# *Behind Straight Curtains*

## TOWARDS A QUEER FEMINIST THEORY OF ARCHITECTURE

KATARINA BONNEVIER

*Behind Straight Curtains*
*Towards a Queer Feminist Theory of Architecture*

Author: Katarina Bonnevier
Title: Behind Straight Curtains:
Towards a Queer Feminist Theory of Architecture

Akademisk avhandling 2007
PhD Dissertation 2007
TRITA-ARK-Akademisk avhandling 2007:1
ISSN 1402-7461
ISRN KTH/ARK/AA—07:01—SE
ISBN 978-91—7178-574-9

KTH Architecture and the Built Environment
School of Architecture
xakt Critical Theory in Architecture
Royal Institute of Technology
SE-100 44 Stockholm
Sweden



Published by Axl Books, Stockholm: 2007
www.axlbooks.com
info@ axlbooks.com

ISBN 978-91-975901-6-7



Printed in Latvia

**Contents**

## Illustrations

All figures by the author unless otherwise stated.

Cover

E.1027: Montage of living-room with shower corner and passage-niche at far end.

Following page 224, in order of appearance

1. E.1027: The door which can be both open and shut in the same moment
2. E.1027: *Maison en bord de mer*, façade towards the sea.
3. E.1027: *Invitation au voyage*
4. E.1027: Plans of upper and lower ground floor
5. E.1027: Living-room with balcony fringe
6. E.1027: Closeted staircase
7. E.1027: Balcony and terrace carpets
8. Montage of Turkish Exhibit in *Crystal Palace*, London, 1851.
9. Jalousie
10. 20 rue Jacob: Street entrance
11. 20 rue Jacob: Plans of ground and upper floors.
12. 20 rue Jacob: Façade towards the *sous-bois*, the large part of the garden. Photographer Jens Johnsson.
13. 20 rue Jacob: Garage. Collage on still from Louis Malle, *Le Feu Follet*, France: Nouvelles Editions de Films, 1963.
14. 20 rue Jacob: *Temple à l'Amitié*
15. 20 rue Jacob: Interior of *Temple à l'Amitié*

16-21. Tentative: Portraits. Photographer Marie Carlsson.

22. Mårbacka: Façade, Image letter, Karlstad: Herman Anderssons bokhandel, 1953.
23. Mårbacka: Façade drawing signed I.G. Clason, wall decoration in Valborg Olander's bedroom.

**Acknowledgments**

To all people that have influenced and encouraged this work, thank you, I couldn't have made this without you! Towards my main advisor Katja Grillner, I direct my heartfelt gratitude (your garden of knowledge and confidence have surrounded me with unbroken faith throughout this overwhelming drama). To co-advisor Rolf Gullström-Hughes (your extraordinary wit and all the letters you found), and to Jenny Sundén (no official role, but always there, love and sharp analysis in a rare combination). To the readers that stepped in at decisive moments, challenging and contributing extensively: Nina Lykke, Jane Rendell and Gertrud Sandquist (guest opponents at final and halftime seminars). To the generous, intelligent and beautiful teachers I've had the fortune to meet; Jennifer Bloomer (you shared your abode of theory and flesh, I am forever grateful), Pia Laskar, Annika Olsson and Tiina Rosenberg. To the Queer seminar & courses at the Center for Gender Studies at Stockholm University, other students, researchers & teachers. For the hours of discussions in our living-room; Aylin Boynukisa, Marie Carlsson, Karin Drake, Hedvig Nathorst-Böös, Kerstin Olsson, Joakim Strandberg, Veronica Svärd, Eva Vaihinen, Rebecca Vinthagen, Linda Örtenblad. To Brady Burroughs (you stepped forth and shared your sense and sensibility in the eve of this project). To the research group of critical theory in architecture, *xakt*, colleagues, friends and students related to the School of Architecture, KTH; Thordis Arrhenius, Ana Betancour, Katrin Fagerström, Catharina Gabrielsson, Anders Johansson, Ulrika Karlsson, Daniel Koch, Helena Mattsson, Anna Odlinge, Christina Pech, Lars Raattamaa (affection and strength), Monica Sand,

Meike Schalk and a special thank you to Malin Zimm (before and throughout). To Staffan Henriksson, Lena Villner, Weronica Ronnefalk, Jonas Andersson, Christina Danielsson & Victor Edman. To Lina Andersson, Helena Eklund, Linda Fredén, Linnea Holmberg, Sanna Söderhäll, Ylva Åborg and all the participants of *Jalusi* (let's transform the world). To Margitta Kylberg & Anna Laangard of the architecture library. To Valdemar Angelov, Carin Österlund, Margareta Pettersson, Amparo (for always cleaning up my mess). I wish to thank the institutions that have been indispensable for the production of this dissertation, providing me with economic fundaments and significant details; Royal Institute of Technology, KTH, and the Museum of Architecture in Stockholm, Mårbacka memorial estate in Sunne, *Centre Culturel Suédois* in Paris, at KB, Swedish National library special thanks to librarian Ingrid Svensson (sharing your books and knowledge), in Paris to Monsieur François Chapon and Madame Vera Michailsky. Thanks for taking interest in my work; Hilde Heynen, Jonathan Hill, Judith Halberstam, Christopher Reed, Jens Rydström and Jan Hietala. To the wonder man, Staffan Lundgren of Axl books (with good humor, competence and, in no time you shaped up and turned my manuscript into this book). Hugs and kisses to Anna Broberg, Jenny Selander, Malin Nord, Tilda Lovell, Monika Nilsson, Lina Kurttila, Malin Arnell, Sara Stridsberg, Mattias Litström, Albert Lindemalm, Thérèse Kristiansson, Simon Häggblom, Karin Lind, Ulrika Westerlund, Anna Larsson, Anneli Gustafsson, Sanna Fogelvik, Marion Fust Sæternes, Jorun Kugelberg, Klas Ruin, Elin Strand & my new small friend Vita Strand-Ruin, April Chapman, Robert and LB Segrest, Hanna Hallgren, Klara Lidén, Isabelle Dussage, Jens Jonsson, Maya Hald, Suzanne Osten, Horst Sandström, Joakim Rindå & Stefan Nordberg (the royals of Haga), and my new neighbors at Gibbenäs & Ormestorp. To my family Björn, Ulla, K-J, Ulrica, Linnea, Gabriel & William Bonnevier. To family Carlsson; Yvonne, Mikael, Malin, Sofie, Anders & Nisella. To the one person who keeps me connected to what it's really about, Marie Carlsson, the princess of my life, all my love to you. This book is dedicated to my students. I couldn't have made this without you.

# Introduction
# *Enactments of Architecture*

With this exploration into the queerness and the theatricality of architecture I wish to contribute to a queer feminist critique of heteronormative and sexist structures that repeatedly reduce, ridicule or neglect, gendered and sexual aspects of our built environment. My ambition throughout the thesis is to contribute to an architectural shift; a shift in both the analysis of architecture and the enactment of architecture, towards a built environment which does not simply repeat repressive structures but tries to resist discriminations and dismantle hierarchies.

This is a theatrical queer feminist interpretation of architecture which moves within a series of scenes in order to investigate the performative force of architecture; architect Eileen Gray's momentum building *E.1027* in the south of France, 1926-29 and the literary salon of author Natalie Barney at *20 rue Jacob* held in Paris between 1909-1968 are the main acts together with author Selma Lagerlöf's former home and memorial estate *Mårbacka*, situated in mid-west Sweden, transformed in 1919-23. I look at these cases as different kinds of *Enactments of Architecture*, that vary in scale and temporality, where the actors and the acts are entangled with the built environment. Each exploration of these cases are framed in lecture theatres in Stockholm; seminar room *A3* at the School of Architecture, Royal Institute of Technology (KTH), *Café Copacabana*, Hornstull strand and *Turkiska salongen*, at Wallingatan 3.

In any building activity ideologies and norms are reiter-

ated. What I want to bring into play is that this also works the other way around – subject positions are partly construed through building activities. Feminist and queer perspectives, especially theories of performance, performativity and heteronormativity, are critical strands throughout the thesis to investigate how this happens. *Enactment* is the key term I propose for the study of this entanglement of actors, acts and architecture. It holds an overtly theatrical association along with a performative force. Firstly, I use the term enactment very close to the word *staging*, to exhibit or present on or as if on a stage. Apart from directing the actors, staging also includes the set, the lighting, the costumes, the props, the masks and so on. Secondly, enactment can also be synonymous with *act*, to represent or perform through action – for example when dramatically representing a character on stage by speech, action and gesture. The term en*act*ment includes the act and brings into play the interconnectedness of material container, the setting, the deeds and the actors. Thirdly, an enactment is a performance which is also a command or regulation, for instance the passing of a law by a legislative body. It emphasizes the performative force that the term staging does not evoke.[1]

In 2000 architect Leslie Kanes Weisman noted in her definition of *architecture* for the *Encyclopaedia of Women*:

> Even though built space shapes the experiences of people's daily lives and the cultural assumptions in which they are immersed, it is easy to accept the physical landscape unthinkingly as a neutral background. But the spatial arrangements of buildings and communities are neither value-free nor neutral; they reflect and reinforce the nature of each society's gender, race, and class relations.[2]



Feminist scholars have exposed how knowledge production is governed by a seemingly neutral – natural and invisible – norm but actually is an articulation of "white," Western, heterosexual, middle aged, middle class men.[3] Many feminist architecture theorists have examined the contribution of architecture to the construction of gendered and sexual identities.[4] A related aim of this study is to supplement the previous research with a queer study of gender and sexuality in architecture that takes a lesbian, or a female non-straight, subject position. Such research would not have been possible without the work that has already been done.[5] While intersections with several analytical categories – questions of class, nationality and ethnicity – are present in the work, gender and sexuality have been my main concerns and the research is limited accordingly.

Architecture is said to combine, in the words of the Swedish *National Encyclopaedia*, "two inseparable sides; a practical, constructive and functional side with an aesthetic, harmonious and symbolic side."[6] Feminist architecture theorists have pointed out how these sides are marked by gender, which is to say the masculine-feminine hierarchy. The latter part of the two is suppressed when not entirely rejected. The anthology *The Sex of Architecture* (1996) re-examines some gender-based assumptions, or "Inherited Ideologies," that shape architecture: "that man builds and woman inhabits; that man is outside and woman is inside; that man is public and woman is private; that nature, in both its kindest and its cruellest aspects, is female and culture, the ultimate triumph over nature, is male."[7] This dichotomy informs the feminist strategy to re-evaluate the feminine. Aside from the already listed dichotomies, feminist architecture theory has also reconsidered the decorative and structural divide. The feminine, decorative aspects – surface and ornament

– are less valued. Architect Jennifer Bloomer has furthered the ongoing discussion concerning the dichotomy of structure and ornament by pointing out the inseparability of the terms; of artefacts both ornamental and structural.[8] This dichotomy implies that the ornamental has been, and for the most part still is, considered superfluous, while the structural is essential.

In social constructivist theory the architectural term *construction* is used to question essentialist arguments about gender and sexuality. However, within a prevailing architecture discourse *construction* is often not seen as a social and cultural construction at all but appears to be a strangely essentialist term. The construction is driven by so-called *rational* arguments about function and economy far from superficiality, ornamentation or other "effeminate" characteristics.

What counts as feminine or masculine change in time and context.[9] For example, architect Adrian Forty has revealed how the term *form* was embedded with muscular masculinity for most modernists, while *formlessness* remained the unarticulated "other."[10] In addition, as shown by literary theorist and poet Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) the homosocial paradigm of masculinity is connected to homophobia. Following queer theory, I use the terms masculine and feminine without essentialist ties to anatomy; at the same time, I wish to bend these two categories, both to study the undervalued feminine and to untie the masculine from narrow definitions of a "rational," heterosexual, stern manliness.

An intriguing example of how the masculine acts as a masquerading surface is the work of architect Adolf Loos at the beginning of the twentieth century. Architecture historian Beatriz Colomina has revealed how Loos used the black suit as a motive for the outer appearance of his architecture.[11] His architecture enacted gender dualism. Apparently Loos himself dressed inconspicuously in dark colours and English tweed suits, while he designed a lavish white mink coat for his wife Lina Loos as well as a bedroom entirely draped in fur. He was operating with the interior as the feminine and the exterior as the masculine. The wall became a celebration of the cliché "opposites attract".



There are other intersecting categories; for instance the decorative is also a mark of non-western traditions, of the allegedly bad taste of "lower" classes, of amateurishness, of gay culture or of local style.[12] In the influential and widely debated essay *Ornament and Crime* (*Ornament und Verbrechen*, 1908), Adolf Loos not only connected ornaments to criminality but also to "less civilized" cultures.[13] The ornament in his view was an unnecessary addition and therefore a crime in relation to the taste and social order of modern man. Loos' outbursts on ornaments are marked by a feverish attempt to elevate the modern man from any mark of femininity, ethnicity, sexuality or class. Beatriz Colomina writes in *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (1994) that "...Loos' raid against ornament is not only gender-loaded but openly homophobic."[14] In *Bloomsbury Rooms: Modernism, Subculture and Domesticity* (2004) art historian Christopher Reed explores the process that has marked modernism with a stern heterosexual masculinity. The book adds to the feminist deconstruction of hierarchical binaries; it demonstrates how norms that "rationalize and even celebrate male aggression as a talisman of creativity" simultaneously associate the decorative and cosy with the superficial and unimportant. Reed contests the heroes(heteros)-only versions of modernism that is limited to conventional standards of masculine accomplishment and shows how the "Amusing Style" associated with the

designs of the Bloomsbury group offered a kind of queer modernism.[15]

E.1027, 20 rue Jacob and Mårbacka are building constellations tied to a distinct main character but they all involve larger casts of characters. They all housed queer collectives; collectives that were not the hetero-normative family constellation. The singular actor is influential, but nothing without the others. As sociologist Elspeth Probyn has stated:

> Space is a pressing matter and it matters which bodies where and how press up against it. Most important of all are who these bodies are with.[16]

Eileen Gray (1878-1976), Natalie Barney (1876-1972) and Selma Lagerlöf (1858-1940) share some common traits. They are all heroes of cultural history, largely due to the previous work of feminist scholars. In time their lives spanned the turn of the twentieth century. They were all masters with servants, but masters that deviated from the norms of society. They all had same-sex relationships; Natalie Barney's life and legacy are explicitly linked to a lesbian scene, while the worlds around Eileen Gray and Selma Lagerlöf have been hidden behind straighter curtains.

Despite the fact that women at the time had not yet obtained civic rights, Gray, Barney and Lagerlöf were privileged enough to have the means to engage in building activities. In addition they all had feminist ideas about social change and architecture and with their financial resources they were able to pursue the ideas of how they wanted to live in a way that eludes most people.[17] They all created buildings, but in three different ways; E.1027 was built and designed by Gray as part of much broader research; the Salon at 20 rue Jacob, was an appropriation by Barney of an existing site; the third building activity was a complete transformation of Lagerlöf's old family farm Mårbacka with the help of the renowned architect's office of Isak Gustaf Clason.



The three interconnected themes in my work influence not only what I write about, but also how I write; architecture, queer feminism and theatricality – all with specific implications, challenges and demands on the work. The main chapters of the thesis masquerade as a series of lectures. They are not manuscripts for lectures but lectures that take place in the text. The writings have borrowed the form and structure of the dramatic script. They are not only about, but operate through, enactments. Visual materials accompany the lectures. A cast of characters act and interact with the architecture. In between the main acts are short entr'acts that shed another light on my pursuit of appropriate representations. After the lecture series there is a chapter called 'Drawing the Curtains' which is a kind of underlayment for the three lecture texts. Here I demonstrate some theoretical and methodological strands, comment on the sources used in the research process and situate this research in relation to existing material and other research; it is also an orientation for further reading. The aim of this formal experiment is not only to explain and critique from a detached perspective but also to create and show architecture enacted. It is an attempt to stay close to the physical matter with a continuous involvement of actors. That means architecture seen not only as a theoretical metaphor but also as a concrete material practice always entangled with subject positions. Jennifer Bloomer wrote in *Architecture and the Text. The (s)crypts of Joyce and Piranesi* (1993):

> It is hard to disagree with Audre Lorde's much-cited dictum that the Master's tools will never

dismantle the Master's house. But people have to live in a house, not in a metaphor. Of course you use the Master's tools if those are the only ones you can lay your hands on. Perhaps what you can do with them is to take apart that old mansion, using some of its pieces to put up a far better one where there is room for all of us.[18]

This thesis is a search for critically queer architecture; to find strategies for resistance to, and transgression of normative orders.[19] It does not mean that queerness is an essentialist core of some buildings, and not others – the queer perspective is, just like seemingly neutral observations, an interpretation – but the cultural production that surrounds us is not as straight as heteronormativity makes it appear. Queer implies inter-changeability and excess; the possibility to move, make several interpretations, slide over, or reposition limits. To understand buildings as queer performative acts, and not static preconditions, opens architecture to interpretation and makes it less confined within normative constraints. It is a key both to accomplish a shift in how architecture can be understood or analyzed and to my ambition to contribute to a transformation in future building; thereby presenting in a broader sense, *enactments of architecture*.



**Notes**

1 Performativity will be explained in 'Living-room', 35-36, 49-51. For an exploration of the relations between performance and performativity see the final chapter 'Drawing the Curtains', 370-380.

2 Leslie Kanes Weisman, 'Architecture', Cheris Kramarae & Dale Spender, eds., *Encyclopaedia of Women. Global Women's Issues and Knowledge*, New York & London: Routledge, 2000, 86.

3 In the introduction and conclusion to the anthology *Feminism and Methodology*, Sandra Harding discusses the methodological implications of the feminist epistemological shift from a supposedly objective researcher to one placed in the same critical plane as the researched subject. Sandra Harding, ed., *Feminism and Methodology*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987. In *Transforming Knowledge* Elizabeth Minnich argues that there are four foundational mistakes that characterize the ruling tradition of knowledge: faulty generalization, circular reasoning, mystified concepts and partial knowledge. Elizabeth Kamarck Minnich, *Transforming Knowledge*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990.

4 See for instance the anthologies; Beatriz Colomina, ed., *Sexuality & Space*, Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992, Joel Sanders, ed., *Stud – Architectures of Masculinity*, Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996, and Jane Rendell, Barbara Penner & Iain Borden eds., *Gender Space Architecture – An interdisciplinary introduction*, London & New York: Routledge, 2000.

5 For an overview of the research situation see the final chapter 'Drawing the Curtains', 391-400

6 My translation of "Arkitekturen förenar oåtskiljbart en praktisk, konstruktiv och funktionell sida med en estetisk,

harmonisk och symbolisk", Johan Mårtelius, 'Arkitektur', *Nationalencyklopedin (Swedish National Encyclopedia)*, [Online]. Available: <http://www.ne.se/jsp/search/article.jsp?i_art_id=117826> [September 15, 2004]

7 'Inherited Ideologies: A Re-Examination' was the name of the conference on which the anthology was based. Diana Agrest, Patricia Conway & Leslie Kanes Weisman eds., 'Introduction', *The Sex of Architecture*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996, 8, 11.

8 Jennifer Bloomer, 'Abodes of Theory and Flesh: Tabbles of Bower', *Assemblage*, no. 17, April, 1992, 12.

9 For instance Ulla Wikander has written about the process of gendering of technical professions, Ulla Wikander, *Kvinnoarbete i Europa, 1789-1950. Genus, makt och arbetsdelning ("Women's Labour in Europe, 1789-1950. Gender, power and job divides")*, Stockholm: Atlas Akademi, 1999, 83, 105-111. (also published in German: *Von der Magd zur Angestellten. Macht, Gesclecht und Arbeitsteilung 1789-1950*, Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1998.)

10 In *Words and Buildings* (2000) Adrian Forty has written about the use of the terms *feminine* and *masculine* within architecture theory. He argues that until the Second World War the terms were in frequent use in architectural production, but what made them unacceptable was "the explicitly masculine, not to say homo-erotic, orientation of culture in the totalitarian regimes of inter-war Europe."(54) Forty, however, goes on to point out that the organizing structure of gender difference is not renounced but simply appears in another guise. Even if the terms are not in frequent use anymore, the hierarchical divides still have gendered connotations. And, it is worth noting that when direct gender markers are used these refer to the works of female architects; their designs can be described as *womanly*, whereas the designs by male architects are less explicitly gendered. The debate is often essentialist – for instance the term *phallic* can be used to describe some inherently manly characteristics of architecture. Adrian Forty, *Words and Buildings, A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture*, London & New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000, 54-61.



11 Loos wrote "When I was finally given the task of building a house, I said to myself: in its external appearance, a house can only have changed as much as a dinner jacket. Not a lot therefore...I had to become significantly simpler. I had to substitute the golden buttons with black ones. The house has to look inconspicuous." Quoted in Beatriz Colomina, 'The Split Wall — Domestic Voyeurism', Colomina, ed., *Sexuality & Space*, Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992, 94.

12 The camp esthetics of gay culture is an example how these marks of deviance have been depoliticized and turned into commerce in late capitalist society.

13 Loos, 'Ornament and Crime', *Ornament and Crime. Selected Essays*, Riverside, California: Ariadne Press, 1998.

14 Colomina also states that Loos' homophobia (in relation to Josef Hoffman) deserves further research. Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*, Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1994, 38. My thanks to Catharina Gabrielsson for pointing out this reference.

15 Christopher Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms. Modernism, Subculture and Domesticity*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2004, 16, 236-237.

16 Elspeth Probyn, 'Lesbians in Space. Gender, Sex and the Structure of Missing', *Gender, Place and Culture*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1995, 81.

17 In relation to Gray, Barney and Lagerlöf I use a broad def-

inition of feminist ideas. There are extensive discussions on how to understand the various feminist political ideas and activities of these personages that exceed the frame of this thesis. What is important to point out is that they had different attitudes and ways of working, which also differed along their respective life spans, but they all had a feminist insight with an active agenda to change women's subordination to men.

18 Jennifer Bloomer, *Architecture and the Text: The (S)crypts of Joyce and Piranesi*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993, 166.

19 "Critically queer" is a reference to Judith Butler, *Bodies that matter*, New York & London: Routledge, 1993, Chapter 8 'Critically queer', 223-242. *Queer* in the meaning deviant from the expected or normal has been used earlier as an offensive slang term for an openly homosexual person. For decades, queer was used solely as a derogatory adjective for gays and lesbians, but in the 1990s the term has been semantically reclaimed by gay, lesbian and transgendered activists as a term of self-identification. The word is used as a term of defiant pride to overcome limiting identities. Within academia an entire field *queer theory* stems out of the term and it has also become an identity term. In the final chapter 'Drawing the Curtains' I discuss the term further, 373-375

# Lecture Two
# *Out of the Salon*

*May our drawn curtains shield us from the world or,*
*Never trust the decor*[1]

**Orientation**

The lecture begins at a literary salon at café Copacabana in Stockholm in 2006. Copacabana is not a salon, but a café, until the salon takes place. The event transforms the café into a salon.

From café Copacabana the text explores the settings of the salon around author Natalie Clifford Barney, scandalously famous for her overt lesbian lifestyle. She opened her home on 20 rue Jacob, in central Paris, on Friday afternoons for over sixty years, but the focus of this study lies on the first twenty years, 1909 to 1929, demarcated by the span of her book about the salon *Aventures de l'esprit* (*Adventures of the Mind*, 1929).[2] Natalie Barney/20 rue Jacob is an enactment of architecture embedded in fiction that blurs the boundaries between truth and appearance, theater and lived life; this is explored throughout the lecture.

The place is abandoned, but in an imaginary tour of the premises the deserted former home of Natalie Barney is redressed, and in a masquerading representation the salon appears once more. It is an extravagant architecture with a carefully directed visibility in a succession of disguises. Barney was well aware of the transformative power of disguises, to simultaneously hide and reveal. One of Barney's aphorisms was: "Never trust the decor." Barney's performance is influential, but nothing without the larger queer scene.

The salon is carefully chosen as a starting point because it explicitly shows how architecture participates in performativity, in the construction of gender and sexuality. The lecture-text operates as the salon; it is theater and everyday life at once, a kind of masquerade that reworks the constraints of heteronormative society and creates another sociality. This masquerading architecture in writing involves a group of people; it is in the move, in the actions of the social scene. The lecture-text shows how the salon of Natalie Barney/20 rue Jacob staged a queer feminist culture through a performative appropriation of an existing building constellation.

**Cast of Characters in Order of Appearance**

The LECTURER – a character who resembles the author/researcher/architect of these writings. She has a taste for Paris and is flattered to be invited to speak at the literary salon of Café Copacabana.

The PHOTOGRAPHER attends the literary salon of Café Copacabana somewhat reluctantly, but has brought her camera to amuse herself. She has accompanied the lecturer to Paris, officially to help documenting the sites.

MADAME W – an evasive woman with many keys.

BASKET – a white poodle named by Gertrude Stein.

JULIAN follows the lecture series with an inquiring mind. Julian is a feminist scholar and architecture historian who works as a journalist.

TABELLE has an encyclopedic knowledge of the gay and lesbian Parisian scene of the beginning of the twentieth century, and is particularly fascinated by the literary salon of Natalie Barney. In her bow tie and grey pleated skirt she looks like a school teacher from another time.

SALLY is known for her critical wit and decisive taste. Self sufficient, she can seduce any woman she desires. At least she assumes as much.

NATALIE BARNEY – a historical character, based on writings by Barney and others; she is 'the Amazone', Natalie Clifford Barney (1876-1972), a feminist and lesbian, author and seductress, who hosted salons at 20 rue Jacob in Paris, 1909-1968.

A LADY OF FASHION – a literary character based upon the "slight satiric wigging" of Djuna Barnes in *Ladies' Almanack*.[3] 'A Lady of Fashion' was Barnes' pseudonym used in the first publication in 1928.

## CAFÉ COPACABANA

*Through the large windows of the café on Hornstulls strand in Stockholm the bouncing lights of a space full of people spread to the street outside. A neon sign,* Copacabana *in undulating letters in the window, identifies the café. Small details in the decor echo the name; a bottle of sand from the beach in Rio de Janeiro stands on the counter. The walls are in white, gold and cappuccino apart from a brisk red concave wall. There is a big painting, graffiti on canvas, of a riot beauty* Pink *and a couple of gilded mirrors.*[4] *A long counter divides the continuous space in two and there are also smaller spaces within the space; nooks and crannies. The guests sit on several levels; there are low coffee tables next to armchairs, café tables with chairs from the fifties and sixties, cushions on benches along the windows and also a couple of tall tables, where some stand and others sit on bar stools. A slow fan rotates in the ceiling in an unsuccessful attempt to refresh the air. On a clothes hanger in the corner is a forgotten dress in white brocade. A flyer on a table announces: "The Literary salon at Copacabana proudly presents: Out of the Salon – A Queer Tour of Natalie Barney's 20 rue Jacob, Paris."*[5] *The lecturer, next to a table stacked with books, stands in the projection of the street entrance door of 20 rue Jacob. The* porte-cochère[6] *is projected onto the convex wall, which widens it in a fish eye distortion.*

LECTURER: Behind this door in a private garden in the 6ième arrondissement of central Paris is the former home of Natalie Clifford Barney; the home where she staged her literary salons on Friday evenings from four to eight almost every season from October 1909 to 1968.[7] Natalie Barney was a feminist, writer and poet and one of the main characters of a lesbian avant-garde. She had the mind, the fortune and the relative freedom to live inde-

pendently.[8] She staged her life as art. Born in Dayton, Ohio, USA, she found her home in Paris by the turn of the twentieth century. Natalie Barney was not only a literary person and a *salonnière*, but also a legendary seductress – she "saved" women from heterosexuality, a mission she carried on well into her eighties.[9] *The lecturer smiles.* From 1909 Barney rented the place at 20 rue Jacob where she held her salons. She did not own it, but she and her party appropriated it.[10] I am particularly interested in how Barney's salon was part of staging a queer/lesbian culture and especially the role played by architecture; the building constellation, the settings and the décor, as well as the different rooms with their furniture and things. Her salon assembled Anglophone and French writers, painters, some aristocrats – the ones who accepted such a scandalous poet – designers, politicians and actors of all sexes and diverse sexual preferences. Her salon was a queer space in that it crossed borders of gender and sexuality in the midst of the male-dominated bourgeois society.

In brief Natalie Barney's home consisted of a two story pavilion with two salons and a boudoir, some additional rooms in the adjacent house, a large garden, and a small Doric temple at the north cove of that garden. The temple is called *à l'Amitié* (*To Friendship*). Barney's pavilion is reached from the back of a courtyard via a passage, wide enough for a car, behind this door of the street building.

*The lecturer gestures towards the image behind her.*

LECTURER: That is, if you have the code; in case you're on your way to Paris it is #761031. It is a landmark, but



private property, so be discreet. Or, you can, as the photographer encouraged me to do on our first visit, sneak in when someone leaves. If it wouldn't have been for her, I would probably not have dared to enter. It was late at night; we had been following the guide book *Walks in Gertrude Stein's Paris*,[11] via the book shelves at Shakespeare & Co, the house where Isadora Duncan had her dance studio, Gertrude Stein's and Alice Toklas' place on *rue de Fleurus* to *rue Jacob*, in the darkness we stood staring at a mute door.

PHOTOGRAPHER (*whispers to a neighbor on another table*): We'd stared at closed doors and dark windows for hours and she was still excited. I just longed to soften up with a glass of rosé.

LECTURER: In 1963 Natalie Barney let her premises for a film set, Louis Malle's *Le Feu Follet* an adaptation of a 1930s novel by Pierre Drieu La Rochelle – who once had frequented her salon.[12] I will show you the sequence where the character Alain, played by Maurice Ronet, follows his former confidante Jeanne, played by Jeanne Moreau, home. In the film she lives at 20 rue Jacob with a decadent group of people.

*She starts the film; the projection starts to move through a passage with pigeonhole mailboxes. The camera follows the characters from behind. They walk a few steps across a paved court with a two story building covered in ivy and closed shutters at the far end.*

LECTURER: That's Barney's pavilion.

*The characters turn aside; the left wall of the court ends with an iron gate which Jeanne and Alain enter. A car is parked on what has been a lawn inside the gate. The spacious, untidy garden is taken over by*

*some fine large trees. At the entrance gate the neighboring buildings can merely be glimpsed through the vegetation. The camera moves around to the right side of the couple, behind them is now the pavilion of Barney. The lecturer freezes the image. The part of the building that faces the court has two stories. Its short end, towards the garden, has a symmetric, classicist gable, with three balcony windows, corner pilasters and two medallions. It is overgrown by ivy. Behind the tall pavilion is a single story addition. It looks modern, with a wall almost entirely made up of glass. It is a brick structure.*

LECTURER: The lower part, which looks like a studio or small factory, is probably an early twentieth century addition to the pavilion that was built in the eighteenth century. On the ground floor there is one large salon in each part of the building, the literary salon took place in both. What I find remarkable with this façade is the mirror.

*She points to the tall part of the building. A large mirror, the size of a window, is mounted on the wall between the two glass doors of the ground floor. The lecturer reverses the film and plays it again. The mirror reflects Jeanne and Alain, the leaves and branches of the garden and a fraction of the light sky as the camera passes.*

LECTURER: It is like the mirror extends the garden into the salons of the building, the pavilion is not only inscribed in the garden; the garden decorates its façade both with the ivy that grows on it and indirectly through the mirror. The mirror that also, in an imaginary space, reflects the garden and the activities that take place there into the body of the building; into the salon. You can also see yourself inscribed in the setting, looking out from the wild garden in the midst of the salon. I will come back to the intriguing relation between salon and garden later on.



*She lets the film continue. Jeanne and Alain continue to walk. They pass the windows of the addition (Julian to the person beside her: "Was that a trick of the light or did I glimpse Natalie Barney in the window?") and another modern structure appears behind it. Between the studio-like addition and the stone wall that marks the end of the garden is a garage. The garage is open at both ends with large glass doors. The couple walk around the corner of the addition, through the garage, and another piece of garden is seen in front of them. At the far end of this garden is a small temple. The camera leaves the couple and zooms in on the portico of the temple. Above the four columns are the words Á L'AMITIÉ. The lecturer turns the film off and the first projection of the street entrance is seen once more.*

LECTURER: The single window above the entry belongs to the apartment where Berthe Cleyrergue (1904-1998), who worked as a house manager for Barney from 1927 and on, used to live with her husband Henri.[13] She just had to cross the courtyard to get to work. On the other side of the building she had two windows facing the court and the pavilion. From her home she could see everyone going in and out, not that she kept a record.[14] For Barney she played many parts, *gouvernante* of the salon, famous cook, maid, confidante, librarian and accountant. The bookkeeping was known to be as impeccable as the rest of the house.[15]

To me, the architecture of 20 rue Jacob is nothing without the stories of the social scene that occurred here. What strikes me is how much this setting depends on the "personal theater" of Natalie Barney; the literary salon, which in its turn can not be separated from the built environment.

A *salon* is a material container but also an event con-

tained in a salon. The living-room of a private house is often called the salon, but the salon as an event can exist beyond that room. The salon is architecture of matter and event. In the case of Barney, the salon moved across the ground level, within the walls of the house but also into different parts of the garden with its *Fountain of Serpents* and little Doric temple. In the case of this evening's salon at Copacabana, its container is not a salon, but a café, until the salon takes place. This is what's interesting from an architectural point of view; the event transforms it into a salon. The architecture appears in the event, or the act. It shows that architecture plays a part in performativity. The architecture of the literary salon is in the move; in the actions of the social scene. The salon as a model for architecture can help us gain a better understanding of how our built environment plays a role in the construction of gender and sexuality. I also think this is one key to understanding and creating architecture other/wise, to make it less determined, more supple and transformative. This is a key motive for my interest in the salon.

I also want to state my view that the salon Natalie Barney staged in her home in Paris was important for architecture on an individual level as well. For instance, Eileen Gray, the architect of modern domesticity whose work I showed you in my first lecture, was involved.

To clarify, an architecture that appears in the event does not mean that architecture is a neutral frame in which anything can take place. Our actions shape the architecture and we, in turn, are shaped by the architecture. The house participates in the construction of the inhabitant, just as masks and clothes create character. The material container suggests rules but does not determine the actions. In a proscenium theater for instance the salon is where the audience sits and is separate from the stage. The layout prescribes a behavior but does not hinder experiments where the ensemble leaves the stage or the audience sits on the stage. In the literary salon the distinction between performer and audience is vague and not built explicitly into the architecture.



*The lights of a huge ship that pass in the darkness outside Copacabana interrupt the lecturer for a moment. Several of the café staff slip outside to have a smoke.*

LECTURER: In the salon the distinction of theater and life is blurred. What is remarkable is that the term *salon* lends itself to different containers, both public and intimate. A literary salon in a private home has an exclusive tendency with a restricted access. The salon at Café Copacabana relies on the network of the queer scene of Stockholm but counteracts the exclusivity by taking place in an everyday hang out; a public living-room.

The salon is exclusive but also creates a sense of belonging, which is why I am particularly proud to be here with you tonight. Yes, as Sally Munt writes in "The Lesbian *Flâneur*": "Lesbian identity is constructed in the temporal and linguistic mobilisation of space".[16] There has to be a collective of masquerading identities, a social system, to give me a sense of belonging. And they, we, who perform this scene, are always on the move in, or around, the corners of architecture.

Tonight we're going to move around the corners of a site in Paris. In *Women of the Left Bank, Paris 1900-1940* Shari Benstock[17] reveals the central role of Barney's salon in the twentieth century culture of literature; and

still an unceasing production of new texts are generated by these women, their texts and spaces continue to provoke and affect. An essay that has been very helpful in my understanding of the interrelations between the physical and fictional architecture of 20 rue Jacob is Amy Wells-Lynn's text "The Intertextual, Sexually-Coded Rue Jacob: A Geocritical Approach to Djuna Barnes, Natalie Barney, and Radclyffe Hall".[18] Wells-Lynn states (*the lecturer reads loud from a bunch of photocopies where certain sentences are highlighted in light green*)

These women go beyond just creating a space within Paris; they create a new Paris on the whole – a Paris where women can write, publish, have public sexual relations with other women (and/or other men), and dance naked in their gardens.[19]

In other words, they redraw the map on their own terms, which overthrows exclusive phallocentric assumptions in favor of a Paris devoted to female (same sex) desire. Wells-Lynn has studied the sexual codes in the spatial relations of the triangle: the salon of Natalie Barney, Djuna Barnes' book *Ladies' Almanack* and Radclyffe Hall's novel *The Well of Loneliness*.[20] In these two classics of lesbian literature, both published in 1928, the salon and the salonnière Natalie Barney play important roles. For instance when the main character, Stephen Gordon, of Hall's story moves to Paris she buys a house on Rue Jacob based on the home of Natalie Barney.[21] In a fictional turn it is even the character Valérie Seymour, based on Natalie Barney, who encourages Stephen to move there: "If you want a house, I know of one in the Rue Jacob; it's a tumbledown place, but it's got a fine garden."[22] Wells-Lynn knows that readers familiar with the "community" will immediately recognize the address with the implication that the location is lesbian-friendly.[23]



There are many scholars who have studied the importance of the salon as a place where women shaped and participated in the political and social agenda of their time. For example, Dena Goodman shows the fundamental role played by the salon for the creation of the Republic.[24] In *Feminism and Theatre*, Sue-Ellen Case writes about the salon as a *personal theater* and a place where women have been important forces in the shaping of a public discussion.[25] Case points to the class aspect of the culture of the salon – the women of the salons were privileged – but she argues that there might be other oppressions that make the salons into places of disturbance.[26] Barney's salon was important in the staging of a lesbian life style which counteracted the invisibility of lesbians in everyday life. Homosexuality in France at the time was, if shocking, at least not criminal as it was in Sweden until the nineteen forties.[27] Another important context when discovering this culture is that French women did not achieve the right to vote until after the Second World War.[28]

*A short middle aged woman, Madame W, makes her determined way through the crowd. Her fox colored suede coat risks being stained by latte and wine as she makes her way through. She comes up to the lecturer and sneaks in behind her. It all happens very quickly.*

MADAME W: S'il vous plait, can you help me with this. (*She murmurs something incomprehensible in French.*) Sorry I am late. I was delayed at the office and then I had forgotten the keys at home.

*Madame W fiddles with a door handle and a lock, her glasses halfway down her nose. The lecturer turns and examines the wall. The curved wall hides a door, not larger than a closet door. Madame W fails to turn the key with her shaky hands. The lecturer puts the pen and manuscript down and grabs the key. The door glides open into an eerie space lit from above.*

MADAME W (*enters and disappears*): Shut the door behind you, there are so many tourists around.

*Through the opening there is a dim reflection of a room full of people. The café and everyone inside stares back from a mirror.*

LECTURER (*inhales and sighs*): It's the *Temple à l'Amitié*, the Temple to Friendship!*She recites*

In the vast garden, a small temple from the first Empire with Doric columns, carry the inscription 'A l'Amitié'.[29]

*There is a stir in the café as the guests rise and lean forward to see more.*

LECTURER: Barney used it as a small salon for a limited number of guests, but also as a prop and back-drop for her literary salons… Hemingway mentions it in his account of his Paris years.

*She turns some pages in her manuscript and finds a quote from* A Moveable Feast *and reads aloud:*

Miss Barney had been a friend of Rémy de Gourmont who was before my time and she had a salon at her house on regular dates and a small Greek temple in her garden. Many American and French women with money enough had salons and I figured very early that they were excellent places for me to stay away from, but Miss Barney, I believe, was the only one that had a small Greek temple in her garden.[30]



PHOTOGRAPHER: Hemingway… come on. What are we waiting for? Friends, let's go!

*The lecturer who stands in the door opening and looks in, there is a cold draught coming through, says over her shoulder with a smile:*

LECTURER : Of course, come on in, but "*Entrez lentement*". We don't want to scare the shadows away.

*Other Titles From Axl Books*

Daniel Koch
*Structuring Fashion*
*Department Stores as Situating Spatial Practice*
978-91-975901-8-1

Sven-Olov Wallenstein
*Essays, Lectures*
978-91-975901-1-2

Catharina Gabrielsson
*Att göra skillnad*
*Det offentliga rummet som medium för konst, arkitektur och politiska föreställningar*
978-91-975901-7-4

Sten Gromark & Fredrik Nilsson (red.)
*Utforskande arkitektur*
*Situationer i nutida arkitektur*
91-975901-4-2

Malin Zimm
*Losing The Plot*
*Architecture and Narrativity in Fin-de Siècle Media Cultures*
91-975901-1-8

Katja Grillner, Per Glembrandt, Sven-Olov Wallenstein (ed.)
*01.AKAD*
*Experimental Research in Architecture and Design – Beginnings*
91-975901-0-X

***Behind Straight Curtains*** presents a series of critical scenes that celebrate the queerness and theatricality of architect Eileen Gray's building E.1027, the literary salon of author and seductress Natalie Barney at 20 rue Jacob, and author Selma Lagerlöf's home Mårbacka. Lifting the curtains of heteronormative and sexist assumptions, the book explores examples of architecture that challenge social norms. Speculatively, yet with passion and engagement, the work posits an architecture arising from the dream of transformation.

Architect and gender scholar Katarina Bonnevier is a teacher and researcher at the School of Architecture and the Built Environment, Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm, Sweden. ***Behind Straight Curtains*** is her doctoral dissertation. Bonnevier has recently contributed to ***Negotiating Domesticity*** (2005, eds. Hilde Heynen and Gülsüm Baydar) and ***Critical Architecture*** (2007, eds. Jane Rendell, Jonathan Hill et al.), both available from Routledge.

Axl Books
www.axlbooks.com
info@axlbooks.com
ISBN 978-91-975901-6-7
9 789197 590167