

[L]’ère de la domination de l’Etat-nation et de la culture nationale est finie. Nous nous trouvons aujourd’hui dans des eaux inexplorées, à essayer de trouver suffisamment de stabilité pour réaliser nos rêves, ce qui s’appelle « vivre sa vie de l’intérieur » et qui est le rêve de tout le monde. Vivre sa vie en soi, sans le moindre statut, sans la moindre religion. Ce qui signifie également que nous devons garder des attachements, des liens, des choses auxquelles nous puissions nous identifier, sans qu’il s’agisse pour autant d’une identité solide. Vivre avec la « différence », apprendre à vivre avec l’ouverture et l’incertitude, avec la non-fermeture et la non-finalité, vivre sa vie comme un texte ouvert, comme un entretien infini... Ce sont quasiment de nouvelles aptitudes humaines, comme si nous avions été rendus incapables par trois à quatre siècles d’européocentrisme, deux siècles de rationalisme des Lumières, cent ans d’impérialisme téléologique, conduits à vivre les uns avec les autres, en tant que les autres.

[T]he era dominated by the nation-state and national cultures is finished. Now we are in uncharted waters of trying to find enough stability to realise our dreams, to live our lives from the inside. Which is the dream of everybody. To live, you live from inside yourself, not as it is given by your status or religion. Which means that we have to have attachments, places or things we can identify with, but not necessarily any consolidated identity. Living with “difference” learning to live with the openness and uncertainty, with non-closure, non-finality, and to live life as an open text. These are almost new human skills. It is almost as if we were untrained by 300 or 400 years of Eurocentrism, and 200 years of Enlightenment rationalism, and 100 years of high imperialism – cultural to live with the others, as others.

— Stuart Hall

Extrait du numéro 1 « The world with it self » en campagne de Stuart Hall. *Artforum*, 1999, n° 37, octobre 1999, édVA, Londres.

radio temporaire est un projet collectif né en 1999 et rendu possible grâce à la co-opération de différent/es intervenant/es et co-producteurs/trices des entretiens et des textes retranscrits dans cette publication. Initié par Zeigam Azizov, Sylvie Desroches, Dean Inkster, Alejandra Riera, Caecilia Tripp, et Adrian Laubscher, le projet radio temporaire est issu des discussions et échanges menés dans le cadre du programme d'études curatoriales du Centre National d'Art Contemporain, Le Magasin de Grenoble, France.

radio temporaire is a collective project started in 1999 and made possible thanks to the co-operation of different participants and co-producers of the interviews and texts published here. Initiated by Zeigam Azizov, Sylvie Desroches, Dean Inkster, Alejandra Riera, Caecilia Tripp and Adrian Laubscher, radio temporaire sprung from a series of discussions and exchanges organized within the context of the curatorial studies program at the Centre National d'Art Contemporain Le Magasin in Grenoble, France.

radiotemporaire

The Sensitivity of the Viewer, the Sensitivity of the User...

Meeting with Julia Dwyer and Anne Thorne (ex-Matrix), 28th September 1999, London

Is there such a thing as a specifically feminine language of the body? Are buildings, space, and furniture gendered?

Charlotte Perriand: "Architecture goes from inside to outside. It should respond to our needs, act as the continuation of our gestures at the tips of our fingertips. Architecture is biological."¹

Julia Dwyer: Obviously for me, there is a specifically feminine language of the body, it is something that is learnt from a very young age. It has been very well explored by feminists looking at things like the male gaze and this self-consciousness about the body for me that is just *everywhere and obvious...*

Anne Thorne: Women have a very different attitude to their work and a very different way of approaching things and communicating both as clients asking for design and as architects or designers designing. They ask different questions, the answers are quite often different. But how much that is a result of conditioning or a true difference is still to be explored and will probably never be defined...

Julia Dwyer: There is a difference between designing sensitively and designing in a way that is caring. In this sense women designers are very conscious of subtle *movements* and of the *sensitivity of the viewer* and the *user*, and the client. It doesn't however mean that the projects they work on are very caring. They could be working on anything and be behaving in that sensitive way. Some people have in the past said that women architects have tended to mainly work on social projects because they are sensitive, but I don't think these are the same thing...

¹ Charlotte Perriand, *Une Vie de création* (Paris: Editions Odile Jacob, 1998).

² The Museum of Women's Art: conceptual design model and Arts Council funded feasibility study in 1995.

³ "Are feminine constructions more attentive to the aspects of childhood and memory?"

⁴ Elizabeth Grosz, "Bodies-Cities" in Beatriz Colomina ed., *Sexuality and Space* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992), p. 248.

⁵ *Shared Ground, Southwark Street: 1 km of Urban Transformation*, 1996-1998 (still in progress)

⁶ *Pleasure Garden of the Utilities*, Stoke on Trent, an initiative of the Can Do Scarman Trust, 1998. For this project, muf collaborated with the workers of a ceramic fabric (Armitage Shanks Cliff Vale), to create benches for a public space for rest, which includes trees. Extract from muf's website: "the hands of the person you sit next to on the bus, or pass in the street are the hands of the person who molded the plate from which you eat your dinner".

⁷ *What Would It Take?:* three research projects for the Scarman Can Do Trust initiative in the Birmingham periphery: with the Law Learning and Leisure organization in Handsworth, the Restless Youth Club in Shard End, and the Modular Playstrip in Bromford in 1998.

⁸ *Ibid.*

Open, hidden, empty: does this define femininity and its spatial practices?

Charlotte Perriand: "The void is all-powerful because it can contain everything."²

Anne Thorne: I think it is really difficult to be as clear as that because there are women architects like Zaha Hadid who have done very strong or quite brutalist designs for buildings, like Allison Smithson, which I don't think you could necessarily put in opposition to men designing vertical, phallic buildings. And in this country, only 8% of architects are women, and so how many have actually had an opportunity to design a large building, you know to actually be able to explore that, and to be able to understand what it would mean for women to be designing large buildings is something *we don't really know about yet*, that is an interesting thing which will evolve I hope...

Julia Dwyer: I like tall buildings in certain situations. One of the projects that is being explored in Britain at the moment is how you actually build again tall housing blocks in a way that would work. There was a teaching unit last year led by a woman engineer at a very famous architecture school in London, called The Architectural Association, that was entirely to do with the construction of tall buildings...

Anne Thorne: Women's perceptions are slightly different from men's in the way that they see and use the environment. Some of this again is socially engendered, because most women are concerned about using the external environment, public space even though men are more likely to be attacked in that space... the way they view public space is different from the way men view public space. There are some very interesting things to be explored about how women map the city, how they see the city. The famous map of London, the A-Z, was invented by a woman as a way of understanding the geography of London. It is a very different perspective than, say, a technical map of London...

Julia Dwyer: The question of formalism is one of the things behind tall buildings... In many parts of the world now there is a competition to build the tallest building. There is one in Korea going up and Frankfurt and one in Kuala Lumpur. And these are all just ridiculous *competitions* to build tall buildings and, male architects, a certain kind of male architects, have these projects of building the tallest building, like Norman Foster, the famous British architect... and that kind of fetish, which is a formalist and competitive fetish, it is not just architects but their clients, developers, the cities that want these buildings, the

mayors, politicians etc. that I would characterise as a *male attitude*... You asked whether furniture / architectural spaces have a gender, this turns these objects into persons doesn't it? Whereas I can't understand a house as a person, or even a machine. I think that the way you look at it and experience it, this is what creates the gendering of a situation, or of a space or a house... how its understanding is transferred in society from one person to another, how it's talked about, this makes it gendered... For example Wimbledon Tennis Club, for me, is a gendered space... Because a lot of very famous tennis women have made extremely strong statements by coming out as lesbians or as feminists, Martina Navratilova, Billie Jean King... So the Women's Wimbledon Singles Final is a very important match, and also the colours of Wimbledon are purple and green, the Suffragette colours... This is a coincidence... But I have gone past this place in the middle of the day and I've seen women standing outside having their pictures taken by other women, it is a strange, odd place of pilgrimage... It's a social construct...

Anne Thorne: But the question is, whether in the ultimate extreme, whether there are certain spaces that you could never use, either men could never use, or women could never use, successfully. I haven't got an answer to that...

Sylvie Desroches: That's an interesting idea, could you speak about some places which for you are like that?

Anne Thorne: Well currently in the City, there are places like underpasses, streets, which women don't use, or use very transiently... and avoid using in a full sense completely. Whereas maybe men use those at the moment, women still don't use public space, although statistics prove that they could use it. But then there are social constructs which affect that.

Julia Dwyer: You were involved in a project which was exactly about changing that perception in a series of underground passageways in London, Anne...

Anne Thorne: It's true, I'd be amazed if any woman was involved in the concept of subway underground tunnels. Because most women would never dream of going across the city like that, going underground and giving cars, machines the priority... this is a crazy idea... the same as building very big bridges for pedestrians to walk over motorways and so on!

Julia Dwyer: I think though that many buildings and built spaces in the city,

public spaces, are obviously completely designed from a male point of view by men in every respect. So the height of things and surfaces and facilities are all determined by male needs. An extreme situation might be a female rugby team, of which there are many now, using male changing rooms. When women go into those places they change them: they close the door, they stop men coming in... But the problem is, it's *a compromise*, because everything that they are using has *not been designed with them in mind*...

Anne Thorne: That is the interesting thing about working with women and trying to design buildings as a woman. Because women are so used to compromising and adapting. So that when you are starting afresh with a new building and you say what would you like, it is very difficult for most women to actually get to grips with the idea that they can think what they want for themselves.

Sylvie Desroches: It comes from education in the first place, women have always learnt to abnegate... You seem too have mainly worked with women... How was this collaboration and consultation? How could they express their needs?

Are feminine spaces places of dialogue, open to the other, on a different scale, do they take users more into account?

Elizabeth Grosz: "The city in its particular geographical, architectural, spatializing, municipal arrangements is one particular ingredient in the social constitution of the body."¹

Anne Thorne: We had to *provoke discussion* with models, with outings, to look at buildings, while trying to talk things through in quite a wide way. We had to allow space for people to go away, think about it and come back... and the other important thing is *demystifying technicalities*. What would happen was that you'd be talking about possibilities with women and then quite often there would be somebody, usually male and technical, who was supposedly helping them, who'd come up with technical reasons about why you can't do something and actually having a woman there who was able to interpret what that technical problem was... so it wasn't just that it was a technical problem and you couldn't do it. But it meant you might have to think about this differently... and very quickly. Women, because they are so used to being adaptable were able to think through another way of doing things...

Julia Dwyer: We had one client who had trained as an architect, but in the end

she didn't complete her training and became involved in making a community garden in Kings Cross, a very dense area of London. And these people took an empty site, where the houses had been demolished, and transformed it into a garden... A very large function of the garden was to provide a place for children to play and they wanted to make a proper nursery for children to play. They also had many gardening groups from different ethnic groups that live in Kings Cross—a Chinese gardening group and a Bangladeshi group—and this woman who was a co-ordinator was very active in bringing up ideas for the kinds of building that she might want and that they might want. And together with Matrix, she set up consultation with all the different groups using the garden, she created events like picnics, big open days at the garden which would end with a meeting and a discussion about where the design could go. And she made it very clear that, for example, the images that we used could come not only from England or Britain but also from other parts of the world related to some of the groups...

Anne Thorne: It is really interesting, when you use images which actually relate to people's cultural background, how much that frees and opens things up for them, changes the discussion and makes them feel included to the point where they feel that they can contribute... not necessarily particularly relating back to their culture but it just *opens up the field for them so that they can join in*. Whereas it is quite easy to be exclusive in design and to make people feel embarrassed because they don't know enough about steel and chrome and modern design, which is a good technical sort of exclusion tool...

Julia Dwyer: We were very committed to making good buildings in every sense of the word, that satisfied everybody, including ourselves. We wanted to bring the clients into that feeling of excitement and interest in design, so that the building was more than simply answering some functional problems...

Sylvie Desroches: It was a response to a common desire...

Julia Dwyer: One of the most positive experiences of working in Matrix was the way in which the buildings evolved in relation to discussions and exchanges...

1 Charlotte Perriand, *Une Vie de création* (Paris: Éditions Odile Jacob, 1998).

2 *Op. cit.*

3 Elizabeth Grosz, "Bodies-Cities" in Beatriz Colomina ed., *Sexuality and Space* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992), p. 248.