

Jane Rendell

Architecture could be defined as a subject that operates using a number of different disciplinary research methodologies, four in particular: those of science in the building sciences area, those of the social sciences and the humanities in the study of buildings in terms of culture and society, history and theory, and those of practice-led research in architectural design. To date (and rather bizarrely given that the core activity of architecture is the design of buildings) the most dominant academic modes of research have been science and humanities-based, and work in both these areas has often been conducted in ways that is rather self-contained and which often follows accepted and long-standing methodologies.<sup>1</sup> This situation has changed recently though, slowly at first, and now rather more rapidly, such that design or practice-led research is coming to be recognized as one of architecture's core research activities, and at the same time, different strands of architectural research are talking to each other and starting to loosen their historic methodological attachments.

In lots of subtle, but important, ways, design research differs from more traditional modes of research, for example, by reversing the order of research methods, instead of posing research questions and then finding answers, in much design research the process operates through generative modes, producing works at the outset that may then be reflected upon later. And, in terms of context, while a researcher in the humanities might first explore the

---

<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed discussion of architectural design research related to the UK's RAE 2008, see Jane Rendell, 'Architectural Research and Disciplinarity', *ARQ*, (2004), v. 8, n. 2, pp. 141–7. See also Jane Rendell, 'Architecture and Interdisciplinarity: Modes of Operation', *Building Material, Journal of the Architectural Association of Ireland* (2010) and Jane Rendell, 'The Transitional Space of Interdisciplinarity', in Daniel Hinchcliffe, Jane Calow and Laura Mansfield (eds), *Speculative Strategies In Interdisciplinary Arts Practice*, (forthcoming 2012).

context or background for a research question in order to find out the current state of knowledge in a specific field, in some cases design researchers will investigate ideas through the production of a work first and later consider the larger field, who else is researching the same questions, in order to argue how the particular knowledge they have generated is original.

In academic research there has been a shift over the past decade towards supporting multi- and interdisciplinary research. Although the two terms are often used interchangeably, I understand them to mean quite different things. Multidisciplinary research for me describes a way of working where a number of disciplines are present but maintain their own distinct identities and ways of doing things; whereas in interdisciplinary research individuals operate between, across and at the edge of their disciplines and in so doing question the ways in which they usually work. This can occur when one individual's work moves from one discipline to another, and it can also occur when individuals from different disciplines work with one another getting closely engaged in the procedures and ideologies that structure each other's research modes and practice paradigms.

For a subject like architecture, that already involves a number of different disciplinary processes, this support for interdisciplinary research by those that fund and assess research has the possibility of opening up opportunities. However, since such a turn towards the interdisciplinary has been paralleled, in the UK at least, by a call for applied work or research that has impact beyond the sphere of the academy, the situation is not without tensions, since certain definitions of 'application' run counter to the qualities of interdisciplinary research as those in the humanities have understood them historically. In calling for interdisciplinary *and* or even *as* applied research, the very particular ways of working that come out of arts and humanities research, which are often critical, may be subsumed in relation to those methods supported by those who have 'industry links', and if we are not careful, this could lead to the

marginalization of those areas that do not immediately and obviously demonstrate economic benefit.

Of the different modes of architectural research, it is design, which appears to offer the most potent set of possibilities in the field of application. Yet architectural design research can have many different purposes, it is certainly possible, and some would no doubt argue likely, for architectural design research to be driven by the logic of ‘application’ and the need to solve problems, to produce artefacts that are functionally useful and can be ‘taken to market’, however, it is also the case that architectural design research can raise questions rather than provide answers, and make ‘problematic’ artefacts whose function is to pose critiques of architectural design’s position and role – cultural, economic, ideological, material, political and social.

Architectural design research that puts forward questions and/or reflects on its own methods can be productive of new knowledge in research terms, but increasingly such knowledge may not be valued if it is not seen to be of direct relevance to the needs of commerce and industry. In the wake of the disastrous outcomes for the economy visited on the majority by the banking sector we find the British government – amongst many others – willing to sacrifice the public good and rather than take measures to redistribute the assets acquired by the financial élite instigate so-called austerity measures, in order to balance the books, in the form of educational cuts for example. In the UK, we have seen public support for teaching in higher education withdrawn, against fierce opposition, and the future of publicly funded UK research becoming increasingly tied to government agendas and to the market. In such a precarious moment we need more than ever to protect interdisciplinary research, for rather than adopt the underlying neoliberal agendas of the architectural profession and construction industry, this kind of work often produces critiques of the capitalist system of building production, acquisition and use.

In exploring questions of method or process that discussions of interdisciplinarity inevitably bring to the fore, Julia Kristeva has argued for the construction of ‘a diagonal axis’:

Interdisciplinarity is always a site where expressions of resistance are latent. Many academics are locked within the specificity of their field: that is a fact ... the first obstacle is often linked to individual competence, coupled with a tendency to jealously protect one’s own domain. Specialists are often too protective of their own prerogatives, do not actually work with other colleagues, and therefore do not teach their students to construct a diagonal axis in their methodology.<sup>2</sup>

In my view, engaging with this diagonal axis demands that we call into question what we normally take for granted, that we question our methodologies, the way we do things, and our terminologies, the words we give to the things we do. The construction of ‘a diagonal axis’ is necessarily a difficult business. Kristeva’s phrase ‘expressions of resistance’ points to the unconscious operations at work in interdisciplinary practice. And cultural theorist Homi Bhabha also describes the encounter between disciplines in psychoanalytic terms as an ‘ambivalent movement between pedagogical and performative address’ – suggesting that we are both attracted by and fearful of the interdisciplinary.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Julia Kristeva, 'Institutional Interdisciplinarity in Theory and Practice: an interview', in Alex Coles and Alexia Defert, (eds), *The Anxiety of Interdisciplinarity, De-, Dis-, Ex-*, v.2, (London: Blackdog Publishing, 1997), pp. 3-21, pp. 5-6.

<sup>3</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 163. In an interview with English and art historian W.J.T. Mitchell, cultural critic Homi Bhabha discusses the operation of two different forms of interdisciplinarity in academic institutions over the past thirty to forty years. The first, which he names ‘Interdisciplinarity 1’, assumes that different disciplines have ‘foundational truths’, but that by putting ‘two foundations in proximity’ a ‘wider base’ can be created. Bhabha believes that institutions are quite comfortable with Interdisciplinarity 1, but that there is another interdisciplinary mode, which he calls ‘Interdisciplinarity 2’. For Bhabha, Interdisciplinarity 2 ‘is not an attempt to strengthen one foundation by drawing from another; it is a reaction to the fact that we are living at the real border of our own disciplines, where some of the fundamental ideas of our discipline are being profoundly shaken’. In his view, ‘questions to do with the indeterminate, with contingency, with intertextuality, have become central – the issue of ambivalence too’, and for Bhabha, ‘It’s because Interdisciplinarity 2 is

It is precisely for this reason that I am a passionate advocate for interdisciplinarity; because such projects are for me critical, ethical and political and also emotional – interdisciplinary work *is* difficult – not only materially and intellectually, but also psychically. In demanding that we exchange what we know for what we do *not* know, and that we give up the safety of competence and specialism, and instead enter a terrain beset with fears of inability, lack of expertise and the dangers of failure, the transformational experience of interdisciplinary work produces a potentially destabilizing engagement with existing power structures, allowing the emergence of fragile forms of new and untested experience, knowledge, and understanding. It engenders multiple modes of operation, which explore the

---

fired with a desire to understand more fully, and more problematically, that its posed at the point of our disciplines' liminality, and that it requires us to articulate a new and collaborative definition of the humanities'. See 'Translator Translated', (interview with cultural theorist Homi Bhabha) by W.J.T. Mitchell, *Artforum* v.33, n.7 (March 1995) pp. 80–84. COPYRIGHT *Artforum International Magazine Inc.* 1995  
<http://prelectur.stanford.edu/lecturers/bhabha/interview.html>. (accessed 2 September 2012).

boundaries of disciplinary knowledge in order to reveal and expose the workings of power.<sup>4</sup> This is in order to allow for the emergence of marginal and often complex forms of research that are at once questioning of dominant ideological and economic systems and capable of proposing alternatives.

In this essay I go on to explore three of these more alternative forms of architectural design research. First, I consider ‘critical spatial practice’ as one way of exploring the multiple possibilities of interdisciplinary architectural design research, particularly through the practice of muf architecture/art; second, I examine, with special reference to the projects of Jennifer Bloomer, a specifically feminist mode of critical spatial practice which places emphasis on subjectivity and which also emphasizes the critical and creative role of writing in architectural design research; third, and finally, I offer some reflections on my own practice of site-writing,

---

<sup>4</sup> In Gary Genosko’s excellent book on philosopher Félix Guattari, he describes how for Guattari, the interdisciplinarity (of 1968) was compromised, it relied too much on the disciplines between which it was located, and served to strengthen rather than question their dominance. See Gary Genosko, *Félix Guattari: An Aberrant Introduction* (London: Continuum, 2002), p. 24. In many ways the problems of the interdisciplinarity of 1968 as recounted by Genosko, in terms of being ‘team-based’, adopting ‘brain-storming’ and the ‘growing influence of the marketplace’, resonate both with the characterisation of multidisciplinary as I have described it and Homi Bhabha’s definition of interdisciplinarity 1 as discussed in note 3 above. However, to really interrogate the relation between these three pairs of distinctions I would need to conduct a much longer piece of research thoroughly embedded in the material conditions of these two historical periods and locations: the late 1960s in France and the mid/late 1990s in the UK and the US. The limitations of interdisciplinarity inspire Guattari to argue instead that transdisciplinarity that holds the potential of radical critique, related, in his own philosophy, to ‘transversality ... explicitly a creature of the middle’. See Gary Genosko, *Félix Guattari: An Aberrant Introduction* (London: Continuum, 2002), p. 74. The ‘trans’ is capable of transversal actions, which, in cutting across existing territories of knowledge, allows them to be experienced differently, thus providing new positions and perspectives.

as a form of architectural design research which through the acts of configuration aims to produce textual spaces which relate the experiences of writing and reading.<sup>5</sup>

### **Critical Spatial Practice**

In 2003 I came up with the term ‘critical spatial practice’ to describe projects located between art and architecture, and the standpoints theory offered for playing out disciplinary definitions.<sup>6</sup> I developed this concept further in *Art and Architecture: A Place Between*, in which I examined a series of projects located between art and architecture – defined as critical spatial practice – since they both critiqued the sites into which they intervened as well as the disciplinary procedures through which they operated. I argued that such projects were situated at a triple crossroads: between theory and practice, between art and architecture, and between public and private, and I was keen to stress three particular qualities. First, I proposed that the definition of the term ‘critical’, taken from Frankfurt School critical theory, be extended to encompass practice – particularly

---

<sup>5</sup> The take-up of writing as a potentially active form of design research has been most vibrant in the areas that work most closely with the critical and interdisciplinary methodologies of fine art practice. See for example, Katy Macleod, and Lyn Holdridge (eds) *Thinking through Art: Reflections on Art as Research*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2005); Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt (eds) *Practice as Research: Context, Method, Knowledge*, (London: IB Tauris, 2007) and Marquard Smith and Michael Ann Holly (eds) *What is Research in the Visual Arts? Obsession, Archive, and Encounter*, (Clark Art Institute/Yale University Press, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> I first introduced the term ‘critical spatial practice’ in my article Jane Rendell, ‘A Place Between Art, Architecture and Critical Theory’, *Proceedings to Place and Location* (Tallinn, Estonia: 2003) pp. 221-33 (published in English and Estonian) and later consolidated and developed as a concept in my book Jane Rendell, *Art and Architecture: A Place Between* (London: IB Tauris, 2006). Since that time, the same term has been taken up by individuals such as Judith Rugg in her seminars at the RIBA, London, from around 2008; Eyal Weisman to describe activities as part of the ‘MA: Research Architecture’ at Goldsmiths College of Art, London; and most recently by Marcus Miessen to identify the ‘MA: Architecture and Critical Spatial Practice’ launched in 2011 at the Städelschule, Frankfurt.

those critical practices that involved self-reflection and the desire for social change, that sought to transform rather than to only describe.<sup>7</sup> Second, drawing on the work of Michael de Certeau and Henri Lefebvre, I made a distinction between those strategies (for de Certeau) or representations of space (for Lefebvre) that aimed to maintain and reinforce existing social and spatial orders, and those tactics (for de Certeau) and spaces of representation (for Lefebvre) that sought to critique and question them, defining the latter as ‘critical spatial practices’.<sup>8</sup> Third, I was most interested in practices, which desired to investigate the limits of their particular disciplinary procedures and to explore the interdisciplinary processes at work in between them.

I found Edward Soja’s examination of the interrelation of the conceptual categories of space, time and social being,<sup>9</sup> highly productive; reading his texts suggested to me that my understanding of critical spatial practice, in terms of the interdisciplinary place between art and architecture, needed to be understood through three distinct aspects: the spatial, the temporal and the social. I’d like to focus here on the work of architecture/art, as an example of an architectural design practice drawn from my exploration of the social aspect of ‘a place between’, in order to examine how the ‘work’

---

<sup>7</sup> Critical theory is a phrase that refers to the work of a group of theorists and philosophers called the Frankfurt School operating in the early twentieth century. The group includes Theodor Adorno, Jurgen Habermas, Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse and Benjamin; and their writings are connected by their interest in the ideas of the philosopher G. W. F. Hegel, the political economist Karl Marx, and the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud. Taken together, their work could be characterized as a rethinking or development of Marxist ideas in relation to the shifts in society, culture and economy that took place in the early decades of the twentieth century. See Raymond Geuss, *The Idea of Critical Theory: Habermas and the Frankfurt School* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

<sup>8</sup> See Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, [1974] (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991) and Michael de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, [1980] (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

<sup>9</sup> See Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: Expanding the Geographical Imagination* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996) and Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989).



of architectural design research can be understood less as a set of ‘things’ or ‘objects’ than as a series of exchanges that take place between people through such processes as collaboration.

It is worth starting out by considering an early work, which in many ways began to define muf’s approach. In Hanley, in 1998, muf architecture/art won an open competition set up by Stoke City Council with the Public Art Commissioning Agency.<sup>10</sup> muf’s brief was to make a lifting barrier to prevent illegal traffic entering Hanley town centre as part of a larger urban regeneration project. In dialogue with the council planner at an initial stage of the project, the brief was opened out to reveal how ‘art can contribute to a safer, more social environment’.<sup>11</sup> The proposal was to make two ceramic benches in close collaboration with Armitage Shanks from a design generated by muf. The Stoke area has a strong tradition of ceramic production, today branching out into sanitary ware, and this was the inspiration for the design of the bench, ceramic patterned with oversized fragments of a blue dinner plate design positioned among white birches and roses. Projected overhead, in close physical proximity to the benches, a video showing portraits of people’s faces, was a documentation of the design process and underscored the benches’ role in tracing the relationships between the various people who produced the work, as well as their position as prompts for future conversations between those who lived and worked around them about the site and its culture of ceramic production: ‘We wanted to reveal this as the place where the hands of the person you sit next to on a bus or pass in the street are the hands of the person who shaped the plate from which you eat your dinner.’<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> See <http://www.muf.co.uk/> (accessed 21 August 2012).

<sup>11</sup> muf, *This is What we Do: A muf Manual* (London: Ellipsis, 2001), p. 92.

<sup>12</sup> muf, *This is What we Do*, p. 92.

As an architectural practice, muf's work, has made inspirational contributions to the definition of what architectural design might be over the past twenty years. There was a period in the first decade of the twenty-first century when muf was frequently criticized in mainstream architectural discourse for not producing any 'architecture', I suggest that this was due to the blindness of a discourse unable to recognize architecture as the production of anything but stand-alone object-buildings. muf's very practice continues to evolve and invent new approaches to critical spatial practice precisely 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 solely an activity that leads to the making of a product, but is rather the location of the work itself. In their award-winning project, a new town square for Barking in London completed in 2010, as well as the more formal urban design elements, the scheme also involved a seven-metre high folly, which invents an imagined and lost history for Barking. This art project, involving the participation of a diverse range of groups for example students from the Theatre School, elders from the Afro-Caribbean lunch club and apprentices from the local bricklayers college, forms a fourth wall to the square, and was conceived by muf as integral to their architectural design approach. [see images 1–2, please place these opposite each other on a double page spread with no text]

In an earlier architectural project, muf's work in St Albans, UK, their brief was to protect and enclose a Roman mosaic and hypocaust. Here muf's wish to juxtapose what was once the Roman city of Verulamium with the contemporary life of the park. Its building is a simple structure with a few key elements: a roof of which the underside is

---

tilted upwards with a mirrored soffit reflecting the activities of the park and a roof that drains into an ancient Roman well filled with pieces of crockery rejected by the archaeological dig. A glazed strip allows the passers-by to see the mosaic but also layers their reflections onto the view of the mosaic within: 'is this a football game in a Roman city or a mosaic interrupting a football game? Is this building standing in for an attitude, a methodology?'<sup>13</sup> [see images 3-4, please place these opposite each other on a double page spread with no text] 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 a building, is a radical proposition.

As a form of architectural design research muf's work emphasizes a particular angle to practice – which proposes that the process is the product. Such an approach is perhaps more familiar to those working in the field of fine art, for whom the terms 'social sculpture' and 'relational aesthetics' are common place, and where it is not hard to consider the making of relationships or the processes of materialization to convey aesthetic values, but architecture and other built environment disciplines continue to be challenged by the idea that aesthetic values might not only be object-driven but also related to time, process, ethics and subjectivity. Thus muf's work remains important as an example of architectural design research that challenges a linear conception where research as a process leads to design as an object, instead showing how design is a research-led process, while research can also be thought of as a form of design.

## **Feminist Critical Spatial Practice**

---

<sup>13</sup> muf, *This is What we Do*, p. 151.

Although muf have never (or at least almost never!) referred to themselves as feminists, their work has had a huge influence on the development of feminist architectural design, enriching an approach which in recent times, from Matrix onwards,<sup>14</sup> has challenged those definitions of architecture carefully guarded by the architectural profession, working collaboratively to critique the single architectural signature and resisting notions of architecture as simply a formal object.<sup>15</sup>

One particularly important aspect of feminist critical spatial practice has been its desire to relate theory, often, but not always feminist, to architectural design, to make connections between built practice and written text.<sup>16</sup> The drawn and written projects of American architect and critic, Jennifer Bloomer have been highly influential in this respect.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> See Matrix, *Making Space: Women and the Man Made Environment*, (London: Pluto Press, 1984).

<sup>15</sup> There are currently many fascinating versions of a collective feminist critical spatial practice: see for example FATALE and taking place. For FATALE see [http://researchprojects.kth.se/index.php/kb\\_7796/io\\_10197/io.html](http://researchprojects.kth.se/index.php/kb_7796/io_10197/io.html) (accessed 21 August 2012) and for taking place, see Katie Lloyd Thomas, Helen Stratford and Teresa Hoskyns 'taking place', *Scroope*, v. 14, (2001); Doina Petrescu and Teresa Hoskyns, 'Taking place and altering it', Doina Petrescu (ed.) *Altering Practices: Feminist Politics and Poetics of Space*, (London: Routledge, 2007); Katie Lloyd Thomas with taking place, 'The Other Side of Waiting', in Imogen Tyler and Dr Caroline Gattrell (eds), *Birth*, special issue of *Feminist Review*, (2009). Most recently there has been the emergence of <http://www.archiparlour.org/> a site debating women, equity and architecture, and the publication of Sarah Hirschman (ed.) *Sex*, special issue of *Thresholds*, 37, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2010) and Lori Brown (ed) *Feminist Practices: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Women in Architecture*, (London: Ashgate, 2012).

<sup>16</sup> See muf, *Architectural Design*, 66/7-8, (August 1996): pp. 80-3 and Amy Landesberg and Lisa Quatrala, 'See Angel Touch', Debra Coleman, Elizabeth Danze and Carol Henderson (eds.), *Architecture and Feminism*, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), pp. 60-71.

<sup>17</sup> Jennifer Bloomer, 'Big Jugs', Arthur Kroker and Marilouise Kroker (eds.), *The Hysterical Male: New Feminist Theory*, (London: Macmillan Education 1991), pp. 13-27 and Jennifer Bloomer, *Architecture and the Text: the (S)cripts of Joyce and Piranesi*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993).

Bloomer's work follows Derridean deconstruction, aiming to reveal the insufficiency of logical and rational structures such as spoken language to explain the world, and instead to bring into operation the irrational and subversive elements in written texts – the feminine. Her work demonstrates that the feminine, and perhaps theory, can be a radical element in architectural practice. Drawing parallels between the creation of a building, assumed to be a clean act of control and precision, and the mess of childbirth, Bloomer has questioned the gender of creativity. Through her dirty drawings and her incorporation of parts of the female anatomy – breasts, milk, fluids, blood, hatching, udders – into architecture, Bloomer generates a critique of the sterility of the architectural drawing process. The feminine in her work is to be found in the so-called slippage of words, for example, the term 'big jugs' placed within an architectural context, suggests many things, including large breasts, but also the role of the feminine and female body as a container or empty signifier used to represent patriarchal ideologies.<sup>18</sup>

In Bloomer's writing, text has a materiality and is carefully constructed and spatially structured, operating as a metaphoric site through which imaginative narratives are explored. For Bloomer, different modes of writing express different ways of understanding architecture through the intimate and personal, the subjective as well as the objective, though sensual rather 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 place and creativity, allowing links to be made between architectural design

---

<sup>18</sup> This type of feminist work influenced a number of other architectural design projects, which, drawing on theoretical concerns, stimulated new forms of design, from the choosing of site to the articulation of services. In work of Clare Robinson, this is clearly formulated in a project, which redefines site as chora or female container. For Michelle Kauffman, the gaps between buildings and occupied by women in patriarchy gave rise to a design project based on a lacuna wall. See Claire Robinson, 'Chora Work', 'Dear Jennifer', *ANY*, n. 4 (January/February 1994): pp. 34-7 and Michelle Kaufman 'Liquidation, Amalgamation', 'Dear Jennifer', *ANY*, n. 4 (January/February 1994): pp. 38-9.

and history, theory and criticism. In this way it is possible to see that Bloomer's work offers an approach to architectural design research which emphasizes the key role that writing plays in contributing to understandings of creativity in architecture both as a critical tool, but also as a form of creative production in its own right.

Another important aspect of feminist work in architectural design in the late 1990s, which has also tested architecture's professional and disciplinary boundaries, was demonstrated through the projects of architects who developed an artistic aspect of their practice, such as Maya Lin and Elizabeth Diller. Diller showed how processes from fine art could inform the development of architectural design through a work, where feminist critiques of women's role as domestic labourers could be used to suggest an approach to architectural design.<sup>19</sup> [see images 5-10, please place these 6 images in a sequence in a horizontal line across the middle of a double page spread with no text] Her 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. This project can be understood as a parody of the precision of housework and a reworking of the skills of the housewife perhaps for a new function: feminist architectural design! More recently architectural designers such as Penelope Haralambidou and Yeoryia Manolopoulou have critiqued architectural representational techniques and design processes, and offered instead new approaches to drawing and design, such as 'blossoming' in the case of Haralambidou and 'chance' and 'indeterminacy' for Manolopoulou; while these projects are not explicitly feminist, they do offer new design processes and approaches which resonate with the critiques of representation offered by feminism.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Elizabeth Diller, 'Bad Press', Francesca Hughes (ed.), *The Architect: Reconstructing Her Practice*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), pp. 74-94.

<sup>20</sup> See for example, Penelope Haralambidou, *The Blossoming of Perspective*, (London: DomoBaal Editions, 2007); Penelope Haralambidou, *Marcel Duchamp and the Architecture of Desire*, (London: Ashgate, forthcoming 2013); Yeoryia

Other architects have worked and continue to do so with or as artists and other spatial practitioners in the public spaces of the city expanding the definition of what constitutes architectural or urban design.<sup>21</sup> Collaborating with those operating through other modes of spatial practice, for example in dance, film, art and writing, has provided architecture and urbanism with new feminist spatial tactics and strategies, where the role of audience, user and critic has become increasingly vital to the construction of subjectivity through aesthetic and spatial processes.<sup>22</sup> In working across the boundary between theory and practice, and between architecture and other disciplines, these significant and influential feminist projects of the 1990s informed by a political concern with subjectivity offer critiques of disciplinary boundaries and procedures.<sup>23</sup> Their work

---

Manolopoulou, 'Drawing on Chance: Drafting Pier 40', *Journal of Architecture*, 11/3, (2006) and Yeoryia Manolopoulou, *Architectures of Chance*, (London: Ashgate, forthcoming 2012).

<sup>21</sup> See for example, Nina Felshin, *But is it Art?: the spirit of art as activism*, (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995) and Suzanne Lacy (ed.), *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*, (Seattle, Bay Press, 1995). For more recent practices which do not define themselves as feminist, but which arguably operate adopting what I would describe as a feminist sensibility towards relational processes see: Atelier d'architecture autogérée / studio for self-managed architecture see <http://www.urbantactics.org/> (accessed 21 August 2012); Public Works, London; <http://www.publicworksgroup.net/> (accessed 21 August 2012); Transparadiso, Vienna, <http://www.transparadiso.com/cms/> (accessed 21 August 2012); and Apolonija Sustersic, Amsterdam and Ljubljana, <http://home.tiscali.nl/apolonija/> (accessed 21 August 2012).

<sup>22</sup> See the collaborations between Dorita Hannah (performance design and scenographer) and Carol Brown (dancer and choreographer), for example, *HER TOPLA: A Dance Architecture Event*, Duncan Dance Centre of Research in Greece (Athens, 2005). See also <http://www.carolbrowndances.com/gallery.php> (accessed 2 September 2012) and Dorita Hannah and Olav Harslof (eds) *Performance Design* (Museum Tusulanum Press, 2008).

<sup>23</sup> See Karen Burns' fascinating recent analysis of the place of gender in contemporary architectural theory anthologies from 1993 to 2010 in Karen Burns, 'A Girl's Own Adventure: Gender in the Contemporary Architectural Theory Anthology', *Journal of Architectural Education*, 65/2, (March 2012): pp. 125–134 and 'The Woman/Architect Distinction', in 'Women, Practice, Architecture', special issue of *Architectural Theory Review* (forthcoming December 2012).

suggests new modes of enquiry and action, which have moved from providing a gendered critique of architecture and its multiple forms of representation, to the production of work inside and outside the academy where subjects, selves and spaces are understood to be performed and constructed rather than simply represented.

The infusion of the insights of psychoanalysis into architectural theory in recent years has helped to destabilize understandings of the boundaries between the subject of architecture and the researching subject him/herself. Although architecture has been informed for quite some time by psychoanalysis at the level of the theoretical analysis, critique and interpretation of buildings, images and texts, what is new in work in this area, is the degree to which understandings of subjectivity and performativity are informing the ways in which subjects are constructed, as well as texts and works. Formerly rather underdeveloped, especially in comparison to practice-led research in the visual and performing arts, this has helped to increase the level of self-reflectivity in debates around architectural design. The particular angle that architecture as a spatial discipline offers to this discourse is a materialized and conceptual understanding of the position or situatedness of the architectural designer or writer herself, and thus the interior as well as exterior relations between criticism and practice in research.<sup>24</sup> Through the theme of 'Architecture-Writing' I have been keen to bring the discussions on art-writing, which engage closely with debates around criticism and critical practice in the visual and spatial arts, into architecture in order to re-examine the relation between criticism and design such that criticism might be understood as a form of creative production like design, while design itself might be considered as a self-reflective process which can offer critical

---

<sup>24</sup> The *Critical Architecture* conference, which I co-organised at the Bartlett School of Architecture in 2004, aimed to address this relation. See Jane Rendell, Jonathan Hill, Murray Fraser and Mark Dorrian (eds.) *Critical Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2007).



insights.<sup>25</sup> Reformulating the relation between criticism and design plays an important role in conceptualizing architectural design research: allowing design to play a role in critical analysis, and criticism to perform creatively.

### Site-Writing

In my own architectural design research, as a spatial writer and critic, I have suggested that, with his/her responsibility to convey an experience of the work to another audience, the critic occupies a discrete position as mediator and that his or her *situatedness* conditions the performance of his/her interpretative role.<sup>26</sup> Site-writing, in taking the location of the critic with respect to his/her object of study or subject matter, as a determining factor in the construction of a critical position, questions the terms of reference that relate the critic to the work positioned 'under' critique, and instead proposes alternative positions, so functioning as a mode of practice in its own right. This is an active writing, which aims to perform the spatial qualities of an artwork or piece of architecture through textual strategies, reconfiguring the sites between critic and work, essay and reader, as an 'architecture' of criticism.<sup>27</sup> Here site-writing operates as a form of architectural design research exploring how architectural processes of structuring and detailing spaces through can work through textual media, offering new insights into what architecture is and might be.

---

<sup>25</sup> See Jane Rendell, 'Critical Architecture: Between Criticism and Design' and 'Architecture-Writing', in Jane Rendell, Jonathan Hill, Murray Fraser and Mark Dorrian (eds) *Critical Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2007). See also 'Architecture-Writing', Jane Rendell (ed.) *Critical Architecture*, special issue of the *Journal of Architecture* 10/3, (June 2005): pp. 255–64.

<sup>26</sup> For a discussion of the politics of spectatorship see for example, Umberto Eco, 'The Poetics of the Open Work', [1962] in Claire Bishop (ed.), *Participation: Documents of Contemporary Art* (London and Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press and the Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, 2006) pp. 20–40 and Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005) p. 13 and p. 131.

<sup>27</sup> Jane Rendell, *Site-Writing: The Architecture of Art Criticism* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2010).

*To Miss the Desert* was a site-writing written in response to Nathan Coley's *Black Tent* (2003), curated by Gavin Wade.<sup>28</sup> *Black Tent* had developed out of Coley's interest in sanctuaries in general but particularly the evocative and precise description of the construction of the tabernacle given in the bible.<sup>29</sup> Wade had read a piece of my writing, where I questioned whether it was possible to 'write architecture' rather than to 'write about architecture' and so he asked me to 'write a tabernacle'. I felt that the text in the bible had already written the tabernacle, so I decided to write *Black Tent*.

*Black Tent* consisted of a flexible structure, a number of steel-framed panels with black fabric screens stretched across them, and smaller 'windows' inserted into them. *Black Tent* moved to five sites in Portsmouth reconfiguring itself for each location. My essay echoed aspects of *Black Tent*, each of its five sections was composed around a different spatial boundary condition, such as 'around the edge'. Yet in order to critique Coley's choice of sanctuary as a specifically religious and judaeo-christian one, my choice

---

<sup>28</sup> Jane Rendell, 'To Miss the Desert', Gavin Wade (ed.) *Nathan Coley: Black Tent* (Portsmouth: Art in Sacred Spaces, 2003) pp. 34–43.

<sup>29</sup> Nathan Coley's fascination with places of religious worship runs through his practice. An early work, *Fourteen Churches of Münster* (2000), comprises a street plan and the view from a helicopter circling fourteen churches in the city: in the Second World War allied bomber pilots were issued with an order to target them. *The Lamp of Sacrifice, 161 Places of Worship, Birmingham* (2000) and *The Lamp of Sacrifice, 286 Places of Worship, Edinburgh* (2004) consist of cardboard models of all the places of worship in the towns listed in the *Yellow Pages*, have been argued to express the premise of Coley's work – that architectural forms remain empty contained until socially occupied. See Martin Herbert, 'Nathan Coley, Fruitmarket Gallery Edinburgh', *Art Monthly*, n. 278 (July–August 2004) pp. 35–37, p. 36. More recent projects, such as *There Will Be No Miracles Here* (2006) Mount Stuart, Isle of Bute, question the passivity of architecture especially in current religious conflicts. One part of the exhibition – *Camouflage Mosque, Camouflage Synagogue, Camouflage Church* – comprises three models covered in 'dazzle' camouflage, a technique applied to ships during both World Wars as protection from attack. See Andrea Schlieker, 'Negotiating the Invisible: Nathan Coley at Mount Stuart' at <http://studionathancoley.com/works/camouflage-mosquesynagoguechurch> (accessed 2 September 2012).

of spatial motif was the secular sanctuary of home.<sup>30</sup> Like the squares, the voice of my text was two-sided, setting up a dynamic between private and public sanctuary. One remembered a childhood spent in various nomadic cultures in the Middle East. The other adopted a more professional tone by taking texts from construction specifications I had written when designing contemporary sanctuaries – a series of community buildings for different minority groups.<sup>31</sup>

A couple of years later, for an exhibition entitled *Spatial Imagination*, I selected ‘scenes’ from this essay and reconfigured them into a text three by four, in response to the grid of a window, where I wrote the word ‘purdah’ on the glass in black eye liner from Oman. This two-part text installation *An Embellishment: Purdah* – one part sited in a book and the other in a building – responded to the window as a boundary condition, performing the interface between inside and outside.<sup>32</sup> [see image 11]

---

<sup>30</sup> Coley’s interest in sanctuaries has been related to their role as places of refuge outside state control. See Nathan Coley, *Urban Sanctuary: A Public Art Work by Nathan Coley* (Glasgow: The Armpit Press, 1997) which comprised a series of interviews with eight people including a policeman and a fen shui practitioner where the artist asked each person what the term sanctuary meant to them and documented their answers.

<sup>31</sup> Coley’s work has examined the representation of architecture through different kinds of media simultaneously, for example, *Minster* (1998) an installation in The Tate Gallery Liverpool, consisted of slide projected images of a non-conformist chapel in Liverpool’s Toxteth, a recorded lecture of a guided tour of York Minster and an explanatory pamphlet describing the correct procedure for establishing a tabernacle or portable sanctuary. See Nick Barley (ed.) *Leaving Tracks: Artranspennine98, an International Contemporary Visual Art Exhibition Recorded* (London: August Media Ltd., 1999) pp. 78–81.

<sup>32</sup> See Jane Rendell, *An Embellishment: Purdah* (2006) *Spatial Imagination*, domoBaal contemporary art, London with an associated catalogue essay Jane Rendell, ‘An Embellishment’, Peg Rawes and Jane Rendell (eds) *Spatial Imagination* (London: The Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL, 2005) pp. 34–35. See [www.spatialimagination.org.uk](http://www.spatialimagination.org.uk). (accessed 8 July 2008). For a longer discussion of this installation see Jane Rendell, *Site-Writing*, pp. 103–109.

The discipline of performance studies is increasingly becoming a central reference point for feminists writing in architecture, mainly because it is within performance practice, including theatre, but also more specifically in performance writing, that one finds the conceptual depth to the thinking-through of ‘performativity’.<sup>33</sup> The autobiographical approach to Peggy Phelan’s commentaries on performance art have informed a mode of writing criticism that declares its own performativity and the presence of the body of the critic in the writing as ‘marked’.<sup>34</sup> In drawing attention to the conditions of its own making at the level of the signifier, not only the signified, much autobiographical writing is performative. In Della Pollock’s highly informative discussion of the key qualities of performance writing, she includes being subjective, as well as evocative, metonymic, nervous, citational and consequential as exceptional aspects of this type of writing.<sup>35</sup> For art critic Gavin Butt, the attempt by critics and practitioners to ‘renew criticism’s energies’ within fine art occurs specifically through a ‘theatrical turn’.<sup>36</sup>

Across the arena of experimental and critical writing, new possibilities are being invented, often performative, which question the distanced objectivity of academic writing styles.<sup>37</sup> This includes artists producing text-based works,<sup>38</sup> writers exploring the

---

<sup>33</sup> Here I should note the work of practitioners and writers such as P.A. Skantze, Emily Orley and Ella Finer, at the University of Roehampton, and Susan Melrose, at the University of Middlesex.

<sup>34</sup> See for example, Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993) and Peggy Phelan, ‘To Suffer a Sea Change’, *The Georgia Review*, 45/3 (Fall 1991): pp. 507–525.

<sup>35</sup> Della Pollock, ‘Performing Writing’, Peggy Phelan and Jill Lane (eds) *The Ends of Performance* (New York: New York University Press, 1998) pp. 73–103.

<sup>36</sup> See Gavin Butt (ed.) *After Criticism: New Responses to Art and Performance*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005).

<sup>37</sup> See for example Maria Fusco (ed.) ‘The Dream that Kicks: Transdisciplinary Practice in Action’, special issue of *a-n* (*Artists’ Newsletter*) (London, 2006). See also *The Happy Hypocrite*, the journal edited by Fusco. See also the work of Emma Cocker, <http://not-yet-there.blogspot.co.uk/> (accessed 24 August 2012).

poetics of criticism,<sup>39</sup> as well as performance writers,<sup>40</sup> poet-artist practitioners,<sup>41</sup> and philosophers who question subjectivity through alternative visual writing forms.<sup>42</sup> Spatial practitioners can draw inspiration from this intensely creative and theoretically rigorous strand of speculative criticism, yet within it there is also a very particular focus for those engaged in architecture: to enhance writing's spatial qualities and in so doing to explore the 'position' of the writer through the spatial and material qualities of the text. This approach brings writing closer to architectural design processes and so to the heart of architectural design research, showing how writing is not only a way of communicating research findings, but also a tool through which to investigate architectural ideas, and at the same time allowing writing to indicate different spatial, material and conceptual possibilities for ways of knowing and being in architectural design research.

---

<sup>38</sup> See for example Brigid McLeer, 'From "A..." to "B...": A Jealousy', Peg Rawes and Jane Rendell (eds) *Spatial Imagination* (London: The Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL, 2005) pp. 22–23 and more recent work such as Brigid McLeer, *Horizontal Ontologies: One + One (The Reading)* and *Vexations* (2012). See also Ken Ehrlich and Brandon Labelle (eds) *Surface Tension Supplement, n. 1* (Copenhagen and Los Angeles: Errant Bodies Press, 2006).

<sup>39</sup> For alternative strategies of critical writing by poets and others, see for example, Juliana Spahr, Mark Wallace, Kristen Prevallet and Pam Rehm (eds) *A Poetics of Criticism* (Buffalo, New York: Leave Books, 1994).

<sup>40</sup> See for example Iain Biggs, *Between Carterhaugh and Tamsbeil Rig: A Borderline Episode* (Bristol: Wild Conversation Press, 2004) and Mike Pearson, *In comes I: Performance, Memory and Landscape* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2007) and Mike Pearson, *Site-Specific Performance*, (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2010).

<sup>41</sup> See for example the work of Carolyn Bergvall, Redell Olsen and Kristen Krieder. See Carolyn Bergvall, *Éclat* (pdf edition, ububooks, 2004) [http://www.ubu.com/ubu/bergvall\\_eclat.html](http://www.ubu.com/ubu/bergvall_eclat.html); Carolyn Bergvall *Fig*, (Cambridge: Salt Publishing, 2005); Redell Olsen, *Book of the Fur* (Cambridge: Rem Press, 2000); and Kristen Krieder, 'Toward a Material Poetics: Sign, Subject and Site' (University of London, unpublished PhD, 2008).

<sup>42</sup> See the work of Sue Golding (Johnny de Philo) and Yves Lomax. See Sue Golding (Johnny de Philo) *Games of Truth: A Blood Poetics in Seven Part Harmony (this is me speaking to you)* an Inaugural Lecture delivered at the University of Greenwich, 27 March 2003; Yves Lomax, *Writing the Image: An Adventure with Art and Theory* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2000); and Yves Lomax, *Sounding the Event: Escapades in Dialogue and Matters of Art, Nature and Time* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2005).

*Undoing Architecture* was the first piece of writing where I juxtaposed my own voice with those of various critical theorists, and referred to my own life as the subject matter for theoretical reflection.<sup>43</sup> This incorporation of the personal into the critical had different kinds of effect depending on the reader, and so raised many questions for me concerning the ethical responsibility a writer has to those others who become subjects or characters in a narrative form. The essay was inspired by a house where I had lived with a co-inhabitant who invented an unusual mode of DIY much of which involved the removal of building elements, as well as the use of objects against the purposes for which they were originally designed.

The text was a triologue constructed out of eleven scenes, where three voices performed the doing, undoing and overdoing of architecture. My own practice of living or ‘overdoing’ architecture followed my ambivalence towards the trajectory of a DIY set against the grain, positioned as a third, in fluctuating allegiance, between the ‘father’ who set out normative procedures for ‘doing’ architecture, described in terms of the modernist design principles still largely adhered to by the profession, and the ‘mother’ of feminist critique, Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous, whose words of ‘undoing’, suggested alternative modes of writing and using space which differed from the masculine economy of appropriation and the self-same.

Several years later I produced another triadic text in which I also referred to my personal life as subject matter for architectural criticism, drawing attention to the subject not simply as a research topic for architectural design, but also to the figure of the researcher herself as an embodied subject who brings specific emotions and life experiences to inform

---

<sup>43</sup> See Jane Rendell, ‘Doing it, (Un)Doing it, (Over)Doing it Yourself: Rhetorics of Architectural Abuse’, Jonathan Hill (ed.) *Occupying Architecture* (London: Routledge, 1998) pp. 229–246. See also Jane Rendell, ‘(Un)doing it Yourself: Rhetorics of Architectural Abuse’, *The Journal of Architecture* v. 4 (Spring 1999): pp. 101–110 and Jane Rendell, *Site-Writing*.

her investigations into and through architecture and design. This time the work took the form of a text-based installation positioned on a public street. With voices drawn from autobiography, psychoanalytic theory and building specifications, *Confessional Construction* explored the confession as a form of story-telling which concealed rather than revealed the 'I' of the author.<sup>44</sup> In order to demonstrate how material concerned with an interior can be used to build an exterior covering, the text comprised a main statement – an autobiographical detail – interwoven with more critical reflections from upon what it means to confess. Footnotes consisting of architectural specifications concerning the detailing of walls and openings were located down the side of the page, numbered from bottom to top, to read upwards as one builds a wall. [see images 11 and 12]

Although some critics are also beginning to consider the possibilities that the written medium of their work affords, fewer have actively exploited the material possibilities of texts for architectural design research, the patterning of words on a page, the design of a page itself – its edges, boundaries, thresholds, surfaces, the relation of one page to another. Literary critic Mary Ann Caws's concept of 'architexture' is helpful here

---

<sup>44</sup> This piece of work was originally installed as Jane Rendell, *Confessional Constructions* (2002) *LLAW*, curated by Brigid McLeer, BookArtBookShop, London. It was then performed as part of a poetry reading at The Foundry, London in 2003 and published as part of longer essays in Jane Rendell, 'Between Two: Theory and Practice', Jonathan Hill (ed) *Opposites Attract*, special issue of *The Journal of Architecture* v. 8 (Summer 2003) pp. 221–37; Jane Rendell, 'Architectural History as Critical Practice', Elisabeth Tostrop and Christian Hermansen (eds) *Context: (theorising) History in Architecture* (Oslo: Oslo School of Architecture, 2003) pp. 17–29; and Jane Rendell, 'From Architectural History to Spatial Writing', Elvan Altan Ergut, Dana Arnold and Belgin Turan Ozkaya (eds) *Rethinking Architectural Historiography* (London: Routledge, 2006) pp. 135–150. I also described my performance of Jane Rendell, 'Travelling the Distance/Encountering the Other', in David Blamey (ed.) *Here, There, Elsewhere: Dialogues on Location and Mobility* (London, Open Editions, 2002) pp. 43–54, as part of *taking place*, University of North London, November 2001 as a 'confessional construction'. See for example Katie Lloyd Thomas, Teresa Hoskyns and Helen Stratford, 'taking place', *Scroope: Cambridge Architecture Journal*, n. 14 (2002): pp. 44–48. A script of this performance was also published as part of Jane Rendell, 'How to Take Place (but only for so long)', in Doina Petrescu (ed.) *Altering Practices: Feminist Politics and Poetics of Space* (London: Routledge, 2007) pp. 69–87.

in allowing us to take texts, structures which are not buildings, as architecture, a move which is rather more closely guarded against in architecture itself, where the professional view still tends to dominate. A term that refers to the act of reading rather than writing, for Caws, architecture 'situates the text in the world of other texts'<sup>45</sup> drawing attention to the surface and texture of the text, and suggesting rather implicitly, or certainly this is what I draw out of her work, that we might consider the text as a form of material construction or architecture. And if not architecture, then surely we can agree that each medium has its own architectonics – a series of procedures for the material organisation and structuring of space – and that coming to understand the architectonics of writing offers a new way of imagining architectural design.

Responding to a collection of essays constructing a debate between the seemingly opposite facing disciplines of urbanism and interiors – one looking outwards to the spaces of the city, the other towards the world inside buildings, I will move on to describe a site-writing configured as a series of intermezzos inserted into the book as built structure. An intermezzo is a composition that fits between other musical or dramatic entities, such as acts of a play or movements of a larger musical work. In this context the intermezzo consisted of double-sided joints located between the interior territories of the nine essays situated within the larger scaled urban texture of the book. I took the first line and last line to constitute the exterior edge of each essay, and responding to the content of the text through association,<sup>46</sup> I positioned quotes from

---

<sup>45</sup> Mary Ann Caws, *A Metapoetics of the Passage: Architectures in Surrealism and After* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1981) p. xiv.

<sup>46</sup> Psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas has noted that Freud's clearest account of his method outlined in 'Two Encyclopaedia Articles: A. Psycho-Analysis', suggests that psychoanalysis takes place if two functions are linked – the analysand's free associations and the psychoanalyst's evenly suspended attentiveness. See Christopher Bollas, 'Freudian Intersubjectivity: Commentary on Paper by Julie Gerhardt and Annie Sweetnam,' *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, v. 11 (2001) pp. 93–105, p. 93. See also Sigmund Freud, 'Two Encyclopedia Articles: (A) Psycho-Analysis' [1923] *The Standard*



other practitioners and theorists which touched on similar subjects, objects and spaces, back to back on pages inserted between the essays, creating a series of interfaces between adjacent interiors.<sup>47</sup>

Opportunities for producing this kind of work and for developing its critical and creative potential are now finally possible because of the emerging body of architectural design research exploring the spatial qualities of writing, for example, as a form of materialized philosophy in the work of H elene Frichot,<sup>48</sup> Stephen Loo, Peg Rawes,<sup>49</sup> and Katie Lloyd Thomas; poetic practice in the artefacts and texts created by Linda Maria Walker;<sup>50</sup> landscape criticism in the essays of Katja Grillner<sup>51</sup> and Sarah Treadwell;<sup>52</sup> and

---

*Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVIII (1920–1922): Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Group Psychology and Other Works*, translated from the German under the general editorship of James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955) pp. 235–254. In ‘On Beginning the Treatment’ Freud explains how, in including rather than excluding ‘intrusive ideas’ and ‘side-issues’, the process of association differs from ordinary conversation. See Sigmund Freud, ‘On Beginning the Treatment (Further Recommendations on the Technique of Psycho-Analysis I)’ [1913] *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XII (1911–1913): The Case of Schreber, Papers on Technique and Other Works*, translated from the German under the general editorship of James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1958) pp. 121–144, pp. 134–135. Bollas defines free association as that which occurs when we think by not concentrating on anything in particular, and where the ideas that emerge which seem to be the conscious mind to be disconnected, but are instead related by a hidden and unconscious logic. See Christopher Bollas, *Free Association* (Duxford, Cambridge: Icon Books Ltd., 2002) pp. 4–7.

<sup>47</sup> Jane Rendell, ‘Intermezzo’, in Rochus Hinkel, (ed.) *Urban Interior – Informal Explorations, Interventions and Occupations* (Baunach, Germany: Spurbuchverlag, 2011).

<sup>48</sup> See for example H elene Frichot, ‘Following H elene Cixous’s Steps Towards a Writing Architecture’, in *Writing Architecture*, special issue of *Architecture Theory Review*, 15/3, (2010) and H elene Frichot, ‘I Would Prefer Not To: How Bartleby’s Formula Troubles Collective Design Practices’ in *Alternative Practices in Design: The Collective - Past, Present & Future*, convened by Harriet Edquist and Laurene Vaughan, *Geoplaced Knowledges*, DRI, RMIT University (9 July 2010).

<sup>49</sup> See for example, Peg Rawes, ‘Plenums: Re-thinking Matter, Geometry and Subjectivity’, in Katie Lloyd Thomas, (ed.), *Material Matters: Architecture and Material Practice*, (London: Routledge, 2006) pp. 55–66.

<sup>50</sup> See for example, Linda Marie Walker, ‘Of Restless Goings-On, and Actual Dyings’, *Angelaki*, 11/1 (April 2006); Linda Marie Walker. ‘My Friends the Birds’ in Barbara Bolt, Felicity Colman, Graham Jones, Ashley Woodward (eds)

architectural theory in the performative texts of Katarina Bonnevier,<sup>53</sup> and Naomi Stead.<sup>54</sup> With the current flourishing of this field, the time is ripe to consider how this kind of research, which takes place through writing as a form of designing, defines a new relation between these two architectural processes.<sup>55</sup> This relation is no longer one of opposition or negation, nor one where writing, as handmaid, simply documents and

---

*Sensorium: Aesthetics, Art, Life*, (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007); Linda Marie Walker, 'Tender and True: the place the time the particle', *IDEA: The Journal of the Interior Design/Interior Architecture Educators Association* (2009); Linda Marie Walker, 'And So On, And' in 'Entr'acte: Interval', *Architecture Theory Review* 16/2 (2011); and Linda Marie Walker 'Writing, A Little Machine', *Architecture Theory Review* 17/1 (2012)

<sup>51</sup> See <http://www.akad.se/progwri.htm>. (AKAD: The Academy of for Practice-based Research in Architecture and Design). See also Katja Grillner 'The Halt at the Door of the Boot-Shop', in Katja Grillner, et al. (eds), *01..AKAD*, (Stockholm: AKAD and Axl Books, 2005); Katja Grillner, *Writing and Landscape – Setting Scenes for Critical Reflection* in Jonathan Hill (ed.), *Opposites Attract*, special issue of the *Journal of Architecture* 8/2 (2003): pp. 239-49 and Katja Grillner, *Ramble, Linger and Gaze: Dialogues from the Landscape Garden*, PhD Dissertation 2000, KTH Stockholm.

<sup>52</sup> See for example, Sarah Treadwell 'Pink and White Descriptions', in Naomi Stead and Lee Stickell (eds), *Writing Architecture*, special issue of *Architecture Theory Review*, (2010) v. 15, n. 3.

<sup>53</sup> Katerina Bonnevier, *Behind Straight Curtains: Towards a Queer Feminist Theory of Architecture*, PhD Dissertation 2007, KTH Stockholm, (Stockholm: Axl Books, 2007).

<sup>54</sup> See for example, Naomi Stead (ed.), *Semi-Detached: Writing, Representation and Criticism in Architecture*, (Melbourne: Uro Media, 2012); Naomi Stead, 'Writing the City, or, The Story of a Sydney Walk,' *NORA—Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, (December 2010): 18/4, pp. 226–245; Naomi Stead, 'If on a Winter's Day a Tourist: Writing the Experience of Stockholm,' *Architectural Theory Review* 14/2 (August 2009): pp. 108-118 and Naomi Stead, Katrina Schlunke and Trina Day, 'Sydney Letters,' in *Mapping Sydney: Experimental Cartography and the Imagined City*, exhibition catalogue, (Sydney: Local Consumption Publications, 2009), unpaginated.

<sup>55</sup> The issue of the timeliness of this strand of feminist interdisciplinary writing has been addressed directly by feminist sociologist Mona Livholts who with sensitivity and humour draws on performative techniques to describe the sexism of academia. See Mona Livholts, 'The Snow Angel and other Imprints: An Untimely Academic Novella', *International Review of Qualitative Research*, 3/1 (2010): pp. 103–124; Mona Livholts, 'The Professor's Chair: an Untimely Academic Novella', *Life-Writing*, 7/2 (2010): pp. 155–168; and Mona Livholts (ed) *Emergent Writing Methodologies in Feminist Studies* (London: Routledge, 2012).

comments on the architectural design research activities of her master, instead, by employing design to their own ends, to confront the institutional limits of both architectural research and academic writing, feminists offer reconfigurations of architectural design research through new conceptualizations of positionality, subjectivity and textuality. You might say we are finding our way with words.<sup>56</sup>

### List of Images

Images 1–2: muf architecture/art, *Barking Town Centre*, London, (2010). Courtesy of muf.

Images 3–4: muf architecture/art, *Hypocaust Pavilion*, St Albans, (2004). Courtesy of muf.

Images 5–10: Elizabeth Diller and Ricardo Scofidio, *Bad Press: Dissident Housework Series* (1993-1998). Courtesy of Diller Scofidio + Renfro.

Image 11: Jane Rendell, *An Embellishment: Purdah* (2006) *Spatial Imagination*, The Domo Baal Gallery, London. Photograph: David Cross of Cornford & Cross (2006). Reproduced by kind permission of David Cross.

---

<sup>56</sup> 'A way with words', rather than 'away with the fairies' – I use 'finding' to evoke the on-going present tense, as an indirect gesture of thanks to Hélène Cixous and her magnificent essay 'Coming to Writing' which has served as a source of inspiration for many of the writers I reference here, including myself. See Hélène Cixous, 'Coming to Writing', [1977], in Hélène Cixous *'Coming to writing' and other essays*, edited by Deborah Jenson, translated by Sarah Cornell, Deborah Jenson, Ann Liddle, Susan Sellers (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991). And as Cixous writes on page 4: 'Writing is good: it's what never ends'.

