



[SUBSCRIBE](#)

[LOGIN / REGISTER](#)

# The Architectural Review

## Outrage: the prejudice against queer aesthetics

27 MARCH 2019 | BY ADAM NATHANIEL FURMAN | OUTRAGE

Architecture represses plurality and queerness in favour  
of heteronormative culture



Source: OTTO

Artist Antoni Miralda and chef Montse Guillén's El Internacional Tapas Bar & Restaurant (1984–86) in Tribeca, New York, was a melting pot for transcultural interaction

The right to be different, to exist openly and without fear of repression, is a primary principle of modern liberalism. As someone who doesn't conform to the norms of the majority, to be able to both live a life that is in consonance with your nature, and be free to express that existence openly and with pride in the public arena, is a benchmark for how inclusive society is at any given point in history.

The struggle for trans\* equality is only the latest battle in a century-long fight against a tendency towards social homogenisation. It is the latest stage in the unfinished project of achieving the complete participation in all areas of society, the economy, politics and culture, of those who aren't male, hetero, cisgender, and who refuse to relinquish their distinct identities in pursuit of acceptance. The visible physical presence of queerness in all its manifestations is a litmus test of how close, or far, we are from creating a genuinely inclusive environment.

‘Marginal groups and identities are tolerated but restricted to private spaces, with any forms of spatial expression kept from the easily outraged gaze of the wider public’

Expression has a vital role to play in this journey. It marks the transition between tolerance and acceptance. On the one hand, marginal groups and identities are tolerated but restricted to private spaces, with any forms of spatial expression of their shared existence kept from the easily outraged gaze of the wider public – effectively, licence to do as you wish as long as no one can see the things you do and make. On the other hand, with acceptance comes the difficult process of incorporating different modes of expression into the shared and – once diversified – contentious space of the visible.

We are moving towards a situation in which difference is, potentially, tentatively beginning to be widely accepted in the social realm, but this newly uncovered plurality of orientations, experiences and genders, with their alternative approaches to expression and aesthetics, has been repressed and excluded from the built environment and the profession of architecture.

It is human instinct to externalise our identities through the form and decoration of our environments and buildings. Architecture has a duty to reflect the nature and make-up of those who produce it, and those it contains. Alternate taste or cultures from those of the mainstream have an equal right to presence in the urban context. Within architectural circles, it is, to a degree, acceptable to be queer in your life but it is not, and has never been, acceptable to express this through the architecture you produce. You will be tolerated, not accepted.

‘The built form of the city is a symbolic space only for the middle-aged cis hetero men and women’

When a project or series of projects that operate as a product of queerness is built proudly in the shared sphere of the city, whenever an architecture deviates from the shockingly narrow, heteronormative

#### RELATED STORIES

##### **Editorial View: Gender and Innovation**

1 JUNE 2012 | BY CATHERINE SLESSOR

##### **Your views: Gender distinctions under scrutiny**

24 JULY 2012 | BY BRUCE BUCKLAND

##### **Queer Gothic: architecture, gender and desire**

20 JANUARY 2015 | BY AYL A LEPINE

##### **‘Despite the pulls of gender, there is still the work – the ideas, designs and buildings that transcend any single notion of identity’**

1 MARCH 2016 | BY MIMI ZEIGER

##### **Outrage: ‘The risk and reward of anonymous and unchecked interpersonal contact is the very essence of the city’**

14 MARCH 2017 | BY HUW LEMMEY

##### **Outrage: Architects should not design without considering the politics that they are tacitly sanctioning**

15 JUNE 2018 | BY LÉOPOLD LAMBERT

##### **Outrage: a toxic mix of snobbery and prejudice**

framework of mainstream architectural culture's arbitrary parameters of taste, they are instantly othered as unserious, capricious, ridiculous or, at best, exotic – all of which are the kiss of critical death.

Be warned, the built form of the city is a symbolic space only for the middle-aged cis hetero men and women who abjure any and all alternate identities, and conform in their entirety to the deathly status quo. As a queer architect, you can write essays in academia and you

ESSAYS BUILDINGS PLACES ARCHITECTS ARCHIVE COMPETITIONS FILMS PODCASTS AWARDS STUDENTS

cadaverous brick silos of contemporary British architecture, but God forbid you try to express yourself, your community, your background and your life through your architecture. In this respect, we might as well be in the 1950s.

Modern times have not been a beacon of utopic acceptance. If you turn yourself into a harmless joke, a throwaway stereotype, if you neutralise your radical potential, you are allowed to exist in plain sight. This court jester or lovable freak role is not acceptance, it is ritual humiliation, and it is currently the only way an architect may operate in a mode that does not entirely disown his, her, they, their, them, ze, sie, hir, co, or ey's radical and innate difference.

'Where queerness can thrive, there is space for everyone'

The perpetuation of architectural and aesthetic conformity in our urban environments, with its enforcement beginning with the architectural profession's self-imposed normativity, is much more than just a harmless desire for continuity: it is the material embodiment of exclusionary tolerance. It is a dangerous cultural suppressant that soothes wider society into believing nothing has changed, both belying the massive shifts and reorientations that are occurring just under the nostalgically uniform surface, and ostracising the visible presence of those who are agents of those very changes. It is a tragic, narrowminded and shockingly unrecognised impoverishment of our built environment.

Our cities should be parliaments of social signification in which the depth and variety of our history is celebrated, and the plenitude and complexity of our present is represented. Where queerness can thrive, there is space for everyone. At the moment, there is space for almost none. Architectural orthodoxy of the traditional and the quasi-modern kind, our planning system and the general tenor of debate on the form of our cities leaves barely the slightest glimmer of hope that one day our streets might be allowed to be as queer as fuck, as the best parts of our society are starting to become. I can but hope I will be proven

## governs eating in public

19 OCTOBER 2018 | BY HUW LEMMEY

## Initiatives promoting gender equality in architecture

7 DECEMBER 2018 | BY AR EDITORS

## Outrage: losers – history is on your side

## Out of space: changing homosexual geographies

28 MARCH 2019 | BY HUW LEMMEY

## Naked ambition: blurring the line between creator and consumer in the porn industry

28 MARCH 2019 | BY ESTHER FERNÁNDEZ CIFUELA

## Binary code: technologies of gender

18 MARCH 2020 | BY POL ESTEVE

## Interview with Joel Sanders

19 MARCH 2020 | BY LILI ZARZYCKI

## Outrage: subversive sleep

9 APRIL 2020 | BY RUTH NOACK

WRONG.

This piece is featured in the AR March 2019 issue on Sex + Women in Architecture awards – click [here](#) to purchase your copy today

**MARCH 2019**

ar

Since 1896, The Architectural Review has scoured the globe for architecture that challenges and inspires. Buildings old and new are chosen as prisms through which arguments and broader narratives are constructed. In their fearless storytelling, independent critical voices explore the forces that shape the homes, cities and places we inhabit.



SUBSCRIBE NOW

*Join the conversation online*

Marketing & advertising solutions   Monographs & bespoke publishing   Cookie Policy   Privacy Policy  
Terms and conditions   FAQ   Contact us

COPYRIGHT © 2020 EMAP PUBLISHING LTD