History Thesis

Feminist methodology in practice and pedagogy

process, engagement and empowerment through architectural education and professional practice

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cover image: WIAB poster. *Matrix Open Archive*. 1993

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Education is often seen as something that prepares the student for a task or a role in the future, as a worker, as a professional, or more rarely, as a citizen. But as education is a reproductive activity, it concerns not simply the transfer of knowledge between generations, but the active production of persons and relations *in the here and now. If we want different futures, we will need modes of education to produce them, modes that are open to alteration by those participating.*

Trogal, Kim. 'Feminist pedagogies'. p. 239

Prologue

Throughout my own education, I had the opportunity to experience how young architects *are being designed* in three European countries – the UK, France and now the Netherlands. What was quite unique about the University of Bath, where I obtained my Bachelor's degree, was the fact that we went into professional practice very early on – in the spring semester of the second year. All of us found assistant jobs in a 'conventional' practice (either in architecture or construction) because that was what everyone wanted at the time, and that was what we were prepared for in terms of skills and knowledge, and, to be fair, only a conventional practice was able to 'afford' to employ an inexperienced student for some 3-6 months. While the purpose of this practical placement was to facilitate our entry into this professional factory and give us an edge compared to other students, also in terms of salary, it has very often enabled us to be more critical about the role of the architect or the profession in general. It meant that some of my peers have decided to pursue other careers revolving around architecture but nevertheless more satisfying in terms of creativity, work hours, or remuneration. Those who still wanted to stay within the architectural profession but remained critical of so-called 'professional practice,' myself included, graduated alone and confused in their pursuit of alternative forms of practice.

These experiences, as well as my interest in participatory design, led me to dive into feminist theory which in turn encouraged me to question how architectural education can already be a participative, self-reflective and critical practice itself, and how we students are encouraged to (or discouraged from) interrogating not only what we learn but also *how we learn it.* My motivation for investigating feminist pedagogy in architectural education is therefore linked to, and influenced by, my subjective experiences. While my experience both in education and practice has never been that of discrimination or exclusion, I do acknowledge that I owe it in great respect to the women I am writing about, and that my experience is not universal. With this essay I hope to add a voice to the collection of subjectivities which is that of recognition what feminist values have brought to practising, teaching and learning in architecture.

Julia Korpacka

Introduction

on object of inquiry

This paper interrogates the recent history of architectural education through the lens of feminist (design) methodologies. Building on Kim Trogal's call to 'raise questions about the ways feminist pedagogies can transform relations for feminist futures,'[1] I aim to problematise the methodology employed in architectural education and explore how architects are trained to think about their role in the design process in relation to other stakeholders. I investigate how the historical situatedness of feminist practitioners based in the UK between the 1980s and 2000s, particularly the design co-operative Matrix, influenced the ways they practise(d), and, consequentially, their teaching methods employed in design education. Judy Attfield in *Bringing Modernity Home* suggests that 'by providing historical explanations for women's lack of visibility at the production stage, it is possible to understand better why dominant masculine values are constantly reproduced in the material world.'[2] While her statement refers to the production of design, I argue that it rings even more true concerning the production of *designers* – the design education. By problematising the personal-political[3] context which triggered the emergence of Matrix (contrary to developing purely from theory) and a specific methodology, or in Julia Dwyer's words, tactics,[4] I enquire how their approach to projects translated into pedagogy.

on structure of argument

The first chapter aims to situate people, discussions on architecture and education in their time and place to problematise what ideas, philosophies and events informed their perception of the built environment and their positions as feminist practitioners, educators and scholars. Firstly, I look at the theory of feminist education in literature, its elements and objectives, as a frame of reference and contextual basis for my analysis of Matrix's approach. Then, through literature analysis, conference recordings and past interviews, I enquire into how British feminist architecture practice between the 1980s and 2000s was informed by a particular interdisciplinary discourse and political activism, which has in turn influenced their pedagogical awareness. This section interrogates the context in which Matrix, a feminist architecture co-operative from London, which operated between 1981 and 1994, was able to emerge, and how the architectural discourse and socio-political atmosphere of the time encouraged a specific methodology in

their practice. Consequently, I begin to trace the relations between thinking and doing related to the development of their practice and didactics by means of a network drawing, informing my line of inquiry.

The chapter that follows investigates the access courses for women led by feminist practitioners and teachers connected to Matrix. It interrogates how their feminist values were translated into didactics, with a particular focus on the reinterpretation of the role of the architect in the decision-making mechanisms surrounding the design process. Through the use of archival material, such as studio brochures, photographs and recordings, as well as writings and testimonies of those involved, I trace back the methodology employed in their pedagogy and contextualise it against their practice. The examples look at the interrelations between Matrix's approach to projects, such as the Jagonari Women's Centre or The Other Side of Waiting, and pedagogy embedded in their practice – the *Women into Architecture and Building* and *Women in Architecture and the Built Environment* courses, which ran when Matrix was operating.

1 Kim Trogal. 'Feminist pedagogies.' In Meike Schalk et al. eds. *Feminist Futures of Spatial Practice.* AADR, 2017, p. 239

2 Judy Attfield. *Bringing Modernity Home, Writings on Popular Design and Material Culture.* University Press, 2007, p. 77

3 ***Personal is political*** is a slogan attributed to Carol Hanish and her 1969 essay, and popularised by second-wave feminist activists and student protests. Hanish argued that personal experiences are a result of one's position within the system of existing power relationships. While the inverse interpretation, that of personal actions having a political significance, is often considered a misinterpretation, I argue that within the collective dimension, actions such as squatting, sit at the intersections of personal and political. See: Carol Hanish. 'Personal is Political'. In Shulamith Firestone, Anne Koedt eds. *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation*. Radical Feminism, 1970, pp. 76-78

4 Julia Dwyer. In Lynne Walker (chair). *AA XX 100: AA Women and Architecture in Context 1917-2017 - DAY 2 / PART 4.* Architectural Association, 3 November 2017

on sources and method

While published writings and archival material constitute the point of departure and foundation for my research, what proved invaluable in filling the gaps in the literature and answering my questions were recordings of conferences, lectures and panels, and most importantly, written exchanges. They bring to light the shared connections, the processes and the contexts influencing feminist practices and pedagogies, not only in their content but also in their structure. It is something I became a lot more aware of after reading Jane Rendell's chapter in *Altering practices. How to take place (but only for so long)* is a record of personal reflections on the conferences on which she spoke and how she attempted to reaffirm her feminist position as a point of departure for more autobiographical, self-reflective writing, poetic in its prosaicism.[5] Many of the conferences I watched took place at universities at which members of Matrix studied or taught; the audience made up of students and feminists, the panellists speaking not anymore from a defensive position but rather taking part in a more relaxed, horizontal discussion along with their peers, which allowed more insight into the context they operated in. Similarly, a paper by Christine Wall on *Squatting, Feminism and Built Environment Activism in 1970s London* offered a unique insight into the links between lifestyle, activism and feminist practice through oral testimonies.[6] These records of spoken history revealed links between the background which feminist architectural practices could emerge from and the methodologies employed by members of these practices in architectural education.

Part of my initial assumption was to write about the *individual* case studies – taking a single 'protagonist' and writing about *her* ways of practising, *her* ways of teaching. I have soon realised, however, that truly feminist pedagogy, just like practice, is never autonomous or self-contained. Feminist education draws from the intricate, rhizomatic web of collaboration, reciprocity and shared experience. While studying the materials for this essay I realised that the people I want to write about are not self-reliant 'entities' – they collaborate, contribute to one another's books, cross-reference, credit and dialogue with each other in chapters, conferences, projects and pedagogies.[7] This led me to try to position these networks spatially and in relation to time, and each other. Not quite as a tree, whose logic expects of each idea to have a mother and a father; the family branching out from a common trunk, but as a rhizome – a term which architect and feminist Doina Petrescu borrows from French philosopher Gilles Deleuze in the introduction to *Altering practices*.[8] Deleuze describes as rhizomatic those assemblages operating simultaneously, emphasizing the lateral connectivity and multiplicity

of things in opposition to the 'Western' bias towards root-tree symbolism.[9] In the case of these feminist relations, the advantage of a rhizomatic understanding is not only ontological, as in feminist values *being* multiple and interconnected, but also epistemologically – a rhizome is an open-ended system which seems more appropriate to use in such production of knowledge. Examples investigated in this essay are radically collaborative – drawing on the networks between architects and artists, pedagogy and practice, philosophy and activism. They were never a product of a single mind; it would therefore be ignorant of me to assign them to a specific 'author'. Instead, I attempt to present them as nodes, or 'points of encounter' of certain people, practices, philosophies and methodologies.

5 Jane Rendell. 'How to take place (but only for so long)'. In Doina Petrescu. *Altering practices. Feminist politics and poetics of space.* Routledge, 2007, pp. 69-88

6 Christine Wall. '"We don't have leaders! We're doing it ourselves!": Squatting, Feminism and Built Environment Activism in 1970s London'. *field* 7(1), 2017, pp. 129-142

7 Doina Petrescu. op. cit. p. 10

8 Ibid. p. 11

9 Geoffrey Mitchell. 'Rhizome'. In *Dictionary of Sociology.* Routledge, 1979.

Chapter 1: Personal is Political

on feminist classroom as space of radical interrogation

In *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks pointed out that during her undergraduate and graduate years, the feminist classroom was 'the only space where students could raise questions about the pedagogical process.'[10] The reading of this paragraph about an American university in the 1970s from the perspective of a female student at one of the top European schools of architecture half a century later is, at this particular moment, my solution to the questions which have built up in my head over the course of my architectural education. Since I joined the ranks of academia, I have been perpetually confronted with the challenges to 'reinvent the profession,' 'redefine the role of an architect,' whether in relation to the climate crisis, technological advancements, economic processes or social agency. While looking for an answer to these questions as part of my degree, I found that the issue of education itself is rarely being problematised. My position is one in which I attempt to question what I get exposed to during my studies. From there I noticed that feminist architecture and pedagogy integrated into the curriculum is most often present at progressive (or socially-oriented) universities such as the University of Sheffield in the UK or Stockholm's KTH. In more conservative university environments, among which I consider TU Delft to be such,[11] those positions centre nowadays around particular teachers, functioning more as isolated entities rather than radically collaborative collisions.[12] As students, we are being challenged to reinvent ourselves, what we know and how we will practice, while the underlying principles guiding our education remain unchanged. Dear bell hooks, it appears you may still be right *(to some extent)*.

As hooks reminds us, 'the classroom remains the most radical space of possibility' in the academic environment.[13] Hers was a position of a black female whose education began in segregated schools as the *practice of freedom*[14] which she had to reclaim in academia after entering the racially 'integrated' system. Nevertheless, it remains relevant as a stance that prepared ground for the possibilities of a feminist education which has evolved from (what bell hooks labelled as classist and predominantly white) second-wave concerns with the underrepresentation

of women in academia and professional practice, confrontation with the domestic and 'feminine', to third- and fourth-wave influences, leading to engaged, participatory, transversal practice. The voices of black female academics and educators made space for the concept of intersectionality[15] in feminism - one that takes into account the interrelations of the elements of identity such as gender, race, class, ability, or ethnic background, and the resultant patterns of exclusion. These notions triggered a new form of pedagogy and practice towards the end of the XX century. One that, according to Kim Trogal, nurtures 'different kinds of relations, which are not only less exclusive and hierarchical, but are transformative connections made in recognition of, and active engagement with, difference.'[16]

Leslie Weisman in *Re-designing Architectural Education* argued that the profession of architecture faces irrelevance and anachronism unless it becomes more responsive to the human condition of society as a whole.[17]

16 Kim Trogal. op. cit. p. 239

17 Leslie Weisman. 'Re-designing Architectural Education'. In Joan Rothschild, Alethea Cheng. *Design and Feminism.* Rutgers University Press, 1999, p. 159

10 bell hooks. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as a Practice of Freedom.* Taylor & Francis, 1994, p. 6

11 As it was pointed out to me by my tutor Birgitte Hansen, there was a Women's Studies research group present at TU Delft during the 1970s and 80s. See Noortje Weenink. *Veertig jaar na Vrouwenstudies: een post-feministisch tijdperk?* Archined. 09 February 2021.

12 ***collision*** understood in its physical meaning - a meeting of two or more bodies causing an exchange of energy and momentum.

13 bell hooks. op. cit. p. 12

14 hooks refers to education as a ***practice of freedom*** when she speaks of excitement, enticement and empowerment that comes from mutually-engaged pedagogy – something she experienced in a segregated school and what she has been advocating for throughout her life. See ibid.

15 ***Intersectionality*** is a term used by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw in her 1989 essay to describe how individual concepts of identity such as race, class, gender or (dis)ability come together to intersect 'at specific experiential and structural points' see: Kimberlé Crenshaw. 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics'. *University of Chicago Legal Forum.* 1(1), 1989. and Abigail Moody. *Theorizing an Intersectional Approach to Feminist Composition Pedagogy.* Master Thesis. Western Carolina University, 2017, p. 4

She described how the XIX and XX century imposed dichotomies and fragmentation of societies and (built) environments, which are no longer appropriate in the face of a new century, growing inequalities and environmental degradation. She highlighted the necessity for, and advantages of, interrogating the meaning of architecture both in pedagogy and practice. Judy Attfield emphasised it is at 'that particular intersection – between what we think and what we do – that the transitive meaning of "design" as a verb, as an action, can take place.'[18]

Weisman listed 4 general feminist educational principles which constitute the basis for, but do not delimit, my further analysis:

- Employ collaborative learning methods
- Share authority and knowledge
- Emphasize ethical values, respect for human diversity, and interconnectedness
- Eliminate false dichotomies by connecting theory with 'hands-on' practice

While it can be argued that elements of these principles are being employed in many design studio pedagogies worldwide, I am interested in the togetherness and interconnectedness of these points, as well as some other, perhaps more contextual components which, for some reason, got lost in the theoretical, academicized discourse. In the following chapters I attempt to problematise how these principles, together with more radical approaches, can be traced back to the methods developed and employed by feminist design practices at the turn of the century, but remaining on the margins of the architectural canon – such as the feminist design cooperative Matrix.

on the conditions for Matrix

Jos Boys, one of the founding and most outspoken members of Matrix, during the *AA Women and Architecture in Context 1917-2017* conference, chaired by Lynne Walker, mentioned how, throughout her studies,[19] she and her peers were educated to think that architecture is neutral and purely functional, which they did not agree with, as, back in 1979, they had a strong notion that changes were inevitable, both in the profession and in the society. While this may ring true to many generations of soon-to-be-architects, the objects of their concerns and the conditions surrounding them shift according to the presence of larger economic, political and societal forces. Boys highlighted that, particularly as female students coming from top London schools of architecture, such as the Bartlett or the Architectural Association (AA), they were concerned with female agency and representation in

the profession. They formed the Feminist Design Collective to discuss these issues, arguing, as she recalled, whether to situate oneself within the profession, or outside of it. They looked at American historians, like Dolores Hayden, and feminist geographers, as they were unable to find these answers within the architectural discourse. This led to a range of more or less formal initiatives, such as the feminist group of the New Architecture Movement, Women's Design Service, as well as Matrix which began as a book group,[20] resulting in the publication, *Making Space: Women in the Man-made Environment*.[21]

This retrospective account of the background of Matrix focused mainly on the academic context, as the conference took place as part of a larger event and book release celebrating the centenary of women's admittance to the AA in 2017. It is, however, important to point out also the more personal-political engagement which went beyond mere disagreement with the status quo perpetuated in academia. In a partly-autobiographical paper released in the same year, Christine Wall uncovers links between squatting and the emergence of feminist architectural practice in 1970's London by interviewing Matrix's founding members who also spoke at the AA conference – Jos Boys and Julia Dwyer[22] – adding another layer of understanding how their feminist position was also evident in certain

18 Judy Attfield. op. cit. p. 77

19 Jos Boys received her Architecture degree from The Bartlett School of Architecture, University College London

20 Jos Boys. In Lynne Walker (chair) op. cit.

21 Matrix. *Making Space: Women in the Man-made Environment*. Pluto Press, 1984.

22 Christine Wall. op. cit. pp. 129-141

lifestyle choices, or rather, how what they were *doing* influenced the ways in which they were *thinking.*

As Wall recalled, squatting became regulated by Inner London Authorities during the late 1970s with several more-or-less official support initiatives which included legal advice, newsletters, or small repair grants available to organised groups.[23] Squatting became a popular practice among a number of architecture students from the more radical units at the AA or the Bartlett, including Boys and Dwyer, for whom it constituted a political choice rather than a financial necessity,[24] but which nevertheless grounded their views and became a catalyst for further initiatives, also within the profession. Often living in places in need of repair,[25] but also simply by *being able* to perform major architectural alterations (contrary to the contemporary student realities of living in privately-rented rooms or at parental homes), they acquired, often by necessity, some very practical skills of plastering, bricklaying, or carpentry, going beyond what students are usually involved in academia. Moreover, squats were used not only for residential purposes; they were also the first meeting spaces for the Feminist Design Collective and, consequentially, Matrix. As Jos Boys recalled, 'both the practice and the book grew out of it.'[26] Many of the squats operated communally, and Julia Dwyer's was in addition women-only and on an income-sharing basis. Active participation in discussions was necessary in collective living to achieve group consensus, especially between class and opinion differences. Moreover, as Jos Boys pointed out, the squatting community sensitised her to values, gender relations and hierarchies other than those of a traditional nuclear family and the environment she was brought up in.[27] They both considered these experiences invaluable for their feminist positions as architects, and, in the case of Jos Boys, also as a writer. As Christine Wall[28] summarised, squatting 'enabled a generation of feminist women to engage directly with the built environment'[29] and the politics around it.

Jos Boys highlighted how, thanks to a socialist atmosphere in 1980's London, funding opportunities arose around community-oriented services, which enabled Matrix to operate, for a limited time, in the way they did. As Lynne Walker recalled, post-war Great Britain was struggling with the failures of high-rise social housing, which fuelled the feminist and leftist debates of the 1970s.[30] In *Women & Planning*, Clara Greed points out how the 1981 Greater London Council (GLC) elections resulted in a new form of local governance, headed by Ken Livingstone.[31] What was particularly important within the context of Matrix, was GLC's Women's Committee, operating between 1982

and 1985, whose interest in community politics, feminist groups, transport and planning facilitated much of Matrix's work. Their budget rose from £350,000 to £16 million,[32] and a significant amount of it funded projects in which the cooperative was involved.

At the AA conference, Julia Dwyer spoke of Matrix's tactics 'that were adopted given the conditions of the time that were mutating through that decade, and they were feminist tactics.'[33] While these tactics are a retrospective reflection on how their methodology evolved, they offer valuable insights into key principles linking the experiences of squatting, activism and critical architectural education with their approach to projects (and, as I will demonstrate in the following chapter, to pedagogy). She highlighted four key adjectives which informed this approach:

- *Exemplary* – by practising differently and consciously, they interrogated how practice is managed and how it can accommodate gendered needs, also those of female practitioners,[34] such as equal pay, or flexible working hours. In addition to that, exemplary

23 Ibid. p. 131

24 Julia Dwyer recalled 'a large noticeboard [which] held an invitation for people to join a squat' present in the AA upon her arrival. Not only students, but also tutors were involved in squat communities, and university officials seem not to have minded these anarchist and libertarian initiatives being promoted within their walls, something I dare say unthinkable in contemporary institutions, often implicated in politics in a completely inverse way. See ibid. p. 132

25 It was a common practice at the time for councils and developers to partly demolish or destroy houses to discourage squatters. See ibid. p. 133

26 Ibid. p. 132

27 Ibid. pp. 135-137

28 Christine Wall, towards the end of the text, reveals that she was also a squatter herself and a tradeswoman involved in a collective project led by Susan Francis, also a member of Matrix. This experience encouraged her to join an access course at North London Polytechnic, which I will introduce in Chapter 2, and to eventually study architecture. See ibid. p. 137-138

29 Ibid. p. 139

30 Lynne Walker, Sue Cavanagh. 'Women's Design Service: Feminist Resources for Urban Environments'. In Joan Rothschild, Alethea Cheng. op. cit. p. 149

31 Clara Greed. *Women & Planning* Routledge, 1994, p. 169

32 Ibid.

33 Julia Dwyer. In Lynne Walker (chair) op. cit.

34 Matrix Design Cooperative. 'Final words on women in architecture'. *Building Design*. 2 September 1983.

meant being vocal – in writing, speaking and doing – confronting different opinions on what women should be doing (instead).

- *Selective* – working only on publicly funded projects. This particular approach coincided with working in a specific time and place – 1980s London – which provided the (mainly financial and organisational) conditions for Matrix to operate in the way they did for a limited time.

- Enabling – their projects were mainly funded by GLC Women's Committee, so a large part of their work was actually helping women groups to apply for funding for these building changes.

- *Instructive* – this tactic revolved around a transparent building process – involving and participatory. Moreover, when the GLC was dissolved by Margaret Thatcher in 1986, the members of Matrix realised the need for a legacy in printed material, showing not only their building process but also promoting a career in the built environment, architecture being but one of many.[35]

As Dwyer admitted, 'we didn't know a lot, so we embarked on an experiment.'[36] Jos Boys in her essay on feminist analysis of architecture, written in 1984, wrote that 'feminist ways of looking at and making architecture [...] are based on a certain approach, not a "recipe". This approach stems initially from an understanding that our surroundings are not neutral, that there is a relationship between the content of architecture and our capitalist and sexist social structure.'[37] Paired with a more retrospective, mature reflection on the tactics, this shows how the way in which they understood their role as architects has also changed through time. Matrix may have started as a discussion group, but it was born out of the juxtaposition between what the women were experiencing around them, how they were engaged in squatting and activism, and what they were told by academia, media and mainstream society. Their position was that of agents and doers, rather than academics and thinkers. The practice and their approach to projects were not based on any pre-existing model – by working in a specific way and *learning by doing*, they performed an intuitive experiment with practising differently given the conditions of that time. Deleuze's rhizomatic structure comes in handy again when trying to describe the relationship between doing and thinking in Matrix's practice,[38] as shown in Figure 1 (p. 18-19). The lateral stem symbolises the *doing* – squatting, practising, engaging – while the ideas, texts and pedagogies are 'offshoots' which sprouted from that richness of experience. Politics made Matrix possible, and politics

also brought the end of it. After the GLC was shut down, such a way of practising was no longer financially viable and Matrix closed in 1992. Some members set up their own practices, others combined it with education or moved completely into teaching, especially if they were already involved in didactics while Matrix was still operating. Pedagogy was a way of extending the practice's legacy and sustaining its influence. Its members nevertheless kept on collaborating at the intersections of practice, pedagogy and theory. Problematising discrimination, sexism, underrepresentation and objectification of women, which were part of the larger feminist discourse of the time, and the reasons for the practice to begin with, was combined with the experiences of *direct engagement* with the built environment and its users through squatting and practising. This led to a small but meaningful portfolio of built projects that influenced Matrix's pedagogical engagements which I will discuss in the next chapter, maturing into broader concerns with (dis)ability, race, or class through the projects and groups they were involved with.

35 Matrix consisted not only of architects; Susan Francis was trained both as an architect and carpenter, and Frances Bradshaw was also a bricklayer. The group collaborated with and organised classes for women bricklayers, plasterers, carpenters and surveyors.

36 Julia Dwyer. In Lynne Walker (chair) op. cit.

37 Jos Boys. 'Is there a Feminist Analysis of Architecture?' *Built Environment 10(1). Women and the Environment*. 1984, p. 33

38 Using the rhizome to describe also Matrix's thinking by doing approach was suggested to me by Brigitte Hansen.

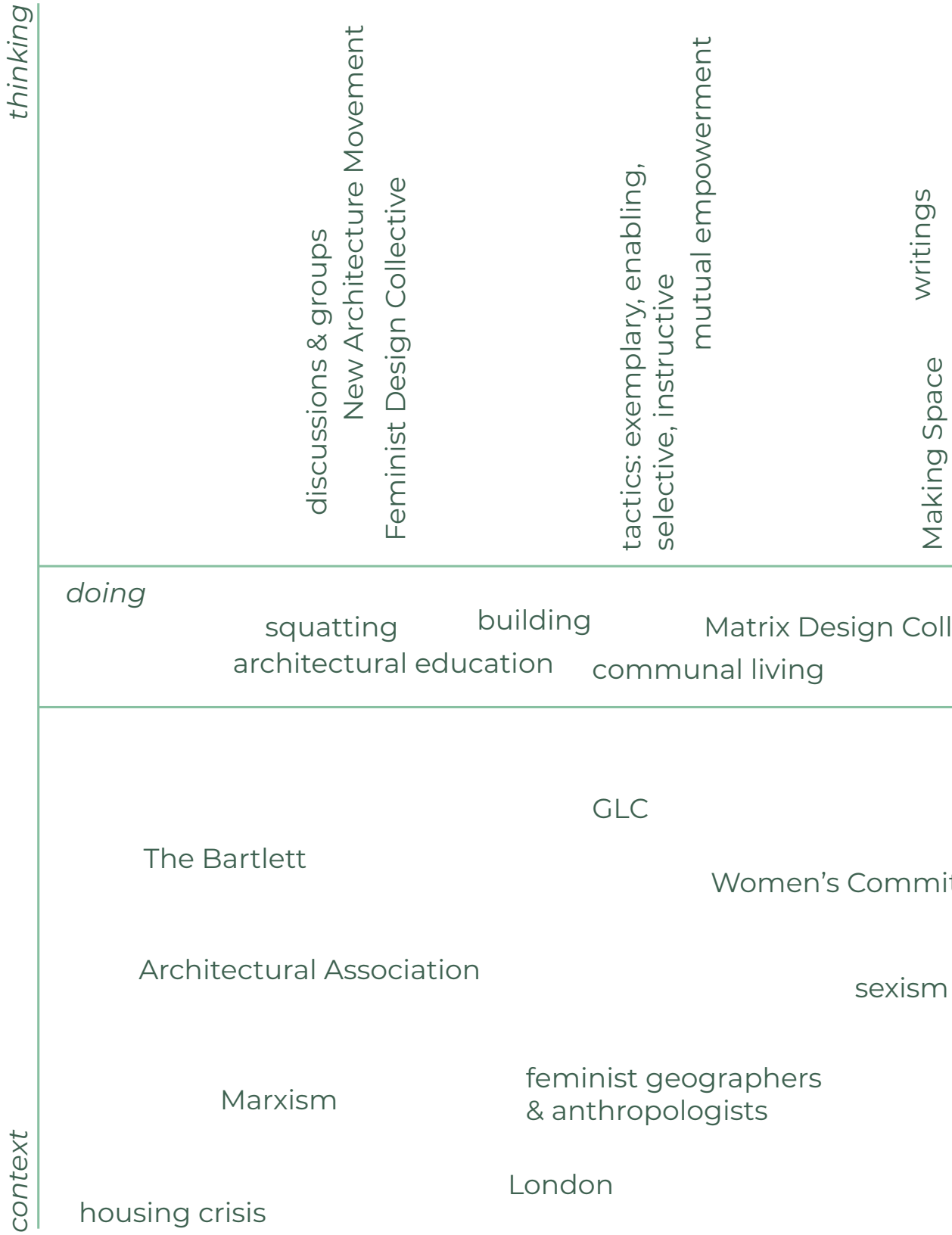

thinking
discussions & groups
New Architecture Movement
Feminist Design Collective
tactics: exemplary, enabling, selective, instructive
mutual empowerment
writings
Making Space
doing
squatting
architectural education
building
communal living
Matrix Design Coll
GLC
The Bartlett
Women's Commit
Architectural Association
sexism
feminist geographers & anthropologists
Marxism
London
housing crisis
context

Figure 1. Relationship between doing and thinking in Matrix's practice over time.

Chapter 2: Practice is Pedagogy

Matrix was a derivative of a particular combination of intellectual trends (in feminism and socialism), lifestyle and political & financial opportunities which occurred in that particular time and place. Its members reflected on it as a period of 'radical re-ordering [of the political climate] when many things were tried out.'[39] Their profound engagement, professional and private alike, in the critique of cultural, societal and spatial conditions surrounding, first and foremost, the position of women, but also larger political and market forces shaping the built environment in general, channelled into a reformatory approach to architectural practice.[40] Towards the last decade of the XX century, however, the trends in architectural discourse shifted away from direct political engagement with the withdrawal of state-led financial support for community-oriented work, including architectural services. Their tactic of changing the status quo by being an exemplary practice turned out to be very much dependent on the broader, mainly economic circumstances (also political ones but this was still inherently related to being able to survive financially). This meant, however, that their strong involvement in pedagogy was perhaps eventually a more tenacious means of influencing

39 Julia Dwyer, Anne Thorne. 'Evaluating Matrix: Notes from inside the collective'. In Doina Petrescu. op. cit. p. 56

40 Jos Boys. In Jos Boys et al. *Matrix and After: Ways of working around feminism and architecture.* Newcastle University School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape. November 2019

41 Julia Dwyer, Anne Thorne. op. cit. p. 46

42 Birgitte Hansen. Personal communication. 9 March 2022.

43 Frances Bradshaw. In Jos Boys et al. op. cit.

44 Anne Thorne. In Ibid.

45 Ibid.

46 Julia Dwyer, Anne Thorne. op. cit. pp. 47-48

47 Matrix was nominated for the RIBA Gold Medal award in 2019 and 2020.

(is Practice)

the profession. This chapter examines Matrix's approach in practice through examples that are relevant to their approach in pedagogy – access courses that Matrix's members were part of when the practice was in full operation – to trace how their feminist values were translated into teaching.

on architecture as a means of (user) empowerment

Matrix's strategy of working exclusively on publicly-funded projects meant that they very often worked with groups for whom it was their first encounter with an architect.[41] This triggered a particular way of working with the user, centred around a transparent and inclusive building process which, from a historical perspective, has defined Matrix's practice. The influence of feminist geography and anthropology on their approach is quite evident in this respect. For the women groups to which Matrix provided services, architecture was a need, not a desire, and that notion was reflected in their approach – shifting away from the Beaux-Arts interpretation of architecture as an art object, towards architecture as a social (re)production of reality.[42] 'It's about the process', said Fran Bradshaw in Matrix's 2019 lecture at Newcastle University. 'One does not make good buildings unless all those people bring all their complex experience and their expertise to the table.'[43] The architect's role is to find ways of meaningful extraction and consolidation of that information into spatial solutions.

What I found striking was the emancipatory effect of this approach; what Anne Thorne said about the user involvement in the design of the Jagonari Asian Women's Centre in Whitechapel was that these women, both as a group and in their private lives, were used to having to adjust to a space they had or were given, adapting their habits and routines to it. Being able to *design the space around their needs* was a completely new opportunity for them.[44] An important part of taking this responsibility was being able to understand architecture and the process of designing buildings. For Dalston Children's Centre Matrix made 1:25 'dollhouse' models of the buildings, to involve the group into thinking about the space differently,[45] after their first drawings felt too complete and incomprehensible to the parents and childcare workers who formed DCC.[46] Christine Wall, in her letter of support to the RIBA,[47] mentions also large-scale plans with movable cut-outs of scaled furniture and machinery for

Southwark's Women Training Workshop, which were used to make decisions about space layout.[48] This approach to models and drawings as a communication tool was present in many of their projects and further reflects that architecture in Matrix's view was not an object in itself, but a means of empowering its (female) users in, through and with space.

It feels almost inappropriate to refer to their approach as participatory, seeing how this word is being (over)used to describe the processes which, through user 'involvement', aim to validate an already designed project. Matrix's strategy was that of partnership, evident also in the testimonies of the users. In her letter of support, Solma Ahmed, former Chair of Jagonari Centre, recalls how Matrix designed the building around their needs, big and small alike, starting from safety and security, through sensitivity to their cultural and religious needs, but also including sit-down sinks to be able to wash large saucepans.[49] What Julia Dwyer and Anne Thorne recounted in *Evaluating Matrix* were the negotiations between the impact of racism on the lives of the group and expressing their culture on the façade of the building[50] which sits on a busy London street, right by the subway. What emerges from these memories is a balancing act between feminist and feminine, these two not being in opposition to each other but rather generating perhaps slightly different responses to the design problems put forward by the user. Derived from that is a network of (reciprocal) women empowerment,[51] sharing of expertise and helping each other grow.

on pedagogy as an engaged practice

Matrix's understanding of the role of the architect had many parallels with a feminist understanding of the role of an (engaged) teacher. Their focus on the collaborative and participative process involved, as shown previously, developing a set of communication and educational tools which proved to be useful not only when interacting with users but also aided in the creation of some of the teaching material for the Women into Architecture and Building (WIAB) course at North London Polytechnic, [52] initiated by Yvonne Dean in 1985.[53]

The WIAB and a similar Women in Architecture and Built Environment (WIABE) course at South Bank Polytechnic, founded by Marina Adams,[54] were both access courses aimed at providing women over 21 years with the fundamental knowledge and basic skills, taught by women, that would enable them to pursue a career in the built environment, such as architecture. They were a fairly independent type of pedagogy because they were not part of degree courses – in that sense,

they operated on institutional margins while being able to attract municipal funding. Some members of Matrix were involved in teaching there, as, just like contemporary universities, these courses relied on practising architects and craftswomen to pass on their knowledge and experience. The WIAB and WIABE courses had some overlaps, sharing tutors, such as Lynne Walker. Marina Adams, leader of the South Bank course, was also an external examiner for WIAB.[55]

The original purpose of the WIAB course and its structure[56] aimed to even the chances for women to pursue a career in the built environment. The *content* of the course, however, as seen in Figures 2 and 3 on the following page, developed into one that had a lot more to do with a particular (feminist) awareness with which the participants would go into further education.[57] Marina Adams recalled that the main point of the WIABE course was *learning by doing*,[58] hinting at the prioritisation over process over product, which Yvonne Dean referred to as *thinking through drawing*.[59] The tutors encouraged the students to derive their analytical position from own life experiences. Buildings visited during the course were sometimes unknown to students and staff alike, and they also worked together on large-scale mock-ups of structural joints, the students often already trained in carpentry or other crafts sharing their expertise with other participants.[60]

48 Christine Wall. *Letter of Support for Matrix*. August 2019.

49 Solma Ahmed. *Matrix Letter of Support to the RIBA*. 24 August 2019.

50 Julia Dwyer, Anne Thorne. op. cit. p. 48

51 Mutually-empowering. Matrix was helping the women groups define and build 'a place of their own'. The experiences, in turn, shaped their position as women architects concerned also with the issues of disability, ethnicity, or race.

52 Julia Dwyer, Anne Thorne. op. cit. p. 54

53 Yvonne Dean. 'A Way in for Women'. *Architect's Journal*. 20 March 1991, p. 43

54 Lynne Walker. Personal communication. 18 February 2022

55 North London Polytechnic. *Women into Architecture and Building.* NLP, 1993

56 The course was divided into modules titled Drawing; Design; History; and Practicals. See Yvonne Dean. op. cit. and Lynne Walker, Sue Cavanagh. op. cit. p. 154

57 The reading list was not yet in place during the 1980s, showing that the course's content has also changed and matured over the years.

58 Marina Adams. Personal communication. 08 March 2022

59 Yvonne Dean. op. cit. p. 43

60 Ibid.

SOUTH BANK UNIVERSITY

HISTORY OF ARCHITECTURE SPRING TERM 1993

TUTOR : LYNNE WALKER

Wed., January 27	Lecture/Discussion: The Uses and Abuses of History: Architectural History - an Introduction
10:0° - 11:0°	Lecture/Discussion° Thå Useó anä Abuseó oæ History: Architectural History - an Introduction
11:0° - 1:0°	Seminar (Groups A & B: Seminaò (Groupó Á ¦ B)° How to write a good essay. How to make a bibliography.
Wed., Feb.3	
10:00 - 11:00	Lecture: The Arts and Crafts Movement
11:00 - 1:00	Seminar: Case study: The Red House (Group A) Case study: Waterlow Court in Hampstead Caså study° Waterlo÷ Courô iî Hampsteaä Garden Suburb (Group B)
Wed., Feb. 10	
10:0° - 11:0°	Lecture° American Architecture
11:0° - 1:0°	Seminar: Case Study: Seminar° Caså study° The Chicago Skyscraper (Group A) Caså study° Thå Ideaì Americaî Home?° Franë Lloyä Wright's Robie House (Group B) Case Study: The Ideal American Home?: Frank Lloyd Wright's Robie House (Group B)
Š Wed., Feb. 24	
10:00 - 11:00	Lecture: The Modern Movement
11:00 - 1:00	Seminar: Le Corbusier (Group A)
	Seminar: The Rietveld Schroder House (Group B)
Wed., March 3	
10:00 - 11:00	Lecture: Women and Architecture
	Seminar: Case Study: Eileen Gray (Group A)
	° Issueó arounä thå rolå anä positioî of women in architecture, design and building today (Group B) Issues around the role and position of women in architecture, design and building today
Wed., March 10	
10:00 - 11:00	Lecture: Current Trends in Architecture
11:0° - 1:0°	Seminar° The Fountainhead (Video)

SUGGESTED READING FOR WIAB: ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY 1992

Adam, Peter, ▯Eileen Gray: Architect/Designer▯, 1987.
Attfield, Judy, Kirkham, Pat (eds.) 'A View from the Interior:
Attfield¬ Judù ¦ Kirkham¬ P® (eds.)¬ ▯Á Vie÷ froí thå Interior°
Feminism, Women and Design▯, 1989.
Bayer, H. Gropius, W., Gropius I. (eds.) 'Bauhaus 191g-1928'. 1938/1952.
Bayer¬ H.¬ Gropius¬ W.¬ Gropius¬ É (eds.)¬ ▯Bauhauó 1919-1928▯¬
1938/1952.

Berkeley, Ellen Perry, ▯Architecture A Place for Women▯, 1989.

Boutelle, Sara Holmes, ▯Julia Morgan: Architect▯, 1988.
Crawford, Alan. 'C.R. Ashbee: Architect, Designer & Socialist'. 1g9
Crawford¬ Alan¬ ▯C.R® Ashbee° Architect¬ Designeò ¦ Socialist▯¬
1985.

Curtis, William J.R., ▯Modern Architecture Since 1900▯, 1982.
Davey, Peter. 'Arts and Crafts Architecture: The Search for an Earthly Paradise'
Davey¬ Peter¬ ▯Artó anä Craftó Architecture° Thå Searcè foò aî
Earthly Paradise▯, 1980.

Dixon, Roger & Muthesius, Stefan, ▯Victorian Architecture▯, 1978.
Esther, L. 'A Broken Wave: The rebuilding of England 1940-1980'. 1981.
Esher¬ L.¬ ▯Á Brokeî Wave° Thå Rebuildinç oæ Englanä 1940-1980▯¬
1981.

Hayden, Dolores, ▯The Grand Domestic Revolution▯, 1982

Matrix, ▯Women and the Man Made Environment▯, 1984.
Musgrove, John (ed.). 'Sir Banister Fletcher's a History of Architecture'.
Musgrove¬ Johî (ed.)¬ ▯Siò Banisteò Fletcher'ó Á Historù oæ
Architecture▯, 19th ed., 1987.
Open University. 'History of Architecture and Design 1890-1939'.
Opeî University¬ ▯Historù oæ Architecturå anä Desigî 1890-1939▯¬
1975; units in series include, for example, ▯USA 1890-1939▯.

Overy, Paul et al, ▯The Rietveld Schroder House▯, 1988.
Pearson, Lynn F. 'The Architectural & Social History of Cooperative Living'.
Pearson¬ Lynî F.¬ ▯Thå Architecturaì ¦ Sociaì Historù oæ
Cooperative Living▯, 1988.
Rasmussen, Steen Eiler. 'London: The Unique City'. 1g82 (original edition 1932)
Rasmussen¬ Steeî Eiler¬ ▯London° Thå Uniquå City▯¬ 198² (originaì
edition 1932).
Roberts, Marion. 'Living in a Man-made World: Gender Assumptions
Roberts¬ Marion¬ ▯Livinç iî á Man-madå World° Gendeò Assumptionó
in Modern Housing Design▯, 1991

Saint, Andrew, ▯The Image of the Architect▯, 1983.
---------- 'Towards a Rational Architecture: The Role of School
----------▯Towardó á Rationaì Architecture° Thå Rolå oæ Schooì
Buildinç iî Post-Waò England▯¬ 1987.
Building in Post -War England'. 1987.
Torre, Susana (ed.), ▯Women in American Architecture▯, 1977.

Figure 2. (left) WIAB History course schedule. courtesy of Lynne Walker. 1993.

Figure 3. (above) WIAB Suggested reading list. courtesy of Lynne Walker. 1992.

These examples show a practical implementation of non-hierarchical pedagogy, valuing experiential approach to design. The structure of the final design project, shown in Figure 4, opens with a quote by Eileen Grey and a deliverable of a brief which, in fact, is a detailed description of a person for whom the dwelling would be designed. The site is a rooftop of an existing building, very appropriate for London where (residential) rooftop extensions became a sort of building typology in itself. There is an emphasis on process and site sensitivity; the deliverables include a 1:50 scale for drawings and models. The parallels between this brochure, WIAB guideline on developing a design brief (Figure 5) and Matrix's approach in practice are apparent. The majority of the questions refer to the use(rs) of the building and 'non-professional' impressions of the architecture, future and existing, quite directly referring to the collective's methods. Tools Matrix used to engage users – dollhouse-sized (1:50 or even larger) models, for example, that were used in DCC or Jagonari projects, were also part of the WIAB course (Figures 6 and 7), especially in the *Practicals* course teaching carpentry. One of such playhouses, featured in Figure 7, was later donated to the university's creche.[61] By directing the design process through working in a particular way, 'emphasis was placed on building students' confidence.'[62]

University of North London
Department of Architecture & Interior Design
WIAB
Project Three

designing an apartment for minimal livi

*"It is not a matter of simply constructing beautiful ensembles of lines, but above all **dwellings for people**"*

Eileen Grey 1929

brief

You are to design an apartment for one woman of your choice.

You are to bear in mind that space is at a premium in the city: you may wish to consider unusual domestic arrangements such as you might enjoy in a weekend house where practicalities can be reduced to a minimum.

You are to describe, on one A4 sheet, the character for whom you have chosen to design a dwelling. You are to invent her nature, her interests, the circumstances in which she lives (she should either live alone or with one other person, child or adult).

Try to imagine her as a real person. The more information you invent the easier it will be to design a dwelling.

Envisage a typical day in the life of your client. This may not only give you a clue to the type and size of the rooms you need but also show how the spaces might relate to one another.

This A4 sheet will be your **brief**. You will be trying to design a building which satisfies all the requirements of your client while exploring your own notions about dwelling. You are to complete this brief as homework and bring it to the design sessions.

site

The site is located at Camden Town, on the roof of an existing six storey industrial building in Jamestown Road which overlooks the Regents' Canal at the back. The building is mainly empty at present, although there is a car park in the basement.

A developer has purchased the existing building and intends to develop it for mixed residential and studio/office use, with commercial uses on the lower floors. **You are asked to develop an innovative scheme for the rooftop of this building.** This will involve strengthening the existing flat roof and constructing a rooftop courtyard of new houses. House plots will be arranged around the courtyard, and will share a lift and stairs giving access from the street.

You will each be allocated a plot on which to develop your scheme after the site visit.

61 Anonymous source. Personal communication. 21 March 2022.

62 North London Polytechnic. op. cit.

ng

As you are designing, you will be drawing together threads from different sources: you will be knitting them together - but you do not have a ready-made pattern - it will emerge and change as your ideas progress. It is unusual for any designer to come up with the final solution straight away: most designs evolve by trial and error- so don't be afraid to sketch something, however wild or straight forward as it will help you to decide what you like and don't like and then try again.

Create a story and then try to illustrate it.

presentation

Your final submission is to include a written brief, site analysis, model of the apartment at 1:50 scale, sketches of the interior and exterior spaces, plans, sections and elevations at 1:50 scale.

You will discuss with the tutors which techniques are most appropriate to your design and develop them accordingly.

dates and submissions

Unless other arrangements are indicated the design sessions will take place in the studio (room 134) between 2 pm and 5 pm every Friday.

Jan 15 Introduction to project and site analysis.
Your homework is to develop the brief

Jan 22 Site visit and presentation of analysis.
Meet at the site at 10 am
Studio from 2 pm

Jan 29 Design Tutorials

Feb 5 Interim review

Feb 12 Design Tutorials

Feb 19 Half Term

Feb 26 Design and Drawing Tutorials

Mar 5 Design Tutorials

Mar 12 Final Review

Mar 19 Design Model and personal tutorials

Mar 26 Design Model (all day)

Design Tutors: Julia Dwyer, Susan Francis, Gozi Wamuo

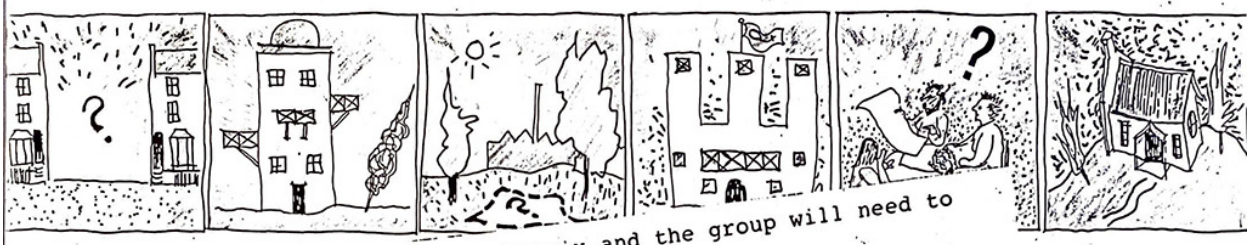
10/1/1993

Figure 4. WIAB Final design project brief. *Matrix Open Archive.* 1993

DEVELOPING A BRIEF

RIBA Stage C

The brief is a description of what the group needs from its new building. It may begin as a short description of the activity which needs accomodation , or as a simple list of rooms,their functions and sizes, or it may consist of one clear image.



These are the questions which Matrix and the group will need to ask and answer, in order to develop the brief.

- Who will use the building?
- How exactly will they use it?
- When during the day or week will they use it?
- How should the building feel to its users?
- What happens on an average day in the building?
- What impression should the building make on local people?
- How should it feel to the community it serves?
- Have disabilities been consideredin the brief?
- Which rooms should be near each other and which far away?
- What parts of the site should be built on?
- If the group is converting an existing building: which aspects of it do they like and want to keep,and which aspects do they dislike?
- What level of running costs are envisaged?

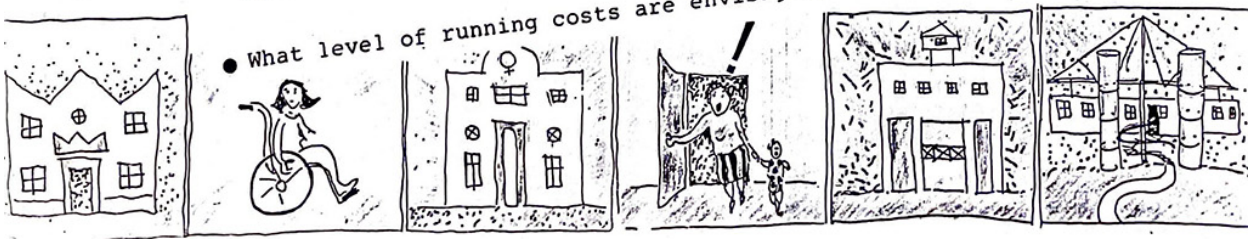


Figure 5. (left) WIAB guide to developing a brief. *Matrix Open Archive.* n.d.
Figure 6. (top) Working model for the Jagonari Women's Centre. *Matrix Open Archive.* 21 February 2020
Figure 7. (bottom) WIAB students working on a 'playhouse' model. *Architect's Journal.* 1991

What one of the former students also highlighted, WIAB was important to her for its 'underpinning assumption that architecture, and architects, worked for the social betterment of the society as a whole, with the extra understanding that feminism was integral to this.'[63]

Lynne Walker and Sue Cavanagh in *Women's Design Service: Feminist Resources for Urban Environments* pointed out that the course aimed to create opportunities for the students to be able to apply their mature understanding to design problems,[64] hoping that the critical feminist perspective on architecture that they promoted within the access course would be more immune to the intellectual pressures the students would encounter in degree education. As Yvonne Dean observed in *A Way in for Women*, published in the Architect's Journal to commemorate the end of WIAB, 'there were unforeseen effects from the WIAB course on the BSc course. As the women entered the design school, they showed themselves to be fairly vocal contributors in discussion and there was polarisation within the first year between mature students and school leavers.'[65] This was also pointed out by the students, the WIAB cohort supporting each other throughout their degree. What emerged from a testimony of a former student, although the degree course at PNL initially shared much of WIAB's ethos, changes at the top of the department, resulting in a new body of Cambridge-trained tutors, 'discarded the social purposes of architecture in favour of the post-structuralism of Dalibor Vesely.'[66] Changes in PNL's attitude coincided with and bore political resemblance to what happened to Matrix with the abolition of the GLC by Thatcher's government. Design briefs changed from social housing and nurseries to mansions for art collectors and emphasis was put on the quality of drawings and models as art objects. Even though WIAB's cohort was involved in an active critique of the new approach, it was met with little support or understanding. Changes in design didactics reflected the trends in architecture that resulted from shifting political and economic circumstances, increasingly oriented towards architecture as a vessel for capital investment and a withdrawal of the welfare state.

While Yvonne Dean made explicit that, in her view, in the field of the built environment, providing opportunity is more important than 'talent' or proven ability,[67] from the student reports provided by dr Lynne Walker emerges an image an engaged teacher, concerned with not only with the 'product' but also people and their progress.[68] The assessment criteria: motivation; organisation, individual progress; (design) ability; overall ability; seem to put emphasis on the intersection of design and personal development.

The understanding of education as a process and awareness of a broader context within which the students produce their work corresponds with the course's concerns with experiential learning. While it was not explicitly feminist, the emphasis on non-hierarchical structure, prioritisation of (own) experience over expertise and interpretative sensitivity and criticality reflected (and encouraged) such perspective.

It appears that Matrix's influence was disseminated not only by teaching women specific skills but teaching them in a particular way. There were many parallels between the architect-user rapport in their practice and the teacher-student relationship in pedagogy, not only through the tools used to share knowledge but also the personal engagement, in bell hooks' words 'transgressing boundaries [...] to establish a relationship of mutual recognition.'[69] WIAB nurtured an encouraging and supportive teaching environment which was often very different to what the students encountered later on in their education. Moreover, just as the users were impacting the participatory processes on which Matrix focused their practice, their pedagogical position had an impact on the thinking behind their later work.

63 Anonymous source. Personal communication. 21 March 2022.

64 Lynne Walker, Sue Cavanagh. op. cit. p. 155

65 Yvonne Dean. op. cit. p. 44

66 Anonymous source. Personal communication. 21 March 2022.

67 Yvonne Dean. op. cit. p. 43

68 This paragraph is directly informed by the interpretation of these reports by Birgitte Hansen whom I consulted as an expert in architecture pedagogy and reflective practice. Birgitte Hansen. Personal communication. 10 March 2022.

69 bell hooks. op. cit. p. 13

The methodology of Matrix was derived from an intersection of larger socio-political concurrences in a particular time and place. The same conditions granted the emergence of women-only access courses such as WIAB and WIABE which, through converging goals, enabled the members of Matrix to disseminate their approach within the time in which the cooperative existed, laying the foundation for their further engagement, and, in some cases, consequent shift, towards pedagogy. Similarly, some of the students of WIAB did not find themselves comfortable in the more product-oriented design trends that succeeded both in education and professional practice in the 1990s. While how the members of Matrix chose to proceed with their careers differed, from Anne Thorne continuing her own practice to Jos Boys turning completely into teaching and writing, the principles they followed remained informed by their time in the collective.[70]

on process as (self-) reflective practice

Matrix's interest in the processes linked to the design of the built environment focused primarily on the relationship between the user and the architecture, and the architect's agency in facilitating it, but it was not their only point of attention. Their understanding of the role of the architect, especially woman architect, had to do with breaking away from the 'professionalisation' of the designer's position in relation to the user but also to the builder; dissolving the class and gender(ed) differences, understanding construction processes better and learning craft skills to develop the design process.[71] What begun in their twenties as a very hands-on approach to reciprocal empowerment and an experiment in alternative practice forms, matured into a recognition of the need for an aware, (self-)reflective practice through their engagement with people and their processes, both in pedagogy and the profession.

After Matrix ended, its members kept on collaborating in other ways. *taking place* has been one of such initiatives, made up of loose collaborations of UK-based women artists, architects and academics, established in 2001.[72] While it forms one of the rhizomatic threads rather than the 'core' Matrix approach, it is a relevant example to illustrate how their position evolved, perhaps also influenced by stronger academic involvement.

In her essay *Inscriptions as a Collective Practice*, Julia Dwyer seems to assume an 'outsider' position when reminiscing Matrix's legacy in the approach of *taking place* group. While the manner of oscillating between first- and third-person narrative is not different from her earlier (or later) writings,[73] what is different is a reflection upon their feminist *thinking* rather than *doing*. It provides a critical

reflection of one's own processes within a broader context of feminist narratives, negotiating between *Making Space* (1984) and *Altering Practices* (2007). What Dwyer highlighted was the evolution of the collective voice and radical activism embodied in the phrase 'feminist politics' towards 'feminine poetics' characterised by the recognition of more sophisticated, multiple subjectivities and of difference, acting within a collective experience.[74]

Inscriptions began with Julia Dwyer's invitation to the members of *taking place* to 'make explicit their sense of the positions and relationships they have found within [their] current project'[75] which was a series of artworks made for the Perinatal Unit of a London Hospital. She situated an inscription between a drawing and a text. The pre-invitation discussion process defined only one constraint – that the work does not take more than three hours.

The two inscriptions created by Dwyer take on email communication; evidence of time passing and measure of relationships,[76] which she printed out to visualise the spatial and thematic liaisons communicating more than the content of the text itself. *Inscriptions* also informed my representation of the rhizomatic relations which I describe. The spatial relations of text on a piece of canvas, physical or digital, attempt to show the interrelations between the meanings

70 Jos Boys. In Jos Boys et al. op. cit.

71 Julia Dwyer, Anne Thorne. op. cit. pp. 42-43

72 Julia Dwyer. 'Inscription as a Collective Practice: Taking Place and "The Other Side of Waiting"' In Harriet Edquist, Laurene Vaughan (eds.) *The Design Collective: An Approach to Practice*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012, p. 35

73 In *Evaluating Matrix* (published in 2007, parts written in 1999), and *Revealing Work* (2017) 'we' and 'us' is interlaced with third-person references to Matrix as a group, which are nevertheless explicitly insider ones.

74 Julia Dwyer. op. cit. p. 40

75 Ibid. p. 35

76 Ibid. p. 49

Figure 8. (left) Julia Dwyer and her *Communications* piece. Matrix Open Archive. 2011
Figure 9. (right) *Communications* (fragment). Matrix Open Archive. 2010

behind the black letters. Figure 8 shows Julia next to one of the pieces titled *Communications* (Figure 9), illustrating the relation of scale between the work and a person. For a moment, an image of an architect posed next to her building comes to mind, but this photo is not that of a creator and her work. Instead, it hints at the relations of subjectivity, authorship and process, becoming a metaproduct of the design process of the original project. This illustrates how the feminist understanding of collectivity and process evolved from experimental *learning by doing* towards a conscious ability to describe and share it with others, finding their own language and method for it.

on the need for a feminist archive

Throughout the most recent sources for this essay, a topic of a Matrix archive emerged – an online archive that is now in place, documenting some of the material preserved by its members, projects, publication, correspondence and photos. In 2017, Julia Dwyer and Jos Boys wrote a piece, *Revealing Work*, discussing what such a feminist record could look like.[77] Their concern was that archives often end up being about representation rather than process, so for an archive of a process-oriented practice, they chose artefacts such as a tired copy of the *Making Space* book from the Bartlett library – highlighted, earmarked, full of pieces of paper sticking out to mark important chapters – to illustrate how the process is built into it.[78] An online archive means that the processes of being worked on and re-worked over again are no longer *physically* evident, but it allows them to continue on a much larger scale.

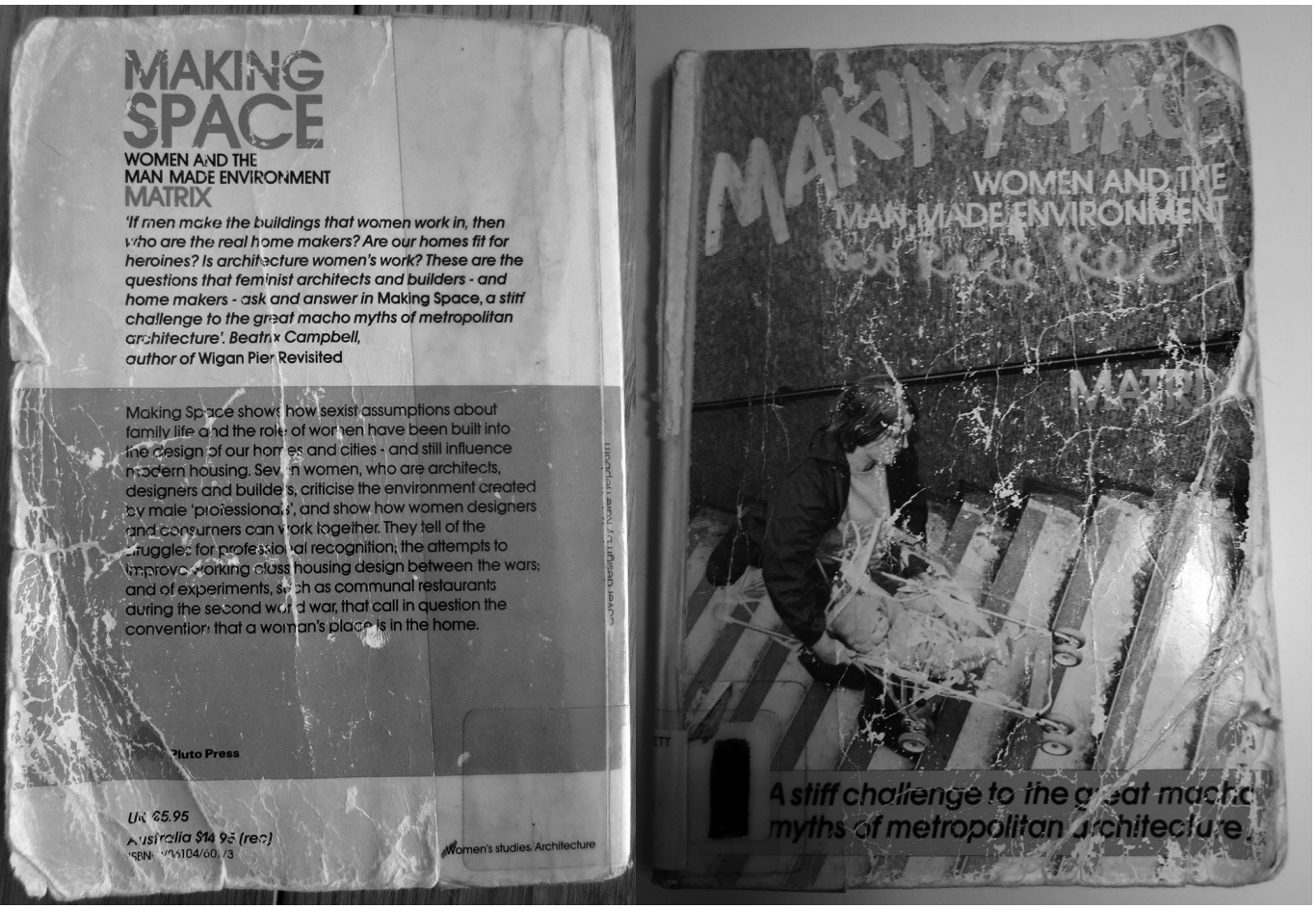
The research processes of filtering, discovering, unfolding and pursuing threads of online archives, lecture recordings, e-mail communication and attached files digitalised after some 30 years enabled me to oscillate within a larger network of references rather than progressing linearly. A lot of more contemporary material I used comes from around 2017 onwards. It is not only the year marking the centenary of admitting women to London's Architectural Association but also the death of Susan Francis – one's of Matrix's founding members and WIAB course coordinator. Julia Dwyer passed away in January 2020; her unplanned absence and message she passed on through the slides from the lecture at the University of Newcastle in November 2019, from the historical perspective I was looking at these sources, acquire weight. I may only speculate here on the influence of time and age on the decision Matrix's members took to document their legacy. It seems that the archive came primarily as a response to the growing interest in Matrix's work over the recent years. It was largely funded by the Bartlett, where Jos Boys teaches, and was accompanied by an exhibition

in London's Barbican Centre curated by a UCL alumnus. The pursuit of feminist methodology, encouraged by those involved in Matrix back in the day or discovered independently, seems to come as a response to the very conditions which caused those trends to disappear at the end of the XX century. Matrix's artefacts *in action* can serve as tools and resources for contemporary investigators, myself included, to discuss how their approach can be relevant today.

77 Jos Boys, Julia Dwyer. 'Revealing Work. Interrogating Artifacts to (Re) View Histories of Feminist Architectural Practice'. *Architecture and Culture* 5(3). 2017, pp. 487-504

78 Jos Boys. In Jos Boys et al. op. cit.

Figure 10. Copy of the *Making Space* book from the library of The Bartlett. Matrix Open Archive. 2017



Conclusion

on meeting myself halfway

Learning from feminist pedagogy, I realised that there is no model teacher, nor a specific method that could become a definite answer. There are tools and strategies, like those of shared authority, learning by doing, or focusing on people and process. However, a feminist approach to education, both in learning and in teaching, is, above all, about an active, conscious production of self and the awareness of the conditions in which it occurs. *Thinking by doing* does not necessarily require making physical structures like buildings or models. It can also mean writing, curating, making art, or indeed, teaching. In *Evaluating Matrix*, Julia Dwyer and Anne Thorne bring back how in 1999 they were already questioning whether the *processes* of building, teaching and collaborating were ultimately more important than the buildings themselves.[79] That evolved into acceptance, as they turned the question mark into a full-stop. *Thinking by doing* employed by feminist architects in practice and didactics at the time resulted in a process-oriented approach that encouraged a type of spatial practice operating between academia, theory and society; one that does not necessarily fulfil the requirements of the predominantly visual culture of contemporary architecture, and that focuses on its non-spatial outcomes. In professional practice, it meant user liberation instead of space liberation; in education, it was student emancipation over creative liberty.

What is interesting from a historical perspective was the transition from a unison, collective voice in their writings and projects, to the idea of a collection of subjectivities that may have had to do with the fragmentation of their practice and ways of working. Different times call for different ways of practising but also for the evolution of one's (self) awareness within a larger framework, be it a collective or a looser, fluid network of collaborations.

There were many parallels between Matrix's understanding of the role of the architect and the role of a teacher, and similar methods were used in their practice and pedagogy. Drawings and models are conventionally used, understood and constructed as (visual) modes of representation. Through the specificity of Matrix being a process-oriented practice, these tools of representation, in their hands, moved away from attempting to mirror the reality towards representation understood as a means of agency enabling the decision-making process to become

participative and empowering to those without architectural training. This is how their architectural process became politicised[80] and this appears to me to be the most universal message conveyed in Matrix's approach in practice and pedagogy alike. During the time they were operating, it related mainly to gender. In the light of Black Lives Matter and post-colonial discourse, it relates to race and ethnicity. Recurring financial crises, the climate crisis and growing inequality show its pertinence to class and spatial justice.

According to Andrés Jaque, the essence of architecture is its relevance to others. It can activate forms of politics that we [architects] can be experts on and we can then allow others to have access to them.[81] For Jaque it is about detailing; in my view, Matrix focused on two things: the skills architect acquires through education - the *processes* of design, which do not necessarily have to materialise in an inhabitable structure – and the emancipatory effects of space tailored to the needs of its user. Their feminist approach in education and practice was, in a sense, also that of squatting – occupying a space uninvited and taking control of it– as a woman, as a student or a user.

79 Julia Dwyer, Anne Thorne. op. cit. p. 56

80 This thought was informed by the ideas and language used by Andrés Jaque in his Berlage Keynote lecture. See Andrés Jaque. *The Politics of Transscalar Architecture*. Berlage Keynotes. The Berlage Institute. 17 March 2022.

81 Ibid.

on the derivatives of Matrix

Matrix was part of a larger network of movements centred around unionisation, Marxism and feminism. Just like Yvonne Dean said about WIAB's students, also in their case opportunity could be perceived as a more important factor than talent or ability. Matrix's members started with a very concrete intent and devotion to building but, despite their good intentions, the frame in which they set out to work was too dependent on a specific set of political and economic conditions that were too unstable for the practice to survive without them. The new status quo centred around privatisation (of architecture, public space, money) and product granted a lack of Matrix's direct historical continuity. Changes in the top-down approach to architecture that resulted from political and economic transitions were reflected not only in what was taught at universities but also in *how* it was done. The approach and values taught by courses such as WIAB sharply contrasted with what their students encountered later in their education, which in some cases led to the abandonment of design-oriented practice rather than a reform of the profession.

Working on the organisational edges, like WIAB did by being a part-time access course and as Matrix did by employing an uncompromising, 'hard core' approach to practice, simultaneously escapes and entails existential limitations. The temporariness, or rather temporal oscillation between withdrawal and comeback, seems inherent to operating on the institutional margins of education and profession alike. The awareness and understanding of the underlying (historical) conditions preceding these transitions are crucial to the magnitude of the wave that follows.

While it is highly improbable that a contemporary practice could operate in the exact same way Matrix did, their tactics were re-interpreted anew to make space for feminist practice in the XXI century. Practices that came after, building on that legacy, such as muf, started under conditions completely inverse to those in which Matrix worked - a conservative government, no funding for public projects, no activist networks to hold on to. Nevertheless, 'before muf there was Matrix.'[82] Political engagement, critical education, non-spatial consequences of architecture, process-based work and representation as agency were translated to new circumstances. muf has had to be a lot more aware that one, when working on commercial projects, becomes complicit, and worked to establish 'where to make the compromise to make a contribution'.[83] Losing some of the radical edge can also be a (survival) tactic.

Unfortunately, elements of feminist practice, user participation being the prime example of this, become strategically abused, superficially adorning commercial investments to sell a certain image of the project without much influence on the actual process surrounding it. Feminist methodology, however, even though it may employ specific tools or work on particular topics, is primarily concerned with a particular attitude towards those involved in the process of making space, which is difficult to maintain while the distance between architects and users keeps growing. While back in the 80s and 90s this approach was still concerned with making buildings, I would argue that today it is about whether to build at all. There seems to be a generational shift away from neoliberal preconditions that have, over the years, diminished the role of the architect as an actor in society. By looking at the historical situatedness of Matrix within the socio-political context of the time, their tools and methods can be re-interpreted under new circumstances to address how architects can re-assert their role as mediators between institutions and individuals, society and governance, to transform how architectural practice can remain relevant by activating new forms of (political) engagement.

82 muf, 'An Invisible Privilege'. In Doina Petrescu. op. cit. p. 60

83 Liza Fior. In Lynne Walker (Chair) op. cit.

Epilogue

When I first started working on this research, I had a pretty clear idea for its structure and content. Over time, I came to realise that I was actually being taken on a journey which I was not so much in control of anymore; certain doors opened for me more widely than others, and I trusted my sources (and my gut) to lead me towards a single facet of the original idea, which turned out to be the corner piece of a complex, multilayered network, impossible to describe in a few thousand words. The support and encouragement I received from my tutor, dr Lynne Walker and my sources made me feel part of a larger discourse which I attempt to enter with this work. The information and material I received from them helped me to get to the essence of this topic – the *personal-political* engagement and a peek 'behind the scenes' – aspects much less described in literature and lectures. Through these testimonies, and partly my own journey through this essay, I realised that the honesty, challenge and strength of feminine/feminist practice comes with awareness of the influences of scales – one's personal context, struggles and processes, as well as the overarching socio-political trends and forces that guide a particular awareness of one's actions.

Julia Dwyer's attention to 'process' communication in *Inscriptions* and Doina Petrescu's manner of referencing forum exchanges in *Altering Practices* made me very aware of the influences of the email feedback loop between me and my tutor, Birgitte Hansen; the direct loans which I reference in the body of the essay, and the less-direct ones which I acknowledge here.

As for the possibilities for future research, I feel that there are two threads which have developed from this investigation so far. The first one concerns further the effects of Matrix and WIAB on today's practice and education, also through the examples of more contemporary

architects-teachers who continued their legacy in the XXI century, as well as a broader student perspective.

The second thread leads back to my personal journey and the effect this work has had on my perception of what kind of architect I want to become. One of my conclusions about feminist methodology concerns the understanding of the conditions in which a conscious production of self occurs within (architectural) education. I am becoming increasingly interested in being able to interrogate the *institutional* environment which is shaping these conditions, and, consequentially, my perception of the profession. Questioning how architectural thinking can be used for conducting unsolicited research into organisational structures and the framework within which the production of knowledge occurs could reveal more nuanced relationships between education and practice.

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