# Making (Domestic) Space: Feminist Spatial Practices in Britain's Long Nineteen-Eighties

## *Eve Nicholson*

Rat Race Recs

Photograph of Archway subway. Reproduced from Matrix, *Making Space: Women and the Man-Made Environment*, ed. Matrix (London: Pluto Press, 1984).

Matrix Feminist Design Co-operative was founded in 1979 in Hackney, London. Matrix comprised a group of women who worked as architects, builders, teachers, and writers seeking to develop a feminist approach to both critiquing and shaping the built environment.[1] Its membership fluctuated over its lifespan but in total included between twenty and thirty-five women—many of whom were only loosely affiliated. Early members included Anne Thorne, Susan Francis, Julia Dwyer, Fran Bradshaw, Barbara McFarlane, and Jos Boys. Ann de-Graft Johnson, and Benedicte Foo were later important additions. According to Dwyer and Thorne "at least seven Matrix members did building work professionally"—reflecting the cooperative's belief that "the way to [really] change things" was to engage in the "whole process" of building and designing.[2] Matrix was also divided into a design and book group. Whilst the former worked on building projects, mainly for community groups, the latter developed Matrix's co-authored manifesto *Making Space* (1984)—the first book in Britain to link transatlantic feminist theory to the production of the built environment. Key buildings that Matrix worked on included Lambeth Women's Workshop (hereafter, LWW) (1979–80), Jagonari Educational Resource Centre (Jagonari) (1984–87), Dalston Children's Centre in Hackney (DCC) (1984–85), and Jumoke Nursery in Southwark (Jumoke) (1986–88). The essay that follows focuses on the work of Matrix contributors and contributes to renewed conversations about how British feminists used domestic space in this period to realize their political goals. Through *participation, emotion,* and the *archive,* I argue Matrix expanded who domestic space was *for,* how it should *feel,* and how it should be *remembered*. These ideas continue to ripple through contemporary architectural practice.

---

[1] Matrix, preface to *Making Space: Women and the Man-Made Environment*, ed. Matrix (London: Pluto Press, 1984), xvii; "Amendment to Manifesto Notes," loose document, M02111, Matrix Open Feminist Architecture Archive (MOfaa)

[2] Julia Dwyer and Anne Thorne, "Evaluating Matrix—Notes from inside the Collective," in *Altering Practices* , ed. Doina Petrescu (London: Routledge, 2007), 43; Fran Bradshaw, personal interview, 1 May 2025, online.

Early days of Matrix Co-operative: Barbara, Anne, Sue, Julia, Cath and Kate.
Reproduced from 'Co-operating for Change,' *Building Design* (July 8 1983), 17.

Liberating the term *domestic space* from its association with a sacred *Angel in the House* was one of the goals of the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM).[3] Various historians, anthropologists and critical theorists presented the domains of inside and outside as historically constructed, culturally loaded, and politically contingent.[4] Today, domestic space is defined as an emotional and symbolic construction, no longer confined to the walls of a building or feminized domains of care and housework. The concept has embraced successive methodological turns like space, the vernacular, emotion, and globalization—becoming an increasingly vague "emotive place and spatial imaginary," sometimes lacking any "universally legible analytical frame."[5] I take domestic space hereafter to refer to enclosed sites of everyday care, safety, and cultural production.

Few have looked at how, after reformulating the term, British feminists used domestic space in their everyday organizing. Squatting, housing cooperatives, and practical interventions into building design were just a handful of tactics city-dwelling feminists deployed to build new domesticities and critique old ones.[6] In the 1970s, women in British cities were able to access grants for temporary women's centers in hard-to-let properties awaiting demolition or renovation.[7] These centers, Angela Phillips and Jim Nichols explained, were the "basic building blocks" of women's liberation, providing a fixed site for women to meet, access healthcare, childcare, welfare advice, and socialize.[8] Amanda Sebestyen of *Spare Rib* magazine reminisced over the "tremendous feeling of possibility" brought about by squatting in women-only households.[9] Olive Morris and Liz Obi's squat on Railton Road in London's Brixton became a 'homeplace' for Black women—doubling up as a feminist study group and, later, a bookshop.[10] In 1975, Erin Pizzey's Chiswick Women's Aid squatted an empty mansion in Richmond in response to the failure of Hounslow Council to provide them with larger accommodation. Pizzey's actions and her book, *Scream Quietly or the Neighbours Will Hear* (1974) inspired the first women's shelters in Berlin and the International Tribunal of Crimes Against Women held in Brussels in July 1976.[11]

---

[3] The term was coined by Coventry Patmore in his poem "The Angel in the House" (1854): Coventry Patmore, *The Angel in the House* (Boston: Ticknor & Fields, 1856). It was problematized by feminists during the WLM, for example in, Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Virago, 1983), 30; M. Jeanne Peterson, "No Angels in the House: The Victorian Myth and the Paget Women," *The American Historical Review* 89, no. 3 (1984): 677–708.

[4] For example, Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780–1850* (London: Hutchinson Education, 1987); Mary Douglas, "The Idea of a Home: A Kind of Space," *Social Research* 58, no. 1 (1991): 287–307; bell hooks, "Homeplace (a Site of Resistance)," in *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1990), 382–90.

[5] Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling, Foreword, *Home, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Routledge, 2020)*; Antoinette Burton, "Toward Unsettling Histories of Domesticity," *The American Historical Review* 124, no. 4 (2019): 1332. For a useful overview of the term, see Irene Cieraad, "Domestic Spaces," *International Encyclopedia of Geography: People, the Earth, Environment and Technology* (2017), 2–3.

[6] Christine Wall, "Sisterhood and Squatting in the 1970s: Feminism, Housing and Urban Change in Hackney," *History Workshop Journal* 83, no. 1 (2017): 79–97; Janice Rosina Morphet and Sule Takmaz Nisancioglu, "Early Experiences of Women and Planning Initiatives 1980–1990," *Town Planning Review,* no. 93 (2022): 595–615.

[7] Krista Cowman, "Women's Activism and the Post-War City," in *The Modern British City, 1945–2000,* ed. Simon Gunn, Peer Mandler, and Otto Saumarez Smith (London: Lund Humphries, 2025), 317, 319.

A focus on feminist spatial tactics also offers an opportunity to overcome the atomization and fatalism typically characterizing histories of women's liberation after 1978.[12] Recently, historians have pointed to the changing nature of feminism across the 1980s, noting the emergence of multiple sites of contestation and an attentiveness to difference.[13] Drawing on Chela Sandoval and Kimberly Springer, Lucy Delap proposes a useful model of "mosaic feminism" to characterize a diverse WLM built around "snatched moments between the demands of everyday work and care," attentive to both feminism's long political tradition and tensions around issues like race and class.[14]

Conterminous with this reappraisal, the past decade has seen a resurgence of historians' interest in the relationship between built forms and British political culture.[15] This new 'urban social history' looks "through" architecture to better trace the fate of ideological formations such as "welfare state modernism" or "market liberalism."[16] It treats architecture as a "hieroglyph" for political discourse, flexing both ways to accommodate the demands of both the New Left and New Right.[17] This new scholarship's commitment to uncovering the murky genealogical timelines of political culture differentiates it from the oft-cited, but ideologically dogmatic, geography of Doreen Massey and David Harvey.[18] Yet, despite its commitment to pluralistic trajectories, the new urban social history tends to exclude women—focusing instead on "planning and policy elites" and generally maintaining an understanding of architecture that starts and ends with a building's construction.[19]

---

[8] Cowman, "Women's Activism," in *The Modern British City, 316.*

[9] Wall, "Sisterhood and Squatting in the 1970s," 4.

[10] Milo Bettochi, "Fairies, Feminists and Queer Anarchists: Geographies of Squatting in Brixton, South London" (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Nottingham 2021), 110–12.

[11] Routon, "Mothers, Wives, Friends," 17; Jane Freeland, "Gendering Value Change: Domestic Violence and Feminism in 1970s West Berlin," *German History 38*, no. 4 (2020): 647; Zora Simic, "From Battered Wives to Domestic Violence: The Transnational Circulation of Chiswick Women's Aid and Erin Pizzey's *Scream Quietly or the Neighbours Will Hear* (1974)," *Australian Historical Studies* 51, no. 2 (2020): 120.

[12] Past scholarship has dated the decline of WLM to this event: Anna Coote and Beatrix Campbell, *Sweet Freedom: The Struggle for Women's Liberation*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987); Jeska Rees, "A Look Back at Anger: The Women's Liberation Movement in 1978," *Women's History Review* 19, no. 3 (2010): 337–56.

[13] Sue Bruley, "Women's Liberation at the Grass Roots: A View from Some English Towns, c.1968–1990," *Women's History Review* 25, no. 5 (March 16, 2016): 723–40; Natalie Thomlinson, *Race, Ethnicity and the Women's Movement in England, 1968–1993* (London: Palgrave Macmillan , 2018), 161–193; Sarah Crook, "The Women's Liberation Movement, Activism and Therapy at the Grassroots, 1968–1985," *Women's History Review* 27, no. 7 (2018): 1152–68; Lucy Delap, "Feminism, Masculinities and Emotional Politics in Late Twentieth Century Britain," *Cultural and Social History* 15, no. 4 (2018): 571–93. See also, Diane Abbott, "Diane Abbott on Feminism in the 1980s: 'It Was so Exciting Being in a Hall Full of Black Women,'" *Guardian,* February 1, 2018.

[14] Lucy Delap, *Feminisms : A Global History* (London: Penguin Books, 2021), 20 ; Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); Kimberly Springer, *Living for the Revolution* (North Carolina: Duke University Press Books, 2005).

[15] A good summary of this trend can be found in, Simon Gunn, review of *Boom Cities: Architect Planners and the Politics of Radical Urban Renewal in 1960s Britain*, by Otto Saumarez Smith, *Reviews in History* (2019), https://reviews.history.ac.uk/review/2361/.

[16] Guy Ortolano, *Thatcher's Progress: From Social Democracy to Market Liberalism through an English New Town* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

[17] Holly Smith, "Community Architecture," in *The Modern British City, 1945–2000,* ed. Simon Gunn, Peer Mandler, and Otto Saumarez Smith (London: Lund Humphries, 2025), 68.

[18] Doreen Massey, "Enterprise Zones: A Political Issue," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 6, no. 3 (1982): 429–34; Michael Parkinson, "The Thatcher Government's Urban Policy," *Revue Française de Civilisation Britannique.* 6, no. 4 (1989): 72; David Harvey, "From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism: The Transformation in Urban Governance in Late Capitalism," *Geografiska Annaler* 71, no. 1 (1989): 3–17.

[19] Otto Saumarez Smith, *Boom Cities: Architect Planners and the Politics of Radical Urban Renewal in 1960s Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 8.

There thus exists an exciting opportunity to rectify both narrow and fatalistic histories of British WLM and the shortcomings of a new urban social history. Thinking expansively about how British feminists engaged with domestic space in the 1980s is the natural accompaniment to preexisting scholarship on how feminist scholars reconfigured the meaning of the term itself. This essay also responds to cultural theorist Stuart Hall's calls for the development of a "counter-hegemonic" genealogy in order to "genuinely contest [the period's] hegemonic form of politics."[20]

## THE "LURCHING PROCESS" OF PIONEERING FEMINIST ARCHITECTURAL PRACTICE

Matrix was initially named the Feminist Design Collective (FDC)—a choice Dwyer and Thorne describe as "contentious," as it indicated the group's intention to value "non-architects."[21] The first project that FDC/Matrix worked on was Stockwell Health Centre (1978–79), a community group in South London. The job was never completed, but it gave the collective their first experience of working with a consensus-based client group. Alongside *Making Space,* Matrix also published texts such as, *A Job Designing Buildings (*1986) and *Building for Childcare* (1986). They predominantly worked with women and community groups "fighting to take control" of the spaces they "need and use."[22]

MAKING SPACE
WOMEN AND THE MAN MADE ENVIRONMENT
MATRIX
'A stiff challenge to the great macho myths of metropolitan architecture.'

Cover of Matrix's co-authored manifesto *Making Space: Women and the Man-Made Environment*, ed. Matrix (London: Pluto Press, 1984)

---

[20] Stuart Hall, "Introduction: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left," in *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left* (London: Verso Books, 1988), 14–15.

[21] Dwyer and Thorne, "Evaluating Matrix," 42.

[22] Promotional flyer, M02201, MOfaa.

Matrix also provided state-funded technical aid, created and taught educational courses, lectured widely, and researched and published information leaflets. Central to their thinking was an emphasis on the architectural process rather than the end-product.[23] There are no photographs of buildings in *Making Space* but plenty of architectural drawings. This was not just the result of the experimental nature of Matrix's work—the "tentative, lurching process" of "pioneering" a feminist architectural practice for the first time—but also their view that their role was merely to enable the needs and desires of their users.[24] Most of Matrix's funding came through housing associations and local authorities—initially the Greater London Council under the New Left's Ken Livingstone (1981–86) and, later, the London Boroughs Grant Scheme (LBGS) (1986–1995). Matrix went into voluntary liquidation in 1995—crippled by progressive LBGS cuts, the 1988 Housing Act, which redirected housing association funding towards the private sector, and the rise of Compulsory Competitive Tendering in the Local Government Act (1988).[25]

Matrix is a particularly useful case study for examining feminist spatial tactics as the group was clear about their theoretical and practical intentions and have continued to archive their work through exhibitions, talks, and the online Matrix Feminist Open Archive (MOfaa).[26] It is for these reasons that it is also surprising that historians of both new urban social history and feminism have scarcely examined the group. Christine Wall, Stephen Brooke, and Krista Cowman are the only historians to have published research on Matrix, albeit not situating the cooperative in a framework of feminist spatial tactics.[27] Matrix reimagined the domestic in ways that were both representative of the time and distinctly feminist. My framework of participation, emotion, and the archive may prove useful for scholars thinking about how to link diverse feminist spatial practices during the 1980s with broader developments in political culture. Research on this topic is needed to correct a threadbare historiography.

## THE "WELL-GREASED KNUCKLE" OF PARTICIPATORY POLITICS

Recently, historians of late twentieth-century Britain have explored participation as a "new style of political action" adopted by both the New Right and Left, who united in a general disillusionment with top-down modernism.[28] Following architectural disasters such as Ronan Point (1968), the collapse of a 22-story east London tower block, or the Summerland fire (1973), a large scale fire that ripped through a leisure center on the Isle of Man, architects and planners were increasingly considered greedy, paternalistic technocrats who cared little about their users.[29] In 1974, architectural journalist Martin Pawley described the architect as a "faceless government lackey" and the critic Malcolm MacEwan observed a "yawning gulf" between designer and user.[30] In 1979, the demolition of Birkenhead's Oak and Eldon Gardens—flats once considered utopian 'streets in the sky'—rang the death knell for British modernism.[31] Out of this maelstrom, participatory methods, such as public consultation and self-build caught on. Vague in political economy but amenable to the self-reliant ethos in British culture, this popular movement became known as Community Architecture. Over the course of the 1980s, it was endorsed by a motley assemblage spanning the Prince of Wales, the Department of the Environment, the celebrity architect Rod Hackney, and anarchists at the Architectural Association (AA) like Colin Ward.[32]

---

[23] The importance of the process over the end-product is mentioned in several oral history interviews with ex-members. For example, Benedicte Foo interviewed by Stephen Brooke, 23 November 2017, M03622, MOfaa; Fran Bradshaw, "Working Together/On Cooperative Principles," M03612, MOfaa; Fran Bradshaw, personal interview, 1 May 2025.

[24] Bradshaw, "Working with Women," in *Making Space: Women and the Man-Made Environment, ed. Matrix* (London: Pluto Press, 1984), 104–5.

[25] Under the Local Government Act (1988), local authorities were required to invite private firms to bid for contracts to run housing services previously delivered by council employees. The legislation aimed to promote efficiency, reduce public sector monopolies, and improve value-for-money.

[26] MOfaa is the most comprehensive archive of Matrix's work and can be found here, http://www.matrixfeministarchitecturearchive.co.uk/.

[27] Stephen Brooke, *London, 1984: Conflict and Change in the Radical City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024); Christine Wall, "'We Don't Have Leaders! We're Doing It Ourselves!': Squatting, Feminism and Built Environment Activism in 1970s London," *Field-Journal* 7, no. 1 (2017): 129–40.

[28] Matthew Hilton, "Politics Is Ordinary: Non-Governmental Organizations and Political Participation in Contemporary Britain," *Twentieth Century British History* 22, no. 2 (2011): 230–68. See also, Chris Moores, "Thatcher's Troops? Neighbourhood Watch Schemes and the Search for 'Ordinary' Thatcherism in 1980s Britain," *Contemporary British History* 31, no. 2 (2017): 230–55; David John Ellis, "Pavement Politics: Community Action in Leeds, c. 1960–1990" (PhD thesis, University of York, 2015), 7; Smith, "Community Architecture," in *The Modern British City*, 68–83.

[29] Stewart Lansley, Sue Goss, and Christian Wolmar, *Councils in Conflict: The. Rise and Fall of the Municipal Left (*London: Macmillan, 1989), 2; Elain Harwood and Alan Powers, "From Downturn to Diversity, Revisiting the 1970s," *Twentieth Century Architecture*, no. 10 (2012): 8–35.

This cross-party abandonment of architectural modernism accompanied a perceived breakdown in Britain's inner-cities, which environmentalist Paul Harrison likened to a "third world."[33] Much of this hysteria was to do with the combined effects of deindustrialization and suburbanization, which saw jobs and capital move out of cities to New Towns like Milton Keynes, a situation made notably worse after the economic crisis in 1973, when the burst of a property bubble reduced investment in office blocks and luxury flats and lowered the quality of construction. In 1975, an estimated 50,000 publicly owned properties in London stood unoccupied, having been cleared for post-war redevelopment but abandoned due to lack of council funds.[34] In response, many took to direct action like squatting. By 1976, there were around 30,000 squatters in London and 50,000 nationally.[35] These do-it-yourself tactics later became associated with the rise of community political activism and localism, whether in the form of childcare and legal centers, street murals, or neighborhood policing.[36] By the 1980s, participatory community politics was progressively absorbed into the voluntary and non-governmental sectors, tied to a new form of "active citizenship."[37] Meanwhile, the Community Architecture movement was reclaimed by the cost-cutting, entrepreneurial spirit of Thatcherism, intent on stripping municipal oversight in favor of deregulation and manifested in urban Enterprise Zones and Development Corporations.[38]

Matrix's variant of participatory politics drew from experiences within both Community Architecture and community politics. While studying at Newcastle in the late 1970s, Thorne and Bradshaw helped organize a woman-only project in their final year where they "interviewed women in Newcastle about what they thought about their housing" and invited the progenitor of self-build, Walter Segal, to speak.[39] At Hull, McManus described working with "community groups [and] working with participatory design."[40] Whilst squatting at Agnes Place in Lambeth, Dwyer described "[taking] all the walls [and] the fences down between the back yards" and eventually enrolling in a bricklaying course at Brixton School of Building.[41] Before attending the AA, she spent six months working on a building site.[42] Upon arriving at the AA in 1975, Dwyer found her way into squatting after seeing a "huge noticeboard" advertising open properties and encountering tutors who actively encouraged students to squat for a term.[43] Suzy Nelson lived at the infamous Tolmers Square squat before joining Solon Housing Cooperative, which, with Arscott, Francis, and Bradshaw, worked to transform a derelict house in Islington into a short-life cooperative where they lived for two decades.[44] Dwyer described repairing squats with "care and precision" intended to restore buildings so they were indistinguishable from the rest of street.[45] Bradshaw also trained as a bricklayer via a Training Opportunities Program Scheme (TOPS), a GLC-funded initiative aimed at addressing unemployment and promoting equal opportunities across London.[46]

---

[30] Harwood and Alan Powers, "From Downturn to Diversity," 11 ; Malcolm MacEwen, *Crisis in Architecture* (London: RIBA Publications, 1974), 11, 33, cited in, Smith, "Community Architecture," in *The Modern British City*, 70.

[31] A similar crisis of faith in architectural modernism was occurring across the Atlantic with the demolition of the Pruitt-Igoe housing complex in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1972 and 1976.

[32] Parkinson, "The Thatcher Government's Urban Policy, 1979–1989, A Review," 73–74; Richard Sennett, "An Urban Anarchist," *The New York Review of Books,* January 1, 1970. Wetherell also touches on this in *Foundations*, 191; Smith, "Community Architecture," in *The Modern British City*, 68–83; Jos Boys and Nathan Silver, eds., *Why Is British Architecture So Lousy?* (London: Newman, 1980), 4–20; Colin Ward, "Community Architecture: What a Time It Took for the Penny to Drop!," *Built Environment* 13, no. 1 (1987): 11; Nick Wates, "ACTAC in Action," *Architects' Journal*, October 12, 1983, 63.

[33] Paul Harrison, *Inside the Inner City: Life under the Cutting Edge* (London: Penguin, 1973), 11, cited in Andrews, Kefford, and Warner, "Community, Culture, Crisis," 206.

[34] Davis, "Community and the Labor Left in 1970s London," in *The Art of the Possible, 2*12; Nick Wates and Christian Wolmar, eds., Squatting (London: Bay Leaf Books, 1980), 230.

[35] Matt Cook, "'Gay Times': Identity, Locality, Memory, and the Brixton Squats in 1970's London," *Twentieth Century British History* 24, no. 1 (2011): 88.

[36] Sarah Stoller, "Forging a Politics of Care: Theorizing Household Work in the British Women's Liberation Movement," *History Workshop Journal* 85 (2018): 99–119; Davis "Community and the Labor left in 1970s London," in *The Art of the Possible,* 213; Ellis, "Pavement Politics"; Sam Wetherell, "Painting the Crisis: Community Arts and the Search for the 'Ordinary' in 1970s and '80s London," *History Workshop Journal* 76, no. 1 (2013): 235–49; Moores, "Thatcher's Troops?" 230–55; David Dahlborn, "Voluntary Organisations and the 1981–6 Greater London Council," (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2023), 51; Hazel A. Atashroo, "Weaponising Peace: The Greater London Council, Cultural Policy and 'GLC Peace Year 1983,'" *Contemporary British History* 33, no. 2 (2018): 1–17.

[37] Hilton, "Politics Is Ordinary," 230–68; Alistair Fair et al., *Building Modern Scotland,* 8.

[38] Good overviews of this are Otto Saumarez Smith, "Action for Cities: The Thatcher Government and Inner-City Policy," *Urban History* 47, no. 2 (2020): 274–91; Sam Wetherell, "Sowing Seeds: Garden Festivals and the Remaking of British Cities after Deindustrialization," *Journal of British Studies* 61, no. 1 (2021): 83–104.

[39] Anne Thorne and Fran Bradshaw, interview by The Farrell Centre, 2022, https://soundcloud.com/20x20-podcast/15-anne-thorne-and-fran-bradshaw.

Mary-Lou Ascott and Susan Francis setting out a floor plate. Reproduced from Christine Wall, "'We Don't Have Leaders! We're Doing It Ourselves!': Squatting, Feminism and Built Environment Activism in 1970s London," *Field-Journal* 7, no. 1 (2017): 137.

From the outset, Matrix implemented an organizational structure that was sensitive to the diversity of female experience. Part-time work, flexible hours, and meeting times scheduled around child-caring responsibilities meant women did not have to sacrifice motherhood for employment. Its structure echoed members' previous experiences in collective households such as squats. Responding to the fact that 92 percent of architects were White British, Matrix enforced a rigorous Equal Opportunities Policy and promised to include a "balance of Black women, lesbians, and women with disabilities" on their interviewing boards.[47] Matrix thus collapsed the divide between spaces of domesticity and those of labor, as well as cultivating a wider workforce made up of mothers and minorities keen to reconfigure domestic spaces. Reflecting on the day-to-day realities, de Graft-Johnson remembers, however, that when it came to negotiating with clients or contractors outside the practice, Matrix's progressive bubble was often burst by flippant racist remarks.[48]

---

[40] Sheelagh McManus, 'Working for Matrix,' online, MOfaa, M03671.

[41] Julia Dwyer, interview by Christine Wall, 2017.

[42] Ibid.

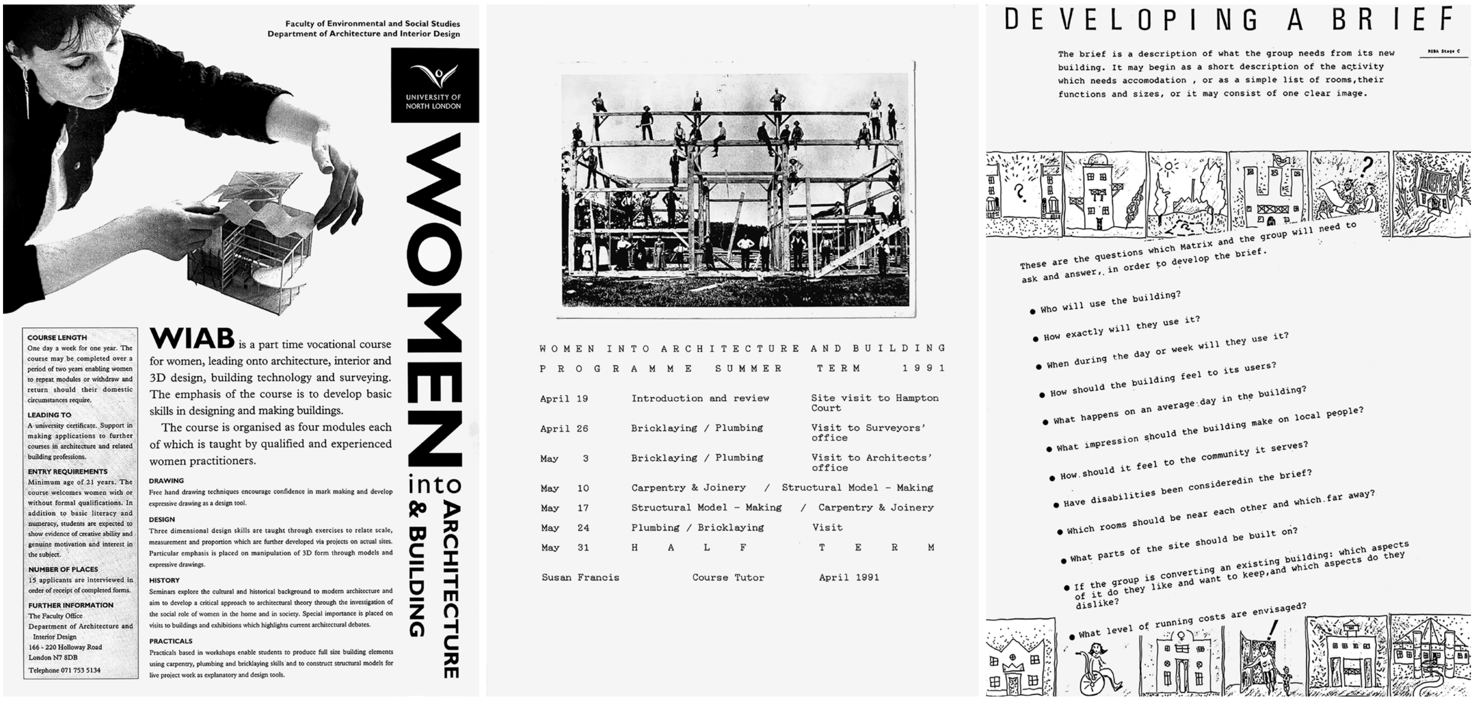
[43] Julia Dwyer, interview by Christine Wall, 2017; Joseph Bedford, "Robin Evans's Empty Room: Collective Living in the 1970s and the Problem of Domestic Realism," *Burning Farm*, no. 6 (2024), 14.

[44] Bedford, "Robin Evans's Empty Room,"17, 19.

[45] Julia Dwyer, interview by Christine Wall, 2017.

[46] Christine Wall, "Sisterhood and Squatting," 88; Wall, "'We Don't Have Leaders! We're Doing It Ourselves!'" 138.

Matrix encouraged women to participate in the construction of domestic space through booklets and educational courses. Women into Architecture and Building (WIAB) launched at the Polytechnic of North London (PNL) in 1985. Led by AA graduate Yvonne Dean and taught by Bradshaw, Boys, Dwyer, and Francis, the course did not require formal qualifications. Teaching methods were "experimental," with staff and students working together, using methods like "thinking through drawing" or making structural models to visualize joints.[49] WIAB classes on bricklaying, plumbing, and joinery were taught by women. Of the fifteen who enrolled in 1985, four went on to complete architectural degrees by 1991.[50] A WIAB leaflet described how "the notion that [women] can influence and participate in the shaping of the material world is liberating."[51] This politicization of participation within the built environment not only echoed the practices and "self-generating ethic" of Matrix's experiences at architectural schools, within Community Architecture, and squatting, but it also signaled a distinct feminist participatory politics that had its roots in WLM's historic critique of separate spheres.[52]



Faculty of Environmental and Social Studies
Department of Architecture and Interior Design

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH LONDON

**WOMEN into ARCHITECTURE & BUILDING**

**WIAB** is a part time vocational course for women, leading onto architecture, interior and 3D design, building technology and surveying. The emphasis of the course is to develop basic skills in designing and making buildings.

The course is organised as four modules each of which is taught by qualified and experienced women practitioners.

**DRAWING**
Free hand drawing techniques encourage confidence in mark making and develop expressive drawing as a design tool.

**DESIGN**
Three dimensional design skills are taught through exercises to relate scale, measurement and proportion which are further developed via projects on actual sites. Particular emphasis is placed on manipulation of 3D form through models and expressive drawings.

**HISTORY**
Seminars explore the cultural and historical background to modern architecture and aim to develop a critical approach to architectural theory through the investigation of the social role of women in the home and in society. Special importance is placed on visits to buildings and exhibitions which highlights current architectural debates.

**PRACTICALS**
Practicals based in workshops enable students to produce full size building elements using carpentry, plumbing and bricklaying skills and to construct structural models for live project work as explanatory and design tools.

**COURSE LENGTH**
One day a week for one year. The course may be completed over a period of two years enabling women to repeat modules or withdraw and return should their domestic circumstances require.

**LEADING TO**
A university certificate. Support in making applications to further courses in architecture and related building professions.

**ENTRY REQUIREMENTS**
Minimum age of 21 years. The course welcomes women with or without formal qualifications. In addition to basic literacy and numeracy, students are expected to show evidence of creative ability and genuine motivation and interest in the subject.

**NUMBER OF PLACES**
15 applicants are interviewed in order of receipt of completed forms.

**FURTHER INFORMATION**
The Faculty Office
Department of Architecture and Interior Design
166 - 220 Holloway Road
London N7 8DB
Telephone 071 753 5134

---

WOMEN INTO ARCHITECTURE AND BUILDING
PROGRAMME SUMMER TERM 1991

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| April 19 | Introduction and review | Site visit to Hampton Court |
| April 26 | Bricklaying / Plumbing | Visit to Surveyors' office |
| May 3 | Bricklaying / Plumbing | Visit to Architects' office |
| May 10 | Carpentry & Joinery / Structural Model – Making | |
| May 17 | Structural Model – Making / Carpentry & Joinery | |
| May 24 | Plumbing / Bricklaying | Visit |
| May 31 | HALF TERM | |

Susan Francis Course Tutor April 1991

---

DEVELOPING A BRIEF

RIBA Stage C

The brief is a description of what the group needs from its new building. It may begin as a short description of the activity which needs accomodation , or as a simple list of rooms,their functions and sizes, or it may consist of one clear image.

These are the questions which Matrix and the group will need to ask and answer,. in order to develop the brief.

- Who will use the building?
- How exactly will they use it?
- When during the day or week will they use it?
- How should the building feel to its users?
- What happens on an average day in the building?
- What impression should the building make on local people?
- How should it feel to the community it serves?
- Have disabilities been consideredin the brief?
- Which rooms should be near each other and which far away?
- What parts of the site should be built on?
- If the group is converting an existing building: which aspects of it do they like and want to keep,and which aspects do they dislike?
- What level of running costs are envisaged?

Left: WIAB promotional leaflet. Reproduced from M03006, MOfaa.
Center: WIAB's Programme for the Summer Term 1991. Reproduced from M02988, MOfaa.
Right: WIAB sheet on 'Developing a Brief.' Reproduced from M02993, MOfaa.

---

[47] Matrix, *Women in Architecture,* 6; "Equal Opportunity Policy," document, M02300, MOfaa. See also the desired requirements within the job description for workers with experience in "Black or Lesbian groups," document, M02301, MOfaa.

[48] Ann de-Graft Johnson, "Gender, Race and Culture in the Urban Built Environment," in *Social Town Planning, ed. Clara Greed* (London: Routledge, 1999), 102–24.

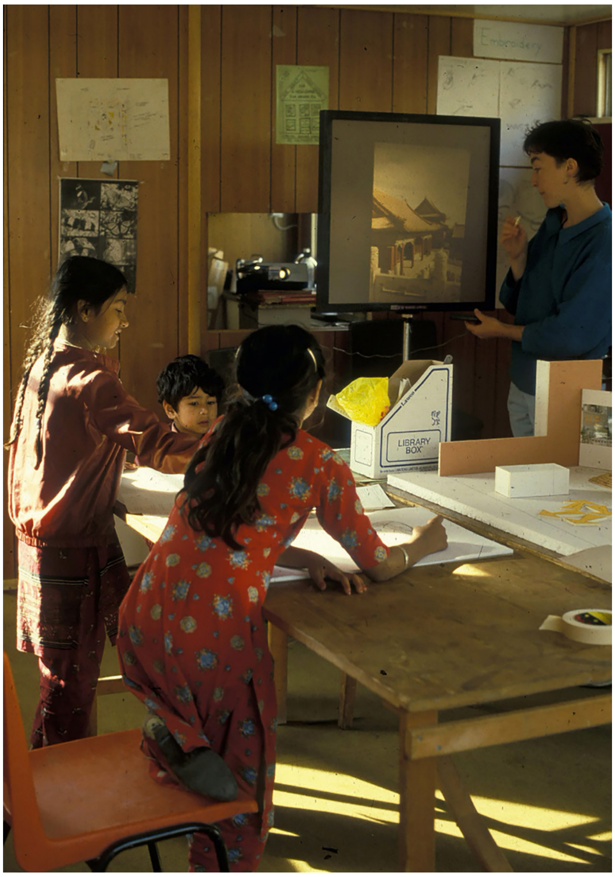
[49] Yvonne Dean, "A Way in for Women," *Architects Journal,* March 20, 1991, 43-4; "Women into Architecture and Building," promotional leaflet, M03007, MOfaa.

[50] Dean, "A Way in for Women," 43.

[51] "Women into Architecture and Building," promotional leaflet, M03007, MOfaa.

[52] Dwyer describes developing a 'self-generating ethic' from her time squatting in her oral history interview with Wall.

Refusing to see users as needing to be "contended with" or as "puppets capable of being manipulated," Matrix also developed a way of working that centered on the client's desires and needs and brought them into the participatory fold.[53] During a building's planning stage, Matrix would ask what happens there in an average day, what its access requirements were, and how the space should feel to its users. Matrix encouraged their users to learn about architecture, leading courses on building design and drawing for those involved in Dalston Children's Centre.[54] During the construction of Jumoke, Matrix ran a course for their clients on the building process, using Battenburg cakes to teach the difference between a plan and a section.[55] A whole chapter of *Making Space* explains to how to read architectural plans.[56] The idea was that "if you gave people the technical tools" to understand drawings, then they "could comment on them."[57] For Jagonari, a new four-story women's center for Bangladeshi women in Tower Hamlets, Matrix asked women to bring in photographs of their family homes in Bengal to act as inspiration for the design.[58] As a result, the kitchens were fitted with traditional high and low-level sinks. Solma Ahmed, ex-chair of Jagonari, remembers Matrix understanding "exactly what our requirements were without being patronising […] they worked with us throughout."[59] Matrix credits these participatory techniques with enabling them to design the first wheelchair-accessible buildings in London.[60]



Consultation for Jagonari. Reproduced from M00062s, MOfaa.

---

[53] Darke, "Women, Architects and Feminism," in Matrix, *Making Space: Women and the Man-Made Environment* (London: Pluto Press, 1984), 13.

[54] Bradshaw, "Working with Women," in *Making Space,* 96.

[55] Dwyer and Thorne, "Evaluating Matrix," in *Altering Practices,* 50.

[56] Jos Boys et al., "House Design and Women's Roles," in *Making Space*, 55–80.

[57] Anne Thorne, "Doing Architecture Differently, Part One," online interview, M03707, MOfaa.

[58] Birmingham Film and Video Workshop (BFVW), "Matrix Architects—Jagonari Centre Hackney 1980s," 1988, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2TLm8Hfm-HI.

[59] Letter from Solma Ahmed to Anne Thorne, "Matrix Letters of Support to the RIBA," August 29, 2019, M00066A, MOfaa.

[60] Anne Thorne, interview by Stephen Brooke, 20 February 2018, M03701, MOfaa.

Darke describes how practices like "listening to each other, giving each woman space to express her feelings, and developing theories from women's own experiences" emerged within WLM and were later infused into feminist design.[61] This approach also resonated with contemporary socialist and feminist conceptions of the so-called 'local state.'[62] Rather than focus on superstructure, the new municipal politics of the period aimed to transform everyday social relations by empowering ordinary people and developing counter-organizations. When 'Red Ken' took over the GLC in 1981, its Deputy Chief Economic Advisor, Hilary Wainwright, declared that if "sharing power meant anything […] it began from getting resources […] out of County Hall."[63] Between 1982 and 1986, the GLC's Women's Committee distributed £30 million through 1,000 grants to women's voluntary groups, and by 1986 the GLC funded twelve per cent of all full-time childcare places in London.[64] As well as funding half of Matrix's buildings, the Women's Committee published two of Matrix's texts, *A Job Designing Buildings* (1986) and *Building for Childcare* (1986), and published its services leaflets. Matrix also collaborated with the Women's Committee research and design guidelines in *Changing Places: Positive Action on Women and Planning* (1986). Jos Boys describes the GLC working like a "well-greased knuckle" because its employees and benefactors were both "part of the same network" that sought to transform structures via participating in local politics.[65]

## BUILDING THE "SOFT ARCHITECTURE" OF SAFETY AND CARE

Emotions are learned, performed, and spatial expressions that negotiate the relationship between affect and structure. They are bound up with the securing of social hierarchy.[66] Recently, historians have declared the decades after 1945 an emotional "revolution."[67] Popular individualism, secularization, humanistic psychology, and the rise of social researchers and advertising executives all indicate the development of a "confessional habitus," a "right to feel," and an economy more interested in how people "feel" than what they "think."[68] In his discussion of "enterprise culture" and contemporary governmentality, Nikolas Rose argues that self-fulfilment and emotional freedom are Foucauldian techniques of rule, bolstered by the rise of psy-disciplines and their roster of "experts of subjectivity."[69] Rose argues that the strength of the New Right came from its ability to monopolize and naturalize new "needs, feelings, and aspirations" generated by consumer capitalism.[70] The interventionist post-war state, meanwhile, stymied the self in the name of the collective.

---

[61] Darke, "Women, Architects and Feminism," in *Making Space,* 25.

[62] The foundational text for the local state is London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group (LEWRG), *In and Against the State (*1979; repr., London: Pluto Press, 1980). The influence of the pamphlet on feminism is described in Sheila Rowbotham, *Reasons to Rebel: My Memories of the 1980s* (London: Merlin Press, 2024), 33.

[63] Mackintosh and Hilary Wainwright, *A Taste of Power,* 16.

[64] Anna Coote and Beatrix Campbell, *Sweet Freedom: The Struggle for Women's Liberation,* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), 107.

[65] Jos Boys, interview by Stephen Brooke, 20 November 2017, MOfaa.

[66] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (London: Routledge, 2013); Katie Barclay, *The History of Emotions: A Student Guide to Methods and Sources* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020).

[67] Lynn Abrams uses the term in *Feminist Lives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024), 31. But see also: Claire Langhamer, *The English in Love: The Intimate Story of an Emotional Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Jonathan Moss, Emily Robinson, and Jake Watts, *The Politics of Feeling in Brexit Britain (*Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2024); George Morris, "Intimacy in Modern British History," *The Historical Journal* 64, no. 3 (2021): 796–811.

[68] Abrams, *Feminist Lives*, 31; Claire Langhamer, "An Archive of Feeling? Mass Observation and the Mid-Century Moment," *Insights: Institute of Advanced Study 9*, no. 4 (2019): 9; Emily Robinson and Jonathan Moss, "The Politics of Feeling," *Renewal* 32, no. 1 (2024): 45, 47.

[69] Nikolas Rose, "Governing Enterprising Individuals," in *Inventing Our Selves: Psychology, Power, and Personhood,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 150–68.

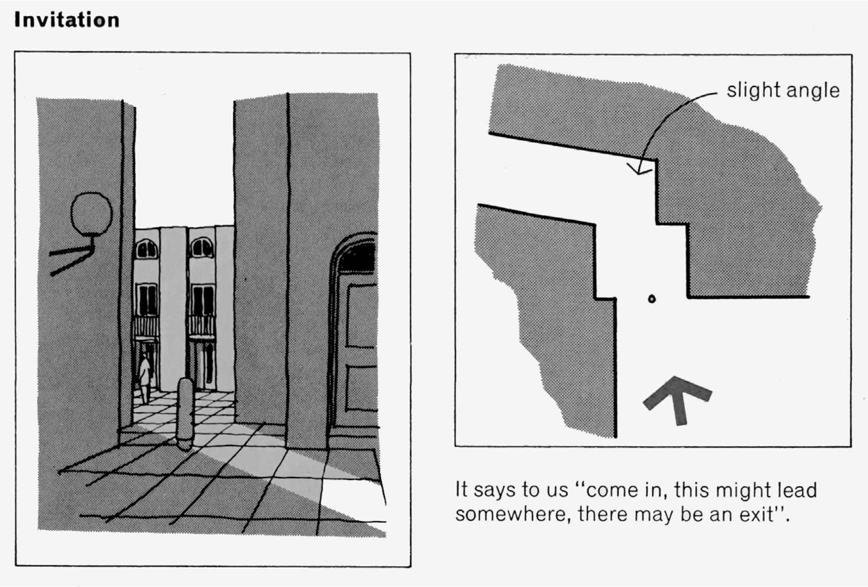
[70] Rose, "Governing Enterprising Individuals," in *Inventing Our Selves,* 166.

Geoff Mulgan uses the term "soft architecture" to evocatively describe the emotional dimensions of the built environment.[71] In 1980s Britain, the soft architecture of the state was infamously delivered by an imported situational criminology. Its progenitor, the Canadian-American architect and planner Oscar Newman, won the hearts and minds of Thatcher's planning team for his trademarked "defensible space" approach to urban design. This was a way of planning to secure a feeling of individual ownership and personality. Visiting the Aylesbury Estate in Peckham, as part of the BBC documentary *The Writing on the Wall* (1974), Newman predicted that the modernist design of the housing block would produce criminal behavior. Thatcher's housing adviser, Alice Coleman, agreed. She held British council estates responsible for generating feelings of "stress, trauma, [...] fear, anxiety, marital breakdown, and physical and mental disorder."[72] During the 1980s, Coleman proceeded to retrofit waist-high fences, panoramic bay windows, front gardens, and private entrances—design features, that she argued, were "socially stabilising"—onto modernist housing estates.[73] They also fostered feelings of private ownership. A shining example of the ideological amorphousness of the Community Architecture movement, Coleman acted alongside the father of Community Architecture, Rod Hackney, who argued Coleman's "alternative way [...] involved ordinary people."[74] If this is how Thatcherism rebuilt the soft architecture of domestic life, how did its adversaries?

Matrix's approach was also one that "started from feelings," drawing on their experience in feminist Consciousness-Raising (CR) and finding a "language accessible to everyone involved."[75] For instance, in *Making Space's* chapter "House and Home," Benedicte Foo interviewed friends living in nineteenth-century townhouses. She admits her chapter is "hardly a representative sample," but argues the point was to showcase "equally valid experiences."[76] Foo describes how the "design of a house can positively discourage [women] from attempting to go out."[77] In her account, a friend describes the six-step process of taking her son outside and navigating a "particularly narrow hall," "narrow stairs," and "steep front steps."[78] In drawing our attention to cumbersome repeated actions that signify a body out place, Foo's friends' confessions unveil an invisible form of emotional labor generated by domestic design that inhibited mothers from leaving their homes. Boys's chapter in *Making Space,* "Women and Public Space," also starts from feelings, critiquing a 1978 GLC pamphlet on housing design. The section on pedestrian ways quotes psychologist G. A. Miller, who claimed that "surprise [in design] is essential to mental health."[79] Yet, looking at one of the designs for a housing development, Boys remarks that "no woman is invited by a blind alley."[80] Rather than surprising, these spaces "feel dangerous."[81] Boys's analysis reveals how emotions like fear work to "shrink" and "contain" the body within domestic space.[82]

---

[71] Geoff Mulgan, "The Changing Shape of the City," in *New Times,* 264.
[72] Alice Coleman, *Utopia on Trial: Vision and Reality in Planned Housing* (London: Hilary Shipman, 1985), 3.
[73] World in Action, "Designed for Living" (ITV, 1985).
[74] Ibid.
[75] Bradshaw, "Working with Women," in *Making Space*, 94; Fran Bradshaw, "Early Days," online interview, M03609, MOfaa.
[76] Foo, "House and Home," in *Making Space,* 121.
[77] Ibid., 123.
[78] Ibid., 122.
[79] Department of Architecture and Civic Design of the GLC, *An Introduction to Building Design* (London: The Architectural Press, 1978), 115.
[80] Boys, "Women and public space," in *Making Space*, 50.
[81] Ibid., *49.*
[82] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion,* 69–70.



It says to us "come in, this might lead somewhere, there may be an exit".

Invitation into a blind alley. Reproduced from the Department of Architecture and Civic Design of the GLC, *An Introduction to Building Design* (London: The Architectural Press, 1978), 121.

While Matrix was the first group of British feminists to formulate an emotionally grounded spatial analysis, there had been earlier attempts across the Atlantic. In 1979, the American "psychohistorian" Susanna Torre explored how the walls within the home constituted a sense of "enclosure and protection, as well as separation and denial."[83] Writing in 1981, in a special architectural issue of the feminist journal *Heresies*, Torre proposed designing domestic space as a "matrix" in order to rescue women from isolation and transform consciousness.[84] In her formulation, Torre proposed replacing the "zoning" of homes into enclosed spaces according to implicit hierarchies with flexible, multifunctional spaces that reflected how people actually lived.[85] Dwyer and Thorne speculate the article may have served as inspiration for Matrix's name.[86] At the very least, Torre's piece sits in their archive.

## INFUSING DAILY LIFE WITH NEW MEANING

In 1977, Maria O'Reilly, resident of the post-war Netherley Estate in Liverpool, described "the overall emotion here [as] isolation and despair."[87] Concerns over the lack of safety and facilities proved well-founded when three-year-old Carl Scurry fell from a balcony, fracturing his skull.[88] Five years later in 1983, the GLC's Planning Committee circulated a report on racism in London. The report found an "alarming level of harassment."[89] In Tower Hamlets, the report documented incidences of "excreta pushed through letterboxes [and] windows broken."[90] Social surveys from the time also confirmed a theater of fear, hatred, and danger on estates from Toxteth in Liverpool to Broadwater Farm in North London.[91]

---

[83] Susana Torre, "Space as Matrix," *Heresies 11 3*, no. 3 (1979): 51–53.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Torre, "Space as Matrix," 51, 52.

[86] Dwyer and Thorne, "Notes from Inside the Collective," 1999.

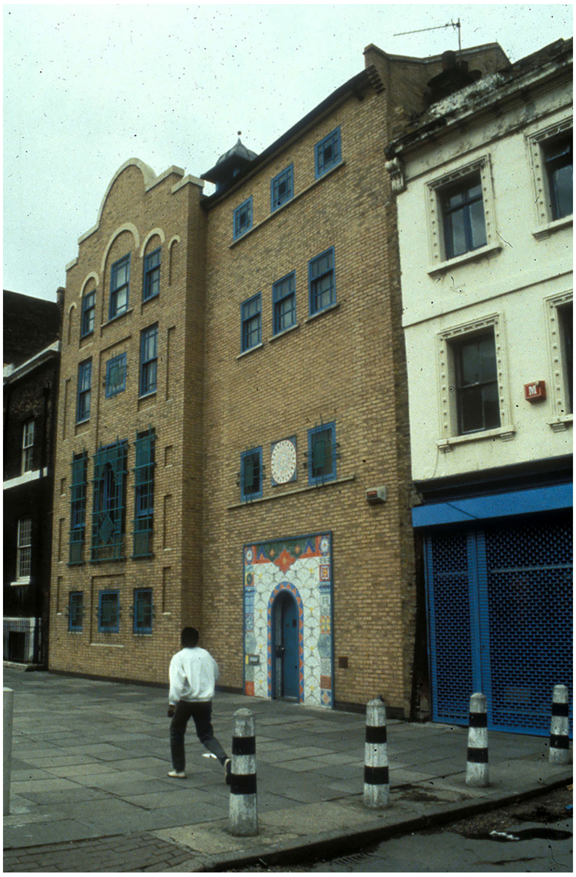
[87] *Spare Rib,* no. 56 (March 1977): 10, cited in Cowman, "Women's Activism," in *The Modern British City,* 318.

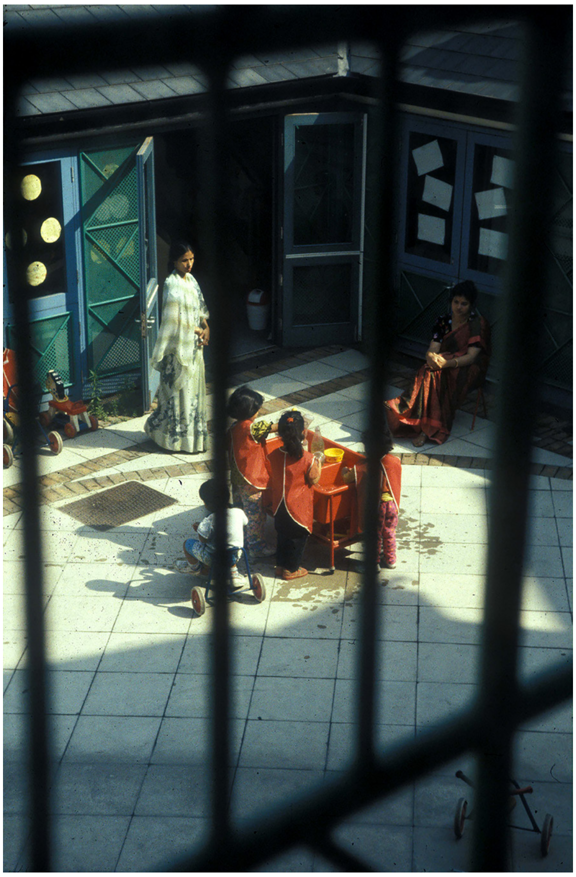
[88] *Liverpool Echo*, 15 June 1974, 8, cited in Cowman, "Women's Activism," in *The Modern British City*, 318.

[89] London Metropolitan Archives, GLC/DG/PRE/49/17, Police Committee, *Report by the Panel of Inquiry into Racial Harassment*, 29 September 1983, 3, cited in Brooke, "Space, Emotions and the Everyday," 132.

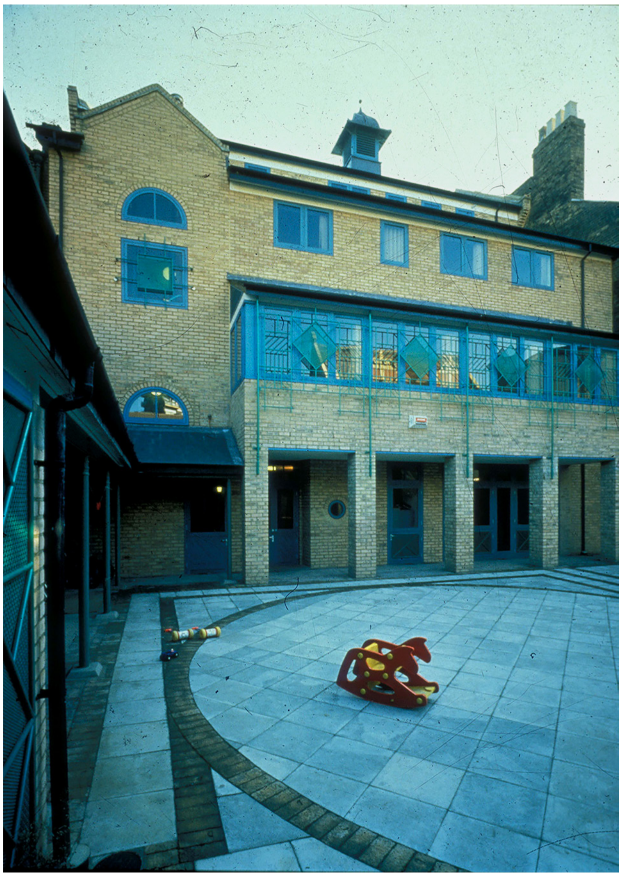
[90] Ibid.

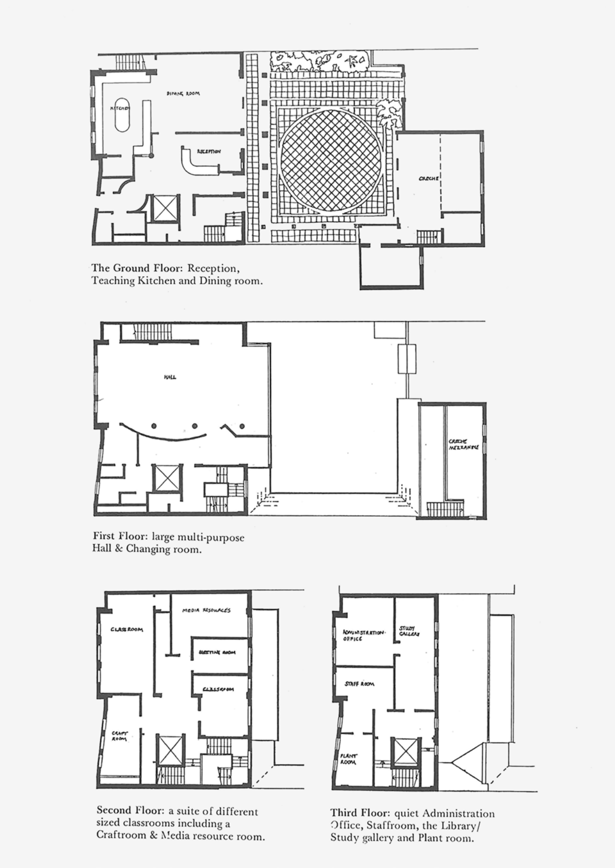
[91] Mass Observers, A1530, T1277, S1570, in Mass Observation Project (MOP), "Retrospective on the 1980s"; Brooke, "Space, Emotions and the Everyday," 114.





Left: Photograph of Jagonari’s façade. Reproduced from M0051S, MOfaa.
Right: Photograph of Jagonari’s creche. Reproduced from M000057S, MOfaa.




DINING ROOM
KITCHEN
RECEPTION
CRECHE
The Ground Floor: Reception,
Teaching Kitchen and Dining room.
HALL
CRECHE MEZZANINE
First Floor: large multi-purpose
Hall & Changing room.
MEDIA RESOURCES
CLASSROOM
MEETING ROOM
CLASSROOM
CRAFT ROOM
Second Floor: a suite of different
sized classrooms including a
Craftroom & Media resource room.
ADMINISTRATION OFFICE
STUDY GALLERY
STAFF ROOM
PLANT ROOM
Third Floor: quiet Administration
Office, Staffroom, the Library/
Study gallery and Plant room.

Left: Photograph of Jagonari’s interior courtyard. Reproduced from M00058s, MOfaa.
Right: Jagonari’s floorplan. Reproduced from M00065, MOfaa.

Welfare-modernist estates were perceived as dangerous and unsuitable places to live not just by Newman-inspired Thatcherite planning corporations and busybody community architects. In 1988, the Channel 4 documentary *Paradise Circus,* dedicated to female perceptions of the built environment, broadcast a similar feeling. Julmur Mukerji from Jagonari Women's Centre in Tower Hamlets described how "nearly all" Bangladeshi women in the area had experienced "physical racial attacks" and "fire attacks on their home."[92] One woman likened life in the area to a "prison."[93]

Matrix's design for Jagonari was determined not to replicate a "soft architecture" of fear and isolation. Instead they proposed a low-key façade featuring protective eleven-millimeter laminated-glass windows, decorative metal security grilles, and hardwood-panelled doors. The layout of the entrance hall meant that the women could always see who was at the door, while a creche was built in the enclosed safety of the courtyard—protected from the risk of firebombs. A light-flooded multi-purpose hall on the first floor provided space for badminton, dance, and drama, whilst study rooms and media rooms facilitated individual tutorials and private study. Communal washing facilities also allowed the women to "socialize whilst working."[94] It was important, Anne Thorne recalled, that the space did not feel like a "prison."[95] Reflecting on "good memories" of the space, the ex-Chair of Jagonari Women's Centre, Solma Ahmed, described the building itself as creating feelings of "safety [and] security."[96] We might rearticulate this here as the construction of new domesticities in the absence of safe, traditional ones. Against an emotional regime of everyday racism, Jagonari's design "infuse[d] daily life with new meaning," challenging the idea that women's only 'homeplace' was in a narrowly defined domestic sphere.[97]

## JUMOKE: "EVERYONE LOVES THE CHILDREN"

Motherhood was a thorny issue within WLM, often associated with "isolation, drudgery, and boredom."[98] It was understood as an activity that, more than any other, changed women's relationship to the social world and was behind many women's first encounters with WLM.[99] Twenty-four-hour nurseries were one of the key demands of the 1970 National Women's Liberation Conference. The fact that in 1975 there were only five free nursery places for every 1,000 pre-school-aged child in London highlights the structural pressure on mothers to become full-time, unpaid carers.[100] Women's relationship to domestic space, therefore, was as much a product of political economy as it was a personal choice.

In January 1984, Matrix applied successfully to the GLC's Women's Committee for a grant of £108,000 to turn Shacklewell Lane Baths into a permanent children's center.[101] Dalston Children's Centre (DCC) was to be a new site of care for both local children and "those who are responsible for childcare—mostly women."[102] DCC had previously been housed in a squat, but such sites were increasingly difficult to secure after the Criminal Law Act (1977) and the GLC Housing Department stopped handing out licenses and instated a squatting amnesty (1978).[103] Brooke has focused on how DCC's cooperative model, varied activities, and ethnic, sexual, and socio-economic diversity created an "emotional community" amid what was considered one of the most deprived inner-city areas in Britain.[104] There is little in the historical record on how Matrix actually made the space "warm and friendly"—we know that the building was accessible, had an enclosed garden that ensured safe outdoor space, and a photography studio so that mothers could "do something for themselves."[105]

---

[92] BFVW, "Matrix Architects," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2TLm8Hfm-HI; Anne Thorne, "Jagonari," online interview, M03704, MOfaa.

[93] LMA, GLC/DG/PRE/49/17, Police Committee, Report by the Panel of Inquiry into Racial Harassment, 29 September 1983, 90, cited in Brooke, "Space, Emotions and the Everyday," 135.

[94] "Proposed New Building 181/185 Whitechapel Road," Box Matrix/17, Bishopsgate Institute.

[95] Anne Thorne, interview by Stephen Brooke, February 2018, M03701, MOfaa.

[96] Solma Ahmed (Previous Chair of Jagonari) to Thorne, "Matrix Letters of Support to the RIBA," letter, M00066a, MOfaa.

[97] Patricia Hill Collins, "The Sexual Politics of Black Womanhood ," in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 112. On prevalence of racist discourse during this period also see, Anna Marie Smith, *New Right Discourse on Race and Sexuality : Britain, 1968-90* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 1–27, 129–182; hooks, "Homeplace," 383–7.

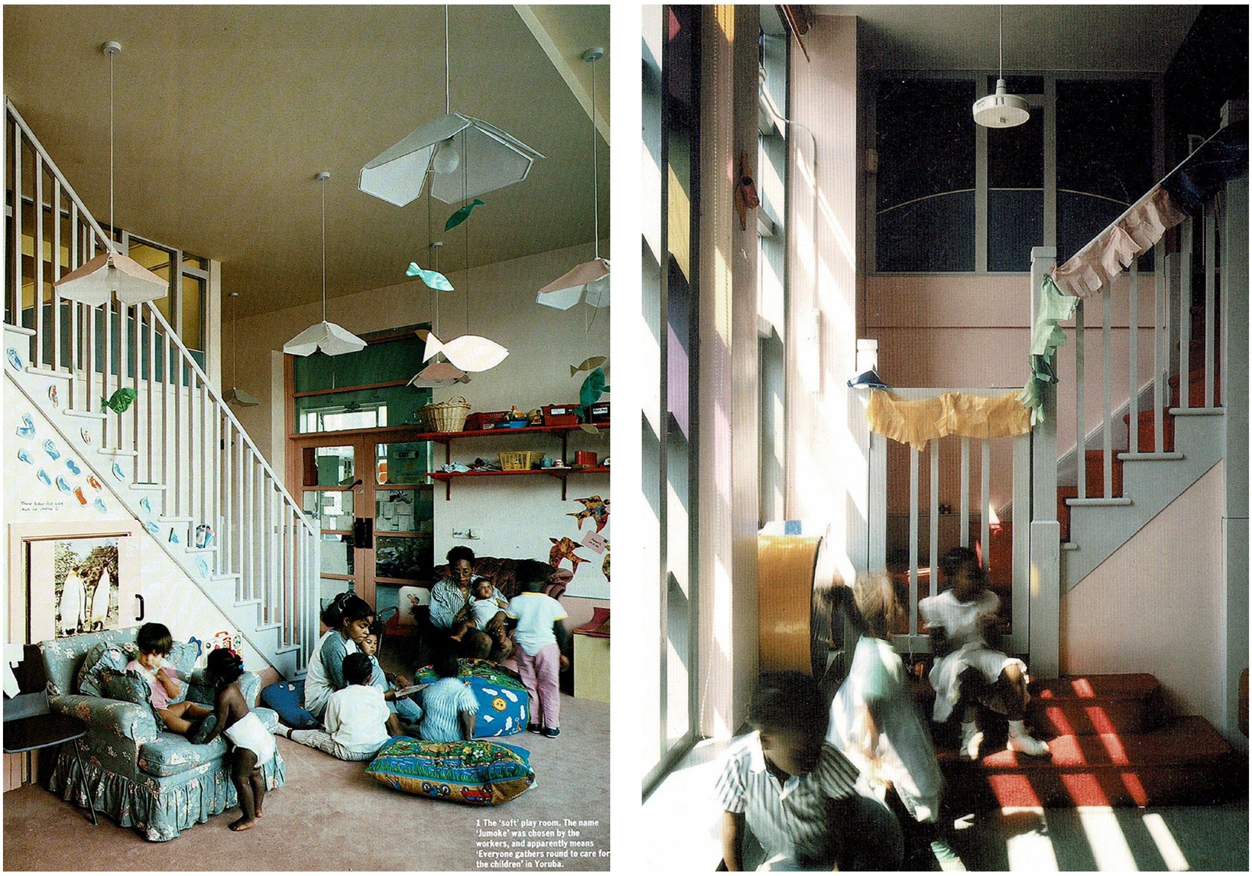
[98] *Spare Rib,* July 1980, 26, cited in Sarah Crook, "Writing about Mothering and Childcare," in *Women's Periodicals and Print Culture*, 356.

[99] Sheila Rowbotham, "To Be or Not to Be: The Dilemmas of Mothering," *Feminist Review,* no. 31 (1989): 82.

[100] Stoller, "Forging a Politics of Care," 104.

[101] GLC, Women's Committee, "Dalston Children's Centre," Funding Application, 22 June 1984, London Metropolitan Archives, GLC/DG/PRE/223/22, cited in, Stephen Brooke, *London, 1984: Conflict and Change in the Radical City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024), 166.

[102] Stephen Brooke, "Space, Emotions and the Everyday: The Affective Ecology of 1980s London," *Twentieth Century British History* 28, no. 1 (2016): 130.


1 The 'soft' play room. The name 'Jumoke' was chosen by the workers, and apparently means 'Everyone gathers round to care for the children' in Yoruba.

Left: Photograph of Jumoke's main playroom.
Reproduced from The Architects' Journal, 13 October 1989, 39.
Right: Photograph of Jumoke's interior.Reproduced from JAMOKE_05s, MOfaa.

A clearer illustration, perhaps, of Matrix's soft architecture of care is Jumoke Training Nursery (1986–88). Matrix took much of what they had learned at DCC and applied it to Jumoke. Funded by Southwark Council at a time when the borough's priority waiting list for nurseries stood at 850, Jumoke had a front-page feature in *The Architects' Journal* in 1989.[106] The piece reported that "a large proportion of the eligible children [were likely] to be Black," and Matrix wanted the space to be as inclusive as possible.[107] The nursery's name is taken from Yoruba and translates to "collective love and care for children." Following their plans laid out in *Building for Childcare*, Matrix designed rooms that would generate a "homey atmosphere" via contrasting color schemes of soft pinks, blues, and yellows intended to provide variety and warmth.[108] Jumoke scaled up DCC's experiment with "child-sized" spaces, introducing "play platforms" at the mezzanine level, sinks and kitchen counters at child-height, and extended window ledges where children could sit.[109] The idea was to create "play spaces that felt more like theirs," rather than the portacabins and churches "often used" for childcare.[110] High ceilings and huge windows gave an impression of light and air—not dissimilar from Jagonari. French windows in the cafeteria gave easy access to the playground, while glazed doors inside gave adults a view from room to room.[111]

---

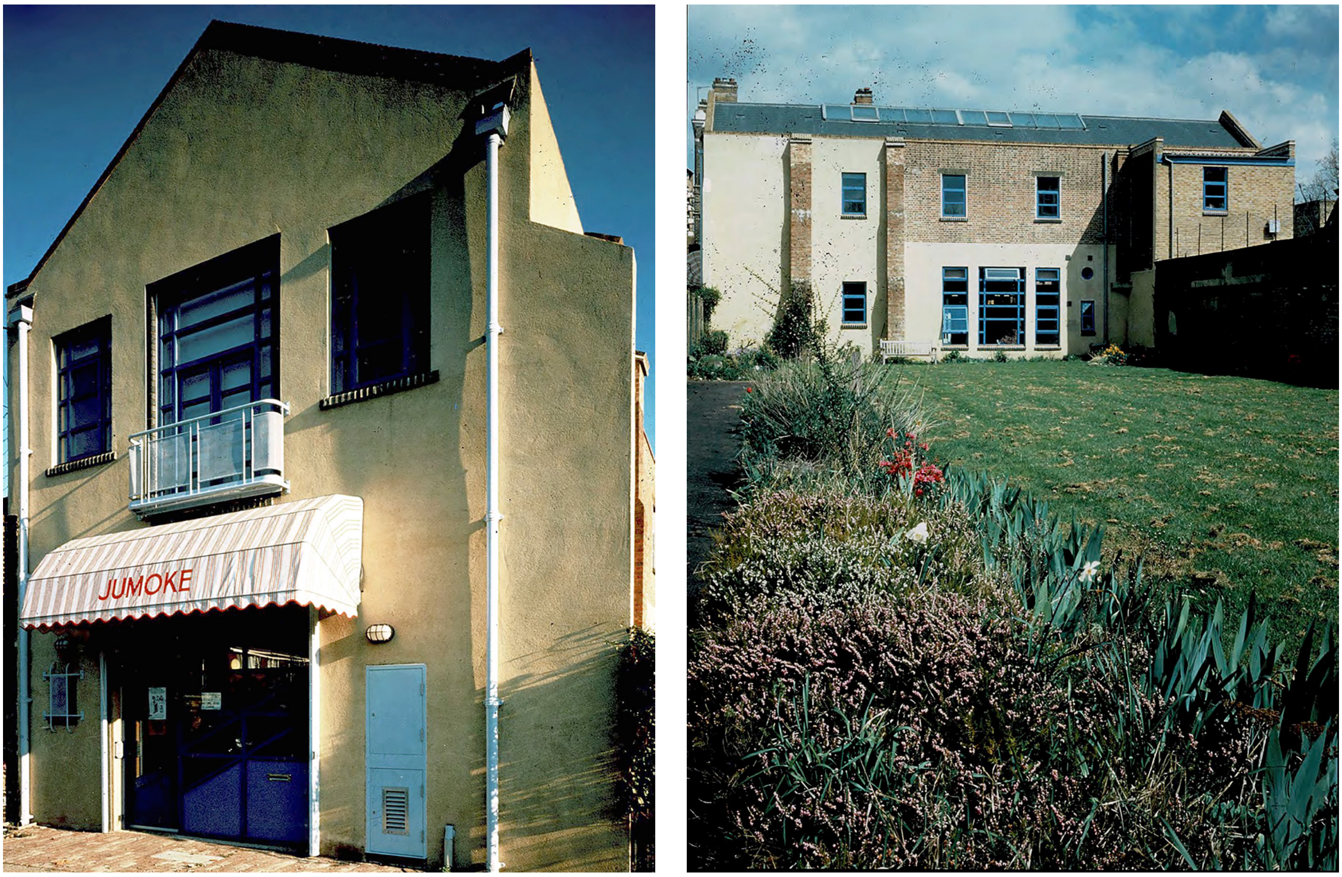
[103] Wall, "Sisterhood and Squatting in the 1970s," 92.

[104] Brooke, *London: 1984,*169, 172.

[105] Anne Thorne, interview by Stephen Brooke, 20 February 2018, cited in, Brooke, *London: 1984, 179; See drawings of DCC in Bradshaw,* "Working with Women," in *Making Space,* 95; Matrix, "Building for Childcare: Making Better Buildings for the Under-5s," (London: GLC Women's Committee, 1986), 12; Anne Thorne, "Dalston Children's Centre," online interview, M03701, MOfaa.

[106] Maureen Mackintosh and Hilary Wainwright, eds., "Women's Work," in *A Taste of Power: The Politics of Local Economics* (London: Verso, 1987), 114.

[107] "Southwark Nursery," *Architects' Journal*, October 18, 1989, 41.



Left: Photograph of Jumoke's facade. Reproduced from JAMOKE_02s, MOfaa.
Right: Photograph of Jumoke's garden. Reproduced from JAMOKE_01s, MOfaa.

The feminist Liz Heron may have been complaining when she declared that women were "melting into motherhood" by the early 1980s, but Matrix's soft domestic architecture of care suggests motherhood and feminist praxis were not mutually exclusive.[112] Against the paranoid architecture of Alice Coleman and the isolation of Victorian townhouses and modernist estates, Matrix constructed new *homeplaces* for everyday acts of care. In doing so, they echoed bell hooks's remark that domestic space can be somewhere that "transcends tiredness" and is a form of meaningful political action.[113]

[108] "Southwark Nursery," *Architects' Journal*, October 18, 1989, 41.
[109] Mark Swenarton, "Guiding Lights," *Building Design* 940 (1989): 7.
[110] "Southwark Nursery," *Architects' Journal* , October 18, 1989, 41.
[111] Ibid., 44.
[112] Liz Heron, "The Mystique of Motherhood," in ed. Feminist Anthology Collective, *No Turning Back* (London, The Women's Press, 1980), 139, cited in, Rowbotham, "To Be or Not to Be," 84.
[113] hooks, "Homeplace," 382.

## ARCHIVING OTHERS, ARCHIVING OURSELVES

Writing in 2024, the British historian Lawrence Black declared that the history of modern Britain, is "not so much *in the archive as it is the archive."*[114] That the archive is the outcome of a selective ordering of knowledge has been well established since the 1980s. It was during this period that new social and identity histories platformed new historical subjects, while oral methodology collapsed the boundary separating the 'chronicler' from their 'audience.' Jeffery Weeks's landmark social history of homosexuality from the nineteenth century to the 1970s quoted Karl Marx's "liberation is an historical and not a mental act."[115] Queer and anarchist squatters in London produced their own documentaries, books, and oral histories to compensate for their invisibility within the built environment.[116] Feminist archiving stretches back even further. From the suffragettes' historical pageants to Greenham Common and contemporary Wikipedia edit-a-thons, the "web of women's history-telling" is an integral part of feminist 'herstory,' challenging established narratives and building new ones.[117]

Alongside emerging British historians like Leonore Davidoff, Matrix argued that historic spatial organization was responsible for naturalizing and exacerbating the contemporary sexual division of labor.[118] Despite formal legislative equality, a 1980 survey by the Department of Employment found that only two per cent of women's husbands did "most" of the housework, while an article in *Women's Own* magazine reported that one in six had never looked after his child.[119] In 1980, Matrix held an exhibition on domestic design called *Home Truths.* Half of the exhibit was devoted to a genealogy of domestic space, documenting the collective labor and intergenerational makeup of the seventeenth-century home to the neat divisions of the nineteenth. The narrative was simplified, but the idea was to accessibly convey the social construction of the partitioned home and its relation to capitalist labor relations. "By the late 1950s," Matrix argued, "the nuclear family was established as norm, as was the ideal home, where each house is detached and functions of rooms are inflexible […although] 62 percent of us do not live in such families."[120] Boys's chapter in *Making Space* digs into the archive to explain further. Postwar planning, Boys argues, failed to recognize women's unequal status both at home and in employment and failed to distinguish between women's work and leisure.[121] Design bulletins published by the Department of the Environment, which set industry standards for private and public housing, assumed not just a nuclear family and an unrealistic rationalization of time, but also a kitchen hermetically sealed from the rest of the house.[122] With regards to mobility, Boys notes that new towns like Milton Keynes were built upon the assumption of 100 percent car ownership, despite the fact that only twenty-nine per cent of housewives knew how to drive.[123] The architectural decisions of the past, Matrix argued, had fossilized a problematic view of domestic space that was holding back emancipation in the present.

---

[114] Erik Linstrum et al., "Forum: The Past, Present, and Futures of Modern British History," *Modern British History* 35, no. 1 (2024): 13.

[115] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (1846), cited in, Jeffery Weeks, *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain, from the Nineteenth Century to the Present* (London: Quartet Books, 1977), 231.

[116] Cook, "'Gay Times,'" 94; Alexander Vasudevan, *The Autonomous City: A History of Urban Squatting* (London: Verso Books, 2017), 54; Nick Wates, *The Battle for Tolmers Square* (London: Routledge, 1976).

[117] Zoë Thomas, "Duncan Tanner Essay Prize 2016: Historical Pageants, Citizenship, and the Performance of Women's History before Second-Wave Feminism," *Twentieth Century British History* 28, no. 3 (2017): 319–43, especially 322. See also, Laura Mayhall, "Creating the 'Suffragette Spirit': British Feminism and the Historical Imagination," *Women's History Review* 4, no. 3 (1995): 319–44; Rose Debenham, "'Who Makes History Anyway?': History-Making at Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp," *Women's History Review*, 2024, 620–639. Recent archival histories include Margaretta Jolly, *Sisterhood and After: An Oral History of the UK Women's Liberation Movement, 1968–Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

[118] For example, Leonore Davidoff, "The Separation of Home and Work? Landladies and Lodgers in Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century-England," in *Fit Work for Women, ed. Sandra Burman* (London: Croom Helm, 1979), 64–97; Leonore Davidoff, *Worlds Between: Historical Perspectives on Gender and Class* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995).

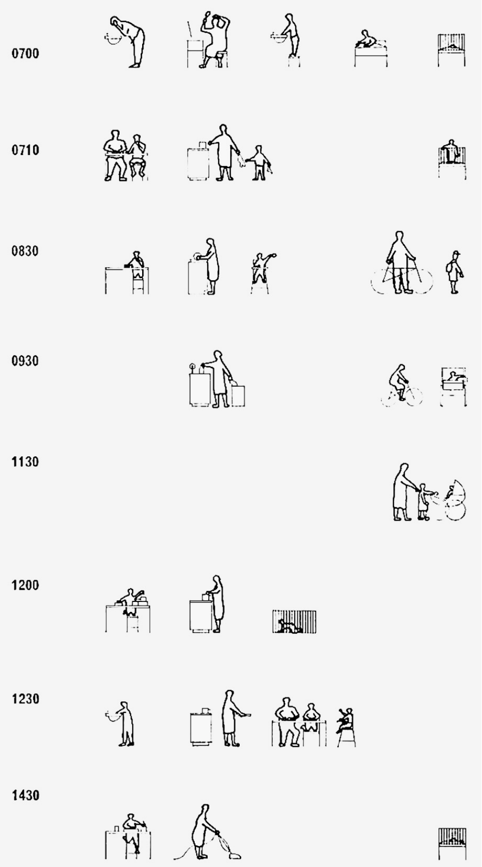
[119] Coote and Beatrix Campbell, *Sweet Freedom,* 85–6.

[120] Matrix quoted Bodil Kjaer, "A Woman's Place," *Architects Journal,* 15 September 1982.

[121] Boys, "Women and Public Space," in *Making Space,* 38.

[122] Susan Francis, "Housing the Family," in *Making Space,* 87.

[123] Boys, "Women and Public Space," in Matrix, *Making Space,* 39.



Time and activity chart. Reproduced from MTP Construction, *Housing the Family* (London, 1974), 50.

Matrix also uncovered forgotten histories that offered new ways of thinking about domestic space, as well as opportunities to link their work to a "genealogical politics" across feminist waves.[124] Jane Darke's chapter in *Making Space* recovers a lost feminist architectural tradition by documenting Ethel Charles, the first female member of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), and interwar architects like Elizabeth Scott. Darke also describes the "excellent account" of a "lost feminist tradition" in Torre's *Women in American Architecture* (1977), signalling transnational exchanges hitherto unexplored.[125] Inside, Torre said the "recovery of a cultural past [was] crucial for any future choices made by women."[126] The excavation of this cultural past was the focus of the second half of *Home Truths.* A panel on Victorian housing included a quote from a Mrs. Layton, who describes how, contra to John Ruskin's call for women to be "protected" inside, the realities of working-class life meant women "had to work outside the home."[127] It is likely Matrix sourced the quote from Margaret Llewellyn Davies's 1931 oral history on working-class women, republished in 1977 by Virago, and the quote implies Matrix was sensitive to how socio-economic positions differentiated female experience.[128] Another poster exhibit revealed the state-provision of restaurants and nurseries between the wars. This is also the focus of Marion Roberts's *Making Space* chapter, "Private Kitchens, Public Cooking." These "unknown" non-profit, state-run British Restaurants were a "challenge to women's unpaid labor in the home."[129] Roberts trawls through the unsorted food catalogue of the Mass Observation archive to question whether the "domestic idyll [has] always been so generally with us?"[130] In demonstrating the historical contingency of domestic space, Roberts and *Home Truths* could pave the way for its revision.

---

[124] Kate Eichhorn, *The Archival Turn in Feminism : Outrage in Order* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013), 8.

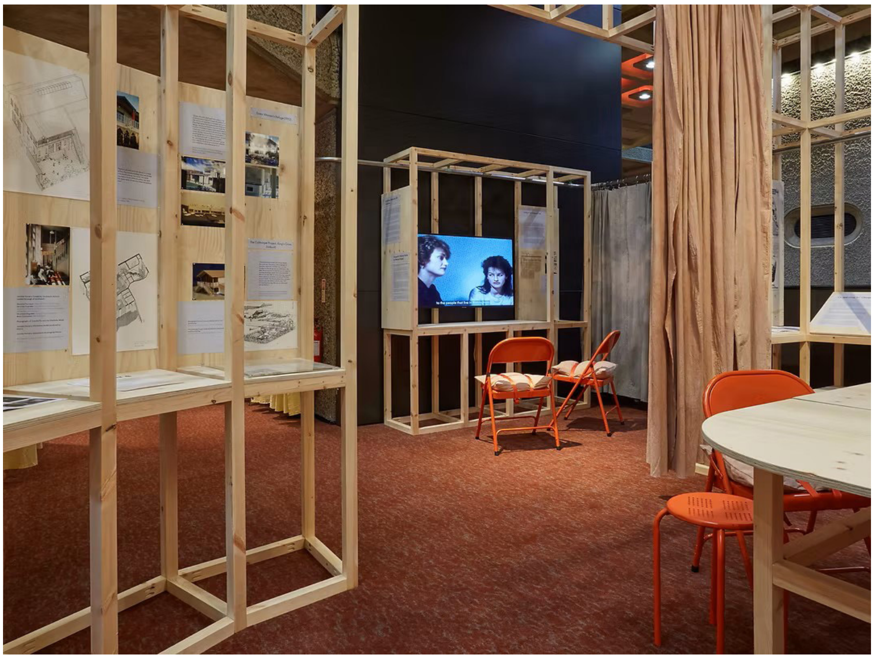
[125] Darke, "Women, Architects and Feminism," in *Making Space,* 19.

[126] Susana Torre, "Introduction: A Parallel History," in *Women in American Architecture: A Historic and Contemporary Perspective,* ed. Susana Torre (New York: Whitney Library of Design, 1977), 11.

[127] Fran Bradshaw, *Home Truths exhibition material,* 1980, private collection.

[128] Mrs. Layton, "Memories of Seventy Years," in *Life as We Have Known It: The Voices of Working-Class Women,* ed. Margaret Llewellyn Davies (London: Virago, 1977). Wilson's book was criticized by Liz Bondi for underplaying the divided character of women's experience in her review of *The Sphinx in the City,* by Elizabeth Wilson, *Feminist Review,* 1993, 138-40.

During my conversation with Bradshaw, she described her frustration that much of Matrix's communication was "hard to track down [because when] you're in the present, you don't write it down."[131] Matrix's preoccupation with the present is characteristic of many activist groups at the height of activity. Yet, following the deaths of Susan Francis and Julia Dwyer in the 2010s, they have embarked on a mass self-archiving project. The bulk of material used in this essay has come from MOfaa—which features a rich array of material, including member profiles, administrative documents, architectural plans, personal photographs, press coverage, and self-recorded oral history interviews.[132] The 'architecture' of the online archive is egalitarian—free to access, no project nor individual is prioritized, and the user can navigate the site in any way they choose. As an 'open archive' MOfaa also invites collaboration with old collaborators, contemporary architects, and educators. We might want to consider not only how MOfaa builds an alternative history to domestic space but also how it offers a counterbalance to imposing and hard-to-access institutional archives.



*How We Live Now* exhibition. Reproduced from Edit.

Alongside MOfaa, surviving members reissued *Making Space* (2020) and held an experimental exhibition at the Barbican Centre (2021), which has since toured Newcastle (2022) and Melbourne, Australia (2023). The exhibition is held within a plywood skeleton designed and built by the female collective, Edit. The structure intended to reflect the "behind-the-scenes work" of construction and Matrix's occupation of "informal spaces

---

[129] Marion Roberts, "Private Kitchens, Public Cooking," in Matrix, *Making Space,* 108, 119.
[130] Roberts, "Private Kitchens," in *Making Space,* 106, 110.
[131] Fran Bradshaw, personal interview, online, 1 May 2025.
[132] Matrix, Matrix Open feminist architecture archive (MOfaa), 2026, http://www.matrixfeministarchitecturearchive.co.uk/.

[…like] meeting in someone's living room or gathering around a kitchen table […it was] designed to feel domestic."[133] The walls of the exhibit are intended to be transparent, while metal curtain rails weave in and out like plumbing, bringing "intimacy" and also "flexibility" in levels of privacy.[134] The exhibition was accompanied by a catalogue, *Revealing Objects* which, in its bespoke typeface, *Domestic*, included a manual for understanding the layout of our homes.[135] Alongside documenting Matrix's work, *How We Live Now* also included the work of contemporary feminist housing activists across the globe, thus forging new historical timelines for future feminist research on the design of domestic space. The level of self-referential archiving may seem overdone, even egotistical. Yet, given that only thirty-one per cent of British architects are women, 1 percent are Black/Black British, and the last reported gender pay gap was 16 percent, records of feminist spatial tactics are needed to demonstrate the possibility of equitable architectural practices and generate feelings of "belonging" for women engaged in the profession.[136]

## MAKING FEMINIST SPATIAL TACTICS CONCRETE

Late-twentieth-century feminists did not just critique historical definitions of domestic space but also remade them in three-dimensional planes. Experimental sites of care, safety, and cultural production had been the building blocks of the WLM, and it was inevitable that women would seek to make these domesticities 'concrete' as the 1970s gave way to the 1980s and the mass redevelopment of Britain's urban centers. Yet, neither historians of British feminism nor urban social historians have given feminist spatial tactics in the 1980s much attention.

Matrix Feminist Design Cooperative reimagined domestic space through *participation, emotion,* and *the archive*. Like 'popular individualism' or 'ordinariness,' these fields were pre-existing in British political culture. Yet they were deployed by Matrix in ways that bridged their popular usage with a longstanding feminist tradition. Through involving women in the planning and construction of an emotional and revisionist soft architecture, Matrix unpicked the neutrality of domestic spaces and fundamentally altered parts of it. It is not lost on me that this study has been confined to London, with its disproportionately generous GLC funding, diverse demographics, and hubs of leftist activity. Yet, as London was also the focus of market liberalism and Thatcher's new Britain, it makes sense to explore Matrix's activities there as a localized instance of 'counter-hegemonic' strategy.

In a 2020 roundtable to mark Verso's reissue of *Making Space*, architectural historian Harriet Hariss quoted feminist Donna Harraway's adage that, "it matters what ideas we use to think other ideas."[137] Harriss was responding to Bradshaw's recognition that many of the ideas first expressed in the book are now considered mainstream. In 2024, British architect Thomas Heatherwick launched plans for a master's degree at Loughborough University which focuses around "emotion as a function of design."[138] In June 2025, plans were unveiled for the first women-only tower block for survivors of domestic abuse.[139] Although Matrix's activities ground to a halt in the mid-1990s, the maelstrom of feminist tactics that it, and those like it, pioneered continues to circulate. It is important to recognize the debt these contemporary initiatives owe to feminism. Otherwise, we raise the risk of "unwriting" Matrix's work.[140]

---

[133] EDIT, "How We Live Now ," 2021, https://www.editcollective.uk/how-we-live-now ; *How We Live Now: Reimagining Spaces with Matrix Feminist Design Cooperative,* The Barbican, 2021, https://www.barbican.org.uk/our-story/press-room/how-we-live-now-reimagining-spaces-with-matrix-feminist-design-cooperative.

[134] EDIT, "How We Live Now," 2021, https://www.editcollective.uk/how-we-live-now.

[135] Ibid.

[136] RIBA, "RIBA and Fawcett Society Survey: Tell Us Your Views about Gender Equity in Architecture," March 25, 2025, https://www.architecture.com/knowledge-and-resources/knowledge-landing-page/riba-and-fawcett-society-gender-equity-in-architecture-survey?srsltid=AfmBOooy-DumXuaf_VYta8AD-woxZ_YZPt5D7Wv6K_Y2fweASHmcgdyZO; Caroline Watkinson, "Using Archives to Educate for Feminist Architectural Praxis," *Charrette 9*, no. 2 (2024): 5–6.

[137] "Making Space Roundtable," video recording, December 13, 2020, personal collection of Fran Bradshaw; Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2016), 34.

---

[138] Lizzie Crook, "Thomas Heatherwick's Humanise Campaign Launches 'Joyful Architecture' Degree," Dezeen, May 15, 2024, https://www.dezeen.com/2024/05/15/thomas-heatherwick-humanise-campaign/.

[139] Philip James Lynch, "Women-Only Tower Block in Acton to Open next Summer," *BBC News,* June 17, 2025, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cwyjyyy2r5eo.

[140] Jane Rendell, "Only Resist: A Feminist Approach to Critical Spatial Practice," *Architectural Review,* no. 1449 (March 2018), https://www.architectural-review.com/essays/only-resist-a-feminist-approach-to-critical-spatial-practice.

## AUTHOR

*Eve Nicholson* is a recent MPhil graduate from the University of Cambridge, based in London. She currently works as a researcher at *The Week* and is co-founder of the prose, poetry and politics publication, *Running Dog*.

## COPYRIGHT

©2026 Burning Farm, ©2026 The Authors.
All content can be shared, distributed, and reproduced provided the original author and source are credited.

ISSN 2813–8058
burning.farm