

Architecture and the Dialectic of Sex

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ABSTRACT EXHIBITION CONTRIBUTION: The contribution for the Potenziale deals with an umbrella topic and the general motivation of the PhD thesis. In contrast to art history, architecture and architectural history are still rather hesitant to even question the canon. When in fact the aim is mere to explore figures and works outside of it and eventually to adapt it to the present. Therefore, photographs of buildings that are indisputably part of the architectural canon have been reworked with embroideries that are modified and appropriated works by women artists (Hilma af Klint, Verena Löwensberg, Lucia Moholy, Toyin Ojih Odutola and Sophie Taeuber-Arp). The five collages are accompanied by a quoted title by the writer and activist Audre Lorde (2003).

ABSTRACT PHD THESIS: Deriving from the question “To what extent does architecture respond to the feminist theories of care work and reproductive labour?”, to define parameters for a feminist architecture, the second wave feminist Shulamith Firestone and her groundbreaking work *The*

Dialectic of Sex (1970), shall be used as a filter through which architecture and urban space can be looked at, analysed, and maybe even be designed. The focus of this PhD thesis is therefore also to provide an answer to the question of whether and how feminist concepts and theories have found expression in architectural designs, concepts or even drawings, and to offer ways of reading these.

Using technology, radical feminist Shulamith Firestone proposes the abolition of the traditional nuclear family in *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970). Within this vision, children would not any longer grow up in nuclear households, but in living communities, where a group of adults, who are not necessarily related to these children, raise them in shared responsibility. For Firestone, this would not only generate autonomous and independent individuals but also free society from its patriarchal parameters and women from their reproductive duties. The dissertation parallels this concept with the architectural work and building concepts of the so-called material feminists, a term coined by Dolores Hayden in *The Grand Domestic Revolution* (1982). Between 1865-1929 material feminists followed the idea of endorsing equality between men and women with spatial arrangements. After the end of this first domestic revolution, similar approaches can be found in the GDR. Such as the spatial concepts for urban developments and designs for childcare facilities by the architect Karola Bloch. Developing schematic plans for the *Deutsche Bauakademie*, it was Bloch's architecture and research that participated in triggering a change in the role of women according to socialist principles.

Furthermore, the dissertation wants to investigate the feminist potential of this other mode of producing architecture: Instead of designing single buildings, Bloch was concerned with guidelines, norms, and regulations, as well as design principles for specific building typologies. And by reading those as a continuation of the work of the material feminists, it becomes clear that even today there still is a lot of potential in this other way of producing architecture. For this matter, the concepts of the historic examples are used to illustrate contemporary approaches towards space and architecture such as *Xenofeminism*. *Xenofeminism* is since the beginning a centre point of this research. It functions as a tool to keep staying in the contemporary field of the discourse of gender and feminism, as well as architecture. Not least play architecture and technology a significant role in the achievement of equality and abolition of sexism and racism in the *Xenofeminist Manifesto* (2018) by Laboria Cuboniks. Moreover, both Bloch and the representatives of material feminism perform within the spectrum of medium design. Borrowing from Keller Easterling's *Medium Design* (2021) definition of medium design, also their works are concerned with the interplays that can take account of change and offer alternatives.

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