Housing for Spatial Justice

Building Alliances Between Women Architects and Users

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Today, many architects are seeking to transcend conventional disciplinary concerns and to directly address social problems through the design of the built environment. Historical perspectives that can guide this commitment, however, tend to be limited in their emphasis of the singular visionary (and usually male) architect, if not altogether missing. New histories of socially engaged architecture and public-interest design must necessarily acknowledge the conditions of the profession itself, such as the value of labour, and gender and racial inequality within the profession. With this conviction, I examine how a group of feminist American architects arrived at low-income housing as a form of alternative, experimental practice in the late 1970s. Based on archival documentation and oral histories, I discuss two interrelated organizations, the Women's School of Planning and Architecture (WSPA), a radical pedagogical project, and the Women's Development Corporation (WDC), a non-profit developer of housing. My examination situates these organizations in their economic, political, and policy contexts: the end of Fordism, and the resulting funding cuts for social and public services which led to decline in low-income neighborhoods in urban centres, and the rise of community development corporations (CDCs).

WSPA was originally founded in 1974 as a two-week summer gathering of women architects. The motivation at the beginning was to foster collective learning in a non-hierarchical environment and to make design education and professions more inclusive to women. Within a couple of years, the focus shifted to social justice, and three of the "sisters" went on to establish WDC to work in the field of housing for low-income single parents, virtually all of whom were women of ethnic and racial minorities. These architects were concerned about their marginalization in a "male-dominated" profession yet simultaneously cognizant of their class and racial privileges as white, middle-class, professional women. Aligning with other marginalized women, specifically, low-income single mothers, would support their broader cause toward the spatial dimension of social justice—that is, of "spatial justice," a term relatively recently coined by the Los Angeles–based urban geographer Edward Soja (2010).

This study of these interconnected organizations, WSPA and WDC, provides a demonstrative case for political scientist Nancy Fraser's (2013a, 2013b)—passionately challenged (Aslan and Gambetti 2011; Funk 2013; Bhandar and Ferreira da Silva 2013)—characterization of second-wave feminism as a "handmaiden" of capitalism. This study also contributes to concerted efforts to acknowledge or "unforget" the contributions of women architects (Stratigakos 2016). It offers a lens onto women architects' contributions to socially engaged design, remarkably as a means of self-empowerment

through building alliances with women users, and seeks to encourage further scholarship in the history of socially engaged architectural practice.

Women and the Design of the Built Environment

Second-wave feminism ought to be credited for its critical role in raising consciousness both among women architects and about them—that is, in expanding research on the history of the built environment to include women's contributions (Torre 1977; Rendell 2012). Second-wave feminism also led to increasing awareness, in the context of the United States, that the housing stock, most of which was for the nuclear family, with a working father and homemaker mother, did not address demographic trends. The women's movement fought against the paternalistic values of the state-managed capitalism of the immediate post-war era—with the suburban single-family house as its emblem, "prisoning" the women at home—at a time, however, when that model was rapidly eroding. Economic restructuring following the OPEC oil crisis of 1973 had led to the weakening of the unions, and the feminization of the labour market in flexible and part-time, low-paid configurations. Without acknowledging or being aware of this change in labour relations and conditions, feminist women in architecture took issue with the suburban house as the culprit. They convincingly argued that the form of new housing had to speak to women's needs. Especially influential for architects was Dolores Hayden's *Redesigning the American Dream* (1984), which praised and publicized Women's Development Corporation, WDC, founded by three WSPA "sisters," as an exemplary project that achieved economic equity, spatial integration, and urban revitalization, all at once.

Of course, efforts for networking and collaboration among women architects predate second-wave feminism. Regardless, women remained marginalized in both education and professional practice by the 1970s (and despite their increased numbers, they remain so, if, for instance, the award system is taken as a litmus test). Most efforts toward professional alliances focused on alleviating this marginalization. Calls for professional networking among women in the early 1970s led by the end of the decade to concerted efforts to ally with women living at the margins, women suffering from different types of oppression.

The San Francisco–based Organization of Women Architects, Cambridge (MA)-based Women in Architecture, Landscape Architecture, and Planning, and New York–based Alliance of Women in Architecture were all formed in 1972; Chicago Women in Architecture in 1974. It is no coincidence that such organizations were founded in metropolitan areas. Networking could help women architects resist and reverse their marginalization within schools and offices, academia and the profession. First meetings increasingly communicated that there could be alternative ways of making architecture, and despite the dominant image of the architect as a "pipe smoking, tweedy suited white male," that "It's OKAY to be a Woman Architect,"[1] that women architects did not have to choose between the private and social parts of their lives—for example, as mothers and wives, and their identities as professionals. From earlier concerns about improving their numbers and wages, participating women architects moved to a questioning of the boundaries of the discipline and the profession.

The seven founders of WSPA—Katrin Adam, Ellen Perry Berkeley, Noel Phyllis Birkby, Bobbie Sue Hood, Marie I. Kennedy, Joan Forrester Sprague, and Leslie Kanes Weisman—who had been living in Boston, New York, Detroit, and San Francisco areas, met through various networking events from 1972 to 1974, conferences in Los Angeles, Oregon, and Lincoln, Nebraska. Most of the preparatory work, however, was realized over the mail and through phone conversations. Only Spraque and Kennedy were in existing collaboration as partners in the non-hierarchical, all-women "Open Design Office" in Boston. In fact, the seven of them met together for the first time in the first WSPA summer session of 1975, the 52 participants of which came from 21 states in the United States and from Canada. It is important to note that, as affiliations, most listed educational institutions: Katrin Adam, City College, School of Architecture (New York); Ellen Perry Berkeley, Columbia

Figure 14.1   Women's School of Planning and Architecture participants forming a woman symbol, 1975.

From the Women's School of Planning and Architecture Records, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College (Northampton, Massachusetts).

Figure 14.2 Introductory session of the Women's School of Planning and Architecture, St. Francis College, Biddeford, Maine, August 10, 1975. Photo by Patti Glazer. From the Women's School of Planning and Architecture Records, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College (Northampton, Massachusetts).

University; Phyllis Birkby, Pratt Institute; and Leslie Kanes Weisman, New Jersey School of Architecture. Two of these seven women would go on to found WDC: Boston-based Sprague and New York-based Adam. Typical of most experimental work back then as today, their alternative practices were co-supported by educational institutions in an indirect way.

A graduate of Cornell University's professional program in architecture (for a BArch) and Harvard University's Graduate School of Education (EdM), Sprague produced work ranging from furniture to collective housing for low-income women and children at the aforementioned Open Design Office. She worked as consultant to Benjamin Thomson Associates as well as several other prominent local firms and institutions. Also active as a writer, she published manuals (1984, 1986, 1988, 1991) for other women to take up her kind of community work. Adam was born in Germany and studied carpentry and architecture at the State Academy of Beaux Arts and at the Cabinetmaking Guild of Munich before she came to the United States to work with a number of prominent architects, including Eero Saarinen in Connecticut and Frank Gehry in Los Angeles, California.[2] During the latter time, in Los Angeles, she got involved in the women's movement. She finally settled in New York and started taking leadership roles in community design.

Today, Linda Nochlin's 1971 article "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" (*Art News*) is remembered as a turning point—for challenging the notion of greatness or genius that had hitherto characterized the art historical canon as well as shaping contemporary criticism since. Los Angeles had a particularly active scene for women artists who defied accepted norms about art production and the cult of the artist as genius: for example, at "Womanhouse," a collaborative installation, Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro—founders of Feminist Art Program (1971) at CalArts—transformed an abandoned Hollywood mansion with installation work that "confronted" stereotypical American middle-class domestic roles of women (Chicago and Meyer 1995). Secondly, in opposition to the male-dominated art world, women artists did collective work. The feminist social practice of "consciousness raising" was a key concern in this type of work, especially through group discussions. This practice sought to enable women to identify patterns and beliefs that perpetuate dictated gender norms, and to question these norms, to change their own behaviour, and to lead to collective action, especially among women (Rosen 2006).

WSPA was very much influenced, informed, and in conversation with such collaborative and radical artistic work, and feminist-identified, women-only educational programs at its inception; it was the only one in the United States focusing on architecture and the built environment (Kahn 2014).

There were five WSPA sessions: the first one took place in 1975 at St. Joseph's College in Biddeford, Maine; the second one in 1976 took place at the University of California, Santa Cruz's Stephenson College; the third in 1978 at Roger Williams College in Bristol, Rhode Island; the fourth one in 1979 at Regis College in Denver, Colorado. The first four were two weeks long. The final one in 1981 took the form of a weekend symposium in Washington, DC, in 1981.

WSPA co-founders Katrin Adam and Joan Forrester Sprague teamed up with a younger participant of WSPA sessions, Susan Aitcheson, to found WDC. Aitcheson had graduated from the University of Nebraska with a bachelor's degree in architecture in 1975.[3] She participated in the first session of the Women's School in Maine and continued to attend the sessions, becoming part of the planning group in 1978. Having worked on (Bridgewater) prison and (Monsanto's) chemical plant projects until that moment, she wanted to "integrate feminism and architecture"[4] and establishing the non-profit housing corporation seemed like an effective way of changing both women's professional roles and the client groups that they served.[5]

While the first session of WSPA was very much in the spirit of consciousness raising, subsequent sessions led the organization to focus more on action, and led Adam, Sprague, and Aitheson to choose Providence, the capital city of Rhode Island, to build affordable housing for women in need. It was midway from Boston, where Sprague was based, and New York, where Katrin Adam was based. They regarded Rhode Island as an "empty field" since there were no other CDCs with which

they would be competing.[6] In Aitcheson's words, "it was possible in Rhode Island, the smallest state in the United States, to have the governor, the mayor, everyone in the same room. So [they could] push things along more quickly."[7] Furthermore, the state had rejected most of the federal investment in urban renewal in the 1960s, avoiding the fate of other inner-city areas in major U.S. cities, such as Boston and Chicago. As a result, there were many historic residential buildings they could renovate and adopt. In Providence, the trio met and invited to their group Alma Green, originally from Mexico, and a recent graduate of Brown University, with work experience in the mayor's office and an understanding of local actors and federal and community grant opportunities.

Just as WSPA was inspired by and part of a larger women's movement, WDC was not founded or operating in a vacuum. There had been slightly earlier as well as parallel efforts both in providing housing for women-headed households and by women-focused housing corporations elsewhere in the United States as well as abroad (Ahrentzen 1989; Anthony 1991). All these efforts and the reporting on them consistently point to the fact that the rates of divorce and the proportion of single-parent families had noticeably increased; a high share of single-parent families were women-headed, and financially disadvantaged (Ahrentzen, 1988, 442).

Housing alternatives for the changing family thus had emerged as a focus of feminist design practice as well as historical inquiry (Hayden 1984; Ahrentzen 1989). It must be noted, however, that women designers were historically ghettoized within the profession as house designers (Wright 1977). The profession encouraged women to specialize in housing based on sexual stereotypes, with the home as the sphere of women. As a result, those women who were concerned with social aspects of the built environment became, in Gwendolyn Wright's words, "adjuncts to the profession" (Wright 1977, 284). The three WSPA sisters' move to the field of housing occurred in light of contemporaneous discussions on women's environmental needs perhaps perpetuating rather than confronting long-established stereotypes.

Housing as a Field of Action for Gender Equity

WDC's origins lie in the women's movement in architecture but it also emerged as a result of a major shift in housing policy, which allocated governmental spending from that of direct housing supply to dispersal programs that ranged from community development programs to vouchers (Goetz 2003). Not only in the United States but also internationally, many public housing programs moved to a public-private partnership model in their financing or provision. Interestingly, this move was paralleled with a celebration of user participation in housing design with acclaimed examples, for example, by Lucien Kroll and Christopher Alexander, where the architect–expert retained control over the project, despite soliciting participation in the earlier design phase (Ruesjas 2012).[8] Indeed, their works have been interpreted mostly within an architectural discourse that still focuses mainly on architectural and social intentions rather than financial or regulatory underpinnings, or rather than outcomes and impact.

In stark contrast to these better-known examples by male architects, by the time the three women architects from WSPA decided to establish WDC, they chose to establish not an architectural office or firm but a community development corporation (CDC), in order to be able to tap into federal grants. WSPA sisters had reasoned early on that their marginalization within the profession was somewhat liberatory, allowing them to "devise solutions men may be too restricted to consider" (Leslie Weisman, quoted in Reif 1975). This solution turned out to be community development (which is much more comprehensive than "community design"). At the moment of its founding, WDC founders were concerned not solely with unit design, financing, and delivery but also with providing other kinds of social support mechanisms, such as an informal daycare network so that women could come to meetings, and the provision of training in self-help concepts and techniques (Adam et al. 1981). Finally, they were interested not only in new buildings but also in adaptive reuse
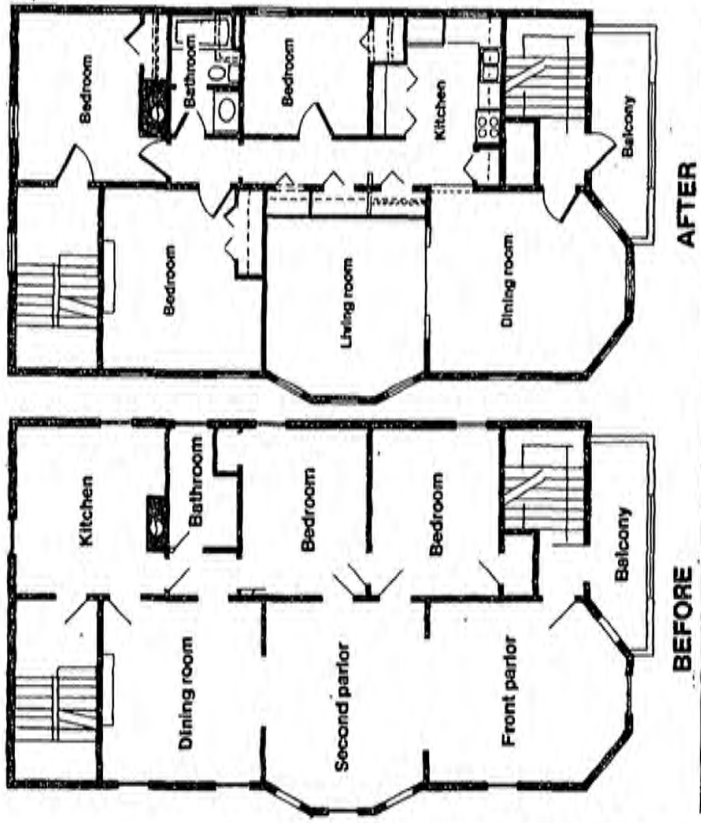
In a Providence, R.I., triple-decker building the **Women's Development Corporation** redesigned the original floor plan, left, so that living, dining and kitchen areas flow together. The revised layout is intended to make it easier for a single parent to supervise children.

BEFORE

Kitchen

Bathroom

Bedroom

Dining room

Bedroom

Second parlor

Front parlor

Balcony

AFTER

Bedroom

Bathroom

Bedroom

Bedroom

Kitchen

Living room

Dining room

Balcony

Figure 14.3 "174 Camp Street," a triple-decker renovated and converted into rental units for low-income people by Women's Development Corporation in Providence, Rhode Island, next to its "before and after" plan layouts featured in Joseph Giovanni, "Planning New Living Spaces for the Nontraditional Family," *The New York Times* (Thursday, September 20, 1984), C10.

(Adam et al. 1981). The founders started out by rehabilitating a factory building, and with help from Providence Preservation Society, they continued with abandoned Victorians, colonials, and triple-deckers. These scattered conversions helped revitalize neighbourhoods.

WSPA's move toward housing production was nurtured by the federal government. HUD, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, had taken a special interest in these emerging women's organizations (Skinner 1978). In 1976, the "Women's Policy and Program Division" was approved as a special unit within HUD to improve women's access to housing. While community development and women's housing had been central concerns in specific courses during WSPA's 1975 and 1976 sessions, the grant opportunities provided by HUD and explained at the 1978 session in person by HUD representatives gave these issues an increasing importance and led to group workshops on the potential of Community Block Grants for the special needs of women (Adam et al. 1981). It is no coincidence that WDC was established following this session. In the end, HUD did not finance the proposal by Adam, Aitcheson, and Sprague, but the Women's Policy and Program Division within HUD guided them toward other agencies, the Community Services Administration and the Economic Development Administration, which granted funding by October 1979 (Adam et al. 1981). In WDC's initial scheme, housing planning was connected to supporting women's participation in the workforce and thereby independence from welfare, while also achieving urban revitalization.

Reinventing the Image of Low-Income Housing

WDC's housing projects in Providence focused initially on the adaptive reuse of abandoned historic properties, and helped downtown revitalization. Because the units were dispersed, their earlier projects avoided the stigmatization associated with living in public housing projects as well as in unmaintained slum-type rental units in the private real estate market. This stigmatization was a key reason that WDC founders could recruit local women for their community design workshops.

The participating women attended these meetings because they wanted to get out of public housing to a place which they thought would be closer to one's home, simply by not being labeled as a "project." For example, two of them (interviewed on 19 May 2011), Fanny and Jessie, were both living at that time in a local public housing project called Chad Brown. Chad Brown was developed by the Providence Housing Authority in 1942 (Campbell 2007). It consisted of 28 two-story row houses with 198 units spread out among 13 acres of land, which was landscaped. It was originally built to house 600 war production workers, upon the departure of which—that is, by the 1960s—primarily low-income residents of Providence had moved in (Campbell 2007). Chad Brown was quite different from the tower blocks that came to characterize public housing projects in the post-war era. It was stigmatized nonetheless as a "project," and suffered visibly from lack of maintenance and investment by the 1960s.

The dominant image of public housing in post-war United States has been the high-rise, high-density "project." Yet, this model was relatively short-lived. By the end of the 1960s, legal measures and programs (e.g., Fair Housing Act of 1968) paved the way for scattered-site projects that sought to overcome racial discrimination and the concentration of poverty (Goetz 2003). Perhaps the most famous of these high-rise, high-density projects, Pruitt-Igoe—designed by Leinweber, Yamasaki & Hellmuth and built in the early 1950s in St. Louis, Missouri—was demolished in the 1970s. The highly publicized and broadcast demolition of the first of the 33 blocks on March 16, 1972, by the federal government became an iconic moment in housing policy debates.

Within architectural circles, the spectacle of the demolition was glorified as the end of modernism and the beginning of postmodernism, most memorably by Charles Jencks (1977) in *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture*, and much quoted via Jencks in seminal books, such as *The Condition of Postmodernity* by David Harvey (1990). According to the chain of authority established by repeated

comments, the failure of Pruitt-Igoe was in its design. Katharine Bristol's 1991 *Journal of Architectural Education* article entitled "The Pruitt-Igoe Myth" and, 20 years later, the 2011 documentary film with the same title by Chad Freidrichs aim to "debunk" the myth by showing how the project's operation was plagued by a number of political, economic, and social contextual factors—such as the white flight to the suburbs enabled by mortgages underwritten by the federal government, the lack of funds for maintenance, and managerial discrimination and failure. The "myth" served the architecture discipline trying to legitimize its new direction (Bristol 1991). What the myth served in housing policy and broader policy debates is another question.

Not disconnected to the impending oil crisis of October 1973 and the ensuing economic recession, in January 1973, President Richard M. Nixon halted federally administered housing production programs (Oberleke 2000). Over the next decades, federal policy shifted from a project-based approach to tenant-based assistance. However, federal funds kept flowing into low-income housing production through subsidies, including housing vouchers, housing block grants, and the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (Oberleke 2000). These policy tools encouraged non-governmental players (non-profit corporations and for-profit firms) to participate in shaping new programs that delivered low-income housing and other social services. David J. Erickson (2006, 167) explains, "more than one million federally subsidized apartments for low-income tenants that were built in the 1980s and early 1990s . . . primarily by for-profit and non-profit housing developers and funded largely with tax credits and federal block grants." Referring to the 2008 census, Alex Schwartz (2010) provides the figure of 1.61 million low-income units built by non-profit community development corporations alone. In summary, the welfare state did not simply disappear but, according to Erickson, "became less transparent, lost in a confusion of public-private partnerships and back-door financing techniques" (2006, 168), many of which were fulfilled by non-profit housing developers, such as WDC, as well as for-profit developers. In short, WSPA's move toward housing production for low-income marginalized women was nurtured by the federal government's changing housing policy and the creation of a special unit within HUD that engaged women's housing issues.

The Question of Participation

While non-profits in low-income housing provision had existed for a long time in the United States, before the 1970s they were mostly religious organizations, labour unions, or settlement houses—notably, housing was not at the centre of their services (Schwartz 2010, 294). The non-profit scene that emerged in the 1970s consisted of predominantly community development corporations (CDCs). CDCs, in turn, have roots in community design centres, established by professionals (Schumann 2006; Comerio 1984). The first community design centre was established in 1963 New York City (Architects Renewal Committee in Harlem) in opposition to urban renewal plans threatening inner-city neighbourhoods, part and parcel of the civil rights movement. Architects who got involved with such initiatives questioned the legitimacy of the profession, especially of the modern movement, which proposed to offer solutions to social problems but created, in their eyes, more problems. For example, high-rise, tower-form public housing projects, which sought to improve the conditions of inner-city slums, exacerbated racial discrimination and poverty for their residents.

In its earlier phase, "community design" meant a group of professionals, mostly university-based ones, worked with a local community in challenging top-down plans. In many instances, they did not find a "community" that was organized and unified; hence their tasks included galvanizing public support and forming the very communities they hoped to work with. Mary Comerio (1984) identifies a shift from this earlier idealist 1960's phase to the 1980s' pragmatic entrepreneurialism. In the 1960s, advocacy programs started receiving government support but by the 1980s national

political and economic agendas had shifted, and along with it professional concerns for environmental and distributive justice subsided. Even before the era of Reaganism—that is, by the late 1970s—community designers had shifted their focus from process to product—namely, delivering built projects (Comerio 1984). In WDC's case, this meant benefiting from newly made available funds for scattered-site low-income housing programs.

The availability (or thereof the lack of) funds partially explains why the participatory design workshops WDC initiated when they started out in Providence in 1979 were terminated after 1981, but they flourished as a housing developer until today. Comerio explains, "advocacy and citizen participation did not demystify professional knowledge, but instead created a new category of expertise in special interest politics" (Comerio 1984, 239). WDC is very much part of this expertise; it is still within the realm of community design because they produce affordable housing not merely for the generic user but for a specific constituency. By 1981, when WDC had produced its first buildings for low-income single mothers, WSPA held its last session.

Participation in the Field

The founders of WDC applied the ideological agenda of WSPA directly into practice in the field in Providence. WSPA proposed alternatives to conventional architectural practice. The curriculum was designed to offer subject matter unavailable in standard academic or professional settings. Male-defined and -identified education was competitive and hierarchical; in contrast, WSPA founders and organizers turned their focus toward pleasure, humour, and fun. "Cake campus" exercise at the 1975 session and commemorative necklaces, passports, and other memorabilia they produced as well as recordings reveal these aspects of the school.

In their applications of pedagogic experiments in the field, the courses acquired practical goals. For instance, one WSPA course was called "Demystification of Tools in Relations to Design."[9] Offered by Katrin Adam, who had trained in carpentry and cabinet-making back in Germany, this course taught participating women to work with wood. Such a class was not meant to directly advance women architects in their professional careers but to empower them through know-how. However, when adapted for WDC, in Providence, the "Women in Construction" class offered under the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA), and again taught by Adam, was quietly utilitarian: this training could allow several (of the 225) participants to enter the highly gendered and well-paid construction trade as builders and developers.

Most strikingly, the fantasy drawing classes which were originally conceived by Weismann and Birkby for well-educated, mostly white women architects to imagine their ideal environments as poetic statements were repurposed in WDC's community design workshops with local mothers to gather design information (Torre 1977). Weisman (1992, 170) explains the following about the WSPA sessions:

> Workshop participants entered a room in which long rolls of paper and a large supply of coloured markers stretched across the floor. We instructed women to get comfortable, close their eyes, and imagine their ideal living environment. With long pauses, in between, we asked: "What does it look like?" "What size and shape?" "What is it made of?" "Where is it located? "What do you do there?" "Is there anyone else there?" "Where?" and so on. As pictures came to mind, the women silently began to draw, allowing their images to develop by free association. . . . As our collection of drawings grew, we began to notice patterns that spoke of shared experiences and common aspirations among the participants. Four themes emerged: the women needed private, safe space; they wanted control over who could enter it, why, and for how long; they wanted the physical arrangement of their dwellings to adjust to changes in their moods, activities, and relationships with others; and they felt that it was important to have contact with nature and natural materials that soothe and stimulate the senses.

Figure 14.4 Identification of fasteners for Katrin Adam's core course "Demystification of Tools," Women's School of Planning and Architecture, August 1975.

Photo by Patti Glazer. From the Women's School of Planning and Architecture Records, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College (Northampton, Massachusetts).

In the WDC workshops, in Providence, however, the women participants were not asked to do fantasy drawings. Instead, they were given clearly defined ruled papers, and small coloured pieces of paper to explain their ideal domestic configurations. They were then asked to create floor plans using the coloured pieces, each of which stood in for a type of activity, and to use heart-shaped pieces to identify spaces special to them. The collages that were generated were in turn used by the WDC founders and architect Nancy Santagata (Breitbart 1990) to generate a prototypical plan solution, which would then be incorporated into each new project.

The participatory design workshops of WDC founders and local women lasted for more than a year. These sessions were used by WDC founders, in the words of Weisman "to break down the barriers between design professionals and low-income client groups, particularly those who speak English as a second language" (Weisman 1992, 170). How effective the guided drawing exercises were in terms of cross-class solidarity is a question that remains unanswered.

The participating low-income women understood the purpose of the drawings for the architects but did not necessarily enjoy them as a poetic exercise in the same way as women architects participating in the WSPA drawing sessions did. The workshops did give them a sense of participation in a process, and helped them form bonds among the group that have continued until this day. However, especially because the WDC founders remained as managers of the properties they converted or built anew, the power relations between the architects and the "clients" became more problematic over the ensuing years, with WDC leadership having the sole incentive in the shaping of the housing, and in decisions regarding who has access to their housing units. Though WDC cared about residents' feedback—for example, it commissioned Myrna Marhguiles Breitbart (1990) to do a post-occupancy study in 1986–1987—in subsequent projects, it focused its efforts on real estate management, development, and fundraising.

Since federal grants became extremely competitive over the years, WDC diversified its target groups to include elderly, disabled, and other marginal groups to tap into other types of local, city, and state funds as well. And since the historic housing stock is not so readily and cheaply available today, they have also engaged in building new housing in clusters, which inevitably looks like low-income housing, which undermines to a degree the non-profit's founding goals.

Conclusion

WSPA advocated that women architects engage not only with the design aspect but with all aspects of the housing process, from planning to designing, from building to maintaining, from creating housing codes to lobbying development authorities. Among these WDC chose to focus on building and management. WDC's path and approach to development fitted perhaps too well with the restructuring of the economy and its impact on cities: just as downtown revitalization schemes corresponded with the feminist critiques of suburban living, the rise of complex public-private collaborations encouraged a new generation of architects to turn to development (most significantly marked by the opening of "real estate" units in academic institutions, such as Harvard University) and this alternative path of "architect-as-developer" corresponded with and spoke to the feminist critique of the male-dominated architectural design office. Second-wave feminism had emerged as a critique of the state-managed capitalism of the post-war era; feminist architects' critique of suburban home and endorsement of public-private partnerships and inner-city redevelopments dovetailed with new urbanization trends under neoliberalism. And emancipatory aspects of feminism, such as solidarity, collaboration, horizontality, and participation, were key ideas which somewhat lost steam on the way.

WSPA had showed its participants that their marginalization within the profession was not a singular phenomenon, and if they had more presence—say, within the AIA, within architecture schools, as students and as faculty, and in architecture offices—it would not solve all that much because the whole built environment was designed by male-dominated institutions within a male-dominated
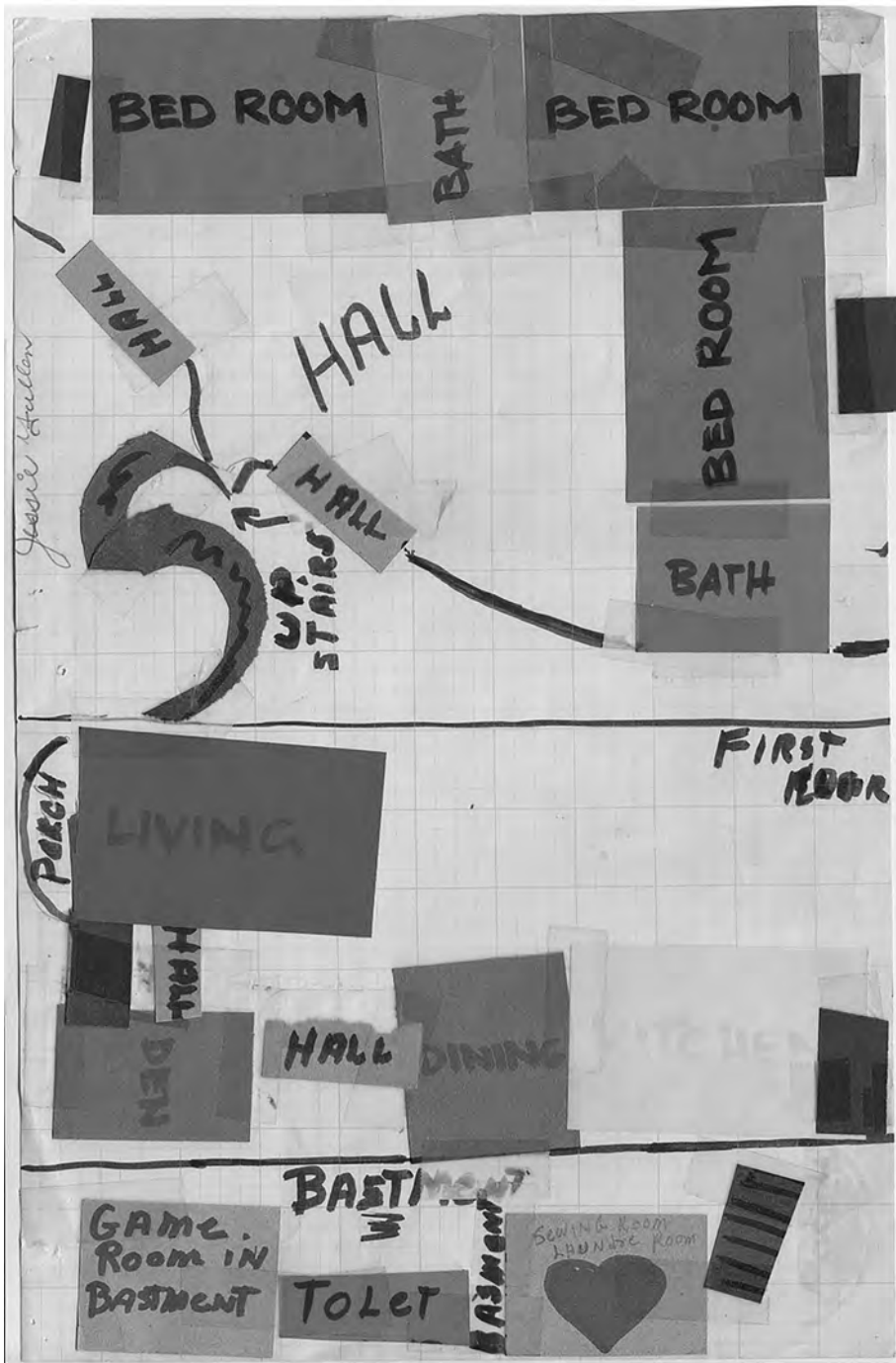
Figure 14.5 Apartment plan configuration produced at a participatory design workshop held by Women's Development Corporation in 1979.

Courtesy of WDC.

Figure 14.6 Participatory design workshop held in 1979. Katrin Adam overlooking two participants working on their ideal plan diagrams.

Courtesy of WDC.

spatial paradigm. Thus, if they instead aligned with other marginalized groups, they could create new kinds of spaces that foster human equality. Hence, they organized and networked in experimental summer schools, horizontally organized open offices, and development corporations that would house low-income people. "Users" for these women were not generalizations; they advocated a design process involving specific future users from the start. Hence they fulfilled Italian architect Giancarlo De Carlo's (2005 [1969]) call to not "design for" but "design with" users, as well as American planner Paul Davidoff's (1965) to be advocates for disadvantaged groups. The right to housing would be the basis for a just society.

To remember WSPA and to examine WDC's trajectory in a continuum is significant today for a number of reasons. Feminist architects discussed here challenged conventional forms of (top–down) practice in how they themselves organized as professionals. They opposed institutional methods of housing delivery and instead opted for the participation of users and working with specific user groups. They were aware of their relational power in choosing to work with other women of different racial and class backgrounds and experiences, but they necessarily wanted to build alliances—alliances which would challenge the norms of the "male-dominated" built environment and empower both the user groups and themselves as architects.

WSPA's interest in housing initially had to do with the critique of suburbia and was based on second-wave feminism. Yet, the interest in building low-income housing was nurtured directly by the federal government at a moment when federal policy was shifting from a project-based approach to tenant-based assistance, from centralized provision of units to dispersal housing programs. The connection and continuity between WSPA, the itinerant women architects' school, the radical pedagogical project, and WDC, the non-profit housing developer and manager, are an illustration of Fraser's aforementioned argument that "second-wave feminism became capitalism's handmaiden"; that "it has entangled in a dangerous liaison with neoliberal efforts to build a free-market society" (2013b). Fraser's point is not to condemn feminism but to point to ways it can be reclaimed as a critique of contemporary capitalism. Uncovering or not forgetting this story seeks to first acknowledge the unique role of women architects in histories of participation in the profession, and second, to promote models of horizontality and collaboration, and most importantly solidarity, which were informed by their feminist perspective.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1 See the poster of "Organization of Women Architects," 1974. Available from http://owa-usa.org/docs/1974poster(front).pdf [Accessed 13 September 2016].

2 "Coordinator's credentials for the 1978 session." Box 8 Folder 7; *WSPA, 2002 Reunion Album,* 1–2. Records of the Women's School of Planning and Architecture, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, MA.
3 Interview with author on December 8, 2010, at WDC, RI.
4 "Participant List for 1979 Session," Box 9, Folder 13. Records.
5 "Program for the 1979 Session," Box 9, Folder 14. Records.
6 Interview with author on December 8, 2010, at WDC, RI.
7 Ibid.
8 For example, Ana Laura Ruesjas's post-occupancy study of Christopher Alexander's Mexicali project shows how the buildings were transformed during use because, while the result of a participatory process, the design was removed from the residents' immediate realities. Swedish architects Ralph Erskine and Johannes Olivegren, British architects Walter Segal and John Turner, Italian architect Giancarlo de Carlo, and American architects Sandy Hirshen, Richard Hach, Charles Moore, Karl Linn, David Chapin, James Vann, Randy Hester, Henry Sanoff, and Troy West are some of the well-known names associated with participatory design processes and community design. Among contemporary practices, muf, which was founded in 1994 in London, has made a name for itself as an all-women collaborative of artists, architects, and urban designers.
9 "Background Facts of WSPA for the 1976 Session," Box 1 Folder 1. Records.

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The Routledge Companion to
Architecture and Social Engagement

Edited by Farhan Karim

The Routledge Companion to Architecture and Social Engagement

Socially engaged architecture involves a blend of practices and principles committed to refocusing the profession away from its market-driven proclivities towards new forms of altruism and activism: prompting an increased emphasis upon participatory, egalitarian and emancipatory pedagogies. *The Routledge Companion to Architecture and Social Engagement* offers a critical enquiry of socially engaged architecture's current context characterized by socio–economic inequity, climate change, war, increasing global poverty, microfinance, the evolving notion of professionalism, the changing conception of public, and finally the growing academic interest in re-visioning the social role of architecture. Organized around case studies from the United States, Brazil, Venezuela, the United Kingdom, South Africa, Rwanda, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Nepal, Pakistan, Iran, Thailand, Germany, Australia, Taiwan, and Japan, the book documents the most important recent developments in the field. By examining diverse working methods and philosophies of socially engaged architecture, the book shows how socially engaged architecture is entangled in the global politics of poverty, reconstruction of the public sphere, changing role of the state, charity, and neoliberal urbanism. The book presents debates around the issue of whether architecture actually empowers the participators and alleviates socio-economic exclusion or if it instead indirectly sustains an exploitive capitalism. Bringing together a range of theories and case studies, this companion offers a platform to facilitate future lines of inquiry in education, research, and practice.

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