communities during field research while mapping craft production (Noronha 2011).

The *provotype* consisted of laying out the 16 images on a table and asking the craftswoman to choose three images most closely related to one of the four parameters. After this first choice, the artisan was asked to choose three more images. She had to justify her choice of image. The images were placed on a board the research team had mapped out. Each place on the board corresponded to generic images associated with Western imagery and closer to the WEF's parameters of empowerment; situated images referring to various communities in the state of Maranhão; and hyper-situated images referring to Santa Maria itself. As the artisan chose, the researcher positioned the image on the board, relating it to its situational context (Figure 2). Each stage was photographed to identify the choices made by

Figure 2: Identifying other references to Western parameters at Santa Maria. (credit: NIDA)

each craftswoman, with a record of their assembly of the image board. At the end, we compared all the photographs and ana-lysed the recordings. Both quantitatively and qualitatively the situated and hyper-situated images were the most frequently used. After using the *provotype*, we realised our impossibility of overcoming colonial categories with generic images and con-structing a *provotype* outside the community.

In the speeches of these women, we identified paradoxes about the consequences of craft production fostered by the tourist trade: on the one hand, it allowed access, especially to the possibility of raising children, and on the other hand, the overload, the labour pain caused by the high productivity of orders and commitments to shops and companies that do not

take into account the slower, seasonal rhythm of craft produc-
tion, imposed on these women. Empowerment or imprison-
ment? This question gave the title to Raiama Lima Portela's *(in
memoria)* master's thesis, which specified and problematised
the role of the *provotype* in the field. After this first experience
we carried out the same experiment with the same *provotype* in
two more maroon communities of women artisans to broaden
our reflections on activating and re-signifying the official cate-
gories of female empowerment for the WEF.[04]

In short, this first experience in the field revealed some
colonial traps, which we could not overcome, considering the
universality of our point of view, taking the questions raised by
Curiel (2020) to construct a feminist methodology. We then
set out to overcome the lack of situationality and together
with two undergraduate students, to build the tool in the field
with the women babassu coconut collectors in the village of
São Caetano.

The comparative element between the experiences was
the WEF's four parameters for empowerment, and what we dif-
ferentiated was how the *provotype* itself was constructed. We
built it in and with the community based on the women's un-
derstanding of these parameters. It is important to emphasise
that we went out as a group to take photographs, visited the
spaces in the community that were alluded to as representative,
and deepened our understanding of why it was some images re-
markably situated and not others of Western capitalist common
sense, that identified these women's perceptions and desires

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04   The experience is summarised in the documentary Codesign and Empowerment,
      available on YouTube: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=REpTsAYGpa8*.

about their own autonomy (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Co-creating local values for global categories with women of São Caetano. (Credit: NIDA)

This was a turning point for us researchers, who identified the concept of autonomy as more appropriate and pertinent than empowerment. We did not use this word in any of the communities so as not to make it an external category since I realised that women never mentioned the word empowerment. It was an unknown word.

After building the prototype in São Caetano, we moved on to the dynamics of using the Coconut Game about the food that sustains and moves the community, the babassu coconut. The game used the community's spaces, such as the field (associated with economic participation), the residents' association

(associated with political participation), the community school (associated with access to education) and the vegetable garden (associated with health) to be the points of arrival after the various questions and critical situations that we used for the *game-provotype* (Figure 4). The speculative character emerged as the question to stimulate decision-making critical and speculative positioning in the face of the daily challenges we identified during our stay in the community[05].

At the end of this journey, we distanced ourselves from a specific tradition of participatory design – those that occur in contexts where social welfare is paramount. Conducting design research in environments of profound vulnerability, such as the communities we studied, presents a challenge that necessitates building a research community around the diversity of perspectives involved and remaining constantly aware of the power dynamics at play. As presented here, the question of the situationality of research tools cannot be left out of this debate, which implies the construction of epistemologies that make equity possible. In this sense, the subjective construction of *provotypes* can be a way of overcoming the colonial vision that prioritises academic points of view over the visions of the black women with whom we research.

Figure 4: Playing the Coconut game with women at São Caetano. (Credit: NIDA)

Final thoughts

I return here to Gonzalez's (Gonzalez 2020) reflections on the place of black women in contemporary society as a reflection of colonial places but not a repetition. I understand the design experience narrated here as an exercise in overcoming coloniality toward research that contemplates equity.

The socio-material reality proposed as a means of carrying out research through design establishes materiality for the constitution of places of participation, in this case, of maroon women who are black, vulnerable and not very visible in their status, following Fraser's theorisation (Fraser 2001).

Participation, as observed in the reflections of the decolonial intellectuals I engage with in the text, is not something that is given but is often partially authorised by those who hold a monopoly on discourse and power practices. We could have visited Rivera Cusicanqui's (Rivera Cusicanqui 2020) conditioned inclusion when we propose an a *priori provotype* constructed only by us as researchers. We realised its colonising nature in the field and questioned our roles in constructing the common plan.

This recovery of mistakes and successes, exposing the path of the research, is vital because we are dealing with people who do not have their status recognised in society and who, as I presented in the history of the Alcântara region, were officially seen as a *demographic void* that made them invisible to the Brazilian state, by the Brazilian state itself.

Our research serves as a case study for thinking about the possibilities of participation that research orientated by decoloniality in design can offer or deny to its participants when it does not consider the community's communal values. Temporality and situational factors are among the issues and challenges to be debated in the research, alongside the importance of the socio-material construction of design tools in light of this critical and feminist literature.

As Curiel (Curiel 2020) proposes, asking the right questions is a fundamental step towards resolving asymmetries and building the necessary places of enunciation. When prototyping in the field of design to enable design processes does not take into account the time and space in which it is directed, I perceive the strengthening of the positivist, patriarchal, Western, and capitalist paradigms, which ignore other temporalities and relationalities.

When discussing rapid methodologies, I use design thinking as an example of a co-creation process that aims to engage others in conversation without genuinely including them. This oversight is critical when constructing an ethic of valuing life. My work has focused on developing this ethic through biocentric design (Noronha and Rezende, 2024), which emphasizes the importance of subjectivity in research.

The homogenisation of differences and a specific wave of research focused on communities are indicators of colonial violence. This violence limits the visibility of vulnerable people, especially Black and impoverished women, while prioritising a colonial representation of their identities. This issue extends beyond design and reflects a broader problem in Western positivist research, which fails to recognise the subjectivity of researchers.

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Felix Kosok

Queer Masculinities in Design

For a long time, our world was designed for men. In the recent political shift towards the right in Europe, masculinity is a central theme in the rhetorics of the new right, reinforcing the normative gender binary that queer studies challenged. In this text, starting from a subjective perspective on masculinity, I'll explore the potential of queer masculinity in design to create possibilities for being otherwise. Even though queer masculinity doesn't offer a utopian model outside of societal norms and the consumerist construction of identity in capitalism, it nevertheless provides an opportunity to open up equal opportunities and agency for all "men". Design can celebrate and explore queer masculinities and pave the way for reimagining masculinity in ways that are more fluid, diverse, and reflective of contemporary queer experiences.

The rules of the game

Just because our world is designed for men, I am in the position to be the subject of this world and not accidentally also here. Just because I was born a biological man, for the longest time, this world revolved around me. But instead of giving me the *#main-characterenergy* this lucky constellation of circumstances was supposed to provide, it put me under a lot of pressure. As soon as I discovered my divergent sexual orientation, my inferiority complex became my biggest motivator in life. I was pushed to the sidelines, forced to observe the playing field, trying to understand the rules of this game called *masculinity* just to make sure that I would still be able to fit in. Maybe because of these complexes, I became a designer in the end: to prove to this patriarchal world that I can master these bodily techniques of improvement and ultimately design myself (Kosok 2021).

What role does design play in shaping spaces to explore divergent, queer forms of masculinity? How is masculinity itself designed? How can it become queer? And what would be the added value of the possibility of queer masculinity, not just for design, but for society as a whole?

To give some context, I grew up in the 1990s in Germany. A decade marked by the release of Judith Butler's seminal work *Gender Trouble* in 1990. Butler challenged conventional understandings of the relation of gender, sex, and sexuality and asserted that gender is performative and, therefore, socially constructed. Gender, including stereotypical masculinity, is the game that I was observing, something that has to be proven with every new move by following the game's unwritten rules.

To some degree, we are all little gender design projects before we are even born, and our parents start decorating our nurseries in pink or blue (Canli 2016). A common misunderstanding of Butler is that this negates the existence of sex and makes gender something artificial.

On the contrary: "To claim that gender is constructed is not to assert its illusoriness or artificiality, but rather to contend that it is real only to the extent that it is performed" (Butler 1990, 43). Social norms are the invisible glue that holds us together. Their reality is their stickiness, which also applies to gender. Building on feminist theory, Butler's *Gender Trouble* describes a way to cheat at this game: by playing it slightly differently, exaggerating the norms. In repetition, the rules themselves can become visible and, therefore, malleable (ibid., 189). It was a get-out-of-gender-jail card.

The progress of the 1990s wasn't just cultural but legal as well. The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the reunification of Germany brought about the supposed triumph of capitalism and the abolition of §175 of the German Penal Code in 1994. Originating in 1871, the paragraph criminalised penetrative sexual acts between persons of the male sex. It thus enabled the persecution of gay men, who seemingly were a more significant threat to a patriarchal society than lesbians. Admittedly, since the 1970s, the article only concerned sexual acts with minors in West Germany and was thus limited to the protection of children (Kraushaar 1997).

Nevertheless, the specificity of masculinity remained and still emphasised this traditional fear of penetration. On May 17 1990, the World Health Organization removed homosexuality

from the International Classification of Diseases. In February 2001, Germany legalised civil partnerships between persons of the same sex, followed by the legalisation of same-sex marriage in 2017. The Netherlands beat us to that, being the first country to legalise same-sex marriage in 2001.

The state of manliness

In my designerly naivety, I saw continuous progress and improvement with every iteration of our society's hegemonic and material design process. It looked as if the world had been designed for men, but it didn't have to stay that way. However, in recent years, the debate about gender has been rhetorically redesigned into a threat to a binary gender norm in general and to masculinity in particular. What happened? "Why would anyone be afraid of gender?" asks Butler in her recent publication, more than 30 years after the release of Gender Trouble (Butler 2024).

There is no easy explanation for this conservative backlash on a global scale over the last decade. From an intersectional perspective on gender, which has been at the core of queer studies challenging "normativity" through "multidimensionality" (Laufenberg, Trott 2023), one would have to consider that the supposed victory of capitalism wasn't a smooth transition into utopia at all. Globalisation has exacerbated the inequalities on our planet, causing further social decline of the working classes, creating the gig economy through deindustrialisation and digitisation, causing forced migration from the global South and environmental disasters that are destroying our natural resources.

Ensuing international financial crises further accelerated this process.

According to Butler, gender has been turned into a "phantasma", absorbing and incorporating many of the fears associated with the uncertainty of the current state of things (Butler 2024). This rhetorical phantasma can then be used to shield off progressive politics to address these challenges: The pope, Italian Prime Minister Georgia Meloni, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Jair Bolsonaro and Vladimir Putin, among others, agree that "gender ideology" is a terrorist threat to the natural, the traditional and/or divine order of things – and therefore to everyone (ibid).

However, for the case of a threat to masculinity specifically, I want to focus on Germany. On 18 November 2015, during the European migrant crisis, Björn Höcke, one of the worst leaders of the partly fascist party AfD, began his speech at a rally in Erfurt with the words: "The big problem is that Germany, that Europe has lost its masculinity. We must rediscover our masculinity because only [then] will we become manly, and only when we become manly will we become capable of defending ourselves." (Berg 2016) Höcke is not afraid of gender but rather fears for one specific gender: the masculinity of the German nation. He is not the first politician to make the body politic – the metaphor of the state being a physical body – explicitly male. The image we make ourselves of it is that of a male body. The stereotypical qualities of masculinity lend the metaphor its persuasiveness: strength, independence and, most importantly, impenetrability. Moira Gatens argues that an image of the modern body politic, for example, on the cover of Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*, is based on a masculine body, reflecting fantasies about its capacities and

values (Gatens 1996). The power of the image is transferred to all men of the state. An idealised form of masculinity grants men a share of the patriarchal power. An idealised form of masculinity that must be protected. But against what?

Pragraph 175 gives us a clue. The integrity of masculinity must be protected from the penetration of foreign bodies at all costs through what has been labelled as the "masculine protest" against perceived feminine weakness, an "over-compensation in the direction of aggression and restless striving for triumphs." (Conell 2005, 16). In *The Authoritarian Personality*, Theodor W. Adorno suggests a double bind of submission under the authority of a "stern and distant father (…) as well as the ideal of aggressive and rugged masculinity and a compensatory striving for inde-pendence" (Adorno *et al*. 1950, 387). An idealised man needs to compensate for his weaknesses through impenetrability and independence. Passivity and receptiveness are regarded as ef-feminate. We can read all these qualities into Höcke's speech. The masculine body politic needs to be strong and defend itself against the intrusion of the *wave* of strangers. This metaphor is dehumanising and implies femininity in its reference to the ebbs and flows of water (Taylor 2021). It operates within the logic of us vs. them, creates an outside and an inside, and even demands strengthening the boundaries that separate us. Masculinity is at the centre of this right-wing rhetoric.

Queer masculinities have historically destablised this ideal image and have reclaimed and reshaped the concept of masculinity. From the outset, they are an inclusive project, as they try to expand and transform the idea of masculinity and challenge prviliges. Historically queer masculinities faced a lot

of adversity doing that, so most, if not all, examples of queer masculinities in design came from queer subcultures. I want to look at two design examples: the graphic design of a magazine from the early 2000s and a contemporary approach to the graphic design of a festival. Both creatively carve out a space for the exploration of different as well as queer concepts of masculinities and have a strong sense of community embedded within their designs.

On pink pages

Zines have always played a significant role in queer subcultures, as mainstream media and culture lacked presentations of homosexuality and queerness. Zines offered undisguised access to these underrepresented cultures and, as a media format, could be interpreted as inherently queer (Klein 2014; Wilde 2014).

BUTT magazine was published between 2001 and 2011. It quickly became a seminal publication within queer culture, known for its unapologetic celebration and unfiltered portrayal of gay life, sexuality, and art. With its raw aesthetic, candid interviews, and intimate photography of mainly young men, BUTT has consistently pushed the boundaries of how queer male identity is represented in media. The magazine's minimalist yet bold design, exclusively using pink paper and only the bold version of the font *Compacta* for headlines and *American Typewriter* for its body text, reflects its ethos of authenticity, the immediacy of its community and rebellion against glossy mainstream gay culture. It was first published in Amsterdam with

Fig. 1, Cover of BUTT Magazine 5

the subtitle "faggot magazine", reappropriating a derogatory term for homosexual men.

Peter Rehberg discusses BUTT in "Hipster Porn" in the context of the post-pornographic culture of the 2000s as a paradigmatic shift in the understanding and representation of sex, gender and desire (2022). It is within this specific historical context that he situates BUTT's aesthetics and their subsequent popularisation. Style, according to Dick Hebdige, "does have its moment, its brief outrageous spectacle, and in our study of style in subculture we should focus on that moment" (Hebdige 1979, 130). And even though BUTT's style has been popularised and commercialised, Rehberg sees in their portrayal of gay, hairy, mostly naked, male bodies in often casual situations a rebellion against popular gay visual culture and pornography of the 1980s and 1990s: "[BUTT] tells us what an alternative to the narrative of assimilation and homonormativity looks like, what subjective and social potentials are to be found in a sexual culture when it is not limited to a private activity or as a compensatory fantasy for a heteronormative social reality" (Rehberg 2022, 9).

To better understand BUTT's brief moment of outrageous spectacle and the transformative potential of its stylish aesthetics, we have to look at its context. Rehberg references two aesthetic factors that influenced BUTT's cultural significance: It reflects the aesthetic convergence of 1970s visual strategies, their resurgence following the AIDS crisis, and the impact of the digital media shift around 2000 on amateur pornography (Rehberg 2022, 28).

Queer culture today cannot be understood without its references to the AIDS crisis. BUTT first appeared in 2001, 5 years

after the introduction of combination therapy in 1996, which saved countless lives. In 2009, a paper by the Swiss Federal Commission for AIDS-related Issues confirmed that HIV-positive individuals below detectable limits under treatment can not pass on the virus. In this sense, BUTT's post-porn and post-AIDS aesthetic "embodies a culture of survival" (Rehberg 2022, 27). But even more than just surviving the pandemic, it directly challenged the psychological and visual effects that AIDS had on popular gay culture and pornography.

The scandalised portrayal of gay male bodies dying of AIDS as damaged and sick in the media during the 1980s was swiftly countered within gay media and culture of that time. In response to the HIV and AIDS crisis, body politics centred on fitness, muscles and health was vigorously promoted. A new ideal of healthy yet stereotypical masculinity emerged within the gay culture of the 1980s, which gained even greater significance as the threat of AIDS became more prominent. This idealised image of fit and healthy masculinity in gay pornography, always ready to perform, acted as a direct counter-narrative to the depiction of the gay man as a victim of AIDS.

Rehberg conceptualises BUTT's return to a 1970s indie aesthetic as a direct response to the post-AIDS gay body politics of the 1980s and 1990s. By the time BUTT first emerged in 2001, body politics that emphasised almost intrusive visual proof of the gay male body's fitness and health was no longer essential (Rehberg 2022, 26).

The other influence that Rehberg highlights is the new digital and interactive media environment in which BUTT had to position itself, namely the media environment of amateur

internet pornography. Even though it features well-known porn stars, it puts unknown models right next to them. Its interview style, typewriter typeface and accompanying blog give the magazine a feeling of immediacy as if you were watching the boys through a webcam and could start chatting with them at any moment. The authenticity of BUTT is further emphasised by the models' beards and body hair. And even though these stereotypical markers of masculinity play a central role , they don't reinforce a version of masculinity that is based on the performance of autonomy and strength. Unlike the performative artificiality of the commercialised, sporty and clean-shaven porn pop of the 1990s, the BUTT bodies adopt a deliberate, "post-phallic carelessness" that seemingly no longer requires such efforts – or erections (Rehberg 2022, 41).

When considering BUTT magazine as challenging an image and ideal of authentic masculinity, its possible discontinuities and shifts are less evident than those of transgender, butch lesbian, or drag queens. But it's precisely BUTT's gay perspective on a possible queer masculinity, a perspective on the materiality of maleness, that provokes gender norms of impenetrable masculinity. In *Bareback Porn, Porous Masculinities, Queer Futures* João Florêncio argues for the concept of "porous masculinity" and explores how bareback pornography and gay "pigsex" practices serve as a radical site for reimagining masculinity, intimacy, and queer identity (Florêncio 2020). Porous masculinities describe a form of masculinity that is open, fluid, and permeable to the body fluids of others, in contrast to traditional forms of masculinity that are rigid and self-contained. This porosity allows for new forms of connection, care and community, particularly

within queer spaces, but also helps us to "speculate on alternative formations of the body politic, predicated on an openness to displaced bodies and border crossings rather than on policed self-containment, thus welcoming rather than fearing the foreign and the strange" (Florêncio 2020, 39).

It is through the lens of these porous masculinities that I want to understand BUTT's potential for questioning the rigid, binary notions of masculinity. The magazine's design, its flesh-tone pages, and the typewriter face that mirrors early chat rooms visually embody immediacy and the possibility of being touched, influenced, and even changed by others. However, the focus on authenticity, a defining characteristic of the early 2000s, must be problematised from today's perspective. To a certain extent, the *naturalness* of the BUTT boys suggests a masculinity that could be independent of its performance. But, as Paul B. Preciado points out: "The truth about sex is not disclosure; it is sexdesign." (Preciado 2013, 35)

There's a land that I've heard of once in a lullaby

Florêncio ends his book by pointing out that if the "pigsex" practices of queer men are "sustained by structures of care, solidarity and comradeship", they open new future possibilities of being otherwise "even as they sacrifice or undo pre-coded arrangements of bodies and subjectivities" (Florêncio 2020, 39).

My second design example emphasises the possibilities of queer utopias, even though, as Jose Esteban Muñoz notes in the opening words of *Cruising Utopia*: "Queerness is not yet

here" (Muñoz 2009, 1). But a glimpse of queer utopia in the mode of "as if" can be "the determined negation of that which merely is, and by concretizing itself as something false, it always points, at the same time to what should be" (ibd., 36).

While BUTT challenged the past, WHOLE festival imagines a possible queer utopian future and uses design to embody its vision for a better world. For Muñoz, queer utopias represent an aspirational horizon, a space where queerness is not confined to the restrictive norms of the current social and political order but is instead a mode of potentiality, constantly moving toward a world that allows for more expansive forms of identity, community, and love: "Queerness is an ideality. Put another way, we are not yet queer, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality" (Muñoz 2009, 1). Muñoz argues that queerness, in its most radical form, is about a realistic rejection of the "here and now" and an insistence on reimagining a "then and there," a future that has yet to come into full being but can be glimpsed through the aesthetic "as if" of queer art, performance, activism, and design. Muñoz draws on the work of critical theorist Ernst Bloch, who proposed the concept of "utopian longing" as a way to rethink political and social structures. Muñoz uses the example of the gay practice of cruising to extend this idea into a queer context, suggesting that queerness is always a longing for a better future, a negation of the unjust present.

WHOLE festival is the product of such a queer longing. Still, it transcends Muñoz' description of aesthetic practices, as it manages to create – albeit for a limited time – a space of such a queer longing. Which is not without challenges, as the creators

point out: "We do aspire to be a very real haven for all queers, where we can have a moment of peace, together. Unfortunately we do internalize a lot of the crap society keeps ruminating at us and the issue is some people bring it to the festival, so our work here is making people aware of that through different kinds of interventions." (personal communication via mail, September 2024) WHOLE is an annual gathering that began in 2017 as a collaboration between different independent Berlin collectives and has quickly become a cornerstone of queer culture, blending music, art, design and community in a celebration of radical inclusivity and self-expression. Held at Ferropolis in the forests of Germany, in a region where the far right party AfD can receive up to 30% of the vote, WHOLE offers a unique, immersive experience where normative boundaries dissolve, and participants are encouraged to explore their identities in a safe, supportive environment. The festival's ethos is deeply rooted in queer values, fostering a space where diverse expressions of gender and sexuality, particularly queer masculinity, can thrive, and above all: create a community, because "people want/need to feel whole."

WHOLE's design as part of the mentioned interventions has played an essential role in achieving its unique atmosphere. As I am writing from a graphic designer's perspective, I want to focus on the festival's visual appearance of 2024. As you can see on the festival's Instagram Account, its design encapsulates a vibrant, playful, and community-focused aesthetic that reflects a broader reimagining of queerness and queer masculinities. The bright, bold colours and eclectic use of different fonts signal a break from traditional, rigid representations, leaning into an expressive, inclusive, and non-binary space.

Fig. 2, WHOLE festival graphics

Each post on a specific topic – Food, Merch, Awareness Team, Installations, Cruising Area, Sober Space – is designed with its own fonts and paired with objects and toys. The toys reappear on the festival's website, where the intro drops the viewer on a playing board, an open field where all the toys are positioned among giant lipsticks, stilettos and cocktail glasses – a child-like and playful representation of the actual festival grounds.

Fig. 3, WHOLE festival graphics

These playful aesthetics with visual references to actual toys not only represent the game of gender and its bendable rules, which I introduced in the beginning but also invite festival-goers to engage with the space in a carefree and imaginative way, to make it their own through play. "The most important thing is to make everyone feel seen and heard." The graphic design already invites the viewer into the WHOLE world where anyone can participate

Fig. 4, WHOLE festival graphics

in designing new settings and arrangements of fonts, colours, typography and toys. In playing, we can choose the characters and dolls that are supposed to represent us and switch them, ultimately giving us creative agency about our representation and role. WHOLE's graphic design and marketing give a glimpse of what an experience at the specially designed festival grounds feels like. it is an experience of queer liberation. In the words of

WHOLE's creators: "let it be something that unites us and not tear us apart."

Concluding this analysis of queer masculinities in design, I have to come back to the political dimension of such an endeavour. Outside of spaces like WHOLE the right is on the rise in Europe and Germany. Scholars like Judith Butler have pointed out, the protection of a binary construction of gender, particularly the defence of an impenetrable masculinity, is central to their rhetoric. Gender and identity politics have become the focus of these attacks, but it is a mistake to dismiss them as distractions from class politics. The struggles for gender and sexual liberation are inseparable from economic and social justice; the two must be interconnected, especially in our concepts of queerness. Only by recognising how identity politics and class politics intersect can we effectively resist the regressive forces of the far-right, their false promises of security and stability, and build a more inclusive and equitable future for all. This requires new solidarities across axis of discriminations and privileges, as the creators of WHOLE festival point out as well when asked on how they plan to keep the festival queer: "Through creating solidarity between us queers, it's all we got."

Taken together, this means that opening up these concepts of masculinity isn't merely a stylish design fad but could have unforeseen ramifications, even on ideas of democracy itself. In this context, design research should never underestimate the potential that comes from the visual and material practices of subcultures and the impact that they can have on the norms of our society. Like Hebdige reminds us: "[T]he

challenge to hegemony which subcultures represent is not issued directly by them. Rather it is expressed obliquely, in style." (Hebdige, 17)

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Leyla Acaroglu

Am I the Product of Design? Ontological Reflections on Gender Norms

Words and the way we use them wield great power. Linguist George Lakoff is one of the main proponents of dissecting the structural power of language; he explains how the brain uses frames as mental structures that guide how we each see and experience the world (Lakoff and Johnson 2020).

Frames are like an invisible scaffolding that influences our thinking and actions informing the foundations of our worldview. Over time, frames create structures in our brains that, once there, are hard for us to access and assess; they get locked up in our *cognitive unconscious* (Lakoff and Johnson 2020) and work to form the stereotypes and associated implicit biases that direct perception and opinions of others (Filut, Kaatz and Carnes 2017). This is certainly the case when it comes to the persistent frames held regarding gender, power and leadership.

The way frames are constructed is through our language – the words, images, and phrases that we learn to use and replicate – these are all impacted by a number of variables, shaped by the social and cultural norms we live amongst. These become the tools we replicate to share ideas and reinforce or disrupt the status quo. We draw on our frames to transfer knowledge and information between us via language, both body and verbal. This is one way power structures are replicated and reinforced, and how we can accidentally get implicated in the process of maintaining dominant ideas, norms and narratives that were imposed upon us through our education and life experiences.

There is no doubt that we still live in a world where people presenting as female are restricted in their career development by the frames and biases that are culturally imposed upon their gender (Ayari 2023; Evans and Maley 2021; Ellemers 2014; Bol and Fogel-Yaari 2023). Furthermore, there is much research to demonstrate that being made aware of implicit gender bias can often reinforce it rather than resolve it (Caleo and Heilman 2019; Bezrukova *et al*. 2016).

Within the design industry, which in the UK is 77% male according to the UK Design Council (2024), we face a significant gender gap when it comes to who stays in the industry and who is able to progress to a leadership position. The lack of females within design results in cultural biases being integrated into products and services that further reinforce the socially constructed perceptions of femininity (Korellis Reuther 2022). Furthermore, male dominance in design professions results in the persistence of inequitable, unsafe and unethical design outcomes (Nunn *et al*. 2024).

Contemporary theorists have explored the dynamic relationship between social construction and the structural forces that inhibit females from progressing beyond the frames in which they are restricted (Haslanger 1995; Buzzanell 1995; Hjelm 2014). We are being designed by the world in which we live, and our language, perceptions and actions are in turn designing the world around us (Willis 2006; Hjelm 2014). This is what scholars such as Tony Fry, Arturo Escobar and Anne-Marie Willis have referred to as Ontological Designing (Hartnett 2021), where design is both a tool we wield and a force we must succumb to. As Willis proposes, "We design our world, while our world acts back on us and designs us" (Willis 2006, 80). From a social constructivist perspective, we are the products of the world in which we live and one can argue that our entire perception of the world and the experiences we are subjected to or impose upon others are thus ontological designing in action. As Haslanger frames it "...there is no reality independent of our practices or of our language and that *truth* and *reality* are only fictions employed by the dominant to mask their power" (Haslanger 1995, 96). Thus, we are each in a dynamic relationship with the systems that we are socialised within, and in turn, we blindly replicate or actively disrupt them based on our willingness to adopt or reject them.

As a female-presenting person navigating the world in a leadership role, I am constantly reminded of the structured position in which I am linguistically and culturally expected to perform. The expectations imposed upon me based on my presented gender are restrictive by design, intended I assume, to reinforce power structures of the past, but persist to this day

in much more subversive ways. I am not to be too assertive, aggressive or authoritative in my position, for this will upset the structured system of control that is imposed upon those of us who exist in the world as a female. By disrupting the subjective norms of my gender, I am perceived as threatening by those who are socialised to benefit from the mainstream culture of male intellectual and leadership dominance.

In writing about race, gender and framing, Winter (2008) articulates this as:

> "Race and gender are extremely well suited for shaping social and political perception and evaluation and that very subtle language can trigger powerful effects. In a sense, then, we are subject to the power of our own mental categories and to the power of communication to evoke those categories, and avoiding these effects is extraordinarily difficult, if not impossible."

Lakoff argues that the act of reframing is social change, but he does not argue that it is necessarily *good* change. Many power structures in society, such as the media, institutions and politicians, strategically use framing as a way to construct public opinion. The framing of climate change instead of global warming, for example, was in part about making it sound less scary (Lakoff 2010). Language is the activator of frames, and frames can lock us into worldviews and mindsets that do not serve us but instead subtly control us. Thus, frames are designing each of us.

One such design-inducing frame is the socially-constructed expectations around the behaviours and characteristics of leadership being male (Gloor *et al.* 2020). Years ago, I did a project that explored how to address the lack of females in positions of leadership within the graphic design industry (Acaroglu 2016); the research led me to identify a few key things. One is that there seems to be a chalk outline in people's minds of what a leader looks like, referred to by Criado Perez in her book *Invisible Women* (2019) as the *male default*. The frame evoked when people think of leaders is one that takes the shape of a physical male and the associated traits, such as being strong, assertive and powerful. When a female becomes a leader, this male-outlined frame is imposed upon them, expectations of leadership qualities and gender get mixed up and females are then penalised for performing socially-acceptable male traits, even though the general frame is that leaders must behave in predictable male ways.

This is, in a way, a trap that is reinforced by normative gender frames. There is the phenomenon of the glass cliff (Ryan *et al.* 2016; Bruckmüller and Branscombe 2010), whereby women are hired as leaders in times of crises because it is perceived they will offer a softer persona. They are then metaphorically pushed off the cliff, as they are also seen as expendable, often only hired as a temporary deviation from the dominant male leadership roles and then companies inevitably revert back to male leadership after the crises have been resolved.

The stereotypes that females are kind, naïve, emotional and easily influenced, whereas males are strong, intelligent, rational, and allowed to be aggressive (Eaton, Visser and Burns 2017), reinforces the gender gap. When women enter

into leadership roles they are both expected to be feminine and yet still contort to the male frame. How does one win at a game that is rigged to begin with?

Sue *et al*. define the experience of microaggressions as "… verbal and nonverbal interpersonal exchanges in which a perpetrator causes harm to a target, whether intended or unintended. These brief but commonplace indignities communicate hostile, derogatory, and/or negative slights to the target" (Sue *et al*. 2010, 8). From my own lived experience, throughout the past twenty years of my career, subtle to overt microaggressions have been commonplace. They have occurred covertly, such as a male host of a panel I was on made a comment about my having a PhD as being *cute*, and overtly, as a recent experience where a male academic called me after a meeting that we were jointly chairing and told me I should talk less, specifically saying I should be less *aggressive* in my approach without any evidence of my behaviours negatively affecting the group.

I am frequently in high-power environments and find in these situations that my gender influences the way other people choose to approach and perceive me. I see this as being ontological in nature. The system has allowed males to perceive their worth and entitlement to a higher position over me; the designed intent in their actions is to conform me to the space that they feel I should inhabit, a place lower than them, or at least that I am not entitled to be equal to them. Even if this is entirely the result of their unconscious frames, the replicated scenarios create additional work and effort for those of us who have to invest energy in combating these aggressions when we enter traditionally male-dominated spaces.

Incidents like these are not isolated or unique to me. Their prevalence in discussed in the academic literature (Basford, Offermann and Behrend 2014; Sue 2010; Nadal *et al.* 2016) and in conversations with my female peers, which raises the question in me: How have the power structures that I have been socialised within and that which I must contort to or combat in my daily professional life influenced the design of myself? After all, I went through twenty-five years of institutional education, which by design is gendered (Knupfer 1997), starting school at five and ending with a PhD at thirty. I was constantly told to be less opinionated and quiet, to contort myself to the system in which females are not overly boisterous, ambitious, assertive, and certainly not aggressive in their manner or speech.

During my PhD in Industrial Design, I realised I was having an especially gendered experience that my male peers were not. This was in part due to the lack of female leaders in design, and it drove me to question the future path I was taking. The conditioning and contortion expected of an agent of a system designed to create replicas that reinforce its dominance became so obvious to me that I had to actively reject it. I had a hunch that others may feel the same way, so instead of proceeding down a traditional academic path, I launched my own intentionally provocative educational initiative called *The UnSchool of Disruptive Design* and have built a successful career, despite my gender, as an independent sustainability provocateur since.

During this time, three instrumental things worked to challenge the dominant frames that I had been conditioned within, which allowed the perspective I held on my own agency and role in the world to significantly transform: the work of Paulo Freire,

who wrote *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire 1996), where he perfectly articulates how education is a system designed to re-inforce oppression; the discovery of systems thinking (Meadows 2008; Kauffman 1980) and the complex fractal relationships (Mandelbrot 2004) of all elements within a reinforcing or bal-ancing feedback loop, of which we are all a part of; and finally, the realisation that I was being conditioned into a system designed to replicate itself and that I had the agency to poach power from within it (de Certeau 1984) then use it to challenge the dominant status quo. I think the latter came about after reading the work of Anthony Giddens on structuration theory (Giddens 2014), which essentially says that all systems need agents to replicate the exist-ing dynamics to reinforce them. Thus, agents can actively change systems by tactically disrupting them.

     I started to question if I too was being designed, just like the objects that I had been taught to create in design school. I realised that the systems I was seeped within were all working to flavour and frame the way I see and exist within the world so that, inten-tionally or not, I was then replicating the structures and frames that empowered some and intentionally disempowered others.

     In learning how to replicate a system of knowledge, I would be rewarded with the right to embody the privilege that comes with this – a privilege that for most of human history was not bestowed upon women, nor on non-white people, minorities or people with disabilities. For the lion's share of educational history, the right to be educated was reserved for wealthy men, mostly from colonizing countries, who incidentally still dominate most of the higher positions in academia, design, government, business and leadership in our society today, and with whom have vested

interests in maintaining their inherited status quo, even if they publicly say otherwise.

We live in a complex system that dynamically evolves as a result of the actors within it. For centuries, only certain people were allowed by the system to have ideas and share language via written or verbal form that influenced the world. Under this former worldview, cultures were structured to enable specific kinds of people to replicate themselves and continue to possess all the available power. The last few decades have been challenging this power distribution, and like any system that benefits from maintaining its state of homeostasis, those who have been entitled to accumulate power work to maintain their position of dominance within and over it. This is essentially the gendered ontological design issue: frames condition each gender in such a way that we are locked into centuries-old unconscious biases that play out in lived experiences to reinforce the gender gap in leadership and make the lived experiences of presenting females more entrenched in systems of control and contortion that restricts their natural ability to elevate and progress beyond the inhibiting frames.

However, frames can be re-coded with new language, which allows for different lived experiences, which can design different outcomes, which in turn will allow for divergent systems to emerge.

In recognizing how I am the product of design, the object of the design intent of others, and the objective of my own designs, I can definitely state that we are all being designed and, in turn, designing each other. Just like the mycelium networks that hold the earth together and share resources between the trees so that

a forest can flourish as an emergent outcome of its parts, we are all interconnected in unseen ways.

By choosing to reinforce the system by not questioning it, by not disrupting its dominance, by not exposing its underlying objective of self-serving frames, and by not working to reconfigure the frames that inhabit the deep recesses of our minds, we enable certain people to accumulate unfathomable amounts of power that are then used to oppress those who cannot access it.

Understanding that impacts happen whether we actively choose to disrupt a system or to remain passive participants of it, is one of the critical keys to unlocking our personal agency and performing divergently within the system at play to create divergent outcomes.We are all agents of change, action, inaction, provocation, passivity, and we are all participating in the systems that create us, define us, design us. Yes, we are the objects and the objectives of design. But we can aggressively redesign these systems, challenge the ontology of design and re-code the dominant self-serving structures. In activating our agency, in poaching power and redistributing it, and in disrupting the status quo through creative interventions, we are reclaiming this system that seeks to serve itself and working to undo the damage it has created.

> Yes, I am the product of design – but I am also enabled to redesign.

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Bitten Stetter

Finally, we are fragile – An Applied Design Research about Things of Dying

Living with dying[01]

When we walk through city centres, we are flooded with beautiful things, useful as well as useless ones. When we enter a store and roam the mommy area, we are seduced by maternity clothes, birth gifts, diapers in jeans print, colourful bean bags made by organic cotton, rubber pacifiers, and a huge selection of baby carriages in retro or natural look. We find rompers from Dior to H&M equipped with golden buttons and dream catchers to lull our little ones to sleep. We are overwhelmed by options; we just have to decide what material or lifestyle fits us. When we further

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01   This article was published in a similar form as part of the Swiss Design Network:
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move on to the kid's section, through the departments for conscious Best Agers, we see that everyone can get what they think they need. The products for all phases and generations are finely segmented and infinitely differentiated. Most of these lifestyle offers increasingly clearly demonstrate that the design of meaningfulness becomes more important, because the "essence of meaning lies in our experiences" (Ossevoort 2015). They promise possibilities of a better future.

When we walk through never-ending hospital corridors, visit a hospice or enter a palliative ward, the experiences are totally different. We *breathe* an aura of illness, dying and standardisation. When the patient room becomes the centre of life in the last phase of life, the nursing bed determines the radius of action, for living, eating, bathing, and receiving visitors. In this case, the things that are (not) present become more important. Then we experience that our daily life had been taken place as a matter of course in the midst of a wealth of products, something we notice only in exceptional situations – when something is not right, does not work, is missing or seems inappropriate (Mareis 2014, 10ff). If we think of artificial potted plants, washable resopal tables, barracks-like lockers, imitation leather seats, sinks hidden behind dralon curtains, bedpans and stackable feeding cups, then we realise how already the mere enumeration of materiality generates specific emotional qualities. This is what Walter Benjamin calls the "aura" (1931): emotions and atmospheres created by spaces and things (Böhme 2014). These things alienate us from the fact that we – as individuals and as a society – have to deal with mortality. The repulsive force of these things creates discomfort and distance and turns us

Figure 1. Finally for fragile times. Photo: Mina Monsef

away from places like these, whether we are patients, family, neighbours or friends. We want to escape and hope that we never end up there. We hope for a quick death in our lovely decorated homes and try to ignore that only a few of us will get this dream fulfilled (Borasio 2013). We explore that dying is a process and death is not likely to be a sudden event, it is a phase– a phase of life. When a society works on longevity, it not only prolongs life, but also death.

As a relative of a chronically ill person, but also as designer and trend researcher, I was able to experience the medicalized and decelerated death first hand. I unwittingly became an *observer in residence* of settings of dying, in which patients and relatives spend most of their time. I became aware of health care atmospheres and I was confronted with drip stands that

stood uselessly in rooms because they were no longer suitable for curative applications. I identified bedside tables that do not fit the needs of weak patients. I was involved in crises caused by a lack of human-centred design. I was irritated about the missing knowledge of dying in my community and I was shocked that–even as a non-mother–I know so much about baby-care, but nothing about dying. And I could not believe that there are no lifestyle offers for the final phase, even though our consumer society is normally very quick to offer *special things to buy.*

I tried to get special clothes for people with special needs, I did not find them. I tried to get care accessories, they offered me products in packs of hundreds. I asked for palliative-care lotions and they recommend products for babies. I searched on care websites and I found stackable products that communicate: *We don't care about taste.* Design shapes and controls ourselves and society, notes von Borries, "it influences on a material and immaterial level the ways and means of our living together. Whether we are fearful or courageous, free or not, lonely or in community, is not only, but also guided by design, according to Marx' dictum *being determines consciousness*" (von Borries 2019).

As a private individual person I was annoyed by the fact that my relative had to die, but as a trend researcher, I was also bothered that everyone is designing new fancy funerals formats or bio gradable urns. I was irritated that institutes of the future predict a "The New Death" (Manthorpe & Smith 2015: 1 et seq.) and what I monitored are end-of-life-care-machines and death-planner-apps. I was confronted with the claim: *We*

are dying so individually, but what I see is just uniformisation. Consumers get *crazy* over terms like karma consumption and holistic health living, but more or less no designer cares about the phase when we are weak and in need of help. Diseases, like cancer, change our lives, in many cases destroying our bodies and causing wounded identities (Corbin& Strauss 2004). But not enough that they hurt our physics and psyche and cripple our social interactions, a health-obsessed society also excludes seriously ill and dying people from life outside the medical confinements. This social isolation is like adding insult to injury. A palliative physician describes it in a interview with me vividly: "Patients are not people who live on an island, they live in social contexts" (Kunz 2017). These contexts are linked to lifestyles and an empire of things (Trentmann 2016). We can criticise our consumer society on many levels, but we must accept that consumer goods transport narratives of social interaction and, in the way they affect our everyday culture, they also activate us to think about how we are able to bring to an end our own and the lives of others with dignity. Besides their practical functions, things have symbolic and ritual meanings (Bosch 2014). The (non-)human-centred design creates (in)dependence, (non-)quality of life, dignity or unworthiness. In this sense, things are not only tools, they are "living objects" (Jordan 2020). They can make us sad or happy, proud or ashamed, anxious or secure. They can empower patients, infuriate or delight them. However, they represent contemporary concepts and moral standards of dying.

Figure 2. Collage of current care objects in settings of dying.

Researching on dying

After the death of my loved one, I took all my anger and sadness and started my dissertation *Things of dying – Assemblages. Goods. Transmitters.* I visited medical care exhibitions, read books about death and dying and observed the dark sides of design, "including the fractures, ambivalences, taboos and transgressions" (Mareis 2014, 22). I had further education in palliative care, entered the field and became part of the inter-disciplinary research project "Settings of dying" (sterbesettings. ch) funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation. Questions that accompany my analyses are: what effect does the lack of a material (care) culture (or a de-aestheticised culture) have on our relationship to illness and dying? What support can design provide to improve dignity for dying people and which design methods are beneficial to implement end-of-life design as a common good? In my multi-scaped and multi-layered

ethnography (Clarke 2005) I explore a design-sensitive society, in which the wearing of white diapers or "lying in bed" seems already understood as a "loss of our values" and a social and medical "defeat" (Prätorius 2005). And once again I realise: "What we consume has become the defining feature of our lives: our economies live or die by spending (…) and even public services are presented to us as products in a supermarket" (Trentmann 2016, blurb) – preventive services for health included. I protest against the notion that "people who are free from disease and whose injuries are repaired are better able to pursue their own goods, to contribute to the common good, and to share communal interactions with fellow citizens" (Cochran 1999, 4). Certainly, there is agreement that modern medicine is important for repairing injuries and curing diseases and illness and that it is an essential aspect of the common good of modern societies (ibd.). But death is not an illness (Ariès 1996) and accepting mortality seems to be equally important for a modern society. I use approaches like empathy design (Kruger 2008), mindful design (Niedderer 2013), and frameworks of "Designing pleasurable products" (Jordan 2020) for analysing things in the field.[02] "A feeling of pride may be linked

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02   The Empathy Design approach focuses on understanding users' emotions, needs, and experiences. Designers place themselves in the users' shoes to create products that are more human-centered, addressing both functional and emotional needs. The Mindful Design (Niedderer, 2013) encourages designers to be conscious of the broader social, environmental, and ethical impacts of their work. It promotes thoughtful decision-making in the design process, ensuring that the product's development considers sustainability, user well-being, and positive societal contributions. Designing Pleasurable Products (Jordan, 2020) is a framework that focuses on creating products that deliver positive emotional experiences. It explores how design can evoke pleasure, joy, and satisfaction in users, enhancing their overall experience with the product. All these methods help analyze products by considering emotional, ethical, and experiential factors.

to […] good aesthetics. For example, annoyance might be linked to poor technical performance whilst anxiety may be related to a lack of usability" (Jordan 2020, 8). Significantly, the sensual qualities of things have received less attention in cultural science and Health Care research. Moll, Artner, Depner and other researchers remarks, that things are involved in nursing and care settings and interpersonal interaction is mostly created with the help and use of things, but there are only a few "material care studies" so far (Artner *et al.* 2017; Mol *et al.* 2010). At first glance, this may seem perplexing, especially considering that as early as the early 19th century, nursing textbooks and guidelines extensively addressed the physical environment's material design for patients, treating it as a central focus. (Artner & Atzl, 2019).

This is despite the fact that my participatory field research has conclusively shown that nurses spend a lot of energy to change things in end-of-life settings. They act like amateur designers, converting existing plastic tablet cups into scented objects, hanging dralon curtains over neon lights to create a more pleasant atmosphere or creating specific palliative care products from towels. They improvise in using hacks to change curative settings to end-of-life settings, because the material present in health institutions often does not fit to the needs and demands of a dying person. This creative care knowledge is unfortunately mostly bound to the individual caregiver and is rarely shared with the public. It is used in acute crises and not for prevention; this end-of-life design knowledge seldom leaves the institutions, although it contains a lot of implicit know-how, which could be utilised by professional designers entering the field of end-of-life design.

According to the Design Council London (2018) "there is a huge wave of dying, death and bereavement" that affect design discipline and initiatives by designers like Sonnefeld start to re-invent death with a very wide range of ideas. Palliative care is part of this movement, focusing on the time, when cure is no longer considered a primary goal. Palliative care includes medical treatment, nursing care and interventions as well as psychological, social and spiritual support. The discipline offers a way of holistic thinking that fits our current spirit of time, where people search for meaning. It fits into a Western world where community thinking, solidarity and words like common good are rediscovered. It relies on civic engagement and wants to re-democratise death from a health care perspective. In doing so, the concept of participation as a "genuine goal" and "constitutive characteristic of democratic societies" (Fleckinger 2013, 113) is to be understood as a strategy in order to "no longer exclude the dying and seriously ill from society (the living), but to bring them back into society with their needs and requirements and thus enable them to die in community as well as in dignity" (ibd., 65). Palliative care is thus a concept of and for the common good. The main goals is to resist the exclusion of the dying and to fight against a "societal and social definition of a dying person as already dead person" (Goebel 2012, 25). Well-designed products could have a similar function in this participatory concept as voluntary and spiritual work already have.

Figure 4.1 Turnarounder, a textile companion on the health journey to the end of life

Things of dying

The disposable sponge stick for mouth care is a good example.
People outside the care sector are rarely familiar with these
cheap sticks with pink or green sponges on top, as they are
not available in pharmacies for private use. But in difficult care
situations, these ephemeral things are more than a care thing
with a clearly defined purpose. These sticks can work as a sur-
rogate for the cultural practice of social eating, they enable
closeness and affection, they empower relatives to act and to
do something in the phase of "not being able to do anything
anymore" (Rehsmann & Stetter 2024). They evoke non-verbal,
sensual-physical, physical-mental connections (Krippendorff
2013). They are care objects and *social workers* par excellence

as they convey knowledge about the special needs at the end of life without many words. They allow us to create well-being not only for the patients but also for relatives. The big problem of simple disposable sponge sticks is that, unlike, for example, baby-soothers or feeding cups for babies, they are not part of our consumer culture, they are not created in variety and quality and they do not disrupt our everyday life. So, they cannot communicate knowledge about dying, they cannot change our behaviour and are not able to sensitise a society for the final phase. We know that mindful design leads to special reactions (Niedderer *et al*. 2014). Craig and Chamberlain (2017) note that more and more health care researchers finally realise that human behaviour and design are integrally linked. The interest arises from the recognition that adopting certain behaviours leads to improved health outcomes and quality of life (ibd.), but this insight is not yet really noticeable in the material culture of dying. In the mid-19th century our approach to illness and dying was different. Beak-shaped feeding cups were available in a variety of forms and high-quality materials. Today, feeding cups as well as other care products are made of cheap plastic, are dishwasher-safe, de-individualized, and not adapted to the individual needs and values of patients and their relatives (Stetter 2019). They are omnipresent in medicalised settings of dying but not part of our lifestyles. If we take a closer look at the current aesthetics of feeding cups, uniformed nursing shirts and white adult diapers in the spirit of democratic consumption, then these things make us aware of our relationship to death and profit-oriented health policies. If we contrast a historical filigree feeding cup with today's plastic cups they appear like a

kind of societal utopia that acknowledges the reality of weakness and the need for care. The function of both cups is fundamentally identical, but the approach to the world is completely different. Design and its possibilities are often romanticised and idealised and often ignores the "shadow sides of design" (Mareis 2014, 22) that are closely linked to the design of society (Moebius & Pritz 2012). In this sense, my research explores the dark side and the light side of design as well as manifestations of the *Old* and the *New Death* and tries to understand in which area novelties get visible.

I distinguish between pre-mortem, ad-mortem and post-mortem styles, because my investigation clearly shows that the most innovative designs are created post-mortem, ranging from new mourning clothes, webcasting funerals, bio-urns to eco-friendly coffins. It seems to be symptomatic for an antiseptic and tech-affine society that pre-mortem products are missing, because dying is perceived as something dirty and shameful (Ariès 1996). Most pre-mortem designs focus on technologically and usability-based solutions such as community or death planner apps or care robotics. "The premise on which these approaches are based appears to be that the product must be designed such that the cognitive and physical demands places on the users are minimized – that the demands do not exceed the persons processing capacity" (Jordan 202, 7). According to Jordan this approach is "by implication if not by intention – dehumanizing" (ibid.). If designers were really hands-on in the field and would accompany dying with their bodies and souls, they would know that *high touch* is more relevant than *high tech* and that recapture of knowledge

Figure 4.2 Turnarounder, a textile companion on the health journey to the end of life

is more necessary than outsourcing as the questions of a relative impressively shows: "Is it medically justifiable if I stroke the hand of my dearest one?" (Stetter 2019–2023, personal field notes). I currently observe that some rhetorics of design (Jost & Scheuermann 2008) view the social primarily as a "system of norms or as a chain of rational, utilitarian actions" (Reckwitz 2015, 16), which reduces seeing, hearing, feeling, and smelling to information processing, that is, to purely cognitive acts. The design approach I pursue is different, focusing on an alternative access to the world to criticise the retrograde idea that "for the continuance of modern, Western societies, there is hardly anything as superfluous as the aesthetic" (ibid., 13). Using the power of aesthetics does not exclude usability, but includes a holistic approach to dying.
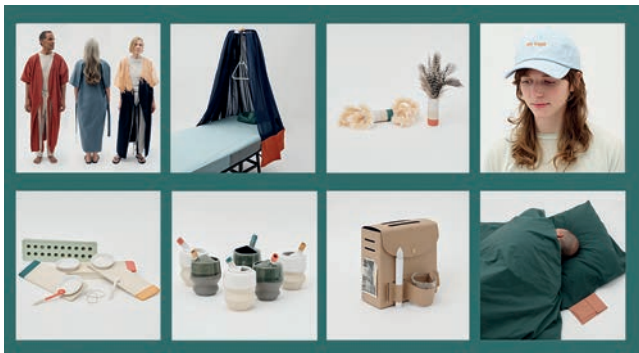
Figure 5. Overview of various products from finally.

Figure 6. finally. the Care Atelier in Zurich.

New designs of dying

My research-through-design approach allows transferring my findings directly into new products. They are being implemented as *materialised questions* in settings of dying and be presented in exhibitions like Design Biennale (2019), Werkschau Waid (2020), Friedhof Forum (2021) in Zurich for both an expert and public audience. My designs are thought not only to support ill individuals but also to contribute to the common good by offering new accesses to mortality and enhancing our ability to shape our lives in a society that is secretly driven by the fear of death. I create individual nursing shirts with different patterns, materials and new functional solutions inspired by an interview with a palliative care doctor who remarked: "If I had seen this woman in her own

clothes and not in a standard care shirt, I would have advised her differently" (Stetter 2019-2023, personal field notes). Most of these textiles are not only care shirts, but *apparel for transition* focusing the fact that illness and dying are a process of travelling. In healthy times, one can wear the *apparel for transition* as a dress or a kaftan, and when one gets ill, it can be transformed into shirts to meet care requirements. *Products of transition* allow us to be sensitive to our finiteness in times of blossoming health. They are travel companions that accompany us through our lives. They show who we are and who we want to be even in difficult times (Stetter 2022). These shirts do not communicate *I am a medical loss* but speak self-confidently and with dignity:

"Yes, I am finite".

Next to this product line, I create for example dices that help talking about moods and fears. Other products are ceramics, or folded paper product lines that relatives can decorate with messages and patients can use for the "Lebenswelt" (Lifeworld, Husserl 1954) – the bed. All DIY-sets function as communication helpers and *well-being makers*. They provide information, invite participation and offer autonomy and collectivity. Dr. Roland Kunz used the term "bridge building" in an interview: "[…] Now I can imagine that design would not only help patients and relatives, it will also build bridges. Bridges to a society that has forgotten to understand death as part of life" (Stetter 2019-2023, personal field notes). All products are material answers and are developed out of my empirical material, focusing on different strategies und perspectives such as tinkering, hackings, self-designs used by

nurses, relatives and patients.

      In regard to the last question, I feel the biggest challenge is to attract the retail sector. We know, that we do not only need creation, production, and media exposure, but also distribution channels to reach the intended audience. That means my research does not end with the design of new *things of dying*. I also seek contact with the retail sector, because as a designer and trend researcher I know that for the implementation it also needs insights into the current consumer culture and the distributors and producers. Because if decision-makers from institutes, department stores or shops do not have the courage or arguments to include products for *othered* parts of life, you are not able to change the end of life system.

      I decided to found the lifestyle brand *finally. finally* not only takes care of the last phase of life but also develops high-quality design for transitions and trajectories: for the life cycle including fragile times. For this new design approach, I frame it in my dissertation project: *Trajectory Design. With this design approach a grounded the company finally. finally* is honoured with two design prizes[03] and has received grants from Swiss foundations. This enables me to build a sustainable company. Together with my team, I want to design a society that finally accepts I am fragile, I am finite. We humans are living beings who have to learn again to care for ourselves and others. With *finally* I would like to contribute to this.

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03   Design Prizes Switzerland 2023, iphiGenia Gender Design Award 2023, *www.finally.design*

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DOROTHEE ADER (Dr. Phil.) is the director of the Klingspor Museum for Modern and Contemporary Book and Type Art in Offenbach am Main. She is responsible for the museum's collection and realised a great number of exhibitions in the field of book art, typography, graphic design and printing history. Most recently she collaborated in the curatorial team of the exhibition *Same Bold Stories? Type Design by Women and Queers in the 20th and 21st Centuries*. She works regularly as an author and lecturer, recently at the Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen on participation and social involvement in the exhibition context. Of particular importance for her curatorial work is the development of the museum as a community space that inspires, accompanies and connects.

Foto: Thomas Lemnitzer

ANA JULIA MELO ALMEIDA holds a PhD in Design from the School of Architecture, Urbanism and Design at the University of São Paulo (FAUUSP 2022). This includes a period of research at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS Paris 2019–20), and both were supported with a grant from the São Paulo State Research Foundation (FAPESP). Currently, she is finishing her post-doctoral research at the Institute of Brazilian Studies at the University of São Paulo (IEB-USP) on a FAPESP scholarship. She is a member of the Red Latinoamericana de Diseño y Género (ReLADyG) and the research group GAAI – Genders, Arts, Artifacts and Images (CNPq-USP). Main research subjects include: design history, women and design, design and gender studies, women and immigration, gender and archives.

Prof. Dr. TOM BIELING is professor of Design Theory and chairman of the doctoral committee at HfG Offenbach. At HAW Hamburg he was Vertretungsprofessor of Designtheory and Designresearch, previously visiting professorships at the University of Trento and GUC Cairo, and various teaching assignments. He was Head of Social Design at Design Research Lab/Berlin University of the Arts, previously research fellow at T-Labs/TU Berlin. Chief Editor at *DESIGNABILITIES Design Research Journal | designforschung.org* since 2008, co-editor of the book series *Design Meanings* (Mimesis) and BIRD (Birkhäuser) of the *Board of International Research in Design*, founding member of the Design Research Network, and co-host of the conference series NERD New Experimental Research in Design. Elected Young Innovator of the Year by the Falling Walls consortium. Book selection: *Design (&) Activism* (2019), *Inklusion als Entwurf* (2019), *Gender (&) Design* (2020), *SPECOLOGY* (2023) and *NERD III* (2025).

Photo: Kai Hattermann

Prof. Dr. UTA BRANDES was tenure professor for Gender Design and Design Research at the Koeln International School of Design, Technical University Cologne (1995–2015) – the first ever chair dedicated to gender issues in design. She is an author and editor of numerous publications, and a frequent lecturer and guest professor at universities in Germany, Japan, China, Taiwan, Korea, Australia and the USA. Among others, Uta Brandes is co-founder of the *German Association for Design Theory and Design History*, co-founder, former chair and honourary member of the *international Gender Design Network/iGDN*, and co-chair of the *Board of International Research in Design* (BIRD).

Photo: Ute Vogel

VALERIA DURÁN, Sociologist and Master in Communication and Culture (FSOC-UBA). She is a PhD candidate in Social Sciences at UBA. Associate Professor of Design and Gender Studies at FADU-UBA. Researcher of the Topography of Memory programme of the alliance of human rights organisations Memoria Abierta, of which she has been a member since 2012.

GRISELDA FLESLER, Graphic designer and Master in design theory (FADU-UBA). She is a PhD candidate in Social Sciences at UBA. She is a principal Researcher and Full Professor of Design and Gender Studies at FADU-UBA, Argentina. Co-cordinator of the Latin American Network of Design and Gender (ReLADyG).

FELIX KOSOK completed his doctorate in 2020 at the HfG Offenbach on the aesthetic-political dimension of design. His dissertation was published in 2021 by transcript Verlag under the title *Form, Funktion und Freiheit*. In addition to research, he is a designer with the design collaboration Bureau069. He is a Graphic Design and Design Theory professor at the German International University Berlin since 2021. Since 2024, he is the director of the design discourse for World Design Capital Frankfurt RheinMain 2026 under the motto of *Design for Democracy*.

Photo: Ben Kuhlmann

CELESTE MORETTI, Publicist and Master in Institutional Communications Management (UADE) and Specialist in project and design management (FADU-UBA). Assistant Professor of Design and Gender Studies at FADU-UBA. Member of the communications committee of the *Latin American Network of Design and Gender* (ReLADyG). Responsible for communication at the Observatory of Gender in the Justice of the City of Buenos Aires.

Dr. LESLEY-ANN NOEL is a Trinidadian design educator and Dean of Design at OCAD University in Toronto, Canada. She is the author of *Design Social Change* and co-editor of *The Black Experience in Design*. She has created tools for critical reflection, such as *The Designer's Critical Alphabet* and the *Positionality Wheel*.

Photo by Niamh Brennan

RAQUEL NORONHA is a designer with a PhD in Anthropology. She is an Associate Professor at the Design and Technology Department of the Federal University of Maranhão, and a member of the Graduate Programme in Design. Leader of the NIDA – *Research group Narratives in innovation, design and anthropology*, where she develops research in participatory methodologies and the potential of tools for community building, emancipation and anti-capitalist, anti-colonial and anti-sexist resistance. She was a Visiting Researcher (2018) within the ERC Advanced Grant *Knowing From the Inside* (KFI), coordinated by Prof. Tim Ingold, at the University of Aberdeen (UK). She was Regional Adviser for Latin America in Gender Design in STEAM Programme, funded by IRDC, led by Carleton University (CA). Currently, she is a research productivity fellow from CNPq and a founding member of RELADYG – Latin American Design and Gender Network.

NAOMI RADO is an art historian based in Frankfurt am Main, who works as a freelance curator, researcher, and writer. She is a founding member of the feminist collective +FEM and a board member of Synnika e.V., a space for experimental practice and theory. Rado is part of the curatorial team of the exhibition *Same Bold Stories. Type Design by Women and Queers in the 20th and 21st Centuries* at the Klingspor Museum Offenbach. Together with the museum, she co-edited the book of the same name, published as part of the exhibition. In addition to her focus on feminist issues in art historiography and exhibition practices, her work centres on political tendencies in modern and contemporary art, as well as on critical theory and Marxist approaches in art theory.

Photo: Neven Allgeier, 2022

Prof. BITTEN STETTER is a designer and develops trend forecasts and exhibition concepts for the creative industry. Since 2003, she has held university teaching positions in Germany and Switzerland. Currently, she is a professor in Design, head of the master program, and leader of the Research and Investigation division in the Trends & Identity program at Zurich University of the Arts. Her work has earned design awards like the Swiss Design Prize 2023 and iphiGenia Gender Design Award 2023.

Since 2015, her research focuses on Care Futures and the Future of Dying. She is completing her doctoral thesis: *Things of Dying – an Applied Design-Anthropological Exploration of Current Death- and Consumer-Culture* at the University of Bern in collaboration with the University of the Arts, Bern. Part of this research was funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (sterbesettings.ch), with additional support from the Age Foundation, Pro Helvetia, and Migros Pioneer Fund. Her lifestyle brand *finally* creates offers for life's fragile moments (www.finally.design).

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