

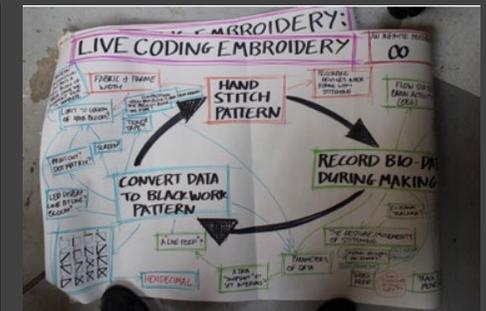
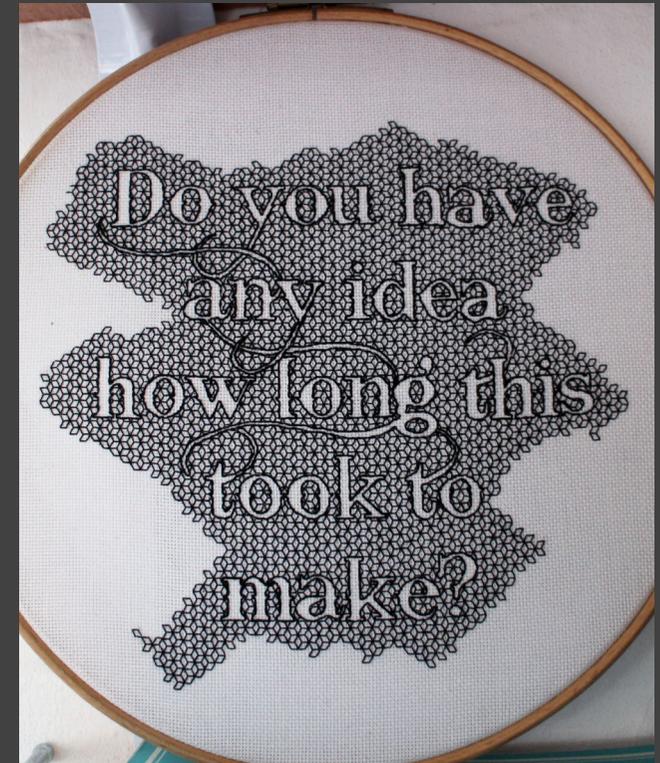
This body of work investigates how design research informed by feminist theory and philosophy can facilitate future design ontologies conceived beyond normative patriarchal and capitalist value constructs.

Gendered power relations in design determine who has agency within a professional disciplinary context and within the public realm in terms of meaning making and form giving. These outputs examine how contemporary western design ontology is constructed, why this affects conceptions of female creative practice and how this impacts women's lives. Guided by feminist theory, they discuss accounts of women's lived experience in UK design industry, and question broader issues of gender exclusion and the need to make embodied values in design visible to bring about change.

Levick-Parkin's research deployed design anthropological approaches, finding that paying close attention to women's making practices can facilitate discussions of ontology and insights within broader critical frameworks. Putting feminist philosophy and design critique into conversation, these insights conceptually model potential transformations of how both female and non-waged creative labour might be valued in future post-capitalist economic systems. Further analysis critiques how visual

and material voice in the public realm is perceived based on gender, and discusses how normative identity positions are re-worked within women's different making practices. By putting the micro of female making practice into the macro of gender politics, an analytic discourse is developed informed by ethnographic vignettes. Reflections on Cartesian thought and material feminist philosophy closely analyse how conceptions of immanence have implications for ontological concepts of agency.

Data from a speculative design project is contextualised by feminist contestations and utopianism in order to surface positionality and foundational ethics in design practice and pedagogy. Overarching themes of space, time and materiality draw design's future directed temporality into the gaze of a speculative feminist lens in order to trouble design's material, theoretical and philosophical responsibilities.



Above: Some of the images from the research that informed this body of work

Chronological List of Published Outputs

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A: 15-16 June 2017	Radical Mundanity	Conference Paper
B: 7-8 Sept 17	Agent Makers	Conference Paper
C: Oct 17	The values of being in design	Journal Article
D: DEC 18	Freedom to Make	Book Chapter
E: June 20	It tells you what it wants to be	Journal Article
F: Dec 20	Beyond Speculation	Journal Article

Note: This is a chronological list of when the outputs within the body of work were actually published and does not reflect the order in which they were submitted or when the research was done for each output, which often overlapped (see 'Methods' section). Click on each title to go to that output

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New Experimental Research in Design

Conference at the
Braunschweig
University of Art (HBK)
15 & 16 June 2017

Rael Futermann
Sajith Gopinath
Max Pietro Hoffmann
Melanie Levick-Parkin
Shintaro Miyazaki &
Susanna Hertrich
Otto Paans
Laura Popplow
Susanne Ritzmann
Sören Rosenbak
Helga Schmid
Kakee Scott
Irmi Wachendorff

NERD

Above:: NERD Conference Poster

Output A: Conference Paper. Levick-Parkin M.,
'Radical Mundanity – How Feminist Inquiry and Creative Practice can Unbind us from the Ontological Entrapment of Contemporary Design Epistemology', New Experimental Research in Design / NERD Conference at Braunschweig University of Art (HBK), Braunschweig, Germany, 15 & 16 June 2017.
<http://shura.shu.ac.uk/23400/1/Final%20-%20Freedom%20to%20Make.pdf>



Above: DHS Conference Poster

Output B: Conference Paper. Levick-Parkin, Melanie, Stirling, Eve, Hanson, Maria and Bateman, Roger (2017). *'AGENT MAKERS - The un-masking of environmental agency through design for speculative social innovation. In: Making and Unmaking the Environment'*, the DHS Annual Conference in Oslo, Norway, 7-9th September 2017.
<http://shura.shu.ac.uk/17211/1/Agent%20Makers-DHS%20Oslo%20smaller.pdf>

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Output C: Journal Article. Levick-Parkin, Melanie (2017). *'The values of being in design: Towards a feminist design ontology.'* GENDER : Zeitschrift für Geschlecht, Kultur und Gesellschaft, 9 (3), 11-25.

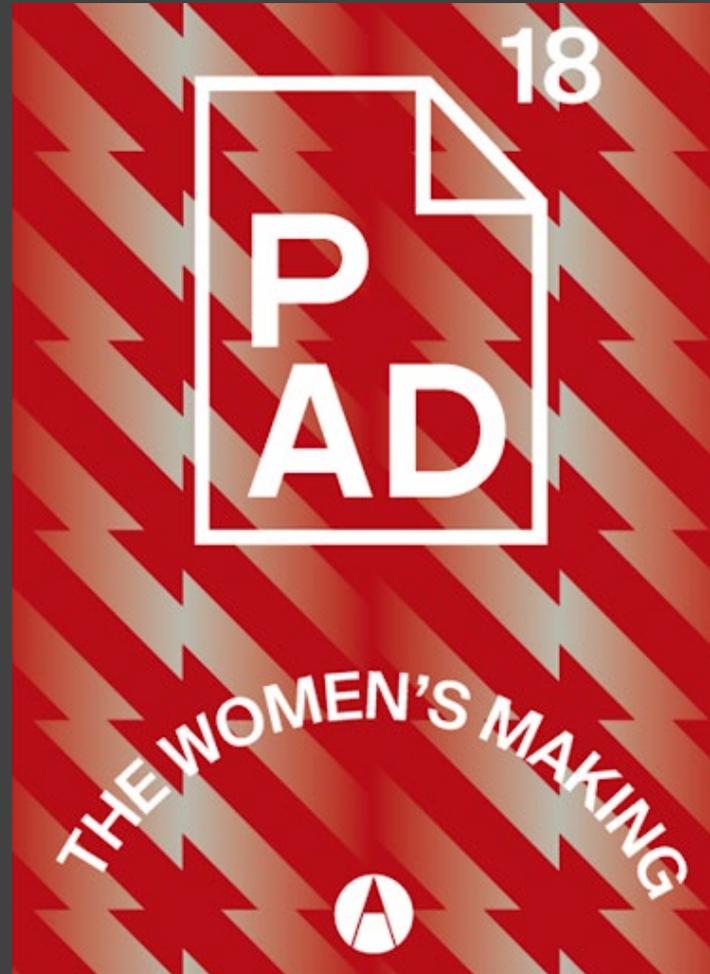
<http://shura.shu.ac.uk/17015/1/Levick-Parkin-ValuesofBeinginDesign%28AM%29.pdf>

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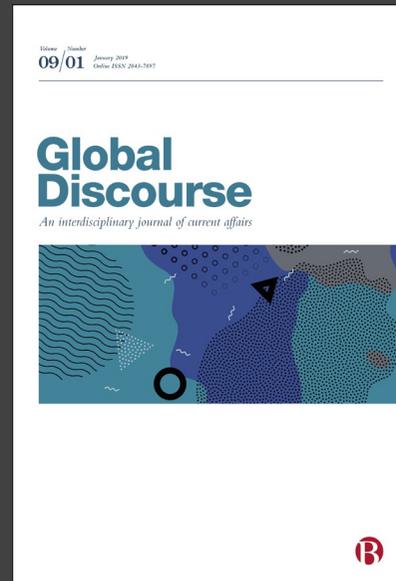
Output D: Book Chapter. Levick-Parkin, Melanie (2018). *Freedom to make: Rad-ical mundanity and its anarchic undertones in female making practice*. In: ERLHOFF, Michael and JONAS, Wolfgang, (eds.) *NERD – New experimental research in design: Positions and perspectives*. Berlin, De Gruyter, 55-81. <http://shura.shu.ac.uk/17015/1/Levick-Parkin-ValuesofBeinginDesign%28AM%29.pdf>

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Output D: Journal Article. Levick-Parkin, Melanie (2020). *"It Tells You What it Wants to Be" How Women Make, with Immanence, Love, Decay and other Trans-gressions*. PAD. Pages on Arts and Design, 18, 329-366.
http://shura.shu.ac.uk/27307/2/It%20tells%20you%20what%20it%20wants%20to%20be%20Article%20MLP_18-PAD-THE-WOMENS-MAKING.pdf

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Output D: Journal Article. Levick-Parkin, M., Stirling, E., Hanson, M., Bateman R., (2020). *BEYOND SPECULATION – Using speculative methods to surface ethics and positionality in design practice and pedagogy.* In: *From Anthropocene to Chthulucene – Staying with Speculation: Natures, Futures, Politics*, Special issue of Global Discourse Journal: An interdisciplinary journal of current affairs.

[Click here for content](#)

<https://doi.org/10.1332/204378920X16055409420649>

Above: Special Issue Blog Screen Shot

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● An overview of how this body of work was created and incrementally built, framed by Design Anthropology, using a mix of research methods including participant observation, co-making and semi-structured in-depth informal interviews, documented with ethnographic field notes, photography, film and visual analysis, supported by secondary research.

This research was originally informed by and conceived through doctoral research for a thesis entitled 'How Women Make – exploring female making practice through Design Anthropology' and research in the design studio with postgraduate design students.

The doctoral research explored the process of female making as a creative and socio-political act and how/where/why this creative labour gets 'spent', in terms of energy, outcomes and beneficiaries as well as how it might be situated in the context of contemporary Western Design ontology.

The research questions were framed within a feminist epistemological context and a feminist design anthropological approach. Design Anthropology was chosen because of its specific aim to focus on the investigation of people's ability to create, craft and re-shape materials, systems or experiences (Smith, 2015; Gunn and Donovan, 2012; Kjærsgaard and Otto, 2012), whilst feminist epistemology provided, through material feminism in particular, its specific theoretical framework for further analysis and specific critique.

The research had 12 female participants and documented, and made visible, both their making practice and things impacting upon it and how agency manifested in their practice and thinking.



Above: Image from 'How Women Make' research of woman's work on the floor of her house. She was working on the floor because the table was full of Lego and dishes and she said she had found that if she started tidying up she never got any of her creative work done.

Whilst this thesis was being written up and the research data was being analysed in early 2017, Levick-Parkin wrote a conference paper ([Output A](#)) which acted as a 'think' piece focusing on the urgent need to bring female experience of making, in and outside of the creative industry, to light. It drew on certain emerging themes, discussing secondary data which illustrated the



Above: Image from 'How Women Make' fieldwork

dichotomy between professional and amateur making practices and their tension of being situated within a still overwhelmingly patriarchal design ontology. The paper included a call to interrogate the role of art and design education in the furthering and stifling of female making practice, as well the questioning of whether female making can even be methodologically differentiated from 'other' making practices. It asked: How do we as design educators and researchers account for this and what, if anything, would we like to change? It offered some tentative proposition, that based on the emerging data that new ontological frameworks and ways of knowing might be necessary in order to move the discipline on and that feminist critique, theory and practice could

support this ontological shift.

The paper 'Radical mundanity - How feminist inquiry and creative practice can unbind us from the ontological entrapment of contemporary design epistemology' ([Output A](#)) was delivered at the New Experimental Research in Design / NERD Conference at Braunschweig University of Art (HBK) on the 15th June 2017, concluded with a fruitful 25 minute discussion with the audience.

During the conference one of the organisers, Prof. Dr. Michael Erhoff, introduced Levick-Parkin to Prof. Uta Brandes, who issued an invitation to write a journal article expanding on the conference talk for a special edition of Gender

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○ Magazine entitled 'Gender und Design' which she was co-editing.
 ○ Based on Levick-Parkin's participation in the conference Prof. Dr. Michael Erlhoff and Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Jonas offered an invitation to write a book chapter for their next publication called 'New Experimental Research in Design'. Both of these outputs will be discussed further down in order to keep the order of outputs intact.

In the meantime, during the academic year 2016/17 Levick-Parkin had been working with colleagues from the Postgraduate design team at Sheffield Hallam University on new design curriculum, which focused on speculative design methods for social innovation and design fiction. Academic interests which informed this included speculative feminism, post humanism and speculative realism. Influenced by some of work being done by Levick-Parkin as part of the research for 'How Women Make', particular questions around agency became a focus and the team called the project 'Agent Makers'. An internal teaching enhancement grant was acquired which employed students as researchers to work with the academics on the project.

An examination of students' creative work for the speculative design briefs began which looked for evidence of young designers agentic practices and whether this

could be surfaced through visual analysis of their work. The research explored whether and how speculative, future oriented design briefs could make design students aware of their agency in social and environmental contexts beyond the micro-environment of their immediate design discipline or industrial disciplinary context.

This also linked to Levick-Parkin's work by exploring if defining positionality in design could make agency visible to the makers/designers/students.

In the first year the project 'Agent Makers' examined the content of a student design exhibition, 48 project reports, 18 projects for further close reading, 16 digital questionnaire responses, 4 student interviews, through visual and contextual analysis. Levick-Parkin put forward a joint conference paper to the 2017 Design History Society call for papers titled 'Agent Makers - The un-masking of environmental agency through design for speculative social innovation'. ([Output B](#)). This got accepted and was delivered at the DHS conference in Oslo which ran from 7-9 September 2017.

During the summer term of 2017 Levick-Parkin had further expanded on the conference paper delivered at NERD ([Output A](#)) and was working on completing the article for

the Gender Magazine. The article drew on the secondary research conducted for Levick-Parkin's 'How Women Make' research, focussing on discussion points around critiques of the invisibility of female making practice and accounts of still widespread exclusion and discrimination.

The article was foregrounded with an extended positionality piece, influenced by secondary research of feminist critique and positionality. The article titled 'The values of being in design: Towards a feminist design ontology' ([Output C](#)) was published October 2017 in Gender Journal for Gender, Culture and Society, special edition 'Gender und Design', which included essays in both English and German.

Whilst completing the 'How Women Make' thesis write up in winter 2017/18, Levick-Parkin also worked on the previously mentioned chapter for the 'New Experimental Research in Design' book publication ([Output D](#)). Building on the discussions of the previous article in 'Gender' ([Output C](#)) in relation to Design's ontological entrenchment in patriarchal and capitalist value structure, it further expands on feminist theory on space, time and materialism, as well as critiques of



Above: Image from fieldwork around women's making spaces informing discussion in Output D

gendered labour. The discussion is formed around primary research from 'How Women Make' and is framed by feminist materialism and post-capitalist theory. It draws on data created through participant observation, co-making and semi-structured informal interviews, and juxtaposes it with discussions that aim to locate agency and freedom within female making practices.

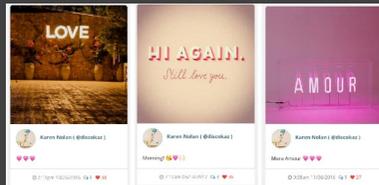
The resulting chapter 'FREEDOM TO MAKE – radical mundanity and its anarchic undertones in female making practice' ([Output D](#)) was published in December 2018 in NERD – New Experimental Research in Design, edited by Michael Erlhoff and Wolfgang Jonas, Birkhäuser, Berlin, De Gruyter, 55-81.

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Following a call for papers in Jan 2020 from PAD Journal for PAD18 titled *'The Women's Making'*, Levick-Parkin proposed an article which would further drawn on thesis research data which had not previously found space for discussion in the other publications. The proposal was accepted and the paper was written up with an emphasis on the close encounters with women's making practice informed by ethnographic and auto-ethnographic accounts.

It explored concepts of immanence, ontological concepts of agency and identity positions, based on the making practices of two of the participants in more depth. It triangulated visual analysis of



Above: Image from ethno and netnographic methods that informed Output F

the data and accounts from the semi-structured informal interviews and participant netnography with feminist theory and materialism.

It was published in June 2020 under the title 'It tells you what it wants to be' How Women Make with Immanence, Love, Decay and other Transgressions' ([Output E](#)) in PAD18 Vol 12 'The Women's Making', Editors Shujun Ban and Marinella Ferrara.

The last output in this submission ([Output F](#)), was actually supposed to be published in autumn 2019.

Levick-Parkin responded to a call for *'Staying with Speculation: Natures, Futures, Politics'* Special issue of Global Discourse Journal in July 2018, which was accepted, but the original editor left which mean there were some delays while new editors were taking over and the co-authored paper 'Beyond speculation: using speculative methods to surface ethics and positionality in design practice and pedagogy' ([Output F](#)) was not published online until December 2020 in the slightly retitled *'From Anthropocene to Chthulucene – Staying with the Speculation: Natures, Futures, Politics'*, editors Malé Lujan Escalante and Christine Mortimer, Global Discourse – An interdisciplinary journal of current



Above: Image from one the exhibitions and student's speculative design work that informed output F

affairs, Bristol University Press.

This last output ([E](#)), first-authored by Levick-Parkin, picked up and expanded on the research conducted for the Agent Maker project and [Output B](#). It brought together research findings from the second and third year of the project, which included semi-structured follow up interviews with participants at the end of their post-graduate studies on the design programme.

The interviews asked them to reflect on how the speculative design project early on in the course had impacted on their perceptions of positionality and ethics in their design work.

[Output F](#) looped back some of the theory and analysis used to the previous outputs, by building on secondary research that contextualised why feminist theory and critique, and feminist materialism had been so important to the development of the speculative curriculum.

It highlighted how feminist utopianism and materialism had influenced the projects endeavour to uncover ontological dimensions in the design curriculum and interrogated some of the issues with ethics and positionality in contemporary design discourse.

Intern Mag: The Ladder – 7th February 2019

Gender Pay Gap

"The Ladder is a new podcast from Intern. In the first episode of our two-part pilot, we seek to better understand the issue of the gender pay gap".

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PART 1 INTRO

"Wow. Are we ready to share this with you?"

It's been a long journey behind the scenes to bring our concept for a podcast to life. It's a process we started way back in mid-2017 with applications for funding to the Arts Council. As with everything we create, it was vitally important that a young, diverse team were involved in the making of it and that they were paid properly for their involvement. For whatever reason, the Arts Council turned us down repeatedly, so last year we invested in a field recording kit and started to interview people for what has become a two-part episode on one of the most glaring and common inequalities in the job market, the gender pay gap. Our investigation into the gender pay gap was sparked last year by an email from Hannah Rottger, a student of Alec's at the time. It intensified with Ruby Goss' brilliant 'Mind the Gap' piece, which went to prove that there was a lot to be done before women were likely to see genuine equality in the workplace. The intention of our move into podcasting, is to provide a space where we can dive deeper into the key issues in the world of creative work, empowering our listeners

to make informed choices about their careers. We want to do this right, so don't expect episodes consisting of single interviews, we pride ourselves on dynamic storytelling and presenting a range of perspectives. In this first episode, you'll hear from Ruby Goss, Pip Jamieson, Abraham Asefaw, Madeline Grant, Imriell Morgan, Kirstie O'Mahony, Ellen Ling and Melanie Levick-Parkin."

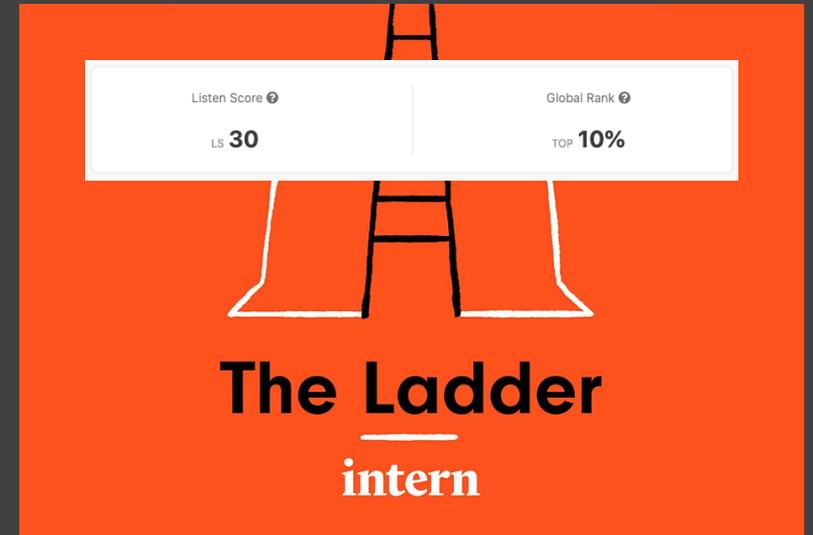
PART 2 INTRO

"Last time out in The Ladder, we started our audio investigation into the gender pay gap. We discovered how the issue is just one of the manifestations of wider inequalities that women face across a range of industries. Whether just starting out, or as the founder of a fast-growing startup, our interviewees shared a range of honest and revealing stories that showed how the deck can often be rigged against female professionals.

In this episode though, we move towards some solutions. From big businesses to agile, fast-growing companies and for individuals alike we're on a mission to uncover the ways in which the pay gap can be tackled. We speak to Melanie Levick-Parkin, Heather Melville OBE, Hailley Griffis, Malin Persson, Imriell Morgan and Till Leopold."

Interview for the Ladder/ intern Gender Pay Gap in July 2018

Levick-Parkin was contacted by the editor Alec Dudson as he had heard about her work for [Output A](#) and [C](#) from a fellow designer. Levick-Parkin was interviewed about her work in relation to the podcast subject July 18.



Above: Intern Mag - The Ladder Page Hyperlink Listen Score



Above: Ladder Hyperlink Podcast Contribution 24:50 - 31:03



Above: Ladder Hyperlink Podcast Contribution 02:21 - 04:37

Occupy Project # 1 New York
 Sponsored by the French Embassy
 February 13th - May 13th 2020
 Greek Consulate

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○ 'Thinking of Penelope'
 ○ Incomplete triptych
 ○ Melanie Levick-Parkin 2020

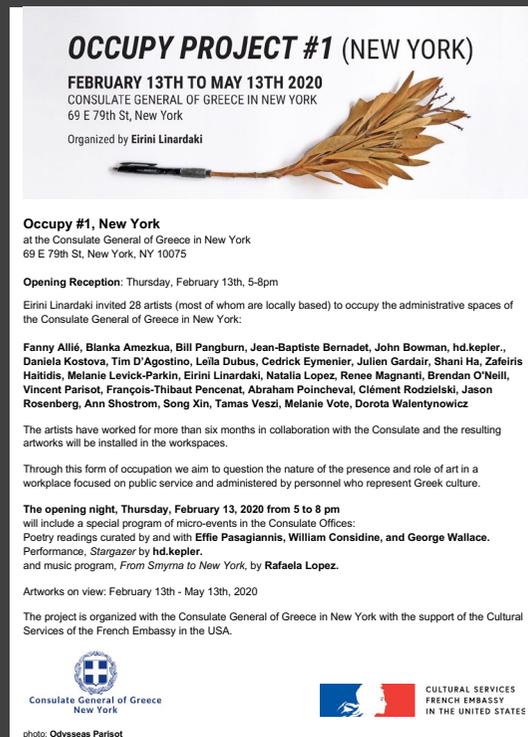
Folded A0 Wall Hangings: Digital collages - vintage Mediterranean nautical charts, architectural floorplans & found imagery.
 Incomplete triptych
 Part 1: Penelope's Kitchen, Part 2: The Weaving Room and the suitor's balcony,
 Part 3: Odysseus' Bedroom (Incomplete)

EXHIBITION TEXT

In western thought and tradition, the virtue of Penelope is held in high regard. The myth of her dedication to her husband throughout his 10 years of wandering the Mediterranean has strongly influenced patriarchal ideals of desirable female behaviour and values for millennia. I have always found this deeply disturbing. This is a woman who had to unmake the fruits her exquisite labour each night for ten years, whilst being a virtual prisoner in a house which was not her own.

Re-reading the Odyssey, this time by Emily Wilson, for the first time translated by a woman, - a hailed translation. I am looking for Penelope, - I am feeling for her, - I am thinking of her. *Cont.*

Exhibition of visual work supported by text, which visualised aspects of the theoretical framing in [Output C](#) in relation to historical narratives of women's place in society and the valuing of their (creative) labour and agency. The co-curator of the show Eirini Linardaki was aware of this work and how it linked to Western Classical Greek heritage and invited Levick-Parkin to put forward a contribution to the panel in July 2019. The audience was people working in and visiting the consulate, though Covid 19 limited footfall after March 2020.



Above: Event Announcement with Hyperlink



Above: 'Penelope's Kitchen'



'Whereas Odysseus has many choices, many identities, many places to go and people to be and to see, Penelope has only one choice, and it is defined exclusively by her marital status: she can wait for Odysseus, or marry someone else—and even this very limited choice is not open forever, since the abusive suitors can eventually force her hand.' Wilson 2017

Even as Wilson (2017) explains that 'the silencing of female voices, and the dangers of female agency, are central problems in the poem', - beyond the rational intellect it is hard not feel a kind of visceral sense of horror and panic at the idea of being as trapped as Penelope. As trapped as all of the Penelope's, through all of the ages, - and the visceral sense that even as we stand here now, with some of our privileges seemingly secured, powerful forces are at work, to curtail female freedom once again and forever more.

The domestic space can be our refuge but also our prison. The private sphere has for centuries been signposted as the female domain and is the place where we were supposedly kept safe from the outside world for our own benefit continues to be a place of myth. During Covid19, domestic violence incidences increased manifold – the vast majority directed at women. Reports also tell us that for those women lucky enough to be able to isolate in a safe home, - domestic labour, child care and home schooling has fallen disproportionately on their

shoulders. Much has changed and nothing has changed.

We need new maps, to plot our escapes to different futures.



Above: Detail from 'Penelope's Kitchen'



Above: In Situ at the Greek Consulate, NY



Above: Penelope's Weaving Room and the Suitors' Balcony

Based on previous collaboration Levick-Parkin was invited to participate in the Group Exhibition *'The island K and the theory of the South'* An artistic fiction 1-30th August 2020 at Viannos Gallery, Crete, Greece.

Levick-Parkin's contribution was a mural painting and participation in the panel discussion about the overarching theme of the exhibition.

Links between the exhibition theme and Levick-Parkin's work were discussed in relation to aspects of Outputs A C D E F, through sharing research findings and talking about insights gained of female creative labour and the impact of feminist utopianism on her design practice. The mural work also picked up on previous themes from classical Greek literature and myth and to Archaeological heritage specific to the island of Crete.

EXHIBITION TEXT FOR PANEL DISCUSSION

The piece is called *'I was born a Naiad on the 8th floor of a high rise'*

- it builds on some of my previous work about female histories and public visibility and voice.

It was specifically created for 'The island K and the theory of the South' project, the work placing itself in an imagined utopianism that speaks of hope for creative futures and connection with others, whilst acknowledging that collective action is necessary to re-make the world better and anew as part of our everyday practice.

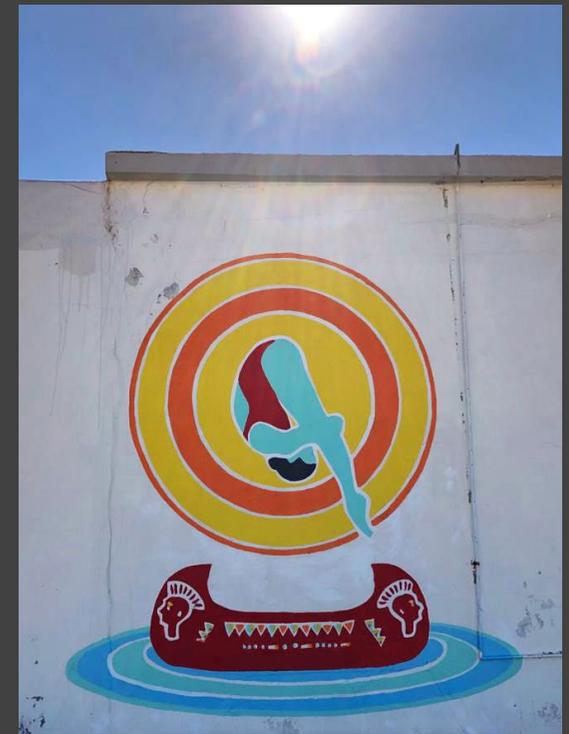
It links to my reading of the 'Penelopiad' by Margaret Atwood and the first female translation of 'the Odyssey' by Emily Wilson and Mary Beard's 'Women and Power'. The canoe in the image is based on an inflatable boat I used to play

with in my bedroom when I was 4, imagining being able to travel the seas freely. The shape of the boat in the image consciously hints at the Minoan horns of the sacred bull and the Labrys double-bitted axes. Both this and the use of the head symbol from the Phaestos Disc on the hull, place the work directly into the visual heritage of Crete and the south coast in particular, as well as linking it to previous projects working with Cretan script.

The female figure represents a 'Naiad', a greek water nymph - representing both mental and physical agility, freedom and power as well as a self-containment from which other things can be nurtured.



Above: Exhibition announcement with Hyperlink to blog post.



Above: Mural design applied to the wall of a local house with the kind permission of and support from the owners.

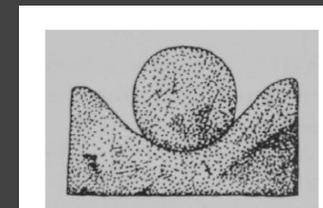


Fig. 2. The Egyptian symbol of the 'horizon' (Wilkinson 1992, 134, fig. 1)



Fig. 3. The clay model of 'horns of consecration' from Petsophas (Davaras 2003, 58, fig. 25c)

Above: Archaeological images used to explain the link of the mural design to the visual heritage of Crete

A culmination of all the previous activities and Outcomes A - F, **Levick-Parkin and Eirini Linardaki** convened a Roundtable discussion centering on female making practice and its agency in the public sphere.

It brought together a broad range of panellists from art and design. Guests included Prof. Uta Brandes who had supported [Output C](#) and Prof. Elizabeth Reznick whose work had been influential on aspects of the design curriculum discussed in [Output B and F](#).

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- TALK#5 15th Dec 2020
- **Women’s visual and material voice making in the public sphere**
- moderated by : Dr. Melanie Levick-Parkin & Eirini Linardaki

with: Prof. Dr. Em. Uta Brandes, Co-founder of the international Gender Design Network/iGDN, Elizabeth Reznick, Professor Emerita MASSART, Eleni Riga, Curator, Stefania Strouza, Visual Artist, Stella Malliaraki, Museum Educator, Dorota Walentynowicz, Visual Artist & the team of Occupy #2

With the support of Institut Français de Grèce.



Above: Announcement page of Talk #5 with Hyperlink to recording

DISCUSSION OUTLINE

For women to speak in public has always been a difficult undertaking. To be actually heard is in so many instances still beyond our reach even as we stand at the cusp of the year 2021. In her ‘Women & Power’ manifesto, the Cambridge Classics Scholar Mary Beard (2017) highlights that for the past 3000 years attempts of women to have a voice in public has often been violently opposed and that the Classics are littered with moral examples of how women who dared to speak in public have been brought to heel. These are the very foundations of western culture

and philosophy and Beard points out that those foundational values that are still act upon us, - often unconsciously, hidden and opaque, but also often, loud, clear and violent. ‘Up until now the form-giving subject has always been male. And this structure has, unbeknownst to itself, clearly given form to culture, and to the history of ideas. They are not neuter’. (Luce Irigaray 2002, p.3)

Agency and voice are not just what is spoken or printed, - it is power materialised in the physical fabric of the cities and environments in which we live as well as through

the systems that govern us and our production. It is material and it is visual and it has physical consequence. How much agency do we as women have, here and now, when it comes to form giving and meaning making activities in the public realm? Some things have improved for some, some things have never changed for many, and some things have been actively getting worse again in recent years.

With all these things in mind we invite you to this roundtable discussion, to share our thoughts on these questions:

- How can we best use our creative agency to amplify women’s visual and material voices in the public sphere?
- What are the challenges to women’s visual and material voices in the public sphere?
- Who has agency in visual and material voices in the public sphere?
- How can we best advocate or make space for those lacking agency in visual and material voices in the public sphere?