014

INTRODUCTION

Gender in Design |
An Overview

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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.
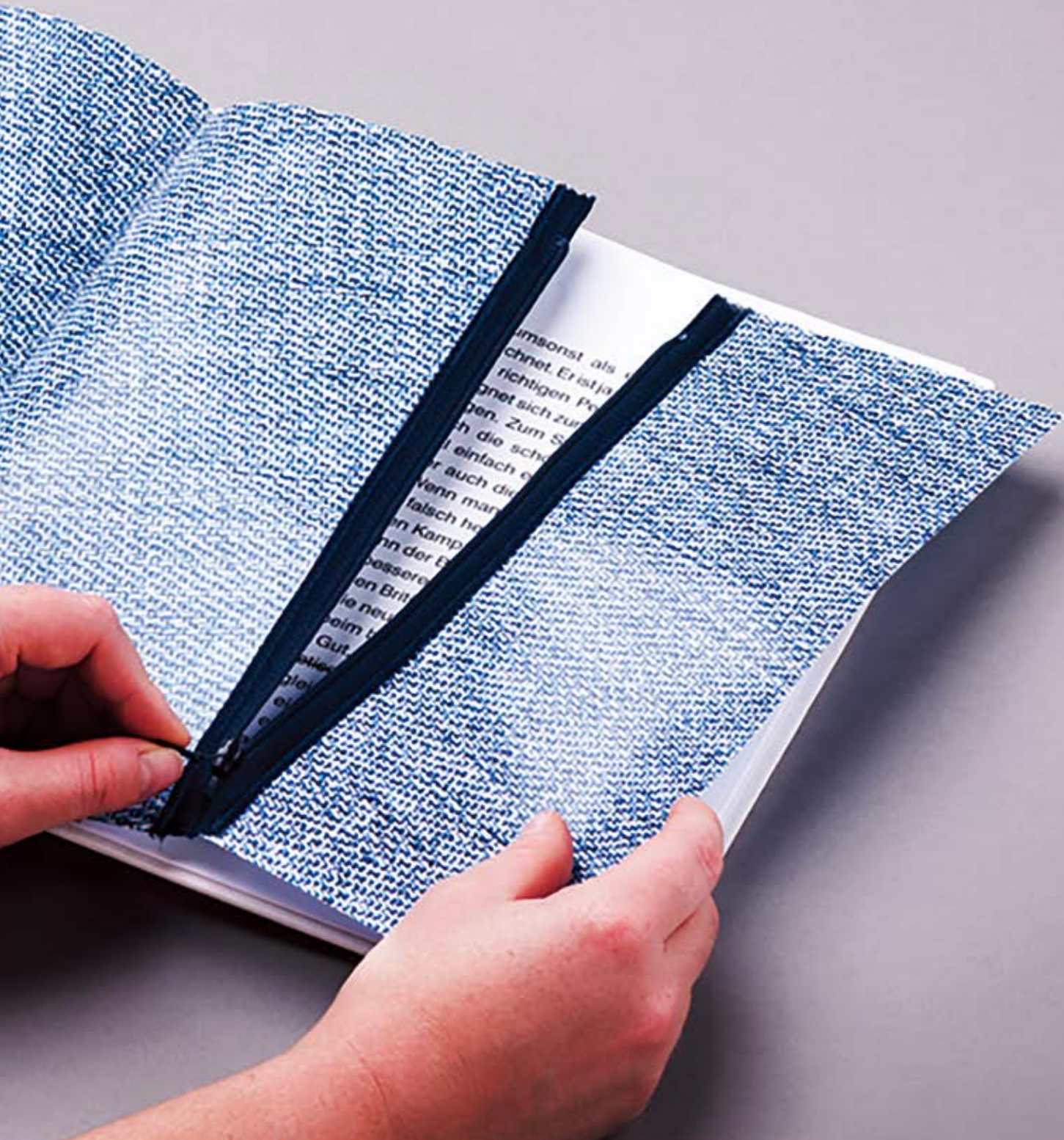
relationships, and practices in design fields from fashion to sex toys.

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.

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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.

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 Koeln 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.