

Becoming a Feminist Architect, ... visible, momentous, with

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¹ Besides this issue, the conference has led to Hélène Frichot, Catharina Gabrielsson and Helen Runting, eds., *Architectures and Feminisms: Ecologies, Economies, Technologies* (London: Routledge, 2017) and Karin Reisinger and Meike Schalk, eds., “Styles of Queer Feminist Practices and Objects,” *Architecture and Culture* Vo. 5 Issue 3 (2017).

² Elizabeth Grosz, ed., *Becomings: Explorations in Time, Memory, and Futures* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999), 77-157.

³ Doina Petrescu. “Foreword: From Alterities and Beyond,” in *Altering Practices: Feminist Politics and Poetics of Space*, ed. Doina Petrescu (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), xvii.

⁴ See for example Nishat Awan, Tatjana Schneider and Jeremy Till, *Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2011).

⁵ “Dirty resilience” is a term used by Tara Tabassi in Wendy Harcourt, Sacha Knox and Tara Tabassi, “World-wise Otherwise Stories for our Endtimes: Conversations on Queer Ecologies,” in *Practicing Feminist Political Ecologies: Moving Beyond the ‘Green Economy,’* eds. Wendy Harcourt and Ingrid L. Nelson (London: Zed Books, 2015), 299.

This issue is one of three publications subsequent to the 13th International Architectural Humanities Research Association (AHRA) Conference “Architecture & Feminisms: Ecologies, Economies, Technologies,” which was held at KTH School of Architecture, Stockholm, between the 17th to 19th November in 2016.¹ The conference gathered around 200 participants and included over a hundred paper presentations and performances, as well as two exhibitions. The overwhelming interest in reviving the feminist discourse in architecture gave us the opportunity to reflect on the process of becoming feminist architects. *Becoming a feminist architect* is a complex process, rife with strategies, tactics, frictions, advances and retreats, that will continue to engage us in the future as it does now. This became clear through the presentations of a wide range of different feminist architectural practices, both historical and contemporary, their diverse theoretical underpinnings and methodological reflections and speculations. The present publication assembles a series of vital discussions that emerged at the event, including accounts of careful and creative ways of becoming feminist architects by “knowing and doing otherwise,”² “practising ‘otherwise,’”³ or doing architecture in other ways,⁴ the implication of which is a rethinking and expansion of the conventional scope of architectural practice. With these three publications – this edition of *Field Journal*, the *Architecture and Culture* issue “Styles of Queer Feminist Practices and Objects,” and the anthology *Architecture and Feminisms: Ecologies, Economies, Technologies* – we have made an effort to create space for as many of the voices and positions present at the conference as possible.

This issue presents a number of practices, as well as processes of formation, taking into account personal becomings and individual actions, and embracing the “dirty resilience”⁵ of collaboration, which refuses to be purified into neat categories or binaries. Instead, we have invited a wide variety of feminist approaches from “radical feminist, to lesbian feminist, to black feminist, to postcolonial feminist, to crip

- ⁶ Hélène Frichot in the call for papers, see <http://architecturefeminisms.org>
- ⁷ The notion of becoming has for example been developed in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983); Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).
- ⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*.
- ⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 238.
- ¹⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*. The orchid and wasp become an especially timely parable on account of recent research about the drastic decline of 75% of the insects of nature reserves across Germany during the last 25 years. See Damian Carrington, "Warning of 'Ecological Armageddon' after Dramatic Plunge in Insect Numbers," *The Guardian*, Oct. 18, 2017.
- ¹¹ On the disloyalty and disrespectfulness of the nomadic subject, see Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subject: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 24. For the connection of subjects and acts see Elizabeth Grosz, *Becoming Undone: Darwinian Reflections on Life, Politics and Art* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 64-67, referring to Bergson's *Time and Free Will*.
- ¹² Doina Petrescu, "Altering Practices," in *Altering Practices: Feminist Politics and Poetics of Space*, ed. Doina Petrescu (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 3.
- ¹³ Meike Schalk, Thérèse Kristiansson and Ramia Mazé, eds., *Feminist Futures of Spatial Practice: Materialisms, Activisms, Dialogues, Pedagogies, Projections*. Baunach: AADR / Spurbuchverlag, 2017.
- ¹⁴ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, 5.

feminist, to queer feminist, to trans feminist, to Sara Ahmed's feminist killjoy, to feminist men, to posthuman feminist, to the liberal and neoliberal feminist, to material feminist, to marxist feminist, to eco feminist, to Roxane Gay's popular *Bad Feminist* and many others, even to postfeminist voices," in an attempt to show that the "claim to feminism continues to be tested and contested."⁶

Before discussing *feminist* advancements of becoming, the concept of becoming and the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari requires some attention.⁷ Processes of becoming are responsive; we become in relation to our environments,⁸ and we become through our alliances.⁹ These aspects are demonstrated in Deleuze and Guattari's famous example of the orchid and the wasp, who perform in collaboration. The orchid mimics the wasp so that the wasp momentarily becomes part of the orchid's reproductive apparatus. For a brief moment, orchid and wasp act in unison while maintaining their distinction.¹⁰ Mapping this cross-species event of a perfect match onto feminist theory and practice, we could surmise that the wasp moves on from the beautiful orchid in order to develop other strategies and other tools, enacting the "art of disloyalty" of a nomadic subject.¹¹ As Doina Petrescu reminds us, "the logic of 'becoming' may offer the potential for an infinite variety of constellations, forming and reforming in perpetual change."¹² Becoming offers us new positions from which to reclaim sustainable futures with long-term perspectives,¹³ while paying attention to micro-politics and micro-perspectives and being aware of how these connect across smaller and larger scales. In these ecosystems of micro and macro, of past, present and future, and of the centers and the margins, Rosi Braidotti has taught us about nomadic subjectivity as a simultaneous destabilization and activation of the center in interaction with the margins.¹⁴

Becoming a Feminist Architect includes different nuances of becoming: from becoming visible, becoming momentous and becoming with, to the becoming of nomadic subjects, formations of knowledge and the development of an ethical practice. Concerned with the built and materialized environment, but well aware that building is not the only way to influence architecture, the authors of this issue reveal different processes of becoming attentive, strategic and collective, starting with the important practice of becoming visible.

Becoming visible

We have collected accounts of practices and discourses that make visible, invisible or (re)present things in particular ways, showing various tactics of unveiling and foregrounding what is not usually taken into consideration. They make us aware of our position as well as the positions of others, enabling us to take up ethical and political questions as part of a feminist practice that contributes to change. "Becoming visible" refers

¹⁵ See also Colebrook, “A Grammar of Becoming: Strategy, Subjectivism and Style,” in *Becomings: Explorations in Time, Memories and Futures*, ed. Elizabeth Grosz (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999), above all 120-21, 132 and 140.

to active as well as reactive strategies of becoming,¹⁵ because the feminist strategy of making visible is often a critical reaction to that which has been rendered invisible or lacks representation, and which therefore demands to be reactivated.

Jane Rendell took the “Architecture and Feminisms” conference as an opportunity to reflect on practices of citation. This is an ethics which is often neglected under the neoliberal conditions that characterise academia at present, which place pressure on researchers to “publish or perish.” In **Jane Rendell *From, in and with Anne Tallentire***, Rendell develops a specific way of becoming in dialogue with Anne Tallentire, demonstrating the importance of careful and situated approaches. Such care, she argues, must be directed not only towards the questions of who we cite in our writings and projects, or whose thoughts we build our thinking upon, but how we give credit to each other. Rendell’s article appeals to researchers to critically reflect upon our citational practices in the production of scholarship in architecture and art. Marie-Louise Richards points to invisibility via the practical paradox of hyper-visible invisibility. In **Hyper-visible Invisibility: Tracing the Politics, Poetics and Affects of the Unseen** she brings out the hegemony of whiteness in architecture and suggests hyper-visible invisibility as a tactic of transgressing borders and going beyond the binaries of race, class and gender.

Aikaterini Antonopoulou enters an equally complex terrain in **Situated Knowledges and Shifting Grounds: Questioning the Reality Effect of High-resolution Imagery**. Here, Antonopoulou discusses how different visualization technologies create different representations of the Zaatari refugee camp. Amelia Vilaplana discusses how devices of media technology transform our relations. In **Urban Sonographies: A Feminist Art Work and the Transformation of Architectural Culture in the Infosphere**, she introduces the decolonial practice of a “spoken space” by the artist Eulália Grau in 1978, examining representational methods and their technological interconnections. In this way of re-claiming, making aware and making visible through citational practices, tactics of hyper-visible invisibility, and the use of various technologies, the authors of this section discuss how different actors approach their matters of concern from amidst their situated territories, which are at the same time impacted upon by global politics.

“Becoming Visible” concludes with Andrea Jeanne Merrett’s study on **Scholarship as Activism: Doris Cole’s and Susana Torre’s Pioneering Feminism in Architectural History**, which examines the legacy of women in American architecture in the 1970s. Merrett argues that Cole and Torre’s scholarship can be understood as a form of activism, challenging the accepted architectural historiography of the time by making visible women’s historical participation in the built environment. As Merrett stresses, this work is far from completed, and continues to engage

- ¹⁶ Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2017), 45.
- ¹⁷ Isabelle Stengers and Vinciane Despret, *Women Who Make a Fuss: The Unfaithful Daughters of Virginia Woolf* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).
- ¹⁸ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (Buffalo, London, Moorebank: Broadview Press, 2013).
- ¹⁹ Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*, 44-45.
- ²⁰ Milevska, "Becoming-Woman from a Feminist Point of View," in *New Feminism: Worlds of Feminism, Queer and Networking Conditions*, ed. Marina Gržinić and Rosa Reitsamer. Vienna: Löcker, 2008), 47.
- ²¹ Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*, 3.
- ²² Meike Schalk, Brady Burroughs, Katja Grillner and Katarina Bonnevier. "FATALE: Critical Studies in Architecture," *Nordic Journal of Architecture*, Vo. 2 (2012), 90-96. FATALE stands for Feminist Architecture Theory: Analysis Laboratory Education.

current feminist architectural activists, now organised in platforms such as Parlour, Architexx and n-ails, and in the collective scholarly effort of actively rewriting architectural course syllabi, textbooks and Wikipedia entries.

The aim of this issue is not only to foreground feminist struggle. We also want to capture a range of shifts which led to rethinking architecture from a feminist perspective.

Becoming momentous

In her book *Living a Feminist Life*, Sara Ahmed writes: "Once a flow is directed, it acquires a momentum."¹⁶ Ahmed, Deleuze and Guattari, Stengers and Despret,¹⁷ and Braidotti have all learned from Virginia Woolf, especially from *Mrs. Dalloway's* walk.¹⁸ Ahmed considers Mrs Dalloway's walk, undertaken on an ordinary day, as indicative of how "life itself can be understood as a path or a trajectory," requiring a shift in "momentum" to change directions or become un-directed.¹⁹ A shift in momentum can take place through a specific event, a conference for example, in relation to an act, or can even be located within a question. Becoming momentous also means becoming influential. Suzana Milevska stresses the importance of events in becomings, and claims a need for "compossible" and connected events to accumulate effects.²⁰ Ahmed locates a notable contemporary momentum in feminism: "... more people gathering on the streets ... more people using a name to identify themselves... the high visibility of feminist activism on social media; in how the word *feminism* can set the stage on fire ..."²¹



Fig. 1 Discussion with Katherine Gibson at the Practices Roundtables Salon at the conference. Photo: Björn Ehrlemark



Fig. 2 Conference bags prepared for the participants to arrive. Photo: Karin Reisinger

Each of us confesses to different histories in our relationship with feminism. For many of us there has been someone who has taught us about gender and feminism and inspired us with a critical momentum and different ways of reflecting on doing architecture, even expanding on what architecture could be. The conference "Architecture & Feminisms" involved students in the course "Architecture and

²³ https://twitter.com/ahra_archfems?lang=de

²⁴ Many thanks to the students of the “Architecture and Gender” course (autumn 2016) who co-shaped the event: Layal Al Haddad, Marie Ekblad, David Hagberg, Matthias Hagegård, Akane Imai, Gabriella Jakobsson, Lisa Christin Jonas, Patrycja Komada, Alice McColl, Jessika Mulraney, Banah Rashid, Lucia Schreiber, Selina Sigg, Hanna Skog and Sofie Tidstrand. (In 2016 the course was held by Karin Reisinger.)

Gender,” which has been delivered regularly at KTH Stockholm since 2008, and was initiated by the teaching and research group FATALE.²² In the autumn term of 2016 the students of the course developed proposals for organising a feminist conference in architecture. They contributed their organisational ideas to the event by preparing necklaces as badges, designing timetable maps to facilitate different itineraries through the many panels and workshops hosted at the conference, and by creating an online exchange platform using twitter (@ahra_archfems).²³ The students participated in creating a welcoming atmosphere for the conference guests, allowing for moments of exchange. They made suggestions about the choreography of presentations, and they also shared their experiences of what “blew them away.”²⁴



Fig. 3 and Fig. 4 Necklace packages for the participants of the conference, prepared by the students of the Architecture and Gender course. Photo: Sofie Tidstrand.

Feminist pedagogies formed an important part of the conference, especially as many of the contributors became pedagogues as part of a feminist aim to transform architectural practice from within the academy. Enabling practices of mutual exchange, peer-to-peer based learning, the insightful re-negotiation of the kinds of knowledge we need to produce in architecture - and according to whose terms and conditions - constituted a crucial concern. Torsten Lange and Emily Eliza Scott curated a conference roundtable dedicated specifically to feminist pedagogies by bringing together situated practices from a wide range of topical, geographical and cultural contexts. Contributors included Lila Athanasiadou, Harriet Harriss, Andrea Jeanne Merrett, Iradj Moeini and Rachel Sara; Jane Rendell concluded the roundtable session with a response. The roundtable resulted in a jointly authored text called **Making Trouble to Stay With: Architecture and Feminist Pedagogies**. Further, in a series of tales Malin Åberg-Wennerholm offers a narrative account of her daily work

²⁵ This is a critical term forwarded by Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*.

²⁶ Special thanks to H el ene Frichot who organised this additional call in the electronic conference system.

²⁷ See <http://www.takingplace.org.uk> (accessed November 6, 2017).

²⁸ Matrix also included the current members of **taking place**, Boys and Dwyer.

²⁹ See also Parlour's website: <http://archiparlour.org>

as the program director at the KTH School of Architecture. Her essay **The Gender-Eye Approach: Eleven Tales from KTH School of Architecture in Stockholm** shows how much fun it can be to act as a feminist "killjoy,"²⁵ especially when pursuing this activity together with students. Through tactics of interruption and actions involving pamphlets, posters, snacks, questionnaires and publications directed towards gender equality issues at KTH,  berg-Wennerholm has made an impact on the school's culture by bringing students and staff together, engaging in critique and criticism, and shifting discussions.

A momentum of a special kind at the conference in Stockholm was stirred by the group **taking place**, which is made up by Jos Boys, Julia Dwyer, Teresa Hoskyns, Katie Lloyd Thomas and Helen Stratford, and their curated 8th **taking place** breakfast, early in the morning of the second conference day. Before the conference, they staged an open call, posing the question: "What are the relevant questions for architecture and feminism today?"²⁶ which were printed on tablecloths they had designed for the discussion-breakfast. Participants took down notes directly onto the tablecloths, while enjoying a buffet of coffee, kn ackebr od, cakes, crazy sweets and fruits. In the essay **TAKING PLACE 8: INTERSTITIAL BREAKFAST**, Hoskyns and Lloyd Thomas share the experience of the **taking place** group,²⁷ over their 15 years of collective practice, which has avoided hierarchical organisation and unitary positions.

Christine Wall gives an account of a history of another collective practice, which we find highly relevant today. In "**We don't have leaders! We're doing it ourselves!': Squatting, Feminism and Built Environment Activism in 1970s London**", she describes how the common care and repair of abandoned buildings has fostered groups of feminist architects in the 1970s, such as Matrix.²⁸ Wall offers detailed insight into the experience of squatting and the material engagements that allowed for reflections on shared feminist struggles.

In the concluding contribution to this section, the Australian research and activist group Parlour generously illuminates their processes of becoming, introducing the audience to the incredible momentum they have applied in the Australian context to addressing the underrepresentation of women in positions of leadership in the field of architecture. With **Parlour: The First Five Years**, Naomi Stead, Gill Matthewson, Justine Clark and Karen Burns share insights into their formation, the pre-history of which was supported by a major research project on gender equity in the architectural profession, and into the outreach activities the group engaged in during the first five years of their collaboration. They show their multi-faceted practice and their momentous activism,²⁹ which has led to substantial change in attitudes to gender in architecture in Australia, as well as inspiring similar activities in the US.

Becoming produces multiple approaches to feminist architectural practices. These are specific and diverse and need to be developed collectively, as groups, across shared platforms, and in relation *with*.

Becoming with

The concluding section foregrounds connective thinking and action, alliances and collective multiplicities. Braidotti's expression "we-are-in-this-together-but-we-are-not-one-and-the-same"³⁰ resists what she calls an "uncritical reproduction of sameness on a planetary scale,"³¹ while at the same time allows us to think, act and become together. In Donna J. Haraway's words, this can also be described as how "[o]ntologically heterogenous partners become who and what they are in relational material semiotic worlding. Natures, cultures, subjects and objects do not preexist their intertwined worldings."³² Haraway argues for transgressing dichotomies by looking at how we are *becoming with*, seeking a resilient and dynamic relation with species, natures, materials and the world around us. This section addresses how we can extend our situated knowledges by embracing a posthuman becoming in which "we" are part of an environment, and entangled in multiple dependencies. And yet the tricky "we" deserves more attention. According to Ahmed, "[t]o build feminist dwellings, we need to dismantle what has already been assembled; we need to ask what it is we are against, what it is we are for, knowing full well that this *we* is not a foundation but what we are working toward. By working out what we are for, we are working out that *we*, that hopeful signifier of a feminist collectivity."³³ Ahmed connects the formation of a *we* to the processes of becoming, which requires collective work.

Gill Matthewson offers a profound insight into such a formation. Based on the collection of empirical data and voices of women in the architectural profession in **Thinking Through Creative Merit and Gender Bias in Architecture**, she shows, through the frame of Isabelle Stengers' concept of the "habitat" of profession and an ecology of practices, a research that became an important knowledge base for the activism of the group Parlour.³⁴ Evan Pavka explores a different kind of archive and history, namely that of same-sex desires through the closet and the grave in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. **From the Closet To the Grave: Architecture, Sexuality and the Mount Royal Cemetery** examines cemeteries and the art of memorialising relationships that happened outside of the heteronormative community of the family. From the queer typology of the closet and the queering of the grave, we move on to multiplying understandings of the concept of *chôra*, another form of receptacle. In **Reconsidering Chôra, Architecture and "Woman"** Louise Burchill gives an account of the philosophical and architectural discourses on *chôra*, from Plato's understanding of *chôra* as the "nurse of all becomings" to Elisabeth Grosz's feminist reading of *chôra* as beyond identity and form, and Ann Bergren's discussion of *chôra* in

³⁰ Rosi Braidotti, "Aspirations of a Posthumanist," (Tanner Lecture on Human Values, Yale University, March 2, 2016).

³¹ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subject*, 6.

³² Donna J. Haraway, *Staying With the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016), 12-13. For *becoming with* see also Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

³³ Sarah Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*, 2.

³⁴ Isabelle Stengers, "Introductory Notes on an Ecology of Practices," *Cultural Studies Review*, Vo 11 No 1 (March 2005).

relation to architecture. Burchill describes *chôra* as the becoming of a pre-architectural space, which makes itself available to multiple readings.

The concluding contribution to this issue, **Of the Urban and the Ocean: Rachel Carson and the Disregard of Wet Volumes** by Charity Edwards, encourages us to rethink our architectural and urban concepts from a posthuman standpoint. With the engagement of the hitherto neglected perspective of a wet ontology, Edwards “wets” the binary and static thinking of architecture. Edwards’ written and visual account of both Rachel Carson’s connective thinking in her main work *See Trilogy* – which has remained in the shadow of her seminal book *Silent Spring* – and her biography, demonstrate the necessity of acknowledging the interdependency of different spatial and temporal scales, the land and the sea, the entanglement of scientific work and personal life, and the relation between past, present and future.

At the 2016 AHRA “Architecture & Feminisms” Conference, we reacted together on shared issues like the need to reframe ontologies, acknowledged a wide variety of approaches for instance, the struggle for resilient working conditions, and projected a care-focused architectural education. There are of course no simple conclusions that can be drawn from this conference. We may rather speak of a multiplicity of outcomes – including new perspectives and insights; inspiration for research, teaching and professional practice; and new collaborations – which may linger, staying with us for some time. One result is this issue, which is one of three publications, each of which illuminates one aspect of the meeting. In this volume, we have gathered contributions from the conference that foreground different becomings of feminist architecture through common concerns and matters of care.³⁵ These “*collective re-constructions*”³⁶ draw attention to the crucial project of becoming feminist architects, which is an “interactive collective process.”³⁷ With this assemblage of essays, it is our ambition to contribute to rethinking, discussing, encouraging, undoing and doing architecture in other ways, in anticipation of alternative futures.

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³⁵ Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

³⁶ Term borrowed from Doina Petrescu, “Altering Practices,” 5.

³⁷ Braidotti about figuration, in *Nomadic Subjects*, 11.

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