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Learning and teaching with the 'body': pedagogical *hatches* from Jennifer Bloomer

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In 1999, I ran a studio at Iowa State University, College of Design, at the invitation of Jennifer Bloomer, who was working as a professor there. This invitation was motivated by her interest in my work and my PhD in Women Studies under Hélène Cixous's supervision and indeed by Jennifer's proximity with Cixous's thinking and French Theory as a whole. The studio, inspired by Bloomer's work and by the tradition of thinking the 'body' in French Theory, was focused on 'Bodies and Cities', highlighting the role of the body as a 'para-theoretical device' that would help students to look differently at urban contexts. This was done through a feminist pedagogical approach inspired and guided by Jennifer and her own references: bell hooks, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, Jacques Derrida, Paulo Freire, Roland Barthes, and Sigmund Freud. Taking an autobiographic route, this paper revisits Bloomer's contribution to the feminist turn in architectural theory and education, which started in the 1990s, addressing her particular role as feminist thinker, educator, colleague, and friend in shaping this route. The paper reframes some of Bloomer's 'tropes' like 'mopping', 'hatching', 'quilt-making', and 'real life', together with other feminist concepts which were influential to my own route in theory, practice, and education, to speak about how I understand Bloomer's legacy and how this legacy can be further taken today to address current challenges.

Important debates concerning issues of race and gender inequalities, the imperative of decolonising our thinking, practices, and pedagogies, as well as calls for climate justice have emerged with more urgency than ever in architectural education in the last decade. As an author of texts and initiatives dealing with these issues, I have been interested in the role feminist pedagogy plays in transforming not only education, but architectural theory and practice in general. I address this question again, this time with a focus on Jennifer

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Bloomer's contribution to the discourse and practice of architecture. In this article, I use the legacy of Bloomer's critical provocation to place 'writing' and the 'body' at the core of architectural education, theory, and practice. I tell this story by taking an autobiographical route, which is in keeping, I hope, with the ethos of Bloomer's own methodologies.

The 'body' and *écriture féminine*

I met Jennifer at the Iowa State University College of Design, where she invited me to run a studio as a visiting professor in the spring of 1999. The school was led by Robert Segrest, Jennifer's partner, and it was one of the most overtly feminist schools of architecture in United States at the time. In addition to Jennifer, scholars such as Karen Bergen, Catherine Ingraham, and Paulette Singley were involved in the architectural programme in Iowa. People from the school were close to the currents of thinking developed around journals like *Assemblage* (1986–2000) and *ANY* conferences, magazines and edited collections (1993–1999). It was a moment when theory, and more specifically French Theory, were central to arts and architecture, at least in the Anglo-Saxon academic and experimental practice context, with a few philosophers as key references.¹ There was Jacques Derrida, the philosopher of deconstruction, whose thinking informed the dominant philosophical current in practice at that time, influencing the work of Peter Eisenman and Bernard Tschumi, two notorious examples. There was also Gilles Deleuze, whose materialist thinking influenced theorists and architects such as Greg Lynn and Sanford Kwinter, for example.

Another factor that favoured the influence of French Theory in architecture was the flexibility of the educational system in the USA, which allows for shifts in educational trajectories. It is possible, for example, to pass from literary or philosophical studies, conducted at the undergraduate level, to architecture at the graduate level. The influence of French Theory in architecture was therefore supported by architects whose educational background included a solid education in the humanities. Jennifer can be counted among them. She was also an active advocate of the necessity of bringing criticism and theory inside professional education in architecture.² In her case, this was also a feminist standpoint. Like bell hooks, she recognised the empowering role of theory for subjects otherwise excluded from the construction of discourse in academic disciplines, particularly, in this case, women.³

One of the key topics raised during this theoretical turn in architecture was the 'body'. Arriving with the wave of French Theory represented by Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, Félix Guattari, and, importantly, with feminist theorists such as Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, and Hélène Cixous, the 'gendered' and 'sexed body' started to enter architecture. A series of important publications emerging across the 1990s testify to this influence, including *Sexuality and Space* (1992), *The Architect: Reconstructing Her Practice* (1996), *Desiring Practices: Architecture, Gender and the Interdisciplinary* (1995), and *Gender Space Architecture: An Interdisciplinary Introduction* (2000).

French Theory extracted the 'body' from the many structural binaries, usually framed through body/mind and body/spirit oppositions in occidental philosophical tradition, and placed it back in the centre of considerations. 'Thinking the body' became a way of deconstructing the oppositional logic of the Western 'logocentric' tradition by bringing to surface the suppressed terms, for instance, the 'sexuality', the 'unconscious', the 'desire', and the 'feminine'.⁴ For feminists, the liberation of knowledge and the liberation of the body and its sexuality coincided historically. In her seminal text, *Le Rire de la Méduse* [*The Laugh of Medusa*], originally published in French in 1975, Cixous announced that 'women' should enter the realm of discursive creativity by starting with their bodies and their sexuality understood as a world of research and knowledge.⁵ They should start from 'a systematic experimentation of/with the body and its functioning and through a passionate and precise interrogation of its erogeneity'. The practice of writing, or what Cixous calls *écriture féminine*, plays an important role in this 'experimentation' involving a 'patient and precise interrogation of the body'.⁶ She, therefore, considered the practice of *écriture féminine* as a political gesture, enabling the reclamation of the voice, the right to speech, and also the reclaiming of 'desire' by women. All these involved a revolutionary transformation of behaviours and values.

Jennifer was indeed one of the stakeholders of *écriture féminine* in architecture. Her *écriture* engaged with critical ways of representing architecture in practice and theory by combining words with drawings and models, and by doing this as an embodied practice. More than this, Jennifer challenged the very definition of architecture by staging its reclamation by and for women.

Mopping

Écriture féminine in architecture is a special issue of *ANY* magazine, 'Architecture and the Feminine: Mop-Up Work', published in 1994, which was coordinated by Jennifer.⁷ Although the *ANY* publication series was, in part, based on a set of debates influenced by the French Theory turn in architecture, this was the only issue that directly addressed 'the feminine' in architecture by using a different type of discourse and vocabulary and by challenging the mainstream references of the *A* theoretical elite.

For this, the issue is a marker of Jennifer's provocative feminist statement as theorist, practitioner, and pedagogue, as well as member of the architectural elite. A similar position was held by Cixous in the context of the French thinkers' elite that she was part of. Like Cixous with her *écriture féminine*, Jennifer purposefully used her editorial position to contest the 'monarchisation du désir'⁸ in architecture at a moment when the most exciting practice, much like the most exciting theory, was located within the remit of male architects. She used the occasion of this publication to promote forms of *écriture féminine* in architecture which were explored by female architects such as Catherine Ingraham, Karen Bergman, Michelle Kaufman, Claire Robinson, and Liquid Ink, but also as a way of 'nesting' feminist contestation in the mainstream forums of theoretical discussion.⁹ Almost all authors of the issue were women, which was

indeed very unusual for the *ANY* series. Some of the authors were colleagues of Jennifer in Iowa, where she was a professor. In fact, at that time, the Iowa State University College of Design was a place where students were initiated to forms of *écriture féminine*, and where pedagogical curricula overtly encouraged related topics including materiality, the body, and sexuality.

'Architecture and the Feminine: Mop-up Work' is full of references, allusions, meanings, and concepts related to the underground, the unconscious, the desire, and the body; it is full of hidden richness of literature and theory. As Jennifer writes in her essay 'D'Or' (where she convokes numerous references from different domains by playing on the French word for 'gold' — 'or' — the door, and the name of the young women Dora, the object of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical work): 'We must go underground, down the hatch, following veins, discovering paths and secreted, encrypted treasures.'¹⁰ For Jennifer, *hatching* is a spatial and architectural way of searching for hidden meanings, which echoes the French Theory's use of methods deriving from linguistics, semiotics, psychoanalysis, and writing. Her architectural language is full of allegories, metaphors, metonyms, and other linguistic and spatial constructions, which create multiple associations of significance and meaning.

'Mopping' is one of those words she pulls out of her 'bag of tropes'.¹¹ Down the hatch and across the hatches, one can follow the military meaning of the word (i.e. 'completing the conquest by capturing remaining resistance troops') to understand the battle hold by Jennifer (even within the production of that special issue of *ANY*) to create space for a different kind of discourse that relates to the 'feminine'. However, Jennifer has never understood the 'feminine' in an essentialist way: 'I would like to suggest from the beginning that what is construed as "feminine" can also be read as a much broader category. For the duplicity and degeneracy of the feminine is a metaphor for many forms of alterity to the dominant.'¹²

Mopping also alludes to the domestic work of women and minorities, bringing into focus the everyday of the subaltern body and the 'real life and real-life time', as described by Jennifer in her letter to Anne Bergren, published as a preamble of the issue.¹³ Through this direct connection to domesticity, 'care' and the long-term work of reproductive labour also enter the picture.

Mopping, I suggest, is a complex feminist position for Jennifer. It is a bodily position taken from the standpoint of a feminist teacher, theorist, and practitioner. It is also the pedagogical position taken by the 'clinaminal pedagogue', the one who inclines her body of knowledge to be better shared with students.¹⁴ It is also a position taken by a daughter who 'takes some refuge beneath a mantle of "paternal legitimation"' to better dis-mantle it — 'a daughter who messes up and misreads her fathers'.¹⁵ It is equally the position of a feminist warrior mopping up the patriarchal heritage. And the position of a mother who takes full responsibility for the 'real life', and the labour of taking care of and mopping up space so that others can continue to thrive and grow. With mopping, there is a fighting body and a reproductive body that enter the scene at the same time. Jennifer indirectly acknowledges the joy, the difficulty,

and the paradox of being and doing all these things at the same time, a sentiment she shares with many women academics.

This way of positioning herself is indeed full of irony and parody. As Jane Rendell remarks, mimicking or parodying of their own position as not speaking subjects would be the ways for women to represent themselves and trouble the symbolic order in place in architecture.¹⁶

The articles of this special issue of *ANY* propose to look at the body as a spatial entity in the 'feminine'. The issue addresses the presence of (gendered) bodies in space by paying attention to their needs, their aspirations, and their desires. It proposes also a different feminist phenomenology of space and a theoretical filiation, in which I would situate myself alongside Jennifer. No doubt, the position hold in this issue might have been also related to the reason for which she invited me, a student of Derrida and Cixous at that time, to teach in Iowa, a few years only after the publication of that special issue of *ANY* and its important mop-up work.

The 'stuff of the body'

The 'body' and its matters provided the starting point of my pedagogical proposal for an elective design studio at the Iowa State University. The studio was called 'Clothing: Between Bodies and Cities' and, probably because of this topic, the students who took the class were all women.¹⁷ 'A blessing', I remember Jennifer whispering when the students' options were disclosed. I knew then that the 'body' we would deal with in the studio would be specifically gendered and this fell perfectly into an educational model that Jennifer used to call the 'teaching of girls'. In one of her essays on education — 'Writing on the Wall' — she revisited the traditional model of pedagogical transmission through analysing syntagms, such as 'writing on the wall', to demonstrate that even within authoritative methods there are always forms of contestation and criticality that create connections, networks, secrets, and new expressions. She gave the example of graffiti in toilet stalls, which in order to pass on unauthorised messages need to scratch and picture them in hidden places. 'Writing on the wall', she said, can also be 'at the edge, on the borders, in the margins'. She further mentioned the 'quilt' as another kind of 'wall' — one which is horizontal and layered, softer and collective — and the 'quilt making' as a metonymic model for a mode of teaching which undermines traditional 'pedagogy' and the *paideic* approach to knowledge transmission, inherited from the Athenian Academy, where education was only for and by males. In oppositional response to this ancient educational model, she proposes to take inspiration from a bodily and participative model of learning *for and by women*, through assembling scraps and bits of material from many different sources, involving forms of doing, conversations, demonstrations, that are usually passed on from mothers and grandmothers to daughters at home, as part of a cyclical reproductive work.¹⁸ However, this model emerging from a women-based tradition is not exclusive and can indeed be embraced by all. Speaking about

the structure of teaching in the design studio, Jennifer discussed the 'quilt-like' student-teacher relationship as

[...] a discursive exchange that allows for the production of palimpsestic assemblages with carefully invented joints and intersections: architectural products that emerge from the connection of minds of two or more beings, in which teaching and learning no longer sit comfortably on either side of a dividing line.¹⁹

Decentring and collectively managing the student/teacher power relations is crucial in feminist pedagogies. bell hooks discusses ways of creating a community in the classroom that resembles both democratic process and healthy family life shaped by 'mutual willingness to listen, to argue, to disagree, and to make peace'.²⁰ In this way, the power of knowing is shared through making space for the voices of the marginalised, honouring students' expertise and de-centralising learning and knowledge creation, among other goals. 'Writing on the wall' should thus be replaced by the 'making of the quilt'.

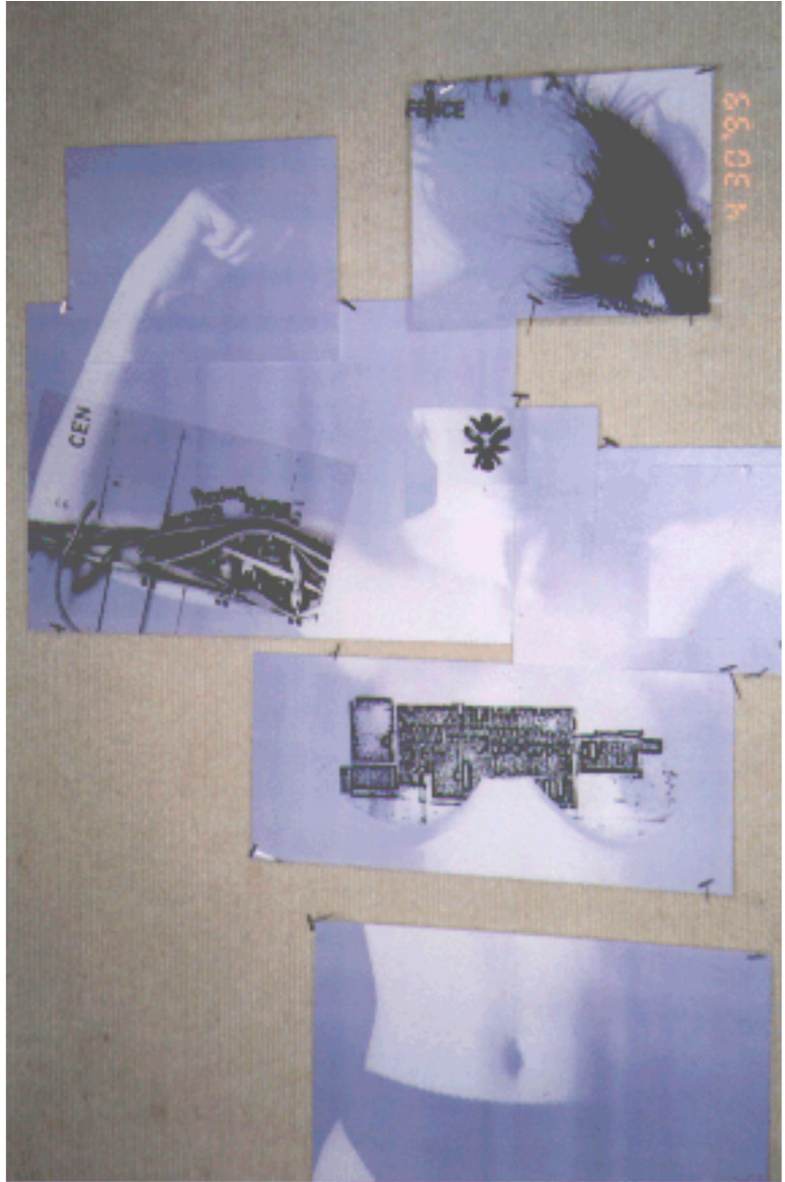
This was indeed the case with Jennifer's students, and also with my students and me. We used a quilt-like model of teaching and learning, but our quilt was rebellious and undisciplined. The students randomly chose parts of the body and parts of the city of Ames, where the University was located, to be included in the studio quilt. They used their own bodies as sites of investigation, in parallel with the urban contexts we studied, which were chosen randomly (literally by dice throwing) in order to dismiss prejudgements and hierarchies. We arrived having shopping malls, suburban traffic lanes, parks, parking lots, residential green patches together with arms, legs, hips, hair, mouths, etc. The topic and act of 'clothing'— which, similarly with the quilt making, is another form of making related to feminine tradition — was the way of relating all of these (Fig. 1).

The body is one of these 'para-theoretical devices' that keep architecture not entirely bound to, or bounded by, theory but also bring the body materials and *mat(t)ers* as means of representation.²¹ In our case, the body was used not only as a metaphor but also as a metonym, as the 'stuff of the body', being directly integrated into architecture both individually and collectively as a form of hatchery.²² Because, as Jennifer said, 'the body is, in a sense, a multiply-constituted hatchery, a messy assemblage of flows — blood, organic matter, libidinal, synaptic, psychic'.

Vanessa drew with hair, Olivia with her mouth, Claire with her legs, YY with her hips. They were using the body *mat(t)ers* directly as drawing material. We drew and built models, body imprints and castings, sometimes using the body as a material, as a mould, as a model, or as a site. We expanded the process of 'writing on the wall' into writing and drawing *on the body*. These approaches were conceived as a direct form of *écriture féminine* (Figs. 2 and 3).

Here we can speak again, in a feminist tradition that goes to Irigaray or Kristeva but also to contemporary artists like Louise Bourgeois, Jana Sterbak, Helen Chatwick, and others, about the disruptive role of the matter, the dirt, the abject, the detritus, and ask how this way of working with (body) matters changes the pedagogy of architecture.

Figure 1.
Project sites for 'Clothing: Between
Bodies and Cities' design studio at
Iowa State University, 1999,
photographed by the author



Dirty drawings

Following Jennifer's tradition, we made 'dirty' models and drawings. As she writes in 'Abodes of Theory and Flesh', drawing addresses architectural representation by colliding the rendering with the working drawing, the sacred with the profane, while at the same time critically pointing to the fetishistic role of the image in architecture.²³ The 'dirty drawing', as Jennifer puts it, is

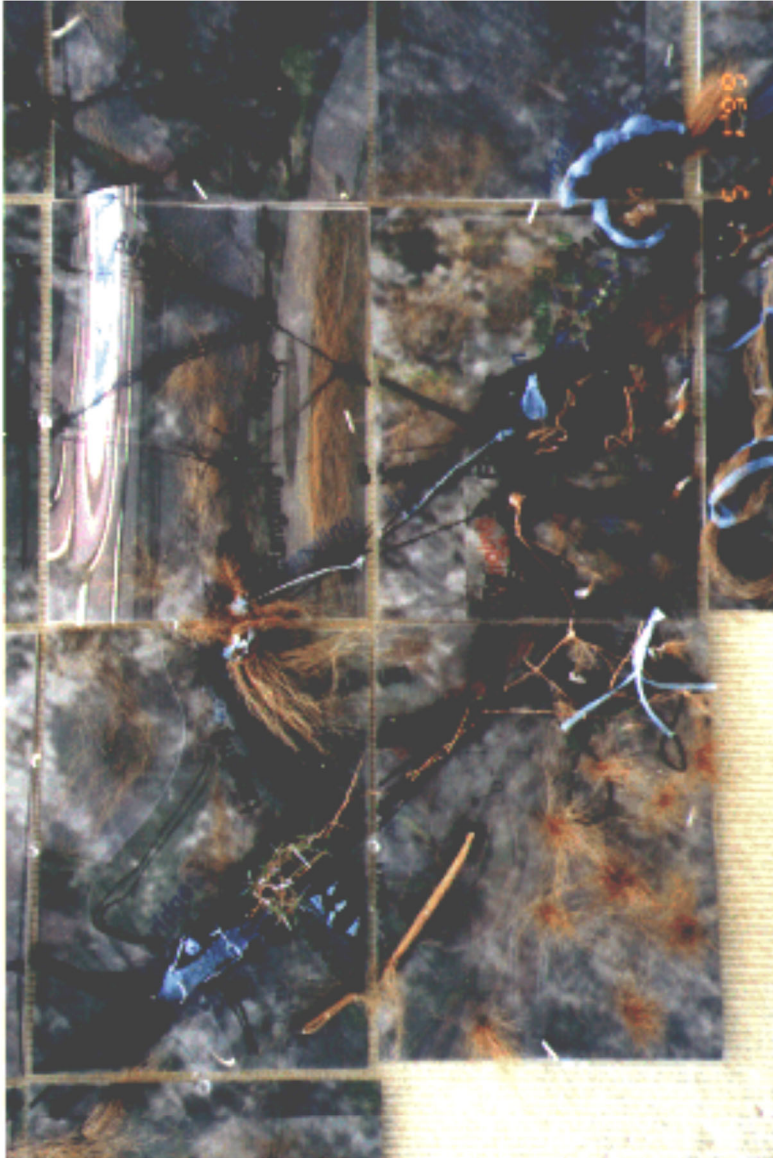


Figure 2.
Hairy Park, by Vanessa Schuler, as
part of the 'Clothing: Between
Bodies and Cities' design studio at
Iowa State University, 1999,
photographed by the author

a sort of 'pornographic' drawing, which is at the same time technical, critical, and pleasurable. And, of course, 'dirt', one can argue, is part of the *mop-up work*.

Our experiments conducted not only to full-scale constructions (something that Jennifer considered as critically engaging with architectural conventions) but to 'live' constructions, performative constructions using the body.²⁴ Some of them were quick sketches and improvisations, releasing the pleasure

Figure 3.
Mouth doors, drawing by Jian
Shuk-Man, as part of the 'Clothing:
Between Bodies and Cities' design
studio at Iowa State University,
1999



and the force of the 'poetic' which, as Anne Bergren reminded us of in her text 'Dear Jennifer', is something that 'the feminine' puts further away to dismantle the symbolic order of discourse (Fig. 4).²⁵

In her book, *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks argues that 'excitement' in higher education was always viewed as potentially disruptive of the atmosphere of seriousness considered essential to the learning process.²⁶ She speaks about excitement as something generated through a collective effort and a flexible agenda which allow shifts in direction, transforming teaching



Figure 4.
Performative live construction using
the body, design studio at Iowa
State University, 1999,
photographed by the author

into a performative act.²⁷ The performativity of teaching fosters excitement further to subvert rules and conventions in the classroom.

We laughed a lot during our workshops and tutorials but also during serious reviews and examinations. Roland Barthes noted that 'laughter is a subtle subversion [...] a subversion that is not directly interested in destruction, dodges the paradigm and seeks another term: a third term, that is not, however a term of synthesis, but an eccentric, unexpected term'.²⁸ Laughter is also an 'unexpected' element in architecture and, I suggest, plays a 'third term' role between form and function, useful and beautiful, ephemeral and solid. As

Cixous stated, practices of the feminine can use laughter as a subversive tool. In 'The Laugh of Medusa', she explains that this laughter that comes after a long silence is part of women's speech. It bursts into the discourse to deconstruct the *logos* and the symbolic order in place, and 'breaks up the "truth"' that dominated cultures.²⁹

The encounter with Jennifer and the experience in Iowa convinced me that architects must rediscover this kind of laughter inside their own practice: a laughter that is not opposed to seriousness but operates as a subtle subversion, as described by Barthes, or deconstructs the dominant value system, as called for by Cixous. For Jennifer, laughing was indeed part of the *mop-up work*.

Attempting to weave a relationship between bodily hair (usually removed through depilatory procedures) and two parking lots in the city of Ames, my student Claire proposed a parodic project meant to dissolve narrow perceptions and mentalities, and introduce new civic rituals and routines in the context of a small Midwestern city. These routines were formulated by the city in relation to adverse meteorological conditions, which are very frequent during the long winters in Ames. In contrast to the existing rigid administrative framework of snow 'duties', *Frigid Felt* brought something completely unexpected: the play, the performance, the humour. Much like a joke, a *Witz*, which constructs unexpected misalliances between heterogeneous ways of thinking and provokes laughter,³⁰ the programme of *Frigid Felt* proposed by Claire condensed a double meaning: feminine legs and parking lots, hair and snow. Combined with subjective knowledge related to manoeuvres of hair removal, she tested on her legs specialist techniques usually involved in the removal of snow from parking lots. By celebrating the gesture of removal as both work, care taking, and play, she proposed a shift in the perception of snow as urban matter.

As both a parody and a political contestation, Claire played, so to speak, the city on her legs, establishing unexpected relationships between intimate ecology of the body and urban ecology of the city. In a strong feminist tradition and following Jennifer's pace, she used the power of parody to generate creative and critical change in the conception of urban programmes. She parodied the modes of representation of the urban briefs by proposing a collection of small foam installation realised on her legs that she described in an innovative storytelling manner (Fig. 5).³¹

Interestingly, Claire was not qualifying as a 'good' designer in a conventional way, but she was a good storyteller. She was indeed good at 'making constructions with words'.³² Cixous refers to *écriture féminine* as a way for women to free their writing at the same time as their body. 'Freedom' was likewise a central element in Jennifer's pedagogy.

I guess that Jennifer was inspired by bell hooks' *Teaching to Transgress*, and perhaps by hook's filiation with Paolo Freire's *Education as the Practice of Freedom*.³³ She was indeed all for freeing education from the 'masters' discourse and for speaking about the autobiographical self. From hooks, Jennifer followed the impetus to relocate the margin at the centre.³⁴ She initiated ways of decolonising design education by challenging the dominant forms, conventions, grammars, and language through which knowledge was expressed and



Figure 5.
Frigid Felt, by Claire Mcpherson, as
part of the 'Clothing: Between
Bodies and Cities' design studio at
Iowa State University, 1999

MUFFLERS

Approach
the snow
from any
side. Lean
down and
place your
lips on the
snow. Yell
as loudly as
you can.



image 02

FLOPPERS

Approach
the snow
from any
side. Stand
with your
toes at the
edge of the
pile. Fall
forward.



image 01

enacted in ongoing research and design work. But for Jennifer, as for Cixous, 'freedom' and 'pleasure' were inseparable.

Real life

At the dining table, in the garden, amongst bees, with colleagues and family members; when studying with Cixous, the courses would usually end up around a cup of tea in her Parisian flat together with her mum and her cat. Pedagogy, I learned, does not stop in the classroom, but continues into everyday life with all those that are around. Everyday life, or 'real life', as put by Jennifer, is an important dimension of feminist pedagogy. It can interrupt the

academic calendars, protocols, and conventions, as Jennifer pointed so well in her letter.³⁵ It was the case also during my time in Iowa, at a moment when chronic illness burst into Jennifer's 'real life'. I have observed with her that one has to learn how to deal with these moments and with the presence of the everyday body as part of open pedagogical formats.

In the *Bodies and Cities* studio, we used the body as a way to create direct connections with everyday life. Claire's gestures of removal of hair on her legs, which was an allegory for the removal of snow on the streets of Ames, were framed as a form of learning with the body. This involved transposing the gestures of epilation with foam into the snow (and vice versa), and therefore enriching the depilatory language with snow removal techniques (and vice versa). This 'chiasmatic' exchange was another lesson I learned from Jennifer, and her 'masters'.³⁶ YY, another student in my class, looked into feminine underwear, using her own knowledge of using and repairing pieces of underwear as a way of opening up the architectural imagination of urban materiality. Her explorations led her to imagine elastic bike lanes, lace decoration, and textile hooks, all of which became elements of a distributed 'urban underwear' project (Fig. 6).

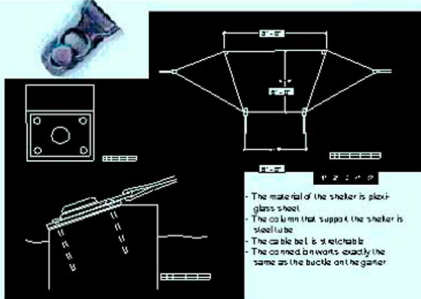
These design experiments gave birth to 'minor architectures'. Inspired by Deleuze and Guattari's concept of a 'minor literature', Jennifer puts forward the idea of a 'minor architecture'. Minor architecture is not quite architecture, but rather 'looks like' architecture, being composed by collective assemblages realised through making architectural objects and writing architectural texts. It is 'a criticism from within' which goes deeply in the 'within'.³⁷ She further defines minor architecture as one of the outputs of feminist education in architecture, stating that 'the space of minor architecture cannot stop at the building, with its major entrance, but proliferates across the lines among drawing and constructing and writing'.³⁸ Our design studio was indeed more interested in this proliferation of means and processes than in the products themselves.

Further hatches

One of the things we discussed in Iowa was how to support the proliferation and expansion of ways of experimenting with feminist pedagogies. How to deepen the hatches across lines and lineages? How to pass on and expand the *quilt*? The conference 'Alterities', organised in June 1999 in Paris, was an immediate hatch of my time in Iowa. The Iowa State University College of Design was in fact one of the funders of the conference, which was hosted by l'Ecole d'Architecture Paris Villemin and l'Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts. 'Alterities' brought together different generations of feminist scholars and practitioners from different locations and feminist genealogical lines. It mediated encounters between theorists from North America (such as the group that produced the issue of the *ANY* magazine on 'Architecture and the Feminine'), feminist practices and theories from United Kingdom (such as Feminist Design Collective, Matrix, muf art/architecture, and the authors of books like *Making Space: Making Space: Women and the Man Made Environment* (1984), and the aforementioned *The Architect, Desiring Practices*, and



Panel Bus Shelter : Detail and Materials



- The material of the shelter is glass sheet.
- The columns that support the shelter is steel tube.
- The cable belt is stretchable.
- The connection works exactly the same as the buckle on the garter.

Figure 6.
Urban Garter belting, by Yin Yuen
Chan, as part of the 'Clothing:
Between Bodies and Cities' design
studio at Iowa State University, 1999

Gender Space Architecture), and a few French interdisciplinary practices, more or less rooted in French feminism. A few of my colleagues from Iowa (i.e. Jennifer, Catherine Ingraham, Karen Bergman, and Pat Porter) were part of the conference and some of our pedagogical lines became panel subjects in the conference, addressing the relationship between art and architecture, including issues of technology, bodies and spaces, gendered practices, and situated knowledges. Many of the conference participants contributed to the book I published a few years later, *Altering Practices: Feminist Poetics and Politics of Space*.³⁹ The book stressed that the 'political' and the 'poetic' should not be opposed, but rather assembled in what I called *altering practices*, practices operating through 'alterations' but also through *alter* subjectivities, for which politics are always also poetics: forms of *poiesis*, 'ways of making', that work with spaces, materials, and bodies which were shared by all contributors. The book showcases *altering* modes of practicing, teaching and writing, hold, in most of the cases, by women across different geographies and social contexts. *Altering practices* are in fact ways of making 'minor architectures'.

I took some of these lines, specifically concerning body politics, further with me when I started to teach at the Sheffield School of Architecture, and also in my own architectural practice and in 'real life', weaving in forms of civic pedagogies that I have further developed for more than twenty years. Already at that time, the early 2000s, and very much like the Iowa State University College of Design, the Sheffield School of Architecture was another place where feminist pedagogy was collectively approached by a number of colleagues: Ruth Morrow, Sarah Wigglesworth, Prue Chiles, Jeremy Till, and Stephen Walker. One structural moment was the organisation of a feminist day as a whole school event, involving students and teachers, proposed by the feminist group *Taking Place*.⁴⁰ I recalled this event in the *Altering Practices* book, but perhaps I haven't mentioned enough how much Jennifer's inspiration was important for its organisation and framing.⁴¹ During this 'feminist day', we hatched the setting, the content, and the places of teaching, we 'mopped-up' and 'wrote on the wall' in *altering* ways, we used *écriture féminine* to question hierarchies with irony and choreographed a critical exchange of spaces and roles between students, teachers, and administrative staff; we made bodily political constructions 'with words' (Fig. 7) and we laughed a lot! These dynamics continue today with the Feminist Library, another feminist initiative that collects work done in the school across two decades.⁴² The Library, which is a collective effort involving teachers, students, and former students testifies the need to care about and maintain continuities within the feminist 'quilt'.

Jennifer's legacy influenced my further teaching practice, specifically in the design studio and my sustained attempt to decolonise the body politics in education that started early 2000s. For example, the MArch studio I was leading in 2005 was based in Africa. Our main partner was REFDAF (Réseau de Femmes pour le Développement Durable en Afrique) — a network of women working on sustainability in West Africa. We were working closely with one of the REFDAF groups, comprising 300 women organised as a networked community including a number of small organisations focused on aspects of subsistence economy.⁴³ They had set up a cooperative in order to save money, buy land, and construct houses in a self-initiated community called 'Cité des Femmes' in the periphery of Dakar.⁴⁴ Our collaboration involved working with women to build their own spaces and, at the same time, working with students to change their own preconceptions about design, working with other ontologies, protocols, and ethics of care. Going to Dakar was a challenging moment that we lived both culturally and physically. The body was again central, given that we were imagining projects in which women were self-builders — an idea we took from Jennifer, but also from feminist practices like Matrix as well as from the 'live projects' developed in Sheffield.⁴⁵ However, in this case, we engaged with different ways of thinking the 'quilt' and different politics of materiality and embodied education, considering cultural differences and decolonial concerns. We were working with recycled materials but also with local forms of organisation (like the *tontine*) empowering women to conceive, design, and build themselves in collective cyclical ways.⁴⁶

'Real life' was here the concern of these women and their bodies holding the reproductive work in their communities: the ecological reparation, the civic



Figure 7.
Spaces for (un)learning, a feminist
day and whole school event,
University of Sheffield, 2002,
photographed by the author

education, the empowerment, and the 'surviving well'⁴⁷ of their families, as well as the reality of their fight for women's rights to own their own houses within a conservative society. In Dakar, the students set up an 'atelier de construction' [building workshop] to build a number of 'walls' prototypes for future houses together with women from the Kambeng Kafoo group, one of the initiators of the project. 'Kambeng Kafoo' means in Wolof 'putting together and sharing'. From the very beginning we were interested in the material and collective aspects of the project, in how architecture could be realised through a principle of 'putting together and sharing' and how this principle would affect the design process. We were also concerned with how our own position was politically defined through what we, as white Europeans, 'put together and share' with the women of the Cité des Femmes. Other types of walls have emerged, and other forms of *écriture féminine*, whose authors were the future users of the Cité. We learned from these women that the material of thinking and building in architecture should not be separated from the material of living: live 'matters' as part of the materiality of everyday economies, socialites, and politics.⁴⁸ During the workshop, the Cité gained a full-scale 'live' performative dimension, involving women, students, children, and teachers (Fig. 8). Following the spirit of Jennifer's 'dirt drawings', we did 'dirt consultations', using everyday objects and other 'stuff of the body' to symbolise and locate potential facilities of the Cité and 'make constructions with both words and objects' on the dusty ground of the future site (Fig. 9). Like Jennifer's full-scale models, we made one-to-one prototype walls using tires, cans, strings, bamboo, mud, and other materials women used in their everyday life. Working one-to-one, we were working at the 'scale of life'.⁴⁹ These prototypes were integrated in the students' proposals for projects dealing with women's



Figure 8.
Cité des Femmes wall prototype in
Dakar, realised by the REFDAF
women and MArch students from
the University of Sheffield, 2005,
photographed by the author



Figure 9.
Cité des Femmes consultation with
REFDAF women, organised by
Doina Petrescu and Alejandra Riera
in Ker Massar, Senegal, 2004,
photographed by the author

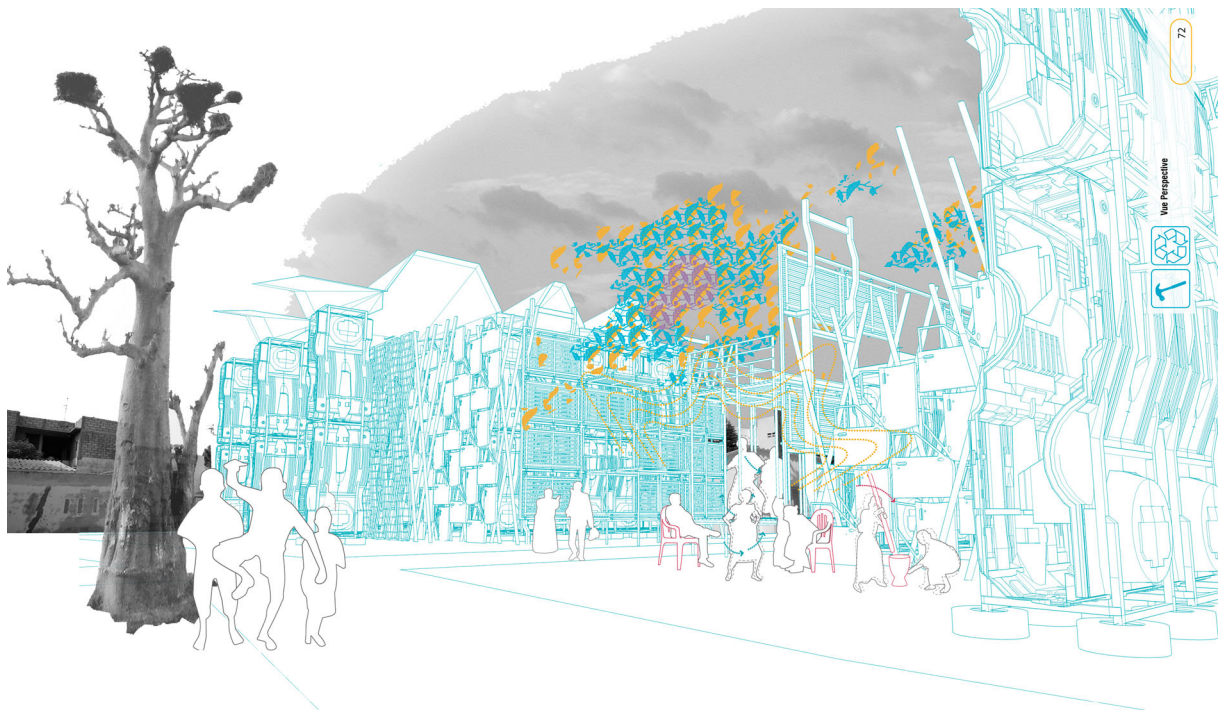
houses but also with their circular economy, their waste and water management, and their cultural and political activities (Fig. 10).

Some of the students attending the studio in Dakar took this experience further into new hatches. For example, Claudia, who, after going back to Dakar for a while as a volunteer to finalise the work she started as a student, returned to Lima, her home city, to continue this engagement in a different context with similar stakes. She is currently working in the area of civic pedagogy and development both in academia and practice, supporting communities in deprived neighbourhoods in Peru and Colombia.⁵⁰

I continued to work along these hatches in my own practice *atelier d'architecture autogérée*.⁵¹ We consider our projects as 'tactical architecture', which is, we can argue, a form of 'minor architecture' made of collective assemblages and social and political processes rather than buildings per se.⁵² The communities that we engage with via our practice are most of the time located in deprived metropolitan neighbourhoods facing social and economic problems. In times of Climate Change, these neighbourhoods,

which are poorly designed and densely built, and are most often inhabited by culturally and economically diverse communities, are also lacking green spaces and tend to become urban heat islands. Here once again we work at the scale of life. Our approach is to stir civic initiatives to recreate productive and biodiverse green spaces and empower everyday resilience practices and emergent forms of urban commons. By doing this, we directly deal with the expanded cultural ecologies of these commons and the more-than-human communities they form. Animals, plants, and other forms of life are important actors in such communities where other 'bodies' are involved with other rules and other politics of materiality to produce compost, planted patches, and ecological services. Pedagogy here is *civic pedagogy* and the feminist approach helps to challenge policies, attitudes, and habits in these less affluent suburban contexts. Not only students but also all kinds of stakeholders were involved in taking further the lessons we forged in Iowa. In the end, this pedagogical hatching became a way of teaching and learning how to manage not only the bodily mater but also the wider living matter architecture interacts with: the water, the soil, the biodiversity. Once again, like in Dakar, I discovered the role of women in doing the *mop-up work* in these derelict places by deconstructing prejudgements and creating relations which hold together the collective body of a more-than-human diverse community. This is the work of the 'gardeners of the commons', invol-

Figure 10.
Performance Centre at the Cite des Femmes, by Neil Samson, as part of the MArch diploma project at the University of Sheffield, 2005



ving a continual learning and teaching 'with the body' the construction of inclusive 'quilts' in neighbourhoods in need (Fig. 11).⁵³

Today, more than twenty years after my first encounter with Jennifer, architecture and the society as a whole continue to face many of the challenges we identified that time, in 1999. The emergence of global movements like #MeToo or *black lives matter* testify once again the enduring need for deconstructing patriarchal relations and gender and racial inequalities in our society. We know that all contemporary crises are related and intersectional, and that the important tools and lessons put forward by feminist pedagogies — such as 'mopping', 'hatching', 'quilt making', working 'one-to-one' with 'excitement', and 'freedom' — are urgently needed in 'real life' as a whole.

Pioneering approaches such as the 'multiply-constituted hatchery of the body' can help us to consider the entanglements with other bodies, the ones of the non-human others — animals, plants, and the planetary living matter as a whole — on which our own bodies depend. Forms of 'minor architecture' can have a powerful role in showing new possibilities supported by new 'clinamenal pedagogies' that can continue the *mop-up work* at a moment when decolonising knowledge is an imperative. These are all directions in which Jennifer's legacy continues to hatch.

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Figure 11.
Passage56, by atelier d'architecture
autogérée, Paris, 2009,
photographed by Constantin
Petcou and courtesy of atelier
d'architecture autogérée

founder Constantin Petcou, for the work we did together during more than twenty years in the suburbs of Paris. Finally, I dedicate this article to the memory of Madjiguène Cissé whose activist engagement and work first with the *sans papiers* in Paris, than with the women from REFDAF in Senegal, inspired my teaching and practice for ever.

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Notes and references

1. French Theory is a postmodern corpus of philosophical, literary, and social theories, in which the concept of deconstruction holds a central place, in the tradition of post-structuralism. The terminology emerged in American universities and research centres from the 1970s onwards, based on a current of thought that began in France in the 1960s. French Theory was particularly popular in American humanities departments from the 1980s onwards, where it contributed to the emergence of cultural studies, gender studies, and postcolonial studies. It has also had a strong influence on the arts and activism and, not the last, in architectural studies.
2. For this, see notably Jennifer Bloomer, 'Writing on the Wall', *Journal of Architectural Education*, 45.1 (1991), 15–6.
3. bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as a place of Freedom* (London: Routledge, 1994).
4. Following Platon's tradition, the *logos* — language, speech — is considered the epistemologically superior and normative way of knowledge expression in Western science and philosophy in the detriment of other forms of expression. Jacques Derrida and other representatives of French Theory has critiqued the binary oppositions on which Western thought is based, in which one term (from the series associated with the *logos*) is privileged over the other. Such oppositions include mind/body, masculin/feminin, speech/writing, identity/difference, truth/error, conscious/unconscious, etc.
5. Helen Cixous, 'Le Rire de la Méduse', in *Le Rire de la Méduse – et autres ironies* (Paris: Galilée, 2010), p. 35–68, first publ. in 1975; English translation published as Helen Cixous, 'The Laugh of Medusa', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 1.4 (1976), 875–93.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
7. 'Architecture and the Feminine: Mop-Up Work', special issue edited by Jennifer Bloomer, *Any*, 4 (January–February 1994).
8. Cixous, 'Le Rire de la Méduse', p. 60.
9. In her article 'Chora Work' in 'Architecture and the Feminine', Claire Robinson, refers to Jennifer's work as a 'nest' in which other feminists could start develop a different theoretical and practical agenda that can gain agency on the international scene. See Claire Robinson, 'Chora Work', *Any*, 'Architecture and the Feminine: Mop-Up Work', 4 (January/February 1994), 33.
10. Jennifer Bloomer, 'D'Or', in *Sexuality and Space*, ed. by Beatrice Colomina (New York, NY: Princeton Architectural Press, 1990), p. 165.
11. Jennifer Bloomer, 'Writing on the Wall', *Journal of Architectural Education*, 45.1 (1991), 15.

12. Jennifer Bloomer, 'Abodes of Theory and Flesh: Tabbles of Bower', *Assemblage*, 17 (1992), 6–29 (p. 9).
13. Bloomer, 'Architecture and the Feminine', pp. 8–11.
14. Bloomer, 'Abodes of Theory and Flesh', p. 11.
15. Bloomer, 'Writing on the Wall', p. 15.
16. *Gender Space Architecture: An Interdisciplinary Introduction*, ed. by Jane Rendell, Barbara Penner, and Iain Borden (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 26.
17. The participants in the studio included Yin Yuen Chan (YY), Dana Maria Cox, Jian Shuk-Man (Olivia), Tandi Mclevain, Claire Mcpherson, and Vanessa Schuler. For a previous account on this studio, see D. Petrescu, 'Apprendre avec (de) l'espace' ['Learning with Space'], *Faces* (September 2002), 42–9.
18. Bloomer, 'Writing on the Wall', p. 15.
19. *Ibid.*
20. bell hooks, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2003), p. 120.
21. Jennifer Bloomer, 'Big Jugs', in *Gender Space Architecture*, ed. by Rendell, Penner, and Borden, p. 373.
22. Bloomer, 'Abodes of Theory and Flesh', p. 15.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
25. Anne Bergren, 'Dear Jennifer', *Any*, 'Architecture and the Feminine: Mop-Up Work', 4 (1994), 14–5.
26. hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, p. 7.
27. *Ibid.* p. 11.
28. Ronald Barthes, 'Le plaisir du texte', in *Oeuvres Complètes*, II (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1994), p. 15–22.
29. Cixous, 'The Laugh of Medusa', p. 888.
30. Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (New York, NY, and London: WW. Norton & Company, 1960), first publ. in 1905.
31. For example, Rosie Braidotti speaks about parody that can be 'politically empowering on the condition of being sustained by a critical consciousness that aims at engendering transformations and changes'; see Rosie Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1994). p. 7.
32. 'And I could not fail to notice that some people were making constructions with words, as if they were materials themselves, not transparent containers of meaning but fabrications with structuring geometries and joints and details that, to me, where much more thoughtful, profound and soul-satisfying than those of the shopping malls and corporate headquarters I was helping to churn out by day and that, I truly believed, contained important lessons for making architecture.' See Jennifer Bloomer, 'Jennifer Bloomer Writes', *ANY*, 0 (May/June 1993), 16–7 (p. 16).
33. Paulo Freire, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York, NY: Continuum, 1970).
34. bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Boston MA: South End Press, 1984).
35. Bloomer, 'Architecture and the Feminine', pp. 8–11.
36. For an elaboration on the chiasmus, the 'x', see Bloomer, 'Big Jugs', pp. 380–1.
37. Bloomer, 'D'Or', pp. 179–80.
38. *Ibid.*
39. *Altering Practices: Politics and Poetics of Space*, ed. by Doina Petrescu (London: Routledge, 2007).

40. 'Taking place' is a group of seven women artists and architects (Sue Ridge, Julia Dwyer, Doina Petrescu, Jane Rendell, Katie Lloyd Thomas, Jos Boys, Brigid McLeer, Helen Stratford, Miche Fabre Lewin, Angie Pascoe, and Teresa Hoskyns) that began in 2000 out of a shared interest in questions of gender and spatial practice. Since then, it developed as an ongoing space of discussion, investigation, and exchange in which to explore new practices, and to imagine and speculate on new directions and strategies for change. See 'Taking Place: Scheffield, UK', 2010 <<https://architectuul.com/architect/taking-place>> [accessed 10 March 2022].
41. Doina Petrescu, Teresa Hoskyns, and other mixed voices, 'Taking Place and Altering it', in *Altering Practices*, ed. by Petrescu, pp. 17–37.
42. SSoA Feminist Library, The University of Sheffield, n.d. <<https://feminist.ssoa.info>> [accessed 4 November 2023].
43. REFDAF, 'Intro: Réseau des femmes pour le développement durable en Afrique', n.d. <<https://www.facebook.com/refdaf/>> [accessed 4 November 2023].
44. Most women in Senegal are active within the informal sector that is of vital importance to the country. They have, for example, the monopoly in vegetable and fruit trading. Even if the household subsistence economy is mostly covered by women, traditionally they do not have any right to own their own homes. As in most Muslim societies, this right is always transmitted through masculine lineage. The Cité des Femmes aims to break with this tradition and demonstrate women's capacity to organise themselves to fund, build, and manage a home according to their own needs.
45. 'Live Projects', The University of Sheffield, School of Architecture, n.d. < <https://liveprojects.ssoa.info>> [accessed 4 November 2023].
46. The *tontine* is a very simple form of collection of money and goods based on proximity, confidence, and close connections between persons sharing a common interest. The contribution of each member in money or goods is defined for a period agreed collectively (usually weekly or monthly). This form of saving plays an important role in the African economy, allowing many women to put together capital for housing construction, family ceremonies, or business.
47. 'Surviving well' is a concept in communities economies accounting on the necessity of connecting individual surviving work to the survival of others (humans and non-humans); see Take Back the Economy, 'Surviving Well: Collective Actions for Surviving Well', n.d. <<https://www.communityeconomies.org/take-back-economy/collective-actions/2-surviving-well>> [accessed 4 November 2023].
48. For more details, see Doina Petrescu, 'Live Matters Making Place', in *Material Matters: Architecture and Material Practice*, ed. by Katie Lloyd Thomas (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 225–36.
49. See Doina Petrescu, 'The Heap Agency and the Work of (Re)Production through Art', in *Art on the Scale of Life*, ed. by Kathrin Bohm (London: Showroom and the Stengberg Press, 2023) p. 99.
50. Claudia Amico Tudela is currently a professor at the PUCP and a researcher at CONURB — PUCP <<https://blogs.iadb.org/ciudades-sostenibles/en/author/claudiaam/>> [accessed 4 November 2023].
51. *atelier d'architecture autogérée* (urbantactics.org) is a professional organisation funded in 2001 by Constantin Petcou and Doina Petrescu which conducts actions and research on participatory urbanism and architecture, involving local residents in creating and sustaining commons in their neighbourhood, engaging in social and ecological practices and initiating resilient networks.
52. Doina Petrescu and Constantin Petcou, 'Tactics for a Transgressive Practice', *Architectural Design*. 83.6 (2013), 58–65.

53. Doina Petrescu, 'Gardeners of Commons, For the Most Part Women', in *Relational Architectural Ecologies: Subjectivity, Sex, Nature and Architecture*, ed by Peg Rawes (London: Routledge, 2013).