

0 2 **Jane Rendell, Barbara Penner, Iain Borden**
Introduction

[taken from Jane Rendell, Barbara Penner and Iain Borden (eds.), *Gender, Space, Architecture: an Interdisciplinary Introduction*, (London: Routledge, 1999)]

Research on gender and architecture first started to appear in the late 1970s, largely written by women and from an overtly political feminist angle. Until recently much of this work has remained internal to the discipline, concerned largely with the architectural profession and issues concerning the 'man-made' environment. Published in 1992, Beatriz Colomina's edited volume Sexuality and Space,¹ was the first collection of work to bring ideas about gender generated in other fields – such as anthropology, art history, cultural studies, film theory, geography, psychoanalysis and philosophy – to bear on architectural studies. What such work provides is an interdisciplinary context for a gendered critique of architecture, one which expands the terms of the discourse by making links, through gender, with methodological approaches in other academic disciplines. Gender theory, often drawn from other fields of study, provides useful tools and models for critiquing architectural culture – design, theory and history.

Following Sexuality and Space, a number of other texts have investigated architecture and gender, taking clearly feminist perspectives, as well as exploring concerns with sex, desire, space and masculinity.² What such books have in common is their multifaceted nature. They are all edited collections, compositions of different voices; rather than describe the work of female architects or prescribe the architecture we should be producing, the attitude toward the relationship of architecture and feminism is speculative. Gender Space Architecture offers something different: it is an interdisciplinary introduction which consists of a carefully selected, comprehensive collection of seminal texts from the last twenty years, organised both chronologically and thematically. This introduction and the

three sectional introductions form an important part of the book, offering a map of the territory and a route-guide through it.

Gender Space Architecture is divided into three parts. 'Section 1: Gender' is a collection of seminal texts from feminism and gender studies, introducing key debates in the development of feminism, women's studies and gender theory. The chapters in 'Section 2: Gender, Space' largely derive from more spatial disciplines for whom space is treated as concept as well as context. 'Section 2: Gender, Space' covers different ways of thinking about these terms from alternative academic positions, such as anthropology, cultural studies, geography, philosophy and psychoanalysis and the different ways that gendered representations can be produced and received in different cultural and social practices – including writing, painting and dwelling. 'Section 3: Gender, Space, Architecture' is composed of chapters largely drawn from inside the discipline of architecture which deal with considerations of different architectural practices – design, history and theory. The chapters explore both how feminist ideas have influenced the work of women practising within the internal concerns of architectural practice, but also demonstrate the specific effects of applying the gender and spatial theories contained in parts 1 and 2 of this book to architectural ideas. The result is both an elucidation of the importance of gender to architecture and, conversely, the importance of architecture to gender.

Gender

Originally used in the 1890's to describe a belief in sexual equality and a commitment to eradicate sexual domination and transform society, feminism depends on an understanding that in all countries where the sexes are divided into separate cultural, political and economic spheres and where women are less valued than men, their sexuality is held as the cause of their oppression. Today, despite the persistence of certain kinds of sexual discrimination in society, few

women describe themselves as 'feminists'. Furthermore, in the work place, and within professional environments such as architecture, the majority of women choose to describe themselves in gender neutral terms, as architects, rather than as female architects. In academia, although the situation is somewhat different and may appear to embrace issues of sex and gender from a position of radical difference, feminism is still frequently met with a degree of hostility, with resistance to overtly politicised feminist ideas and actions coming from both the establishment and also from women who believe that openly aligning themselves with feminism will result in stereo-typing.

On the other hand, in recent years, there has been a gradual warming toward gender issues, from both men and women, with an increasing openness to discussing ideas of gender relations – feminine and masculine – as well as sexuality. The terminology has changed: feminist theory has become gender theory, women's studies has become gender studies. It is easy to be cynical, and assume that gender has replaced feminism as a less-politicised, more neutral and descriptive rather prescriptive term. But it is also the case, one which this editorial group advocates, that to talk of gender is to take a political position but one which is more sympathetic to difference. As described by Joan Wallach Scott in chapter 11, gender can be considered as a category of analysis, one which allows us to talk about masculinity and femininity in mutual and dialectic relation. Such an understanding of gender as a form of relationship between men and women is also important in the development of men's studies as outlined by Harry Brod in chapter 13. These changes in cultural attitudes towards feminism and gender are part of a more general opening of intellectual discussions – broadly termed postmodernism – toward issues of cultural hybridity and diversity, as well as radical democracy and environmental awareness. Feminism and gender studies have become postmodernised, made interdisciplinary and therefore have to be considered as such.

It is in this context that the first section of Gender, Space, Architecture should be viewed. This first section charts a brief history of western feminist thought over the past century focusing on the contemporary condition and changing definitions of gender and sex, as well as identifying a number of key positions taken by feminist thinkers – liberal, radical, essentialist, materialist, marxist, lesbian, psychoanalytic and postcolonial – and introducing the relatively new discipline of men’s studies. The early work of feminists fighting for women’s equality can be seen to have shifted towards critiques of existing value systems, from understanding why to analysing how oppression occurs. One of the most important aspects of current feminism is the consideration of the inter-relation of a number of different forms of oppression at different times and in different places. Thinking about gender alone is not enough, for current gender theorists, issues of race, class and sexuality are inextricably involved.

In summary, ‘Section 1: Gender’ introduces some concepts central to an understanding of feminism and gender studies and the development of this area of study over the last thirty years. The section sets out a simple historical and theoretical framework through which to explore considerations of space and architecture in subsequent chapters.

Gender, Space

A number of academic disciplines – in particular anthropology, cultural and visual studies, geography, history and philosophy – have now developed extensive and sophisticated methodologies informed by gender concerns and feminist politics. Furthermore, they have embarked on a series of interdisciplinary exchanges, thus creating not only developments in gender within existing disciplines, but also irrevocably changing the nature of gender discourse.

The second section of this book, Gender, Space, Architecture, identifies those disciplines which might be thought of as spatial and therefore most relevant to discussions of gender, space and architecture. Chapters include contributions from a number of influential thinkers within these key disciplines, such as anthropologist, Shirley Ardener (chapter 16), geographer, Doreen Massey (chapter 18) and cultural theorist, Elizabeth Wilson (chapter 21), and suggests the relevance of their work to architectural studies. Since discussions about the gendering of space as public and private emerged in relation to the term 'built environment' rather than 'architecture' as it is traditionally defined, as the work of well-known architects, this section focuses on spaces which are not usually considered architectural, for example Meagan Morris looks at shopping malls and suburban developments where as consumers and mothers women spend much of their time in chapter 23, while in chapter 24 Mary McLeod examines so-called 'everyday' places in the city.

Each chapter deals with space, but in a different way. For bell hooks in chapter 25 and Elizabeth Grosz in chapter 26, for example, space is at once both real and metaphoric: space exists as a material entity, a form of representation and a conceptual and political construct. Picking up on such thematic strands in section 2, allows the reader to consider a number of chapters in section 1 as explicitly spatial. For example, if we consider space as a metaphor, we can understand how: for Virginia Woolf in chapter 4, the occupation of a 'room of one's own' is fundamental to female emancipation; for Audre Lorde in chapter 7, patriarchy is a 'house' which must be deconstructed; and in a more utopian moment, for Luce Irigaray, in chapter 10, it is the specific spatiality of the female sex, the fluidity of 'two lips', which provides inspiration for imagining the shape of a different kind of culture.

It is also possible to take particular ways of thinking about space adopted by authors in 'Section 2: Gender, Space', to set out a framework for considering architecture in 'Section 3: Gender, Space, Architecture'. Discussions of the role of gender in the social production of space, elaborated in section 2 by authors such as Daphne Spain in chapter 17 and Rosalyn Deutsche in chapter 19, provide important ways of understanding various chapters in section 3, such as the different forms of architectural production considered by Labelle Prussin in chapter 34 and Elizabeth Diller in chapter 42, as well as the work of historians such as Zeynep Çelik in chapter 36 and Alice T. Friedman in chapter 37. Concerns with issues like public and private or relations of looking and consuming, introduced by various authors in section 2, such as Susana Torre in chapter 20 and Elizabeth Wilson in chapter 21 allow us to think of architecture as a setting for the playing out of gender relations, rather than as a formally styled immobile object. For some feminist critics in section 2, such as Griselda Pollock in chapter 22, the interpretation of various forms of cultural representation as gendered is the focus of their work. Such work, has important implications for considering architectural space as a form of gendered representation in section 3, for example by Beatriz Colomina in chapter 35 and Diane Agrest in chapter 40.

In this way, links can be made between chapters in the three different sections of this book, Gender, Space, Architecture, as well as between chapters within each section. It is possible therefore to consider how the theoretical positions adopted in section 1 can be used as critical tools and theoretical frameworks through which to understand architecture in section 3. For example, Judith Butler's notions of gender as performed in section 1, chapter 14 closely informs Henry Urbach's historical and theoretical study of closets and coming out in section 3, chapter 38, whereas Harry Brod's summary of the main tenets of men's studies in section 1, chapter 13 provides a way of considering S.O.M.'s Cadet Quarters, U. S. Air Force

Academy, at Colorado Springs as a cultural representations of masculinity in section 3, chapter 39.

In a similar way, Mohanty's critique of the colonising aspects of western feminism in section 1, chapter 12 provides a theoretical backdrop for understanding the ways in which issues of race and gender intersect in the architect, Le Corbusier's conflated notions of the ethnic and feminised other in Algiers in section 3, chapter 36. Working between sections 2 and 3, Labelle Prussin's account of African nomad women's involvement in the building process in section 3, chapter 34 can be positioned as central to architectural practice by acknowledging bell hooks' call to reclaim and celebrate the margins as centre in section 2, chapter 25.

In the United States, the work of Nancy Chodorow on mothering in section 1, chapter 9 has provided new ways of thinking about women's creativity for Karen Franck in section 3, chapter 33. Equally Betty Friedan's consideration of the problems of women trapped in suburbia in section 1, chapter 6 has been highly influential to architectural practitioners in designing places which would allow new relations between men and women in the urban realm, for example in section 3, chapter 31. In the United Kingdom, complex studies of the relation between gender and class oppression in feminist theory, such as those of Michèle Barrett in section 1, chapter 8 are manifest in the work of the feminist architectural co-operative Matrix in the 1980's in section 3, chapter 32.

Gender, Space, Architecture

Traditionally, architecture has been seen as the design and production of buildings by professional architects, which are then discussed by critics, theorists and historians as completed self-contained objects in terms of style and aesthetics. Marxist critics have extended this field of discussion by examining buildings as the products of the processes of capitalism, and architecture as an articulation of

the political, social and cultural values of dominant classes and élite social groupings.³ Although such work has seldom focused on gender difference specifically, many feminists have drawn on the critical methodologies developed through a class based analysis of architecture in order to consider the ways in which systems of gender and class oppression intersect with one another and with systems of racial, ethnic and sexual domination.

Most recently architectural criticism has recognised that architecture continues after the moment of its design and construction. The experience, perception, use, appropriation and occupation of architecture needs to be considered in two ways: firstly, as the temporal activity which takes place after the 'completion' of the building, and which fundamentally alters the meaning of architecture, displacing it away from the architect and builder towards the active user; secondly, as the reconceptualisation of architectural production, such that different activities reproduce different architectures over time and space.⁴ By recognising that architecture is constituted through its occupation, and that experiential aspects of the occupation of architecture are important in the construction of identity, such work intersects with feminist concerns with aspects of 'the personal', the subject and subjectivity.

Furthermore, in the light of poststructuralist readings of architecture, we must consider that architecture is always in part a representation. As well as existing as a material three dimensional object, architecture also exists in the form of architects' drawings (for example plans, sections, elevations) and publicity/periodical disseminations (for example written descriptions and photographs). Architecture also appears indirectly in various forms of cultural documentation, all of which contain representations of gender as well as class, sexuality and race. Considering architecture in this way allows architectural practice to be thought as buildings, images and written scripts, as well as designs,

theories and histories and their various intersections. This position can and has been subjected to gender and feminist critiques, which show that architecture is gendered in all its representational forms. This can be seen explicitly in the writing of historians such as Beatriz Colomina in chapter 35, Zeynep Çelik in chapter 36 and Alice T. Friedman in chapter 37, and the projects of theorists/designers, such as Diane Agrest in chapter 40, Jennifer Bloomer in chapter 41 and Elizabeth Diller in chapter 42.

The third section of Gender, Space, Architecture takes a broadly chronological look at work which has raised issues of gender in relation to architecture over the past twenty years. The former part of the section, chapters 28-34, consists of work by female historians, whose research focused on reclaiming the work of women architects, as well as writings by feminist architects on the products and processes involved in designing places by and for women. The later part of the section, chapters 35-42, consists of recent work which is more theoretically explicit and which openly questions traditional forms of methodology, epistemology and ontology. These authors draw on feminist theory to challenge traditional architectural historical methodology, from the perspective of gender, sexuality and race, to critically analyse architecture as a form of gendered representation and to redefine contemporary notions of design practice. This shift can be identified by comparing the ways in which authors address similar issues, for example, women's relation with the architectural profession. Earlier chapters, for example Sara Boutelle in chapter 28, Lynne Walker in chapter 29 and Denise Scott Brown in chapter 30, account for women's marginalised experience as practitioners and deal directly with feminist struggles for women's equal access to architectural education and professional status, while later chapters, see for example Diane Agrest in chapter 40, Jennifer Bloomer in chapter 41 and Elizabeth Diller in chapter 42, adopt new positions which as well as critiquing architectural value

systems as inherently patriarchal, advance new forms of feminist architectural practice.

References

- ¹ Beatriz Colomina (ed.), Sexuality and Space, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992).
- ² See for example, Diane Agrest, Patricia Conway and Leslie Kanes Weisman (eds.), The Sex of Architecture, (New York: Harry N. Abrams Publisher, 1997); Debra Coleman, Elizabeth Danze and Carol Henderson (eds.), Architecture and Feminism, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996); Francesca Hughes (ed.), The Architect: Reconstructing Her Practice, (Cambridge, Mass.: M. I. T. Press, 1996); Duncan McCorquodale, Katerina Rüedi and Sarah Wigglesworth (eds.), Desiring Practices, (London: Black Dog Publishing Limited, 1996) and Joel Sanders (ed.), Stud: Architectures of Masculinity, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996).
- ³ See for example, Anthony D. King (ed.), Buildings and Society, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980) and Thomas A. Markus, Buildings and Power, (London: Routledge, 1993).
- ⁴ Iain Borden, Joe Kerr, Alicia Pivaro and Jane Rendell (eds.), Strangely Familiar: Narratives of Architecture in the City, (London: Routledge, 1996); Iain Borden, Joe Kerr, Jane Rendell and Alicia Pivaro (eds.), UnKnown City: Contesting Architecture and Social Space, (Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T. Press, 1999); Iain Borden and Jane Rendell, DoubleDecker: Architecture through History, Politics, Poetics, (London: Athlone Press, forthcoming) and Jonathan Hill (eds.), Occupying Architecture: Between the Architect and the User, (London: Routledge, 1998).