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Running against a waistline

Chapter 1ne: It's 6:00 am on a Saturday. The sun is still asleep as I drive to the race. The temperature is cold and I have all my gadgets with me sitting on the driver's seat waiting to be injected with life: [The iPod® \(RED™\)](#), the [Adidas®](#) running headphones of polycarbonate designed to wrap around my [ears](#), the [nike+ipod®](#) sensor to keep track of every step I take and the calories I burn during the half marathon I am about to run. I am wearing [nike® ankle supports](#) and [Asics®](#) shoes; an Adidas® running jacket and a [Brooks®](#) technical [drift® orange shirt](#). I forgot my cap but I brought a can of sunscreen protective coat. A [Polar® heartrate monitor](#) is elastically tight around my [chest](#) and two [Zone Perfect®](#) nutritional bars are momentarily sharing space with my high-tech toys. We arrive to the parking lot and I gear up with all my [orthoses](#) and get ready to start.

Dawn has begun to slowly cover the landscape and I [feel lost](#). I need to get my running number from the registration table. I come across with another runner. I can tell the runner is a "she" by her long legs, waistline, the color of her hair, and ultimately the tone of her voice reveals her gender. She kindly tells me that I am walking in the opposite direction. I turn 180 degrees and begin [trotting down the street](#). As I come across another street I find yet another lost

runner. It's a "he," taller than me, his legs full of body hair, really short hair and strong jaws; his tone of voice is deeper; he is also lost.

Dawn is letting daylight take on the wheel and we can see many people walking down the street with running numbers and pins. He decides to set his pace to [rush mode](#) and disappears. After a few minutes I arrive at the registration table. All the people there are women and I wonder why. I get my number and walk to the starting line. I made it! Once again [on time!](#) Another little triumph in my life. Women and men alike are getting ready to start the x-country race. Heartbeats are in the middle of the air, the get-go is approaching but my water wrist belt has all the bottles empty; I will be drinking air, I [guess](#).

Chapter 2wo: *"A text's unity lies not in its origins but in its destination... the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author."* ([Roland Barthes](#): The Death of the Author," Image, Music, Text, 148) Visual Communicators are meaning makers, society builders, and creators of myths. That is particular important in the case of Advertising Design and the messages that professional communicators design. The misleading component for this communication relationship among designer, message, and recipient is precisely the apparent "death" or disappearance of the author (designer,) and the evident interpretation of the message by means of mass media to a large audience turning the medium into the mediator of any message. Advertising constructs reality and values that are meant to become an integral part of the market of consumption. In the current economy if you have the economic means you may buy anything that is offered: [goods, services, experiences, and ultimately social values, thoughts, and realities](#) (virtual or real,) as they are presented exaltedly by Mass Media Communication. We construct our realities based on the perception of the information presented to us by these means and ultimately we develop a shared, common discourse about a "reality" that is constructed by Mass Media as [Foucault](#) elaborates in "The Order of Things: An archeology of the Human Sciences" (1970.) We live in a society that is mainly founded on a basic and fundamental premise: [MALES RULE](#). This long lasting dominant social system is not evident anymore as it was in a near past, nor has it been enforced by [pain and punishment](#) as a normal practice as it

used to be. Rather it is consciously and subconsciously concealed in every aspect of our daily lives as a seed of perceived reality. Advertising and Mass Media communication water this seed to preserve the financial and social status quo and ultimately to keep the [green river flowing](#).

Chapter [7even Up](#): It is 7:06 am, the mature guy announces: thirty seconds to start. 20, 10, three, 2, uno... Off we go! We are the second crowd; men and women are side by side, there are no differences here within the middle class runners, or is it [upper class](#)? I can see all sorts of people: Long-legged, small and chubby, bodybuilders, thin, fat, ugly, beautiful, hot, young, all beginning to breath rapidly. This crowd, as the previous one is filled with every possible human figure yet we all have at least one aspect in common: running legs. The race starts and my legs react. I have a tactic, a plan: to finish below 2 hours and twenty minutes. Running for me is one of the few places where gender, age, and ethnicity disappear and only will, legs and [lungs](#) count. We are a bunch of human skeletons with flesh moving in apparent unison with a self-imposed rhythm. There she is: a [female](#) with muscled white legs without any sign of cellulites, blue tank top and cool looking running shoes. She has headphones and I can see how they bridge from ear to ear as I try to imagine her musical preferences. I have not seen her face yet but I think her eyes should be blue to match the lines of her long blonde hair. She is about 12 feet ahead of me as my heart and legs begin to adapt to the park's winding gravel paths. She has a steady pace and a nice [fatfree®](#) slim waistline visually attaching her lower and upper body.

Chapter [4our](#): In spite of our lack of gender visual differentiation at birth beyond genitalia –which disappears covered by the first diaper- we tend to categorize humans from the very beginning of their lives by means of color coding ([pink](#) versus [blue](#)) and the way we address to new babies using a softer tone of voice for females and a stronger more reassuring tone for baby males.

In our society a primary area of societal molding concerns sex and sexuality. Much as I rebel against the forced dichotomization of people into female and male, I cannot meet someone who has just had a child without asking its sex. Our very language forces me into it, for if I want to accord the child personhood and not call it "it," I must

know whether to call it "she" or "he." And, of course, that information engenders (note the word) a host of other meanings for me and the parents. The question I want us to ask is how malleable so-called biological sex differences are. Anthropologists since Margaret Mead have taught us that sex *roles* are malleable: that what is sauce for the goose in one society is as likely to be sauce for the gander in another. But Mead also pointed out that whatever the specific roles may be—whether women or men carry the heaviest loads, whether men or women are more emotional—people in that society believe them to be both natural and inevitable. In our society that translates into "based in biology."

Ruth Hubbard *New Literary History*, Vol. 19, No. 1,
Feminist Directions. (Autumn, 1987), pp. 129-134.

These seemingly benign nuances along with many more pieces of information for the final puzzle construct our individual and socially shared gender perception, as we grow older. This perception is fed and reassured by Mass Media, Industrial Design, Craft Design, Art, Music, Literature, Advertising, Economy, and all sorts of sources along the way. I have always wondered about the color-biased definition for male and female since synthetic pigments for clothing are relatively new to human history yet “pink” and “blue” are a given to Western society when it comes down as a starter to define and construct our perception of gender in new babies. How was the [color of objects and designs categorized to specific genders before pigments became inexpensive and popular](#)? What about language? Is Jacques Lacan right when he states “[language](#) belongs to the father, to the patriarchal order of the [phallus](#)”? Is it possible that Advertising had based its communication thrust in a premise similar to Lacan’s?

[Chapter 9](#)**nine:** As humans grow older the gender-biased definition digs deeper into the human consciousness and it becomes subtle yet more effective. According to research conducted by the Department of Psychology at the [University of Stirling in the United Kingdom](#) (HILLI, BRUCE AND AKAMTSU, 1995) we are more likely to perceive gender differences than race based of visual clues in 2D and 3D format. The study attempts to find out the role of color and shape in the perception without considering any of the additional visual clues that we encounter

when we perceive the image of a human body in our context, namely: Clothing, cosmetic paint, hairstyle, physical adornment (attached jewelry, pierced jewelry, tattoos, etc.) and all sorts of attached accessories that could be theorized as visual hyperlinks of lexias that interconnect to previously defined accepted or imposed meanings to finally render a conceptual conclusion: penis or vagina. It is always interesting [to think](#) of our daily context as a physical version of World Wide Web where us –the human species- are [lexias](#) and hyperlinks. As lexias we are defined by our sub-hyperlinks namely: Clothing, accessories, adornments, etc. that conceptually take the reader (the other) to pre-conceived definitions of such hyperlinks. An earring then, reveals that a person is a female, but if a male is the one wearing it links our thinking to the concept of being in touch with his “feminine side.” A [policeman](#) carries a hyperlink defined as “gun” that will link us to the concepts of criminal, justice, safety, etc. When we “touch” an specific hyperlink we can read that lexia and interpret it with further detail.

[Chapter 3hree:](#) As we cross an everlasting iron-bridge my [retinas](#) capture an interesting image: spiders have webbed innumerable threads across the metal poles that constitute the handrails of the bridge. Thousands of dead tiny corpses of flies, butterflies and moths are trapped in this infinite universe of sticky threads. Suddenly, a metaphor lands in my brain between the sticky web, the consumer (all of us) and Advertising. Perhaps the whole problem with gender issues relies of the subtlety of an invisible web webbed by [the Patriarchs](#) through Media. My running pace doesn't allow me to focus on the details that I am perceiving making the web even more difficult to see and making more sense to my comparison: the medium must not be perceived to become a sticky web to trap human prey, it must be subtle, almost invisible to work effectively. The bridge climbs a slope and my heartbeat forces my breath into longer intakes of air, my perception changes a little bit until I reach the top of the [slope](#). We are getting through woods and more gravel now, the conditions of the road forces me to slow down and find a tree to grab from. I still have the blonde woman ahead of me; she is increasing her distance totally unaware of her involvement in my personal challenge to beat her. As I run away from the woods and the gravel a reassuring vision poses in front of me: The first hydration station.

As I read Cheryl Buckley's paper entitled: "*Made in Patriarchy: Toward a Feminist Analysis of Women and Design*" (*Design Issues*, Vol 3, No. 2. (Autumm, 1986), pp. 3-14. I find root for my first thoughts about the subtlety of this invisible hypertextuality all over us. I had always wondered why there are not enough names of recognized female designers in textbooks and design books of any kind and this article seems to have a good lead into a possible answer: Once again the cause might be rooted in the way our perception of the world is rooted and how we –designers- go on creating form and meaning associated to the patriarchal perception and [definition of the world](#). We attribute symbolic value to objects, forms and colors both as a trained methodology and as a natural way to perceive [the reality around us](#). A demonstration of this affirmation is based on the German-American psychologist Wolfgang Köhler's experiment later defined as the [Bouba/Kiki effect](#) (1929) where people consistently indicated to perceive certain forms and shapes as associations with male or female signifiers implying that the human brain is able to directly connect form and sound to create defining roles in language and perception. This seemingly natural definition of signification could be the foundation for a patriarchal perception of the world later used by Advertising, Art, and Design to communicate the role of power through objects and images in the society.

Chapter Five: The Nike® sensor tied to my left shoe talks to my iPOD® and a female voice (I chose its gender) softly and kindly lets me know that "midway point" has been reached. At this point my body demands hydration and I pull one of the little bottles from the belt around my waist. They have been filled with water in the first station and I am happy to have access to them. That stopped cost me about one and half minutes but it was worth it. Out of nowhere, a shadow is cast in front of me. The shadow of a swinging pony tale is rapidly approaching me; there is nothing I can do to avoid her from passing me. She is short, about 5 feet, plump and rounded. I cannot believe my eyes. She is gaining distance and there is nothing I can do.

I think that the concept of gender is obviously slanted towards the continuation of the male patriarchal power and it exists as [factuality](#); without the possibility of denial. Additionally, it has increased as a direct consequence of how media (new an old) defines the roles of male and

female in society. As the invisible web mentioned earlier, what makes this particular texture work is the subtlety and complexity of new media development in both narrative and technology development. This textual pattern has been imbued into my cells during my growth. It has also been enhanced and accelerated through media. It is present everywhere from the very beginning. Blue and pink are associated with gender but when we take a closer look to the signifiers and their meanings through association the results are fascinating. “Blue” is associated first and foremost with sky, water, fresh, peaceful, powerful, omnipresent, god, heaven, sky, hovering, top, high. Today blue is the color used for police patrol sirens to indicate their presence of power and control. On the other side of this coin “pink” is associated with delicate, girly, flower, light drink, the pink panther (genderless?) homosexual, pig, [piglet \(Disney\)](#), princess, soft. Linguistically, the term “pink” as a neologism is redefined as: “pinko:” as a person with left wing or liberal views, which according to the dictionary it is considered a derogatory term. It would certainly be impossible in today’s society to watch a TV commercial for the Army using pink as their color palette, would it be?

Chapter 6ix: Mile twelve, my body has begun to show signs of exhaustion and a potential [“hit the wall.”](#) A runner’s cognitive disassociation of the sensorium due to prolonged periods of exercise. (Stevinson and SJ Biddle, University of Exeter, U.K.) I began to understand that there are not really physical differences at the “non-professional” level of people as this research suggest. Men and Women bodies are different and that is a fact of life, yet the differences in terms of power, stamina, and endurance are only evident at the elite level of sports. However, this elite level is reduced to a few thousand people in the world; usually professional or Olympic Athletes. When we compare normal people the differences are reduced. I am having

a really hard time passing these two female runners ahead of me but finally, on mile twelfth and a half the chased waistline succumbs and my steady pace begins to claim space between us.

To test my claim: Advertising, Old and New Media are waving the texture to feed a patriarchal society silently and effectively. I conducted a little experiment and begun gathering imagery associated with my upbringing. What Media fed me during my early years and what media feeds me today. When I was a child the TV shows I used to watch, the ones that helped me to create values, myths and heroes are male dominant. This male domination doesn't happen only in numbers but also in attributed values: Batman: Hero, millionaire, single. / [Catwoman](#): Deceitful, sexually charged behavior. Superman: Hero, superpowerful, single, two personalities as a good way to conceal his good deeds. Flash Gordon: Fast. [The Jetsons](#): A vision of the future with flying cars and where a female robot cleans and cooks. The Wonder Woman's super powers: to have people tell the truth and to stop violence with her wrists. To become invisible using her plane (technology.) [I dream of Jeannie](#), three men and a woman who is happily enslaved by an astronaut (technology) and turns his wishes into reality. Even in contemporary animation seemingly designed for children we can find many examples: [Finding Nemo](#) (Walt Disney Pictures, 2003) presents us with a male fish (widow) who risks his life in search of his only son to rescue him while the female fish ([Doris](#)) is lost and has memory problems and is completely disorganized. The examples are endless and they do not relate only to past years but are present in today's advertised messages. As Cheryl Buckley points out on her article about patriarchy:

Advertising creates both an ideal use for a product and an ideal user. The actuality of the use and user are unimportant when confronted with a powerful fantasy- the immaculate designer kitchen with superwoman in control, combining with ease the roles of careerist and perfect wife. Like television and cinema, advertising appropriates

women's bodies. Women are objects to be viewed; they are sexualized things whose status is determined by how they look.

As I continue to explore the current media I find all sorts for examples of how the female “lexia” is repeatedly linked to a concept of submission and weakness. This is true even for international corporations such as Nike® that are branded as gender unbiased. When you checked the current site you can find amazing examples of the continuation of the dominant male message. A female soccer team is approached by a male figure in business suit and [says](#): “*Team meeting: Done some research, we realized we need to double your exposure, this way when people look at your back they are looking at your front...*” The mask is a male mask ordered to be used in the back of the head so when people look at the female back (sexual behavior, Desmond Morris, [Manwatching](#)) they see a male face instead. The team silently accepts the plan and stands showing their backs wearing the masks. The ad concludes with ONE woman rejecting the idea. The Adidas® site has also examples of ads where the male role is dominant of making the female of servant.

Chapter 8ight: As I continue this quest, I decided to focus on the company that has constituted over the years in one of the best brands to look at: Apple® and their line of products. The reason why I chose Apple® is because they are perceived by society as a company that means professional higher standard byproduct of a combination among aesthetics, play, and state of the art technology. All they way up to the iPOD TOUCH®, the company message has been clear and sound: male dominance. By analyzing all the pc versus [apple TV and web commercials](#) we can observe the lack of female figures and the association of computers with the male. In a few cases when female appear they are portrayed as “attachments” to the male computers to convey the message of “peripheral.” I assume that their internal visions and politics are changing

since they begun showing ads for TV and web medium where only hands are used. The selected hands have no clear visual signs of gender biased.

I have one bottle of [water](#) left in my belt and I am a quarter of a mile from the finish line. The terrain begins to climb and my legs to complaint. The plump woman is finally at my reach and this is my last opportunity. I begin inhaling and exhaling heavily. The remaining of water is shared between my mouth and my head. Finally I manage to pass the woman and I am close to the finish line. My heartbeat climbed up to 185 bpms as indicated by my POLAR® heartbeat monitor...[The final curve](#)! I am stepping on [grass](#) and it feels just like walking on air with its corresponding thin air. Time stops at 1:58 minutes as I cross the finish line. I have successfully completed my first half-marathon ever along with my second paper. Additionally, I have beaten the women who did not compete against me! Lacan is right! We men rule!

So here I am, completely exhausted and eager to find out in more depth about this new set of intriguing questions: Are Advertising, Design, Art, the Media, and the New Media sponsoring the perpetuation of a patriarchal society? Is there a way to improve the subtle almost imperceptible [universal message](#)? Is there a need for change? Is there will to do so?

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