

The Space between the Studs: Feminism and Architecture

In 1979, I was in my second year of graduate school, searching for a research topic that would sustain my interest for at least three more years while I worked on my dissertation. One day, someone surreptitiously placed a poster in my office mailbox announcing a two-day symposium called “Planning and Designing a Non-sexist Society” at the University of California, Los Angeles, organized by Dolores Hayden. Intrigued, I went and found an engaging cadre of researchers, activists, architects, planners, politicians, and graduate students who were rethinking women’s place in the built landscape. I drove back the sixty miles from Westwood to Irvine, California, where I was going to school, and begged one of my professors (the one, perhaps, who had snuck the poster in my mailbox?) to borrow a copy of his 1976 issue of *Signs*, which contained a ten-page review essay of “Architecture and Urban Planning” by Dolores Hayden and Gwendolyn Wright, an essay that kept cropping up in the discussions at the symposium. The thought that there might be a “field” encompassing women’s (even gender!) issues of the built landscape was like fireworks erupting in my head. I was hooked. I still am.

It’s been twenty-five years since that last review essay in *Signs* that “describe[s] current areas of research concerning women in architecture and the physical aspects of urban planning” (Hayden and Wright 1976, 924). Since then the work in this area has flourished, so much that a ten-page review essay such as the 1976 one could not possibly cover the writings, exhibitions, and projects produced in the past twenty-five years that explore gender issues of the built landscape, let alone of architecture even narrowly defined. The forums where these feminist writings and projects lie are no less diverse than they were in 1976, but the number of books and edited collections has multiplied, particularly in the past decade. Yet quantity of publication does not translate into clout or transformation within the discipline of architecture. In the professional office, feminism (and even the idea of gender) is often highly suspect, even disdained. Many women seeking acceptance in this still male-dominated field—in the United States, 17.5 percent of architects (U.S. Bureau of

Labor Statistics 1999) and 15.8 percent of full-time architecture faculty are women (Anthony 2001)—disassociate themselves from talk of gender or even sex difference.¹ Yet certainly something serious is happening when all annual Pritzker Architecture Prize winners are men, as are all winners of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) Gold Medal, an award given annually since 1907.²

Architecture matters in the daily play of gender, and vice versa. A myriad of projects, research studies, and writings lends increasing insight to understanding the gendering of architecture in its many manifestations and doing something about it. This current essay does not attempt to duplicate the type of comprehensive coverage Hayden and Wright undertook in delineating and describing the various works twenty-five years ago. In their introductory chapter to the 1999 book *Design and Feminism*, Joan Rothschild and Victoria Rosner provide a solid overview of the many prominent monographs and edited collections published in the past couple of decades. I have also provided an overview of many essays, journal articles, chapters, and projects of feminist concerns in architecture in my essay “The F Word in Architecture” (Ahrentzen 1996a). What I endeavor to do in this particular review essay is what any good feminist scholar does: look for the invisible among the visible—the space between the studs—and try to figure out why it is overlooked or devalued, and what that means.

To frame or not to frame?

There has been a minor avalanche of books and collections on the issue of gender (or feminism) and architecture in the 1990s.³ Most are edited

¹ Compare this figure to those of other male-dominated professions. In dentistry, 19.8 percent of the professionals are women, 26.6 percent of physicians are women, and 28.6 percent of professionals in the law and the judiciary are women. Women account for more than 43 percent of executives, managers, and administrators nationwide. But women’s presence in architecture looks favorable when compared with the clergy, where only 12 percent are women—because there are more clergy than architects in the United States, however, you are more likely to encounter a clergywoman than a woman architect (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 1999). Other depictions of the status and influence of women in the architectural profession are virtually impossible to assemble since the professional organization, the AIA, does not compile statistics on job types and employee gender within its member firms.

² Sponsored by the Hyatt Foundation and initiated in 1979, the Pritzker Architecture Prize portrays itself as the international architectural community’s equivalent of the Nobel Prize. The Gold Medal is the highest honor that the AIA can bestow on an individual.

³ See Berkeley and McQuaid 1989; Colomina 1992; Spain 1992; Weisman 1992; Altman

collections—some with original essays, others with reprints—and, for the most part, not targeted to a specific topic or issue in architecture but, rather, encompassing a vast, often disparate array. One striking characteristic that most of these edited collections have in common is that in their wish to be pluralistic the editors refrain from providing a framework for rendering and interpreting the intellectual terrain in the book. Some have even chosen not to subdivide the chapters into sections, claiming that such formal structures are divisive and alien to the multidisciplinary nature of feminist work.

While fashionably “postmodern,” this refusal to provide an explicit interpretation and framework—or even the basis for selection—for a collection of essays that one solicited, assembled, and edited may unintentionally convey to readers a lack of intellectual development, connectedness, or even synergy of these myriad projects and writings. Playing to a friendly inclusiveness or rendering a serial encyclopedic compendium can obscure the political and intellectual stakes that are involved. “Why these *particular* readings?” I-the-reader ask to silent editors. I agree with Jane Rendell (2000) that readers often desire (and can certainly deal with) what she calls “markers” and what I call “conceptual schemas” that they can use to engage in their own thinking about the nature of the field. I am even more convinced of this after having scrutinized this literature and having found various professionals and academics bemoaning the lack of a stance or conceptual framing posed by the editors of these collections (e.g., Haar 1997; Adams 2001). With the growing number of these collections and special journal issues in the past decade, feminist scholars and professionals have become more visible, vocal players on the stage of architectural inquiry and practice. Yet ironically, as Nancy Hartsock forewarned (1987), the concomitant postmodern turn away from grand narratives and authorial authority has suggested to some, including some editors, that since all voices are simply partial, an attempt at overarching synthesis, synergy, or even categorization is simply a tainted effort. However, within context, it must be said that some voices have considerable perspective and insight, particularly the voices of those who have spent

and Churchman 1994; Betsy 1995; Agrest, Conway, and Weisman 1996; Coleman, Danze, and Henderson 1996; Rüedi, Wrigglesworth, and McCorquodale 1996; Sanders 1996; Durning and Wrigley 2000; Rendell, Penner, and Borden 2000; Anthony 2001. Within the past decade, special issues of journals that address feminist issues in architecture include *Design Book Review*, “Gender and Design” (Snowden and Ingersoll 1992); *ANY*, “Architecture and the Feminine: Mop-Up Work” (Bloomer 1994); *Magasin für Modern Arkitektur*, “Feminine Practices” (2000); and the *Journal of Architectural Education*, “Gender and Architecture” (Ghirardo and Stuart 2001, 2002).

months, even years, inviting, selecting, filtering, advising, and editing various essays and ideas to compile in a monograph—all the while keeping one ear to the ground and listening for emerging developments and debate. Taking a stand, positioning one's landmarks, and developing conceptual schemas of the vast array of complex works are important intellectual contributions that benefit many. Clearly, with the onslaught and insight of poststructural criticism in the 1990s, we all realize that frameworks are not fixed in stone. But if we have several such frameworks before us, constructive and reconstructive dialogue has a foundational footing on which to build—even if that means tearing away and resetting that foundation later.

What is not being said when refusing to frame this ecumenical blend of feminist projects and epistemologies is that creating such a comprehensive, nuanced, yet elegant framework that could embrace, not straight-jacket, the various feminist contributions in architecture over the past twenty years is a Herculean task. Editors of two of these collections who have accepted this challenge develop a conceptual reconstruction of the history and current stage of work and scholarship in the field. Reading each is informative, insightful, and intellectually engaging in itself. Both demonstrate the growth of work in this field. But reading their frameworks together, side by side, is revealing also of what is not being framed or covered.

In the introductory essay to the book *Design and Feminism*, Rothschild and Rosner (1999) organize feminist work in architecture along three avenues of inquiry.⁴ The one that they call “Women in Architecture” encompasses research on the work of neglected women architects and the demographic accounting of women architects. Work within the second avenue of inquiry, “Spatial Arrangements,” explores how women experience the spaces they occupy and use. The early work here focused on two interrelated ideologies—women and domesticity and the ideology of separate spheres—and on white middle-class women and heterosexual family arrangements. Later, work addressing and involving more diverse groups of women, settings, issues, and interpretations arose. In the third avenue, “Theories of Architecture and Gender,” the early work in the 1970s and 1980s often examined architecture—whether in symbol or form or practice—in terms of female-male and feminine-masculine differences. In the 1990s, this binary approach was increasingly called into question, resulting in an outpouring of work that conceptualized gender as one of

⁴ Their book encompasses other design fields as well, but I focus only on their treatment of architecture here.

an intersecting number of elements, including class, race, age, religion, sexual orientation, and ethnicity, that comprise identities. From this orientation, theorists challenged the social context and social conditions that make a multiplicity of differences matter.

Gender Space Architecture (Rendell, Penner, and Borden 2000) is an especially dense and rich collection of previously published articles and excerpts, which in itself speaks to the growing maturity of the field. Coeditors Jane Rendell, Barbara Penner, and Iain Borden divide the collection into three parts: “Gender” includes selections of key manifestos, texts, and debates in the development of feminism, women’s studies, and gender theory, with material ranging from Virginia Woolf to Judith Butler. “Gender, Space” includes materials derived from a number of “spatial disciplines for whom space is treated as concept as well as context” (Rendell, Penner, and Borden 2000, 6–7): anthropology, cultural studies, geography, philosophy, psychoanalysis, planning, art history, and architecture. The third section, “Gender, Space, Architecture,” is composed of chapters largely drawn from academics and practitioners of architecture who deal with considerations of the architectural practices of design, history, and theory.

Sectioning off material in “Gender, Space” from that of “Gender, Space, Architecture” reveals the contested nature of defining *architecture* not only among architectural academics but among feminist scholars as well. Although the editors stress the links between the two sections (e.g., mentioning how the ways of thinking about space by the authors in sec. 2 inform those considering architecture in sec. 3), they also claim that the focus on spaces in “Gender, Space” is on spaces that are not usually considered architectural, such as shopping malls, suburban developments, grocery stores, and workplaces.⁵ In their Solomonic decision, the editors have set that genre of feminist work that Rothschild and Rosner (1999) call “spatial arrangements” outside the field of architecture, likening it to an older sister who passes along her wisdom to the younger sister to capitalize on. Their lens focuses on architecture as “history, theory and design,” thereby restricting architecture from its more inclusive, social, lived, and symbiotic experience, as Rothschild and Rosner pose. (I return to this issue subsequently.)

In the introduction to the third section of the book, the one titled “Gender, Space, Architecture,” Rendell (2000) devises a disciplinary and chronological topography that charts feminist projects in the architectural

⁵ I question this rather curious distinction, given that some of the chapters in the third section also deal with “nonarchitectural” spaces, such as health centers, suburbs, African nomadic dwellings, and the like.

practice of history, theory, and design over the past twenty years. Those projects from the 1970s and early 1980s encompass two concomitant and compatible realms: that of “Herstory: Women in Architectural History” and “Drawing on Diversity: Women in Architectural Design.” Within the first is an alternative history of architecture that uncovers evidence of women’s contributions to architecture and that reclaims the history of low-key buildings; everyday housing; domestic, interior, and textile design; and so forth, spaces and practices typically associated with women and historically regarded as trivial. The other body of work during this period addressed the contemporary situation of women in the profession of architecture and architectural education, often emphasizing the diverse nature of women’s architectural practices.

Feminist work produced in the late 1980s and 1990s takes a different slant. In Rendell’s (2000) third category, “Sexuality and Space: Rethinking Architectural History,” are works considering architecture and architectural practices of the past, using feminist and critical theory drawn from fields such as psychoanalysis, philosophy, cultural studies, film theory, and art history. This genre of work has produced, according to Rendell, an architectural history more critical of how patriarchy, capitalism, heterosexism, and racism operate in the production of architecture. The feminist work in Rendell’s last category, “Desiring Practices: Rethinking Architectural Design,” emphasizes the thinking of architectural practice as primarily text. Architecture is critiqued as a form of representation consisting of images and writing.

In both Rendell’s (2000) and Rothschild and Rosner’s (1999) organizing schemas of feminist projects in architecture, we see the intellectual growth of the field from one of binary inquiry to one of multifaceted, more nuanced, and certainly more complex analyses and interpretations, similar to the growth of feminist inquiry in general. But there is also a tension between the two, stemming from the defining and framing of architecture itself. Rothschild and Rosner’s is the more inclusive: they include research and projects entailing the gendering of consumption, experience, and the use of the built environment. The location of the bulk of this work in a “nonarchitectural” category (i.e., “Gender, Space”) in the book *Gender, Space, Architecture* (2000) ironically reflects the received view of architecture, with its defining tripartite dimensions of history, theory, and design—the three “sirens” whose performances are primarily initiated and culturally dominated by architectural professionals and academics. Other disciplines or dimensions are merely supporting cast.

This fissure between the two frameworks can be better appreciated on

reading a review essay of the Swedish symposium “Feminine Practices,” in which Pat Morton (2000) distinguishes two orientations of feminist practice in architecture. The social orientation includes those who focus on women’s experience of the built environment, institutional critiques of the architectural profession, and the creation of alternative, feminist design methods. Focusing on the general category of the “feminine,” the poetic orientation includes those who construct theories of the formation of sexual difference within architectural discourse and design work that transgresses the gendered representational norms of architecture. The poetic’s dismissal of a socially engaged architecture coincides with post-modern architects’ evacuation of responsibility for the social consequences of architectural design and practice that has dominated the profession and the discipline since the early 1980s—including, it seems, the poetic feminist orientation within architecture. While the characterizations and sequencing of the two orientations are simplistic and even stereotyped (such is the case with dualities), Morton’s depiction does resonate with the source of the tension—not only from contested positions of where social change best emanates (discussed in more detail later) but also the public sources where these feminist strands play out. What she calls “poetic” is seemingly dominant in certain presses and conferences: the socially engaged in less avant-garde forums in the discipline and in less prestigious, “high-design” commissions within the profession.

While Morton contends that the editors of the collection *Architecture and Feminism* aspire to bridge the gap between socially engaged feminist architecture and what she calls theoretically sophisticated architecture by women, the structure of this and many of the other edited collections does not allow such connectedness to occur easily. While individually intriguing and arresting, chapters are presented serially, with no attempt at bridging, let alone insightful conceptual linkage or even juxtaposition. There is no dialogue or interaction attempted whatsoever. In an entirely different context, Karen A. Franck and Lynda H. Schneekloth’s book on architectural and design typology (1994) provides an organizing structure that allows the different authors to respond to ideas and issues posed by other authors in different essays alongside (i.e., in the margins), in a manner that almost compels the reader to join in the conversation. If we want to “build bridges,” in Morton’s words, we need to rethink organizational and editorial structures that connect. But even before that we need to consider the unspoken basis for the works selected in these collections.

The questioning of *interdisciplinary*

While many recent edited collections flaunt the label *interdisciplinary* in their introductions and book jackets, the usual theoretical suspects come primarily from the humanities fields (where I lodge “cultural studies”), psychoanalysis, and art and film criticism.⁶ Considerably fewer contributions come from authors in disciplines reflecting social science research, such as geography, anthropology, archeology, cognitive psychology, sociology, environmental psychology, and environment-behavior studies—disciplines where feminist researchers have produced a considerable amount of research and writing on gender and built landscape issues in the past decade.⁷ Contributions from the professional face of architecture, which focuses on constructed buildings rather than representational space or hypothetical buildings, also appear infrequently in these edited collections and special journal issues. Very little surfaces from collateral professional studies such as organizational behavior and management, urban planning and policy, and the like—again instances where there is a considerable body of relevant work.⁸

Also absent in the oft-cited “interdisciplinary” fray are theorists and researchers from the natural, computational, information, and physical sciences. While there is little work here that directly focuses its lens on gender and architecture issues, it seems plausible that feminist writings in these fields could enrich a more penetrating, dare I say “more multidisciplinary,” framing of feminist work in architecture. Prescriptive architectural stances based on evolutionary psychology and Darwinian theory (e.g., Hershey 1999; Hildebrand 1999), which have received considerable architectural and public press, could certainly stand scrutiny by feminist scientists of evolutionary psychology and behavior. The efforts of Elizabeth A. Wilson (1998) and others in contemporary theories of cognition (i.e., connectionism) could lend themselves to tackling gendered cognitions of architectural spaces and places as well. Wilson finds that the neurological facets of connectionism are indispensable to rethinking cognition, psyche, and biology, topics currently examined in feminist theory but from a rather singular lens. In most feminist castings of architectural

⁶ For instance, often cited as one of the first interdisciplinary texts of feminist analyses of architecture, *Sexuality and Space* (Colomina 1992) includes authors from a number of different disciplines, but they tend to use the same lens—psychoanalytic theory, especially of the Lacanian variant.

⁷ See, e.g., Michelson 1985; Ardener 1993; Dandekar 1993; Rose 1993; Altman and Churchman 1994; Massey 1994; Drucker and Gumpert 1997; McDowell 1999; Arnold and Wicker 2001; Domosh and Seager 2001; Franck 2002.

⁸ See, e.g., Milroy 1991; Greed 1994; Ritzdorf 1994; Fenster 1999; Miranne and Young 2000; Halford and Leonard 2001.

thought and practice (e.g., Agrest 1993), the body is viewed as a cultural, representational, and psychoanalytic entity but rarely as a physiological, biochemical, or microbiologically constituted one (see Keddy 2002 for a review). The body in these postmodern architectural writings usually “does not suffer under the elements, encounter other species, experience primal fear or much in the way of exhilaration, or strain its muscles to the utmost. . . . It doesn’t engage in physical endeavor or spend time out of doors. . . . [T]his body described in theory never even aches from hauling the complete works of Kierkegaard across campus” (Solnit 2000, 28). The body in architectural thought and discourse is not simply non-female, as many feminist theorists have pointed out (e.g., Agrest 1993; Grosz 1996). It is also curiously abiological, although sex-related anatomical representations of cities and buildings have a long, continuing history in architecture.⁹

What feminist projects in architecture remain unconceived, what questions remain unasked, because of presumptive foreclosures set from restricting the range of disciplines considered and invited, from routinizing our critical habits and procedures, including antiempirical presumptions? My criticism of the claim of interdisciplinarity is not that it is not interdisciplinary but that it is often the same disciplines being invited to and appearing at the table. If we believe interdisciplinarity is important, why not pursue it in a more comprehensive, inclusive fashion? Why not provide more opportunities, structures, and accessible language that not only allow but welcome diversity? What would it mean to look at architecture from feminist perspectives of not only design, history, psychoanalysis, literary studies, and philosophy (i.e., the usual suspects) but also archeology, sociology, organizational behavior, urban planning and policy, cognitive science, evolutionary science, human kinetics, and the like? Indeed, why not ergonomics? Lance Hosey’s (2001) illuminating analysis of the anthropometric diagrams of nearly seventy years of *Graphic Standards* demonstrates the many ways in which implicit sexism and racism enter architecture’s standards of practice. Because feminism’s maturity in architecture is now witnessed in anthologies and cited sources, it is time to critically question a disciplinary regulation of representation in these recent collections, their overwhelmingly Anglocentric character, and their often nonempirical,¹⁰ non-experiential emphasis—yet all the while flaunting the label “interdiscipli-

⁹ See Karen Keddy’s (2002) current work for an exception.

¹⁰ By the term *empirical*, I do not mean to suggest a narrow usage restricted to an experimental nature. Rather I use the term to reflect that which is guided by the experience of oneself and of specific others, through trenchant observation and listening.

nary.” We also need to stop and ponder why the same disciplinary voices and analytical perspectives are found in current nonfeminist architectural collections as well.

This narrowing—or at least premature arresting—of interdisciplinary invitation also arises in part from the varied and contested term *theory* used in these frameworks and in feminist and architectural discourses generally. Within much of the architectural discipline today, and certainly within poststructuralism, empirically grounded theory is generally disrespected, even discounted.¹¹ The absence of empirically grounded theory in what is labeled feminist theory in many of these collections reflects in part the postmodern turn in architecture (and elsewhere). “The space between the studs” here—that is, what is not being said—is the dilemma of what constitutes “theory” and why certain writings are deemed theory and some are not.

This is part of a much larger debate (e.g., Albrecht 2002) that I cannot go into here. But one perspective that might provide a path out of the quagmire, or at least establish a common ground for debate, is Charlene Haddock Seigfried’s (1991, 1996) considerable work in linking pragmatist and neopragmatist theory with feminism—a perspective I have not come across in feminist writings in architecture. The early pragmatists located reflection in its actual historical, psychological, economic, political, and cultural context and defined its goal as the intelligent overcoming of oppressive conditions. They believed that theory unrelated to practice is moribund and stressed active engagement in the problems of their day. They aimed at democratic inclusiveness and, for the most part, fought the development of a specialized disciplinary jargon inaccessible except to a specialist elite. To the pragmatists, theory had to clarify rather than distort lived-through experiences; it had to facilitate valuable transformations of everyday experiences. Perhaps by revaluing the multiple intentions and meanings of theory in architecture, as both profession and discipline, feminist scholars and practitioners can embrace not only the abstract conceptual nature of much postmodern theorizing but also that derived from serious “hanging out,” looking at, listening to, scrutinizing, and theorizing lived experiences of the everyday.

¹¹ This is not the case in those realms of architecture dealing with structures, materials, and the like, nor when the focus is on architectural history.

Lived experiences in creating architecture

Poststructuralism—in architecture and elsewhere—has been attacked for its seeming detachment from the concrete, from issues of practical life and social change. And among the feminist writings in architecture during the 1990s, abstract representations were a visibly dominant presence over that of lived experience in the academic-disciplinary architectural discourse. Yet some of the richest feminist contributions in the past decade have positioned their projects within the everyday world where individuals conduct their daily lives; where social life consists of exchanges, encounters, conflicts, and connections with one another; and where human interaction is not that of abstract citizens or economic agents but of individuals relating to each other in the flow of daily life (McLeod 2000).

As currently practiced in schools and scholarship in North America, architectural history generally ignores the presence of women unless a woman is designated an architect or a prominent patron (Ghirardo 1996). While many historians today are unearthing documents and constructing biographies and profiles of individual women architects and designers, another cadre of feminist scholars is rethinking the very nature of what is architecture and what is history. One venue is interpreting the lives of architects within the social context, including gender, of their times. An example of this is Diane Favro's (1992) analysis of the architect Julia Morgan, which braids together the social facets that shaped Morgan's practice, influence, and posterity. Another tactic is one proposed by Diane Ghirardo (1996) that places women, their spaces, and their roles in the shaping of cities at the forefront, and not only when women were the designers. Following the theoretical argument of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu that it is through social practices that spaces are configured and acquire meaning, Ghirardo's proposal places the social practices of both women and men at the forefront and understands those practices and therefore spaces in their contexts. She illustrates this approach by her own fascinating research in Ferrara, Italy, during the Fascist period, where the ideal of the domestic sphere did not represent the condition of many women, and where in such circumstances, women took control of their lives in part by moving out of the domestic sphere and into the so-called public one.

In a similar vein, Susana Torre (2000) contends that the role of women in the transformation of cities remains theoretically problematic, with working-class women in particular often presented as mindless followers of a collective social project rather than as initiators and instigators who alter society's perception of public space. She describes the Mothers of

the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, a small but persistent band of women protestors who first captured international attention in the mid-1970s with their sustained presence in the nation's principal "space of public appearance." Their appropriation of the public square as a stage for the enactment of their plea demonstrates that the public realm neither resides in nor can be represented by buildings and spaces but rather is summoned into existence by social actions.

In *How Women Saved the City*, Daphne Spain (2001) examines how women's participation between the Civil War and World War I in voluntary organizations such as the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), the Salvation Army, and the National Association of Colored Women helped create places through a process that she calls "voluntary vernacular," spaces in which problems associated with race relations, immigration, and women's status were at the forefront of dialogue and attention, if not exactly resolved. Few architectural historians, however, identify these places—boarding houses, vocational schools, settlement houses, public baths, playgrounds, and the like—as architecture because they were rarely purpose-built by professionals. But as she notes, if we accept Frank Lloyd Wright's definition that architecture stands for "institutionalized patterns of human relatedness that make possible the endurance of the city, or of society, or of the state,"¹² redemptive places would qualify, as they represent organized attempts to construct social order in a time of intense demographic, technological, and cultural change.

ALICE through the Glass Ceiling was a solo exhibition of work by Sally Levine that focused on the status of women in the field of architecture specifically, and professional women in general, to look at the other side of the glass ceiling.¹³ One installation, for example, called "Rose Colored Glasses" looked at the discrepancy between the rosy media versions of women architects and the reality of women's architectural work. A series of framed building projects 30 inches × 42 inches by architects such as Marion Mahoney Griffen, Julia Morgan, Eileen Gray, and others were juxtaposed with nine miniature images of women portraying architects in the media: in film, television, magazine fashion spreads, and print ads. The next layer was a set of nine viewing devices, held on stands made of steel plate, coil, and reinforcing rod. Covered with rose-colored gels, the lenses focus directly on the media images, placed in the gallery relative

¹² Cited in Spain 2001, 20.

¹³ The acronym ALICE stands for *Architecture Lets in Chicks, Except. . . .*

to their magnifying capabilities. But as the viewer looks beyond the media mystique, the real work becomes most prominent.

Labelle Prussin's (1995) extensive study of the design and construction processes of nomadic peoples in Africa spotlights built structures traditionally perceived as "outside" the domain of architecture, such as mat-covered frames, tensile structures, and other nomadic spaces. In so doing, Prussin challenges us to redefine architecture as well as who does architecture. African nomads view displacement and resettlement as a way of life around which their whole worldview, including gender, is constructed. Central to this way of life are their tent dwellings, with women being the architects of these tents.

Within an entirely different realm from Prussin's analysis of African nomadic structures, but likewise focusing on lived experiences in creating architecture, is Alice Friedman's (1998) *Women and the Making of the Modern House*. The houses that prominent architects such as Wright, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Richard Neutra, and others designed for women heads of household are among their most significant works, and many have become canonized in the history of twentieth-century modern architecture. Friedman relates the personal philosophies and lifestyles of six female clients who helped shape these exemplars of modern domestic architecture—and not simply as architectural exemplars but as homes to these women as well. While the structures themselves represent the high design canon, Friedman's trenchant, in-depth analysis hinges on the clients' proclivities, values, lives, contributions, and interactions with the architects. Two questions drive her work: Why were independent women clients such powerful catalysts for innovation in domestic projects during the modern movement? And why is it that an unexpectedly large number of the most significant and original houses built in Europe and America in the twentieth century were commissioned by female clients? Combining social and architectural history to investigate the roles played by both architects and clients and exploring the processes of collaboration and negotiation through which decisions about program and design were made, Friedman suggests that these structures derived not only from their times, when the essence of modernity was the complete alteration of "home" in terms of construction, materials, and interior spaces, but also from the goals of these independent women, which entwined with this ideology. Their redefinition of domesticity was fundamentally both spatial and physical. These were women who, by and large, faced the conflict between the expectation of marriage and the independent lives they chose and, in so doing, reexamined the separation between the individual house-

hold and the community, replacing it with a wider spectrum of alternatives. As Friedman demonstrates, by changing the social agenda, these women changed the architectural agenda.¹⁴

What Friedman's analysis signals, which is often obscure in other feminist analyses, is the significant, defining influence of the program in the making and subverting of architecture. Programming is the definitional stage of design, the time to discover and establish the nature of the design problem rather than the nature of the design solution (Hershberger 1999). On the surface, a program is simply a list of spaces denoting specific rooms and outdoor spaces, with a gross size for each, sometimes a few key relationships between them, and an overall budget for the project. But there are subterranean elements to the development of this program. The very name of the place or facility to be built and the list of spaces it contains, as well as their functions and their cost, tacitly represent certain social values and relationships that are expected to be supported. Murray Silverstein and Max Jacobson (1985) call this "the hidden program," the system of relationships usually taken for granted that give the building its basic social-physical form and connect it to the rest of society. Architects often avoid dealing with or confronting hidden programs, in part because they feel they are powerless to act on them. Also, once scrutinized, hidden programs can raise questions of such essence that they put the very nature of the building in doubt. It is not likely for an architect to go to the roots of a building type, expertly expose and challenge its hidden program, and still be employed by the client. Furthermore, fundamental restructuring of the hidden program requires sustained social, political, and historical insight and the ability to understand people and what they feel but can hardly say—skills generally not developed in architecture schools or while interning at architecture firms (Silverstein and Jacobson 1985).

But shaping the hidden (and then subsequently the visible) program is a means of controlling the production of the built form. Friedman's portrayals show how these modern architectural exemplars resulted not simply from collaboration over a drafting board or job site but from innovations in fundamental rethinking of the nature of the hidden program—of home, in these instances.

¹⁴ While Friedman's book focuses on highly prominent houses, their designers, and their clients, some of her other work examines lesser-known houses and architects, yet still with women driving the program in collaboration with the architect. One such example is Villa Lewaro in Irvington, New York, built in 1916–17 for Madam C. J. Walker, the founder and head of the Madam C. J. Walker Manufacturing Company and the first African-American woman millionaire (Friedman 1999).

The lived experience of architecture is also highlighted in research and scholarship that explores women's occupation of places in the built landscape. Mary McLeod (1996) contends that a paramount problem in post-structuralist theory generally and contemporary architecture theory specifically is that while these theorists assert and celebrate the "marginal," the "other," that has been repressed in past interpretations, there is yet little substance between any connections of this abstract "other" and women's actual social situations, that is, their lived experiences. Many of these accounts "display an almost callous disregard for the needs of the less powerful—older people, the handicapped, the sick—who are more likely to seek security, comfort, and the pleasures of everyday life than to pursue the thrills of transgression and 'difference'" (10). But McLeod considers Jane Jacobs the most influential critic to stress issues of the everyday in architecture. Preceding the advent of modern feminism and the women's movement in the United States, Jacobs's 1961 book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* does not identify gender as a specific condition of the urban landscape. Yet the urban landscape that Jacobs does portray reflects a woman's experience, a lived experience (Rosenberg 1994; Struglia 1996). As McLeod notes, Jacobs views cities not from overhead as if standing in a penthouse at the top of a skyscraper looking down but from the street level of the pedestrian, the resident, the everyday user. The world she invokes is that of the stoop, the neighborhood market, the hawkers and their wares, the dry cleaners, and the neighborhood park of mothers and children. Her visions share "much with postmodern thought: an interest in blurring categories, in diversity, in understanding and enjoying a genuinely heterotopic milieu" (McLeod 1996, 24), but one with a tangible, empirical, experiential tenor.¹⁵

Jacobs's concentration on the lived experience of the everyday marks only the genesis of this focus in a genre of feminist scholarship in architecture and the built environment. In her analysis of Muslim women's access to and occupation of different kinds of space in the Sahelian city of Maradi, Niger, for example, Barbara Cooper (1997) contends that thinking about how women move through space, rather than focusing on the character of the spaces themselves, may help feminist theorists find a new and revitalizing point of entry into the question of female agency. She documents how women contribute to the gradual transformation of gender relations not simply through conscious manipulation, resistance, or protest but also through the active spatial positioning in which they

¹⁵ Still, as McLeod (1996) notes, Jacobs's depiction of the city as a "self-regulating system" offers few insights into confronting the connections between space and power.

engage in their everyday lives in an effort to define themselves socially and to improve their lives materially. Likewise, Zeynep Celik (1996) depicts the privacy and freedom of movement that Islamic women found on the rooftop terraces of the Casbah that allowed them to control their own space for work and socialization.

Another example of this genre of feminist scholarship of the everyday built landscape is Spain's *Gendered Spaces* (1992). The theoretical orientations that drive Spain's analysis are sociological ones: Anthony Giddens's structuration theory and also social constructionism. But she sets out to substantiate her thesis of "gendered spaces" through cross-cultural historical and comparative analysis, using empirical, survey, and historical data as evidence. She casts a wide net—from Mongolian Gers to nineteenth-century schools to contemporary office parks. And while some settings and situations are covered rather superficially while others more extensively, her lens again is on the everyday environment in which gender is enacted spatially, day in, day out.

Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz (1984) recounts the design of and experiences in the Seven Sisters women's colleges in the United States, where spaces interplayed with society's views of women and women's views of themselves and experiences. Design emerged from and helped create both a different concept of and reality for women. College planners designed spaces intended to isolate and protect students, but such paternalistic intentions were subverted by the development of a flourishing student culture in which campus space was put to varying uses. Settings such as prisons and jails (Jackson and Stearns 1995), "servicescapes" such as beauty salons and barbershops (Fischer, Gainer, and Bristor 1998), and bars and bathhouses (Tattelman 1997; Wolfe 1997) are among the many sites where researchers have explored issues of gender occupation, identity, construction, and the reproduction of space and place in the everyday worlds of women and men.

The project of bricolage

The tension within feminist efforts in architecture surfaces again when considering the forms and meanings of praxis promoted. For those embracing what Morton (2000) calls the "poetic" orientation, change is instigated from transformed consciousness and awareness. In constructing the foundation for change, their intention is to subvert accepted meanings of architecture—as practiced, as represented. But while the intent is clear, the audience who can capitalize on such writings to challenge and subvert their

thinking is a very limited, elite one. The sense of distance or abstract theorizing in these analyses may not be very empowering or enabling for many women, their approaches may be too far removed from reality and real needs, and their language may be inaccessible and difficult to understand—all claims that make one question whether such feminist analysis is not simply an intellectual indulgence (Zalewski 2000). Ghirardo (1997, 77), for example, questions the arcane, fashionable, and limited portrayals that some women architects provide of their own work and thinking: “What marginalizes this work [i.e., profiles of women architects in a recent monograph] is less its content than its resilient pursuit of the fashionable instead of anything remotely resembling a political agenda or critique, inside or outside of architecture. At every point where one might anticipate some politicized understanding, the work drifts off into spacey and circular indecipherability. . . . I wonder what these decon reveries might offer to counter the disparaging references to women and gender issues?”

For those to whom feminism is both a political movement and a theoretical arena of analysis, praxis involves not only analyzing but dismantling structures and mounting a challenge in more than words addressed to an elite architectural audience alone. At a panel discussion held at the Dia Center for the Arts in New York (In ANY Event 1994), moderator Diana Agrest asked, “Can you have a feminist architecture?” But panelist Elizabeth Grosz reframed the question to her own understanding and political perspective: “Are there ways of occupying space and producing places that somehow contest, challenge, and problematize the dominant modalities of organization, of space and place?” (In ANY Event 1994, 55). Lending itself to inclusive yet political feminist approaches in architecture, this question—challenge, really—positions inhabiting and appropriating on the same footing as “architecture-as-object” in the making and meaning of place. By naming “occupying” and “producing,” Grosz calls for actions that contest, challenge, and problematize. In another context, Grosz further asks: “Will we theorists, critics, students, and practitioners of architecture participate in the work of generating ‘new perspectives, new bodies, new ways of inhabiting?’”¹⁶

To advance past architecture’s obsession with shaping objects and space alone to inventing new ways of shaping opportunities and lives through architecture, “new ways of inhabiting” as it were, means going beyond “gears, utensils, widgets, and tools, [to] patterns, rituals, perspectives, celebrations and relationships” (Flanagan 2001, 117). Architecture—as

¹⁶ Cited in Coleman 1996, xiv.

process, as symbol and representation, and as tangible and occupied product—then becomes a social enterprise as much as it is an intellectual, design, and technological invention.

Recent examples of feminist praxis that strive toward “new ways of inhabiting” through architecture appear from a number of sustained, or syncretic, collected works. One syncretic effort is in rethinking the education and practice of architects, based on research endeavors spanning different feminist positions. In her book *Designing for Diversity*, which incorporates the research of several years of interviewing and surveying hundreds of practicing architects, Kathryn H. Anthony (2001) identifies roadblocks to architectural practice that reveal gender and racial differences. But she also points out avenues that many underrepresented architects use when they choose to leave mainstream practice, succeeding in the architectural workplace of government work or corporate architecture, or within their own firms. Her book is replete with recommendations for changing the existing architectural workplace to make it more welcoming of diversity.

My work with Linda N. Groat (Ahrentzen and Groat 1992; Groat and Ahrentzen 1996, 1997) examines the gendered nature of architectural education from the perspectives of hundreds of faculty and students whom we have interviewed and surveyed in three major research studies. As both peripheral and central players in the field, women and students of color are in unique positions to propose ways to invent a critical form of education, and several specific facets of educational transformation were derived from our analysis of extended interviews with them. From our surveys and interviews, we also discovered aspects of the “hidden curriculum”¹⁷ in studio pedagogy, social dynamics, and ideals and expectations that tended to impede or support the progress of a diverse architectural student body. To the extent that school programs ignore the dynamics of the hidden curriculum, they not only turn away potentially talented students but also contribute to the crippling of a profession that must operate in a rapidly changing cultural and economic context.

Annmarie Adams and Peta Tancred’s (2000) study of Canadian women architects between 1920 and 1992 poses another way of thinking about women in this traditionally male occupation. Rejecting the idea that women architects are victims of professional marginalization, Adams and Tancred look at how women have shaped architecture, both its products

¹⁷ The hidden curriculum are those tacit values, norms, and attitudes embedded in the social milieu of the course or studio that shape and determine the course content as well as the process or method of instruction and learning of that content.

and its processes, to fit their own priorities. Women have transformed the architecture profession, they argue, by resisting the profession's definition of their proper roles in two ways: through their buildings and through their career choices. Women contributed to innovative modernist projects in Canada during the 1960s at the same time that women also entered alternative employment that expanded the boundaries of formal architectural practice. They attribute much of these women's success to Quebec's "Quiet Revolution" during the 1960s and 1970s when the social, political, and economic structure of the province was significantly transformed.

All of these works—of Anthony, of Groat and myself, of Adams and Tancred—spotlight the experience of "doing architecture" from the perspectives of many women's voices. These works also reflect a range of feminist perspectives on the making and remaking of the practicing architect. Adams and Tancred's work challenges the conventional look at the extant "top-down" view of the professions with a "bottom-up" view of the same work space, challenging much of the literature on gender and the professions that views and theorizes the professions from an institutional rather than an experiential perspective. They claim such a focus often results in homogenizing gendered experiences of professional work and workplaces. Adams and Tancred's expectation is that the interaction between the existing gendered substructure and women's experiences and actions can create new professional and workplace practices for architecture. Anthony's and Groat and my work take different perspectives, ones that are sometimes accused of being shortsighted because of limited transformative consequences. Liberal feminism's piecemeal, pragmatic approach that Anthony's work incorporates may harbor the dangers of relying on rights-based theories. And the cultural feminist approach emanating from Groat and my work runs the risk of stereotyping and totalizing. But as a practical strategy in the context of current political systems, they both offer a way of maneuvering through that system in ways that deconstructing fictional texts, for example, do not (Zalewski 2000).

The praxis value of these three works, however, lies not in their separate contributions but in syncretism: in uniting, not collapsing, them with a heterogeneous result. Together they represent short-term efforts and tactics to reform existing architectural education and practice, as well as long-term strategies to transform it; that is, syncretized efforts and strategies that together are simultaneously pragmatic and utopian in order to mutually strengthen. Tension arising from different forms of feminist praxis may be fruitfully harnessed when located in synergistic, rather than hierarchical, arrangements of levels of the political and analytical. Along the

same line, anthropologist Gregory Bateson (1979) has made the point that the combination of information from various systems of inquiry produces a type of knowledge that differs from the simple accumulation or addition of information. Using the analogy of vision, Bateson shows that the combination of information from different systems (right and left eyes) produces a new dimension of understanding, the dimension of depth. By combining and integrating the knowledge gained through various viewpoints, we can reach a deeper understanding of a topic than the understanding gained from any one system or from merely placing information side by side. To emphasize that this final activity is more than a matter of collating, collapsing, or totalizing perspectives, it is called *syncretism* rather than *synthesis*.

Another example of efforts to promote and develop “new ways of inhabiting” is Dolores Hayden’s perennial research, community outreach, and professional advocacy (1981, 1984, 1997), which has resulted, directly and indirectly, in many built projects and has infused a generation of practitioners and policy makers in rethinking the nature of the domestic environment. Her earlier work on Charlotte Perkins Gilman and other material feminists (Hayden 1981) identified a vigorous group of architects, journalists, domestic economists, sociologists, anarchists, and suffragists who created alternative living spaces. While for the most part the visionary designs and places catered to the middle class and were mostly elitist, Hayden’s research illuminated how gender relations act as one significant force in the creation of environments. Looking back at her proposals in *Redesigning the American Dream* (Hayden 1984) for reconstructing our gendered landscape in North America—places for cooperative meal sharing in residential developments, the conversion of neighborhood blocks into ones with collective backyards of community gardens and playgrounds, on-site child-care services in workplaces, conversions of the single-family house to multigenerational shared housing, and others—we see many of them today enacted in various communities of the country. Cohousing, for example, began to permeate the residential landscape in many regions of the country during the 1990s. While derived from Danish and Dutch models of collectively oriented housing, these cohousing developments reflect many of the reconstructed gendered practices in public and private space and relationships that Hayden advocated for and publicized as far back as the 1970s—even in that 1976 *Signs* essay!¹⁸

¹⁸ For other examples of innovative housing forms that reflect the ideas promoted by Hayden, see Franck and Ahrentzen 1989; Ahrentzen 1996b, 1999; and the Cohousing Web site: <http://www.cohousing.org>.

Hayden's more recent foray was in architectural preservation (Hayden 1997). Her eight-year *The Power of Place* project, situated primarily in Los Angeles, reflected a community effort to tie place to social history. It profiled distinctive environments ranging from citrus groves, commercial flower fields, oil fields, produce markets, prefabricated housing, and racially segregated firehouses. Asserting that *The Power of Place* and other groups are forging a new kind of urban presentation, one that is community based and targeted to saving vernacular landscapes, her work and book unite hands-on experience and extensive theoretical research to argue for an inclusive interpretation of social history and one that engages the public primarily through art.

Together, Hayden's writings, advocacy efforts, and projects have had what Joseph DiMento (1982) calls "conceptual influence" in policy making, where ideas seep into public dialogue to indirectly influence the thinking of the public and of policy makers. To many, her work has acted as a compass to show how changes in the landscape of life create new contexts, new experiences, and new meanings and can provide possibilities for resistance and contribute to social change.

While the written word in academic tomes seems to be the tool of choice for many postmodern feminists in efforts to subvert and challenge meanings as a form of praxis, exhibits can also act powerfully in this regard, in ways targeted and accessible to a more inclusive audience. In 1972, *Womanhouse* was a groundbreaking feminist project by Judy Chicago, Miriam Schapiro, Faith Wilding, and other artists involved in the Feminist Art Program at the California Institute of Arts and from the local community. Converting an entire house into a series of exhibits and stages for performance art, *Womanhouse* was open to the public for a limited time but captured on film (Denetrakas 1971–72). In the 1990s version, *WomEnhouse*, a multiauthored Web site, explores the politics of domesticity and gender relations through virtual "rooms" and conceptual domestic "spaces."¹⁹ Coming from different feminist perspectives but each reflecting a collaborative venture, both projects dissect the ways in which domestic environments are constructed, perceived, and occupied within gendered power systems.

There are also feminist efforts in architecture that urge us to go beyond simply developing "new ways of inhabiting" in order to focus on the built form and aesthetic itself (e.g., Dutton and Mann 1996). But effecting a formal aesthetic or design that represents critical, transformative feminist perspectives is likely not a top-down proposition. Karen Lehrman (2002)

¹⁹ See <http://www.cmp.ucr.edu>.

claims it is not female designers who have had a transforming effect on design since the 1970s but female consumers. Their interest in aesthetics coupled with women's responsibility for 80 percent of family consumer purchases has propelled the recent "design revolution" in the product industry. Female consumers are far more likely than men to judge a hotel by its window treatments or a razor by its shape, forcing the industries to pay as much attention to form as to function (Lehrman 2002). Here lessons are again drawn from Alice Friedman's work, reminding us of the importance of the program—the social, hidden, and personal—in driving form and aesthetic considerations. Any attempt to transform architecture, not simply as process but as form as well, will have to deal with the fact that architects and designers are generally not in charge of it. Our economic system has reduced the architect to the role of providing culturally acceptable rationalizations for projects whose form and use have by and large already been determined by real estate speculation (Knox 1987). Historically, architects have traded control over the building program for control over formal imagery in the profession's pursuit to define itself primarily as a practice of representation (Markus 1993). This division between formal and social programmatic issues in architecture further diminishes the engagement of architects with issues of power, a prospect untenable for feminists wishing to enact transformative changes in culture and the designed environment.

It seems, then, that feminist praxis and growth in architecture is a project of bricolage, in building stronger and stronger layers or linked threads so that ideas and beliefs about feminist theories and practices draw strength from one another. Claude Lévi-Strauss (1966) describes the *bricoleur* as an odd-job man who works with his hands, employing the *bricoles*, or odds and ends. Unlike the engineer, the *bricoleur* does not perform his work using raw materials and tools conceived and procured for the purpose of the project but rather collects tools and materials because they might come in handy. With a kind of functional arrogance, the *bricoleur* crafts and constructs iteratively and in so doing defines her own success as she engages with the toolbox and the junk box, interrogating their myriad contents to determine how they might be best put to use (Strasser 1999).

The syncretic approach of praxis mentioned earlier is not unlike the project of bricolage in combining the hermeneutic, critical, and empirical; the poetic and social; and process, experience, and form in an iterative layering and weaving so that it successively constructs and reconstructs something new. Since research shows that women more than men are comfortable in fields or departments that cross and transcend disciplinary

boundaries (Aisenberg and Harrington 1988), it may be their prerogative to be instigators of the project of bricolage. Bricolage, however, is tricky business. I am not suggesting we create a theoretical or representational bricolage that fails to achieve any sort of intellectual coherency. In feminist efforts in architecture, we need more continuing dialogue, not serial monologue and disruption. Before the next *Signs* review essay on feminism and architecture (hopefully not another twenty-five years!), feminist projects in architecture may collectively strive toward a multiplicitous, not totalizing or separatist, understanding and reconstructing of the gendering of built form and experience. A healthy, fruitful, and symbiotic tension can emanate as lived experiences and theoretical appropriations continually acknowledge, challenge, and enrich each other. It is a harmful tension if the various perspectives distort or unfairly deny the validity, even existence, of the others.

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