



INSPIRE

Complexity, Compassion, and Courage: towards a holistic systems model for female-led design for change

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SUSTAINABILITY has always been called a wicked problem and gender inequality is one too (RITTEL AND WEBBER 1973). Both require systemic transdisciplinary and collaborative approaches by designers who are creative and powerful beyond what they currently believe and feel. This talk is an opportunity to bring some of my thinking together about methods, tools, and the way we can enact change towards new systems. At CCD we've always been a predominantly female team and the values in the shemakes project are aligned with what has been embedded in our work. It's been very much about building a community of change-makers in an academic setting, to tackle climate issues through textile research projects.

Systemic design is the space where we can take a **systems practice**—let's say as a textile designer—and use **systems thinking** to create a picture of broader change. **Systemic design** is an orientation—not a discipline. You go in as the expert in your area—natural dyeing, wool, heat transfer printing—you are the expert in that area and you work with the creation of the systems, the sharing of the knowledge in order to understand the interconnectedness, the flows (MEADOWS 1999, 2008).

Participatory design and **co-design** (MCKERCHER 2022) are approaches that shemakes has excelled in. Instead of designing *for people*, you are designing *with people*. When we design *with people*, we stand a chance of arriving at products, systems, and services which are more useful, needed, and maybe more equitable too. In **transition design** (IRWIN 2015), we work more in line with the location, community, and natural world. We may do **scenario development** or **speculative design** (DUNNE & RABY 2013) because it is important that, as designers and creators, we show what currently isn't possible or happening. We need to show new futures to speculate—to imagine and dream—to show how things *could* be, because we can't accept what we've got. We all still need textiles and clothes but there's a space for female designers where speculative design can be powerful.

I think we are on the cusp of a moment where this is going to become more and more important. Some brilliant work to look at is *Fashion Fictions*—a project where you can take part in designing future worlds (TWIGGER HOLROYD 2021).

CENTRE FOR CIRCULAR DESIGN (CCD) was established in 2017 and is based at Chelsea College of Arts, University of the Arts London. CCD focuses on design research for circular materials, models and mindsets, and aims to accelerate the transition towards designing for a circular future where textiles, materials, and *things* are designed, produced, used, and disposed of in radical new ways.

Gender Visions, shemakes workshop at CCD, London (April 2022), led by SANNE VISSER and MARILENA GEORGANTZI



I believe that shemakes has shown us that there's a real potential for a female-led systemic theory of change. **Theory of change** is about single and subsequent actions we might take as designers, and the resulting impacts and structures we might go on to create. **Systemic theory of change** takes this further, beyond a series of isolated boxes—individual actions—and recognizes and values the interconnections and intersections (MURPHY & JONES 2020).

I believe that female designers have strong natural curiosity and skills in exploring these interconnections and intersections. I firmly believe that, as female designers and makers, we have a set of underused skills which I think are key to creating the kind of change that the industry and culture needs.

Complexity - understanding the intersections at the beginning of a process

At CCD, Dr ROSIE HORNBuckle focuses on *complex design collaboration*. Her job is about understanding the ecosystem of the project or the ambition

that we've got, how materials can make a difference—like a boundary object—and where the blind spots of knowledge are, who's not involved, who's not drawn in or not being noticed by us, and how do they need us to talk to them (HORNBUCKLE 2021). For our work in shemakes, we were able to look at the circular wool potential in the UK and draw together diverse perspectives from academia. We also took the ideas to the Design Research Society (DRS) event in Bilbao, where we did a workshop which was about bringing diversity and inclusivity into future circular fashion textile design projects.

Compassion – seeing and caring about all intersecting perspectives

Put simply, we can't put the same expectations and measures on everybody. The way in which things are set up—the key performance indicators and the evaluation of different scenarios that people have in terms of careers—needs to shift. We need to redesign the way that the funding, the projects, and the job descriptions work; and I think we need more women involved in rewriting this, bringing compassion and community back to the heart of the work that needs doing.

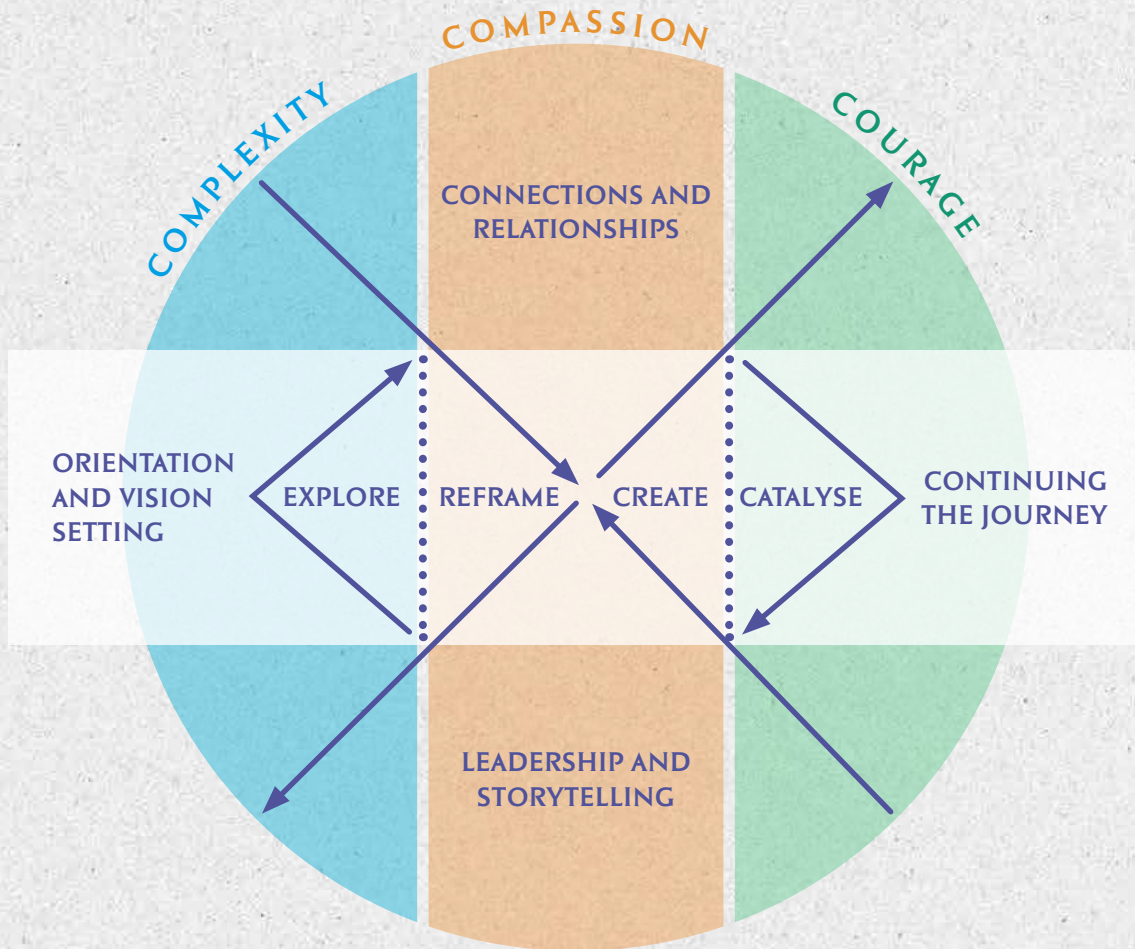
Courage – making change happen when forces may be against you

We're often not recognizing the fact that we really need to be working more with women and girls on being more courageous. It's about understanding that it's okay that you feel unconfident—but it's not your fault. It is the context, and for lots of reasons we all need to become more courageous. I'm choosing my words really carefully here!

Ask yourself: in this project, what fears did you overcome, and what fears do you still need to overcome? I think we can all be leaders in our own way and if we can just understand what's holding us back and what you're frightened of, you will actually unveil all the real opportunities for growth and change, and your own idea of success.

The CCC model

integrating complexity, compassion, and courage into the Design Council's systemic design model



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Empowering future female innovators of the sustainable fashion industry through inspiration, skills and networks



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RogLab - Rog Centre Creative Hub - Slovenia - center-rog.si

Textile Prototyping Lab (TPL) - Germany - textileprototypinglab.com

TextileLab Waag - Netherlands
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The Icelandic Textile Center, TextileLab - Iceland - textilmidstod.is

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The posters (*plakát* in Hungarian), which he created in Hungary around 1983 and for which he designed the typographic style of the titles, served as the basis for his capitals, inspired by Roman lapidary engravings. *Gabor Plakát* is composed of a wide range of roman & italic styles: lowercase, small capitals, alternative characters and ligatures, which fit perfectly with the capitals designed by Paul Gabor.

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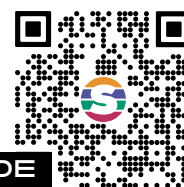
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