

Critical Context Summary
Central St. Martins College of Art & Design
February 12th, 2003

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Gender Perception of Chaos and Order:

In the lecture on Gender and Design by Dr. Hilary Carlisle, she presented a body of research, which related that men and women are mostly unanimous in associating shapes, words, colours, and ideas as either male or female. However, in one concept, male and female perceptions differ. This concept is 'Chaos', where men tend to believe it is a female attribute while women tend to believe it is a male attribute.

We furthered explored this anomaly to try to understand how each gender perceives this concept. In our preliminary research, we found various ideas of chaos and order in different places. For example, the concepts are prevalent in eastern philosophies such as ancient Chinese thought that recognizes the link between chaos and order. This link is further exemplified in Islamic art that uses simple patterns to generate complexity as a mental tool to focus the intellect on the contemplation of the Infinite (Sardar). Recently, the emerging field of chaos theory has introduced a new way of describing complex patterns with simple formulae through Fractal geometry.

Despite this abundance of references to the meaning of 'chaos and order', we discovered that there is really no 'consensus' on these definitions. This is coherent with Dr. Carlisle's findings on the difficulty of ascribing gender to these words. In contrast to this confusion, we found a surprising degree of confidence and consistency in answering the following questions: "who's brain do you think is more rational? (men or women)" and "who is more chaotic? (men or women)". Answers to these questions seemed to hinge on the respondent's perception of "emotion", as a positive or negative force in life. If respondents believed that emotions were a positive force, then they tended to see women as rational and men as chaotic. On the other hand, if the interviewees saw emotions as a negative trait, then they saw men as rational and women as chaotic. Everyone seemed to agree that women are more emotional than men. As in Dr. Carlisle's research, in our interviews there was not a clear gender divide on the nature of chaos. However, it did become clear that the perception of emotion plays an important role.

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