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INTRODUCTION

Gender in Design
An Overview

Hanna Wirman
Uta Brandes

04–13

#gender
#design
#gender performance
#identity
#other
#willful
#culture
All design reflects the established notions of gender both in the culture in which it is created and in the one in which it finds its use. While many creators specifically address questions of gender in designs – think of Rad Hourani’s genderless fashion (est. 2007) or Monica Förster’s Lei desk chair for women (2009) – the ‘gendered values’, user expectations, and often gender-conforming, stereotypical features and functions are typical examples of sheer insensitivity and lacking awareness. Sometimes, however, sexist forms of communication and design are intentionally employed. Whereas some areas of design are more interested in addressing one or the other binary genders through simplistic gender marketing – think of fragrance design or the design of protective headgear – the inclusive and universal design perspectives bring forth an idea of pleasing all, or at least both binary genders.

Firstly, most design approaches remain unaware of the necessity to include gender as a self-evident part of the whole design process (Brandes 2017). Although often overlooked, whatever the focus and method, be it theoretical, research-wise, or in creating products, experiences, signs, apps, or types of online communication, gender and design remain co-dependants. Secondly, gender-related power relationships (cf. Radtke and Stam 1994) claim a key role in the design of products, services, and other things, in the use and identification of target markets as well as in object development itself, their form, functions, and their affordances. And thirdly, in the field of design, gender’s role is vital in the manner in which educational programmes historically signpost masterminds that situate ‘gender’ hierarchy over others. Practitioners and academics in game design or architecture, for instance, discuss the lack of prominent female role models. A case in point is Dorte Mandrup’s “I am not a female architect. I am an architect” (Mandrup 2017) plea that echoes throughout this discussion in favour of acknowledging female equality against that of male counterparts or establishing a ‘separate list’ of successful women.

Following Simone de Beauvoir (1949), Judith Butler (1990; 2004), Karen Barad (2007) and numerous thinkers before and after, we concur that gender is constantly constructed through the regulated repetition of acts. Here we accept the role that both design and design practice have in creating such gender(s). Designers and design researchers talk about ‘practices’, which suggests that repetition and conventions are established and well-formulated.

Designed products are both the results and the material processes of constructing gender as individuals and as socio-cultural notions. As such they are not separate entities that would merely incarnate some pre-existing conceptions. Furthermore, intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989) allows us to consider how ethnicity, class, and regional identities, such as those best addressed through a postcolonial framework, earmark ‘gender in design’ as a positively messy and dynamic topic. Finally, as an acknowledgement of the ‘Other’ genders involved, it is hoped that an expanded discussion will further address queer identities and design concerns specific to LGBTQI creators and audiences.

The debate here commences from the valuable yet at times difficult discussions held at The GREAT small: Gender Design Conference, co-organised by the issue editors at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. In 2014, the international Gender Design Network (iGDN) and Hong Kong Polytechnic University’s Jockey Club Design Institute for Social Innovation (J.C.DISI) co-organised the second International Gender Design Conference (iGDC) with an aim to examine gender’s role in design research, thinking, professional practice, and public reception. The conference, with an exhibition organised as part of it, proved thought-provoking and served to challenge a range of social and cultural conventions in design. New ideas were presented as alternatives and potential futures outlined. Keynotes and workshops were the main venues for discussion and sharing covered the politics, power
Figure 1-3 (Pages 6-9 and page 13): Extracts from ‘Fetish. Gender, Power, Object’ by Sebastian Oft. B.A. of Arts Thesis, Köln International School of Design (KISD). Source: Sebastian Oft, 2016.
Hanna Wirman & Uta Brandes · Other · Different · Willful
relationships, and practices in design fields from fashion to sex toys.

This issue of CUBIC Journal continues exploring what we find an extremely important and complex topic. We sought diverse contributions from a wide range of design sectors and aimed at presenting contributions that reposition design and design research through considering gender dynamics. And just like the conference, the journal issue call for papers was named to reflect how the smallest aspects in design have the greatest influence and are often side-lined by ignorance, oversight, or intention ('The GREAT small'). We added three overlapping and often complimentary concepts to express our interest in the 'Other', i.e. the 'Different' and the 'Willful' (sic).

The idea of an Other draws on Michel Foucault and Simone de Beauvoir, among others, and refers to the socio-cultural power structures that mark individuals and groups as outsiders and different from the norm. The Other is central to studies of gender as well as postcolonialism and helps to unpack the nuanced workings of inequality and identity politics. Looking at how the Other is constructed in different fields of design, we begin this special issue with a pictorial by Claudia Herling and Katja Becker which examines 'gender codes' in web design. In their analysis, various examples illustrate the mechanics professionally used for marking gender in products and users.

Similarly, Tanja Godlewsky's article tackles constructions of gender in music videos and encourages us to consider the role of design and technology in negotiating the subject/object relationships in such gender(ed) performances.

Uta Brandes' take on ‘doing gender’ in textiles and fashion goes into exploring the historical roots of the textile industry in Europe reminding us of the gendered weaving that takes place between humans and technologies within cybernetic systems as suggested by Sadie Plant (1995) and Luce Irigaray (1991). Brandes discusses the roles of the fashion industry, advertising, marketing, and magazines as nodes of the historical complex that produces as well as potentially emancipates certain female bodies and identities.

Sandy Ng's photo essay takes an historical perspective on gender in design. While it analyses the placement of women in advertisements of foreign products in early twentieth century China, it visually inspects the ways in which a gendered body came to serve the process of modernisation.

Considering genders equally, seriously and respectfully in a design process is often the work of 'willful subjects' (sic) (cf. Ahmed 2014) where obedience, dismissal, moral law, and negative emotions meet in the face of injustices. We invited contributions that critically and analytically problematise gender, and cases in which gender is 'appropriately' and 'inappropriately' considered in the process of design. We asked if gender has become a burden or catalyst for designers, and about the possible futures of design where sensitivity to gender is a given.

The last two articles in this issue focus on spatial design in particular cultural contexts: New Delhi and Hong Kong. Sugandha Gupta, Luis Maria Calabrese and Akkelis Van Nes talk about ‘spatial interventions’ and ‘reclaiming space’ in their contribution that describes a project for designing public spaces differently in India.

Leon Buker and Gerhard Bruyns focus on a particular park in Hong Kong as an example of the post and neocolonial structures that operate in Hong Kong's public spaces and influence the everyday lives of domestic workers in their leisure as well as shelter-seeking gay men. Similarly to Gupta, Calabrese and Van Nes, Buker and Bruyns...
take an intersectional approach in considering gender together with ethnicity and add a layer of sexuality into the analysis.

Together, the contributions to this issue talk about the challenges and difficulties, possibilities and potential of considering gender more carefully in existing design and while engaged in design. Participatory practices and the multidimensional involvement of various value systems and power structures are highlighted throughout the articles emphasising the complexity of doing gender in the field of design. This issue hopes to encourage researchers and designers to take gender into account and to keep the conversation going.
Bibliography


Bio

Dr. Hanna Wirman is assistant professor at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University’s School of Design where she teaches Game Design and Social Design. Her research focuses on marginal game audiences, gender and on players’ participation in game creation before and after release. Her game designs range from design for children with special needs to games for orangutans. Hanna’s current research is in Chinese gaming, Mahjong, as well as all-female eSports and game arcades in Hong Kong. Hanna served as the first President of Chinese DiGRA and currently as the Vice President of DiGRA.

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The article highlights gender codes in design, particularly in web design, by means of current examples. Different aspects of gender-specific design are looked at in detail and their inherent problems discussed: on the one hand, the development of a special solution (gender-specific for women), on the other hand, web design with reduced functionality and simplification of information (i.e. image representation) which sometimes even leads to a negation of technology. The article illustrates that gender codes and stereotypical role models can be embodied on different design levels of web design (use and artefact): in structure/navigation, in creative elements by the use of shape, colour and imagery and on a textual level. These design decisions have an impact on the power of users to act, their individual gender identity and the structural gender identity/social perception of gender. The article demonstrates that gender codes in current web design are very present and aims to sensitize the topic.
Introduction

The impact of gender in the design of digital artefacts is complex and greatly underestimated with regard to its overall implications. First of all, the term design in itself is rather complex. Design is not just the end result (the designed artefact); it refers not only to the layout and composition but also to the design process (the development of designed objects) and the objects' use (handling and interaction). The category of gender in correlation with design can be found on all these levels. For a specific application, this means that not only the end product, such as a designed website, can contain gender codes, but that the design process during the development phase (compilation of development team, assumptions about users) and how websites are used also need to be inspected more closely.

Furthermore, design is always embedded in a spatial and temporal context. Thus, design always refers to a region (a country, Nordic design, German design) and can be assigned to a respective era (design of the '60s or '80s). Designers are also consciously or unconsciously in close interaction with the environment that affects them and which they in turn shape through their design (technologies, norms/values, zeitgeist) (cf. Kern 2005, 13).

Many complex approaches also exist with regard to gender. Within Western culture, gender is perceived as a dichotomy that divides people into two categories (man/woman). In this context, we also speak of the "everyday theory of binary gender system" (cf. Kessler/McKenna, quoted from Schirmer 2010, 22; Lübke 2005, 26). Even though there are more specific and non-binary definitions of gender today, binary thinking is still common.

It is critical to recognize that while I am calling for a non-binary treatment of gender with regards to theory, in everyday life binary treatments of gender do exist in society. Individual identity and structural gender are created in relation to binary gender norms, though individual constructions can be non-binary. (Rode 2011, 398)

Due to the historically prominent position of men, this classification entails a stereotypical perception and prejudice that sustains unjust power relations and hierarchies. This dichotomy even illustrates problems that are threefold: firstly, the hierarchy contained therein in which men are superior to women, secondly, the homogenisation due to which the differences within a category of gender often become invisible and thirdly, the exclusion of other genders not to be found in these categories. Even if designers theoretically think and design beyond binary logic and take into account individual identities of gender, designs and actions are subject to the binary gender norms of society in everyday life.

Furthermore, the perpetuation of the female-male category is problematic because it can comprise hierarchy and judgment: woman or girl products are often smaller, of substandard workmanship but nonetheless often more expensive and the handling implies less confidence in the users. This includes the negation of technology, meaning that technology becomes invisible; the reduction of functionality; operating displays and information are reduced; and image representation, the use of images/icons rather than, for example, text and numbers (cf. Ehrnberger 2007, 2).

Possible implications are that female users who do not feel attracted to such a design are put off, they consolidate a technically incompetent self-image or they remain users, as they are dependent upon the application and have to put up with the restricted scope for action/use.

Designers have the power to define what is the "right" and what is the "wrong" input and interpretation of output respectively, thus standardising the permissible conduct of the
user. People who cannot adjust their behaviour accordingly because they do not dispose of the assumed abilities, skills and cultural habits, of experience, time, patience and motivation, of devices, money or social media networks cannot adapt the application to their needs. They are being excluded due to the technical design. (Maaß 2003, 216)

The so-called special solutions may lead to the ghettoisation of women: gender-specific special versions for women are thus perceived as outside the norm, as a deviation from the (male) standard (androcentrism) (Van Oost 2003, 196). This is also demonstrated in the devaluation of technological areas within the realms of products and work: technologies that are established in female living environments are no longer perceived as “proper” technologies, for example, the washing machine, the microwave, and the fridge. (Bath 2009, 40)

The opposite of custom-made products are gender-sensitive approaches that do not exclude anyone but are an extension of the conceptual, creative approach and possible uses. Here, positions that are often underrepresented within design (mostly female approaches, let alone other genders) are being heard and considered. Different needs can even lead to the same requirements. To name one example: the popularity of SUVs across all genders derives from different needs (security versus status symbol).

The following design examples illustrate how common these gender codes are on current websites. These are meant as examples without claiming to be complete, and focus on certain aspects of websites, mostly in an exaggerated manner in order to present the facts in a particularly striking way. The goal of this article is to highlight hidden gender codes and to raise awareness of the topic. The sub-aspects mentioned below are examined and confirmed by examples. In doing so, the following distinctive features are closely examined:

Addressing the ‘Development of a special solution (gender-specific for women)’: different aspects come into place like the product is smaller, the product is manufactured with inferior quality and/or the product is more expensive (despite substandard workmanship). Sometimes the product offers a larger selection of models (i.e. colour variants, the product is more colourful and more playful (i.e. circles, pastel colours, handwriting) and/or the product features decorative elements and additional accessories.

Focusing on reduced functionality/simplification of information or even negation of technology (women’s technical competence is underestimated): there are several indicators such as a reduction of operating displays/information (choice/configuration options), oversized operational controls and a tendency to use images/icons (instead of text and numbers). Some products offer limited possibilities of use, a reduction of functionality and/or a reduced ability to act (controlled interaction, i.e. Guided Tour). Another concept is that technology becomes invisible or is hidden. Operating with these features it defines female users (here only the female one is anticipated) as technically disinterested and incompetent.

The mentioned procedures mainly apply to product design or interior design, but many aspects can also be found in web design as well as a reflection of three-dimensional reality. The significance of the categorisation of products in relation to gender can be documented with the example of Nike (nike.com/de/de_de). On the German website of the American sporting goods manufacturer there are predominantly gender-based navigation points: men, women, boys, girls and personalise. It should be emphasised that the area of children is further differentiated
into boys and girls. The listing begins with the navigation point ‘men’. This could be interpreted as hierarchisation but must not be overrated in this context (Puma differentiates women, men and children – in this order). A thematic search according to product groups, styles or areas of application (i.e. clothes, shoes, without a differentiation in gender) is conceivable here.

If users can only gain access to content through the “eye of the needle” of gender, gender problems immediately arise on several levels: users interested in both contents are disadvantaged on the usage level; they have to perform tiresome twofold searches (i.e. searching the category t-shirts for girls and boys consecutively without direct comparison). Furthermore, the socially established order of sexes is substantiated by the preceding selection. It communicates that users are entering “forbidden territory” if they do not adhere to it. And lastly: users who cannot or do not want to settle for one category are forced to do so by the navigation.
Diagram 1 (top): The British fashion company John Lewis was the first British company to abolish gender denominations in children’s clothing; there is only one category: "Girls & Boys". The multifaceted prints and designs have not changed and the shop layout only has one designated area for children’s clothing. ("A T-shirt should be just a T-shirt – not a T-shirt just for girls or just for boys.").1 Graphic: Claudia Herling and Katja Becker.

Figure 1 (bottom): Gender stereotypes can be found in several details of the Nike website. The sizing of children’s fashion takes place in three steps: the category “Babies and Toddlers” is depicted rather gender neutral, while the category “Younger Children” is obviously attributed to girls (illus. skipping rope), and the third one of the older children to the boys (illus. playing football). Source: http://nike.com/de/de_de. Accessed: November 19, 2017.
**Figure 2 (top):** The nike website’s navigation bar is gender based even for children. Source: http://nike.com/de/de_de. Accessed: November 19, 2017.

**Figure 3 (bottom):** Also newsletter registration includes gender classification. In addition to e-mail address and the age check, only gender is verbally encoded and entered under “shopping preferences” as a mandatory field. Source: http://nike.com/de/de_de. Accessed: November 19, 2017.
Figure 3: Obvious gender codes come to light within the product category of children’s bras; next to the colour pink that has a female connotation (including basketball!), two supposed girlfriends are illustrated (cooperation, friendship) in one room, which is filled with all sorts of objects (homely), including a mirror. Source: http://nike.com/de/de_de. Accessed: November 19, 2017.

Figure 4 (opposite page): Structurally, alleged women’s interests and creative activities are taken up as household tasks (furnishing rooms, dressing), communication (finding friends) and interests (fashion, shopping). The opposite strategy also exists, which does not explicitly mention gender but it becomes apparent which gender is clearly addressed through the imagery. Source: http://ikea.co/de. Accessed: November 24, 2017.
Puppenhaus-Ideen zum Selbermachen: Spielspaß garantiert

Die Kinder möchten „Haus“ spielen? Dann schau dir dein Zuhause mit ihren Augen an. Du wirst sicher in deinen bestehenden Möbeln jede Menge Möglichkeiten zum Spielen entdecken! Ob im Kinder- oder im Wohnzimmer ...

Familienleben Aufbewahrung

Do-it-Yourself Doll’s House Ideas: fun Guaranteed!
The kids want to play “house”? Then look at your home with their eyes. You’re sure to discover loads of possibilities to play in/with your existing furniture! Whether in the kids’ room or in the living...

FAMILY LIFE STORAGE
Design wall storage without drilling

Hands up if you need more storage. Thought so! And that’s why we were immediately thrilled when designer Therese came up with this extra storage solution...

DIY  STORAGE  PERSONAL TOUCH  SMALL ROOMS
Minilu academy (miniluacademy.de) and shop is a website for budding dental assistants. Activities from everyday life are described here with the help of short web videos (explanatory films). The role model, 'Minilu', only has limited skills: she can only point with the hand (no fingers), cannot speak, only smile and fulfils the stereotypical passive role of an assistant. The name and setting comply with the 'pink it and shrink it' strategy (cf. Barletta 2005; Johnson and Learned 2004): the figure is small ('mini') and moves around in an entirely pink/purple colour setting combined with purely decorative, floral ornamentation and a rounded typeface. The objects (plants, cat) do not have any contextual connection to the subject of dental practice and technology. However, the speaker and broadcaster of knowledge (hierarchy!) is a man. This hierarchy is continued within the language of the film: it banks on simple, repetitive wording and encouragement such as 'it is actually really easy' and 'don’t give up'. These imply that the viewers do not have the confidence in themselves to actually perform the processes explained. The rather complex, technical tasks of a dental assistant (the website obviously does not give any consideration to a male occupying this job) are thus negated and are not acknowledged in this design. Although technical competence is to be achieved through this low-threshold offer in an executive function, it is not conveyed as a self-image. On the contrary, there is a concern that this design will only reinforce a technically incompetent self-image among users. It fits the phenomenon of the degradation of female professions: this rather technical occupation is not perceived as such.

The low-threshold offer itself is not being criticised but rather the associated unambiguous connection with the female gender based on the design. By comparison, IKEA also offers descriptions based purely on pictograms and a personal form of address but does not merely refer to women.

**Figure 6 (opposite page):** IKEA Furnishing/creating represents an activity which is structurally allocated to women, while drilling is a handicraft process that can be avoided. Source: http://ikea.com/de. Accessed: November 24, 2017.
Figure 7: Technical processes (turbine rotor replacement) contrast with a playful look (decorative elements, framing, colourfulness).

Simple tasks are described in detail (step by step) and moreover explained without any background information or wider contexts. In addition, there are also calls for ‘perseverance’ or ‘caution’ warnings.

Figure 8: The associated web shop combines technical products with references to beauty webinars and online videos. Fan merchandise is also available (Minilu towel and watch). With a combination of pink – impression spoons and protective masks – the beauty webinar has bizarre features. Source: http://www.miniluacademy.de/minilu-academy/tutorials/. Accessed: November 19, 2017.
Simplifying tendencies can be found in navigation elements. The website of the lifestyle magazine InTouch (intouch.wunderweib.de) (publishing house: Bauer People Magazin KG, circulation approx. 170,000 in Germany 3/2017) converts navigation nomenclatures into emotions. This means that there are no classic descriptions of categories but emotional statements such as “shock”, “wow” or “hot”. This phenomenon is supported by the fact that the printed magazine mostly consists of illustrations (more than a third).¹


This is no isolated phenomenon. The entertainment platform Stardoll (stardoll.com) for young girls also shows a chat banner depicting women with speech bubbles who only communicate by means of symbols (smiley and exclamation marks and music symbol/paw respectively, ‘OMG’ and heart). A sense of purpose is not recognisable here. No content is being communicated but only emotional expressions are presented. Women are being shown as passive beings in the role of an observer and are not represented in an active role. This is the icing on the cake of the already dubious body images (slim, long-haired, dressed-up, unrealistic).


¹ By Wunderweib
Figure 11: There are also counter-examples that break through these gender stereotypes. Exemplary for this is the German fashion label closed (closed.com) that presents younger and older female models in a natural, appreciative manner. Source: www.closed.com. Accessed: November 27, 2017.
Figure 12 ‘Before Image_Hack’ (left) and Figure 13 ‘After Image_Hack’ (right): The iphiGenia Gender Design Award, founded by the international Gender Design Network (iGDN) in 2017, honours businesses and products that are innovative, gender-sensitive and that strike out in a new direction with regard to gender and design. Mindshare Denmark and their campaign Image_Hack is one of the prize-winners that breached stereotypes of shape by hacking a stock photo agency from within, displaying contemporary image results under the keyword ‘beautiful woman’. Photos: mindshare Denmark. Accessed: November 27, 2017.
The design of gender happens on three levels (Van Oost 2003, 195): the individual (skills, views, identities), the structural (i.e. gender-specific division of labour) and the symbolic level (cultural processes, norms, values). Aspects and characteristics with female or male connotations change with time and place and are thus considered a "dynamic and complex phenomenon" (Van Oost 2003, 195). As mentioned above, design is also a fluid phenomenon depending on time and space. Thus, design can be ascribed a special significance/responsibility in the shaping of gender.

The article presents a first approach to an analysis of websites with regard to gender references. Interesting areas of research are identified in relation to an analysis of individual target groups (children, adults), specific industries (sports, beauty) or the type of website (information, shopping).

Designers can break through the exemplified gender codes at different levels of the design process (see above). Unfortunately, the social impact of gender in design is still often disregarded and thus the impact of role models and role preconception is underestimated. The role and responsibility of designers should also be taken into account with regard to gender design and thus increase the awareness of designers.
Notes

1. Individual gender identity changes depending on requirements. Experiments in which the question of gender is psychologically forced into the background show that the behaviour of men and women converges. If the environment emphasises the role of gender, behaviour and self-perception increasingly conform to the respective gender stereotypes (Fine 2012).


4. Wikipedia Commons. “[...] inTouch deals mainly with the topics: stars and celebs, gossip and fashion – more than 30% of the magazine consists of images.” Accessed: November 27, 2017.
Bibliography


Bio

Katja Becker is professor of media and interface design at Westfälische Hochschule (Westphalian University of Applied Sciences). She teaches design research, design management and UX design and is director of beau bureau design (Cologne), a studio focusing on corporate design. Katja’s main interests are gender design, social design and innovation processes. She co-edited the book Young German Design Fresh Ideas in Graphic Design (2009) and was a Professor and Central Representative for Gender Equality at Hochschule Hamm-Lippstadt, a visiting lecturer at Jade Hochschule.

Claudia Herling is director of the Digitale Frische design studio (Cologne) and a visiting lecturer in design at the Aachen University of Applied Sciences and the Cologne University of Applied Sciences. With her studio, she focuses on graphic design, web design and illustration. She is also a freelance translator and author (index logo, 2005 and 2008; index illustration 2009, mitp) and vice chair of iGDN e.V. Germany. Claudia graduated in design from the Köln International School of Design (KISD).

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The design analysis of the media presented in this article focuses on the representation of female musicians, looking at the ways in which they stage both themselves and their gender in music videos. According to my observation, the visual portrayal of female artists has been defined by a long history of stereotypical gender representations that have to be overcome. In the music videos published by female musicians, we can observe design strategies for self-portrayal and gender staging, as well as sources of aesthetic inspirations and trends. Different oppositional design strategies are described that either blur gender, provoke the viewer or overcome stereotypical gender representations.
Focus, Rationale and Approach

Based on a visual communications perspective, this article analyses strategies of ‘acting out genders’ applied by female artists in the production of their music videos. The design analysis in this article focuses explicitly on the representation of female musicians, looking at the ways in which they stage both themselves and their gender in music videos. According to my observations of Artwork and Music Videos of the last decades, due to a long history of stereotypical gender representation, using design to create and acquire new spaces and improved visibility is particularly relevant and challenging for a multitude of female musicians at all levels of expertise.

I will describe and analyse four key examples in which strategies of ‘discerning’ design is successfully used to improve the representation of female musicians by creating images of gender and self-portrayal that overcome and undermine stereotypical gender roles. This article takes a cross-genre approach to the highly differentiated popular music landscape, instead of exploring the specific signs, codes, visual idioms, and established gender representations within particular music genres, for example Hip-hop or Heavy Metal. Although the term gender features a greater diversity than just the differentiation between male and female, this binary division cannot be avoided in the following analysis:

 [...] and, these analyses always have to be read against the background of socially acquired and prescribed gender roles and identities: it is about the positioning, self-perception and self-definition of the genders in relation to socially constructed roles. (Brandes 2014, 27)

Developments

The popular music business was and still is predominantly dominated by men, with only 22.4 percent of performing artists being female, and the numbers are much lower among people behind the scenes like songwriters and producers. Up to the end of the 1990s, male-dominated record companies and music labels were responsible for the distribution and marketing of female musicians and bands, which also included the way in which their image was shaped.

Old-fashioned views held by the male decision makers in the music industry are fuelled by a desire to increase profit margins: sex sells. In an industry where are a sexualised and gendered image of a woman has deep cultural roots, this continues to have a negative effect on female musicians. (Whiteley 2013, 39)

Through the representations on record and CD covers and in music videos, these companies also influenced the representation of gender, often catering to stereotypical concepts of masculinity and femininity. Viv Albertine, guitarist of female British Punk band ‘The Slits’ explains this while describing how her band was treated by the responsible persons from the record company:

First of all, Island assigns us an art director. [...] He says, the cover must be flashy pink and made of plastic with cracks and zippers all over. Bullshit. I say, we want something that reflects who we are and what kind of music we’re making, and this has got nothing to do with pink plastic. (Albertine 2016, 243)

Today, to a large extent, the music business works differently, with social media applications and related technologies playing a central role. As there are fewer and fewer large record companies
and much smaller budgets, female musicians not only have more responsibility with regard to the distribution and marketing of their music but also have more options in terms of self-determination. They have the opportunity to control distribution, marketing and self-representation via social media platforms such as Bandcamp, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, etc. These media platforms give female musicians new freedoms and opportunities in their identity presentation of themselves and their gender, but, on the other hand, these tools also pose new design challenges and need to be used responsibly as the photos and videos that have to be created for these channels to communicate the artists’ identity and image. Hence, the corporate design of the artist becomes increasingly important and is attributed greater responsibility. As female artists largely use the same channels and platforms as their audience, they enter into a direct relationship that facilitates mutual inspiration. This form of participation shapes a development that has led to new styles of performance and gender representation. A good example to show this is Instagram.

Instagram often features photos and videos that the respective female artist has taken, and distributes herself with her smartphone. With this form of communication, she creates an intimate relationship with the viewer and establishes a connection between public and private spaces. On Instagram, she can do this using photos and videos that show her in her own action spaces and activities, and she can also upload images that communicate critical messages on issues she considers relevant.

Mykki Blanco, an artist interacting with 73,000 (cited date January 2019) followers, does this very skilfully: she/he juxtaposes the expected images of her/himself as a ‘man’ or a ‘woman’ with photos or videos featuring critical and provocative content like a photo of a ‘Fuck Trump Tattoo’, for example. She/he thus successfully communicates her/his political and socio-critical thoughts and her/his understanding of gender to her followers and, in the best case, raises their awareness of these issues. With this method, she/he is able to fight against discrimination, to advocate freedom of choice in gender identity and to spread the demand for equality, using only the power of images.

The functions of music videos described by Diedrich Diederichsen in his book Über Pop-Musik can thus also, and not least, be transferred to the contents of Instagram.

The latency of pop music’s connection between sounds and visual ideas had become an object that could be formed and studied, an object whose structures also manifested other fundamental elements not included in the music itself: dance moves, dress codes, cultural solidarity, political position, brands and products etc. (Diederichsen 2014, 148)

For female artists, the following five design-relevant factors have changed: more images have to be produced for more channels. Alongside established representation forms like cover artwork, music video, stage performance, photos for band information and PR, websites, posters, etc., social media provide additional options: complementary sales platforms such as the iTunes Store or apps must also be serviced. Therefore, a distinct and consistent design concept is becoming increasingly important. Second, however, the budgets for these concepts have become smaller (except for the Big Players like Ariana Grande) or there is no budget at all (for all upcoming artists). Third, there are more technologies for creating design-relevant content and they are more easily accessible. For example, photo and video cameras that are able to generate semi-professional to professional-standard products have become cheaper.
A good smartphone can produce images of adequate quality. Additionally, publishing via the Internet has become easier through technical improvements. Image editing, for example, is today already included in most publishing software. Fourth, software for editing videos and pictures is easily accessible and its application is explained in various online tutorials. Therefore, everybody can use the software, at least in theory. Finally, the participation enabled by social media facilitates more direct contact with the audience. This has a reciprocal effect: on the one hand, the (female) artists can decide for themselves the degree of intimacy they want to share with their followers. They can choose how much to reveal about their private lives and can control the experience. On the other hand, through feedback and posts from their fans, artists not only get a feel for approval and criticism but also learn about the issues in their fans’ lives, about their looks and styles. Artists can use this kind of feedback to refine the topics they are addressing in their work and to develop their visual forms of representation and their gender constructions. Through user-generated content, there is an even wider dissemination.

New Possibilities through Design

Due to the above-explained changes, female artists now have more tools and options to play with traditional representations of femininity. In the following, these tools will be analysed in relation to the question of gender construction through design. In this analysis, the music video plays an important role because it also reveals the wealth of possibilities that the medium holds for female artists’ alternative gender constructions: in videos, female artists can not only stage and represent themselves but also their action spaces and actions.

Ideally, design can change visual hierarchies and stereotypical gender roles. There are different alternative design strategies that either blur gender, provoke the viewer, appropriate masculinity or overcome stereotypical gender representations. The strategy of “self-sexualisation” (Reitsamer 2015, 96), in which the artist chooses to sexualise herself and thus transforms herself from a sex object defined by the male gaze to a knowing and powerfully acting sex subject, will here only be treated in the context of provocation. The images generated through narcissistic self-objectification and the presentation of a perfectly sculpted female body by artists like Rihanna, Azealia Banks and Nicki Minaj, are not considered here because, in terms of design, they do not seem to offer an alternative to the sexualised representation of ‘women as objects’. Although, in these cases, the body is stylised as a central resource for female identity construction and thus holds a power potential necessary for an opposing attitude (cf. Gill 2016, 545), this form of power is questionable.

Girls and women are equipped with the power to act (agency) so that they can construct themselves as the kind of subject that comes close to heterosexual male fantasies found in pornography. (Gill 2016, 545)

Without additional explanation, the viewer cannot identify this as a strategy as such. The ‘self-sexualisation’ staged in this form of design is only resolved through additional information provided by the respective artists in their lyrics and interviews, as well as in tweets and posts in their social media channels. If these explanations are missing, it will be difficult for viewers to tell by the video’s design alone whether or not what they see is a self-determined representation. I will therefore omit this form of female self-representation in my analysis.
Based on different definitions developed for music videos and described by, for example, Klaus Neumann-Braun and Lothar Mikos (Neumann-Braun and Mikos 2006, 95ff.), I have identified and expanded four different strategies: blurring / concealing / disguising; provocation; appropriating masculinity; and staging femininity as a principle.

**Strategy 1: Blurring / Concealing / Disguising**

A good example for the blurring strategy is the British artist Planningtorock. Born in 1973 in the English town of Bolton, he/she officially changed his/her first name from Janine to, in gender terms, ambiguous Jam. In his/her work, which in addition to music also includes performance art and multimedia installations, he/she tackles the question of defining gender and the inherent limitations. In order to blur the sexual characteristics of his/her body, he/she uses Autotune on the acoustic level and, in his/her design and performances, often works with the interaction of light and disguise. Additionally, he/she also uses image editing and video software to change the outlines and blur the representation of his/her body through de-constructing photos and moving images. Planningtorock calls this “playing around with gender” (Walter 2015, 19). In his article Die Diktatur der Normalos (The Dictatorship of the Normals) Klaus Walter quotes the artist thus: “I want to push the boundaries in which we live, the way in which we are defined” (Walter 2015, 20). How this is implemented at the design level can be seen in the artwork, including videos, cover design, live performance, and stage costumes, designed by Planningtorock him/herself. In order to identify the visual components I will, by way of example, describe the video for the song The Breaks, produced by the artist.

The video consists of two alternating scenes: first, we see the artist Jam singing, and then we see Jam with his/her arm around a girl, about 9 years old, who looks exactly like Jam. The video is set in wasteland that could be an abandoned military compound. The images are coloured in monochrome blue, and in black and white, and are reminiscent of those produced by a mobile phone camera and, at times, due to the blue tinge and the grain, of VHS-recorded material.

The video’s most distinct attributes are the protagonist’s highly alienated look and the way he/she moves. The face is manipulated with various exaggerations of the nose and forehead, giving it a masculine look. Due to this masking, the facial expressions are constrained and are no longer clearly visible. The artist’s build is strongly altered by shoulder pads, making him/her look broad and tall, which, together with the long hair and a rather female-looking mouth generates confusion. The movements are sometimes captured in slow motion, indicating poses that could be interpreted as dance moves, but remain vague.

On the pictorial level, the veiling is additionally reinforced by using various filters and by superimposing different sequences, which blurs the images even more. The use of a gauze-like transparent fabric and, sometimes, of fog adds to the impression of obscuring and ambiguity.

British artist Elizabeth Bernholz, also known as Gazelle Twin, employs a similar concept. She uses simple means to transform her body, thus portraying it in a less clear manner. In the artwork that she designed for her album unflesh, her face is covered with an opaque stocking mask and the female form disappears under a large hoodie. Under the hood she wears a wig of long brown hair. In photos, videos and illustrations, only her mouth is visible, distorted into an angry and snarling grimace. The aggressive poses and
behaviour are rather male-connoted, while the prominently displayed long hair is suggestive of a female, resulting in a permanent feeling of bewilderment. Through this approach, the artist is not only unidentifiable, but also exudes an air of menace as the viewer is made to feel uncertain about the nature of the hooded figure. We never know who hides behind this disguise, an impression intensified by the artist, for example, in her video for the song *Exorcise*, in which also several identical 'creatures' appear.

In the concept of gender disguise I also include approaches in which female artists use only graphics or illustrations in their artwork that make them unidentifiable as a person and do not allow clear gender attribution.

**Strategy 2: Provocation**

The artist Merrill Nisker, also known as, Peaches is a good example for explaining the strategy of provocation. For many years, she has been developing a space for "alternative sexual identities" (Reitsamer 2015, 96), using queer artistic practices and representations to challenge the "binary logic of gender differentiation" (Reitsamer 2015, 96) and staging herself as a knowing and empowered sex subject. The music video that she produced herself for her song *Rub* offers many examples to illustrate the visual idiom, costumes and artefacts characteristic of Peaches. In its graphic directness, the content references the blurring boundaries between the pornographic and the mainstream as they are visualised today, and illustrates the "Porn Chic" described, for example, by Rosalind Gill (Gill 2007, 546). In parts, the performance and visuals are drastic, highlighting a fundamental problem of provocation: in a world where images and visuals are constantly becoming more radical, provocation is having a hard time to be perceived as what it is. Peaches’ strategy is an important contribution to highlight alternatives to established representations of female artists because she does not limit gender and sexuality to binary sexes and to heterosexuality and she visualises this in her performances, costumes, images, and videos in partly drastic ways. How exactly she does this, will be described, using some example scenes to explain her principle.

A pink cloud of dust settles in the desert, revealing a view of Peaches sleeping. Apparently, Peaches has been abducted by a woman in a short pink tulle dress licking at a vagina-shaped lolly and by a woman in worker's clothes who takes Peaches to a different location in a minivan. They drive into a large garage in which there are many, mostly corpulent and almost naked, women who are in stark contradiction to the beauty ideal promoted by the media because they boast a lot of pubic hair. The women are sweating and rubbing various fluids onto their own bodies and on those of the other women.

For a part of the musical performance, the scene changes to the desert. The band members are naked women who also have distinct pubic hair and a male (initially) singer who proceeds to undress during his performance. He turns from a man into a woman with glued-on breasts, until revealing real breasts underneath the fake ones. The scene changes again; it is night and we see a sex ritual where Peaches is being sacrificed. The bare-breasted “high priestess” is rolling around in the sand in front of Peaches before revealing a penis, forcefully swinging it in front of Peaches’ face. The artist responds to this performance with a hearty laugh. At the end of the ceremony, we see the naked Peaches disappear together with her female abductor, now also naked. Before they walk away, they urinate, standing, in the sand.

With this video, Peaches visualises what Rosa Reitsamer refers to as “sex politics” (Reitsamer
According to Reitsamer, Peaches challenges the binary logic of gender differentiation because she does not reduce gender and sexuality to binary sexes and heterosexuality (Reitsamer 2015, 96). On the contrary, with her pictures, the artist opens our view to the diversities the concept of gender can offer, by representing both lesbian women and transgender.

The representation of the people in the video can be interpreted as a clear criticism of the predominant imagery of perfectly formed and objectified bodies promoted by the media. In her video, Peaches juxtaposes the stereotypical lesbian in the form of the tomboy abductor and of the pink doll-woman (with the vagina lolly) – the epitome of the omnipresent infantile Lolita – with the hairy women in the garage, some of them rather obese, who do not conform to any traditional stereotype. Through the different body shapes and the visible pubic hair, the objectified and sexualised femininity that we know from magazines and advertising, for example, is opposed by using coarse and ‘un-beautified’ representations, an impression that is additionally reinforced by showing the two women urinating in the sand. Simultaneously, with the shot of urinating in public, the artist appropriates a very male-connoted space and literally ‘marks’ her territory. The singer of the band shown in the video impressively visualises a variable, and hence fluid, idea of gender by transforming from a man to a ‘fake’ woman, to a ‘real’ woman. With this form of staging, the dominant heterosexual and binary visual idiom is expanded while simultaneously visualising a distinct criticism of the male gaze. Additionally, the artist uses her drastic images to provoke, and thus to question, the power regime of a normative societal order based on binary sexes.

**Strategy 3: Appropriating Masculinity**

In her book *Female Masculinity* (Halberstam 1998), author Judith (later: Jack) Halberstam describes masculinity with regard to the relationship between the male body and power and dominance, and at how masculinity is also performed by female bodies. She considers performances “that show a male habitus inscribed into female bodies” (Gerhards 2015, 162). Another potential example is the appropriation of rather male-connoted action spaces and behaviour as implemented, for example, by the band SXTN. In the music video for their single, the young German female rappers celebrate a night together with their “Fotzen im Club” (“c*nts at the club”).

First, there is a boozy ‘warm-up’ in a flat, before the rappers and their girlfriends take to the streets. Large bottles of alcohol are being consumed, joints are being smoked, and a baguette is prominently displayed as a ‘penis substitute’. The spaces the women occupy include the streets, an underground station, an underground train, a supermarket, the pavement, public toilets, and a club. Here, the term occupy has to be taken quite literally: they use the handles in the train for acrobatics and dance through the compartment, they harass other (male) passengers, they sit in shopping trolleys or in lockers and they stand, sit or lie on pavements, waste bins and power supply boxes in the urban space. In one scene, we see one of the protagonists losing a tooth when opening a beer bottle and laughing about it. The young women even video themselves, from a bird’s eye view, while urinating in a public toilet. All this happens using distinctly casual, space-consuming body language.

The pictures are reminiscent of a home video: the camera is close to the young women, in the centre of the action, the images seem to be created spontaneously and recorded with a smartphone, which has an (intentional) negative effect on focus and contrast. The cuts are fast, matching the song’s electronic dance beats. Image quality and camera perspective are similar to those in current YouTube videos. With the images produced in the
video and in associated social media channels, the artists visualise a break with traditional female roles (Neumann-Braun and Mikos 2006), creating a new action space for themselves. On the one hand, this includes the way in which they move and behave in the space (brawling, drinking, vomiting, urinating, bleeding, etc.) and, on the other hand, it includes the space itself because ‘the street’, with associated topics like territorial thinking and aggression, is seen as a male-connoted environment.

Strategy 4: Staging Femininity as a Principle

Norwegian singer Jenny Hval provides a successful example of the strategy of clearly staging oneself as feminine while simultaneously overcoming stereotypical gender representations. In her photos and videos, she is always clearly recognisable as a woman, but she avoids the poses, movements, and behaviour, that we know from conventional visualisations of female roles. The protagonists in her videos are almost exclusively women, while men, if there are any at all, are only marginal figures. Her music video for Female Vampire is a good example, illustrating her design concept.

Initially, the singer is standing at the roadside of an urban environment, lifting her black cape like a bat raising its wings. We then see her approaching on a bicycle, cape billowing, and leaning against an illuminated billboard like an insect attracted by light. Then we see six women from behind as they are walking through an underpass and onto an escalator. They are not talking to each other and seem to be walking purposefully and focused on their destination. The scene is reminiscent of film sequences in which street gangs are gathering. The images are coarse and slightly out of focus. They flicker similar to an old movie. The women are wearing trousers and sneakers, making themselves unidentifiable with large scarves or shawls wrapped around their heads. The song starts at the moment when the women reach their destination, a dimly lit and seedy building. It is very dark, and there is only a gloomy red light. Jenny Hval and her companions seem to commence what they came to this place for: the camera pans to show the faces of the young women, who are acting in an illuminated space within the dim setting, their faces and hands now clearly visible. A second video layer is superimposed on the camera pan across the women's faces, showing their hands smearing a jelly-like substance on each other's faces, then carefully placing their faces cheek to cheek. They do this very slowly, carefully and respectfully. The substance on their faces causes the women to stick to each other. The ritual seems to be a kind of unification in which the women turn to each other. What is happening is, quite literally, a joining together and thus a female-connoted action: the forming of alliances. The images move slowly and we can see that the substance on the women's skin has dried and is coming off. The women carefully take the film off each other's faces, 'shedding their skin', and then jump into the air to the same rhythm. They have obviously been invigorated through this nightly unification with other women: a visual translation of empowerment. All this is staged carefully, avoiding any form of objectified, sexualised femininity. Instead, a male-dominated power regime is challenged by a threatening (female) night-time sororization.

Outlook

The above-described analyses show how female musicians can use design and newly gained possibilities to undermine traditional gender representations and hierarchies, thus creating new concepts of artwork and music videos beyond the described stereotypes. In the present situation, these solutions are rather an exception...
to the rule. Further research is needed to identify the reasons for this and we have to accelerate the dissemination of positive examples, giving them increased visibility. If it is possible to gradually break down the boundaries of visually reinforced hierarchies, it may also be possible to shift the hierarchies in the music business, which is still dominated by men, and, simultaneously, to create representations of self(-awareness) and gender beyond the hetero-normative binary logic of gender differentiation.

Everything pop music has openly represented so far is male hetero-sexuality. This can be changed. One can mark it as one principle among others and one can, indeed, leave it behind. (Diederichsen 2014, 169)

Notes

1. Study led by Dr. Stacy L. Smith (analysed Billboard Charts from 2012 to 2017) found out that only 22.4% percent of performing artists were women. http://assets.uscannenberg.org/docs/inclusion-in-the-recording-studio.pdf
2. Island is a record label.
3. The art director was unable to push through with his idea and was later replaced with Neville Brody.
4. Viv Albertine was a guitarist of The Slits, a pioneering female British Punk band.
5. The record company describes her/him as a “non-binary gender-queer post-homo-hop musical artist”
6. Through automatic image editing and filters, there is, however, an increasing danger of aesthetics becoming more universal because these tools warp reality and establish and spread stereotypes.
7. In 1992, Sir Mix-a-Lot loved ‘Big Butts’; today, artists like Nicki Minaj love their own butt, putting it and their nipples (Azelia Banks) at the centre of their visual appearance to great effect in the media.
8. Autotune is software for manipulating pitch.
9. The video is x-rated on all popular video platforms.
Figure 1–2 (pages 41): The Breaks by Planningtorock.

Figure 3–4 (pages 42): Exorcise by Gazelle Twin.

Figure 5–6 (pages 43): Rub by Peaches.
Figure 7–8 (left and right): Fotzen im Club by SXTN.
Source: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NH9HRlyos80

Figure 9–10 (page 46): Female Vampire by Jenny Hval.
Screenshots: www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZVoWc00aZ30.
Bibliography


Bio

Tanja Godlewsky is a lecturer at the Institute of Popular Music at the Folkwang University of the Arts (Essen) and founding member of iGDN (International Gender Design Network) in Germany. Taking on board an interdisciplinary approach to design, she has consistently pursued a multifaceted design career. She supports companies and agencies in the development of holistic design concepts. Since 2006, she has also been a teacher and visiting professor at universities, teaching on subjects related to design concepts, identity, and gender design. In addition to gender issues in design, her research and work also focuses on the interfaces of design and music, and on developments in the field of corporate identity of musicians. Tanja also gives talks and presentations and moderates events on various subjects related to design and pop culture.

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This essay focuses on one of the numerous aspects in design that illustrates the necessity of including gender. It discusses gender identities between subjection and agency within the broad realm of matters, textiles, and fashion. The article exemplarily wanders through various forms of social oppression and exploitation of women in history as well as today, but also offers perspectives of resilience and resistance. Although totally different from each other, they have one phenomenon in common: it is both the body and the material that matters. In the end, the possibility of transforming the social making of objectified and subjectified bodies into fluid identities is discussed.
Whether we like it or not, whether we are aware of it or not, all the products, symbols and services that we either encounter involuntarily or that we voluntarily surround us with speak to us in a gendered language – sometimes confusing or blurred, more often than not in a stereotypical way of what socially is considered and constructed to be ‘male’ or ‘female’.

Objects generally function as cultural signs and symbols, as markers of distinction, and communicative means.

Firstly, products generate and people do gender by voluntarily subjecting. Secondly, gender provides a biographical narration about the construction of gender “and thus also forms a direct connection to the dimension of experience or memory. Things (called object for a good reason) appear to be the most ‘pure’ form of objectivity. In other words, things can be, or tell, stories” (Bal 2006, 271). Thirdly, products also play an important role by serving as props or requisites for small dramas to perform and stage gender roles. Objects and arrangements always fulfil a twofold function: a private and a public one.

I will now demonstrate both the crucial role of design and the urgent necessity to embrace gender in design. I decided to exemplarily discuss gender identities between subjection and agency within the broad realm of matters, textiles, and fashion. To start with I will take a quick glance at two violent types of historic female subjection, although very different in their manifestation.

The Bourgeois Private Woman

When, in the nineteenth century, the bourgeoisie eventually advanced to become the ruling class, the bourgeois woman’s field of activity was limited to the role of being a good housewife and mother in the private home. It was only in this interior space that she was allowed to indulge in her allegedly natural urge to find self-fulfilment in decoration. This even went as far as integrating the woman into the furnishings as a decorative accessory: she was “the finest adornment in her decorated home” (Falke 1882, 356): the bourgeois woman had become invisible. Irene Nierhaus vividly highlights the ideological idea of the, as it were, naturally decorative and decorating private woman:

In the course of the nineteenth century, needlework, textile materials and interior design were linked to a genuinely female gender characteristic. Bio-psychological naturalisation and mythical historisation are the means for this, marking, in 19th century texts, the wealth of textiles and ornaments in the interior space as the true intrinsic culture of the woman. (Nierhaus 1999, 88, transl. by U.B.)

If we wanted to develop any optimistic future vision from this, we could state that, in the course of the twentieth century, these abilities established themselves as independent professional design disciplines such as interior design, jewellery design and, indeed, textile design. So far, however, these disciplines have not been able to truly overcome their one-dimensional association with fields of practice considered typically female: female ‘skilfulness’, ‘dexterity’, the female ‘sense of beauty’ as well as the allegedly special way women handle textiles, flowing fabrics, soft materials and colourful patterns have been weaving their ideological ways from the past to the present.

The Exploited Female Factory Worker

With industrialisation, and accordingly with the mechanisation and technicalisation of work, the female proletarian did not, however, disappear in private life, but rather in an inhumane, standardised workplace: the factory. Here, as
is generally known, she was paid even more miserably than her male colleagues and was given even worse kinds of work for which no qualifications were needed – allegedly.

However, the textile industry would soon become the most important employer for women. With the use of hydropower and, soon after, of steam power, (textile) work had been transferred from the home to the factory. The interim step of collective work at home (cottage industry) through the putting-out system at least allowed women a certain degree of freedom in a community of solidarity with other women: a merchant would supply them with the raw material – yarn – which they would then spin or weave into a product that would be returned to the merchant who would pay them a – doubtless miserable – piece-rate wage. The factory, however, would finally and completely dispossess women of any self-determination: invented in rapid succession, the mechanical machines for the manufacture of textiles controlled both the head and the body by relentlessly dictating the pace of work and dividing up the work process: John Kay’s 1733 ‘flying shuttle’ was one of the first inventions in the long succession of technical innovations for mechanically improved weaving; in 1764, James Hargreaves invented the ‘spinning jenny’ and in 1769 Richard Arkwright came up with his much more complex ‘throstle’ or ‘water frame’, the first spinning machine powered by a water wheel and needing no human power. At least just as significant, the ‘water frame’ was able to continuously process the raw material so that the human work element was reduced to replacing a full spindle with an empty one and to reconnecting broken threads. This kind of work was considerably duller than the former manual work of spinning. Samuel Crompton’s ‘spinning mule’ from 1779 eventually combined the qualities of its two predecessors into a much more sophisticated machine.

As the processing of materials such as yarn or straw had always been women’s work, even in the pre-industrial age, it continued for women as socialised paid work – and, to the present day, it is identified and stigmatised as female. We could metaphorically state that, with mechanised factory work, women lost the thread, and they were deprived of controlling the goods. The product became merchandise by adding exchange value to utility value, and, from then onwards, the exchange value would simultaneously capitalise and subjectify the object while the people who produced the artefact were objectified.

Hence, the women in these two very different classes (proletariat and bourgeoisie) shared the same two phenomena: on the one hand invisibility, with the one disappearing in the anonymity of the factory and the other in the intimacy of the home. On the other hand, both were made responsible for all fabric-related materials, for textiles and for the related activities. Both forms, however, confirm the female ‘deviation’ from the societal, male-constructed norm.

Material and Form

When we consider this part of female history, the (textile) material appears as the substance, and this substance seems to be typically female. ‘Material’ is the matter we handle and with which we come into physical and almost always bodily contact. Material is the raw matter, that which is thing-like. The more general ‘materiality’, on the other hand, can be considered the concept, the form of ‘thingness’. This once again mirrors the recurring interrelated juxtapositions of the Aristotelian concepts of techne and episteme or Descartes’ res extensa and res cogitans. Material amalgamates itself with mater and is hence the original, the source, the fundamental, but, as such, it is also the raw, the wild, the untamed – and that
must be subjugated and shaped: it must be put into form. Having established that, it is no coincidence that we arrive at the bipolarity of the sexes, which usually interpreted as a matter of fate, is indeed nothing but ideological: Didi-Huberman forcefully critiques this ideological meaning of ‘material’, using the example of wax (and referring to the truism of Aristotle’s ‘embryology’):

> What does this preliminary look at the material of wax teach us? First, that its plasticity cannot be reduced to the canonical passivity of Madame Matter enduring the thrusting – and the pounding of seals – that Mister Form would forever subject her to. (Didi-Huberman 2006, 207)

Just like other scholars, Judith Butler also traced the idea of the wild material of ‘woman’ that has to be tamed by the man from its origin in antiquity through to present gender constructions (see, among others, Butler 2011, especially the chapter “Matters of Femininity”, 7-11).

Following this thought, the woman would be material, which is kneaded (soft as wax) and shaped in male hands, and hence is put into form by design. When we combine this logic with the etymological double meaning of the word ‘text’, we arrive at a historically oppositional (and by no means equivalent) pattern: text literally means “things woven”, and stems from the Latin verb “texere”: “to weave”, “to join”, “fit together”, “braid”, “interweave”, “construct”, “fabricate”, “build” (Oxford English Dictionary 2010). The unfolding metaphors match the hierarchical idea: “thought is a thread, and the raconteur is a spinner of yarns – but the true storyteller, the poet, is a weaver” (Brinughurst 2004, 25). The female weavers hold the concealed, the invisible concept of the thread in their hands, while the poet becomes the real hero who visibly interweaves these thoughts. He is the hero who forms language through writing so that it can be preserved and passed on, while the women only provide the raw material that can no longer be identified in the final product. Brinughurst eventually links the written word to the cloth, but he is not aware of the inequality: “After long practice, their [the scribes’], work took on such an even, flexible texture that they called the written page a textus, which means cloth” (ibid.) Although referring to a different context, Thomas is more aware of the precarious “affinity between the woven word and the woven cloth” (Thomas 2016, 1).

**The fairy-tale version of expropriation**

Hence we can safely say that the thread/yarn material fettered women in a very specific and gender-specific way: it tied them to the home, the factory, the man. The female bodily fluids – blood, sweat and tears – which, as already impressively described elsewhere, both physically and mentally merge with the processing of the material – spinning, weaving, sewing – once again reappear metaphorically in many fairy tales, in particular in those by the Brothers Grimm: as a young girl, Sleeping Beauty pricks her finger on a spindle (blood!), Rumpelstiltskin spins the straw of the miller’s daughter into gold and, fortunately, she solves the evil imp’s riddle in the end. In Mother Hulda, when the hardworking servant (girl) is washing her blood (!) off the spindle, it falls into the well, but here too there is a happy end. The Three Spinners is much more ambivalent because the recalcitrant girl dodges the exploitative hunger of the male-influenced production process by unashamedly exploiting three other female workers who are already physically deformed by hard labour. In another fairy tale, Spindle, Shuttle, and Needle come ‘alive’ like robots and help the poor, yet cunningly clever girl, to get the prince. All these more or less obedient fairy tale girls are
spinners but do not end up as spinsters: in stark contrast to the reality of the nineteenth century, they are rewarded with a noble and rich man, who liberates them from their hard work, but at the same time, takes total control over them. In the fairy tale, the female proletarian and the princess blend into one single character, but here too those girls do not find freedom. As soon as they are sexually mature, they are subjected to a man. The blood resulting from pricking their fingers on the spindle anticipates, to some extent, the girls’ deflowering that will later just be re-enacted by the son of a king.

The fact that the women are being dispossessed of both their products and their bodies remains unchanged: the invisible female provision and preparation of both the material and their bodies for the designer of a visible final product – the designed good ‘textile’ and the designed good ‘woman’.

**The objectified female fashion-body**

From these historical associations, all of which are very intensely connected with design, though not in the direct sense of (fashion) design, we will now jump to the present. However, those who think that gender constructions in design have essentially changed are wrong.

The staging of, in particular, the female body in fashion objectifies the subjects in a modern way; they are empty object-shells onto which fashion is applied as the subject. Designers tend to refer to models as ‘clothes hangers’ and abuse them respectively.

Barbara Vinken describes the reasons why these exploitative structures clearly focus on female fashion on female bodies:

*Ultimately, female fashion is about that which male fashion obscures for the sake of preserving the institutional body: about bodily metamorphoses, about the way of all flesh. Female fashion externalises the individual to its corporeality.* (Vinken 2013, 37, transl. by U.B.)

The male ‘institutional body’ cannot wear extreme or crazy clothes on a society-wide level because the both iconic and most successful modern male garment, the suit, sublates the body within a controlled and dominating figure of authority. This is also one of the reasons why queer, trans and neutral (fashion) bodies cannot, may not, due to mechanisms that stabilise domination, play a significant role in socially constructed normality.

**Horror in the fashion body**

*The determining male gaze projects its phantasies onto the female figure. [...] women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to-be-looked-at-ness.* (Mulvey 1999, 62f.)

Using the case of a fashion shoot, I will now demonstrate a particularly perfidious, yet not at all unusual ‘male gaze’ in the contemporary fashion industry. Widely considered one of the international star designers, photographer Steven Meisel (who has designed each cover of Vogue Italia since 1988), who every now and again seems to love playing with images of tortured or murdered women, created a particularly repulsive and misogynist photo spread for the April 2014 issue of Vogue Italia. With the title "Horror Movie", he showed a long sequence of scenes testifying to extremely brutal domestic violence: young women (models in, of course, luxury garments by famous fashion designers), as one can see by their mouths, screaming in shock and horror or as silent corpses.

I will only describe two of the many more scenes published in this issue of Vogue Italia: a young
woman is lying head first at the bottom of a staircase in a house. Eyes half open, perhaps already dead due to a neck fracture inflicted by falling down the stairs, legs twisted, thighs apart, one arm stretched out with a bloody kitchen knife lying next to it. Her shiny dark red hair mixes with the blood that pours out of a head wound and that perfectly matches her red, slightly dishevelled dress. In the twilight a man in a bloodstained shirt sits opposite, yet removed from her in an armchair, looking at her calmly, bereft of emotion.

Second scene: a black-haired woman, a girl rather, dressed all in innocent white (‘like a virgin’), her arms raised in panic, her mouth wide open as if screaming, presses herself against the wall of a staircase. Along the wall, there are bloody traces as if fingers had slipped down the wall. On the top landing, a man in a white shirt features carefully arranged blood splashes. His face is outside the picture frame, the lower part of his body and his hands obscured by the shadowy darkness of the staircase.

Except for the first example, in which the red-haired model is staged as a corpse, all the other victims still seem to be somehow alive. However, we are left in the dark as to how the scene designed as a momentum of violence will eventually end. But still, we could imagine the outcome of these acts of violence because, in each photo, Meisel has ‘reconstructed’ a famous film scene in which a woman becomes the victim of violence, including, for example, scenes from The Birds with the Crystal Plume (original title: L’Uccello dalle piume di cristallo), Suspiria, The Shining or The Silence of the Lambs. It’s hard to determine which is worse: the photo series itself or the fact that the powerful chief editor of Vogue Italia, Franca Sozzani (who died in 2016) claimed that this action was intended to condemn violence against women and as a contribution to the struggle for women’s empowerment and emancipation (see Fury 2014)! Such an impertinent statement once again demonstrates the tacky, yet powerful, construct by which in some parts of the fashion world, with its fashion shows, glamour magazines and advertising campaigns, a sexualised morbidity culture is being celebrated – a culture in which staged passion degenerates into power, romanticism into violence and closeness into sheer hatred.

The beauty of these photographs transforms acts of violence and humiliation into erotic possibilities. […] Torture has not only become normalised, it has been integrated into one of the most glamorous forms of consumer culture – high fashion. (Bourke 2006)

There’s hope: fluid gender constructions

Finally, taking a more optimistic look at the historical gender-web starting with weaving, spinsters, housewives, exploited female workers and poor-girl-to-princess up to the abused models in today’s fashion design and photography, we can see the beginnings of totally different forms, the best examples of which could serve as role models for gender sensitivity, gender openness and gender blur – concepts that, although deriving from fashion, reach far beyond it.

Here I wish to make specific reference of the ‘Inter-Fashion for unmarked Bodies’ collection conducted during 2014 in a course entitled ‘Inter-, Trans- and InBetween-Fashion’ at the Köln International School of Design (KISD), exemplified in the work of Juliana Lumban Tobing (Manyfold Diversity), Annika Mechelhoff (Archi-Dress), Zoe Philine Pingel and Kathrin Polo (#040585) and Katja Trinkwalder and Paul Claussen (Amorphé).

Fashion design spans the highly controversial spectrum from the asocial, sexist and non-ecological discount store and throwaway fashion to mainstream and business dress and to extreme gender stereotyping at the one end
and to experimental gender fluidity at the other. As one of the most advanced fields of design, fashion is, after all, also the perfect playground for experimenting with gender-fluid concepts. Here, gender identities can be explored and put to the test in very experimental ways because bodies can be veiled, exposed, changed, deformed, re-interpreted, and re-composed.

Emancipatory textiles and fashion are finely calibrated seismographs for new tendencies, not only in fashion itself: they also work as a societal blueprint for future societal democratisation efforts. Fashion can be an agent for increasingly unmarked bodies, with openness, fluidity, and many different options at its disposal and the possibility to drive forward self-empowerment for all genders.

It will be exciting to observe what the future will bring: regression to conventional-conservative patterns or a focus on gender inclusion and gender diversity, including the radical openness of 'the sky’s the limit': fluid, elastic constructs that not only allow diverse but also constantly changing gender identities.

The following set of images represent 'Inter-Fashion for unmarked Bodies'. This project embodies an experimental approach by design students who had no expertise in fashion design. In this specific instance, the task was to think about body “shells”, i.e. how to cover a gendered body in a way that both genders and body shapes are blurred and concealed. Twelve images show the various angles that design and gender take, manifesting in a number of fashion proposals.

Figure 1—3 (pages 55-57): Manyfold Diversity by Juliana Lumban Tobing. Many folded pieces of Origami can be assembled and attached in numerous ways to reshape and/or hide the body albeit expressively. Source: Juliana Lumban Tobing, 2018.

Figure 4—5 (pages 58-59): Archi-Dress by Annika Mechelhoff. Architecture can be an initiator when looking for new types of fashion. Here, the inspiration derives from the architecture of Frank Gehry, especially buildings such as the Vitra Design Museum (Weil, 1989), the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao (1997), or Walt Disney Hall (Los Angeles, 2003). Source: Annika Mechelhoff: 2018.

Figure 6—9 (pages 60-63): #040585 by Zoe Philine Pingel and Kathrin Polo. The title '#040585' indicates the specific nuance of the colour blue according to the RGB colour system. This performative message opposes the preformed, conventional construction of gender by claiming the development of free personality. Source: Zoe Philine Pingel and Kathrin Polo: 2018.

Figure 10—12 (pages 64-66): Amorphé by Katja Trinkwalder and Paul Claussen. This is a very fluid, temporary fashion, each time changing the body shape of an individual in an unpredictable way: the model wears a box on their back that is constantly filled with dry ice and hot water, thus producing the effect of a mystical fog that envelops the person and blurs their body shape. Source: Katja Trinkwalder and Paul Claussen, 2018.
Bibliography


Bio

Dr. Uta Brandes is an author and frequent visiting lecturer at German and international universities (e.g. Switzerland, Japan, Hong Kong, China, Taiwan, the USA, Egypt, and Australia). Until mid-2015 she was Professor for Gender & Design and Design Research at the Köln International School of Design, University of Technology, Arts and Science, Cologne. She is co-initiator and chairperson of the international Gender Design Network / iGDN, and co-founder of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Designtheorie und -forschung (German Association of Design Theory and Design Research). Together with Michael Erlhoff she runs “be design”, consulting with institutions and companies on design-related issues.
Cultural Appropriation, Design, and Gender in Calendar Posters in China (1912-1949)

Sandy Ng
68–75

This three image-essay looks at how depictions of modern woman were central in advertising designs and imported products in the context of gender, identity, and design in early twentieth-century China. The adaptation of Euro-American concepts, linked to modernisation in local contexts resulted in both the production of hybrid poster designs to promote merchandise, they embody gender fluid design. This essay uses three specific images to situate objects, image and context, before highlighting specific elements contained within each as examples of mid-century gender narratives.

#design
#modern woman
#poster
#advertisement
#consumerism
Sandy Ng - Cultural Appropriation, Design, and Gender in Calendar Posters in China
Figure 1 (page 69): Hang Zhiying/Zhiying Studio — Calendar Poster for Fengtian Sino-Russian Tobacco, 1920-30s. Source: Fukuoka Asian Art Museum

Figure 2 (pages 70-71): Hang Zhiying/Zhiying Studio — Calendar Poster for Fengtian Sino-Russian Tobacco, 1920-30s. Source: Fukuoka Asian Art Museum.

Figure 3 (this and opposite page): Hu Boxiang — Calendar Poster for British American Tobacco Co., 1929. Source: Fukuoka Asian Art Museum
In early twentieth-century China, images of women became instrumental in familiarizing foreign products to local consumers and in the formation of the modern Chinese lifestyle. The pictures illustrated here are advertising posters (also known as calendar posters because of their initial inclusion in calendars) employing depictions of attractive and fashionable women to introduce novel products to consumers. Female representation became entwined in the process of modernisation in which foreign products were acquainted through local designs. In Hang Zhijing’s “Calendar Poster for Fengtian Sino-Russian Tobacco” (1920-30s) (fig. 1), a young woman is featured in a Chinese-style dress with a luxurious fur-collar coat and white gloves. Her hybrid style shows that her thoroughly modern fashion combines the indigenous and the foreign. Many poster designs of the period bear traditional elements such as a traditionally designed garden or interior settings to avoid appearing too exotic. The model poses in a Chinese garden, featuring slender bamboo and traditional architecture with advertised cigarette packages placed underneath the poetic image. Adaptation of Euro-American concepts of modernism in local contexts resulted in hybrid poster designs and the promoted merchandise became broadly accepted.

At the same time, new and Western designs were part of the composition, impressing consumers with a modern lifestyle that fulfilled a fantasy of progress. In Hang Zhijing’s “Calendar Poster for Fengtian Sino-Russian Tobacco” (1920-30s) (fig. 2), a woman in a study is portrayed with a cigarette package on the desk. She is in the act of smoking, which was deemed undesirable because loose women and prostitutes were known to be avid smokers. By placing the model in a Western-style study, it bettered the negative perception of women smoking, eased the mind of female smokers and associated smoking with intellectual activities. Her awkward posture points to the practice of employing male models to dress up as women because no decent ladies would take on a modelling job that was deemed dubious. The stiffness in rendering (she appears to have two left feet) indicates the painter’s lack of training in regard to rendering human figures. A framed landscape on the right and a photograph of an indistinct subject on the desk emphasise the role of representation in daily life.

The most fascinating advertising poster, however, is Hu Boxiang’s “Calendar Poster for British American Tobacco Co.” (1929) (fig. 3) that positions the delicate woman arranging flowers in the centre of the composition, which illustrates “leisure time”, stated in the two characters in the middle of the stylised Chinese cloud-patterned design on top with the typical characters for “Happy New Year”. The cigarette package (accompanied by a calendar on each side) is almost a second-thought placed near the bottom of the poster. The beauty of the woman and the flowers are sufficient to promote the product and remind us of Wei Yong’s (1643-1654) discussion in Yuerong Bian (Delight in Adornment), emphasising that a beautiful woman’s house without flowers (or gardens) can never be completed:

A beauty is a flower’s “true self” (zhenshen) and a flower captures a beauty’s momentary image. They understand each other’s language, seek each other’s laughter, and care for each other with mutual affection. Flowers not only please a beauty’s eyes, but also enhance her appearance. (Hung 1997, 324)
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Bio

Sandy Ng is assistant professor of Culture & Theories in The School of Design of The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. She received her PhD from the School of Oriental and African Studies (University of London), specializing in modern Chinese art and culture. She is currently working on a book-length research project that explores design, gender, and modern living in the twentieth century. She is a visiting fellow at the Bard Graduate Centre in New York, United States during the 2018-19 academic year.
The first attempt to reinvent the public spaces, #WomenSpatialActivism, reclaims the women’s right to the city in India. Women Spatial Activism (WSA) proposes a gender-sensitive approach to urban design in the neighbourhood of Malviya Nagar in Delhi in India, that inspires the reappropriation of the front door by an old woman, the street by a working girl and the public park by mothers. The proposal is to reclaim women’s right to the city through the recontextualisation of their public spaces which have been lost or need to be developed in urbanised India. The project has three main components: bottom-up strategic spatial interventions, the creation of a strong coalition of local stakeholders, and the use of digital technology. The hashtag #WomenSpatialActivism or #WSA aims to spread this movement through social media. The Women Spatial Activism project calls for a spatial gender agenda for an inclusive urban future for all.
Introduction

If we are going to see real development in the world then our best investment is women.
(Desmond Tutu)

Masculine and feminine roles are not biologically fixed but socially constructed.
(Judith Butler)

According to the United Nations, current urban planning and urban development policies are not sufficiently concerned with gender inequality. The vision of UN-Habitat III aims for cities and settlements that promote civic engagement and participatory planning to engender a sense of belonging and possession among all their inhabitants (“Quito declaration on sustainable cities and human settlements for all” 2016). Violence and crime against women in the form of rape, molestation, and eve-teasing is a grave concern in all parts of the world and has made public spaces fearful (Paul 2011).

The challenge to bring gender-equal public spaces into practice asks for a two-sided approach: a social/cultural behavioural practice (education) and a physical practice (how do we create safe and accessible public spaces for everyone). This article presents a wishful pilot project of Women Spatial Activism that comes from the personal motivation of the author: “I am the motivation for myself. As a young Indian woman, I want to live in a city where every woman feels free and safe in a public space. As a young urbanist I want to plan and design gender inclusive, safe and vibrant public urban spaces” (Gupta 2017). The project aims at defining a new role of Urban Design in enhancing gender equality through public space design in an urban neighbourhood in India.

The issues regarding gender inequality in public spaces in Delhi instigate the main question as: Which spatial interventions, technology-based solutions and design processes could give women of New Delhi a gender-inclusive network of public spaces and re-appropriation to what the city has to offer? The network of public spaces here defines the connectivity between public spaces, in order to give a safe network of connectivity.

The article comprises of seven main sections to answer these questions. Section 2 constitutes Gender Inequality as a cultural, economic and spatial issue in India. This part is followed by gender and urban space that matter worldwide in Section 3. Section 4 targets the neighbourhood in question or the test case. In the next part, Section 5, a WomenSpatialActivism design charter is formulated from the issues that come out of the workshop and site analysis with the theoretical background and best practices all over the world. Section 6 comprehends the main design interventions of WomenSpatialActivism or WSA. Section 7 finally concludes the research and points out the intentional pilot project.

Gender Inequality as a Cultural, Economic and Spatial Issue in Delhi, India

This section focuses on how gender inequality is a spatial issue and impacts the economy of the country. A space that does not support gender equality is a gendered space. Patriarchy starts strongly in the domestic system itself in India and the house remains the central space for women. A woman is strongly identified because of her male counterpart in India and the house becomes the symbol of her identity (Tharu, Susie and Niranjana 1994).

The public spaces for girls and women in India are only for necessary activities, such as going to work, to shop or other necessary activities. Loitering or “flaneuring” in public spaces is not accepted for women in Indian culture (Phadke et al. 2009). #Whyloiter? by the Pukar Organisation focuses on gender as a category to examine the
ordering and experience of the city, particularly public places, ranging from streets, public toilets and market places to recreational areas and modes of public transport (Phadke, Ranade and Khan 2009).

The country has a population of over 1.2 billion where half of them are female (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation 2011). The statistics show the importance and potential of the female part of the population at the same time.

The issues of gender inequality and crime in public spaces in India can be seen from three perspectives – cultural, economic and spatial. Here it has been argued how spatial changes in public spaces can also impact the economic and cultural issues positively in the test case of Delhi:

**Cultural Issue** — The cultural issue includes Delhi as a crime capital with the highest number of cases of crimes against women among India's 'million-plus' cities, followed by Mumbai and Bangalore (National Crime Records Bureau 2013, 79). The dependence of a girl for everyday tasks on her family is also a result of the cultural bindings of the country (Madhok 2008).

**Economic Issue** — The percentage of educated women is high in an urban area like Delhi but the working women population is low after a certain age as they go into domestic labour. Additionally, female labour force participation has been on a declining trend in India, in contrast to most other regions, predominantly since 2004/05 (Green n.d.). US$2.9 trillion can be added to India's GDP by 2025 if it improves gender parity as stated in a report by McKinsey (Dobbs et al. 2015).

**Spatial Issue** — The quality of a public space can be determined based on the strength and the value of the social associations it enables, its capacity to welcome and inspire a mixture of diverse groups and behaviour, and its potential for promoting mutual connection on a symbolic level, cultural expression, and integration (Falu 2009). The bad qualities of the public space network such as poor street lighting at night, domination by men in the streets, and segregated labyrinth streets with a lack of doors and windows on the ground floor make them unsafe for girls and women. The type of public spaces in India are streets, railway stations, parks and gardens, streets, roads, highways, cinema halls, malls, plazas, and bus stops (Mahadevia, Lathia, and Banerjee 2016).

The unsupportive spatial infrastructure is one of the reasons why the girls are not able to participate entirely in the Indian economy. Simultaneously, the relationship between activities for women and how the infrastructure and urban fabric is planned is poor. A fear of crime and the public realm dominates women's minds due to the non-gender friendly environments (Viswanath and Mehrotra 2007). This forces women to stay at home, in spite of having a high education, which represents a huge loss to the GDP and economy of the country (Valentine 1990).

Gender inequality starts as a social problem but in spatial terms it is about the unequal rights in private and public spaces for its inhabitants as well as visitors. Like most large cities in India, Delhi lacks inclusive spaces. Combined with high rates of crimes against women, and poorly designed urban areas, this contributes to a sense of fear experienced by them. It can be argued that there is a missing link between different spheres of politics, the economy, social relationships, safety and communities.

**Gender and urban space studies that matter worldwide**

There are several seminal writings on gender as a performative act, but few on how this performative act relates to the form and use of urban space. The few writings on gender and space are much
rooted in French postmodernism philosophical writings. Henry Lefebvre states that a "right to the city" is the right to urban life. In many ways, only through self-organisation, can members of a free association take control over their own life, in such a way that it becomes their own work. This is called ‘re-appropriation’ or de-alienation (Lefebvre 1996). The right to the city, that is, the right to use and the right to participate, are further researched upon and seem to be violated because of gendered power relations with ethnicity and the nation. In spite of knowing that women have a right to access public spaces, they do not use it because of the local cultural mindset (Fenster 2017). The enduring disregard for gendered and personified rights to everyday life explains the conventional statement of rights to the everyday life in the city (Beebeejaun 2017). Beebeejaun’s discourse on a varied framework towards a right to the city can simply be understood that it depends on experiences of how women use spaces in everyday life. This discussion is used as the basis for the Gender and the City workshop and site analysis for figuring out problems and co-creation of spaces coming from the residents of the selected area.

Early twentieth century approaches to urban planning and urban design have been without a doubt dominated by a biased understanding of gender (Hayden 1980). Decisions about how the built environment should function, and therefore be planned, were taken by healthy white male individuals, making patriarchal suppositions about women and their lives (Woodsworth 2005). The basic unit for urban policies and plans was the stereotyped family, whereas the private realm is for the female members and the public realm is for the exercise of the logos (Arendt 1958). This approach in the Western world remained unvaried until the 1960s, when the ‘second wave’ of feminism came about and started playing an important role in problematising women’s condition (Greed 1994). The narrative implies a role of women in making decisions about the public space usage in the first place, which later is considered to have built the background of WomenSpatialActivism. To involve the women of the area one has to design for this in the planning and design process through a bottom-up approach.

In “Gender perspectives in Urban Planning” (2016) Ana Falú, the Coordinator of the UN-Habitat UNI Gender Hub, states that women are cross-cut by differences of class, income, education, sexual option, race, ethnicity, place and territorial segregation. She concludes that the main factors to be looked at while designing a gender-sensitive city in developed and developing countries are localisation, proximity, participation and resources. These factors form the roots of the design methodology in this particular case.

**Test Case: Malviya Nagar, Delhi**

A mobile application called Safetipin is working on a digital database to mark safe/unsafe urban spaces through users in Delhi. The chosen location, Malviya Nagar area in South Delhi, is highlighted as a problematic area according to the Safetipin application and local police crime records for the area. The locals have an interest in improving the area, in particular the unsafe zone. The neighbourhood houses a high number of young girls (residents and migrated population), and there is a mix of different income groups living in the area (Safetipin 2017). In the year 2009, JAGORI, an NGO, launched the “Safe City Free of Violence against Women and Girls” initiative. The studies are aimed at supporting the struggle of the community to claim their rights and entitlements as citizens of Malviya Nagar, Delhi (Jagori 2015).

![Fig 1. shows a map of the Malviya Nagar area in Zone-F, which is a planned posh locality of Delhi. A number of women from all parts of the](image-url)
world come to live as ‘paying guests’ in the area due to its high proximity to jobs, schools, and services and cheaper living costs (Nag 2016). Many working women aged 18-30 years old face sexual harassment and molestation on the streets. They are either students, or working in the private or government sector. The area is near to various universities and large shopping malls. However, the area’s open spaces are not considered destinations for recreation.

Our approach was to collect spatial data through registrations of human behaviour, and interviews with experts as well as with residents. In addition, a workshop Gender and the City with various stakeholders (journalists, sociologists, architects, planners, target groups, experts and residents) was carried out.

The gender and city workshop along with a site study identified the following objectives: the natural surveillance mechanism, way-finding abilities, transparency of the building facades, openness and lighting in the urban spaces, including sharing space, variety and mixed-use in functions, innovation and creative platforms with improved accessibility.

The area’s residents stressed the absence of pavements and toilets, no community activities for women and a lack of meeting points. The expert interviews demarcate how there is no gender discrimination at policy levels, coordination clashes between stakeholders and government differences at local and central level. One of the main outputs of the workshop was that women prefer a medium crowded street instead of an isolated one. These objectives turned the route of the research towards a deeper connection on public spaces, safety, inclusiveness, co-creation and community building from a gender perspective.

WomenSpatialActivism Design Charter from Best Practices around the World

For a better understanding of the critical context of gender in public spaces, it is very important to understand the interrelationship between both gender and public space in an Indian context. The best examples from the world, academic writings and authors are relevant in the sense of forming a basic structure for the design charter.

Collective housing and shared common spaces within residential projects for working women by Oho Fick, Sven Ivar Lind and Sven Markelius, and the Steilshoop project in Denmark, Sweden and Germany, respectively are perfect examples of community building (Hayden 1980). These particular practices fit to the present Indian society where there are more working and independent women specifically in urban areas. Col·lectiu Punt 6 (Collective Point 6) strongly thinks that co-working and co-responsibilities can change the environment for the women completely where she can be more free. The methodology of co-creation with temporary urbanism is therefore adapted for the design solutions of #WomenSpatialActivism.

From the writings with a focus on street life, several authors touch upon the sitting and standing activities of people as an indicator of urban street life and safety. As Jan Gehl describes in his book Life Between Buildings, places where people like to stop and sit are the hubs of public life (Gehl 2011). Urban spaces facilitating only necessary activities, or places to sit or stand for men only, create neighbourhoods where women only perform necessary activities such as rushing, though only when strictly necessary. Jane Jacobs claims that the presence of people in streets enhances “eyes on the streets” to ensure safety. She stated: “Cities have the capabilities of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody”
(Jacobs 1961). Derived from Jacobs’ and Gehl’s work, the WomenSpatialActivism charter comes with the solution of “Bring out your own chair”, to increase eyes on the street and community building by the women in the area.

As more women use public transport and walk than men, the quality of the pavements and surroundings is essential for moving around and staying in public spaces. The concept of ‘Blockers’, the ‘Parking Interrupters’, is based on these principles of reclaiming the pavements to walk and solve one of the biggest hurdles of illegal parking.

Wayfinding abilities was another objective during the workshop which has given Kevin Lynch’s work importance. He made some cognitive maps on how most people imagine the city (Lynch 1972). His results comply with the wayfinding abilities of women who depend more on landmarks and signages than maps (Lawton and Kallai 2002). The Pink Carpet project or wayfinding strip in the dark and ‘signage board bombing’ come up as placemaking solutions to the issue.

Streets more on the commercial side are considered unsafe at night (Hillier and Sahbaz 2008). Lighting is considered as a very important safety parameter also by the Safetipin organisation (Viswanath and Mehrotra 2007). To solve the safety issues WSA came up with Light Your Lantern in order to light the streets in the night and impose a responsibility structure on the residents who put them on their balconies.

Another issue highlighted is connecting the objectives and issues. In this world of computers and a tech-savvy lifestyle most of the low-income countries are still inaccessible to computers but smartphone technology has reached the hands of many Indian citizens. A report estimates that smartphone usage in 2014 was 1.76 billion and it was estimated that one in three persons would have a smartphone in India by 2017 (Vishwanath and Basu 2016). The WomenSpatialActivism design charter therefore uses digitalisation in terms of the application She-Connect that connects women travelling from the same source to the same destination. Digitalisation is also used in terms of checking the street connections through GIS and Space Syntax.

Space syntax is a method that analyses the spatial configuration of streets through visual sight lines. In the spatially integrated spaces, there is a mix of men and women on streets. Women avoid spatially segregated spaces (Nygen and Van Nes 2014). Likewise, women also avoid streets where there are no active functions and entrances with windows on buildings’ ground floor levels (Van Nes and Rooij 2015). Integration and community opportunities came into existence as important features of the WSA design charter and gave rise to ‘guerilla gardening’ and the merging of diverse users in the public space giving rise to the Reclaiming the Park project (Gupta 2017).

In a research project on sexual harassment and urban space in Egypt, sexual harassment in terms of touching take place only in the spatially most integrated streets (Mohammed and Van Nes 2017). These results are integrated with the space syntax map of Malviya Nagar in Delhi and have been layered to draw conclusions for the purpose of choosing the first street for the pilot project.

A volunteer-run collective called Blank Noise launched a campaign – #WalkAlone – to encourage women to reclaim public spaces. The campaign urges women to undertake the challenge at any time of the day, for three weeks, humming a song, daydreaming, with hands unclenched, and shoulders relaxed, until they get back their right to walk without fear (Agarwal 2016). The movement is an inspiration for #WomenSpatialActivism to spread awareness through social media.
**WomenSpatialActivism Design Intervention for the Test Case Malviya Nagar**

The WSA design charter forms #WomenSpatialActivism, which is a cycle of the three processes jointly impacting each other. The spatial part of #WomenSpatialActivism makes physical changes in the urban infrastructure. The social structure is about creating a stakeholder structure and process implementation. The digital movement is to activate the social stakeholder structure for implementing the changes. The three potential target actors for re-appropriation of spaces are: 1) The old woman reclaiming the space outside her house at the front-door level; 2) The young working girl walking to and from work or shopping; and 3) the homemakers and mothers spending time within the community through reclaiming public parks. The spatial activism starts firstly from a street and park level, and will spread through the neighbourhood and city levels. The three main components of the strategy are:

**#WomenSpatialActivism Spatial Design Structure**

The physical interventions are at the street/building interface and neighbourhood levels. The key projects in revitalizing streets (community building and cleanliness through guerrilla gardening) consist of: Lighting Your Lantern (a fundraising project for lighting the streets), The Pink Carpet (a way-finding strip for a safer street), Spatial Activism Headquarters (engaging citizens for temporary urbanism to achieve re-appropriation for women) and Reclaiming The Park (re-appropriation by women in public parks with basic amenities). All these projects are a composition of small WSA design charter interventions, which are generic in nature and can be implemented in other areas.

The proposed various spatial interventions are bottom-up approaches led by citizens. Fig. 3 shows one of the connections between the neighbourhood's central part and the shopping mall outside the neighbourhood. This design proposal consists of several micro-scale strategic initiatives that can be applied everywhere. It is based upon the WSA design charter and objectives and issues that have been layered upon in an urban analysis.

The Light Your Lantern project (fig. 4) is a fundraising sustainable hanging lantern proposal lighting up streets in the hours of night for late-working women. The Pink Lanterns will provide light to the women and everyone else in the dark as the market closes. The Pink Carpet project consists of a glowing pink strip that can be followed by the pedestrians in the night showing them the right way to their destination. The Pink Carpet is an attempt to make the street safe for pedestrians and help them find their way home.

Spaces that are used for dumping garbage can be used to set up a Spatial Activism Headquarters. Several small micro-scale projects are proposed which can be made in this space, for example, the wooden slopes and urban gardening cases. Re-vitalizing the Street, (fig. 5) revitalises dead-end streets with green spaces instead of garbage dumps to accentuate the feeling of cleanliness and thereby safety. Fig. 6 shows how women reclaim space through their daily activities in the neighbourhood by passing cars and making room to walk by restoring the pedestrian path.

On a neighbourhood scale, the project, Reclaiming the Park (fig. 7) is a re-appropriation step taken by the citizens to reclaim the park and regenerate community events and activities. The spatial interventions include a redesigned public park that has women and kids as the central focus. Bamboo-sheltered open-air kitchens and toilets support the daily needs of the women and kids.
The respective proposals do not involve changes to the urban fabric because that might take years to happen. Instead they are short-term solutions that can help citizens now and hereafter find permanent solutions for urban designers of the area. In the longer term, opening up several routes towards the south will increase the spatial integration of the neighbourhood. Fig. 8 shows space syntax analyses of the area before (above) and after (below) the proposed interventions. As can be seen, the local vitality for pedestrians is improved, as well as the main routes interconnecting various neighbourhoods with one another. High spatial integration indicates a high number of people on the street and a higher mixture of different people on the streets, which increases the number of shops and activities in buildings along the streets.

#WomenSpatialActivism Social Design Structure

The degree of implementation for this project is heavily dependent on community building, co-working and co-responsibility for the re-appropriation of public spaces. The involved stakeholder coalition (fig. 9) consists of advisory bodies, funding partners and women spatial activism partners (implementation partners, i.e. the local community). The role of the urban designer is pivotal to bringing all the stakeholders together on a common platform.

The advisory body can be categorised into artists and activists, NGOs or social organisations, university or research institutions and government research organisations. The artists or activists group includes organisations working in the locality such as a studio that is an international artists association. The NGOs or social organisations can provide a platform to conduct the pilot projects such as the revitalising street drive, lighting your lantern drive, painting the pink carpet, spatial activism live workshop and reclaiming park design. These activities are supposed to be organised under their platform as these organisations have vital resources for project implementation.

The funding partners can be NGOs, government bodies, CSR organisations, international grants, social entrepreneurs and national grants. The funds are required to host the mock-up workshops, for subsidising lanterns, to procure materials for the pink carpet and other design ideas.

The Women Spatial Activism partners would be the implementing agencies to put the design ideas into action that would include the local community. These partners can provide key resources in the form of volunteers to implement the ideas. This community-building activity enhances the safety in the neighbourhood and allows women and girls to have secure access to all public places.

#WomenSpatialActivism Digital Design Structure

The digital process has two main components: global digital expansion is taken at two stages of the design process: firstly when we need participants for the mock-ups and the pilot projects to promote them as events, and secondly, we need the digital expansion for spreading and disseminating the hashtag #WomenSpatialActivism globally. It will form a public relations team to disseminate the design proposal.

Secondly, the mobile application She-Connect is a mobile application to be designed to overlay the information and data collected by various organisations working in Malviya Nagar and Khirki, filter and organise them to be used. This information and the spatial activism routes will be shown to the users. The users can then connect with other women from the same origin and destination so that they can travel together.
The aim is to spread the hashtag #WomenSpatialActivism through social media. The mobile application is a part of the awareness project as it will connect women to enable them to travel together along the #WomenSpatialActivism routes.

Conclusions: Towards an agenda for Women Spatial Activism

The project presented in this article shows that designing gender equal spaces has to be a citizen-led approach bringing together a local community. The role of the urban designer in this process is to coordinate the stakeholders and propose physical solutions based on the needs of local communities. Active participation of all key partners in this project help build a spatial framework for an inclusive society and to implement a safe and gender-equal environment. The spatial interventions are a bottom-up approach and citizen-led movement that make their own neighbourhood safe, livable and righteous for them. The spatial interventions include a redesigned public park that has women and kids as the central focus, while bamboo-sheltered open-air kitchens and toilets support the daily needs of all. The Pink Carpet project is an attempt to make the streets safe for pedestrian women and help them find their way home. The Hanging Lanterns project will provide light to everyone in the dark as the market closes. The women reclaim space through their daily activities in the neighbourhood by reducing cars and making room to walk, while the slopes help mothers to push their strollers. In this alternative bottom-up process of city-making, local government ought to hold an open discussion with the stakeholders including social activists, citizens, urban designers and NGOs in order to formulate comprehensive and inclusive policies and plans. The local government and the municipality should integrate the interventions made at the citizen level inside each neighbourhood.
An urban designer's approach towards re-appropriation of spaces by women in New Delhi, India
Figure 1 (top): Map over the Malviya Nagar area in Delhi. Source: Sugandha Gupta, Luisa Maria Calabrese & Akkelies Van Nes, 2018.

Figure 2 (bottom pages 86-87 and page 88): Images from the workshop. Source: Sugandha Gupta, Luisa Maria Calabrese & Akkelies Van Nes, 2018.
Figure 3: The various spatial interventions.
Figure 4 (below): The Light Your Lantern and the Pink Carpet projects. Source: Sugandha Gupta, Luisa Maria Calabrese & Akkelies Van Nes, 2018.

Figure 5 (opposite page): Examples of improvement of poor-quality routes. Source: Sugandha Gupta, Luisa Maria Calabrese & Akkelies Van Nes, 2018.
Figure 6 (below): Reclaimed park. Source: Sugandha Gupta, Luisa Maria Calabrese & Akkelies Van Nes, 2018.

Figure 7 (opposite page): Sections of improved park. Source: Sugandha Gupta, Luisa Maria Calabrese & Akkelies Van Nes, 2018.

Figure 8 (pages 94-95, top to bottom, left to right): The space syntax analyses of the area. Source: Sugandha Gupta, Luisa Maria Calabrese & Akkelies Van Nes, 2018.
Figure 9: Stakeholder mapping. Source: Sugandha Gupta, Luisa Maria Calabrese & Akkelies Van Nes, 2018.

Figure 10 (below): The She-Connects app. Source: Sugandha Gupta, Luisa Maria Calabrese & Akkelies Van Nes, 2018.
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Bio

Ir. Sugandha Gupta graduated from the Department of Urbanism in the Faculty of Architecture at Delft University of Technology in 2017. She developed the project #WomenSpatialActivism as a part of her master thesis in Urbanism. At the same time, she was working on the implementation of the project with various local stakeholders. Previously she studied Architecture at Aligarh Muslim University in India, which gave her a sense of the built environment in her life. She loves being her own motivation and working towards creating a sustainable and inclusive world. She presently works with BFAS & Placemaking Plus in Amsterdam and wants to specialize in temporary Urbanism and Placemaking.

Dr. Ir. Luisa Maria Calabrese is associate professor (Chair of Urban Design) at the Department of Urbanism in the Faculty of Architecture at Delft University of Technology. Her background brings together humanities, architecture, planning and interaction design. Luisa has always combined her academic work with a strong engagement in design practice. Currently her field of interest is the strategic role of urban design in guiding the development of inclusive cities.

Prof. Dr. Akkelies van Nes is professor at the Department of Civil Engineering at Western Norway University of Applied Sciences and assistant professor at the Department of Urbanism in the Faculty of Architecture at Delft University of Technology. She specialises in the study of the relationship between urban space and socio-economic activities such as the location pattern of shops, crime, social segregation, property prices, building density and degree of land use diversity. She has also developed various spatial tools for analysing the relationship between buildings and streets. Akkelies has been a Space Syntax expert for over 15 years and is a highly recognised scholar in the field of spatial modelling. She is regularly invited to give keynote presentations at conferences worldwide.
A photo essay exploring the how gender identity is deliberately constructed through social positioning within the urban landscape of Hong Kong. Hong Kong has always had a binary identity, which continues through from the postcolonial to the neocolonial. This creates layers of additional complexity around gender identity, which is explored in terms of performativity and authenticity through both the heterosexual fluidity of foreign domestic workers and through homosexual tactics of local men, within a public park in Hong Kong. By rejecting the past through a politics of disappearance, previous boundaries around fluidity, repression, and suppression continue to influence the present in a volatile neocolonial context opening questions around what is an authentic performance of self.
This photo essay explores the manner in which gender identity is constructed as deliberate instances of spatial positioning in the dense urban landscape of Hong Kong. The images are drawn from a collection, *Do You Know Where the Birds Are* (2018), created by Liao Jiaming (廖家明), the City University of Hong Kong. Both text and images elaborate on the complexity of contemporary gender practices, in both the postcolonial – British derived – and, what can be termed a neocolonial, Chinese aligned (Zheng 2010) urban space.

Historically, as a territory itself, Hong Kong's inherent identity has always been binary. Hong Kong's 'Special Administrative Region' spatial identity has always differentiated its territorial character based on its geopolitical alignment as being both 'part of' and 'separated from' British-Sino urbanisation processes. The specific constructs associated with the territoriality of a City State, versus the fluid and incremental territorialities of its dwellers, attest to Ravi Sundaram's (2010) concepts of Pirate Modernity, as parallel worlds of existence within the well-intended planning that aims at goals of becoming modern.

Kowloon Park, née Whitfield Barracks, came into existence around 1970 (see fig. 1 and fig. 2). Strategically located in the heart of Hong Kong, originally to defend against invading naval forces, it will be argued that it continues as a symbol of resistance against invading ideologies.

The top-down patriarchal model of urban planning for Whitfield Barracks (Lin 2018) was one of many steps taken towards postcolonialism as the political relationship between Hong Kong, China and the UK changed. The Barracks itself can be interpreted as a masculine space; it had an aggressive stance, was strategic in posture, and predominantly populated by men. The shift from a military role to a public park would have been conceived, at the time, as a liberalising, and unusually (for Hong Kong) non-commercial venture. In general, the city park is not conceived as belonging to either gender, although it could be postulated that as a relatively inclusive (family) space, and a space more orientated to tactical interaction than strategic, it is more feminine than masculine. And in this vein, it can be claimed the shift from barracks to park is, on one level, a shift along the continuum from masculinity towards femininity. However, something more complex is exposed when taking a relational approach to this modern space of participation.

Fifty years into the life of the park, two remarkable and regular activities have developed in Kowloon Park. Sunday is the agreed day of rest for Hong Kong's foreign domestic workers and many of them congregate in the park. The second point of interest occurs most evenings, with gay men using the park for cruising and sex. What ties these two activities together is a very explicit performativity, as per Judith Butler's work (1990): not an expression of what one is, rather as something that one does, and does repeatedly. Butler outlines modes of "self-making" through which subjects become socially intelligible and hence advocates against positions that see a social imposition on a gender-neutral body. In this framework, and according to Butler's theory, homosexuality and heterosexuality are not fixed categories. What is argued for here is the illumination, so to say, of a genesis of gender association that overrides the intentionality of design, and in these instances, neutrally accepted elements of the city, parks, benches, walkways and flyover railings. Spaces may be designed with or without gender in mind, but the final gendering of the space will be socio-culturally imbued, fluidly, over spatiotemporal dimensions by those inside the space and (differently) by those outside the space.

We trace 'Heterosexual Fluidity' in the foreign domestic workers of Hong Kong and their gender identities within Hong's Kong's public spaces. This fluidity is in opposition to the containment of binary
logic which establishes a boundary delineating genders, so that while male still exists in opposition to female, a shifting performativity means an individual need not hold a fixed position. Instead there is an openness, a fluidity or flux, that breaks with discourse of desire following from gender and gender following from sex.

Importing foreign domestic workers to Hong Kong began in the 1970s (Labour Department - The Government of the Hong Kong SAR 2017) in response to labour shortages stemming from the changing relationship between Hong Kong and China. The beginning of the postcolonial journey created a significant boost to Hong Kong's economy that resulted in a labour shortage that attracted many women into the workforce and subsequently increased the demand for domestic workers (a breakdown by nationality and sex can be found in Table 1).

Most foreign domestic workers have Sunday as their rest day and they congregate in public spaces around Hong Kong's central business district. For the remainder of the week, the business district is dominated by power dressing workers from the finance sector: the hegemonic class. On Sundays this hegemonic class who are used to being served, is replaced by those who serve; Hong Kong's foreign domestic workers return each Sunday to the same, known and to some extent controlled, spaces. It not only makes it easier for friends to find each other, but it also makes it easier for Hong Kong locals to avoid these spaces which become unmistakably demarcated by temporary cardboard structures (Cenzatti 2008) – an ongoing segregation of classes, with a temporal relaxation of access to elite spaces in the city.

The foreign domestic workers become simultaneously seen and hidden, or more simply: hidden in plain sight (see fig. 3: Hong Kong locals walk down the centre of a pedestrian bridge, whilst not seeing the foreign domestic workers who are huddled along the edges). The line between public and private is blurred: living in the employer's residence (as per Hong Kong legislation) results in a lack of privacy, which is compensated for by creating semi-private zones in public areas around the city (Cenzatti 2008).

On a surface level, the foreign domestic workers congregate in the park as friends, to share each other's company, food, (religious) study and entertainment (fig. 5 and fig. 9). In some instances, the sharing is contained within a perimeter of a 500 mm high temporary cardboard box. In other instances the exchange is transparent, visible for all to see. However, on a deeper level, they are undergoing a process of self-making, in which their physical acts are used to define a space of being, producing a space of consumption (De Certeau 1984), through who they are and their formation tactics. Living and working in a foreign country, confronted by a culture shock, it becomes easy to feel that one's self-identity is threatened (Ward, Bochner and Furnham 2001), especially when working within a system of oppressive trade-offs. Sunday is a time for foreign domestic workers to speak their own languages, eat food from their home countries, and engage in cultural activities that remind them of home; this is a time to define themselves as not in Hong Kong and not a domestic worker, and to engage in the performativity of their native region.

These actions are repeated weekly, as a community, and it is only through repetition or recitation that this discourse is imbued with power. This is not identical re-enactment; although each recitation is different from previous acts, it still reiterates the norms of the group. Over and above any personal enjoyment, these actions are also undertaken to be seen by others. At its core, this default set of activities and their spatialisation is a performativity that wants to be seen and acknowledged by others from the same community and in this manner mechanises visibility to exert power to define a
social and gender norm within a foreign context. This is not Maurice Halbwachs' (1950) constructing of new collective memories in a new place, but an always imperfect reconstruction from the past in the form of reminiscing about a previous time and place. Hong Kong is an interstitial space for foreign domestic workers, a stepping stone to somewhere else, and not somewhere they can establish roots of their own.4

Located within the same space, ‘Homosexual Tactics,’ construct other identities. In 1967, England and Wales decriminalised homosexual acts in private for males aged 21 or above. At the time, this caused a lot of discussion in Hong Kong, as it did in many of the UK’s other colonies, but a similar law to decriminalise private homosexual acts in Hong Kong wasn’t enacted until 1991. During the mid-1960s the Anglican Church campaigned for Hong Kong to follow the UK’s lead; however, the Hong Kong government declined in the face of survey results which indicated that most of the local population5 harboured “strong feelings of disgust” for homosexuality6 (Vittachi 2016, para. 9).

Not feeling comfortable in private spaces (for example the home7), many gay men in Hong Kong seek solace in public spaces. Kowloon Park offers an anonymous space with sufficient plausible deniability for gay men to meet. Some of them fear using online dating applications, as it is advertising a (non-fluid) version of themselves, which could be used to destructively out them publicly (supported by local lore). Being seen entering, or exiting, a known gay bar or nightclub, within the dense city of Hong Kong, is problematic for gay men wanting to stay in the closet.

Juggling multiple selves and yet operating in opposition within the same heteronormative space as the foreign domestic workers, homosexual performativity alters the very conditions of temporality and space (Halberstam 2005). Reverting back to Moya Lloyd’s (1999) notion, a person is merely in a condition of “doing straightness” or “doing queerness”. Gay men avoid the pressure of heteronormativity found within private spaces by using public spaces, like Kowloon Park. Spaces, public or private, attest to a continuous gender challenge against colonial as well as neocolonial, and in this instance heteronormative, behaviour, narratives and patterns.

Kowloon Park at night is appropriated, through the mix of both anonymity and visibility, to initiate contact. The importance of being visible and hidden, operating on the literal shadow line of the spaces, becomes the performativity of gender within the context of ‘planned’ or zoned space, to subvert cultural beliefs of the Orient and its heteronormative systems. The brightness of the security lighting creates shadowy spaces to meet in; the actors move between showing themselves, displaying themselves, to hiding away from the public gaze.

Men come back regularly to repeat not only their own performance of homosexuality, but to observe others: this set of activities and spatialisation is a performativity that wants to be seen and acknowledged by others from the same community, and in this manner mechanises visibility to exert power to define a social and gender norm within a context that feels foreign.

Concluding Thoughts

Domestic workers and slavery both have a long history in China. A foreign domestic worker is referred to in Cantonese as ‘amah’, which may have come via the much earlier Portuguese colonisation of the area. Due to the impacts of globalisation, many of them see Hong Kong as a first and temporary arrangement; rather than planning to return home, they contemplate working in other countries4 around the world. During this time, female domestic workers give up their immediate roles as wife and
mother: the performativity of these roles shifts into cyberspace. For some, the shift is so significant that it creates changes in the physical realm, as their performativity slides between traditional ideas of femininity and masculinity. At its most fluid, some choose to become tomboy lesbians while in Hong Kong without giving up their original identity.

Masculinity in China is historically talked of as having two qualities: wen (文) and wu (武). Wen encompasses scholarly pursuits, calligraphy, poetry and music. Wu, on the other hand, encompasses more physical pursuits, brute force and conquest. This sounds like the Western concept of brains and brawn, except that wen stretches much further than the intellect to include grooming, the use of makeup, fashion and elegant conduct. This can result in a straight man wearing makeup, without identifying as effeminate, to express that he is more wen than wu. Wen and wu are not fixed as opposites and are without clear boundaries. These concepts shape the performativity of being male, whether subjects identify as homosexual or not.

With the complexities of postcolonial contexts, the overarching concerns remain the balance between the colonial and the process of decolonisation (a seemingly never-ending shift through postcolonial and neocolonial phases). Boundaries around fluidity, repression and suppression all have histories that started before colonialism in Hong Kong and have survived into the neocolonial. Rejection of the past, and what to keep and what to remove remain a key concern for those who dwell within the specific restraints of territories, which leads to questions of authenticity in gender performativity in a highly volatile neocolonial context.

In conclusion, with the city read as process and product, gender and the urban merges, repositioning a binary urban framework within a perspective of performativity. In the dense setting of Hong Kong, identity and space remain ever entwined, with constantly shifting fluid boundaries. Urban space becomes social space in which the performativity of gender occurs, as a condition through which deliberate instances transform the layering of the urban, breaking the smooth continuity with the denaturalisation of hegemonic space and creating sites of critical agency.

Acknowledgements

This photo essay draws heavily on a collection of images created by Liao Jiaming (廖家明) from his collection entitled Do You Know Where the Birds Are (2018). Liao is currently completing an MFA in creative media at the City University of Hong Kong.
Notes

1. This article won’t get involved in the debate around assigning dates for these periods. Hong Kong was technically handed over from the British to China in 1997, which could be argued as the technical line between colonial and postcolonial. The problem with this approach is that the Sino-British Joint Declaration, which announced the intention to hand Hong Kong back to China, was made at the end of 1984. The shift from colonial to postcolonial would have occurred after 1984 but well before 1997, with some theorists using the Tiananmen Massacre of 1989 as the turning point with its associated rise in emigration from Hong Kong.

2. Hong Kong’s foreign domestic workers need to follow several additional rules over and above those applying to foreign workers, two of which are of interest here: they must live in their employer’s place of residence, and they have the right to one continuous 24-hour period of rest every week. There is no specification as to which day of the week is the rest day, but by practice it is usually Sunday, and most likely aligns with (Christian) religious traditions.

3. Most foreign domestic workers from the Philippines and Indonesia were not employed as domestic workers in their home countries. They have taken on these roles in foreign countries because of the relatively low earning power in their home countries – a choice driven by precarity. As such, they don’t define their identities as domestic workers, but rather see themselves as financially empowering their family (back at home) or as a stepping stone to further education in a foreign country.

4. It is illegal for foreign domestic workers to become permanent residents in Hong Kong, except for through the path of marriage to a Hong Kong local. Many of the workers report planning to move to Canada or Brazil, where they are eligible for permanent residence.

5. At the time of the survey the local population was 90 percent ethnically Chinese and non-Christian.

6. It’s worth noting that polygyny was legal in Hong Kong until 1971, although the practise has been allowed to continue for Hong Kong’s billionaires.

7. Hong Kong has prohibitively high property prices combined with a low minimum wage, that results in many children living with their parents well past their twenties.

8. This is a shift in gender roles rather than a shift in sexuality. The majority of workers accepting a “lesbian” role (masculine or feminine) after arriving in Hong Kong, report they have no intention of leaving their husbands or families. It’s a short-term, pragmatic approach, which can be confusing when seen through a binary lens.

9. This is not to imply that subjects are making active choices; performativity requires recitation of previously established norms which precede and constrain the performer.
Figure 1: Kowloon Park with the Whitfield Barracks, 1968.
Source: Lin 2018.

Figure 2: (opposite page) Kowloon Park. Source: Google 2018.
Figure 3: Pedestrian bridge, Mong Kok. Source: Tim Tang 2018.

Figure 4 (opposite page): High as a vantage point, Kowloon Park. Source: Liao Jiaming 2018.
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Figure 5: Studying the Quran, Kowloon Park. Source: Tim Tang 2018.

Figure 6 (opposite page): The same space at night, Kowloon Park. Source: Liao Jiaming 2018.
Figure 7 (page 112, top): Tunnels, Kowloon Park. Source: Liao Jiaming 2018.

Figure 8 (page 112 bottom): Bamboo, Kowloon Park. Source: Liao Jiaming 2018.

Figure 9 (page 113, top): Sitting for religious study, Kowloon Park. Source: Tim Tang 2018.

Figure 10 (page 113, bottom): Sitting and waiting, Kowloon Park. Source: Liao Jiaming 2018.

Figure 11 (page 114): City lights create shadowy spaces, Kowloon Park. Source: Liao Jiaming 2018.

Figure 12 (page 115): Hiding in shadows from the light, Kowloon Park. Source: Liao Jiaming 2018.

Figure 13 (right): Walking among the light and the dark, Kowloon Park. Source: Liao Jiaming 2018.
Bibliography


Bio

Leon Buker is currently completing a master’s in design (design strategies) with the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. He holds a BSc in computer science and a BA in philosophy, both from Australian National University (ANU). He is midway through an MBA with the Macquarie Graduate School of Management (MGSM), and has also taken courses in anthropology, psychoanalysis, art history and data analytics. Leon’s work experience includes IT infrastructure, security and systems design, as well as the management of business change, product management in the baby toy industry, and as a director of a language institute. Leon was born in South Africa, grew up and worked in Australia, then the UK, Germany, mainland China (where he twice received the award of Outstanding Foreign Expert from the Chinese government), and now Hong Kong where he currently resides.

Dr. ir. Gerhard Bruyns is an architect and urbanist. He is assistant professor of the Environment and Interior Design, School of Design at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong. His research deals with the aspects of spatial forms and how these impact both the formal expression of the city and societal conditions that are compressed into an urban landscape driven by speculation and excess. He has published on design strategies for neoliberal landscapes, exploring what this means for concepts as the ‘square foot society’ and models of urban dwelling and planning. In 2012 he coedited *African Perspectives [South] Africa. City, Society, Space, Literature and Architecture* (010 Publishers: Rotterdam) part of the Delft School of Design Publication Series. In 2015 he was co-editor of Issue #16 of *Footprint: Delft Architecture Theory Journal* entitled: *Introduction: Commoning as Differentiated Publicness* (JapSam Books 2015).

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