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Visual Communication Designer (Universidad Nacional de La Plata). She was professor and gave courses and conferences in Argentina, Chile, Mexico, Brazil, Germany, Italy, New Zealand and USA.

Articles of hers were published in journals such as Design Issues (MIT, Press Journals) were published , Ulmer modelle, nach Ulm HfG, Bonn (2007), Dictionnaire Universal des Créatices, Paris (2013), Women's Creativity since the Modern Moviment, Milan, (2018), "After Bauhaus, Before Internet", Yale University 2022, (U Chicago Press), among others. She was curator of the case "Argentina" in the extension of the exhibition "The whole world a Bauhaus?" Karlsruhe (2020), Germany, organized by ifa and in 2025 the argentine chapter in the exhibition "Here we here! Organized by Fundación Proa, Buenos Aires in collaboration with the Vitra Design Museum, Germany. She is director of NODAL (Nodo Diseño América Latina), where she

coordinated *Historia del Diseño en América Latina y el Caribe* (Editorial Blücher, 2008). Since 2008 she has been researching on women in Argentine design.

The nature of design in a feminine key

Silvia Fernández

Abstract

The feminine nature of the project can be compared to the discrete but efficient characteristics of plant life in the form of sociability, without command centers, able to adapt very quickly to the enormous environmental changes. Until the last few decades, design activity in a feminine key had not been recorded by history. And it is revealing itself as a persistent and professionally rigorous work. It is a matter of questioning in a deeper way the predominant value system. Design as a bridge for social transformation.

Keywords

Design. Women. Feminism. Nature. History. Transformation.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau proposed to a friend "Go out, madame! Walk too! Pay attention to what you don't see! Write down your discoveries!"(1) Referring to his passion for the vegetable world. That widespread and unique universe for which the concept "plant blindness" or "botanical blindness" was coined - a term created by two botanists James H. Wandersee and Elisabeth Schussler - which defines the inability of human beings to see or perceive plants in their own environment.

What causes botanical blindness? Most likely the nature of the plants themselves, even though the world depends on them. Thus in a forest, the jungle, the steppe, a garden, a square or in a pot, they cover the ground or gain height, their rootedness, their slow but fluid vital movements, the sounds they emit - audible to the human register, their form of "sociability" that is characteristic of "their own modular construction is the quintessence of modernity, a cooperative, distributive architecture, without command centers, able to resist perfectly to repeated catastrophic effects without losing functionality and capable of adapting very quickly to enormous environmental changes. " In that sense they are two asynchronous universes with respect to the animal universe.

The biologist Stefano Mancuso - director of the International Laboratory of Plant Neurobiology - affirms that everything that man designs tends to have a central brain that governs and organs that respond to these commands, an archaic hierarchical and centralized design, which has the advantage of rapid responses, although not always correct, but it is a very fragile system and lacks innovation. This is the case of the computer, but also the management of a company, the organization of the State and of institutions or the traditional family (2). Mancuso himself argues that without any organ compatible with a central brain, plants are able to perceive the surrounding environment with a sensitivity superior to that of animals, actively compete for limited resources in the soil and atmosphere, accurately assess the circumstances, process a sophisticated cost-benefit analysis, and define and take appropriate actions in response to environmental stimuli. "Any centralized organization is inherently weak. Plants embody a much more resilient

and modern model than the animal; they are the living representation of how solidarity and flexibility can be associated.” (3)

The discreet but efficient characteristics of plant life can be homologated to the feminine universe of the project -of design-, of production and of women's public life in general and of domestic life, of course. Until the last decades, the activity of design in a feminine key had not been registered by history -not even by the present-, which was not very sensitive to the existence and persistence of feminine design. Or it was underestimated.

From the perspective of primary categories such as patriarchy and androcentrism, which are used to explain the subalternity of women in society, a Copernican turn has been taking place in recent years, but it is not yet far enough in scope to move towards a profound social transformation where values proper to the feminine nature prevail, such as solidarity and a sense of community, based on trust, care, responsibility and equity. In order to gain depth, it will be necessary to continue to deconstruct social categories based on male dominance and continue to identify the factors that particularize them.

There are subtle factors such as the established narrative because, for example, we must be very attentive to linguistic biases. Donna Haraway, biologist and philosopher, professor emerita of History of Consciousness at the University of Santa Cruz, argues that modern science has produced narratives about itself and about reality. One of its main constructs is nature, that is to say, nature was invented in its instrumental/productivist conception, as an antagonistic otherness, as a threat, for which control over it has been justified.

According to the above, there is human nature, conceived separately from nature in general, in such a way that it has its own foundation. This narrative construction determines the dichotomy: "human being versus nature" that led the planet to the degree of exploitation and plundering of our days and does not allow us to understand that human nature is part of an integrated and interdependent system with other natural systems.

Other factors such as seeking to stand out above others, overvaluing one's own production, seeking renown or fame, establishing competition over concurrence, favoring dissent and discord, enjoying aggressive environments, despising efforts for association, belittling and underestimating those who appear to be inferior in conditions, are some of the biases that demand attention and awareness to generate actions that will bring them to light, over fear.

The history of design that is being revealed in the last decades in a feminine key shows a persistent and rigorous professional work that understands the nature of materials, the demands of production technologies in each historical moment, empathy with the user and commitment to the dimension of design as an interface between the user and the object. Each object, each system dialogues with the tension inherent to each design between use value and symbolic value, a singular way of intervening in the environment and of establishing links with responsibility, discretion and detail.

The curators of the exhibition Here We Are! 1900 - Women in Design, 1900-Today, Viviane Stappmanns, Nina Steinmüller, Susanne Graner (4), argue that giving women a space in a male-dominated working

world and historiography is only part of the debate. It is also about questioning the prevailing value systems in a deeper way. These questions have reached the field that concerns us today: has our vision been too narrow, too Eurocentric, too non-inclusive?

If we want our practice to have a positive impact on the future, it is essential to critically analyze the past and present in order to develop innovative models and methods. Discussions of feminism and design also provide ideas and inspiration for a new way of working, one that values cultural and ecological sensitivity, encourages interdisciplinarity, and is based on collaboration and experimentation. As we can see, many are already putting this approach into practice. The transformation towards values of solidarity, equitable distribution, deconstruction of power, equity, adaptability, flexibility, care, will be the bridges that design must build to society.

Translate by Deepl.

References

- (1) Negroni, María, La idea natural, Acantilado, Barcelona, 2024.***
- (2) Mancuso, Stefano, Plant Revolution, Giunti, Milano, 2019.***
- (3) op. cit., Mancuso, Stefano.***
- (4) Organized by Fundación Proa, Buenos Aires in collaboration with the Vitra Design Museum, Germany, April-July 2025.***