HELLO!

I'm Hertje, a Berlin-based freelance Strategic Designer and
Design Lead who connects the dots between humans and systems.

HERTJE BRODERSEN · LINKEDIN · HELLO@HYPERCATALECTA.COM

BY THE NUMBERS

2 DECADES of professional experience, split equally between permanent and freelance roles

3 RE-ORGS led through as team lead (and several more adapted to in other contexts)

8 YEARS in leadership roles as people manager or lead designer

35+ ORGANISATIONS worked for across a wide range of industries and company sizes

MANY F*S GIVEN** about people and design as an agent of positive change

IN KEYWORDS

VERSATILE Strategic Designer with strong UX, Service and Product Design foundation

LEADER People-centric approach to running effective, engaged teams and projects

ANALYTICAL AND CREATIVE Knows the usual frameworks but thinks outside the box

EGOLESS Focused on achieving shared goals through multidisciplinary collaboration

STRONG COMMUNICATOR Empathetic, outcome-oriented, articulate, and adaptable

WHAT MOTIVATES ME

As a Strategic Designer, Experience Strategist, and People Lead, I thrive in technically and social complex environments that demand informed, ethical, and collaborative decision-making.

With a systems-thinking approach and a people-centred mindset, I solve real problems and create lasting value for organisations and people.

Guided by Christina Wodtke's principle, "If you don't design, you default," I'm very intentional in problem-solving and combine analysis, creativity and compassion to co-create results that are bigger than the sum of their parts.

HOW I GOT HERE

After earning a humanities degree, I shifted to UX design and spent two decades working on diverse products and services across industries, both as an individual contributor and a team lead. Find a full resume here.

1999–2006	2006–2013	2013–2020	2020–2023	PRESENT
THE UNIVERSITY YEARS	THE AGENCY YEARS	THE FREELANCE YEARS	THE CORPORATE YEARS	BACK TO CONSULTING
M.A. American Studies, Scandinavian Studies, Cultural Anthropology	Junior UX Designer BBDO Interone (Hamburg, DE)	Experience Strategist & UX Consultant	Head of Product Design 'Partner Program'	Strategic Designer & Design Lead
	Information Architect DDB Tribal (Hamburg, DE)	Freelance	Zalando (Berlin, DE)	Freelance
Universität Hamburg (DE) and: København (DK), Victoria, BC (CA), Greifswald (DE)	Senior UX Architect AKQA (Berlin, DE)			

WHO I'VE WORKED WITH

Training at renowned agencies provided a solid foundation for a career spanning B2C and B2B products and services across various sectors, incl. mobility, e-commerce, dating, finance, insurance, lifestyle, and tech, such as:

BRANDS

- AUDI
- BMW
- Consorsbank
- Deutsche Telekom
- Deutsche Bahn
- Google
- NIKE
- Red Bull
- Spark Networks
- TUI Cruises
- Volkswagen
- Zalando

AGENCIES

- AKQA
- Aperto (IBM iX)
- DAYONE
- DDB Tribal
- iA
- INTERONE
- Kolle Rebbe (Accenture)
- Poke London (Publicis)
- Strichpunkt
- Useeds (Diffferent)

HOW I CAN HELP YOU

SOLVE PROBLEMS WITH STRATEGIC DESIGN

With the help of research, co-creation and other methods I arrive at tangible service and product strategies and help teams turn plans into actions.

Strategic Design · Experience Strategy · Product Strategy · Co-creation · Change Management · Stakeholder Management

CONSULT ON UX & DESIGN CHALLENGES

Using a human-centred lens, I advise on creating experiences that balance business needs, system constraints, and organisational context.

Service Design · Information Architecture · Creative Lead · Product Design Lead · UX Design Lead · Content Strategy · Systems Thinking

BUILD, MENTOR AND GUIDE DESIGN TEAMS

Practicing a people-centric approach I build and mentor diverse, engaged, and effective teams and steer them through both calm and choppy waters.

People Management · Hiring · Organisational Design · Change Management · Facilitation · Design Operations

WORK EXAMPLES

HOW I WORK

I enjoy design challenges that work within existing system constraints, thriving on complexity and untangling messy situations to uncover connections across products, services, and organisations.

I thrive in human-centred teams that value adaptability and long-term thinking, and apply methods and frameworks to pragmatically solve problems, drive coherence, move projects forward, and support the team.

I'm proactive in identifying opportunities to enhance experiences and processes, and challenge the status quo if it leads to better results for all.
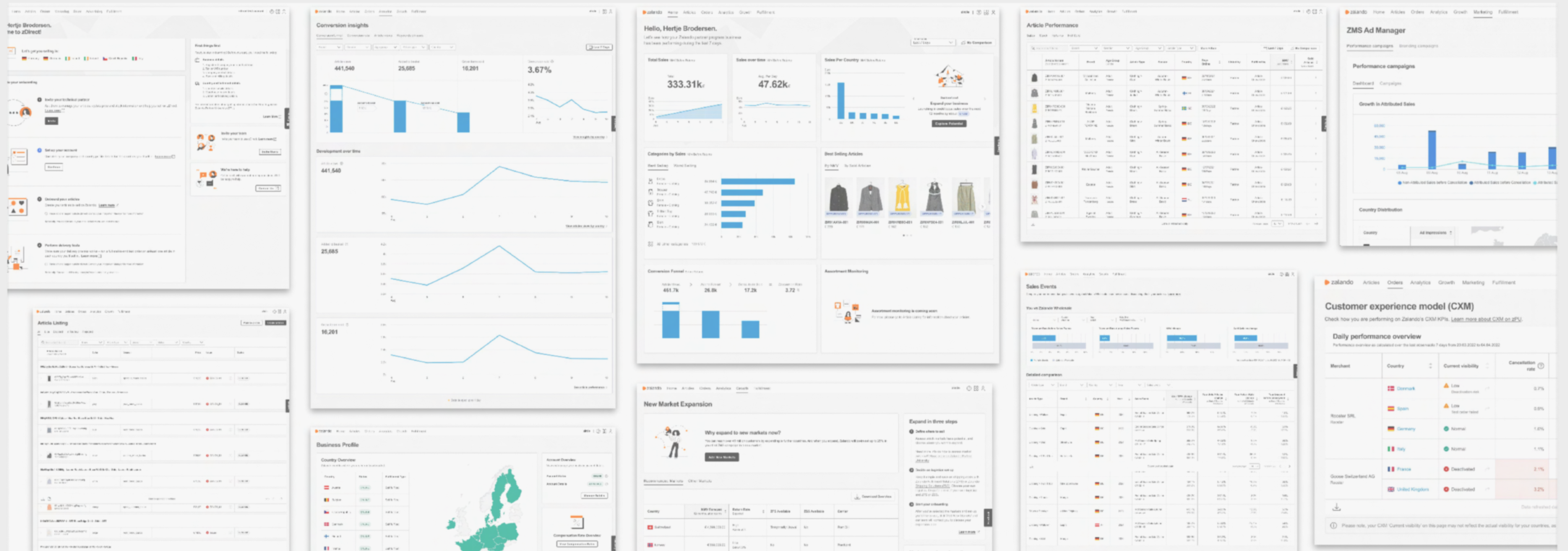
HEAD OF PRODUCT DESIGN AT zalando

I led Product Design for the B2B2C portal 'zDirect' which offers brands and retailers tools to manage and grow their marketplace business on Zalando.

SCALING A PRODUCT DESIGN TEAM

CONTEXT

▶ zalando

ROLE	Design Manager Partner Program (B2B2C)
PRODUCT	Portal for B2B2C marketplace partners 'zDirect'
TIME PERIOD	September 2020–February 2023
TEAM	4 Product Designers (Principal, Seniors, Mid-level); 1 Senior Content Designer; 3 long-term freelancers

In 2020, the then-Head of Design hired me to build a second design team to help scale 'zDirect', a set of self-service tools crucial for marketplace partner success, which was crucial in achieving the ambitious goal of 40% marketplace share in GMV by 2023.

ACHIEVEMENTS

- **Hired key talent within a year:** Recruited 4 product designers, 1 senior content designer, and 3 freelancers in a competitive job market

- **Streamlined onboarding:** Improved onboarding process and handbook, enabling effective integration of new joiners

- **Coached and mentored:** Led the team across 5 (later 9) product work streams, mentored managers and designers, and promoted 3 direct reports

- **Built resilient team culture:** Fostered a supportive, adaptable culture valuing cross-functional collaboration, proving resilient during change.

- **2023 team survey results:** Leading self: 4.8/5, Leading business: 4.5/5, Leading people: 4.9/5.

- **Promoted to Head of Product Design:** Spring 2022

OPTIMISING FOR UX AT SCALE

CONTEXT

zalando

ROLE	Design Manager / Head of Design
PRODUCT	Portal for B2B2C marketplace partners 'zDirect'
TIME PERIOD	September 2020—September 2023
TEAM	Product Design, Content Design, User Research

Launched in 2020, zDirect is a self-service portal for marketplace partners. Rapid growth led to a patchwork of feature, patterns and UI components, so I focused on creating a more coherent, seamless experience.

ACHIEVEMENTS

- **Grew design leadership:** Hired Principal Designer to lead end-to-end initiatives across 9 product work streams, bridging UI and UX efforts

- **Revamped information architecture:** Led a comprehensive overhaul to enhance navigation, usability, scalability, and governance

- **Secured cross-functional buy-in:** Collaborated with product and operations leaders to align on overarching strategies

- **Implemented design system rollout:** Coordinated with product and engineering to apply updated design system across all portal modules

- **Enhanced team alignment:** Introduced new rituals to boost co-creation and alignment efforts

ESTABLISHING CONTENT DESIGN FOUNDATIONS

CONTEXT

zalando

ROLE Design Manager / Head of Product Design
PRODUCT Portal for B2B2C marketplace partners 'zDirect'
TIME PERIOD September 2020—September 2023
TEAM 1 Senior Content Designer and 2 freelancers

Scaling 'zDirect' depended on partners navigating complex workflows independently. Content Design played a crucial role in simplifying forms and workflows to attain maximum clarity and in building the foundations for content governance and a content design system.

ACHIEVEMENTS

- **Launched content design in B2B:** Hired Zalando's first Content Designer for B2B/B2E, leading to increased demand for content support and budget approval for a second hire

- **Developed content framework:** Created a content design system, strategy, and tone of voice guidelines to enhance UI/UX efforts within product

- **Aligned cross-functional guidelines:** Coordinated brand and content standards with communications, support, and partner education teams

- **Secured dedicated product work stream:** Successfully pitched content and education as an independent product work stream to executive leadership

- **Standardised language use:** Collaborated with communications team to unify Zalando's English dialect across the entire company

LEADING THROUGH CHALLENGING TIMES

CONTEXT

zalando

ROLE   Head of Product Design

PRODUCT   Portal for B2B2C marketplace partners 'zDirect'

TIME PERIOD   March 2022–September 2023

TEAM   4 Product Designers; 1 Senior Content Designer; 1 User Research Manager (and 2 skip-level reports)

The 2022 economic downturn necessitated a pivot in team strategy, just as I had taken over as Head of Product Design. It became key to foster a resilient, healthy team that leans on each other during difficult times and works effectively even in a constant state of flux.

ACHIEVEMENTS

- **Navigated major challenges:** Weathered a 66% reduction in design capacity, budget cuts, re-org, leadership changes, and redundancies

- **Strengthened team resilience:** Focused on transparency, trust, and meaningful rituals to anchor the team during uncertain times

- **Prioritised high-impact work ruthlessly:** Streamlined workload across 9 work streams to maximise design's business value and impact

- **Actively engaged in reorganisation:** Co-designed the future team structure and led cross-functional discussions on UX metrics, focus time and content strategy; got team involved in re-org where possible

- **Ensured team stability:** Maintained 100% retention and consistent engagement by prioritising team health and adaptability

CREATIVE STRATEGIST FOR 🆅 AND DB

Contracted by design innovation agency DAYONE, I worked with Deutsche Bahn and Volkswagen and helped designers bring the product visions to life.

MANAGING UX AMIDST CHANGE

CONTEXT

DB

ROLE	Freelance Creative Strategist & UX Lead
PRODUCT	Mobility app (no longer online)
TIME PERIOD	November 2019 — April 2020

I joined just as the unit shifted from innovation lab to corporate team. Once focussed on a mobility app, the team now dealt with a pivot in strategy and structure as well as a looming pandemic. I coached UX designers from both agency and client-side, collaborating closely with product and engineering teams.

ACHIEVEMENTS

- **Strategic alignment:** Worked on alignments across work streams and supported product owners in creating a revised strategy and portfolio

- **Aligned product vision:** Collaborated with client, agency, internal teams, and third parties to ensure a shared vision and design goals

- **Maintained team motivation:** Guided UX designers in their daily tasks and kept the UX team motivated and effective despite the state of flux

- **Enhanced UX Maturity:** Increase the internal acceptance of UX practices, setting up a foundation for the incoming permanent lead

- **Delivered hands-on UX Work:** Assisted with strategic and hands-on UX design for more complex tasks during critical project phases

TAMING THE FLOW

CONTEXT

ROLE Freelance Creative Strategist & UX Lead
PRODUCT Automotive website checkout flow
TIME PERIOD September 2018 — July 2019

Buying an electric vehicle online adds complexity to an already lengthy checkout process due to technical, legal, and business requirements. We collaborated with multiple clients and third-party stakeholders to draft this checkout flow.

ACHIEVEMENTS

- **Unified project vision:** Connected multiple e-commerce projects for the client under a shared vision and purpose

- **Streamlined strategy & roadmap:** Aligned with business and product owners to define clear priorities based on stakeholder, dealer and customer research

- **Delivered key customer journey:** Created a complex end-to-end flow that connected disparate steps into a seamless purchase flow for build-to-order electric cars

- **Led UX/UI design team:** Managed a small team of designers to tackle high complexity, producing detailed specifications for the client's developers

INTERIM PRODUCT DESIGN LEAD FOR **spark** networks

Online dating company Spark Networks contracted me to support designers and researchers and to provide multi-brand design strategy after a merger.
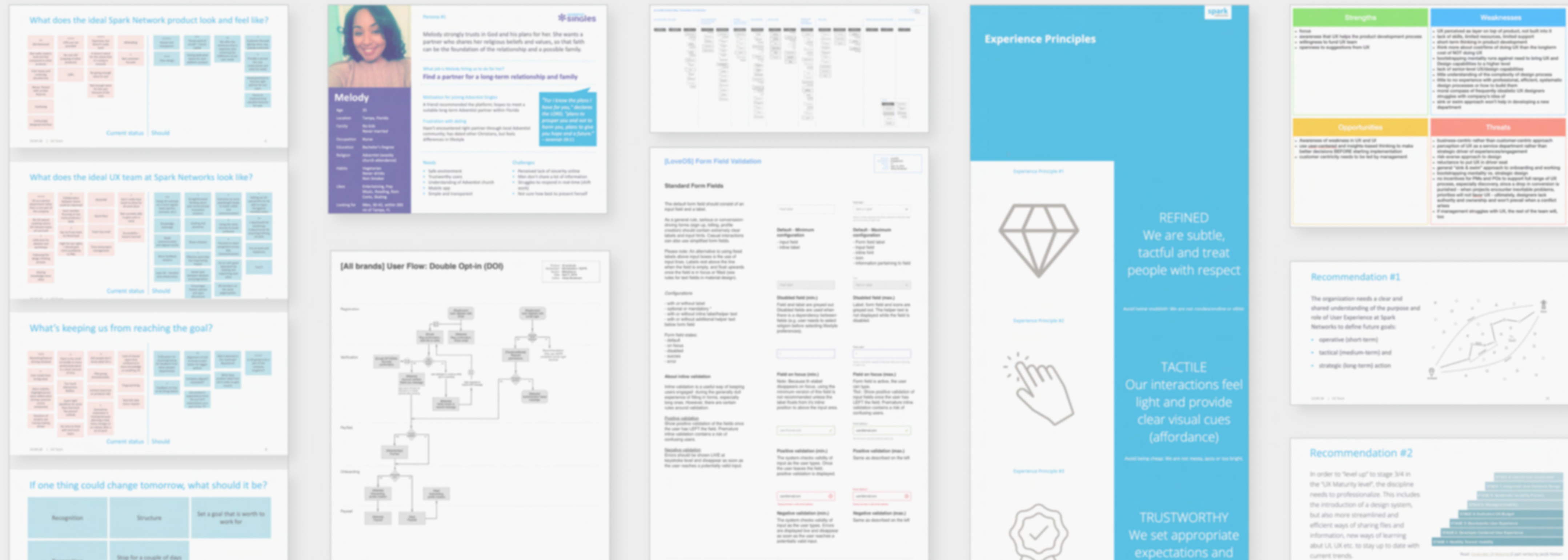
SPREADING THE DESIGN LOVE

CONTEXT

spark networks

ROLE Interim Product Design Lead

PRODUCT Several premium dating apps and websites

TIME PERIOD Feb 2018 - April 2018

TEAM 3 UX/UI designers, 1 user researcher

Spark Networks provides dating platforms for educated, religious, and senior singles. Following a recent merger, the company faced the challenge of managing multiple distinct brands efficiently. As interim product design lead, I supported a small team of product designers and researchers who had been without dedicated design leadership for some time.

ACHIEVEMENTS

- **Team analysis:** Ran research to analyse design maturity as well as needs, wants and pains, identifying areas of strengths and areas for improvement

- **Structure and routines:** Designed actions to increase designers' work flow and engagement; created structure and established routines and rituals

- **Mentorship:** Helped designers and researchers become more proactive in cross-functional collaboration and use data and research to argue points

- **Stakeholder alignment:** Aligned on complex multi-brand setup with product and engineering and advocated for design capabilities and value

- **Multi-brand Design System:** Initiated a universal, cross-brand design system with customisation options, streamlining design operations across brands

LEADERSHIP VALUES

MY PRINCIPLES

1 BOOST TRUST AND BALANCE

Great work happens when people feel safe, in control, and supported, so I'm open, transparent, and set clear expectations while encouraging healthy boundaries.

2 ALWAYS BE ADAPTABLE

I demonstrate the value of design by adapting approaches to fit the context of each cross-functional team, inviting collaboration and integrating design seamlessly.

3 EMBRACE COMPLEXITY

Instead of thinking either/or, I use a both/ and mindset to help collaborators move beyond simple solutions to explore change on multiple fronts.

4 LEAN INTO FRICTION

As a human-centred designer, I advocate for user needs, even when it challenges business goals, and foster productive discussions that respect both perspectives.

5 FOR NOW AND THE FUTURE

I take a systems-oriented, adaptive approach that meets short-term needs while driving long-term change through a deep understanding of system dynamics.

CONFERENCE TALKS

TOPICS I'VE PRESENTED ON STAGE

I've always loved engaging with the design community through conferences and meet-ups and had several opportunities to contribute talks of my own.

I'm fascinated by the patterns that shape our world, often looking into the past to make sense of the present.

Having experienced both the joys and the challenges of the design field my talks often explore the intersection of design and work culture. I hope to offer audiences a fresh perspective and spark meaningful discussions.

WHAT IS JOB LOVE?

SUMMARY

Any job title with "Designer" in it suggests creativity and self-expression. It's not a job you pick to get rich fast, but one you are drawn to because you hope to find meaning in it. 'Find something you love to do, and you'll never have to work a day in your life,' the promise goes.

Is that true, though? Design can be deeply fulfilling, allowing us to create beauty, solve problems, and reshape the world. However, viewing it as a lifelong passion project rather than a job can lead to unrealistic expectations and poor work-life balance.

This talk re-evaluates what it means to love design and work as a designer, especially in light of the pandemic's shift in our perspectives on work.

Interaction 2023   PUSH UX 2023   Boye & Co

INTERACTION 2023 · HERTJE BRODERSEN · @HYPERCATALECTA

WHAT IS (JOB) LOVE?

Drudgery, Devotion & Design — A Meet-Cute

♥

View recording on IXDA

DESIGN LIKE YOU MEAN IT

SUMMARY

As designers, we value user-centricity, yet we operate in systems that measure success by profit. If we truly want to put humans at the center, we need new guiding principles. The past focus on individualism, hierarchies, and rigid boundaries no longer fits our interconnected, interdependent world.

It's time to move beyond biases and some of the neoliberal frameworks we've built. If we want to continue to thrive, we need new principles that embrace collaboration, adaptability, ethics, and foresight.

This talk delves into the biases and blind spots that hold us back and offers ideas for meaningful change.

View recording on Vimeo

EuroIA 2020   Boye 2021
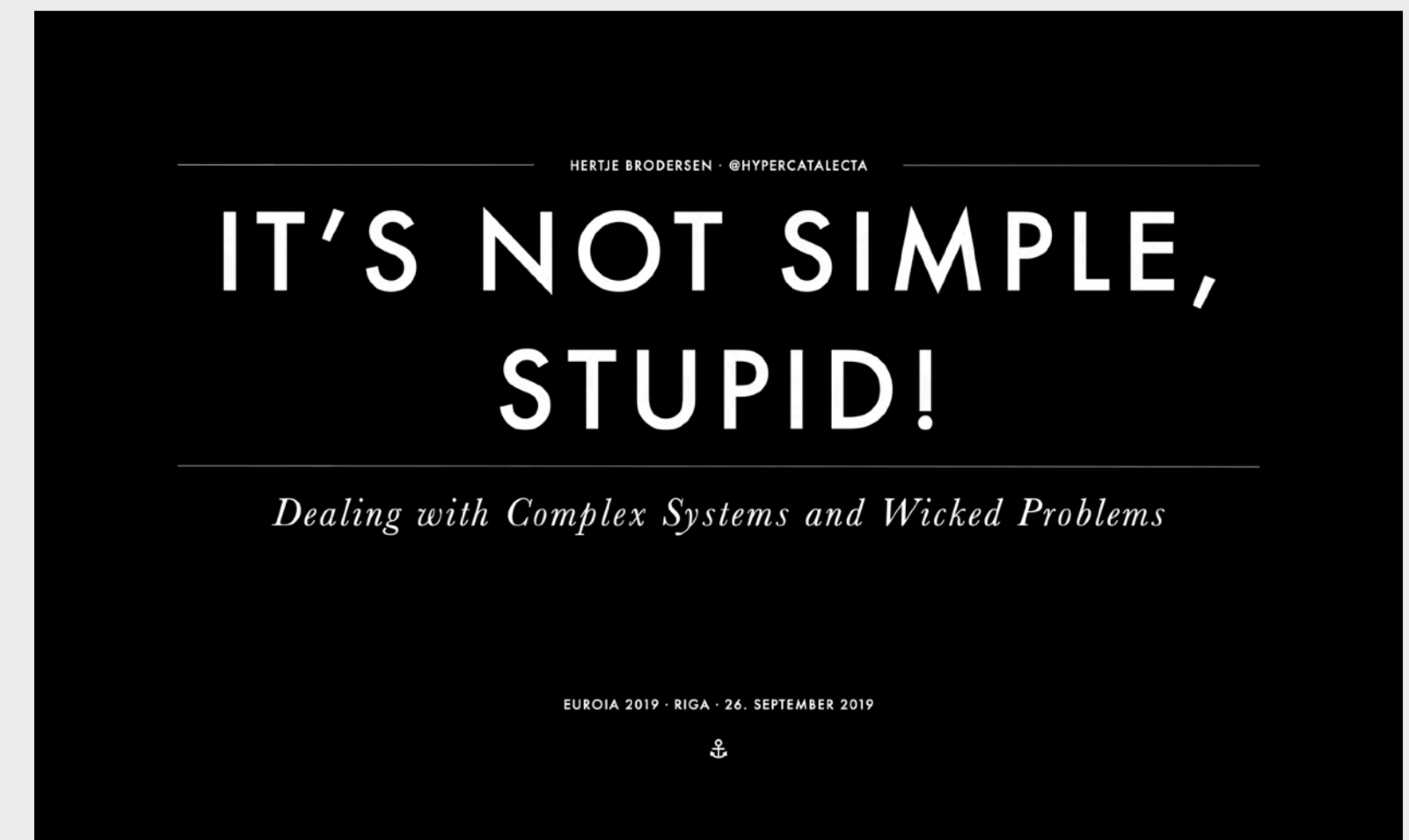
IT'S NOT SIMPLE, STUPID!

SUMMARY

Our toolbox is full of polished tools and processes. We know our patterns, map journeys effortlessly, build design systems quickly, and have frameworks for every situation. Our concepts and designs are efficient and effective. Our discipline is mature and recognised; we seem to know what we're doing.

But do we, really? Many large-scale systems have become so complex that they are impossible to fully understand or predict. Yet, we keep trying—it's our job. Our tools need to adapt to this complexity, and so must our thinking.

This talk explores how we can do our work well even when the complexity feels overwhelming and clarity seems elusive.

View recording on Vimeo (requires login)

EuroIA 2019   World IA Day 2020

STRATEGIC PRAGMATISM

SUMMARY

In fast-paced product development, UX professionals are often seen as "overthinking" when teams want quicker solutions. While it's true that we sometimes complicate things, questioning and understanding are core to improving user experiences.

This talk explores the spectrum between overthinking and short-termism: How can we optimise user experiences quickly without sacrificing quality? How much time is actually needed, and which principles are essential to uphold versus those we can let go of?

The talk is a plea for moving beyond idealistic design dogmatism towards more context-driven strategies that don't lose sight of the big picture.

IA Konferenz 2018


View deck on slideshare

A PATTERN LIBRARY FOR TEAMWORK

SUMMARY

As designers, we observe users' behavioural patterns in order to identify problems and needs and eventually improve the experience. However, we don't always apply these same methods to our own work environments.

Why focus on workplace behaviour? Because satisfaction hinges as much on our interactions as on our tasks. Poor team dynamics can be more draining than long hours and often affect the quality of our work.

This talk outlines common dysfunctional collaboration patterns and their pitfalls. By framing these issues clearly, it offers insights on how we can break free from destructive dynamics—we already hold the tools in our hands.

View recording on IXDA

IA Konferenz 2017   Interaction 2018
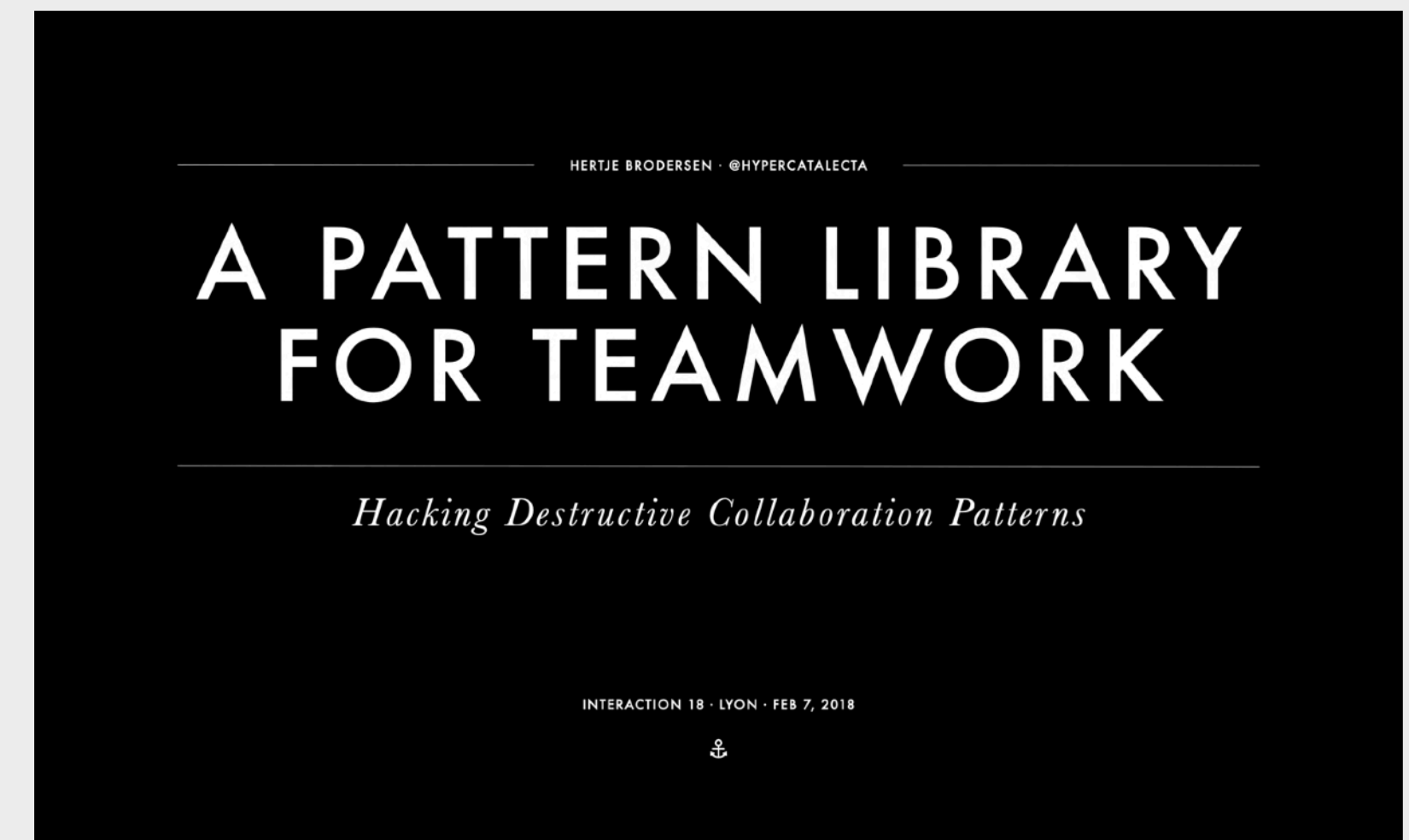
RECOMMENDATIONS

WHAT FOLKS AT ZALANDO SAY ABOUT ME

"… Hertje is an empathetic leader who consistently enabled our team to thrive and reach our full potential. Her approach, grounded in trust and empowerment, allowed me to make meaningful impacts while always being available for guidance and support. Her belief in my abilities and her constructive feedback were pivotal to my professional growth."

— Kim (Principal Product Designer, reported directly to me)

"… what separates her apart is the human connection she fosters within her teams. Rarely have I encountered a leader in this industry who embodies such kindness and empathy."

— Bill (Head of Product Design, peer)

"… She leads her team with strategic vision and great attention to detail at the same time. Most of all Hertje has a wonderful sense for people and their needs."

— Philippe (Freelance Principal Product Designer, reported directly to me)

WHAT OTHER PEOPLE ARE SAYING

"… Hertje is distinguished above all by the great combination of high analytical thinking and a great love of detail. Hertje finds understandable descriptions for the most complex issues, and thus manages to really bring projects forward."

— Maria (Reflecting Advisor, I reported to her)

"… Hertje can call on knowledge from many different industries; at the same time, her approach to each new project is creative, open and with a notable determination to seek out the best possible solutions. Hertje combines meticulous analysis of underlying structures and patterns with a healthy pragmatism when it comes to communicating and applying her findings. She is a great team lead who knows when to listen and when to challenge herself and the team to rethink solutions."

— Katia (User Researcher & Service Designer, we were freelance peers)

View all recommendations on LinkedIn

LET'S TALK!

Have a role, project, or event that could be a good fit?
Get in touch to see how I can support you!

HERTJE BRODERSEN · LINKEDIN · HELLO@HYPERCATALECTA.COM

All I want to be is someone that makes new things and things about them.

—John Maeda

THE END.