

# DESIGN EDUCATION FUTURES Reflections on Feminist Modes and Politics

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This is a pivotal time for design education, as widely discussed in the context of the “Beyond Change” conference. It is a time to consider possible and, even, preferred futures of our field. Our students and future generations of designers are demanding equality, sustainability, and other paradigms than those historically dominating the design profession and education. What do we want for the future, what do we want to be different, and how can we go about making that future happen?

Raising the question of difference, of different or preferred futures, is also a call for criticality. Through my years as a designer and then as a researcher, I have come to appreciate the role and power of critical theory and practice. One role of critical theory is to examine everyday life, to ask how particular norms, hegemonies, and in/exclusions are constructed and (re)produced. Practices of critical historiography ask such questions of the past, and critical futures studies interrogate the future. Further, feminist critical modalities explicitly explore how things could be otherwise. Taken into practice, theory is not neutral – in questioning, naming, and framing, it may destabilize how things were before and open new possibilities for thought and action.

Now is a time for such criticality in design education, for identifying what could and should be different, for aspiring and acting toward our preferred future. Here, I explore some of the everyday building blocks of design

education, namely those of design canons and curricula, academic and research conventions. In order to explore these critically, and in relation to difference, I take a feminist perspective. By *feminism* here, I refer not only, or even primarily, to issues of gender and gender inequality. Feminist theory has become a powerful tool for interrogating the multiple, intersecting variables comprising the human condition, social relations, and societal hierarchies, which result in inequality as experienced by many people and cultures. In this respect, design has progressed. Increasingly, we have been making critical, feminist, and decolonial theories our own, adapting these to our practices as designers, educators, and researchers, and building, as architectural theorist H el ene Frichot puts it, “feminist design power tools.”<sup>1</sup>

In this essay, I write in the first person, from my own experience and work, referencing many others by name. For me, this is a feminist approach to writing. Donna Haraway articulates all knowledge as, unavoidably, situated, embodied, and partial,<sup>2</sup> an understanding that has been crucial not only for feminist theory but also for “research through practice” in design. Positioning myself and others is my refusal of the so-called “God trick” of supposed universality and neutrality.<sup>3</sup> It’s also a way to express a personal stake in, among other things, (design education) futures.

## The Design Canon and Educational Curricula

In envisioning and making a desired future come to be, the past and present are necessarily implicated. The future is not empty – it will be occupied by the legacies and consequences of preexisting worldviews, structures, institutions, policies, and practices.<sup>4</sup> These are historically rooted and, whether by habit or intent, continually reproduced. As the present turns into the future, minute by minute, there is nonetheless a potential to think and do differently, to contest and reform those things that condition, determine, and occupy the future.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, as philosopher Elizabeth Grosz argues,<sup>6</sup> a particular political potential of the future lies in the possibility of conceptualizing difference, of

1. H el ene Frichot, *How to Make Yourself a Feminist Design Power Tool* (Baunach: Spurbuchverlag, 2016).

2. Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1998), 575–99.

3. Sandra Harding, *Sciences from Below: Feminism, Postcolonialities and Modernities* (Chapel Hill, NC: Duke University Press, 2008). Cf. Jane Rendell, “How to Take Place (but Only for So Long),” in *Altering Practices: Feminist Politics and Poetics of Space*, ed. Doina Petrescu (London: Routledge, 2006), 69–88.

4. Ramia Maz e, “Politics of Designing Visions of the Future,” *Journal of Futures Studies* 23, no. 3 (2019), 23–38.

5. Ramia Maz e and Josefin Wangel, “Future (Im)Perfect: Exploring Time, Becoming and Difference in Design and Futures Studies,” in *Feminist Futures of Spatial Practice*, ed. Meike Schalk, Th er ese Kristiansson, and Ramia Maz e (Baunach: Spurbuchverlag, 2017), 273–86.

6. Elizabeth Grosz, *Architecture from the Outside* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001).

7. Katerina Rüedi, "Bauhaus Dream-House: Imagining the (Un)Gendered and (Un)Disciplined Social Body," in *Proceedings of the 87th ACSA Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture Annual Meeting* (1999), 111. Cf. Katerina Rüedi Ray, *Bauhaus Dream-House: Modernity and globalization* (London: Routledge, 2010).

8. Mariángeles García, "The Lost History of the Women of the Bauhaus," trans. Marina Gosselin, *Arch Daily*, May 22, 2018, [www.archdaily.com/890807/the-lost-history-of-the-women-of-the-bauhaus](http://www.archdaily.com/890807/the-lost-history-of-the-women-of-the-bauhaus).

9. Leonie Sandercock, ed., *Making the Invisible Visible: A Multicultural Planning History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998).

10. Christina Zetterlund, "Taikons konst var en del av hennes kamp," trans. Christina Zetterlund, *Svenska Dagbladet*, March 7, 2017, [www.svd.se/taikons-konst-var-en-del-av-hennes-kamp](http://www.svd.se/taikons-konst-var-en-del-av-hennes-kamp).

gaining a critical distance from the past and present and, thereby, building different possible futures.

To take an example from design education, we might look to the Bauhaus, which was widely celebrated during 2019, the centenary of its founding. It was an influential blueprint for design and design academia, also imprinting my own academic trajectory. Beyond the superficial celebration, however, historian Katerina Rüedi has revealed how structural inequality at the Bauhaus was enacted through higher fees for women and a restricted number of places. According to founder Walter Gropius, "no women were to be admitted as students of architecture."<sup>7</sup> Now, this may seem outrageous to us. We may too easily dismiss this as archaic, a policy quickly relegated to history that is simply unacceptable in our academic institutions today. However, this should not – must not – stop us from interrogating specific instances as part of wider phenomena, including legacies and consequences that may continue into the present and, potentially, into the future. Such instances cannot be merely relegated to the past nor are they compensated by pointing out exceptions to the rule – though, certainly, "lost histories" of women such as Gunta Stölzl at the Bauhaus should be told.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, researching and revealing oppressed or omitted stories, thereby "making the invisible visible," are important tasks for critical historiography.<sup>9</sup>

A more recent and, at least for me, even more discomfoting example in design is that of Rosa Taikon. When Taikon passed away in 2017, my colleague, design historian Christina Zetterlund, wrote her obituary for the national newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet*.<sup>10</sup> Taikon's story is close to home, since she was a student during the 1960s at Konstfack College of Arts, Crafts, and Design in Sweden, where both Zetterlund and I later worked. The obituary recounts Taikon's substantial and historical contributions as a late-modernist jewelry artist. Its title also signals a wider impact: "Taikon's work was part of her struggle." Taikon's work builds upon her education but also upon her Swedish Roma family and cultural heritage – which is, arguably, a Swedish heritage, since Roma have lived in Sweden for 500 years. Zetterlund highlights this point, stating "she is undoubtedly one of the most outstanding

Swedish jewelry artists.” Nor was Taikon’s achievement about becoming “normalized” into the mainstream.

Through her degree at Konstfack, Taikon gained access and invitations to exhibit in major galleries and museums in Sweden and globally. Her exhibition at Sweden’s National Museum in 1969 included her own work, that of her sister Katarina Taikon, and an extensive section on the history of the Swedish Roma, including serious human rights abuses. Thus, Taikon’s work might be understood as a critical art/design practice, and, further, a practice of activism and political struggle.

“Rosa Taikon was the only well-known Roma silversmith in Sweden,” notes Zetterlund in the obituary, continuing, “she had no successors, either at Konstfack or any other art school in Sweden.” This is not due to admissions policy – Swedish institutions have equality structures/policies in place, and Konstfack faculty, students, and alumni pioneer gender, queer, and “norm-critical” approaches to the arts.<sup>11</sup> Yet, like most design institutions in Europe and the US, it remains predominantly white and middle- and upper-class. Institutions of design education condition the demographic patterns within the discipline and society, producing qualified graduates for professional practice and cultural organizations which further employ, fund, and give prizes in ways that often reproduce taught, enculturated, and established norms, values, and demographics. What is identified and recognized as a design student, as a designer, as “good” design, is self-perpetuating. Zetterlund argues elsewhere that the absence of multiple types of designers and subjectivities in design history reproduces norms that deter those from more diverse backgrounds from applying to design schools.<sup>12</sup> Making Taikon’s work at the National Museum and Konstfack visible in the media and design history serves to highlight the continuing absence of Roma and other minorities within the national archives, the design canon, and our academic institutions.

Admissions and recruitment policies in academia continue to be the subject of profound cultural, moral, and legal struggles. These have also been the subject of research on the persistent phenomena of inequality – for example, recent evaluation of more than two decades of

11. Camilla Andersson, Karin Ehrnberger, and Maja Gunn, eds., *Norm Form* (Stockholm: ARKDES National Center for Architecture and Design, 2017).

12. Christina Zetterlund, “Just Decoration? Ideology and Design in Early-Twentieth-Century Sweden,” in *Scandinavian Design: Alternative Histories*, ed. Kjetil Fallan (London: Berg, 2012), 103–16.

13. Lotte Bailyn, "Academic Careers and Gender Equity: Lessons Learned from MIT," *Gender, Work & Organization* 10, no. 2 (2003), 137–53.

14. Kristin Monroe and William Chiu, "Gender Equality in the Academy: The Pipeline Problem," *Political Science and Politics* (April 2010), 303–8.

15. Monroe and Chiu, "Gender Equality." Cf. Courtney Gasser and Katharine Shaffer, "Career Development of Women in Academia: Traversing the Leaky Pipeline," *The Professional Counselor* 4, no. 4 (2014), 332–52.

16. Danah Abdulla, "Design Otherwise: Towards a Locally-Centric Design Education Curricula in Jordan" (Ph.D. diss., Goldsmiths University College London, United Kingdom, 2017).

unprecedented gender equity policies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).<sup>13</sup> Despite measurable improvements, inequalities continue to persist there and elsewhere, prompting soul-searching and further perspectives on the so-called "pipeline problem."<sup>14</sup> Focus on the "pipeline" entails increasing the number of qualified people from underrepresented groups and removing barriers to the development of career paths and progression to higher levels within institutions. Associated policies tend to target structural factors at gateway or turning points, such as entrance exams, application evaluation, and promotion processes. In this respect, the increase of women in institutions of higher education and, indeed, a female majority in many of our arts and architectural institutions today, is important and necessary. However, despite increasing numbers of historically underrepresented groups at lower levels in academia and early career stages, the pipeline continues to "leak" dramatically.<sup>15</sup> Inequalities at higher organizational levels and in advanced career stages persist. One conclusion is that pipeline approaches are necessary but not sufficient. This can also motivate a consideration of bias, discrimination, and deterrence as not only effected structurally but through subtle and everyday micropractices, social interactions, networks, and norms as well as through symbolic and psychological dimensions.

In relation to design education, Danah Abdulla's doctoral work makes several valuable theoretical and practical contributions to "decolonizing" institutional structures and everyday practices.<sup>16</sup> Her case is design educational institutions in Jordan, which are conditioned by and reproduce the "neopatriarchal" state. For Abdulla, "neopatriarchy" spans from macrostructures – society, state, and economy – to microstructures – individual psyche, personality, and the family. It also positions male supremacy – i.e., patriarchy – in concert with the socioeconomic organization of modernity, including the fissure between tradition and industry and other originally Western European economic models. Abdulla studies the multiple and varied forms that neopatriarchy takes in design educational institutions and curricula. She examines issues of access, considering entrance exams, fees, and "privileges of the King" (i.e., seats for students from certain sectors of society); power,

academic freedom, and language; course lists and study plans (including how these (re)produce Western/capitalist paradigms); power in the classroom, including models of teacher-centered vs. student-centered pedagogy. Crucially, she starts to make suggestions about how to intervene into the macro (bureaucratic and juridical structures) and micro (curricula and pedagogy).

A particularly interesting example along these lines is the process of decolonization underway at the Ontario College of Art and Design (OCAD), Canada's biggest art and design university, under the leadership of Dori Tunstall. This and other Canadian institutions aim not only at equality but equity in order to redress the historical colonization and oppression of indigenous peoples and territories. A recent open call for indigenous applicants for five tenured or tenure-track faculty positions is interesting both as a structural policy (a pipeline approach to increasing candidates and, potentially, equity through a targeted call) but also in terms of more subtle variables. Previous gender studies have revealed how the composition and form of job ads affect whether or not women apply, which can be down to seemingly trivial things such as wording, tone, punctuation, and lists, which elicit different responses between genders.<sup>17</sup> The OCAD ad is carefully composed to frame traditionally exclusive or excluding categories such as academia, design, and research more broadly than usual through terms such as "university of the imagination," "visual culture," and "indigenous knowledge systems." The ad was further accompanied by Tunstall's personal social media campaign reaching out more broadly than the institutional website and providing practical tips on applying to academic posts.

Decolonization at OCAD goes beyond conforming to the Ontario Human Rights Code, implemented through gateway and pipeline policies aimed at broadening representation in the faculty, board, and student body. The issue has been opened and discussed extensively within an institution-wide cultural and organizational change. Concepts stemming from indigenous communities (such as *mnaadendimowin*) have been developed and integrated into a governing principle of "respectful design,"<sup>18</sup> which is stated in the high-level university mission as well as in

17. Danielle Gaucher, Justin Friesen, and Aaron Kay, "Evidence that Gendered Wording in Job Advertisements Exists and Sustains Gender Inequality," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 101, no. 1 (2001), 109–28.

18. Dori Tunstall, "On Respectful Design," [www2.ocadu.ca/keyword/reseptful-design](http://www2.ocadu.ca/keyword/reseptful-design) (accessed August 16, 2018).



the nitty-gritty of criteria used in grading and graduating students. Thus, beyond the gateway terms for entering the institution, faculty and students continue to work and study within radically transformed structures (including budgets, evaluation criteria, and performance indicators) and subtle or “soft” variables such as institutional brand, content of curricula and courses, cultural values, and ethos.

These examples articulate modalities of institutional critique, which can open for contesting the terms in which design is constituted and practiced. Historians such as Katerina Rüedi sift through meeting notes and bureaucratic documentation accumulated within institutional archives, unearthing particular decisions with far-reaching consequences. Christina Zetterlund and others reveal overlooked or hidden figures within design, recording and making public alternative histories. An important task of critical historiography is troubling (rather than merely celebrating and reproducing) design history and those designers canonized in our past and present history books, museum archives, and educational syllabi.

Further, these examples make institutional critique explicit as a set of possible practices through which not only to contest but to reform design. Within her work, Taikon might be understood as an activist; acknowledging the privilege accompanying enrolment at Konstfack, she used her access to the National Museum to expand what and who might count in design. This is an important example of institutional “criticism from within” design practice, and the example also surfaces further practices available to design researchers and educators. Obituary writing can be understood as a form of institutional critique reaching a broad public, through which awareness and debate might be raised concerning policies, structures, and, importantly, the soft norms governing our design institutions. Writing job ads, in the case of OCAD, seems to be a careful and critical practice with measurable outcomes. Indeed, beyond mere reproduction of top-down national policies, OCAD demonstrates a more comprehensive process of institutional self-critique and change, through which design definitions, cultures, and future generations of designers may be transformed.

Everyday practices within academic life, such as

writing, bring the idea (and ideals) of institutional critique within reach. In my Nordic context, sociologist Liisa Husu has been a pioneering scholar of covert and subtle forms of discrimination and interventions in response. Her book *Sexism, Support and Survival in Academia*<sup>19</sup> is required reading in the mandatory course I took for academic promotion. Sara Ahmed's related and well-known scholarship details the "diversity work" in academia that often starts involuntarily, as a result of experiencing discrimination.<sup>20</sup> Reclaiming slurs such as "feminist killjoys," the title of her popular blog, she also attends to the typically unrewarded and stigmatized diversity work as an ongoing "phenomenological practice" enacted in daily practical reflections, struggles, and actions that take place within the mundanities of academia. For example, Ahmed evokes a further practice of institutional critique that I find relevant to design – namely, citation:

I would describe citation as a rather successful reproductive technology, a way of reproducing the world around certain bodies. The reproduction of a discipline can be the reproduction of these techniques of selection, ways of making certain bodies and thematics core to the discipline, and others not even part.<sup>21</sup>

I have been developing my own "critical citation practice." Influenced by "critical design" during my postgraduate studies at the Royal College of Art (RCA) in London, as my career has developed as a researcher, educator, administrator, and academic leader, I have attempted to transpose criticality into practices associated with these roles as well. I have become increasingly reflexive and meticulous about who I cite and reference in my syllabi, presentations, and publications. For example, my preparation process often involves listing potential citations in spreadsheets to examine and thus make more conscious choices concerning gender and culture (im)balances.

I was shocked the first time I tried this during a book project with Johan Redström, Christina Zetterlund, Matilda Plöjel, and Lisa Olausson.<sup>22</sup> I was writing at the time about how climate change disproportionately affects

19. Liisa Husu, *Sexism, Support and Survival in Academia* (Helsinki: University of Helsinki, 2001).

20. Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University, 2012).

21. Sara Ahmed, "Making Feminist Points," *feministkilljoys.com*/2013/09/11/making-feminist-points/ (accessed August 1, 2018).

22. Ramia Mazé, "Who Is Sustainable?," in *Share This Book*, ed. Ramia Mazé et al. (Stockholm: Axl Books, 2013), 83–124.



23. European Commission, SHE FIGURES 2015 (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2016), [ec.europa.eu/research/swafs/pdf/pub\\_gender\\_equality/she\\_figures\\_2015-final.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/research/swafs/pdf/pub_gender_equality/she_figures_2015-final.pdf). Cf. Kristina Rolin and Jenny Vainio, "Gender in Academia in Finland: Tensions between Policies and Gendering Processes in Physics Departments," *Science Studies* 24, no. 1 (2011), 26–46.

24. Husu, *Sexism*.

25. Vincent Larivière et al., "Bibliometrics: Global Gender Disparities in Science," *Nature* 504, no. 7079 (2013), 211–13; see also Danica Savonick and Cathy Davidson, "Gender Bias in Academe: An Annotated Bibliography of Important Recent Studies," [blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2016/03/08/gender-bias-in-academe-an-annotated-bibliography](http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2016/03/08/gender-bias-in-academe-an-annotated-bibliography) (accessed August 16, 2018).

certain cultures, generations, genders, and geographies, and how design can reproduce such inequalities. When I paused in the process to scrutinize my bibliography, I found it dominated by white, Western, male authors. Deciding to rectify this, I started developing a practice of nerdy, quantitative counting but also, importantly, I started a more qualitative journey to find and engage with more authors from different backgrounds. In the process, I encountered a wealth of new examples and sources that have fundamentally transformed my work. Matilda Plöjel, the book's designer, perceived this shift, and we tried to reflect it in the graphical form of the article. In addition to the normal appended list of references, and alongside my own text and other illustrations on each page of the article, sources were represented visually as reproductions of book spines including author names. Thus, my alternative design canon became even more visible.

As designers, educators, administrators, and researchers, we all, daily, may contest and reform the design canon, understood here, literally, as the doctrine, dogma, and lineage of key figures and works comprising design. Career advancement comes with an increase in authority and privilege, and I try to recognize this with more critical practices. Now, in my position as an academic in Finland, where academia is more gender-equal than almost anywhere in the world, persistent inequalities are still apparent despite substantial policy and structural measures.<sup>23</sup> Liisa Husu calls our attention to hidden forms of discrimination in academia, in which women, parents, and others encounter closed cultures, gendered distributions of labor, and impenetrable social hierarchies, experienced as bias, exclusion, isolation, and obstacles blocking their career paths. These compound to the extent that, in the end, there remains only a dramatically gendered pattern of "professors and 'leavers.'"<sup>24</sup> For me, citation is a contributing practice, among many others, which I can affect. It is, apparently, normal for both men and women to cite equally qualified female authors less frequently than males.<sup>25</sup> While writing the article mentioned above, I found myself reproducing a practice that contributes to systematically discriminating and excluding others like me from advancing within academia. This has done much more than "kill joy" for me;

this kind of critical institutional practice has transformed my ideals, knowledges, and the basic content of my everyday practice.

## Academic and Research Conventions

In 2002, Monica Bueno and I marked a career milestone when we presented our first academic conference paper about our critical and participatory design project with an elder community.<sup>26</sup> The conference keynote, “Neither Bauhäusler nor Nerd: Educating the Interaction Designer,”<sup>27</sup> was given by participatory design pioneer Pelle Ehn, who would later become my doctoral supervisor. This was the time when my postgraduate field of study at the RCA, rather ambiguously named “Computer-Related Design,”<sup>28</sup> was becoming named, institutionalized, and widely called upon by industry as “interaction design.” Ehn’s keynote referred to his previously published “Manifesto for a Digital Bauhaus,”<sup>29</sup> a founding document for a new interaction design curriculum at Malmö University in Sweden and for two new research studios at the Interactive Institute in Malmö. In 2001, I had moved to Sweden to work at the Interactive Institute in Gothenburg and gravitated towards a research career, eventually completing my doctorate through Malmö University.<sup>30</sup> In response to the institutional model of the MIT Media Lab in the US, the Interactive Institute was founded as Sweden’s national research institute, modeling transdisciplinary knowledge production combining art and technology and addressing the public and societal challenges.

By 1998, Ehn targeted the “nerd generation and the third culture.” He argued for building upon the studio-based pedagogies of the original Bauhaus but additionally emphasized transdisciplinarity and “Scandinavian design that unites a democratic perspective emphasizing open dialogue and active user participation.”<sup>31</sup> These were evident in research projects developed within the context of the Interactive Institute studios,<sup>32</sup> along with an orientation, articulated in Ehn’s 2002 keynote, in relation to the critical design of my RCA tutors and authors of *Design Noir*,<sup>33</sup> Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby. Ehn concludes:

26. Ramia Mazé and Monica Bueno, “Mixers: A Participatory Approach to Design Prototyping,” in *Proceedings of the Conference DIS Designing Interactive Systems* (2002).

27. Pelle Ehn, “Neither Bauhäusler nor Nerd: Educating the Interaction Designer,” in *Proceedings of the Conference DIS Designing Interactive Systems* (2002).

28. Gillian Crampton Smith, “Computer-Related Design at the Royal College of Art: 1997 Graduation Projects,” *interactions* 4, no. 6 (1997), 27–33.

29. Pelle Ehn, “Manifesto for a Digital Bauhaus,” *Digital Creativity* 9, no. 4 (1998), 207–16.

30. Ramia Mazé, *Occupying Time: Design, Technology and the Form of Interaction* (Stockholm: Axl Books, 2017).

31. Ehn, “Manifesto for a Digital Bauhaus.”

32. Lone Malmberg, “The Digital Bauhaus: Vision or Reality?,” *Digital Creativity* 15, no. 3 (2004), 175–81.

33. Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby, *Design Noir: The Secret Life of Electronic Objects* (Basel: Birkhäuser and August Media, 2001).

34. Ehn, "Neither Bauhäusler nor Nerd."

35. Pelle Ehn and Peter Ullmark, "Educating the Reflective Design Researcher," in *Practice-Based Design Research*, ed. Laurene Vaughan (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 77–86.

36. Cf. Rolf Hughes, Catharina Dyrssen, and Maria Hellström Reimer, "Artistic Research Today and Tomorrow," *Årsbok Konstnärlig FoU* (Stockholm: Swedish Research Council, 2011); Catharina Dyrssen et al., "The Future of Swedish Research: Overview 2014 Artistic Research" (Stockholm: Swedish Research Council, 2014); Susannah Helgeson et al., eds., *DI! Designforskning för nytänkande, innovation och hållbar tillväxt 22* (2014).

37. Joyce Yee, "Methodological Innovation in Practice-Based Design Doctorates," *Journal of Research Practice* 6, no. 2 (2010).

38. Ramia Mazé, *Occupying*, Cf. Ramia Mazé and Johan Redström, "Difficult Forms: Critical Practices of Design and Research," *Research Design Journal* 1, no. 1 (2009), 28–39.

Design noir is not glamorous with great utopias and modern heroes as the Bauhaus, but it still has a humanist stance and a consciousness about political dilemmas that can take us beyond modern design and challenge both the Bauhäusler and the nerd as the interaction designer of tomorrow.<sup>34</sup>

Against this backdrop, my doctoral research took shape at the Interactive Institute. Indeed, the institute was a testbed for developing design and artistic research in Sweden as a whole. At the time, there was no doctoral program that would accept and fund arts practitioners as researchers, and we at the institute prototyped early examples of "research through practice."<sup>35</sup> Eventually, our approaches and many of my colleagues influenced and shifted to more formal institutions such as educational programs at universities, funding programs at national research foundations and research conferences, and publications in design and the arts.<sup>36</sup> This was part of a larger wave, spanning several decades in the Nordics, Europe, and other regions, of practitioners entering institutions of higher education and research, inventing and reforming academic structures and norms. Critical practitioners, more specifically, have contested the institutionalized practices, doctrinal conventions, and material forms that research takes. Examples in Sweden include the doctoral work of myself and Otto von Busch<sup>37</sup> and my colleagues at the Interactive Institute, Kristina Lindström and Åsa Ståhl. We all conducted "research through practice," a modality of knowledge production that I articulated in my doctorate as "criticism from within" the materiality, methods, and modality of design practice.<sup>38</sup> Further, the doctoral dissertation became a site for expressing, experimenting, and expanding critical practice, challenging the form of the book itself.

The work of Lindström and Ståhl is particularly interesting in this respect. They were researchers at the Interactive Institute, who then applied with the same coauthored research proposal to two different departments at Malmö University (interaction design and media and communication studies, respectively). This is highly unconventional in institutional terms – but it is in the transdisciplinary spirit of the Digital Bauhaus. Their

proposal was accepted, they were assigned different supervisors (Pelle Ehn and Bo Reimer, respectively), and they proceeded to embark on several years of "research through design" together with their project "Threads – a Mobile Sewing Circle." Their final dissertation was written, publicly defended, and published as a single, coauthored book.<sup>39</sup> It was comprised of multiple, coauthored, and peer-reviewed articles published in reputed journals and conferences, with inserted introductory, concluding, and interim texts. The form of the book as well as the writing style and authorial "voice" were carefully and critically positioned, drawing upon feminist technoscience theories that informed not only their project but the composition of the dissertation itself. Particularly striking to me was how their theorized position on knowledge as jointly produced was reflected in shifts between the single-authored first-person singular ("I") and the collective first-person plural ("we") in the book and in the defense.

Their work exemplifies relevant philosophies and epistemologies of Ehn's manifesto and the ambitions of our institute to engage in institutional self-critique and organizational change. The plural "we" reflects the spirit of a "third culture" conception of knowledge *coproduction*. Lindström and Ståhl extend but also challenge philosophical underpinnings of "research through practice," such as pragmatist positions adapted from Donald Schön concerning knowledge as produced through embodied and material action. They seem to depart from the cognitivist assumptions of his scholarship; instead they emphasize knowledge as emerging in-between people and things, relationally and socially through *interaction*. To formulate their epistemological position, they draw upon feminist theorists of science and technology such as Donna Haraway and Karen Barad. Through the work of Barad and Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, they also challenge and develop notions of criticality, moving beyond the Frankfurt School theories influencing the critical design of Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby to theorize their work in terms of feminist concepts of relation, concern, and care. Lindström and Ståhl thus theorize, cross, and reconfigure boundaries between knowledges, disciplines, methods, and, even, bodies and beings. This is an example of how feminist modes of

40. Katja Grillner, "Ramble, Linger and Gaze: Dialogs from the Landscape Garden" (Ph.D. diss., KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm, 2000).

41. Katarina Bonnevier, "Behind Straight Curtains: Towards a Queer Feminist Theory of Architecture" (Ph.D. diss., KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm, 2007).

42. Brady Burroughs, "Architectural Flirtations, Formerly Known as Critique: Dethroning the Serious to Clear Ground for Generous Architectural Conversations," in *Feminist Futures of Spatial Practice*, ed. Meike Schalk, Thérèse Kristiansson, and Ramia Mazé (Baunach: Spurbuchverlag, 2017), 225–38. Cf. Dana Cuff, *Architecture: The Story of Practice* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992).

criticality may not only interrogate, but also project, activate, and enact alternatives. Their alternative articulations of research practices and academic conventions constitute a major departure from doctoral study, which is typically constituted as individualistic and mono-disciplinary.

At the time in Sweden, there was a shift not only of the arts and associated practices into academia but also a reconsideration of more institutionalized and established research traditions. Notably, at the School of Architecture at the Royal Institute of Technology (KTH) in Stockholm, doctoral students experimented with writing and teaching as practices of knowledge production. The subject of Katja Grillner's dissertation was eighteenth-century landscape architecture, for example, but its contribution was not only historical but methodological.<sup>40</sup> She developed a narrative and dialogical mode of writing as a hermeneutical research method for the field of architectural history and theory. Subsequently, Grillner's doctoral student, Katarina Bonnevier, completed her dissertation as a study of historical architectural subjects.<sup>41</sup> Bonnevier integrated dialogical methodologies with activism, design, and theatre, which are theorized and positioned as critical (queer feminist) practices. Bonnevier articulates herself within an emerging tradition of "Ph.D. by architectural design," which parallels "research through practice" in design.

Brady Burroughs, who was supervised mainly by Hélène Frichot but also by Katja Grillner, completed a dissertation that builds upon and further develops these epistemologies and methodologies. Additionally, in Burrough's case, teaching was the site of critical (queer feminist) practice, in which knowledge was produced through experiments with curricula, pedagogical methods, and course materials. In the classroom, for example, she explored alternative relations of power and authority, including coproduction of the course syllabus with students and experiments with subjectivity and voice through theatre, masquerade, writing, and social media. She documents efforts to alter the power dynamic of the architectural jury, or "crit," which is a primary vehicle for indoctrinating students into the working culture, social dynamics, and hierarchies (predominantly patriarchies) of the architectural profession.<sup>42</sup> Some of these methods



were also applied and developed “live” within an interim evaluation of her research, for which I was the opponent, and in the final public defense. The multiple subjectivities and epistemological standpoints informing her research, articulated through fictional personas, is expressed as three authors, Beda Ring, Brady Burroughs, and Henri T. Beall, on the cover and in the colophon of her dissertation.<sup>43</sup>

These examples of doctoral work and dissertations develop dialogical forms of creative and critical practice, thus extending social and relational conceptions of knowledge production to the writing process and form of the dissertation. Grillner, Bonnevier, and Burroughs situate this in relation to a tradition of feminist writing, as articulated by, for example, Mona Livholts.<sup>44</sup> They experiment with subject and author positions, identities, and voices, playing with and blurring theory and practice and high and low literary forms and boundaries. In addition, these demonstrate multiple and interacting practices in knowledge (co-) production, including design practices (such as making, prototyping, and testing), historiographical practices, writing practices, and even naming, referencing, and citational practices. These are further practical examples of institutional critique, thus contributing to potential “feminist design power tools,” accessible in our everyday work as design academics.

The academic book “norm” has become an important site for my own work in collaboration with several of these scholars. I have reconsidered the activity of making a book (“bookmaking”<sup>45</sup>) as a critical and feminist practice of design in two different academic book projects: *Share This Book* with Johan Redström, Christina Zetterlund, Matilda Plöjel, and Lisa Olausson;<sup>46</sup> and *Feminist Futures of Spatial Practice* with Meike Schalk and Thérèse Kristiansson,<sup>47</sup> which includes collaborations with and contributions from Bonnevier, Burroughs, Frichot, Grillner, and more than thirty others from across architecture, the arts, art history, curating, cultural heritage studies, environmental sciences, futures studies, film, visual communication, design and design theory, queer, intersectional, and gender studies, political sciences, sociology, and urban planning. To elaborate more specifically through one example, *Feminist Futures* can be understood as querying the codified format of an

43. Beda Ring, Brady Burroughs, and Henri T. Beall, “Architectural Flirtations: A Love Storey” (Ph.D. diss., KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm, 2016).

44. Mona Livholts, ed., *Emergent Writing Methodologies in Feminist Studies* (London: Routledge, 2011).

45. Ramia Mazé, “Bookmaking as Critical and Feminist Practice of Design,” in *Proceedings of the Design Research Society Conference DRS (2018)*.

46. Ramia Mazé, Lisa Olausson, Matilda Plöjel, Johan Redström, and Christina Zetterlund, eds., *Share This Book* (Stockholm: Axl Books, 2013).

47. Meike Schalk, Thérèse Kristiansson, and Ramia Mazé, eds., *Feminist Futures of Spatial Practice* (Baunach: Spurbuchverlag, 2017).



48. Dexter Sinister, "On Self-Initiated Projects as an Alternative Platform," in *Iaspis Forum on Design and Critical Practice: The Reader*, ed. Magnus Ericson et al. (Berlin: Sternberg Press and Iaspis, 2009), 267.

49. James Goggin, "Practice from Everyday Life," in *Graphic Design: Now in Production*, ed. Andrew Blauvelt and Ellen Lupton (Minneapolis, MN: Walker Art Center, 2011), 32–40.

50. Jane Rendell, "Critical Spatial Practice: Curating, Editing, Writing," in *Issues in Curating Contemporary Art and Performance*, ed. Judith Rugg and Michele Sedgwick (London: Intellect, 2007), 59–75.

51. H el ene Frichot, Katja Grillner, and Julieanna Preston, "Feminist Practices: Writing around the Kitchen Table," in *Feminist Futures of Spatial Practice*, 171–98.

edited, peer-reviewed academic book.

To conceptualize "bookmaking," I looked both to practices of critical design and to critical and feminist theory. Critical (graphic) designers such as Dexter Sinister and James Goggin reconfigure the scope of criticality within their work. Dexter Sinister, the joint identity of David Reinfurt and Stuart Bailey, do produce books. But their practice also takes the form of a "just-in-time workshop and occasional bookstore," a space and time for anyone to learn and self-produce graphic design and with a lending-library and community-building intent. This alternative production and distribution model is "best described as a self-conscious model: both a regular design studio and a tool to question the nature of a design studio."<sup>48</sup> Goggin considers the 99 percent non-design activity involved in running a design company as critical, including the daily details of administering, contracting, lecturing, curating, editing, distributing, and "press-passing."<sup>49</sup> The mundane activity and action of doing criticality is emphasized in his company name, Practise, in which the British spelling with an "s" exclusively denotes a verb (whereas *practice* in American English can be a noun or a verb).

Feminist architectural theorist Jane Rendell further interrogates writing, curating, and making edited books or anthologies as feminist spatial practices, arguing that the edited book is an ideal site for investigating movements between disciplines and between theory and practice.<sup>50</sup> This was enacted physically and socially in "Anthology Works," an event organized by FATALE (of which Bonnevier, Burroughs, Grillner, and Schalk are the main members) featuring Rendell as a keynote. Participants, including myself, took part in a series of activities exploring the notion of *anthology* from different disciplinary positions. The anthology and other academic practices have norms and exclusions. The anthology as, essentially, a structure for selecting, giving voice to, and citing particular texts and authors, can become feminist or decolonial when done by or with others, and otherwise. An example was Grillner's "architecture writing workshop,"<sup>51</sup> which unfolded at the event as role-play and dialog among participants through the medium of extracted quotations from a historical canon of feminist texts. Not only the content of the texts

but the format of the activity itself was positioned as feminist. Texts were selected and sequenced, collectively and performatively, in an embodied and dialogic way, creating relations or interiority among differently situated knowledges in which sub-altern authors outside of the mainstream canon were voiced and heard by each and all together. This can be seen as a microcosm of our “book-making” in *Feminist Futures*.

*Feminist Futures of Spatial Practice* is the culmination of a process set into motion within the Introduction to Architecture and Gender course module offered at KTH. A more extensive account is provided elsewhere of how the course was set up, including its location and position toward the university, admissions policy, and pedagogical methods, conceived as a “pedagogical queering-tool” involving a series of critically debated microdecisions and standpoints.<sup>52</sup> A community and a critical mass of content formed around and through the course. Thus, a book project and process was initiated. Criticality in the book was enacted through mundane practices related to academic conventions such as selection, positioning, sequencing, and voices of contributors; review and editorial processes including language, spelling, and style guides; balance and distribution of theory and practice as well as labor and resources during the process; and terms, materiality, and



Peer review in the round. Roundtable with myself, Katja Grillner, Meike Schalk, Maryam Fanni, H el ene Fricot, and Brady Burroughs. Photo: Ramia Maz e, 2014.

53. Mazé, "Bookmaking."

54. Christing Wennerås and Agnes Wold, "Nepotism and Sexism in Peer-Review," *Nature* 387, no. 6631 (1997), 341. Cf. references in Danica Savonick and Cathy Davidson, "Gender Bias."

55. Nel Janssens, "Collective Sense-Making for Change," in *Feminist Futures of Spatial Practice*, 151–58; Doina Petrescu, ed., *Altering Practices: Feminist Politics and Poetics of Space* (London: Routledge, 2007).

ownership within book publishing and distribution.<sup>53</sup>

To pick one practice to further exemplify here, we reconceptualized review as a kind of "peer review in the round," performed face-to-face, in dialog, and collectively.

Five roundtable sessions were organized in 2014, in which contributors to the course were invited to develop contributions for the book. Roundtables took the form of intimate conversations around texts circulated in advance, closely read and carefully commented by participants and a designated "peer reviewer." Peer review is a key mechanism to ensure quality in the academic system in which many of us work. Standard "blind" peer review is argued to serve gender and other measures of equality in publishing, though certainly not unequivocally, and even the most rigorous standards may be subject to nepotism and sexism.<sup>54</sup> While peer-review standards are important to build and maintain, there is no singular, unassailable solution to quality and equality in review. In *Feminist Futures*, we sought quality and equality through other means suited to the community and project. We were inspired by feminist pedagogy including, in the terms of Nel Janssens, "the pleasure of conversation" and, in those of Doina Petrescu, "feminist collective reconstructions."<sup>55</sup> In the roundtables, we came from different backgrounds, disciplines, and positions within academia or practice – rather distant social and cultural locations that could potentially pose a risk of inequality or hierarchy. Each participant had shared a chapter draft, which meant each was equally vulnerable and had a common stake in both receiving and giving feedback. Giving and receiving feedback in person, as a conversation and around a table meant that critique became dialogic and mutualistic, articulated from distinctly different but mutually respectful positions. The external "peer reviewer" in our session acted as a kind of moderator, rather than as an evaluator, listening to the conversations for common issues articulated from different perspectives.

Peer review in *Feminist Futures* had a pedagogical purpose as a kind of peer learning, in contrast to other purposes such as critique or evaluation. Unexpected commonalities and differences emerged from the peer-review conversations, which thus constituted a kind of interpersonal or collective knowledge-making. After the

roundtables, each draft further evolved through several cycles of further review with the three book editors, in which reviewing continued as an increasingly precise form of dialog. As editors, we also contributed with chapters and were thus reviewed by the others, enhancing our sensitivity to the personal and power relations enacted within review processes. This reflection and transparency throughout the process attuned not only to articulating but listening carefully, more than in standard review or editorial processes. One implication is a more careful and multifaceted editorial position, and the evolution of chapters that expressed ever-more precisely in argument, language, and form the author's (or authors') own position and voice. In practice, there was never a "universal" nor neutral position but rather a safe space created spatially (in the room, around the table, and, consequently, continued in more distant and written exchanges). Within the roundtables, and the "book-making" as a whole, there was an intense and continual "being-in-relation" continuously performed, a continual self-transformation and peer learning.

## Concluding Thoughts

I and my two co-editors of *Feminist Futures* came to academia from different practice backgrounds, each grappling with our positionality and power in relation to our disciplines (no small feat considering our transdisciplinary experiences), within the institution more generally, and in relation to our predecessors and future generations. Nor are we alone in this, as is apparent from the scholarship of Liisa Husu and Sara Ahmed and as articulated by philosophers Isabelle Stengers and Vinciane Despret in their book *Women Who Make a Fuss*.<sup>56</sup> Like Stengers and Despret, an immediate problem for us today is that, unlike our predecessors at the Bauhaus, it can be hard to see or recognize when and where we are oppressed. Covert and subtle forms of inequality are not easily visible in a group photograph. Many of us, and especially women and others in the minority, are too often told not to "make a fuss." Mainstream design, the design profession, and our established cultural and educational institutions are resistant

MAKING THE INVISIBLE VISIBLE

to change and may favor abstract and often uncritical conceptions of “innovation” and “progress.” Here, the idea of the future is critical – we cannot know what needs to be different (or “innovated”) nor what direction we prefer (“progression”) without making a fuss. We must pause to reflect on the past and present.

Critical and feminist practices question and contest but also project, activate, and enact alternative norms or future ideals. The how and when, as well as the by and for whom, of such practices is also important. Even as we expand our collection of “feminist design power tools,” these are always situated and directed, and must also be subject to critical questions. Nevertheless, it is in our everyday practices that present and future overlap, moment by moment, as we critically learn from the past and actively live out alternatives and preferred futures – for example, as “embodied utopias” and through “practicing otherwise.”<sup>57</sup> We encounter glass walls and ceilings, which we try to pierce or make our own. Critical historiography and design studies (for example, through feminist or decolonial perspectives) help us to understand underlying worldviews, ontologies, and ideologies. These are daily reproduced in canons, curricula, and other forms, which, in turn, in/exclude and shape students, teachers, and, potentially, ourselves. We may experience an inevitable “mainstreaming,” or indoctrination, to existing structures and policies. But there is also at least some power in our everyday micropractices, in collaborating, coproducing knowledge, in building collectivity, in becoming toward others and preferred futures.

I have argued here that we can act, each of us, from within our everyday practices, as part of larger sociopolitical entities, in the here and now, and affect the future. I’ve traversed examples of critical/feminist practices of design, history, education, and research. For me, and from multiple standpoints in my everyday life – as a woman, a designer, an educator, a researcher, an author, a jury member, etc. – there are possibilities for asking critical questions, for being reflexive and intentional about the differences and futures I try to affect. Each time I cite others, make a syllabus, supervise students, collaborate with peers, write and make books, there exists the possibility for doing things differently, to

become closer to my preferred future. In *Feminist Futures*, we argue that feminist futures are “becoming” when common projects – e.g., a canon, curriculum, project, or conversation – not only momentarily produce an alternative space, but effect new connections and social relations that can alter ingrained patriarchal structures as many of us still experience them.

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# DESIGN STRUGGLES

Claudia Mareis &  
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*Intersecting Histories,  
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