

WONDER (Women in Design Research) is a network of female professors, postdocs and students from the Scandinavian countries. The network has existed since 2012, it is interdisciplinary and has the goal to increase the number of women in design research, practice and education. www.ntnu.edu/womenindesignresearch

INVITATION LETTER

WONDER

KITCHEN TABLE CONVERSATIONS

19 OCT 2020

The annual WONDER meeting is not an exception from the general events happening right now in society, including academia. We are writing this invitation letter in our third month of quarantine, distancing, and isolation. We have seen and experienced that the pandemic underlines all kinds of inequalities, social and financial, on both local and global levels. Perhaps more acutely than ever, it has raised questions about the current economic and social systems, and how resources are distributed.

Many researchers are privileged to be able to work from home, in improvised home offices, or from the kitchen table. Academic life has transformed from mobile to remote, from face-to-face to virtual and from material to immaterial.

Working from home can, on the one hand, make you isolated from colleagues and society, create anxiety, annoyance, and lack of

motivation and inspiration. On the other hand, despite the screen exhaustion, one beautiful thing about zoom meetings, we have discovered, is that we see each other exposed in our informal everyday habitats, with personal details in the background and family members interrupting.

On a micro-level, the pandemic has turned the most familiar situations upside down. Sociologist Eva Illouz writes that “(t)he world has become, overnight, *unheimlich* – uncanny, emptied of its familiarity. Its most comforting gestures – shaking of hands, kissing, hugging, eating with others – have turned into sources of anxiety and danger”.¹ Her observation points towards the ambiguity of the home as a comfortable space, and in general, many already existing questions and complexities that this situation has brought up to the surface.

Historically, women’s emancipatory projects have centered around struggles to free themselves from domestic spaces and the kitchen. The home has been regarded as an oppressive place that keeps one away from professional and societal life. From a feminist Afro-American perspective, bell hooks suggested instead that home can also be regarded as a site of resistance in a repressive, colonized, and white supremacist world.² Thus she rereads the concept of private domesticity as potentially a public act of resistance.

We think of WONDER 2020 as a moment to share our thoughts and experiences through conversations. We are inspired by the thinking of architect Nel Janssens, who argues that the term conversation suggests a non-linear kind of collective sense-making, that takes place in everyday life. Departing from an etymological analysis of the word, she finds that *conversation*

means “the act of living with or keep company with”.³ Her approach resonates with different critical modes of design research that we choose to inhabit with our different projects, and that allow us to engage politically, socially and designerly with the challenges our world(s) face.

In this light, we are acknowledging the challenges and new insights of this spring for us all, as humans and design researchers and practitioners. Therefore, we invite you to come together and share experiences, practices, strategies, reflections, resistances, and insights to the 2020 online edition of WONDER, framed as kitchen table conversations.

Please apply by filling in [this form](#) by latest **1 September 2020**.
A program will be sent out in early October.

Kind regards,

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Written from Gothenburg, Oslo, Stockholm, May 2020

1

Eva Illouz, “Coronavirus Reveals What Really Makes the World Go Round, and It’s Not Money – The bluff of neo-liberalism must be called out”, *The Haaretz*, 04 April 2020

2

bell hooks, “Homeplace (A site of resistance)”, *Yearning: Race, gender, and cultural politics* (1990)

3

Nel Janssens, “Prologue: Collective Sense-making for Change: About conversations and instructs”, *Feminist Futures for Spatial Practice* (2017) p151–156