

Transferring Otherwise

Building Feminist Knowledge in Architecture

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DOI

[10.4995/ICAG2023.2023.16807](https://doi.org/10.4995/ICAG2023.2023.16807)

Publication date

2024

Document Version

Final published version

Published in

Proceedings ICAG 2023 - VI International Conference on Architecture and Gender

Citation (APA)

Novas, M., Tummers, L., & Noorani, S. (2024). Transferring Otherwise: Building Feminist Knowledge in Architecture. In *Proceedings ICAG 2023 - VI International Conference on Architecture and Gender* (pp. 975-994). Universitat Politècnica de València. <https://doi.org/10.4995/ICAG2023.2023.16807>

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*Transferring Otherwise.
Building Feminist Knowledge in Architecture*

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How to cite: Novas Ferradás, María; Lidewij Tummers and Setareh Noorani (2024). Transferring Otherwise: Building Feminist Knowledge in Architecture. In proceedings book: *ICAG 2023 - VI International Conference on Architecture and Gender*. Valencia, 3-6 October 2023.
<https://doi.org/10.4995/ICAG2023.2023.16807>

Abstract

The Nieuwe Instituut in Rotterdam, the Dutch museum for architecture, design, and digital cultures, is actively working to bring overlooked actors and forgotten stories into the discourse. The focus is on examining the role archives play in shaping urban history and challenging institutional memory and dominant historiography. Since 2020, the Collecting Otherwise project has aimed to reveal and expand understanding of the National Collection of Architecture and Urban Planning in relation to contemporary societal issues. This collaborative effort, including the Cherchez la femme! project (2021-2023), explores how these initiatives have reshaped institutional practices in archiving, collecting, and curating. By engaging with unacknowledged agents, the process has led to new heritage practices and informed collection decisions. This paper discusses the implications of these choices from various perspectives in the archival process—curator, researcher, activist, and donor. Rather than viewing heritage as a neutral legacy, the approach highlights new forms of knowledge production and transfer during and beyond the archival process, presenting new forms of collecting, producing, and transferring knowledge during, meanwhile and after the process of archival collection starts.

Keywords: *Collecting otherwise; transferring; feminist knowledge; architecture; the Netherlands*

1. Introduction

The Nieuwe Instituut in Rotterdam, the Dutch museum for architecture, design, and digital cultures holding the National Collection of Dutch Architecture and Urban Planning, is implementing different initiatives to bring overlooked actors, unacknowledged agents, and forgotten stories into the discussion¹. In recent years, discussions around diversity, equity, and representation in the profession of architecture have resurfaced and intensified - catalysed by emancipatory efforts of a new wave of activist groups, and serious public outcry around #MeToo and Black Lives Matter. Since 2020, the project Collecting Otherwise seeks to disclose, create proximity to, and enlarge the understanding of the relevance and intersections of the National Collection of Architecture and Urban Planning regarding contemporary societal urgencies. The project's aim is to examine the role that archives play in the construction of the history of cities and their inhabitants, as well as to contest institutional memory and the dominant historiography. Collecting Otherwise is a joint effort by the Research and Collections teams to approach heritage as a public and collective negotiation, one that happens beyond the archive rooms and the expertise of archivists. Here the project received indispensable contributions from its internal and external 'Collecting Otherwise Working Group'. Simultaneously, an initiative by Lidewij Tummers to bring together the archive of the network Vrouwen Bouwen Wonen [Women, Building, Living] contacted the Nieuwe Instituut and consequently became one of its pilot cases, starting a prolific collaboration.

From that point of departure, the Nieuwe Instituut has collaborated with a wide array of external researchers, among whom Erica Smeets-Klokgieters,² Linda Vlassenrood, and the co-authors of this paper. Lidewij Tummers and María Novas started to envision the *Cherchez la femme!* project in 2020 during the Covid-10 pandemic, receiving a grant in 2021 by the Creative Industries Fund from the Grant Programme for Architecture of the Dutch Ministry of Culture. The aim was to develop a two-year investigation and playful dissemination of the contribution of women to Dutch architecture throughout the 20th century. Through its conceptualisation and the fruitful collaboration with the National Collection of Dutch Architecture and Urban Planning, *Chechez la femme!* produced many exciting discoveries, both material and conceptual. During their investigation into the *Vrouwen Adviescommissie* [Women's Advisory Committee] in Rotterdam, the team contacted Elske Schreuder, finding out that she had preserved the documents of her grandmother, Guus Schreuder-Gratama (1897–1978), who had studied

¹ As mentioned in the Queering the Collections announcement, 2021, <https://nieuweinstituut.nl/en/articles/queering-collections-inspirational-meeting>

² Erica Smeets-Klokgieters defended her thesis on the first graduated Dutch women architects in January 2022. Erica Smeets-Klokgieters, "'Hulde aan onze kranige architecte!' De opkomst van de eerste vrouwelijke architecten van Nederland." Universiteit Utrecht, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.33540/1058>

architecture in the first decades of the 20th century. Elske kindly donated the documents to the Collection, which are now preserved for future generations (Figure 1).



Fig. 1 Guus Schreuder-Gratama archival material displayed in the event *Building HERitage*, at the *Nieuwe Instituut*, on March 10, 2022. Source © Simaa Al-Saig (2022)

Transferring knowledge requires not only collecting, preserving, and disseminating the findings through public programmes, but also through publications. For instance, each of the authors contributed to the recently edited volume *Women in Architecture: Documents and histories*, the first publication of the book series Document and Histories via nai010 publishers.³ However, as writing and publishing usually require slower times, how can we envision different ways of transferring knowledge, particularly seeking dissemination in parallel to the research process itself? This paper delves into an investigation of testing publishing and public research formats aligned with methods of externalizing and disseminating knowledge, frequently employed by marginalized networks. These networks and collectives need regular forms of sharing and

³ Setareh Noorani, "Advocating for Networked Architectural Archives. Learning from Feminist Spatial Practice", Lidewij Tummers and María Novas, "Cherchez la femme! A Dutch Architectural Research Challenge", and María Novas, "On Being an Architect. The Life and Work of Guus Schreuder-Gratama (1897–1978)". In C. Edens, I. van 't Klooster, S. Noorani, L. Ostyn & L. Schrijver (Eds.), *Women in architecture: Documents and Histories* (Rotterdam: nai010 publishers, 2023).

aligning strategies to consolidate ephemeral, activist actions into institutional actions such as archiving, transferring, and preserving knowledge.⁴

Building upon this foundation, this paper aims to reflect upon and contribute to the vibrant conglomerate of activities emerging from a critical feminist perspective on the history of architecture and urban planning. Specifically, the research focuses on how *Collecting Otherwise* and *Chechez la femme!* initiatives not only transform the research and archival processes they are implicated in but also the act of transferring knowledge; transferring otherwise. Therefore, based on the experience of its authors, this paper maps the interlinked activities that took place from 2018 to 2023 to further investigate how both experiences have transformed the institutional procedures, particularly elaborating on the consequences of these choices from the different positions required in the process: curator, researcher, activist, and donor. During this process of preserving, creating, and transferring knowledge, certain collection choices have been made, and new heritage practices have been developed. At its core is the National Collection of Dutch Architecture and Urban Planning, where the findings meet and results materialise, and new pieces of evidence are stored and made accessible for future generations. Rather than understanding heritage as a neutral and objective legacy, the approaches of *Collecting Otherwise* and *Cherchez la femme!* go beyond the archival process itself. This involving more than ‘counting male and female heads’; it encompasses new forms of collecting, producing, and transferring knowledge during and after the process of archival collection process.

2. Laying the foundations: Building Feminist Knowledge Framework

In 2017, the word *feminism* was declared the word of the year by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary of the English Language⁵, resonating with the rekindled discussions on emancipation in many professions, among which, architecture. The initiative *Un día/Una arquitecta* had been previously launched in the Spanish language in 2015. In 2017, the Deutsches Architektur Museum featured the exhibition “Frau Architekt” along with a catalogue and accompanying program. In the same year, the event ‘Feminisms in Architecture’ was held at the Nieuwe Instituut in their ‘Archive Explorations’-series, bringing together contemporary voices (TU Delft Feminists) with architectural historians and examples of women in architecture⁶. Many proactive initiatives arose from different geographies, reflecting a collaborative spirit. Consequently, the growing information exchange among the Spanish-speaking, German-speaking, and English-speaking communities rapidly emerged.

⁴ Setareh Noorani, “Queer Life(line)s Within the Death of an Archive”, *Footprint* 30, 16, no. 1(2022): 158-178, <https://doi.org/10.7480/footprint.16.1.6287>.

⁵ Merriam-Webster’s 2017 Words of the Year, *Feminism*, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/word-of-the-year-2017-feminism>.

⁶ *Feminisms in Architecture*, 2017, <https://nieuweinstituut.nl/en/events/feminismen-de-architectuur>

In the Dutch context in 2017, Anna Vos, a former staff member at the Department of Architecture at TU Delft, donated the Women's Studies archive (1978-1998) to the Technical University, triggering the first body of student-work, investigations and publications on the history of feminist action in Dutch architecture in 2018.⁷ Inspired by this donation and the publication of the 37th volume of the *Yearbook of Women's History: Gender and Archiving*,⁸ engineer and researcher Lidewij Tummers became aware of the renewed relevance of the network Vrouwen Bouwen Wonen (VBW) [Women, Building, Living]. What followed catalysed a snowball-effect for further archival acquisition and research. After an initial rounding up of former activists, a brainstorm-session and inventory, the archival project was funded by the Creative Industries Funds.⁹ In 2020/2021, the VBW archive was adopted by the Dutch National Collection of Architecture and Urban Planning as part of their collection, in the light of their current thematic focus and positioning. However, the *10th European Feminist Research Conference* held in Goetting in 2018 considered the case too 'practical' for publication. This perspective conceptualized science as primarily theoretical, revealing the challenges of limited cross-language networking, differences in academic cultures across languages, and the difficulty of integrating innovative practices into tradition-oriented academia.

In this regard, researcher and curator Annet Dekker's work on "Living Archives" offers interesting insights into non-institutional archives that encompass personal engagement. These insights often imply how personal curiosity contributes to establishing "what we have achieved" by evaluating the knowledge and proposals of the social movement of its time.¹⁰ To this point, Tummers was part of the above-mentioned VBW network as a student, continued to develop a feminist practice as designer and technical consultant, and co-curated the acquisition and enrichment process alongside being one of the network-archive's donors.

⁷ Among them, the architectural history thesis by Veerle Alkemade, "Feminisme en architectuuronderwijs: een onderzoek naar de afdeling Vrouwenstudies op de faculteit Bouwkunde aan de TU Delft" (History Thesis, TU Delft, 2018), the paper by Charlotte van Wijk, "Women's Studies at the Architecture Department of Delft Technical University", in H.Seražin, E. M. Garda, & C. Franchini (Eds.), *Women's creativity since the Modern Movement (1918-2018): Toward a new perception and reception*, 193-200 (France Stele Institute of Art History, 2018), <https://uifs.zrcsazu.si/en/publikacije/toward-a-new-perception-and-reception#v>, and the architectural history thesis by Mirthe Andriessen, "The end of an era, start of new beginnings: The legacy of the Women's Studies section at the Faculty of Architecture in Delft (1978-1998)" (History Thesis, TU Delft, 2021) <http://resolver.tudelft.nl/uuid:07022a9c-347e-4b26-a28b-ed7ee270dd18>

⁸ Specially the article by Kate Eichhorn, "Past-futures: the temporality of feminist archives", in the *Jaarboek voor Vrouwengeschiedenis 37, Gender and Archiving: past, present, future*, edited by Atria (Hilversum: Verloren, 2017). Eichhorn had previously published the book *The Archival Turn in Feminism: Outrage in order* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013).

⁹ Lidewij Tummers, "De erfenis van 'Vrouwen Bouwen Wonen' 1985-1995" (2021).

¹⁰ Annet Dekker (Ed.), *Lost and Living (in) Archives: Collectively shaping new memories*. (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2017).

In relation to archives and knowledge production, more concurrent activities were taking place. Among them, also in 2018, feminist architect and researcher Carolina Quiroga from Universidad de Buenos Aires started her Ph.D. research on Wilhemina Jansen, one of the first women who graduated in architecture in the Netherlands. Jansen's archive had been donated one year earlier, in 2017, to the Gemeentearchief Schiedam [Schiedam Municipal Archive], after being previously classified by her nephew, Dick Jansen. Another nearly parallel event envisioned more than one year prior—building on the legacy of the TU Delft Feminists—took place from April to June 2019 in the corridor of the Department of Architecture at TU Delft. The intervention titled “That Exhibition that Happened in the Corridor: Approaching Architectural Knowledge(s) Otherwise” sought to challenge canonical historical narratives in the field.¹¹ The exposition, collaboratively co-curated by researchers and students including two of the co-authors of this paper, exhibited diverse portraits, images and texts in front of the mainly-white-male gallery of (famous) architects on display. The contents were later briefly shown at the Research Centre of the Nieuwe Instituut in July 2021.¹²

Lastly, just a few months earlier, in January 2021, anchorwoman Sandra Rottenberg moderated a public event titled “What would a non-sexist city be like?” at the Nieuwe Instituut, bringing together VBW activists from the 1990s and the new generation, including the TU Delft Feminists. Alongside the public event, a workshop was organised to create a timeline that facilitates the collection, documentation, and interpretation of documents and testimonies related to the VBW.¹³ This project's focus catalysed that some of the archival documents of Vrouwen Bouwen Wonen were included in the section “Feminist Design Strategies” of the exhibition “Designing the Social” in Gallery 0.(2021-2024, Figure 2).¹⁴ In parallel, Veerle Alkemade and Catherine Koekoek initiated *Respons*, a podcast specifically aimed at examining and discussing feminist questions in architecture.¹⁵ On a larger scope examples were the Feminist Spatial Practice Book Club organised by ARCAM and architect-in-residence Afaina

¹¹ The exhibition (@exhibition_in_the_corridor) was crafted in its last phase by Maria Novas, Alberto Altés Arlandis, Golnar Abbasi, Tommi Hilsee and Meryam Ajari, but it was a plural collective work of many, far away from being credited or authored individually. In relation to the happenings taking place at the Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment at TU Delft, see: Amy Thomas and Maria Novas, “More than Half the Picture: Challenges at the encounter of feminism & architectural history”. In R. Rocco, A. Thomas & M. Novas (Eds.), *Teaching Design for Values: Concepts, Tools & Practices*, 268-289 (Delft: TU Delft Open Publishing, 2022).

¹² “That Exhibition that Happened in the Corridor: Approaching Architectural Knowledge(s) Otherwise”, 2019, <https://nieuweinstituut.nl/events/exhibition-happened-corridor-approaching-architectural-knowledges-otherwise>.

¹³ “What a non-sexist city would be like?” *Nieuwe Instituut*, January 21, 2021, <https://nieuweinstituut.nl/en/events/what-would-nonsexist-city-be-0>

¹⁴ Curated by Setareh Noorani and Tabea Nixdorff, “Het ontwerp van het sociale”, <https://ontwerpvanhetsociale.hetnieuweinstituut.nl/>

¹⁵ Veerle Alkemade en Catherine Koekoek, *Respons*, <https://www.instagram.com/re.spons/>

de Jong (online, 2020-2021),¹⁶ and the publication of the magazine *Mevrouw de Architect* (2022), edited by Merel Pit.¹⁷



Fig. 2 “Feminist Design Strategies” at the Nieuwe Instituut.

Source Nieuwe Instituut © Johannes Schwartz (2021)

These initiatives merged archival collections with propagation events, disseminating feminist knowledge as a way of encouraging the recovery of legacies and subsequently, data. Some of these were explicitly influenced by prominent and established readings that shaped the theoretical approach to the construction of feminist knowledge in the field. Among them, is the article by Dolores Hayden “What a non-sexist city would be like?” published in 1981 in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, which explores ideas and strategies for creating cities that challenge traditional gender roles.¹⁸ Also from the 1980s, the conceptualisation of situated knowledges by philosopher Donna Haraway emphasised the recognition that knowledge is shaped by one's specific social, cultural, and historical context, challenging notions of objective

¹⁶ “The Feminist Spatial Practice Book Club”, *ARCAM* (December 10, 2020 to March, 18, 2021), <https://arcam.nl/events/the-feminist-spatial-practice-book-club/>

¹⁷ Merel Pit (Ed.), *Mevr. de Architect* (A.Zine, 2022), <https://a-zine.nl/category/mevrouw-de-architect/>

¹⁸ Dolores Hayden, “What Would a Non-Sexist City Be Like? Speculations on Housing, Urban Design, and Human Work.” *Signs* 5, no. 3 (1980): S170–87. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3173814>

and universal knowledge.¹⁹ These readings, experiences and networks, led to efforts of (networked) consciousness raising, where feelings of solidarity and encounter prevailed, and in unison new initiatives started to be envisioned.

More recently, prominent work has been done by Beatriz Colomina and Jane Hall. Colomina has continued to fuel the ‘women in architecture’-movement through her essays and thought pieces,²⁰ paralleling critique on the profession with her long-standing scholarship in Modern architecture history and theory—offering insight into two sides of the same coin: modernism and patriarchy. Hall published the extensive survey on women architects, titled *Breaking Ground*, continuing the efforts to inscribe women architect’s legacies into ‘canon’.²¹ Alongside these more ‘traditional’ sources shedding light onto the persisting issue of representation, it is important to emphasise the influence of other fields of study onto both architecture, architectural history, as well as archival studies. New materialism and ecological thinking, stemming from Rosi Braidotti, Isabelle Stengers, and Karen Barad, as well as radical ethics of care based on radical empathy²². Here the concepts of ‘mattering’, ‘embodiments’, and ‘cooperation’ of agents within a network are productive to understand the relations built intergenerationally and interdisciplinary - expanding the notions of women’s practice and existence in architecture, as well as the ‘field’ of architecture.

3. Constructing the Research

3.1 Building Collecting Otherwise

The Nieuwe Instituut, the Dutch museum for architecture, design, and digital cultures that houses the National Collection of Dutch Architecture and Urban Planning, has a history of rethinking the National Collection through updates to its acquisition policy. Examples of this include the initiatives Keuzes Maken (2012) and the current Rethinking the Collection project,²³ which have been implemented alongside public inquiry. Nieuwe Instituut aims, at the same time, to provide online public access to the largest possible portion of its collection. This not only requires the conservation and restoration of the collection but also its digitisation. Alongside these concerns, in 2018, the Nieuwe Instituut initiated the masterplan Architectuur Dichterbij

¹⁹ Donna Haraway, "Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective," *Feminist studies* 14.3 (1988): 575-599.

²⁰ For instance Beatriz Colomina, "Outrage: blindness to women turns out to be blindness to architecture itself", *The Architectural Review*, March 8, 2018, <https://www.architectural-review.com/essays/outrage/outrage-blindness-to-women-turns-out-to-be-blindness-to-architecture-itself>.

²¹ Jane Hall, *Breaking Ground: Architecture by Women* (London: Phaidon, 2019).

²² Caswell, ML. (2021). From Human Rights to Feminist Ethics: Radical Empathy in Archives. UCLA. Retrieved from <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0mb9568h>

²³ Nieuwe Instituut, "Rethinking the Collection"; <https://nieuweinstituut.nl/en/projects/collectie/rethinking-collection-nieuwe-aandachtsgebieden-verzamelbeleid>

(Disclosing Architecture)²⁴. In collaboration with the Cultural Heritage Agency (Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed) of the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science (OCW), the Architectuur Dichterbij programme received 11 million euros to support these objectives and present an integrated plan spanning several years. In this program, the focus is on the question of what and how we should conserve, strategically realigning the purpose and responsibilities of the Collection department in the Nieuwe Instituut.

In this context, in 2020, plans were developed for the project *Collecting Otherwise* (initially titled *Archiving Otherwise*) with its initial set of questions: “How could the Nieuwe Instituut find new entries and vocabularies to unfold its collection in Other ways, and explore new methods of collecting?”; “How can the Nieuwe Instituut adopt a more experimental yet solid approach that considers immaterial heritage and societal embeddedness? How do collective histories inform archives and their collections?” and, lastly, “Which heritages should be emphasised, and how should these legacies be preserved?”. Consequently, *Collecting Otherwise* centres its attention on marginalised voices within the collection, particularly in the areas of gender, queerness, and decolonial agencies. By exploring the role archives play in shaping the history of cities and their residents, *Collecting Otherwise* challenges institutional memory and the prevailing historiography while contributing to the Nieuwe Instituut's endeavours to include overlooked actors, unrecognised agents, and forgotten narratives in the discourse.²⁵

Collecting Otherwise redirects attention to the choices made prior to the archival process through critical, speculative, and artistic research, expanding the scope of epistemologies that inform archiving, while encompassing a wider range of immaterial heritage captured in the collection. More specifically, the project encourages inquiries that strongly consider immaterial (or intangible) heritage as fundamental to understanding the design(ed) legacies in the Collection, distinctly urgent in the context of non-western cultures and otherwise marginalised presences. From this understanding, immaterial culture as the carrier and context of material culture contains narratives, social institutions, worldviews, and epistemologies. Collective histories constitute archives and vice versa; together they make the places, spaces, and contained objects which are valuable enough to keep.

To ground the larger questions around topics of minoritised legacies, decolonial histories, (im)permanence, (in)visibility, equity, and justice in the collections *Collecting Otherwise* advises on the development of the collection policy based on a series of archives that are either already part of the collection or that are yet to be acquired. Specifically, the acquisition of the Vrouwen Bouwen Wonen network archive is a notable example of how the Collection has

²⁴ “Architectuur Dichterbij”, <https://nieuweinstituut.nl/projects/architectuur-dichterbij>

²⁵ The ideas presented in this extract had been developed by Setareh Noorani in collaboration with Marina Otero Verzier, former director of Research at the Nieuwe Instituut, in 2020.

utilised the Archival Care Rider²⁶ and Oral Herstory methodology. The goals of the VBW Oral Herstories are to collect a general overview of the donor's or interviewee's individual and collective experience in the Vrouwen Bouwen Wonen network and the wider profession of architecture during their practising life, their relationships in the Vrouwen Bouwen Wonen movement, and how they understand being 'active' as or identifying as a feminist member of the network. Also, Guus Schreuder-Gratama and Eleanor Ferguson's ongoing archival acquisitions have recently enriched the collection, diversifying the archive's holdings by including poems or student works.

Since early 2021, Collecting Otherwise works through and with a Working Group methodology, which started with the first of four research and development iterations. The initial iteration centred around "Seen/Unseen: Intersectional Feminisms and Gender Queer in the Collection", and during this time, a Working Group was assembled upon invitation. The Working Group members²⁷ represented different fields of study and practice that related to and could intersect with the case study archives in the collection, including the VBW network, the Stichting Goed Wonen, and the archives of Herman Haan, Wim den Boon, Johanna Eleanor Ferguson and Albert Frederik Aalbers, amongst others. By then, the primary goal was to have an intersectional Working Group that could commit to a long research trajectory, to get to know each other and the situatedness of the collections material in order to offer relevant proposals to enrich tools, acquisition methodologies (both of which are part of the Tool Shed), as well as suggest new acquisitions through research. The facilitators of the Collecting Otherwise Working Group²⁸ aimed at providing a caring space to nurture ongoing conversations on the voices (hidden) in the collection, as well as to facilitate agency of organising amongst the Working Group. Through time, the Working Group, as a working methodology, has proved to be fundamental for the project. Together, a diverse group of people have practised and tested different modes of publishing research findings that go beyond academic papers. Examples of these alternative products are zine making as DIY, counter-culture practice (Figure 3),²⁹ Instagram or social media take-overs,³⁰ pamphlets, and newsletters. Collecting Otherwise also organises regular public events as publishing practices, wherein Working Group members and invited guests actively engage with the current research threads within the project. Thoroughly, Collecting

²⁶ On the Archival Care Rider see: <https://nieuweinstituut.nl/en/projects/collecting-otherwise/archival-care-rider>

²⁷ Collecting Otherwise Working group members are Clara Balaguer, Isola Tong, Alfred Marasigan, Czar Kristoff (aka To Be Determined-Trojan Horse Cell), Robin Hartanto Honggare, Yasmin Tri Aryani, Harriet Rose Morley, dr. Michael Karabinos, Hannah Dawn Henderson, Joseph D. Steele, Yessica Deira and Hetty Berens.

²⁸ The facilitators of the Collecting Otherwise Working Group were Delany Boutkan, Setareh Noorani, Carolina Valente Pinto, Federica Notari, and Mayim Frieden.

²⁹ The Collecting Otherwise Library, including A Caring Zine Update, available at: <https://nieuweinstituut.nl/en/projects/collecting-otherwise/bibliotheek>

³⁰ Instagram Take Overs including Take Over 2021 available at Thursday Night Live Nieuwe Instituut Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/p/CdD8HklorIJ/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igshid=MzRIODBiNWFIZA==

Otherwise has evolved into a comprehensive testing ground, comprising five active research cells and over a dozen realised sub-projects.³¹

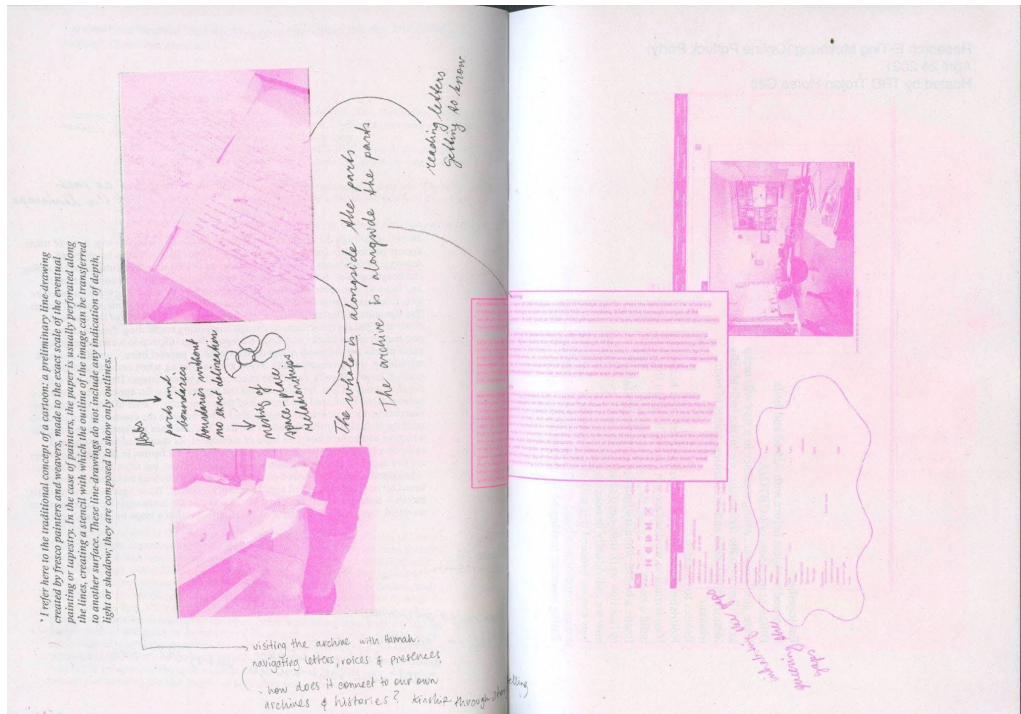


Fig. 3 Page from *A Caring Zine Update #1*, the first zine of *Collecting Otherwise*.
Source © Collecting Otherwise Working Group, design Carolina Valente Pinto (2019)

During the second iteration in 2022, titled “Post/De/Colonial”, the emphasis was placed on seven case studies that have close connections to an architectural and design practice in the colonial ‘abroad’ from the Collection. Through these case studies, dialogues and perspectives were opened up, highlighting the significance of decolonization within institutions and archives, particularly those related to heritage.³² In 2023, in and through its current (third) iteration titled “The Tool-shed: A Testing Ground for Tools and Methodologies” *Collecting Otherwise* seeks

³¹ These sub-projects include: To Be Determined Trojan Horse Cell, Archival Care Rider Cell, Asterisk* Cell, Sonneveld House Cell, Resituating Colonial Archives Cell, and projects/tools such as Asterisk*, Archival Care Rider/Oral Herstory, Trans-Institutional Supra Archive, Resituating Colonial Archives workshops and exhibition (with gudskul and arsitekturindonesia.org), Sourcebook, *Women in Architecture* (book and symposium, with nai010, amongst others), Hidden Histories (grant and working group, with Creative Industries Fund NL), Mapping Collective Memories, Paducah Sonneveld histories, Counter To (with gta archives ETH Zurich), Feminist Design Strategies and the Feminist Assembly Month

³² *Collecting Otherwise*, “Gathering #5: Post/De/Colonial”, <https://nieuwinstituut.nl/en/articles/gathering-5-postdecolonial>

to implement research findings within the Nieuwe Instituut's collection policy and the Disclosing Architecture trajectory. This third interaction has been developed in tandem with the Nieuwe Instituut's General and Artistic Director Aric Chen's vision of the Nieuwe Instituut as a Testing Ground and Research as Testing.

The focus is thus being shifted towards further development of tools or research projects that distil methods for the so-called "Tool Shed".³³ The Tool Shed (as opposed to the widely known 'tool-kit') is a space that encourages collaboration around identified important themes in archiving and reading archives against the grain,³⁴ as well as considering the Tool Shed as a (workshop) space that exists beyond, or on the threshold of, the institution. Then, Collecting Otherwise becomes the "Tool Shed" in which project developments thus far are tested out and intensively applied to case studies (archives, objects, photos or archive donors) from the Collection, while building upon the previous two iterations ("Seen/Unseen" and "Post/De/Colonial"). Presently, the researchers of Collecting Otherwise, which includes a core-team from Collections department, as well as a broader archival community, are connected to the project through "working, making, and doing" within the tool-shed. By considering researching as testing, as well as public research and enacting the tools (as intermediate outcomes) immediately in environments within or at the thresholds of institutions, communities engage in transferring or 'shedding'³⁵ works in the Tool Shed. Shedding means leaving behind tools and structures that can form further Tool Sheds in different environments, where they may be needed, as well as "growing [new] organs for the alternative"³⁶. This cycles back to the project's long-term ambition to contribute through its research iterations to a lasting paradigm shift and concurrent implementation, within institutional policy, and transference of tools beyond the boundaries of the institution, seeking novel alliances with archival communities³⁷.

3.2 Building *Cherchez la femme!*

The *Cherchez la Femme!* project designed and carried out by Lidewij Tummers and María Novas was structured into two main phases: research (2021) and game development (2022). In 2023, the project focused primarily on extensive dissemination, which included publication and participation in panel discussions. However, knowledge transfer remained integral throughout

³³ Collecting Otherwise "Tool Shed: A Testing Ground for Tools and Methodologies": <https://nieuweinstituut.nl/en/projects/collecting-otherwise/toolshed>

³⁴ Ann Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009).

³⁵ Tooling and Shedding as coined by Collecting Otherwise Working Group member Alfred Marasigan

³⁶ Avery F. Gordon, *The Hawthorne Archive: Letters from the Utopian Margins* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015)

³⁷ In progress, "Archival Community and Trans-Institutional Supra Archive", written by Dr. Michael Karabinos for Collecting Otherwise <https://nieuweinstituut.nl/en/projects/collecting-otherwise/transinstitutional-supraarchives>

the entire process. Various activities were carried out, such as meetings of the advisory board,³⁸ game testing with networks of young professionals and groups of students or events co-organised with cultural initiatives that do not explicitly focus on equality, inclusion or feminism such as the Rotterdam Architecture Month. Already during the research, invitations to speak or participate in panel discussions started coming in. The project culminated with the release of videos and a website in June 2023. In this sense, the website *feministarchitect.eu* not only shares the outcomes of *Cherchez la Femme!*, but also showcases new projects and provides references to the international network on gender, architecture, and the visibility of women's history.

During the year 2022, the *Cherchez la Femme!* project developed four game prototypes that aimed to highlight important historical moments showcasing the societal position of women in the Netherlands. These periods included: **Pioneers** 1918-1940 (interbellum), when architectural education began and the first wave of feminism achieved women's suffrage; **Back to the Sink** 1945-1967, when women who entered male-dominated professions during World War II but were pushed back into traditional gender roles during reconstruction; **Democratisation and Feminist Rebellion** 1967-1989, when the democratisation movement and second wave of feminism impacted architectural institutions; and **Institutionalization** 1989-2017, when the EU Gender Equal Treatment Act was agreed (1994), and the Treaty of Amsterdam in 1997 committed member states to Gender Mainstreaming. This period is also characterised by neoliberalism, privatisation, and populism affecting equal opportunity policies.

Consequently, from each period representative role models were chosen whose biographies and architectural works formed the basis to design game prototypes. The games aim to reach a diverse audience, including academics (historians, teachers, and architecture students), professionals (architects from different generations), and the general public attending events or seeking information online. As a result, four games were developed: an escape room, an online trivia, a quiz, and a geocaching experience.

The escape room focused on the Interbellum period, specifically on one of the women studying architecture at the beginning of the 20th century in the Netherlands, Guus Schreuder-Gratama. The prototype was tested on September 2022, with the Advisory Board in the Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam. Through solving the escape room, it becomes clear to the players that the production of architecture cannot be achieved solely through storing documents of an architectural firm and, sometimes, it can only be found in highly personal documents —such as family poems

³⁸ Respectively, on September 17, 2021 (at Het Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam), May 13, 2022 (online) and September 13, 2022 (at Het Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam). The advisory board included representatives of the Research and Collections team of the National Collection such as Setareh Noorani and Hetty Berens (Nieuwe Instituut) and experts on the gendered history of architecture such as Elen van Kessel (Vrouwen Wonen Bouwen), Carolina Quiroga (UBA, Buenos Aires), Zaida Muxi (UPC, Barcelona) and Amy Thomas (TU Delft).

serving as evidence of how Schreuder-Gratama, despite not formally graduating as an architect, designed and built her own house.

The online trivia sought to disseminate the history of the *Vrouwenadvies Commissie* (VAC) and their advisory work in improving the quality of social housing design in Rotterdam during the reconstruction. It was tested on December 22, 2022, by a group of voluntary students of the History Architectural Thesis course in the first year of the master's program in Architecture, Urbanism, and Building Sciences at TU Delft. Furthermore, it raises the question of whether people who lack an official degree in architecture but have dedicated their lives to innovating the provision of housing and urban space should be included in the architectural archive.

The third period, exploring the life and work of Luzia Hartsuyker-Curjel in the form of a quiz, is represented by a visionary architect who ran an office on equal terms with her husband. The event for testing the quiz took place with the collective Urbanistas at Verhalenhuis Belvedere, on November 2, 2022. Finally, the fourth and most recent period was represented in the multi-geocaching “Drie Hoven in Delfshaven”, an urban renewal district in Rotterdam. By introducing architectural projects by architect Ineke Hulshof, treasure hunters explore the streets and observe architecture that is noteworthy not only for its aesthetics, but for its significance in people's everyday lives.

All the events to test the games during the design process contributed not only to evaluating the effectiveness of knowledge transmission through gaming but also to identifying complementary gaps in knowledge about women in architecture that should be addressed and not taken for granted. For example, the co-organisation of “Building HERitage” as part of the Collecting Otherwise Thursday Night Live! series at the Nieuwe Instituut in March 2022, sought to boost an intergenerational and transdisciplinary conversation on this issue, including the participation of Elske Schreuder, who donated the archive of Guus Schreuder-Gratama (Figure 4).³⁹ During this event, the Instituut's not only formally accepted the archive of Guus Schreuder-Gratama, but also that of another woman architect, Johanna Eleanor Ferguson (1900-1982). Later, exchanges experienced exponential growth, involving more archival explorations. Collecting Otherwise invited *Cherchez la femme!* To participate in the “Parity Talks VIII: Get your act together!” organised by the Department of Architecture at ETH Zürich, on March 2023.⁴⁰ Taking the opportunity to consult the ETH archive for another of *Cherchez's* role models, Luzia Curjel (later: Hartsuyker-Curjel) brought to light documents that filled a gap in the archive in

³⁹ “Building heritage”, Nieuwe Instituut, March 10, 2023, <https://live.hetnieuweinstituut.nl/activiteiten/building-heritage>

⁴⁰ Parity Group, “Parity Talks VIII: Get your act together!”, on March 7 and 8, 2023, <https://parity.arch.ethz.ch/talks/info>

Rotterdam. This knowledge was presented during an event organised by the network Post '65 Rotterdam during the Rotterdam Architecture Month in June 2023.⁴¹

In the following months, the research and dissemination work occurred alongside the collection process, as well as the release of a short article by the Nieuwe Instituut including some of the findings titled “Augustine Schreuder-Gratama: The Architect Who Never Was”.⁴² This initial research work eventually culminated in the inclusion of some of the *Cherchez la femme!* findings in the already mentioned publication titled *Women in Architecture*, launched on June 15, 2023 at the Nieuwe Instituut, written during and throughout the completion of the project.



Fig. 4 From left to right, Lidewij Tummers, Elske Schreuder and Hetty Berens in the event *Building HERitage*. Respectively, researcher, donor, and head conservator of the Guus Schreuder-Gratama archive. Source © Simaa Al-Saig, Nieuwe Instituut (2022)

In the meantime, the transferring work is still ongoing, and there are more projects being prepared. In addition to presenting the current paper at the 6th International Conference on Architecture and Gender (ICAG) at the Universitat Politècnica de València (autumn 2023), a

⁴¹ The network Post '65 Rotterdam is an NGO aiming to preserve and understand post 1965 architecture. “TOUR: Zonnetrap”, on June 23, 2023, <https://rotterdamarchitectuurmaand.nl/programma/item/zonnetrap/>

⁴² “Augustine Schreuder-Gratama: The Architect Who Never Was”, Nieuwe Instituut, March 7, 2023, <https://nieuweinstituut.nl/en/articles/augustine-schreuder-gratama>

co-authored article is currently being prepared for the art and architectural history magazine *Rode Haring*. Also, the Dutch TV show “Andere Tijden” (stories from history by VPRO, NTR, NPO) asked our contribution on Guus Schreuder-Gratama's caravan design for an episode on caravan-holidays. The interest shown affirms the expansion and consolidation of the Dutch presence not only in local institutions and channels but also in international networks of architects and historians who address the gender gap in architectural canons.

4. Engineering the flows: Discussion

4.1 Transferring Otherwise

Through both projects, the research process necessitates the simultaneous production and transfer of knowledge, challenging traditional academic approaches to dissemination. In this case, the experimental approach involved exploring parallel developments that encourage interactions, ranging from the creation of a “Tool Shed” (Collecting Otherwise), adopting a mystery-solving playful approach and development of games to staging PR moments such as official document handovers (*Cherchez la femme!*).

Specifically, through the Collecting Otherwise project, a wide array of choices were made to reappropriate the “master's tools”⁴³ and reconsider, reconfigure, and redistribute the (lived) spaces that uphold our legacies. In doing so, the project has materialised tools in different ways that contribute to activating (counter-)archives, thereby increasing awareness of contested architectural heritage. The *Cherchez la femme!* project has contributed to bringing lost archives to light, at the same time the results of the project highlight that some stories will be lost forever. The findings illustrate the importance of shedding light on obscured narratives that, with effort, we have managed to preserve, consequently developing knowledge to analyse the gaps that will persist.

In the process, both cases highlight the importance of not only producing knowledge but also effectively transferring it in various formats and timelines. It emphasises the need for knowledge transfer during the process before a collaborative book or academic paper can be published, such as the book *Women and Architecture* (Figure 5). This approach involves utilising different mediums such as zines, newsletters, events, social media, websites, games, and videos to disseminate information. By adopting this strategy, a broader analysis becomes possible, enabling the exploration of commonalities and questioning the roles involved in transferring both the outputs and the process itself. While books traditionally take a longer time to produce, numerous alternative outputs allow transferring of knowledge otherwise beyond conventional formats.

⁴³ Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and speeches* (New York: Crossing Press, 1984).

4.2 Blurring the roles

The in-depth discussion of these experiences further indicates a significant blurring of roles, and a need to ‘curate the networks’, making the indispensable connections visible through which feminist action in architecture moves. This means a role of operating on the ‘threshold’ of spaces, be it grassroots, institutional, and academic environments, in which individual or networked operations exist. Being on the threshold encompasses a multifaceted role for curators, researchers, activists, and donors. It implies occupying a space that oscillates between being within and outside established systems. When viewed through a feminist lens, this threshold position becomes linked to particular feminist frameworks, emphasising ethics of care, networking, and the establishment of alternative forms of exchange beyond the confines of institutional academia.

The act of transferring knowledge takes on a crucial significance in this context, as events, collection, and dissemination occur simultaneously and become messy. Immediate action is facilitated through mediums like newsletters and news updates on platforms such as the article published on Guus Scheuder-Gratama on the Nieuwe Instituut’s website when the publication of the book *Women in Architecture* was still in process, challenging the conventional procedure of architectural historic research in Academia. While waiting for the publication of a larger piece, there is a porous way of conducting research, granting agency to individuals involved. However, far from being the conclusion of an academic thinking process, this is likely a result of serendipity, limited resources, and the iterative nature inherent in experimentation and innovation. More importantly, it embodies the spirit of engaging in a DIY and grassroots approach to work, operating ‘on the threshold’ between the institutional and academic worlds. This is particularly relevant for individuals who often have no other choice but to adopt this approach.

Yet, it is the responsibility of universities and other knowledge and research institutions to properly disclose and study archives that go beyond the conventional or mainstream canon. This can be done by engaging in a practice of “reading against the grain”⁴⁴, which involves uncovering legacies and traces in ephemeral materials. These materials encompass various mediums such as zines, newsletters, pamphlets, or oral histories. Typically, these media are utilised by groups situated at the margins of ‘normative’ (design) history, as they are caught in or amplify an emancipatory struggle. The materials that filmmakers or students can find when they search these archives depend on the decisions made regarding their inclusion and availability.

⁴⁴Ann Stoler, “Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense”, 2008, <https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/9781400835478/html?lang=de>

Similarly, in academia transferring knowledge carries the weight of claiming co-ownership and a sense of responsibility to share the research, and nurture it collectively. However, the fear of irrelevance may hinder this process. The feminist perspective not only advocates for preserving archives through collaboration and knowledge dissemination but also leads to the transfer of otherwise overlooked narratives and a gradual blurring of traditional roles.

5. Finishing Touches: Conclusions

This contribution set out to map the interlinked activities of two intertwined research projects addressing the historical agency of women in Dutch Architecture: the initiatives Collecting Otherwise by the Nieuwe Instituut and *Cherchez la Femme!* by Novas and Tummers. There was a close and mutually beneficial collaboration between those projects, and a wide array of other initiatives addressing the same theme. Both the Collecting Otherwise and *Cherchez la femme!* experiences demonstrate that historical research is not a linear process and that archiving can be influenced by activist social movements. In parallel, the two initiatives have infused transformative changes in the institutional procedures of archiving, collecting, and curating, leading to the following outcomes:

Both projects opened ways to go beyond the traditional binary analysis of gender as “privileged men versus disadvantaged women”. Gendered differences in architecture in the context of the social and political history of the 20th century were reinterpreted for example by foregrounding societal developments that particularly affect the position of women, such as the right to vote, to accept a public office and open a business.

Furthermore, both experiences build upon research literature from architecture-adjacent disciplines as a framework, applying the theory to address emerging issues like the rising queer movement, institutional and practice-based discussions on care (with and towards minority groups), and the essential need for collaboration and generosity in sharing strategies in the face of unfolding societal crises.

Both initiatives have also contributed to expand the network of the archive beyond the traditional perception of architectural practice or firms, consequently uncovering archives that otherwise would not have been found. These outputs show how women have influenced the production of architecture (for example housing standards) but also throw new light on the architectural qualities themselves (for example the layout of sanitary facilities).

Following the feminist perspective advocating for the preservation of archives through collaboration and knowledge dissemination, the two projects have critically reconsidered the different roles curators, donors and researchers, and connected these in different ‘networked’ ways. This raised awareness to take different, and multiple roles, in such networks.

Lastly, Collecting Otherwise and *Cherchez la femme!* brought forth new types of documents within the architecture archive. One such example is oral history, which has been developed in the feminist movement but has yet to be extensively or seriously applied in the context of Dutch architecture.

Simultaneously, out of these findings derived several implications for practice. Firstly, the curation of networks in the archiving process is a primary recommendation. Both initiatives required not only curators, researchers, or activists but also involved donors in a performative manner, making them active participants in both the research process and the resulting events.

Secondly, several outputs necessarily extend beyond academic papers and books to embrace collaborative outcomes that engage more people in the research process through allyship and generosity. These interconnected events or experiences, happening concurrently or collectively, nurture a communal learning process within a network that counters competition. Through the feminist ethics of care, various networking approaches and forms of exchange emerge both within and outside the institutional and academic value-making processes as crucial factors, giving rise to a new type of researcher within institutions, where the roles of paid and unpaid workers sometimes remain on the threshold.

Third, the introduction and expansion of archival methods are particularly important for the visibility of women and marginalised groups since their activities are recorded predominantly outside the spheres of formal agency, and thus not part of the architectural canon.

Yet, while this paper delved into two projects, it is evident that a more substantial amount of feminist research and activism is emerging in Europe and worldwide, as witnessed by ICAG. These ongoing research projects and activism serve as the groundwork for a comprehensive feminist history of building architecture and urban spaces. Further exploration through additional case studies and analysis of their impact on local institutions is essential to verify not only the significance of documenting research results but also the importance of understanding and capturing the curatorial process itself. Future research could also focus on comparing impacts on education, such as exploring the ongoing body of student research work on the agency of marginalised groups in architecture. Integrating this research seriously into the curriculum has the potential to contribute to a more diverse lineup of role models for aspiring professionals.

All in all, what initially started as an endeavour to rescue material, has evolved into a transformative process within an intellectual realm, pointing towards a paradigm shift. The practical aspects of this work transcend the boundaries of applied science, instead fostering a fundamental rethinking of established practices. In the process, this paper itself serves as an additional archival piece, contributing to the ongoing trajectory of transformation and intellectual exploration, capturing and recording recently passed events.

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