

Gender and discipline: design publication practices

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Abstract

Design writing began to appear in scholarly journals over thirty years ago, coinciding in Australia with the transition of design into universities. Concurrently, a significant increase of women in the field actuated feminist-informed 'women and design' writing, raising important questions about gendered practices. Yet these ideas are not taken up in broader literatures, while publication and citation rates demonstrate the dominance of men in discipline-building 'practices' (Green 2009). This paper argues that the problematically gendered interactions between women, design and scholarly writing are reproduced through the operation of certain scholarly practices. The argument is supported through an empirical audit and analysis of the publication histories of two key journals, conducted in conjunction with a feminist reading of the Australian ERA Indicator Descriptors (ARC, 2008) of research output. I suggest this reading has the potential to productively disrupt and reconceptualise the gendered relations between women, men and design scholarship.

Keywords

women, design, scholarship, publication, practice, discipline, gender

Introduction

In this paper, I argue that disciplinary-formation and field-building practices in design are gendered, and gendered in a multiplicity in ways. While this position is not new or even surprising, my intention is to map the gendered distribution of publication in two scholarly journals, to analyse and tease apart the multiple layers of how such journals come to be gendered spaces and to reflect on how the field is being constituted and

how women and men are being constituted in the field. The aim is to demonstrate a need for further study to make sense of why women and men, but most particularly women, are positioning themselves, and how this positioning is being practiced in relation to decision-making about publication and career-building.

To support my argument, I first outline the theoretical framings; second, explicate the contemporary conditions under which research in universities is measured, funded and published; third, analyse the results of an empirical audit of two scholarly journals; and finally, reflect on the implications for women, men and design scholarship. I suggest that rather than an 'ain't it awful' diatribe, what might be produced is a reconsideration of gendered practices and, following Threadgold, "an ethical rewriting which defines a distance between what is and what ought to be" (1997, p. 29). Next, I outline Green's (2009) theorisations of 'practice' and Threadgold's (1997) interpretation of Foucauldian 'commentary' as conceptual framings for the analysis later in the paper.

On 'practice' and 'commentary'

I wish to trouble the concept of 'practice' as commonly understood in professional practices such as design, whereby attention is drawn to the noun before 'practice'. Hence in discussions about 'design practice', the focus is on the relations between design and knowledge, rather than on practice and knowledge (Green, 2009). As Green argues, what is discussed here is what is being practiced, the knowledge of how we practice, or (citing Kemmis, 2005), "how we think in the course of doing a practice" (p. 40). Yet the relations between practice and knowledge remain under-theorised. Green proposes a concept of the world as practice, whereby the professional world is theorised as a form of practicing the social. In this paper, attention is directed to design scholarship as practice, and as *professional practice*.

Professional practices, according to Green, consist of *speech and bodies* in orchestrated interactions, co-producing the social world. Here, the world is inherently dialogical; practice is "always-already social"; and professional practice is complex, characteristically fuzzy, indeterminate, dynamic, and a form of invention as well as routinized behaviours (p. 43). Individuals are "carriers of practice" and agency is located in the practice (as a nexus of doings and sayings), rather than in the individual (p. 47). This means that what people say and do is constituted in and by practice, and thus subjectivities, or the 'speaking positions' available to individuals, are also constituted in and by practice. Green argues that practices

happen “in excess of” and prior to the subject, subjectivity and agency (p. 48), which means that design scholarship (as practice) exists before people can ‘be’ (positioned as) design scholars.

Practice comprises action and activity, as a “temporally unfolding and spatially dispersed nexus of doings and sayings” (citing Schatzki, 1996, p. 47), and, practice is “polythetic”, meaning that it is capable of managing complexity, and a multiplicity of confusions and contradictions (citing Robbins, 1991, p. 46). In describing the world as practice, a consideration of the relations between practice and representation is required. Green asks, “in what sense might we speak of *knowing practice*—of the knowingness in practice, as well as the activity of knowing itself, regarding practice?” (p. 49). What characterises it? How can it best be described and understood, and what does it *look* like? (p. 49).

In this inquiry into and representation of the nexus of sayings and doings comprising design scholarship, I explore the ‘speaking positions’ available to women and men, while capturing, rather than seeking to resolve, the complexity and contradiction in these practices. The analysis in this paper is structured by Green’s features of practice, as: occurring in space and time; guided by tacit understanding; and purposeful and strategic (p. 46). To underpin the analysis, I draw on Threadgold’s (1997) theoretical framing of Foucauldian ‘commentary’.

For Threadgold, Foucault proposes a change in the order of discourse and ways of seeing, from a Marxist hierarchical order in which individuals are constrained from above and below, to a spatial organisation of various forms of cellular grids (nodal networks). Here, space is transformed into a technology (practice) of discipline controlled by a political technology (practice) of the body. Discourses and bodies “circulate” in space, and regulated by discipline, which is an apparatus for the control of populations (p. 26).

From this viewpoint, scholarly journals become bounded spaces of power and knowledge, constituted and organised by practices that produce speaking subjects, and also the field. In such spaces the “microphysics of power” function by “naming and classifying, distributing and positioning, belong[ing] to no individual but locat[ing] everyone” (p. 27). Bodies and speech become disciplined by practice, controlled by “the structured regularities of discourse [that] are related to the subject through desire...in the form of the power of knowing, and the will to know” (p. 24).

As bounded spaces of power and knowledge, journals are regulated by certain embedded textual practices, Foucault’s ‘commentary’. Threadgold interprets ‘commentary’ as the “ceaseless recitation of the same...which performs the relationship between primary and secondary texts (including the relationship between ‘data’ and ‘theory’ or ‘observation/interpretation’)” (1997, p. 23). The practices of positioning oneself within one of these journals produces the self, and also the field within a particular kind of space. In these journals, and particularly those that are highly ranked, positioning occurs through the activities of authoring and authentication. This involves ‘commentary’ and peer-review, in which “ceaseless recitation of the same” is played out, regulating and managing the bounded spaces of scholarly journals in ways that make it possible and also desirable to enter. Threadgold explains:

Authorship and its various historical and authenticating forms also works to control chance, as do the disciplines themselves, despite the fact that Foucault argues that disciplines are set up in opposition to the principles of commentary and authorship. Discipline is unauthored, anonymous. It is not owned by those it disciplines, and it remains a discipline only as long as it can continue to produce – ‘ad infinitum – fresh propositions’ (Foucault 1970/1971: 223) (Threadgold, 1997, p. 23).

It is precisely how these practices operate to control chance, and to discipline bodies and discipline speech, on which I focus in my analysis. I do not claim that women are consciously excluded from disciplinary spaces, but instead that this might occur unconsciously, and as gender is a pre-conscious space (the default order is normatively masculine), it is often not visible. With the aim of making gender visible in the bounded space of two scholarly design journals, the question is, how do these regulatory practices constitute subjectivities, and also constitute the field? As background to this exploration, I explicate the contemporary ‘space’ of research funding and publication in universities.

On publication: peer review and citation practices

Writing about design began to appear internationally in scholarly art and architecture journals more than three decades ago, coinciding with a significant increase of women in design practice and education (McQuiston, 1988). As founding publications for an emergent professional practice discipline, these early articles are notable for

the absence of women authors, and the paucity of issues relevant to women. Here, I do not discount the "women and design" (Attfield, 2003, p. 77) literatures that problematise the relations between design and women, however, beyond the small network of feminist design writers, this work is not generally cited in broader design literatures. Since then, design writing has proliferated, as have scholarly design journals, yet women's representation in these journals and subsequent citation networks remains problematically disproportional to their representation in practice and in academic positions in universities.

In the current audit climate in universities of 'publish or perish', government funding for research is determined by research output. In Australia, as is the case internationally, output is measured through a state-regulated citation analysis system that maps and calculates the distribution, quality and impact of a range of publication categories and competitive research grants. While books and book chapters are ranked highest in these systems, peer-reviewed articles for scholarly journals and papers published in refereed conference proceedings are currently rated at the same level, although in Australia this is expected to change (ARC, 2008, p. 5). In a value-for-effort ratio, this makes writing for journals attractive to scholars concerned with profile-building.

Journals are also competitively ranked according to 'authoritative status', the highest level being A*, described as "one of the best sources of references in the field or subfield" (p. 14), in which "most of the work is important...and where researchers boast about getting accepted" (p. 21). Until recently in Australia, journals representing newer fields of scholarship such as design attracted a lower ranking than the more established disciplines of art and architecture (Friedman, Barron, Ferlazzo, Ivanka, Melles, & Yuille, 2008). This doubly disadvantages design scholars by having to submit work to non-design journals, and with referees positioned in disciplines with historically difficult relations with design.

At the institutional level, academic levels and 'esteem' in universities are quantified, indicators of which include "editorial roles at A* and A ranked journals, contribution to a prestigious work of reference" (p. 3). Interestingly, "editorial role includes the roles of editor, associate editor, and/or member of an editorial board" (p. 13), while a prestigious work of reference "is one of the best in its field or subfield [which] would be characterised by a refereeing process and high scholarly standards, equivalent to an A*/A ranked journal" (p. 14). Such indicators constitute an obvious gender bias as

men hold the majority of senior academic positions in universities (Tessens, 2008) and editorial positions in A* journals, as my audit will attest.

In audit systems such as these, new writers, and writers in new professional practice disciplines such as graphic design, compete for space in scholarly journals in more established disciplines that privilege traditional (non-design and masculine) knowledges. These practices function as barriers to the dissemination of newer knowledges and marginalised voices, such as those of women. A feminist reading of these processes of discipline-formation suggests that women are doubly disadvantaged, first by their omission from the makings and concerns of the field as represented in literatures and second, by the relational networks of power that operate in peer-review and citation practices. These practices re-produce the gendered conditions under which design is written.

While journalistic writing is important to new disciplines, in this paper I focus on scholarly writing, and while books attract the highest research output ranking, I focus on peer-review and citation practices of scholarly journals as this most productively highlights the gendered social organisation of power and knowledge. Similarly, while I identify as a graphic designer, the discussion is relevant to other design fields.

To reiterate, my central argument is that the interaction between women and scholarly design writing as practice remains problematically gendered. Further, I argue that an exploration of the embedded technologies that operate in design scholarship as practice, has the potential to productively disrupt and reconstitute the gendered relations of power between women, men, writing and design scholarship. Next, I map and analyse the gendered distribution of publication in two journals, in conjunction with a feminist reading of the ERA Indicator Descriptors (ARC, 2008). By feminist reading, I mean to make visible (in order to disrupt) design scholarship as gendered practice.

On gender distribution in publication: an audit

I have argued that the disciplinary knowledge and theory-making processes of the scholarly journal genre are problematically gendered. In other words, I argue that the conditions under which women write are different to those of men in a multiplicity of ways. To support this argument, there is a need to take account of and make explicit what is written and published, where it is published and by whom, and more importantly, who and what is missing from this account.

To establish an empirical basis for the argument and building on a map of the

gendered distribution of power and prestige in design published elsewhere (Bower, Clerke, & Lee, 2009), I conducted a survey of two scholarly design journals, *Design Studies* and *Design Issues*. These journals were selected because of their rating as A* journals, and ranking at first and second positions in an international survey (Friedman et al., 2008) conducted to inform the Australian Government's *Excellence in Research for Australia* (ERA) trial. Here, I acknowledge, but do not engage in, the body of work in biometrics and citation analysis, such as Tight's (2008) map of the citation practices and development of "tribes" in adult education.

The audit of the publication histories of these two journals was conducted by counting editorials and articles comprising more than three pages, and organising them by gender into categories of single and joint author. Where I could not identify gender, I omitted those articles and authors (11% of articles, 14% of authors), and where authors wrote more than one article in the same issue, they were counted as separate authors.

Design Studies is published in the United Kingdom (1979–2009), *Design Issues* is published in the United States (1984–2009), and both are available online. The audit accounted for 1,796 authors and 1,315 articles, of which 793 articles were written by single authors and 522 articles were written collaboratively in groups of two or more (1,003 authors).

The results were strikingly similar for each journal (see Table 1). While this snapshot of gender distribution in publication supports my argument, the following analysis explores the complexity and contradictions that these statistics elide. Specifically, I discuss the implications for women and for design scholarship through the framework of Foucault's "microphysics of power" (cited in Threadgold, 1997, p. 27) that operates within scholarly publication technologies (practices) to *discipline* bodies and speech. In scholarly journals, discipline is maintained in practice by subjecting individuals to, and directing them in, 'commentary', and in turn, these individuals act as "carriers of practice" (Green 2009, p. 47), maintaining discipline through peer-review and citation.

	Design Studies	M	F	Design Issues	M	F
Publication history	Single author	84%	16%	Single author	77%	23%
	Joint author	81%	19%	Joint author	68%	32%
1979–1989	Single author	89%	11%			
	Joint author	90%	10%			
1984–1994	Single author	85%	15%	Single author	85%	15%
	Joint author	88%	12%	Joint author	75%	25%
1999–2009	Single author	74%	26%	Single author	74%	26%
	Joint author	77%	23%	Joint author	61%	39%

Table 1: Audit of gender distribution in publication, 'M' = men, 'F' = women.

Next, I tease apart the complexity of these journals as gendered spaces. Structured by Green's features of practice, first, I examine the gender distribution of publications in each journal at different historical periods [time and space]; second, the gender distribution of authorship and editorship [tacit understanding (of how practice works)]; and thirdly, explore the implications of Foucault's 'commentary' around citation and 'esteem' as defined in the ERA Indicator Descriptors (ARC, 2008) [purposeful and strategic].

Time and space.

The table presents an empirical account of the gender distribution of publication in the two journals. As expected, distribution is overwhelmingly and consistently gendered in both journals, in the first ten years of publication for each journal, in the last ten years, and across the publication histories of both journals. While this inequity supports my argument, the broader implications will become evident in the following discussion.

In terms of authorship, statistically, men are far more likely than women to be published in these journals (82% in *Design Studies* and 75% in *Design Issues*). Men are also much more likely to be published as single authors than women (84% in *Design Studies* and 77% in *Design Issues*). Papers co-authored by men are published more often than those of women (81% in *Design Studies* and 68% in *Design Issues*), and generally involve more authors per paper than those co-authored by women. The implications at the institutional level are that in a joint author publication, for each author located in a different university, each university is awarded the same credit, equal in value to a single author paper. This means that statistically, co-authored papers written by individuals located in different universities attract higher status and

more research funding for each institution, while increasing the measurable research output, profile and esteem of each academic. In turn, this favourably positions them for promotion to higher academic positions, potential appointment to editorial positions, increased esteem, and so on.

Interestingly, the ratio of single author to joint author publication in *Design Issues* is 70:30, while it is the inverse for *Design Studies*, at 68:32. This suggests that co-authored papers are more likely to be published in *Design Studies*, while single-authored papers are more likely to be published in *Design Issues*.

Publication by women authors has increased overall from 10% in *Design Studies*' first ten years (1979–1989), to around 30% in each journal in the last ten years (1999–2009). This suggests that women are now more likely to be published in these journals than previously, yet the level of representation does not reflect the increasing proportion of women in academic positions in design. As academic level is an indicator of 'authoritative status' in citation analysis systems such as the ERA, these statistics highlight an inherent gender bias as women remain under-represented at senior academic levels in design, as in universities more generally (Tessens, 2008).

In terms of editorials, *Design Studies* has published 58 editorials in 143 issues, of which 53 were authored by men, and five by women (1993, 2006, twice in 2008, 2009). In 2008, and for the first time, two editorials were published in one issue, authored by a man and a woman. This appears to represent a seismic change in the gendered editorial practices of this journal, although a look at current editorial positions suggests otherwise. *Design Issues* has published 64 editorials in 73 issues, most of which were jointly authored by four or five of its male editors. Across its publication history, only three guest editors are women (2003, 2005).

Tacit understanding (of how practice works).

A scan of the editorial boards and committees of each journal tells an interesting story about the conditions under which design is written. Across both journals, women's representation on editorial boards, editorial committees and advisory committees totals only nine of 61 positions (13%). *Design Studies* has one male Editor-in-chief, two male and one woman Associate Editors, and of the 26 members of the International Editorial Board, only five are women. *Design Issues* has a four member, all male editorial panel, and of its current Editorial Board and Advisory Board membership, only four of the 34 members are women.

These figures suggest that highly regarded, influential (most often cited) men occupy editorial positions, and thus influence the focus, content and authorship of every issue of these highly ranked journals. Further, editorial positions on A* and A ranked journals attract higher ratings in the ERA, which increases esteem, influence, citation, and so on.

Participation in bounded, gendered journal spaces requires tacit understanding of how practice works through complex rule-governed, but contradictory technologies. Submission procedures regulate authors' compliance with article format and structure, word count, referencing style and deadlines, while peer review and citation processes police and regulate entry to, and circulation through, these spaces. Yet these practices are entirely predicated on the judgment and continuing influence of highly placed individuals, most of whom are men. As speaking subjects, many of these men are also likely to have been involved in establishing the space, and continue to shape the space.

Writing authored by men consistently dominates both journals, making men's writing far more likely than women's to be cited in subsequent articles. As cited authors, men are more likely to become editors and senior academics, making them more likely to engage in peer-review and decision-making processes about who and what to publish, and where and when, but more importantly, who and what not to publish. This is how Foucault's 'commentary' operates (as practice).

Purposeful and strategic.

Research funding under the ERA is partly determined by a volume and activity analysis that measures the profile of researchers in universities by academic level and headcount. Higher levels attract more funding and esteem (and so on), and this impacts on individuals' capacities for strategic interaction in the field in multiple ways, such as choices available, decision-making, career, promotion, remuneration, capacity to attract funding, prestige, authority, invitations to editorial boards (and so on). This is how the "ceaseless recitation of the same" (Threadgold, 1997, p. 23) plays out in practice.

Conclusion: where to from here?

In this paper, I have presented two arguments. First, that design scholarship in the genre of journal writing is a gendered disciplinary practice, which I supported with

empirical evidence. Second, that certain embedded processes, such as peer-review and citation, maintain and reproduce design scholarship as gendered practice, particularly in the bounded space of scholarly journals. Next I ask, what kind of inquiry or theorisation might be required in order to proceed from here?

While I acknowledge that my analysis of the empirical audit in this paper is subject to limitations, I suggest it also opens space for further empirical research to build a more complex interpretation of the map presented in this paper. For example, my doctoral research is underway, looking at women's experiences in design scholarship to understand their histories, decision-making and the choices available to them. Although this is not the work of this paper, I hope the thesis stimulates further discussion as an ethical way forward.

Contributor Details

Teena has worked as a graphic designer since 1987, focusing on community cultural development and design for social change in the community and government sectors, and she continues to work in private design consultancy for the small business and corporate sectors. She has participated in solo and group art exhibitions since 1988, and her work is represented in Australian and international private collections. Teena has lectured in design at three Sydney metropolitan universities and continues to lecture in graphic design at the Tin Sheds at the University of Sydney. She is currently a doctoral intern at the University of Technology, Sydney, where she lectures in adult education. Teena's doctoral research investigates the experiences of women design academics, and she has published in the areas of design practice, design education, doctoral education, feminist qualitative research writing and cultural studies.

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Notes

1. Australia is currently restructuring its scholarly journal rankings policy – see Australian Research Council, 2008, *ERA Indicator Descriptors, Commonwealth of Australia* (<http://www.arc.gov.au/era/indicators.htm>)
2. For example, the Equity and Diversity Unit at UTS reported women's representation in academic positions in the Faculty of Design Architecture and Building in 2008 at around 37%, lower than the UTS average of 40%, less than the 50% government benchmark, however, women comprise 50% of academics in Visual Communication.