

Tendencies and Trajectories: Feminist Approaches in Architecture

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This chapter provides an overview of shifts in the debate around feminism and architecture over the past 40 years, from the 1970s, when (arguably) feminist debate in architecture first emerged, to the 1990s, when discussions concerning the relationship between gender and space gained strength in the academy, to the contemporary moment. We will see how the key concerns raised by gender and feminist theorists are evident in a wide range of architectural texts and practices, from the analytic to the productive, the interpretative to the speculative, and from those which are clearly aligned with the feminist movement, to those which do not necessarily identify themselves as 'political' or motivated by issues concerning discrimination against women. One of the most original and radical aspects of feminist and gendered critiques of architecture has been to draw attention to the body, to reveal how architectural knowledge is embodied and how the practice of architecture is material not only in terms of its engagement with the production of artifacts but also through animate bodies and corporeal processes.

In the first part, *Tendencies*, I outline how architecture's engagement with gender difference has changed in emphasis in the past 30 years, in response to the multifarious demands of 'feminisms' and the changing place of political work in the profession and the academy. In the second part, *Trajectories*, I turn my attention to the present moment, and sketch out the terms and concepts, processes and modes of analytic enquiry and interpretation, critical and creative production, which currently feature across the work of a wide range of architectural writers and practitioners interested in feminism and gender.

TENDENCIES

The early stages of the architectural debate emerged out of the more overtly politicized discourse of feminism(s), where feminists of different persuasions took varying positions: some liberal, arguing for equal representation in architecture, others radical, calling for

the overturning of the patriarchal profession of architecture and its replacement by a form of feminist practice with a different set of values. Within architectural practice, several forms of feminist design emerged, from socialist to essentialist. Published research on gender and architecture first started to appear in the late 1970s, largely written by women and from an overtly political feminist angle. Much of this work brought ideas about gender and women's studies generated in other fields – particularly anthropology, art history, cultural studies and geography and philosophy – to bear on architectural studies. This provided an interdisciplinary context for a gendered critique of architecture, one which expanded the terms of the discourse by making links with methodological approaches in other academic disciplines and which positioned gender theories, often drawn from other fields of study, as useful tools and models for critiquing architectural culture – history, theory, criticism and design. In the UK, the economic recession of the early 1990s produced a situation where a number of architects chose to pursue alternative forms of practice, such as projects, which fused architecture and art, and those which encouraged the role of ethnic minorities and women as clients. The GLC (Greater London Council) had, in an earlier period, supported non-mainstream forms of architectural practice, for example cooperatives, but as this tail-end of socialism disappeared, it was replaced by a cultural climate where state subsidies were removed and all forms of architectural practice were forced to compete in the open-market, thus making it extremely hard for such groups to survive.

Meanwhile in academia, over the same time frame, feminism and women's studies developed into gender studies. From a positive angle, this could be viewed as the recognition of the importance of the dialectical relationship between men and women, masculinity and femininity, and the role of gender as a category of analysis, but seen more negatively, the flourishing of gender studies presided over the slow disappearance

of a politically orientated feminist discourse that was more 'grassroots'/'direct-action' in its approach. In architectural history, the 'herstory' mode of recovering or bringing into visibility the work of female architects, patrons and users, shifted its focus to critiquing the gendering of the discipline itself, the notion of a canon and its associated tools of historical analysis, choosing instead to analyse the gendering of architecture and its multiple forms of representation. This rethinking of the methodology of architectural history was also inspired by feminist art historians such as Griselda Pollock (1981; 1988; 1992; Parker and Pollock 1987). Feminism, in this time period, deepened understandings, across disciplines, of the role of gender in producing forms of representation (both of architecture as a subject matter and the gendered subject his/herself), producing a situation where the signifying structure was no longer taken for granted, and subjects, selves and spaces were understood to be performed and constructed rather than natural and self-evident. This can be understood as part of the larger change in feminist cultural analysis described by Michèle Barrett (1992), for example, which moved from focusing on the causes of oppression to understanding the representation of those different modes of oppression, and representation itself as a tool of oppression.¹

The mid- to late 1990s saw the publication of a substantial number of texts investigating architecture and gender, but expanding the field to explore concerns with sex, desire, space and masculinity, and with a more explicit theoretical framing (Agrest et al. 1996; Coleman et al. 1996; Colomina 1992; Hughes 1996; McCorquodale et al. 1996; Sanders 1996). What such books had in common was their multifaceted nature. They were all edited collections, compositions of different voices, which, rather than simply describing the work of female architects or prescribing the architecture that feminists should produce, were characterized by a more speculative attitude toward the relationship of architecture and feminism.

Feminisms

One of the most important aspects of the relation between feminism and architecture is the diversity of the positions adopted. Some could be considered to follow principles of 'equality' (those who have sought to advance their recruitment and status within the ranks of the architecture profession as it exists) while others prefer principles of 'difference' (those who have questioned the nature of architectural practice and instead redefined their architectural design practice in ways that differ radically from existing models). In dealing with issues of difference, there have been several approaches to looking at the ways in which gender impacts on architecture.

One has been to critique architectural value systems as implicitly patriarchal and to focus on the problems inherent for women as users of 'man-made' environments (Little et al. 1988; Roberts 1991). Socialist and Marxist feminists involved in critiquing the 'man-made' environment in the late 1970s and early 1980s promoted a series of approaches to architectural design. The work of the American feminist planner and historian, Dolores Hayden, for instance, identified how certain features of the man-made environment discriminate against women, such as inhospitable streets, sexist symbolism in advertising and pornographic outlets (1986). Hayden proposed removing these sexist features and replacing them instead with child-care facilities, safe houses and better public transport to ensure a more equitable society. Matrix, a London-based feminist architectural cooperative, set up in the early 1980s, was also concerned with the problems experienced by women users of the man-made environment as well as designing spaces for women users which improved upon aspects of safety and accessibility in the public and domestic realms (Matrix 1984). The cooperative advocated a design process where users were involved in the design from the outset, and architects, rather than imposing their designs, acted as enablers helping

future occupants realize their own spatial needs and desires.

Implicit within this work is a critique of architectural value systems and a suggestion that women have different priorities in the design of built spaces and the organization of their production (Weisman 1992). Although aligned to a socialist viewpoint, this position closely fits with the agenda of radical feminism where femaleness and femininity are seen to encompass a set of qualities, which are quite different from maleness and masculinity (Kennedy 1981). Such feminists see the values of contemporary societies which are patriarchal, which organize and monopolize private property to the benefit of the male head of the family, as reflected in the often phallic building forms that they produce, the quintessential example being the skyscraper. Conversely they suggest that cultures, which revere the feminine principle and treat women at least as equals produce built forms related to the morphology of the female body (Lobell 1989).

A number of feminist designers have also drawn architectural inspiration from the female body, designing womb-like and curvaceous forms rather than phallic towers, spaces which focus on aspects of enclosure, exploring the relationship between inside and outside through openings, hollows and gaps. American critic Karen Franck, following Nancy Chodorow, has argued that women's socialization fosters a different value system emphasizing certain qualities such as connectedness, inclusiveness, an ethics of care, everyday life, subjectivity, feelings, complexity and flexibility in design. Franck has cited the work of women architects such as Eileen Gray, Lilly Reich and Susana Torre's projects such as 'House of Meaning' and 'Space as Matrix' as exemplary of this approach (Franck 1989). Promoting the idea that women designers and users value different kinds of spaces – ones which foster the flexibility required by women's social roles – also suggests analogies between spatial matrices and the fluid spatiality of the female body (Torre 1977, 186–202).

In this time period, a commitment to developing an understanding of the differences among women was key to the agenda of both black and lesbian feminists. The Combahee River Collective, for example, worked to form a more adequate feminist theory of racial difference, which involved developing thematics common to the work of many black women writers, such as a focus on the strength of black women as opposed to their more commonly perceived status as victims, the relation of everyday experience to theoretical concepts, and the positive aspects of relationships between women (Combahee River Collective 1982; see also Davis 1982; hooks 1989a; Collins 1990). For lesbian feminists, the difference between women was to be understood in terms of sexual preference as well as sex; and lesbianism a form of female culture and community as well as a **sexual practice**. For writers such as Adrienne Rich, lesbianism was experienced in the form of both 'continuum' and 'existence' (1983; Fuss 1991), while others emphasized the importance of female friendship (Bunch and Pollock 1983; Bunch 1987; Raymond 1986). The work of the black lesbian poet, Audre Lorde is exemplary here in that it engages with the emotional as well as the rational in order to draw out the interlocking relations of different forms of oppression due to race and sexuality, as well as class and gender (Lorde 1996).

Herstory

Feminist architectural history has also adopted a number of different approaches aligned with various political positions. Following reformist or liberal tactics aimed at establishing conditions of equality for women, some feminists have been concerned with women's exclusion from architecture and sought to produce an alternative history of architecture by uncovering evidence of women's contributions (Boutelle 1988), either as architects of large institutional buildings in the public realm, or within the

building industry and also through their roles as patrons, as the work of Alice T. Friedman has explored (1989; 1997). The work of Lynne Walker (1984) in the United Kingdom and Gwendolyn Wright (1977) in the United States has emphasized an important aspect of the historical recovery of the contribution of women to architecture. Both historians have highlighted the ways in which women have had to fight for inclusion in the predominantly male profession, from their acceptance in institutions of architectural education, to establishing themselves in offices as professional architects.

Other feminists have focused their critique on the gendered nature of architectural history itself, arguing that only the buildings of the great male masters have been categorized as 'architecture' and included in architectural history. By reclaiming the history of low-key buildings, everyday housing, domestic, interior and textile design, spaces or practices typically associated with women and regarded as trivial, such feminists show that it is not only the buildings of the public realm, financed by wealthy patrons, the nobility and merchants of the past and the wealthy capitalists of today, that are worthy of being part of history. In challenging what constitutes architecture, this work is strongly linked to the perspectives of Marxist geographers, namely David Harvey and Edward Soja, and Marxist philosopher, Henri Lefebvre, who have argued that space is socially produced and also that space is a condition of social production (see for example Harvey 1989; Soja 1989; Lefebvre 1991). Feminist geographers, such as Liz Bondi (1990; 1992; 1993), Doreen Massey (1994), Linda McDowell (1993) and Gillian Rose (1993), have developed and extended much of this work, arguing for attention to gender as well as class difference in the production of space.

Interdisciplinarity

Drawing on gender theory, from fields such as psychoanalysis, philosophy, cultural

studies, film theory and art history, increasingly developed the work of feminists in architectural studies through the late 1980s and 1990s, particularly in architectural history, theory and criticism. By the mid- to late-1990s, interdisciplinary feminist criticism had extended the field of architectural discourse, blurring the boundaries between theory and history, and between criticism and practice.

The implications of feminist work on representation and gender in other fields; namely psychoanalysis, philosophy, cultural studies, film theory and art history raised two main issues for the practice of architectural history; first, new objects of study – the actual material which historians choose to look at; and second, the intellectual criteria by which historians interpret those objects of study. An important body of work coming out of US scholarship, specifically East Coast universities such as Princeton and publications such as *Assemblage* and *ANY*, highlights the relevance of such methodological issues. Critics such as Beatriz Colomina (1994), Zeynep Çelik (1997a) and Mabel Wilson (1996) have focused on developing sustained feminist critiques of the traditional male canon. Using feminist interpretative techniques, they place issues of gender, race and ethnicity at the heart of the architectural practice of such male masters as Adolf Loos and Le Corbusier.

Theoretical approaches suggest new aspects of architecture to explore, equally new architectural objects provide new sites through which to explore theory and suggest new kinds of interpretative modes. Drawing on the work by queer theorists such as Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1991), notions of 'performativity' have provoked those in spatial disciplines to look at how place and gender are performed. For Butler, sex and gender are both social and historical constructions, gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; sex as natural fact does not precede the cultural inscription of gender. To think of the body only in terms of the biological, anatomical or physiological, is limited. Instead, Butler considers gender to

be a performance that produces the illusion of an inner sex. Butler (1990) suggests that 'gender trouble' is culturally produced through 'subversive body acts' or 'the body in drag' that exhibit the artificiality of gender and so subvert the system from within through parody. This notion of the 'performativity' of gender shows how the performance of gender may operate subversively to radically critique the naturalness of the biologically sexed body. Working with queer theory to rethink understandings of architecture in relation to the spatial practice of 'coming out', Henry Urbach has focused on the history of the design of the closet, to develop an argument concerning secrecy and display with relation to homosexuality (Urbach 1999).

Drawing on post-structuralism and psychoanalysis, gender and queer theory has developed a body of work which problematizes such seemingly stable terms as architecture, male and female, and examines architecture and masculinity as mutually reinforcing ideologies. In a profession where masculinity is collapsed into the neutral figure of the 'architect', and sites of current architectural education and discourse: the office, the media, the institution and the profession, are also considered gender neutral, recognizing gender as a social construction in order to critique the heterosexual patriarchal bastion of architectural practice has been of key importance. Joel Sander's critique of a project by architectural practice SOM, Cadet Quarters, US Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs, showed how representations of masculinity are central to the work of these contemporary architects (Sanders 1996, 68–78), while Diana Agrest (1993), using examples from the treatises of Renaissance architects who advocated the use of particular proportion systems for setting out the formal geometries of buildings, demonstrated how the male body was used to represent the ideal set of proportions, while the female body was either rejected from the practice of architecture or suppressed within it.

Over this period, feminist research shifted understandings of the role of theory from

inside to outside architecture, from design prescription to design critique, connecting architecture not only to production, but also to reproduction through representation, consumption, appropriation and occupation. Such work has highlighted new directions for feminist architectural practice to concentrate not only on the end product but also the process of design itself, thus pointing to the importance of the dialogue between theory and practice in architecture, which we might call 'feminist architectural practice'.

Feminist architectural practice

The work of feminist architectural practices such as *muf* in the United Kingdom and *Liquid Incorporated* in the United States, have strived to relate feminist theory to architectural design, built practice to written text, and dealt with issues of femininity and decoration, relations of looking and the materiality of fluids, and most importantly embodiment (*muf* 1996; 2001; Landesberg and Quatrala 1996). The drawn and written projects of American architect and critic, Jennifer Bloomer have been highly influential in this respect, dealing with the difference of the 'feminine'. Her texts have a spatially structured materiality, operating as metaphoric sites through which imaginative narratives are explored, as well as employing metonymic devices to bring the non-appropriate into architecture. For Bloomer (1993), different modes of writing express new ways of understanding architecture through the intimate and personal, the subjective rather than objective, through sensual rather than purely visual stimulation. Bloomer's text *is* her architecture; her textual strategies are used to interpret architectural drawings and spaces but also to create new notions of space and creativity, allowing links to be made between architectural design and theory. Her work has greatly influenced other architectural designers, whose projects draw on feminist theoretical concerns, to stimulate new forms of design, from

the choosing of site to the articulation of services.

Another important aspect of feminist architectural practice has been the testing of architecture's professional and disciplinary boundaries, as demonstrated through the work of architects who have developed the artistic aspect of their practice, such as Maya Lin, or collaborated with artists and other spatial practitioners in the public spaces of the city (Felshin 1995; Lacy 1995). Dance, film, art and writing have provided architecture with new feminist ways of working (Thomas et al. 2002), and clearly as well as the makers of works (the architectural practitioners, designers, urbanists, artists), the role of audience, user and critic have become vital to constructing the meaning of feminist practice.

Questions of subjectivity have been very important in feminist architectural practice, with the work of French feminists Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, being highly influential. Irigaray's work on mimicry (1985a, 133–146) argued that, if women are not speaking subjects in the existing symbolic order, then the only way for women to represent themselves is through an acknowledgement of this condition – through mimicking or parodying their objectified position. Architect Elizabeth Diller, addressed this issue through a project that demonstrated how feminist critiques of women's role as domestic labourers can be used to inspire creativity (Diller 1996). Diller's architectural project involved a complex choreography where, by performing a series of folding movements similar to origami, a number of shirts were ironed into perfectly useless forms. As a parody of the precision of housework and the reworking of such skills for a new function, this can be read as feminist architectural practice.

Over the last 30 years then, feminist architectural design and feminist architectural history and theory have changed internally and in relation to one another. On the one hand, feminist architectural history has developed from a recovery of evidence of

women architects to embrace the role of theory, specifically critical and gender theory in interpreting architectural representations historically. On the other hand, feminists have opened up definitions of architectural design to include process as well as product, drawing and writing as well as building, so that the distinctions between design, history and theory are now, more than ever, less than clear-cut.

However, there is still resistance from within the profession to modes of practice seen to be irrelevant to the task of providing buildings in the most cost-effective way possible. Women's exclusion from the architectural profession and education has been a historical problem connected with explicit sexism; today, although more women are entering the profession, a discrepancy between the number of women entering architectural education and those who become practising architects remains. A study in Australia, for example, which showed that although women made up 43 percent of architecture students, less than 1 percent were firm directors, connected this to the fact that women might choose not to take 'traditional practitioner paths'. The problem remains particularly acute for African American women licensed to practice architecture in the United States, where, although the figure has quadrupled over the past 15 years, they still account for only 0.2 percent of the total population of approximately 91,000 licensed architects.

TRAJECTORIES

The past decade has continued to see a flourishing of activity in feminism and architecture, driven by interdisciplinary concerns. One of the key aspects of change has been the role of theory, which has shifted from a tool of analysis to a mode of practice in its own right. The term 'theory' is here not understood to refer to modes of enquiry in science through either induction or deduction

but rather to critical theory (see Chapter 2). Critical theories are forms of knowledge which differ from theories in the natural sciences because they are 'reflective' rather than 'objectifying' and take into account their own procedures and methods; they aim neither to prove a hypothesis nor prescribe a particular methodology or solution to a problem but to offer self-reflective modes of thought that seek to change the world (Geuss 1981, 2). I extend the term 'critical theory' to include the work of feminists and others whose thinking is self-critical and desirous of social change – who seek to transform rather than describe (Rendell 2003). Much feminist practice in architecture has developed ways of working with the 'useful' aspect of theory, not necessarily from a pragmatic point of view, or through modes of applying theory, but rather by practising theory in a speculative manner – which combines critique and invention, and is performative and embodied.

Trajectories is divided into four subsections, each one of which highlights a particular theme important to the current intersection of feminism and architecture. These themes: critical spatial practices, other spaces, difference and location, and the performative turn, feature as the focal points of scholarly energy, professional disagreement and original new research.

Critical spatial practices

As just discussed, the opposition between history/theory/criticism (or activities which write about architecture) and design (or activities which produce architecture) has started to dissipate, especially in the academy, and increasingly outside it in practice, though not yet perhaps at the heart of the profession. Within academia, the rise in what has been termed 'practice-led/-based research' (Rendell 2004) as well as the influence of the writings of Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau on spatial practice, has produced an understanding of practice as a

process which occurs not only through the design of buildings but also through the activities of using, occupying and experiencing, as well as modes of writing and imaging which describe, analyse and interrogate (de Certeau 1984; Lefebvre 1991).

It is possible to draw connections between de Certeau's strategies and Lefebvre's representations of space on the one hand, and de Certeau's tactics and Lefebvre's spaces of representation on the other, and suggest a distinction between those practices (strategies) that operate to maintain and reinforce existing social and spatial orders, and those practices (tactics) that seek to critique and question them. I favour such a distinction and have called the latter 'critical spatial practice' – a term which serves to describe both everyday activities and creative practices which seek to resist the dominant social order of global corporate capitalism (Rendell 2006). This has been the aim of much of the increasing collaborative and interdisciplinary practice across art and architecture, where the construction of relationships between disciplines and a focus on the process as well as the product of design has started to play a key role and shape debate in the production of the public realm.

Described as an architectural practice, *muf*, for example, is frequently criticized for not producing any 'architecture' or buildings, but this is because its way of working is itself a critique of architectural design methodologies that emphasize form and object-making. *muf*'s working method highlights the importance of exchange across art and architecture, the participation of users in the design process and the importance of collaborating with other producers. For *muf*, the architectural design process is not an activity that leads to the making of a product, but is rather the location of the work itself (*muf* 2001, 25). *muf*'s methodology is established out of a critique of the brief, and through the ensuing development of a dialogue between clients, artists, architects and various other material fabricators, between those who produce the work and those who use it.

In architecture, to position a building as a 'methodology' rather than as the end result of the method or process that makes it, is a radical proposition.

Other spaces

Feminist critique has been particularly effective in mobilizing the possibilities of Derridean deconstruction in architecture (Derrida 1976, 6–26). The radical move deconstruction offers is to think 'both/and' rather than 'either/or', putting deferrals and differences into play and suggesting instead 'undecideability' and slippage. This has allowed a thorough and ongoing critique of a number of binary oppositions, but most specifically the separate spheres or the 'public–private' division of gendered space manifest in different cultures at various historical periods. This work has drawn attention to the spaces both marginalized within gendered binaries in mainstream architectural discourse, such as the domestic and the interior, and/or positioned as terms which exceed this binary distinction, such as the margin, the between, the everyday, the heterotopic and the abject (McLeod 1996; Campkin and Dobraszczyk 2007; Campkin and Cox 2008).

The interior and the domestic have been perhaps the most thoroughly explored of these 'other spaces' as they have both been directly associated with the private home, and as such subordinated to the public city, in both patriarchal and capitalist cultures, and within the discourse of modernity. There is a huge heritage of feminist literature, which critiques the separate spheres, and revalues the private sphere, but what is significant in this newer work, is the lack of defensive positioning. The arguments are not necessarily foregrounded in the separate spheres debate, nor launched from a specifically feminist position, and often forge alliances with texts that are not part of the feminist lineage (Heynen and Baydar 2005; Heynen 2002; Rosner 2005).

The research on the interior has a different resonance, with, I think, another set of reasons surrounding its current emergence. First, the newfound confidence of interior design or interior architecture, a professional and academic discipline which has long been marginalized in relation to architecture. The reader *Intimus*, for example, sketches out an intellectual context for interior design, which celebrates its difference from architecture and, in so doing, draws on a rich and far more densely textured field of reference (Taylor and Preston 2006). Second, the interior is both a space and an image (Penner and Rice 2004; Penner 2005), and as Rice discusses (2007), its emergence in the bourgeois culture of late-nineteenth-century Europe links it closely to the birth of psychoanalysis as a discipline. The significance of current interest in the interior might then be understood in terms of the position it occupies as the site of convergence between space and subjectivity, place and psyche.

Difference and location

The 1990s saw a rise in the relevance and pertinence of identity politics focusing on class, gender, race, ethnicity and sexuality. Emerging through, and at times diverging from, this discourse, has been the work of post-structuralist feminists. This work has been particularly important for architecture in offering metaphorical insights; new ways of knowing and being have been discussed in spatial terms, developing conceptual and critical tools such as 'situated knowledge' (Haraway 1988) and 'standpoint theory' (Flax 1991) to examine the interrelations between location, identity and knowledge (Probyn 1990; Benhabib 1992). The groundbreaking personal/poetic writing of black women such as bell hooks is seminal here, as well as the work of Rosi Braidotti (1994) whose figure of the 'nomadic subject' describes not only a spatial state of movement, but also an epistemological condition,

a kind of knowingness (or unknowingness) that refuses fixity.

This subtle understanding of position as physical, emotional and ideological, and difference as multiple rather than binary, as well as a diversified knowledge of the role of colonializing practices/discourses, is present in new understandings of positioned knowledge from a range of theorists including Seyla Benhabib, Sue Best, Rosalyn Diprose, Jane Flax, Moira Gatens, Sandra Harding, Elspeth Probyn, Linda Nicholson, Andrea Nye and Gayatri Spivak. As this work makes clear, identities are contingent and situated, constructed in response to particular times and places. The notion of gender difference as essentialist – as ahistorical and ageographical – is thoroughly critiqued. Many of those with an Anglophone perspective have been wary of the 'feminine' for its association with biological essentialism, but for those with a training in continental philosophy and in the French language, it is clear that the 'feminine' is not only biological but also cultural, and has been associated with the other and with lack (following Jacques Lacan), and as the site of difference itself (Jacques Derrida). Indeed one feminist critic has wondered whether the role of females in producing architectural space can be examined without recourse to the 'feminine' (Bergren 1994). Unleashed afresh, the feminine is a term, which has recently allowed feminists a vibrant engagement with aesthetic experience.

An important and timely volume, *Altering Practices*, edited by Doina Petrescu (2007) brings the debate around feminism and architecture right up to date, with a discussion of the 'poetics and politics of the feminine'. In taking account of the feminine, rather than, or at least as well as, the feminist, essays in this book acknowledge the role of aesthetics as well as ethics, form as well as function, in architecture, turning the focus to the processes through which practices of space are gendered. The focus on the other, and within the book the development of an understanding of practices which aim to

change, transform or alter, as forms of practising 'otherwise' or 'otherhow', evidences the diverse range of feminist work current in architecture in a clear, articulate and political way. Petrescu's own practice as an architect with aaa (atelier d'architecture autogérée), and the ECObox project based in the La Chapelle area of Paris, is transdisciplinary, locally focused and works to produce small changes on a micro level in the community (Petrescu 2005).

The question of difference has not only been taken up and explored by feminists, but also by those in postcolonial theory (see also Chapter 3). In architecture, work in this area has transformed from 'critical regionalism' into a more profoundly politicized and radical arena. Lesley Lokko has addressed issues of black identity in her edited book *White Papers, Black Marks: Architecture, Race, Culture* (2000), which holds fast to a strong sense of desire for political change while recognizing the often contingent and situated conditions of race and identity. Felipe Hernandez's work, although not explicitly about gender, also makes an important point in this field. Hernandez has chosen to develop the critical concept of 'transculturation' generated by the Cuban anthropologist, Fernando Ortiz, in the early 1940s, in relation to his own research on Latin American architecture. This a pointedly political alternative to the more usual use of the 'holy trinity' of Homi Bhabha, Edward Said and Spivak, whose theoretical writings are the backbone of postcolonial studies, yet whose own locational positions in the West are less often taken into account. For Hernandez, the location of theory is an important part of his project (Hernandez 2003; Hernandez et al. 2006).

The work of women architects from South Asia presented in the 2000 *An Emancipated Place* conference held in Mumbai, likewise challenged conventional, and usually minority world-dominated, ways of defining architecture and the role of the architect (Somaya et al. 2000). Rather than adopt a purely conceptual perspective, different

modes of practice were presented as alternative models with 'holistic and inclusive' values instead of didactic ones. These included projects which addressed issues such as participation, enabling, sustainability and conservation of tradition and heritage. In these works, the architect's working mode turns out either to be acting as a community developer or as organizers of a participatory process (e.g. Yasmeen Lari, Brinda Somaya, Afroza Ahmed, Gita Balakrishnan), or creating 'a balance in life' (between nature and architecture) (e.g. Meena Mani, Namita Singh, Anupama Kundoo, Parul Zaveri), or conserving heritage settlements and buildings (e.g. Yasmeen Lari, Sandhya Sawant, Abha Narain Lambah) and crafts (e.g. Minnette De Silva, Parul Zaveri). The attitude towards architecture expressed in *An Emancipated Place* highlights the material reality of the area – a poverty-stricken framework in rural and urban areas – and the need for architects who can address environmental and humanitarian concerns not as a choice but as a necessity and effective intervention in this context. In this conference, it was the other place in terms of geographical location and architecture construction, which provided difference rather than only gender.

The performative turn

In visual and spatial culture, feminists have drawn extensively on psychoanalytic theory to further understand relationships between the spatial politics of internal psychological figures and external cultural geographies (Friedman 1998; Fuss 1995; Rogoff 2000; Silverman 1996). The field of psychoanalysis explores these various thresholds and boundaries between private and public, inner and outer, subject and object, personal and social, in terms of a complex understanding of the relationship between 'internal' and 'external' space. The writings of philosopher Elizabeth Grosz (1994; 2001) and geographer Steve Pile (1996) have been particularly influential in this respect.

Although psychoanalysis has given architectural research insight into the theoretical interpretation of buildings, images and texts, what is new in the feminist work in this area, is the interest in the production of subjectivity and the performative qualities of criticism. Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson (1999), for example, take issue with the tradition that the interpreter must be neutral or disinterested in the objects, which s/he judges, and posit instead, with reference to spatial mobility, that the process of viewing and interpreting involves 'entanglement in intersubjective spaces of desire, projection and identification'. Peggy Phelan's commentaries on performance art (1993) have developed a mode of writing criticism that declares its own performativity and the presence of the body of the critic in the writing as 'marked'. In Della Pollock's highly informative discussion of the key qualities of performance writing (1997), she includes being subjective, as well as evocative, metonymic, nervous, citational and consequential as exceptional aspects of this type of writing. And in Gavin Butt's edited volume (2005) the attempt by critics and practitioners to 'renew criticism's energies' occurs specifically through a 'theatrical turn'.

The level of performativity and self-reflectivity in architectural debate has tended to lag behind other disciplines, namely art and literature. Although, there has been, in architecture, some degree of exploration of the relation between criticism, history and theory (Nesbitt 1996; Hays 2000; Leach 1997; Borden and Rendell 2000), there has been very little explicit discussion of the situated-ness of the critic, and therefore the relation between criticism and practice. My own practice of 'site-writing' (Rendell 2010) aims to address this issue. Site-writing explores the position of the author, not only in relation to theoretical ideas, art objects, and architectural spaces, but also to the site of writing itself. My suggestion is that in operating as a mode of practice in its own right, this kind of criticism or critical spatial writing, questions the terms of reference that

relate the critic to the work positioned 'under' critique, transforming over time depending on their specific locations, constructing as well as tracing the sites of relation between critic and work.

Feminists in cultural, literary and post-colonial criticism, such as Cixous (Sellers 1994) and Gloria Anzaldúa (1999), have woven the autobiographical into the critical in their texts, combining poetic writing with theoretical analysis to articulate hybrid voices. 'Voices' can be objective *and* subjective, distant *and* intimate, drawing on spaces as they are remembered, dreamed and imagined, as well as observed, in order to take into account the critic's position in relation to a work and challenge criticism as a form of knowledge with a singular and static point of view located in the here and now. Mieke Bal's exploration of the critic's 'engagement' with art explores this territory in art history, as someone coming from literary criticism, her interest in narrative opens up ways of thinking about subject positions in criticism (Bal 2001, xi; Bryson 2001, 12). In architecture, Guiliana Bruno (2002), another interdisciplinary traveller, moving this time from film criticism to architecture, also points to the situated nature of writing about architecture, outlining both a personal journey in the introduction to her *Atlas of Emotion*, as well as suggesting that the book itself adopts a spatial structure. For my own part, rather than write *about* the work, I am interested in how the critic constructs his or her writing in relation *to* and in dialogue *with* the work. The focus on the preposition here allows a direct connection to be made between the positional *and* the relational.

The work of Katja Grillner and her colleagues at KTH Stockholm, has been developing in similar directions, examining how writing constructs as well as reflects meaning (Grillner et al. 2005). The role of writing as a form of practice in its own right, has been explored by Rolf Hughes in his discussion of the prose poem as a hybrid genre which combines critical and creative writing practices in relation to what is called practice-led

or based research (Hughes 2006). Katerina Bonnevier operates a performative writing which stages theoretical analysis and historical research to re-examine queer space (Bonnevier 2007). Taken as a whole, this research considers the modes in which we practice theory and criticism to be more than a description of content, but to define critical positions, the 'architecture' of theory then takes into account the structure, processes and materials of the medium employed – these are considered integral to the construction of the writing, showing that theory and criticism are themselves material practices.

The influence of Marxist methodologies in architectural history has played a key role in critiquing a type of architectural history, which placed the designer and the form of the building at the forefront of the discipline. Historical materialism pointed instead to the 'social production of space' – to the role of the construction industry, cultural/social context, as well as the reproduction of space through its representation and use. Such methodologies have been adopted/adapted by certain feminists in the field to highlight the gendering of processes of production and reproduction, but also through feminism's own version of materialist analysis, to develop an understanding of the role of body as matter (Rawes 2007a; 2007b).

This understanding of 'materiality' has started to produce work where material is not only seen as the social and economic context for architecture but also viewed as an active ingredient in the processes of making architecture. This might appear rather obvious in relation to architectural design, but feminist explorations of the different potential of architectural materials from the conceptual design to the level of the detail remain limited; the theoretical work of Katie Lloyd Thomas (2007) is an exception. Sarah Wigglesworth Architecture is one practice, which has consistently explored new potentials for materials, most famously in the use of an unusual range of material including quilting and straw, at 9 Stock Orchard Street,

the Straw House, 2001. It is also the case that the processes of researching and writing architecture have been informed by material concerns, placing emphasis on embodiment, narrative and voice, and articulating texts that are patterned, and that create topographies of intersecting epistemologies and ontologies (Araujo et al. 2007).

CONCLUSION

This apparently highly integrated situation where theory and practice are in dialogue, as I have described it here, could be understood as an expression of the new-found confidence of feminism in architecture, that the gender debate has infused architecture to such an extent that there is no longer any need to directly address issues of oppression. This condition, however, is potentially highly dangerous for two reasons.

First, it could obscure the vital contribution of feminist forbears, producing a new version of 'hidden from history' and diffusing feminism's political imperative. It is interesting to note here that we have seen perhaps fewer sole-authored publications by feminists in architecture than in other disciplines such as visual culture, art history and cultural geography. The recent edited collections which have deepened the exploration of certain gendered dimensions of architectural design and culture have operated in a different mode of authorship, collaborative rather than sole, and in a more nuanced way looking at themes that derive from feminist enquiry but, for the non-informed and often non-feminist reader, are not obviously associated with it, such as domesticity, materiality and pattern. Such collections have been edited by feminists (and I include myself here) who ten years ago would have made their feminist agenda explicit whereas now they seemingly no longer feel the need to do so, perhaps because they wish to explore other questions. However, the danger is that, unless the references to feminist theory are

made clear, we are unwittingly 'unwriting' architecture's feminist genealogy. This then poses questions about acknowledgement, and raises the issue of appropriation and the danger of invisibility. This last point leads to a much graver problem, which is the lack of economic support for making visible – for publishing work – produced outside the narrow confine (physically and conceptually) of the so-called developed, more accurately described as minority, world. The range of published material on feminism and architecture is currently biased in favour of the minority, and so creates an inaccurate construction of the global culture of gendered spatial practice.

Second, and perhaps of an even more serious nature from a humanitarian perspective, is the impression suggested by minority world publications, that gender oppression is no longer an issue. To focus myopically on gender, would suggest a certain blindness to today's context where in some places far more urgent forms of oppression, marginalization and difference demand our attention right now. However, some of these remain directly connected with sex and gender, while in others these aspects are less obvious, but yet still a factor, for example operations of resistance against neo-conservative and neo-liberal politics at work in architecture, connections between military domination and oil consumption, the uneven distribution of wealth between the majority and minority world, and the rapid unfolding of environmental catastrophes and events, such as the current food crisis, related to them. We need then to recognize that the operation of this debate is global, and to ensure that as feminists the particular dimensions of gender struggles at a both macro and micro level are kept firmly on the agenda.

which consisted of a carefully selected, comprehensive collection of seminal texts from the 1970s to the 1990s, organized both chronologically and thematically, which attempted to chart historical changes within feminism and caused by the impact of feminism within the discipline of architecture, as well as map feminist developments in other disciplines which might be of relevance to architecture. See Rendell et al. (1999).

NOTE

1 The volume *Gender Space Architecture*, which I co-edited at this time, offered something slightly different: an attempt at an interdisciplinary introduction