ALTERING PRACTICES

Feminist
Politics and Poetics
of
Space

Edited by **Doina Petrescu**

Altering practices was initially called *Alterities*: its genesis
was a conference in Paris, a manifestation that wanted to
record the recent production of a feminism of difference and
diversity within the practice of space.[1]

I organised this conference at the time because I was inter-
ested in bringing together different genealogical lines within
the feminist approach to architecture in the late 1990s. I was
interested in giving an account about 'where we were' at that
moment and to mediate an encounter 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
the Feminist Design Collective, Matrix, muf and the authors
of books such as *Making Space, Reconstructing Her Practice,
Desiring Practices* or *Gender, Space and Architecture*), and a
few French interdisciplinary practices, more or less rooted in
what is commonly called *French feminism*. People involved
in these undertakings were invited to *Alterities*, together
with other feminists from different fields who had responded
to an open call for papers. We tried to identify politics and
poetics within the relationship between art and architecture,
including issues of technology, bodies and space, gendered
practices and situated knowledge.

The organisation of *Alterities* was made possible through
a series of coincidental networks and spatial and temporal
opportunities: Sylvie Clavel, as head of the school of architec-
ture at Paris Villemin and Mathilde Ferer, a feminist in the
Ecole des Beaux Arts administrative staff – which were two
strategic positions within the institutions that jointly hosted
the conference – and also Jennifer Bloomer, Robert Segrest,
Karen Bermann, Pat Potter and Catherine Ingraham as
supporting colleagues at the University of Iowa, where I was

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1 *Alterities* was co-organised by l'Ecole d'Architec-
ture Paris Villemin and l'Ecole Nationale Supérieure
des Beaux Arts in Paris, 4–5 June 1999. Participants
in the conference included: Niran Abbas, Karen
Bermann, Jennifer Bloomer, Martine Bouchier,
Christine Buci-Glucksman, Raoul Bunschoten, Mireille
Calle-Gruber, Jean-François Chévrier, Harris Dimitro-
poulos, Sonja Diquemare, Mary Flanagan, Christian
Girard, Francesca Hughes, Catherine Ingraham, Jecca,
Olga Kiseleva, Tina Laporta, Neil Leach, Bracha
Lichtenberg-Ettinger, Katie Lloyd Thomas, Vera
Mantero, Petra Marguc, Matrix (Julia Dwyer and Anne
Thorne), Brigid McLeer, Fiona Meadows, Monique
Minaca, muf, Sally Munt, Ilana Salama Ortar, Marie-
Paule Pages, Doina Petrescu, Sadie Plant, Patricia
Boinest Potter, Anne Querrien, Jane Rendell, Victoria
Rosner, Carolsan Shea, Lucy Sheerman, Helen
Stratford and Andrea Wheeler.

a guest professor at the time, and Hélène Cixous as my PhD
supervisor in the department of Etudes Féminines at the
University Paris 8. Without them, the conference would never
have happened in a location and context that were not particu-
larly open to feminism at the time. *Alterities* was a significant
feminist event but also an occasion to confront positions
and perspectives, to empathise, to connect and go further.
It has also empowered some of us to continue, restart, revise
and eventually reinvent our practices.
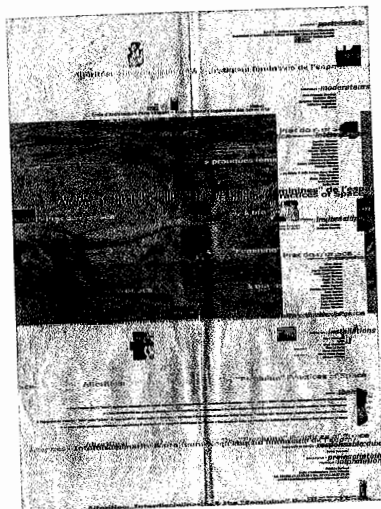
Alterities poster

I realise now that writing about feminist practices in archi-
tecture, twelve years after the publication of *Architecture
and the Feminine: Mop-Up Work*, when issues of feminism in
architecture looked already outdated, still remains a marginal
undertaking. Jennifer Bloomer had noted even then that 'the
surface has been barely scratched in this area. There must be
40 years of work to be done on architecture and the feminine.'
This 'scratched surface' she refers to nevertheless does

metaphorically constitute a ground. Not a ground to settle
on, but a ground to allow growth, to encourage others to go
further in their practices.

I organised *Alterities* because I wanted to continue the
commitment for the next '40 years' with the 'mop-up work',
the 'reinvention of her practice', the 'making of space', the
'nomadic subjectivity' in architecture. The poster that we
designed for the conference reinterpreted the *ANY* publica-
tion cover and the word 'feminine' was put in inverted commas
in the title to signify the critical use of a term that had been
taken apart from its meaning and history and split into new
discussions.[2] The title of the conference reiterated the
question of the 'feminine' from the critical stance of the 1990s
and the perspective of current feminist theories. The use of
inverted commas indicated that we were no longer speaking of
'woman' and her spatial practices within a theory of dichotomy
and a dream of unity, but more within a heterogeneous
spectrum of the 'feminine' coming under a theory of 'alterity'.

'Alterities' became an invented word to name the multiple
possibilities of praxis: 'other spatial practices' or practising
'otherwise', expressing alternative and alterative positions
formulated according to the current re-compositions of indi-
vidual and collective subjectivities within the new technolog-
ical and geopolitical contexts. We were also speaking 'in
several languages' from non-exclusive and non-generalising
positions, trying to overcome the binary of traditional logics
and politics and undermine conventional institutions and
dominant ideologies. The conference addressed different
fields and disciplines: architecture, art, media, psychoanalysis,
literature, sociology, politics.[3] We were aware that translation
and trans-disciplinary moves are familiar to any feminist
approach because women and relations between genders are
everywhere and cannot be contained within a single discipli-
nary framework.

2   The discussion panels in *Alterities* included: Spaces (of the) 'Other': Alternative Strategies of the Architectural Project. Geopolitical Crossings. Feminist Contributions. The Interdisciplinarity of the Feminine Practices: Transversalities and Transgressions. Pedagogies of Alterity: 'Doing' Between 'Thinking' and 'Unknowing'. Technologies, Ecologies and Poetics. The Gendered Body: Art Practices – Architectural Experiments – New Aesthetics of Space.
3   *Alterities* pointed to what we could call a 'situated trans-disciplinarity' – respectful of closures, especially when we are willing to transgress them.

Instead of 'architecture', we took 'space' as a more open category, theorised within a trans-disciplinary framework.[4] The contemporary understanding of 'space' has changed from its traditional metaphysical roots. As Sadie Plant notes in her chapter, the contemporary paradigms and rules emerging from technology and cyberspace contaminate the traditional concept of space, forcing a thinking of it as a fluid environ- ment composed of self-regulating, reactive and intelligent networks. An architecture which integrates intelligent materials and self-regulatory systems must be conceived, according to Sadie, as a process which generates continuous change. It is 'space' which represents, in some way, contempo- rary 'alterity'.[5]

Improvision: 5 minutes. Performance by Vera Mantero in Palais des Etudes of Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts, 4th June 1999 (Credit: D. Petrescu)

The understanding of space has also changed with the evolution of global processes, the current social conflicts and their geopolitical reconfigurations. Space is today understood differently by the feminist theorists who are increasingly concerned with issues of mobility, 'nomadism', 'positioning' and 'situatedness'. 'Connectionist models' mark also a shift away from the central, organising, transcendent thinking of evolutionary processes within space and architecture.

The excitement after the conference generated the idea of a collectively edited book, but as Jennifer said at the time, a book has to be thought of not as a solid object but as a bag that takes the shape of what is contained. The 'bag' filled with

4   In her co-edited book, *Gender, Space, Architecture,* Jane Rendell talked about 'space' as the topic which allowed the start of an interdisciplinary feminist approach to architecture.
5   See Sadie Plant's Chapter 18 in this volume.
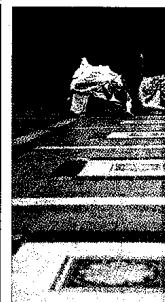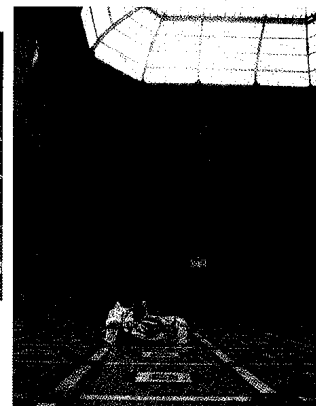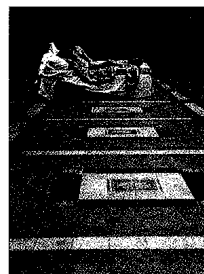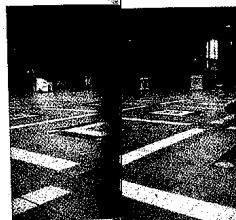
Alterities papers has since changed shape, it has been altered by time. Some of the chapters in this book relate back to *Alterities*, others are newly invited contributions, trying to update the problematic that was discussed at the conference but also trying to mark a shift in time. Having to publish today a book that originated in this event and having to transfer papers initially submitted on floppy discs to DVDs, I felt it was important at the same time to tell the story of *Alterities*, to reveal its context within feminist theory and practice in the

late 1990s and what has happened since. Seven years later, the same story is told differently, from an already historical perspective, in which 'history' is both that of the feminist practices (of space) and the intersection between the 'hi/stories' and 'herstories' of some of those involved in the conference.[6] All these 'collective fabulations' that 'build in the past in a way that challenges the future', all these accounts

6   According to Maria Puig de la Bellacasa: *Writing hi/stories instead of histories or stories is a small attempt to deviate from the truth or fiction alternative. The accounts we make through our knowledge constr- uctions are rooted in reality and representations. They are not mere illusionary fictions nor mere real truths, they are collective fabulations building the past in a* way that challenges the future. Fabulation is a concept that I take from G. Deleuze and F. Guattari. Fabulation is a constitutive gesture of a community, which marks the creative character of truth.

'Feminist knowledge politics in situated zones: A different hi/story of knowledge construction' (*womeninweb.women.it/cyberarchive/files/puig.htm*)

Doina Petrescu

Alterities discussion (Credit: D. Petrescu)

disseminated in the papers, constitute a multi-voiced
narrative, a multiplicity of personal and creative overviews
of the event, that I wanted to record as well. I have also tried
to situate this book within the context of its production,
knowing from Braidotti that '*situatedness* is a powerful appeal
to yearning, an effort to work out shared meanings of a
situation without trying to transcend it. A situated account
of knowledge construction resembles more an implicated
mapping gesture than a normative foundational gesture.7
I wanted *Altering practices* to be a situated account, an
implicated mapping gesture of what happened before and
after *Alterities*.
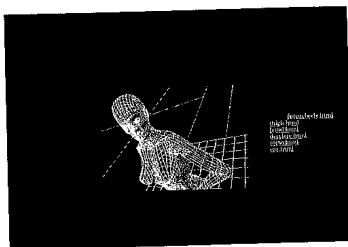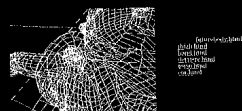
Future_body, version 1.0 (Credit: Tina Laporta)

7   Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, New York:
Columbia University Press, 1994.

Doina Petrescu

ALTERING PRAC

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Becomings, yearnings

The *Altering practices* based their meaning on *Alterities*. They both refer to *alter* – the Latin word for 'other' – more as a verb than a noun. They speak about making or becoming different, about change, a change that could relate to time or directly to gender.[1] In a Deleuzian language, *Altering practices* are 'becomings'; they are 'active, dynamic processes of thinking and transformation, and an affirmation of "difference" as a positive quality'. This notion of 'becoming' has already been appropriated by the contemporary feminist project. Feminist thinkers such as Rosi Braidotti or Elisabeth Grosz have theorised the feminist subject as 'a term in a process of intersecting forces [affects], spatio-temporal variables that are characterized by their mobility, change-ability, and transitory nature'.[2] *Becomings* are 'ways of establishing concrete material and semiotic connections among subjects that are conceived in terms of a multiplicity of forces/affects'.[3]

While the logic of *'becoming'* may offer the potential for an infinite variety of constellations, forming and reforming in perpetual change, specific *'becomings'* are always located, they are always fostered by their particular situation, historically, materially and critically.

Understood in these terms, the present book maps a particularly located and materialised transformation of the contemporary feminist project in architecture but also, as Francesca Hughes notices in her chapter, a certain becoming of the architectural theory and practice in general.

The *Altering practices* are named after the process they induce, *by what they do*. They rely on the transformative power of 'altering', on both its positive and critical dynamics. In the syntagm 'altering practices', 'altering' could mean 'undermining', 'subverting' received identities and authoritative rules, norms and tools and working out other shared meanings throughout their transformation; it could also be an appeal to *yearning*. 'Yearning', this gift made to theory by the black

1 NB: To 'alter' in American English could literally mean 'to change gender'.

2 Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, p.111.
3 Ibid.

feminism, combines hope, moaning and desire, everything that a soul hungers for and is powerless to define, that which will transform the soul rather than be appropriated by it. It brings a sense of immanence that, instead of overcoming contradictions, enables us to slip through them. As bell hooks has put it, the question of 'yearning' is not 'who we are' but 'what we want to become'; the *Altering practices* are about *what we want the world to become*.[4]

Collective re-constructions

Altering practices have taken further the 'mop-up work' begun by their predecessors into a multiplicity of figurations, a number of gestures, figures and actions that constitute the spectrum of these practices in this volume: *'urban curating', 'making space', 'taking place', 'urban cooking', 'drifting walls', 'mapping invisible privileges', 'confessional constructions'...*

They are accompanied by a collection of concepts and metaphors: *chaos, complexity, fluidity, emergence, lightness, connectionism, multiplicity, networks, self-organisation...* We realised that most of the paradigms that structure our contemporary thinking of space have been shaped by the feminist imaginary. But most of them have been brought into theory through technologically and scientifically rooted discourses, losing their poetical and political dimensions. Contributions to this book, such as those by Francesca Hughes, Jennifer Bloomer or Sadie Plant, try to re-appropriate such paradigms. They define the *Altering practices* as gestures of discursive re-appropriation of theoretical territories and actions that frame the contemporary understanding of space.

This act of re-appropriation within a feminist project has to do with knowledge construction and knowledge politics. A political approach to knowledge means, in feminist terms:

a delicate and implicated re-construction of its processes, the search of the links and relations between many different elements often irreducible one to another. In feminism, this gaze

4   bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*, Boston, MA: South End Press, 1990.

into knowledge is informed by confidence on *collective* re-constructions, not only on theoretical deconstructions.[5]

These *collective reconstructions*, in our case, suppose ways of doing and undoing, ways of making and remaking space, of 'producing space' according to 'altered' rules and values. These ways are both political and poetic.

We can also talk about *Altering practices* as practices of 'curating', of 'care taking', acknowledging the work of reconstruction and re-production that bears ethical and emotional charge, the kind of work that was always associated with women. Authors in this volume talk about the importance of memory and genealogies in practices of 'urban curating' (Meike Schalk), 'making space' (Matrix), 'urban cooking' (Kim Trogal), 'civic performance' (Ilana Salama Ortar), 'detailing' (Helen Stratford), 'drawing "otherhow"' (Katie Lloyd Thomas), 'mapping invisible privileges' (muf), 'confessional constructions' (Jane Rendell), 'counter-representations of difference' (Marion von Osten), 'stepping on *stray sods*' (Brigid McLeer), 'longing' and 'standing in for matter/mater' (Jennifer Bloomer and Francesca Hughes), 'building clouds and drifting walls' (Ruth Morrow).

Otherhow
These reconstructions also affect the subjects themselves, constituting at the same time, as Butler has argued, subversions of identitary constructions. The *Altering practices* are altering identities and re-territorialising domains that no longer correspond to traditional categorisations. Chapters in this volume reveal different kinds of practices of writing, teaching, building, planning or art that are breaking barriers between theories and practices, academia and activism and enabling new coalitions between different intellectual, aesthetic and political positions. They are subverting the critical division between 'thinking' and 'doing', emphasising the embodied character of the production of theory and the reflexive and situated approach to practice. Katie Lloyd

5   Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, 'Feminist knowledge politics in situated zones: A different hi/story of   knowledge construction' *(womeninweb.women.it/ cyberarchive/files/puig.htm)*

Thomas talks in her piece about ways of working that can
escape the straitjacket of being 'for' or 'against' and produce
unknown outcomes, which can exceed these oppositions. She
uncovers the importance within feminist practices of shifting
from 'practices of the other', to practising 'otherhow'.

Ruth Morrow's piece is about an 'otherhow' pedagogy in
architecture, which allows students to learn from outside
(of academia), and from others (than architects and teachers).
This pedagogy for the first years emphasises the creativity of
the everyday life and asks students to keep alive their memory
of being *ordinary users*.

She also addresses architecture and architectural education
as 'contested' domains, and proposes alterative ways to re-
conceptualise them as processes of managing conflicts rather
than necessarily trying always to resolve them.

A number of articles in *Altering practices* also propose an
'otherhow' approach to technology, a materialist thinking of
technology from a perspective which places the body in critical
continuity with the technological realm. Some of the authors,
such as Niran Abbas, continue the critique of feminist science
theorists such as Donna Haraway, and reconsider the relation-
ship between the body-politics and the techno-science politics.
The contributions of Francesca Hughes, Jennifer Bloomer or
Sadie Plant address the interactions between matter, tech-
nology and the body through limitations and sustainability
of the transformations they provoke: material, psychical,
affective, social, environmental.

Ways of (be)longing
The contributors look at these transformations as *embodied
genealogies*. They are interested in both *where they belong to*
and *how they become*. For example, Sadie, Jennifer and
Francesca point out the repression of matter and materiality
within Modern architecture and theory and its 'return' in the
contemporary architectural discourse. Given the traditional
association between *matter and mater*, this kind of repression
could obviously be related to the political repression of
women's contribution to Western culture. Francesca and Sadie
are reconstructing the legacies and filiations of this 'return' of

'matter' in contemporary discourses on space and architecture,
convoking also the return of 'mothers' by mentioning, for
example, Jennifer Bloomer's early work on 'dirt', 'formless'
and 'ornament' in architecture, and that of Irigaray on 'fluidity'
in philosophy. Jennifer's piece in the book shows how all
belonging is rooted in a *longing*, which always acts in a realm
defined by the *matter/mater* politics.

Discussing issues of identity and embodiment within tech-
nology and cyberspace, Niran draws attention in her chapter to
the patriarchal tensions existing in any form of socio-cultural
product, and the need to situate female subjectivity within a
gendered and politicised context in the cybercultural matrix.
The fusion of machine and organism becomes a progressive
and transgressive site for political activity only if it involves
the deconstruction of 'incompatible' frames of reference.

Ruth's pedagogy emphasises the importance of opening up
the architectural education to other disciplines and processes
and observes how, when internal dialogues are exposed, the
reactions of others enrich the meaning and progression of
these dialogues. This pedagogy prepares nomadic practitioners
in architecture, who act by questioning the traditional hierarch-
ies between client, architect and builder and by multiplying
relationships and fluidities within the architectural processes.

Meike Schalk discusses 'connectionist practices' and how,
by borrowing methodologies from other domains and collabo-
rations, urban designers could act as 'curators', as creators of
meaning through unusual and unexpected connections, rather
than 'planners' who impose their patronising meaning on space.

The practices of collective reconstruction need maps and
tools to read the new and rapidly changing spatiality of
knowledge and power. They are grounded in a politics of
location that maps out the different material conditions of our
lives, but at the same time the way these conditions stand in
relation to each other in terms of power and inequality. They
are both maps and 'agencies' showing the work of signification
and resignification.

In this sense, Ruth's 'pink booklet', which involves students
in the sharing of the transmission of knowledge and the
discourse that constructs their education, is one such map,

showing how power relationships could be altered within the
academic processes.

Marion von Osten's account of the exhibition *Sex & Space*
introduces the work of artists, architects, researchers and
theorists who investigate how space as a social, cultural and
political structure produces specifically gendered identities
and how the dominant construction of difference has been
deeply inscribed in our modern notion of space. They identify
and criticise discourses and modern legacies that support both
ethnic and gender-specific exclusions within the contempo-
rary capitalist city, realising that 'power is not just patriarchal
power against women, but it is subject to constant production,
reproduction and attribution processes'. In response to this,
the exhibition device is used as production studio for counter-
representations and non-hierarchical collaborations that
deconstruct knowledge and power relationship and make
visible forms of everyday work that usually go unnoticed.
To construct this 'other' space, they critically use text, photo-
graphy, film and the mainstream technology of communication
and display (like reality TV, the internet and movie sets),
emphasising with irony their materialist *détournement* and
manipulation.

Francesca Hughes talks in her piece about the critical use of
drawing in architecture, that for a long time has been the tool
of the male representation of 'form' based on exactitude and
precision, a type of representation that has always failed to
measure 'matter'. This is because matter doesn't deal with
precision, similarity and repetition, but emergence and differ-
ence... So what, then, will be the means of representation or
rather re-presentation of matter (in space)? Katie Lloyd
Thomas's chapter introduces her critical engagement with
architectural drawing from a feminist position, exposing her
concerns with its omissions, repressions, hidden motivations
and operations. She locates this critique in her own practice of
drawing, which is rooted in processes of collaboration, transla-
tion and reciprocal interpretation between 'drawing' and the
'text'. She is interested in both the materiality of drawing and
that of the written language, in their gendered and embodied
nature, in their interdependency and desiring temporality.

Taking on Joan Retallack's work on feminine textual
approaches, Brigid McLeer shows in her chapter how these
discourses are not always concerned with altering and making
sense of what has been produced within the existing norms
and conventions but are challenged to open up explorations
into forms of *'unintelligibility'* at the frontier of the 'feminine',
into what radically confronts reason and established
meanings, into what is inaudible or invisible to dominant
thought and ideology. The task of feminist reconstructions
is to figure this unintelligibility as 'a method of invention –
a process, a "rethinking", that reorders the social, political
and material culture'. It is a method that acts from a feminine
position understood as 'a remote position, necessarily outside
and tangential, that mobilises that position as an alternative
place, not separate from, but active upon, dominant sites
and discourses'.

The collective presence of the authors in the book is
located within a full range of practices from architecture to
writing, pedagogy, activism, media, civic performance and
art, mapping a spectrum of viewpoints, positions, cultures
and sites located in the United Kingdom, France, Switzerland,
Germany, Sweden, Senegal, Israel/Palestine and the United
States. This is the 'we' of the *Altering practices*: a collective,
heterogeneous and multiply situated subject, drawing on
different formations with each subjective instance, in each
chapter of the book. Butler talks about the 'tenuous and
phantasmatic' status of the pronoun 'we' in feminist theory,
always having to deny its complexity and indeterminacy and
constituting itself only through the exclusion of some part of
the constituency that it simultaneously seeks to represent.[6]

Yet, this volume enacts once again this performative
embodiment of the collective feminist subject – always at
risk when it is pronounced because already in movement,
in continual transformation, de-centring and reconfiguring
alliances within a shared political and poetical project.
Following the feminist imperatives of 'being together' and
'reconstructing social relations in a different way', the

6   Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the
Subversion of Identity, London: Routledge, 1990, p.137.

Altering practices draw on a politics of affinity, of alliances, of contaminations, of re-appropriation, of becoming.

'Poetics of relation' and the power to produce difference

Although in the *Alterities* conference there were many men participating, moderating and giving papers, one might note that in this book there are only female authors. This was not a deliberate decision: this omission resulted from a series of alea and transformations induced by the long editing process within the book. In order to correct it, I didn't look specifically for male contributors to play the token role. The book has consequently become a kind of 'room of our own', a piece of feminine textuality, a collective bag woven by women's voices to host their yearnings on space and transformation. And even if one could argue that not all practices included here are explicitly 'feminist', feminist strengths can be identified in the way they position themselves within their professional, social and political context. They are feminist in the way they *take place* and *alter it.*

This multiple connection between pieces resulted in a book which is not divided into thematic sections but takes its shape from a 'mise-en-relation entre des voix-femmes' in which each piece negotiates its proximities within a text like a rhizome, in which any identity extends itself towards another... Most authors in the book know each other, have previously met and collaborated; they cross-refer and comment on each other's work in their chapters, sometimes even still work together and form collectives, as is the case with the Taking Place group. The way contributions are written carries on this performative *being, thinking* and *acting together*, within a rhizomatic config- uration, which conserves the multiplicity of singular positions.

Feminist textual practices are less based on interpretation than on decoding the network of connections and effects that link the text to an entire socio-symbolic system. They embed both a creative and a critical dimension. As put by Braidotti, the feminist text is materialist, is a term in a process, that is to say, a chain reaction encompassing a web of power relations.

That's why relations and connections are not always simple. Jane Rendell speaks in her piece about her long-term critical

relationship with French feminism which is structural to her practice of theory and activates the conflicts between her theoretical knowledge and her political aspirations. She points to the difficult and controversial relations with power and authority, with the values of patriarchal capitalism that run right through academic research and the institutional power structures, that even feminist approaches might reproduce without acknowledging.

Liza Fior, in Chapter 4, underlined Matrix's legacy in the practice of muf but also how, in male-dominated contexts, such as the architectural profession, women's practices are automatically related to and compared with other women's practices just as women tend to be compared with other women. Still critical of the fake relationism, muf base their work on a relational logic and explain that one of the conditions of making a project successful is to build creative relationships with its clients and users. They point to the understanding of the 'personal' as 'political' and the expansion of this principle as a method of brief development. There is a materialism in the way a project can be organised and managed which influences the materiality of the resulted objects. Before being a building, the project is a *rhizome*. The figure of the *rhizome*, borrowed from Deleuze, and much discussed lately in architectural theory, belongs to the poetics of relations. For Braidotti, 'difference' is always to be consid- ered within a relational condition.

Anne Querrien speaks in her chapter about 'difference' as 'power to produce difference'. She addresses the need to create forms of public space that welcome this reproductive power of difference: openly productive spaces that decode themselves as spaces to be continually re-appropriated and transformed...

Ilana Salama Ortar criticises the consumerist public space in Haifa, which erases difference within the social and political memory and transforms everything into commodity. Ilana's work tries to 'thwart' the effects of this erasure, by bringing back into the public realm the image of what has been forced to disappear under the ironic form of an object for sale that questions, by its strange and unexpected presence, the nature of the whole process of erasure.

'Thwarting'

'Thwarting' is, according to Jacques Rancière, the specific
mode of political activity:

Political activity is that which removes a body from a location to
which it was assigned, or that changes the determination given
to a location; it permits the seeing of something no location was
supposed to have seen, permits speech to be listened to where
formerly only noise could have been heard... Politics exists when
the natural suppositional logic of the ruling power... is thwarted...
Politics are not made by power relationships but by relations
between worlds.[7]

'Altering' could sometimes mean 'thwarting', which is also a
spatial word. The *Altering practices* are political in their way of
thwarting, of interrupting continuity and making room within
the dominating rules in academia, professional practices,
public life... They are also poetical, *poethical*, to borrow the
term suggested by Brigid, in their way of making other worlds
possible and suggesting other solutions to the challenge of
reality than mere *adaptation*. Their ways of thwarting involve
resisting homogenisation, normativity, regularisation and
automatisms, not only within the profession but in everyday
life itself. This political 'thwarting' is at the same time a
form of 'critical openness' which, as suggested by Jane in her
chapter, could leave space for other economies than those
induced by the ruling power of the 'patriarchal capitalism', for
new models of reciprocity, new two-way exchanges, patterns
and dynamics of equivalence.

Micro-strategies, minor architectures

Helen Stratford talks in her chapter about 'micro-strategies
of resistance' that are located within the realm of the 'micro'.
Feminist practices are dealing with micro-strategies as local-
ised resistances that can respond to individual oppressions and
thus allow for a plurality of statements and a complexity of
identities. 'Micro', for her, refers to 'the rejection of any general

7   Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philo-
sophy*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.

or universalising emphasis'; it indicates 'not a difference in
scale but a difference in kind'. Also, she theorises the *detail*
which interprets the 'micro' as less a specific scale of looking
than a *field of inquiry*, 'a dispersed framework through which
to re-view space and spatial relations'.

Following feminist interpretations of Foucault and
Guattari, Helen shows how this logic leads to the possibility
of defining diffused powers and politics at the 'molecular'
level of subjectivities and comments on the 'micro-politics'
developed by the feminist group Matrix and discussed by
Julia Dwyer and Anne Thorne in chapter 3.

'Micro' is related to the 'minor', another mode of operating
within feminist practices. Referring to Jennifer's idea of 'minor
architecture', Kim Trogal brings in her chapter the example
of a project for an 'open kitchen', which uses the language of
cookery to form a political statement regarding the processes
of building in architecture and to criticise urban development
conditions in the post-industrial city of Sheffield.

Ilana's Civic Performance Art projects demonstrate how a
minority point of view works always within an articulation of
scales and kinds. She points directly to the Israeli-Palestinian
conflict by reconstructing the model of a demolished Pales-
tinian house in the hall of an Israeli supermarket, which was
erected in its place, thus indicating the contiguity between her
own 'micro-politics' and the geopolitics shaping the context of
her project.

In another context, the micro-politics of urban curating
adopted by Meike Schalk's team in Stockholm were the critical
alternative to approach the large-scale regeneration of the
harbour area.

'Politics & poetics of (dis)location'

The gendered, racialised and classed identities are 'fluid',
being constructed and sustained by geographies of place,
space and time and being produced 'in different ways
in different places.[8] *Altering practices* are concerned with

8   Geraldine Pratt and Pauline Hanson, 'Geography
and the Construction of Difference', *Gender, Place and
Culture* 1(1) (1994): 9.

'politics of location', a term that we borrow with Braidotti from the feminist poet Adrienne Rich.[9] A *location*, in Rich's sense, is both a geopolitical notion and a notion that can only be mediated in language and consequently be the object of imaginary relations.

That's why the politics of location are also poetics of location – they imagine the place taken by the feminist subject and at the same time the way in which this place is removed from the dominant culture. Because, as muf point out in their piece 'an invisible privilege', the location is not always a 'privilege' and could restrain the possibility of creativity which seems dependent on some sort of hidden spatial matrix of social and political circumstance... That's why this location should sometimes be understood as a dis-location, an unexpected shifting to other meanings and places. *She enters by stepping on a 'stray sod'*, Brigid says in her chapter.

The 'political' and the 'poetic' are not opposed but are chiasmatically exchanged within the *Altering practices* that talk about politics that are always poetics: forms of *poiesis*, 'ways of making', of working with space which are common to all the contributors of this book. They explore modes of practising and writing that refuse reductive binary oppositions, denounce patriarchal structures, criticise economic and political dominations and instigate new political and poetical regimes based on alliances, re-appropriations and becomings.

Teresa Hoskyns, Doina Petrescu and other mixe

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