

Made in Patriarchy II: Researching (or Re-Searching) Women and Design

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- 1 By the late 1970s and through the 1980s, women design and architectural historians influenced by second-wave feminism and a handful of pioneering texts began to approach these questions armed with feminist theories. In this context, notions of design value, taste, and significance were seriously undermined; in fact, the basic premises of academic disciplines began to be questioned as the new discipline's failure to account for women as producers, designers, consumers, and users of design became clear. See, e.g., Anthea Callen, *The Angel in the Studio: Women in the Arts and Crafts Movement 1870–1914* (London: Astragal, 1979); Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981); Philippa Goodall, "Design and Gender," *BLOCK* 9 (1983): 50–61; Gillian Elinor, Su Richardson, Sue Scott, Angharad Thomas, and Kate Walker, eds., *Women and Craft* (London: Virago, 1987); Judy Attfield and Pat Kirkham, eds., *A View from the Interior: Feminism, Women and Design* (London: The Women's Press, 1989); and Ellen Perry Berkeley, ed. *Architecture: A Place for Women* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989).
- 2 Swiss Design Network Research summit, "Beyond Change: Questioning the Role of Design in Times of Global Transformations," Basel, Switzerland, March 8–10, 2018; <http://www.beyondchange.ch/font> (accessed August 8, 2018).
- 3 Cheryl Buckley, "Made in Patriarchy: Toward a Feminist Analysis of Women and Design," *Design Issues* 3, no. 2 (1986): 3–14; and Cheryl Buckley, *Women Designers in the North Staffordshire Pottery Industry, 1914–1940* (PhD thesis, University of East Anglia, 1991).

More than 30 years ago, women's relationship to design underwent a process of critical questioning by historians, practitioners, curators, and critics that continues today.¹ At the core was feminist politics, and as feminists began to look to all areas of women's lives, asserting that the "personal is political," design inevitably came under scrutiny. The Swiss Design Network research summit in 2018, titled "Beyond Change," invited a response to the provocation, "Design cannot change anything before it changes itself." This article, developed from a keynote address delivered at the summit, argues that what is essential to affect change is a reconsideration of women's relationship to design.² This reconsideration is undertaken by reflecting on arguments made in the article, "Made in Patriarchy," published in *Design Issues* in 1986; it asks if the questions posed then are useful today.³

It begins by considering the changing nature of debates within feminism. It then revisits debates about the nature of design practice by examining definitions of design and the designer and the role of the historian in interpreting and understanding the connections between women and design. Insisting that design is a vital part of everyday life that has shaped our public personas and individual identities, it proposes that thinking about the innumerable ways in which design is produced, where it is produced, and by and for whom it is produced has the potential to prompt a changed understanding of design.

Situating Myself

As a design historian who has been working in the field since the late 1970s, my intellectual framework was fundamentally shaped by the dual, intersecting formations of social class and gender as I researched a diverse array of things that were produced and designed: domestic tableware, working-class housing, dress-making at home, and, most recently, fashion in everyday lives.⁴ Importantly, this research was informed by my teaching, mainly of practice-based design students (i.e., fashion, industrial design, 3-D design), as well as by PhD research. Although the latter was focused on the producers of design, an interest in the processes of

representation and identity construction emerged, along with a growing concern for women users and consumers of design in the process of teaching practice-based design students.

Exploring the roles of women designers in the North Staffordshire ceramic industry, my doctoral research led to the discovery of numerous examples of ceramic designs in archives (e.g., the Josiah Wedgwood Archive) that had barely registered in design's histories. This recognition prompted a number of theoretical and methodological questions about the nature of design history. These ceramic designs—largely conventional, routine, and everyday—were predominantly domestic neither technically nor visually innovative; they made only an occasional nod to modernity. However, these designs were fundamentally decorative and clearly shaped by the strong traditions inherent in the British ceramic industry. The “designers,” and what was understood by the term “design” in this particular industry didn't conform to “accepted” definitions of design. In these definitions, a marked division, in design terms, was made between the production of shape and pattern design.⁵ Some who “produced” these designs were called designers, while others were described as paintresses or production managers. The line between craft, machine, and new technologies was also blurred—although ceramics in north Staffordshire ostensibly were made by industrial methods, new technologies were not always what they seemed; certainly in the first half of the twentieth century, craft techniques were intrinsic to the whole production process. Assessing these archives prompted further questions about what doing “design” actually meant, what being a “designer” involved, and crucially, who designed.

My approach and thinking, influenced in part by Marxist historians, such as E. P. Thompson (author of *The Making of the Working Class*), were also shaped by immersion in second-wave feminist texts, including Sheila Rowbotham's *Hidden From History*.⁶ The joint interest in Marxism and feminism led me to reconsider the meaning of patriarchy, and the works of Heidi Hartmann and Sheila Rowbotham were especially useful in doing so.⁷ In particular were their thoughtful conceptualizations of patriarchy as neither a universal nor trans-historical concept, but as situated in time and place. Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker's critique of the ideological underpinnings of disciplines—in their case, art history—was also vital.⁸ And working with colleagues who were interested in women and gender—not just design historians, but also those working in film studies, fashion history, and architectural history—also shaped my thinking.⁹

In the midst of my PhD research, my article, “Made in Patriarchy: Towards a Feminist Analysis of Women and Design,” was published. Its purpose was to provide theoretical and methodological tools for this empirical doctoral study of women's role in

4 Cheryl Buckley and Hazel Clark, *Fashion and Everyday Life: London and New York*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

5 See Cheryl Buckley, *Potters and Paintresses: Women Designers in the Pottery Industry 1870–1955* (London: The Women's Press, 1990).

6 See Edward P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Pelican, 1963); and Sheila Rowbotham, *Hidden from History* (London: Pluto Press, 1980). See also Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963; repr. London: Penguin Classics, 2010); Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (Oxford: Pantheon, 1974); and Kate Millet, *Sexual Politics* (1970; repr. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990).

7 Heidi Hartmann, “The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Toward a More Progressive Union,” in *Women and Revolution: The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism*, ed. Lydia Sargent, (London: Pluto Press, 1981); and Sheila Rowbotham, “The Trouble with Patriarchy,” *New Statesman* 98 (December 1979): 970–71.

8 Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981).

9 See, e.g., Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity* (London: Virago, 1985); Jane Gaines and Charlotte Herzog, *Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body* (New York: Routledge, 1990); and Daphne Spain, *Gendered Spaces* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

design in the ceramic industry. This theoretical questioning had four key propositions. First, women had interacted with design in numerous ways, but they largely had been ignored; when women's involvement with design was acknowledged, it was within the context of patriarchy. Second, patriarchy was reshaped and reconfigured depending on specific social, economic, and political circumstances, as well as geography and history. The consequences for women's roles in design were clear: women were categorized; they had sex-specific skills and attributes; they were deemed "feminine," "natural," "decorative," "instinctive." Third, although the various ideologies of patriarchy and its concrete and diverse manifestations were powerful, an array of assumptions about design, the designer, and the meaning of design compounded these views. In the language of writer and activist Rozsika Parker, the devices and tactics deployed by design historians were described as "the rules of the game."¹⁰ The concept of the designer as the "auteur"—an omnipotent, god-like, heroic figure who took a place in the history of pioneering individuals (inevitably men)—was pivotal. Linked to this was the idea that the meaning of design resided in its "author's" intentions (i.e., in the designer's), and the historian's preference for the monograph as a means of writing history reiterated this. Fourth, the effects of other powerful ideologies were ingrained, particularly in the West, including the idea of design as a key element in progress (technological, social, and aesthetic), the concept of "good" design, and, linked to both of these, the commitment to modernism.

What this current article asks is whether these propositions have any validity and currency today or whether our preoccupations and needs have fundamentally changed. To address these questions, I return to the questions that were posed more than 30 years ago. With four areas of discussion in mind first I consider key debates in feminism particularly the influence of third-wave feminism, the growing importance of intersectionality, and the complexities of an identity politics that recognizes a number of subject positions, including class, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and geography, as well as gender. Second, I look again at what we mean by design and the designer, as well as the continuing privileging of categories and sites of design, and types of roles and activities. I argue that perhaps we are still failing to recognize not only that design is polysemic, but also that the work of design makers, producers, and assemblers can be ordinary and everyday—part of routine, mundane lives—and it is this capacity that makes design so potent. Third, I propose that we acknowledge the micro as well as the macro, considering the particular and the local, as well as the global. As Susan Stewart pointed out, "we cannot speak of... small, or miniature work independent of [the] social values expressed toward private space—particularly of the ways the

10 Quoted in Griselda Pollock, "Vision, Voice and Power: Feminist Art History and Marxism," *BLOCK* 6 (1982): 5.

domestic and the interior imply the social formation of an interior subject.”¹¹ That the small-scale, domestic, intimate, and, perhaps, the transitory and incidental remain on the periphery of designers’ interests is indicative that this has yet to be done, I argue. Fourth, I want to propose that we take care with over-arching narratives and stay critically attuned to the power of historians as they (we) attempt to make sense of the past—especially accounting for women.

Reflections on Recent Debates within Feminism

Serendipity led me to write this section about women, gender, and feminism on February 6, 2018, when 100 years earlier, women in Britain—aged 30 and older and who had property—were given the vote through the Representation of the People Act, enacted at 8:00pm on February 6, 1918. Unquestionably a milestone for women’s rights in Britain, the campaign for the vote underscored one of the ongoing criticisms of feminism in the West in the past 100 years—namely, that the campaign and subsequent ones were predominantly about gaining rights and power for middle-class, white women. Indeed, even though in 1918 the Independent Labour party and the Trade Union movement were involved in the campaign for the vote, the popular perception of the campaign was that “it was mainly middle-class.”¹² The question of class is vital; and although it is important to note that economic power is just one aspect of class position, it is pivotal. When women aged 30 and older who had property gained the vote on February 6, 1918—on that same day—all men in Britain regardless of income and property ownership were enfranchised for the first time. British women had to wait until 1928 to be enfranchised on the same basis.

Women’s issues are again at the fore for a number of reasons, highlighting yet again the complexities of the debate about women, gender, and feminism. A handful of examples help to make the point: The #metoo and Time’s Up Now campaigns in the United States; the debates about equal pay at the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) in the United Kingdom (typified by the resignation of the BBC’s China correspondent, Carrie Gracie, over equal pay); the sexual harassment of women MPs and political assistants in the Houses of Parliament in the United Kingdom; the debates about wearing the hijab in Britain and in Europe¹³; and the alternative stance taken by 100 French celebrities and intellectuals whose letter, published in *Le Monde*, attracted a great deal of approbation in Britain because it appeared to defend misogyny.¹⁴ Certainly the history of the campaign for the vote in Britain shows that feminism in 1918—a century ago—was complex with a number of different voices that were not represented equally. This remains so today, although arguably the complexities have multiplied.

- 11 Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 95.
- 12 Rowbotham, *Hidden from History*, 79.
- 13 News reports on each of these issues can be found online. For reporting on Carrie Gracie, see e.g., <https://www.radiotimes.com/news/tv/2018-01-08/carrie-gracie-bbc-news-unequal-pay/> and <https://carriegracie.com/news.html>; for the #metoo movement, see e.g., <https://metoomvmt.org>; for the Time’s Up Now movement, see, e.g., <https://www.timesupnow.com>; for stories about women MPs in the United Kingdom, see, e.g., <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/women-and-equalities-committee/news-parliament-2017/sexual-harassment-women-girls-public-evidence-17-19/>; and for reporting on the restrictions on wearing the hijab in Europe, see, e.g., <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/14/heads-carves-and-muslim-veil-ban-debate-time-line> (all URLs accessed January 8, 2018).
- 14 According to journalist Agnès Poirer, these women (who included writers, actresses, and academics) appeared to many younger feminists in France and abroad “as a retrograde bunch of over-privileged celebrities and intellectuals both totally unconcerned by the plight of all those anonymous victims of rape and sexual harassment and too preoccupied by their sexual freedom.” (Agnès Poirer, *The Observer*, Sunday, January 14, 2018, 32–33). Countering this perspective, the letter’s initiator, Abnousse Shalimani, argued that “[w]e do not dismiss the many women who had the courage to speak up against Weinstein. We do not dismiss either the legitimacy of their fight. We do, however, add our voice, *different voice*, to the debate.” (Ibid.)

In tackling questions of race, sexuality, ethnicity, and class, feminism is many things. Taking bell hooks's proposition that feminism is "the movement to end sexism, sexual exploitation, and sexual oppression," Sara Ahmed, the British-Australian feminist theorist concurs with hooks's view that feminism must be intersectional.¹⁵ Situating herself as a British woman of color who's feminism came from East to West (i.e., from Lahore, Pakistan, to the United Kingdom and then Australia), rather than the other way around, Ahmed acknowledges second-wave feminism's insistence that "the personal is political," but she also asserts that "the personal is theoretical."¹⁶ The theoretical is Ahmed's stock-in-trade as an academic, but she sees its relevance as being close to home and the everyday. Seeking to expand the boundaries of feminism, she asks,

how can we dismantle the world that is built to accommodate only some bodies. Sexism is one such accommodating system. Feminism requires supporting women in a struggle to exist in this world. What do I mean by *women* here? I am referring to all those who travel under the sign *women*. No feminism worthy of its name would use the sexist idea "women born women" to create the edges of feminist community, to render trans women into "not women," or "not born women," or into men."¹⁷

Ahmed's book is a call to be awkward, willful, and disruptive. She identifies the destructiveness of hetero-normativity, as well as the instability of location in a postcolonial world that, crucially, is shaped by multiple historical trajectories. In the discourse on feminism and women (rather than the wider discussion of gender), Ahmed's argument is pivotal: "[I]n a world in which human is still defined as *man*, we have to fight for women and as women."¹⁸ This extends to design and design history, and while noting the plethora of works in gender studies, a focus on women is a tactical priority right now. Indeed, one might argue that by approaching design through the prism of women, design is better illuminated. Revisiting feminism as advocated by Ahmed can provide some useful tools to expose design's ideological priorities and embedded value systems.

Re-Visioning Design Through a Feminist Lens

In thinking about things and their design, the "made" things around us are the theoretical focus of this paper. These things include *Design*, or "things with attitude," as described by Judy Attfield, but mainly those "wild things" that constitute the bulk of material things—design in the lower case.¹⁹ More elusive and less easy to categorize, these "wild things" escape the boundaries of privileged *Design*. They defy categorization as a "special type

15 Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 5.

16 Ibid., 10.

17 Ibid., 14.

18 Ibid., 15.

19 Judy Attfield, *Wild Things: The Material Culture of Everyday Life* (Oxford: Berg, 2000).

of artifact”; instead, they are “just one type of ‘thing’ among other ‘things’ that make up the summation of the material world.”²⁰ If *Design* is “things with attitude,” then Attfield insists on “wild things” as the site of the sociality of design that “dislocate[s] it from the habitual aesthetic frame... to present it as just one of the many aspects of the material culture of the everyday.”²¹

In *Fashion and Everyday Life*, Hazel Clark and I considered how fashion (in the lower case) was part of everyday lives.²² Keen to move beyond the analysis of fashion as intrinsic to modernity, indicative of change and innovation, we insisted on fashion as an ongoing element of people’s lives. We argued that although the extraordinariness of “high fashion” has been clearly visible, “ordinary” fashion has been resolutely invisible. However, visual sources depicting everyday lives show how fashion’s cycles have been “worked with” and adopted even if they do not always reveal the latest style or articulate a coherent “look.” Such fashion is heterogeneous and represents a bringing together of familiar garments accumulated in closets and wardrobes over time. To these garments might be added something modern: a new coat or the latest hat; but most often, they would be ensembles of clothes acquired over years.²³ Here, we point to the ongoing participation by various people in the making, producing, assembling, or (might we even say) designing, often routinely, of clothes or things? Part of our argument is that the spaces and places in which these processes of making and assembly occur are vital to how these “fashions” are perceived. By looking beyond fashion’s familiar terrain—the catwalk, the boutique, department store, the designer—a complementary trajectory can be traced. Indeed, fashion was embedded in and contingent on the practices of people’s everyday lives, and it was located in some familiar spaces—on the street, although not only the major thoroughfares, but also in its margins and back streets. It also took shape in some intimate places—the wardrobe or the sewing box—and in rituals and commonplace social interactions: going shopping, to work, out for dinner, or to collect the kids. Our argument is that the structures of power that designate meaning and, crucially, status are to be found in the places and spaces where “things” are made/produced/assembled—“designed.”

From this observation, we can re-read Susan Stewart, noting that the grand and the gigantic speak to the values of the exterior life of the city (or nature), whereas the small or miniature expresses interiority, the domestic, and the social formation of the interior subject. The implications for design of this juxtaposition as it moves between the two are clear: between the world of the city and the large scale, and the intimate and the particular.

One of Attfield’s tactics was to challenge the idea that design is the domain of the professional designer, residing only in formal design structures, design schools, and professional bodies. Instead,

20 Ibid., 11.

21 Ibid., 14.

22 Buckley and Clark, *Fashion and Everyday Life*.

23 Ibid., 7.

she reminds us that design is also an active verb that involves making/producing something—designing things: “The experience of designing is not confined to professional designers, nor [to] amateur do-it-yourself activities, such as home decorating; it is something that most people do everyday when they put together a combination of clothes to wear or plan a meal.”²⁴ This position resonated with our thinking in *Fashion and Everyday Life*, allowing us to pursue the idea that fashion design is not only the province of the designer. Indeed, this position offered us the scope to question who the designer is; it provided an opportunity to challenge the privileging of certain types of design practice; and it enabled reconsideration of aspects of design that have slipped to the sidelines, or to the margins: the practices and making of stuff for everyday lives.

Home crafts, do-it-yourself (DIY) making and crafting, home dressmaking, sewing, knitting, the domestic making and assembling of things—shelves, tables, sheds, beds—as well as everyday ordering, arranging, and planning. This making—in the sense of constructing—can involve adaptation, reuse, and recycling, as well as the production of everyday devices in the home, garage, garden, workshop, and workplace. Reflecting on this, it is useful to return to this notion of the “making” or “producing” of things. Latterly design historians have steered away from this as they explored the meaning of things: their use, exchange, circulation, and reuse. But perhaps to come to different understandings of women’s relationship to design today means making a case for thinking more deeply about those who produce, make, and assemble things?

Striking here is the status and meaning of a design activity such as service design. What types of services do we mean? Primarily, we have meant exterior meta-structures: transport systems, the processes of government, the organization of social services, the planning of public housing. However, we might, in addition, think of the mundane practices involved in the design or production of services in everyday lives—services that are undertaken on a routine and daily basis by, for example, parents raising children, adult children supporting their elderly parents or relatives, or individuals running a home while working full time and parenting. Indeed, individual acts of producing and assembling services are replicated in different ways across the globe. Crucially, these services are highly political but are a low priority for politicians today.

Re-Visiting Women and Design History

The final section of this article reflects on the power and influence of historians as they have tried to make sense of design’s past through the prism of women and gender. Looking back at design history literature written predominantly in the United Kingdom, we see that some of the foundational texts of feminist design

24 Attfield, *Wild Things*, 17.

- 25 Jonathan Harris, *The New Art History: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2001).
- 26 Philippa Goodall, "Design and Gender," *BLOCK* 9 (1983): 50–61. See, e.g., Jon Bird, Barry Curtis, Melinda Mash, Tim Putnam, George Robertson, Sally Stafford, and Lisa Tickner, eds., *The BLOCK Reader in Visual Culture* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 1996). See also <http://adri.mdx.ac.uk/block> (accessed January 10, 2018).
- 27 The work was a harbinger of things to come, and it also reprinted key early work. Its 15 essays drew together a range of different scholars, setting up debate between feminist historians and encapsulating the variety of ways in which feminism and Gender Studies had influenced design history to date. It included discussions on menswear and masculinity, gender, community and post-war housing, domestic consumption in post-war Britain, and the meaning of the stiletto heel. *A View from the Interior* is an excellent example of the effect that feminism and gender studies had on a subject area, and it was especially important because it brought together some of the latest scholarship in this field. Attfield and Kirkham, *A View from the Interior*, 1989.
- 28 Examples include Beatriz Colomina, ed., *Sexuality and Space* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992); Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1994); Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, Time and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies* (New York: Routledge, 1995); and Frank Mort, *Cultures of Consumption: Masculinities and Social Space in Late Twentieth-Century Britain* (London: Routledge, 1996).
- 29 Examples include Barbara Burman, *The Culture of Sewing: Gender, Consumption and Home Dressmaking* (Oxford and New York: Berg); Christopher Beward, *Fashioning London: Clothing the Modern Metropolis* (Oxford and New York, Berg, 2004); Caroline Evans, *Fashion at the Edge: Spectacle, Modernity and Deathliness* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Carol Tulloch, *Black Style* (London: V&A Publications, 2004); Alys Eve Weinbaum, et al., eds., *The Modern Girl Around the World: Consumption, Modernity and Globalization* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008).

history were published 35 years ago. These texts typically focused on the home and on craft, and they were interdisciplinary in nature. Drawing on a range of early texts, scholars working in the field of design history in Britain in the 1970s also positioned themselves as *counter* to a number of dominant and established disciplines—notably art history and architectural history. But it was also allied to these, in particular the new art history, as it was termed in Britain in the 1980s—to initiate a process of critical questioning of art historical methods—firstly around class, but then around sex and gender.²⁵ Design history also enjoyed fruitful synergies with cultural studies, responding to some of the theoretical paradigms preoccupying scholars working in that field—especially in relation to post-structuralist theories. For example, the journal *BLOCK*, in which Philippa Goodall's key essay "Design and Gender" appeared, was at the intersection of art history, cultural studies, film studies, and design history.²⁶ Retrospectively, Pat Kirkham and Judy Attfield's edited volume of essays, *A View from the Interior: Feminism, Women and Design*, published in 1989, provided a microcosm of the thinking that was taking place in the field.²⁷

Although important theoretical debates relating to broad conceptual themes (e.g., consumption, the body, space, and identity) were pivotal from the late 1980s through to the 2000s, a plethora of texts explicitly or implicitly drew on ideas that had emerged in the context of feminism and gender studies (probably more of the latter).²⁸ In this context, ignoring questions of gender and women in the writing of design history was certainly less academically acceptable. Both historical and theoretical writing about fashion and dress provided some of the most interesting scholarship in which these debates were developed. Bringing sustained critical engagement based on outstanding empirical research and theoretical reflection to design history, writers asked questions about women and fashion, dress and race, fashion and place/space, and modernity.²⁹ What we see in these works is the carrying through of earlier theoretical questioning that addressed subject identities to a range of disciplines.

Writing in *Gender and the Politics of History* in 1999, Joan Scott noted the proliferation of historical writing about women, adding up to "the new knowledge about women."³⁰ She also proposed that, "more than in many other areas of historical inquiry, women's history is characterized by extraordinary tensions: between practical politics and academic scholarship; between received disciplinary standards and interdisciplinary influences; between history's atheoretical stance and feminism's need for theory."³¹ Underpinning these tensions, she observed, was a common dimension "to make women a focus of inquiry, a subject of the story, an agent of the narrative."³² Complicating this inquiry, as in all aspects of

history, were a range of assumptions about the field under investigation—whether literature, film, art, architecture, or design.

Confronting some of these issues, historian John Brewer proposed ways of thinking about the subjects of history that are extremely useful. In “Microhistory and the Histories of Everyday Life,” published in 2010, Brewer examines the different motivations for what he sees as two fundamentally different ways of viewing the world. He describes these views as prospect and refuge history.³³ Prospect history “is written from a single, superior point of view—a bird’s-eye perspective or from a lofty peak.... Because of height, size, and distance, what is observed and recorded is general, not specific.”³⁴ This view produces narratives of history that “are univocal in their exclusion of voices that do not fit the uniform model of change, and univocal in that they do not recognize the contradictions and conflicts within the model.”³⁵ Reflecting on the field of design history, it may be that the ways in which we, as historians, have thought about design is exclusionary and univocal as we sought to prioritize (for diverse reasons, whether social, political, cultural, or economic) what we saw as the important challenges and concerns of the age: modernization, progress, consumption, urbanization.

In contrast refuge history, which Brewer investigates and advocates “is close-up and on the small scale. Its emphasis is on a singular place rather than space.... The emphasis is on forms of interdependence, on interiority and intimacy rather than surface and distance.”³⁶ He argues that a concern for the everyday and the intimate (characteristics of refuge history) is often interpreted as “part of the more general rejection and critique of grand narratives”; and although noting that this is true, he argues that it is important to understand “what is at stake here is not... the question of narration, but... the issue of scale and point of view.”³⁷ Noting that refuge history is fundamentally heterogeneous, he observes that this heterogeneity constitutes both its greatest difficulty and its greatest potential.³⁸

Brewer’s article is worthy of further consideration—particularly when he proposes “that... only by shifting the perspective, scale, and point of view of historical analysis, creating variations on small-scale history, [can] the relationship between structure and agency... be properly understood.”³⁹ I want to situate my own research on women and design upon this ground, asking that we begin to understand making/producing/assembling as part of a continuum *that is design*. This perspective can include the close-up, domestic, intimate, personal. For example, in her article, “Quiet Activism and the New Amateur,” Fiona Hackney proposes the existence of “new super-connected amateurs who, informed by the existence of on- and offline resources (citizen journalism, community broadband, online forums, and social media), as well as their

30 Joan W. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Colombia University Press, 1999), 16.

31 Ibid., 17.

32 Ibid.

33 John Brewer, “Microhistory and the Histories of Everyday Life,” *Cultural and Social History* 7, no.1 (2010), 87–109.

34 Ibid., 89.

35 Ibid., 96.

36 Ibid., 89.

37 Ibid., 92.

38 Ibid., 99.

39 Ibid., 96.

individual life experiences and expertise, are quietly active as they open up new channels of value and exchange by engaging in alternative craft economies and harnessing assets in often surprising, productive ways."⁴⁰

Reflecting on the historiography of design history, we can see that research and publishing on women's varied and complex relationships to design is uneven. For example, the discipline's primary journal, the *Journal of Design History*, has published articles that discussed the routine, the local and vernacular, the ordinary and transitory, and different geographies.⁴¹ And it has fundamentally challenged the prioritization of research into modernism and good design, however, publishing about *women* as designers/producers/makers and as users/consumers/intermediaries is remarkably scant.⁴² Although numerous articles have as their underpinning a concern with gender (probably 25%), the journal published few articles between 2009 and 2018 that directly addressed women.⁴³ As Editorial Chair of this journal between 2011 and 2016, I and the editorial board were extremely alert to questions of women and gender; but what I want to suggest is that, unlike gender, the question of women's relationship to design has slipped to the margins of scholarship and research.

Although I don't have clear answers as to why this marginalization has happened, I have written elsewhere about the consequences of the shift to gender studies away from women's studies.⁴⁴ I argued that, from the 1990s, the politics of feminism took a back seat to that of gender studies in part because of its failure to adequately respond to the complexities of global inequalities and the differential experiences of women. Perhaps another question to ask is the extent to which the uncoupling of design history from design practice has contributed to this marginalization and loss of activism? What has become apparent is that more and more frequently in the teaching of design practice at degree level in British universities, the study of design's histories has been squeezed and marginalized as pedagogic thinking has emphasized business, marketing, and promotion modules rather than historical, theoretical, and critical ones.

From the outset in the 1970s, design history in Britain had a close relationship to design practice, taught in the new Polytechnic sector in which the Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) art and design degree programs predominated. As a result, it maintained an engaged, activist element that connected practice, history, and theory. A central aim and priority was to engage designers in critical debates about their practice—in part through historical examples, but also by drawing on critical theory. As a result, for those practicing as design historians in Britain, design history was never only a sub-branch of the humanities; rather, it was intimately linked to practice with a concern for critical and theoretical discourses, as well as

40 Fiona Hackney, "Quiet Activism and the New Amateur," *Design and Culture* 5, no. 2 (2013): 171.

41 See, e.g., Jesse Adams Stein, "Making 'Foreign Orders': Australian Print-Workers and Clandestine Creative Production in the 1980s," *Journal of Design History* 28, 3 (2015): 275–92; Stephanie Bunn, "Who Designs Scottish Vernacular Baskets?," *Journal of Design History* 29, 1 (2016): 24–42; Patricia Zakreski, "The Victorian Christmas Card as Aesthetic Object: 'Very Interesting Ephemerae of a Very Interesting Period in English Art-Production,'" *Journal of Design History* 29, 2 (2016): 120–36; and Deirdre Pretorius, "Graphic Design in South Africa: A Post-Colonial Perspective," *Journal of Design History* 28, 3 (2015): 293–315.

42 This informal survey involved looking at the articles, images, keywords, and footnotes from the past ten years of the *Journal of Design History*, from volume 22 (2009) to volume 31 (2018), to identify the ones that addressed questions of women's relationships with design.

43 At the time of writing this paper, 38 issues were examined, and each issue typically had at least four articles, thus there were c.150 articles in total published in these ten volumes (2009–2018). Of these, nine articles *significantly* addressed women's relationships with design.

44 Cheryl Buckley, "Made in Patriarchy: Theories of Women and Design—A Reworking," in Joan Rothschild, ed., *Design and Feminism: Re-Visioning Spaces, Places and Everyday Things* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 109–18.

historical ones. Although design history emerged differently in the United States, an engagement with the history of design was increasingly articulated around the emerging field of design studies, which again addressed practice and theory, as well as history.⁴⁵ The consensus was that, to understand contemporary practice, one needed to understand its past; as Victor Margolin put it, “the challenge for those of us who study design at the end of the twentieth century is to establish a central place for it in contemporary life.”⁴⁶

Indeed, we might now contend that design has secured a place at the center of contemporary life, but is it a univocal and totalizing notion of design that has little space for routine, mundane, everyday practices? Further, as Brewer has pointed out, the fundamental difficulty of refuge history is dealing with its heterogeneity; but he also saw this heterogeneity as its greatest potential. Arguably as design historians, our responsibility is to recognize complexities and complications, to look for the awkward and disruptive; and not to settle for easy and comfortable narratives.

Looking back and forward, “Made in Patriarchy” in 1986 was didactic and provocative—the product of a particular point in an academic and intellectual life. Feminist theory and history provided essential critical tools that helped to challenge some of the embedded assumptions about design and the designer. Today’s reinvigorated feminism can do this again. The title of my original article was “Made” in patriarchy, not “Designed” in patriarchy because then, as now, design was an ideologically loaded term that I wanted to question. With Ahmed’s contention as the starting point—that “in a world in which human is still defined as *man*, we have to fight for women and as women”—we might return to the question of women’s relationship to design, helping to prize open understandings and to change perceptions of what design means and who does it, so as to illuminate the possibilities of design as a vital component of everyday lives.⁴⁷

45 See, e.g., this journal’s special issue on design history and design studies, *Design Issues* 11, 1 (1995).

46 Victor Margolin, “Design History or Design Studies: Subject Matter and Methods,” *Design Issues* 11, 1 (1995): 15.

47 Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*, 15.