Architecture & Feminisms: Ecologies/Economies/Technologies
AHRA (Architectural Humanities Research Association) 2016
architecturefeminisms.org

Dr Harriet Harriss
Head of MPhil/PhD programme
Architecture & Interior Design
School of Architecture
Royal College of Art
London
SW7 2EU
UK

Gem Barton
Course Leader
BA (Hons) Interior Architecture
Mithras House,
Lewes Road
University of Brighton
BN2 4AT
UK

Gem Barton is an author and course leader of BA (Hons) Interior Architecture at the University of Brighton. Her specialisms include design education, the humanization and objectification of space and objects, the grey area between reality and representation, and the use of fiction as a means for driving and understanding architecture.

Dr Harriet Harriss (RIBA) leads the Architecture School PhD programme at the Royal College of Art in London. Her teaching, research and writing are largely focussed upon pioneering new and even 'radical' pedagogic models for design education. Her next book, A Gendered Profession', (RIBA Publications, Nov 2016) examines ways to address the lack of diversity - beyond gender binaries - within today's architecture practice and education environments.
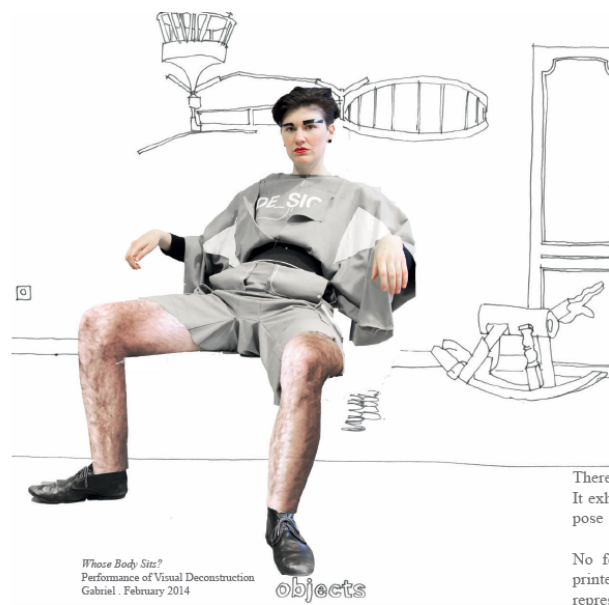

Fig 1. Gabriel Ann Maher (2014) Whose Body Sits

Objectified Interior:
Gendered, non-gendered, re-gendered tools for spatial production

Gem Barton & Dr Harriet Harriss

"….*we constantly drift between the object & its demystification, powerless to render its wholeness. For if we penetrate the object, we liberate it but we destroy it; and if we*

acknowledge its full weight, we respect it, but we restore it to a state which is still mystified.'
Barthes, (1957), p.159

'*…I haven't perceived a texture until I've instantaneously hypothesised whether the object I'm perceiving was sedimented, extruded, laminated, granulated, polished, distressed, felted or fluffed up.*'
Sedgwick, (2003), p.13-14

The perennial question, *can design be genderless* has become increasingly complicated by our fluid, contingent, nuanced and transient gender identities. Most commonly, our collective focus is on the possible gender of spatial outcomes, rather than the processes themselves: upon the genders we attribute to interiors and exteriors, and not upon the role that the objects or indeed *tools* of spatial production play in shaping gendered outcomes. This paper therefore seeks to consider to what extent our processes are gendered, how this impacts upon space and whether there are ways in which the tools of spatial production can be un-gendered, re-gendered or non-gendered.

Writing from the perspective of interior architecture educators familiar with the parallels between object-versus-absence-of-an object and exteriority-versus-interiority disciplinary tensions, we explore the extent to which we are complicit agents of gender assignation: by failing to question both the tactic and explicit identity of the objects or tools used to author space. We do this by examining the role of linguistics in assigning gender to objects, calling into question the extent to which supposedly gendered objects inform the wider social relations of space, forcing us to consider the need for a new lexicon of non-binary spatial syntax. Our analysis also reflects upon the outcomes of a making exercise run during the AHRA Architecture and Feminisms Conference (at KTH, Stockholm, Nov 2016) and a student workshop run at the Royal College of Art. Drawing inspiration from the work of Helene Cixous (1999), the Stockholm workshop began with a piece of provocative prose and invited participating delegates to engage in de-gendering objects and/or making their own gendered/non-gendered objects/voids. As anthropologist Daniel Miller identifies, objects "continually assert their presence as simultaneously material force and symbol. They frame the way we act in the world, as well as the way we think about the world'. (Miller, 1987, p.105) Subsequently, the artefacts produced in both workshops are qualitatively examined using the theoretical tools of constructivism within a feminist analytical framework.