



Aalto University
School of Arts, Design
and Architecture

Women's Design Service, London

Eeva Berglund, for DESIGN FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

9.11.2020



DOING THINGS DIFFERENTLY: WOMEN'S DESIGN SERVICE AT 20

A history of Women's Design Service was published in 2008 to celebrate 20 years of feminist urban design in and beyond London

Eeva Berglund

Women's Design Service

- As technical aid or support
 - 1983 - 1991
- As service
 - 1991 - 2007
- In aid of what?
 - Visibility? Evidence base? Hope for change?

‘Half a dozen loose cannons’

POSITIVE ACTION ON WOMEN AND PLANNING

WDS publications

1988 *Thinking of Small Children: Access Provision and Play*

1988 *Shoppers' Creches: Guidelines for Childcare Facilities in Public Places*

1988 *It's Not All Swings and Roundabouts: Making better play spaces for the under-sevens*

1989 *Making a Space for Women: A resource book on women and the built environment*

1990 *At Women's Convenience: A handbook on the design of women's toilets*

1992 *Designing Houses for Older Women*

Using the built environment



Knowing the modern city

- Because they are so woefully underrepresented in the built environment professions "...women frequently experience inconvenience and obstruction in the designed environment, inadequate solutions are imposed on them and they encounter a widespread lack of knowledge and understanding among professionals about how they use space."

Sue Cavanagh 1998

"Women's Design Service will make women's needs visible"



<http://photogrphy.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/london-colourful-life-in-the-1970s-10.jpg>

"Women's Design Service will make women's needs visible"

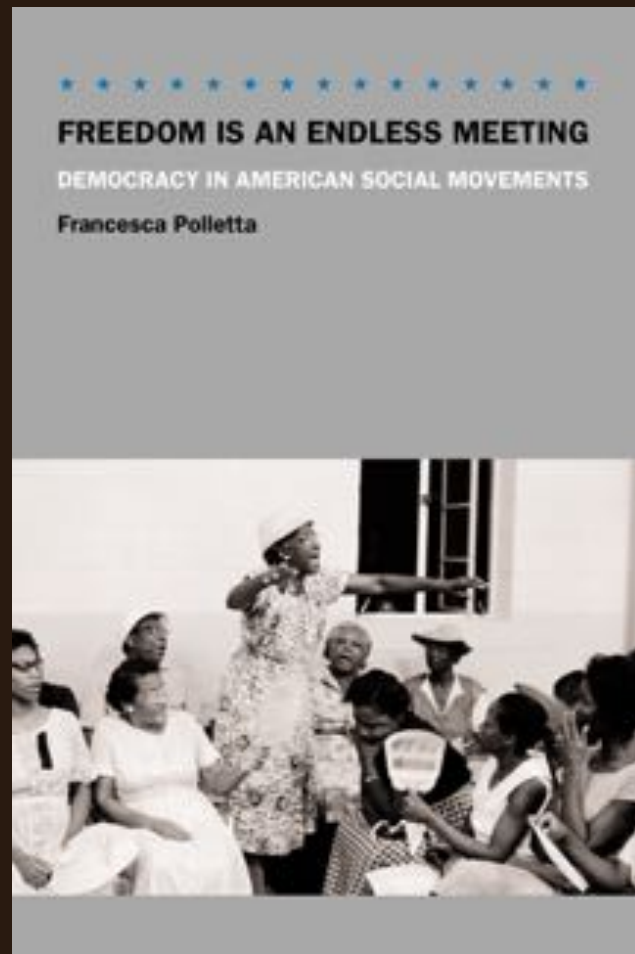
- 1986 Greater London Council (GLC, then London's metropolitan government) surveyed women's opinions and experiences
 - ⇒ *Changing Places – Positive Action on Women and Planning* was published and circulated
 - ⇒ Improvements in gender-aware design
 - ⇒ Democratisation of planning processes and related education

Developing feminist expertise

- ‘Support’ for community groups
- GLC's various urban initiatives
 - Officially brought to an end by Thatcherist conservatism. GLC dismantled 1986
- ‘A certain feminist voluntary sector sensibility’



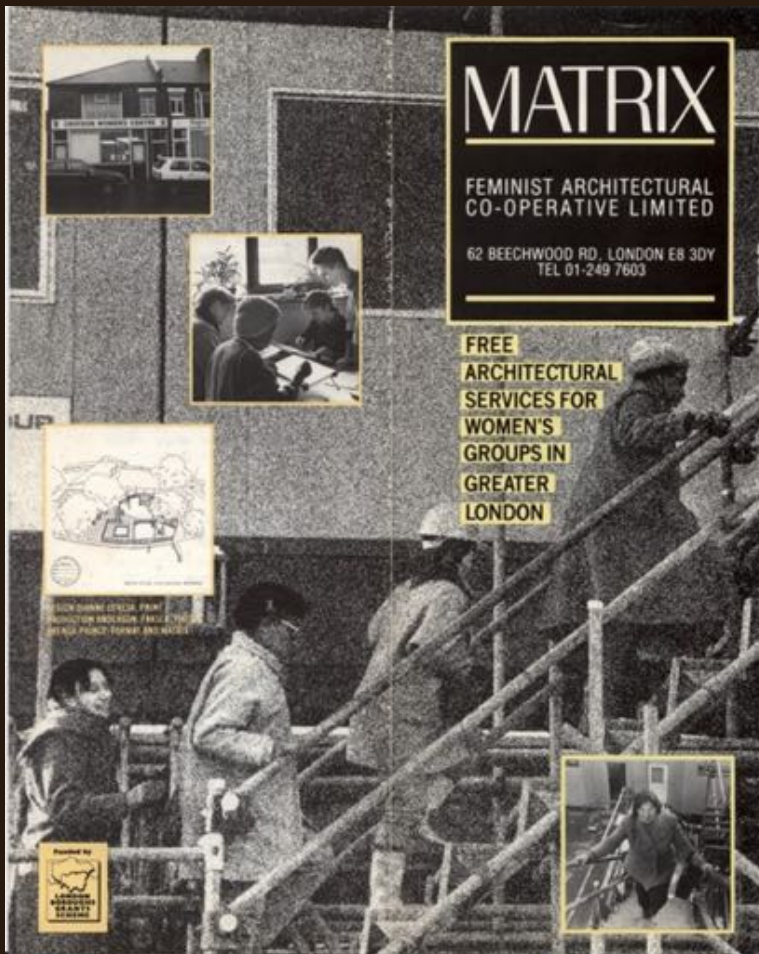
Organising for change



Supporting more social design

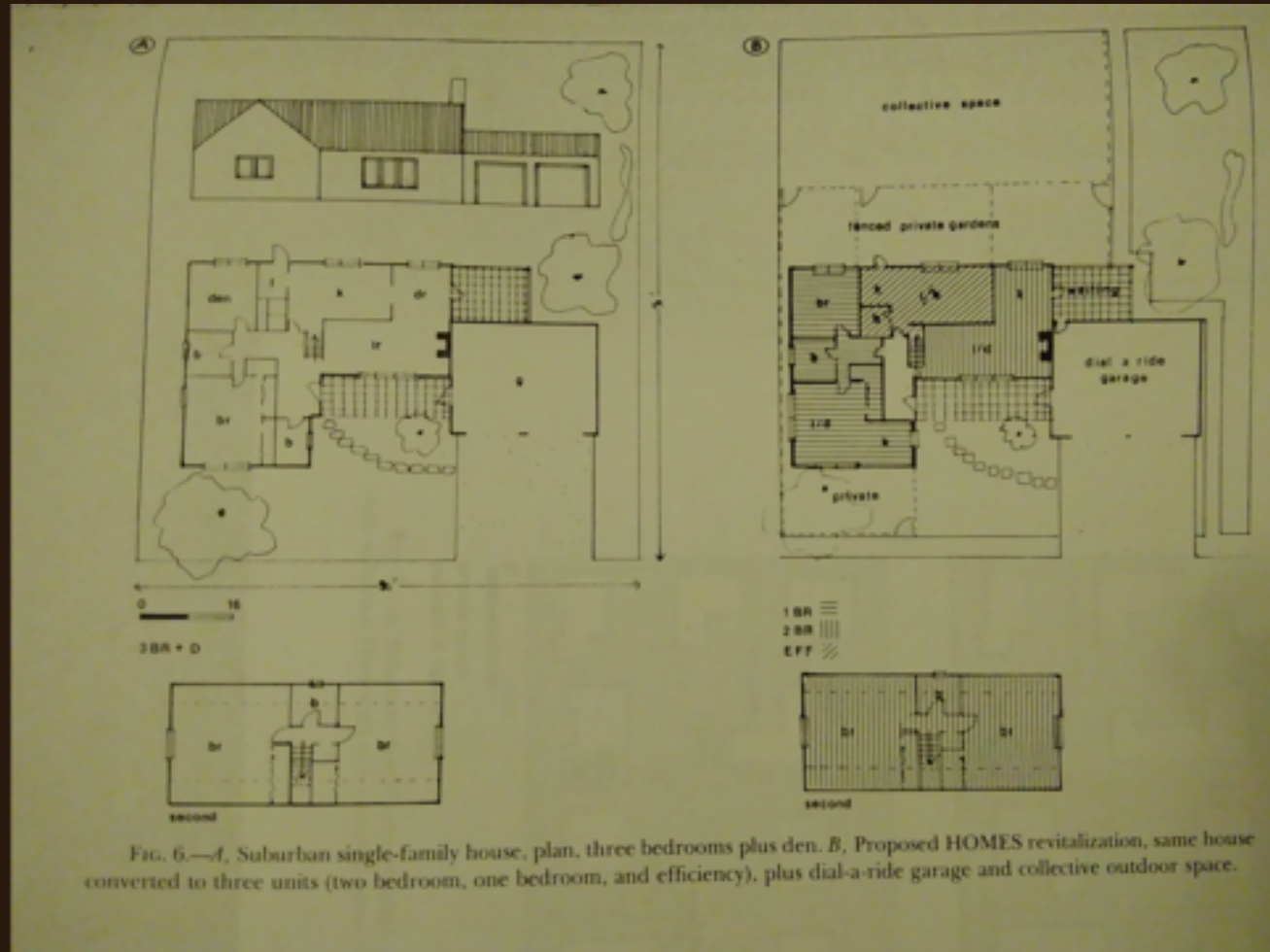
- "Working with projects that relate specifically to women's needs and interests enables the women workers in our cooperative to give practical support to the women's movement as well as contributing to developing a socialist/feminist perspective on the built environment"

Other similar initiatives: Matrix and muf



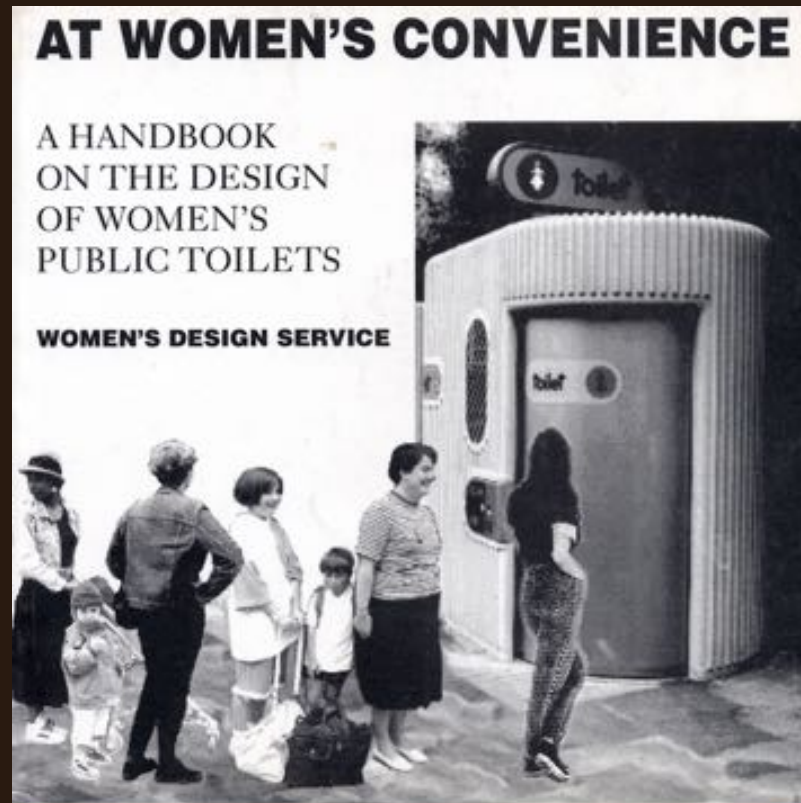
Spatial Agency	How?	Where?	Why?
00/	Subversion	Social Structures	Political
1960s Utopian Groups 2012 Architects A Civilian Occupation Abahali baseMjondolo Aga Khan Award for Architecture Alternative publishing / zines Amateur Architecture Studio Amateur Building Tactics AMO An Architektur The Anarchitektur Group Ankur: Society for Alternatives in Education Ant Farm Architects' Revolutionary Council Architects, Designers and Planners for Social Responsibility Architectural Association Architectural NGOs Architecture Foundation Archtype Artists and Spatial Practice Arup Associates Asiye eTafuleni Atelier Bow-Wow Atelier d'architecture autogère Atelier-3 / Rural Architecture Studio Basurama Bauhäusle Bauhütten Bauplötzen BAVO Line (to Bardi) Bogdan Bogdanovich Patrick Bouchain Alexander Budyko	muf architecture/art Company - London, England	1994 onwards www.muf.co.uk	
Founded in London in 1994, muf officially coins itself as 'a collaborative practice of art and architecture committed to public realm projects'. The practice was set up defiantly and explicitly as an alternative to what the founding members, Liza Fior, Katherine Clarke and Juliet Bidgood, saw as mainstream practice. As the clearest defining set of principles in setting up muf, Liza Fior mentions the 'bringing together of interesting women'. Feminism is not openly mentioned, yet there is an underlying and often explicit tenet of feminism within their work. In particular the notion of collaborative practice signals a commitment to 'mutual knowledge', and the context of the public realm indicates a social (spatial) ambition beyond the fixity of the building as object.	muf's work, includes urban design, buildings and strategic documents where the processes of planning are left open to include the voices of others; they are, in fact, all about the voices of others. Spatial arrangements and material resolutions are treated as the negotiation of interests that come about through consultation between public and private, communal and individual; often, muf suggests frameworks for action rather than determining specific outcomes. Decisions are guided by intuition, aspirations, rows; methodology comes out of doing and then reflecting at the end of doing. The idea of non-imposition informs all their work, with a continuous deliberation and conversation between process and product, and an implicit questioning of given briefs.	This approach allows muf to support marginal claims to space and they often privilege a multiplicity of small, modest proposals to an over-arching solution. They give emphasis to the specificities of each situation, whilst openly acknowledging that an architect's research methods leave out much, meaning that a project can hinge upon a chance encounter. Here the practice of the architect shifts from claiming complete authority to being a more reflexive and intuitive endeavour. On many occasions, muf have advised their clients not to build, an ethical position that may lose them work in the short-term but in the long-term results in lasting relationships that can engender more work. In recent years, muf have collaborated on large-scale regeneration schemes and have trod a difficult line between working with commercial developers and keeping true to their methods. Here muf's subtle subversions and persuasive powers have allowed them to cajole developers and council officials alike into providing much more than they had bargained for.	

Academics too were asking: What would a non-sexist city be like?

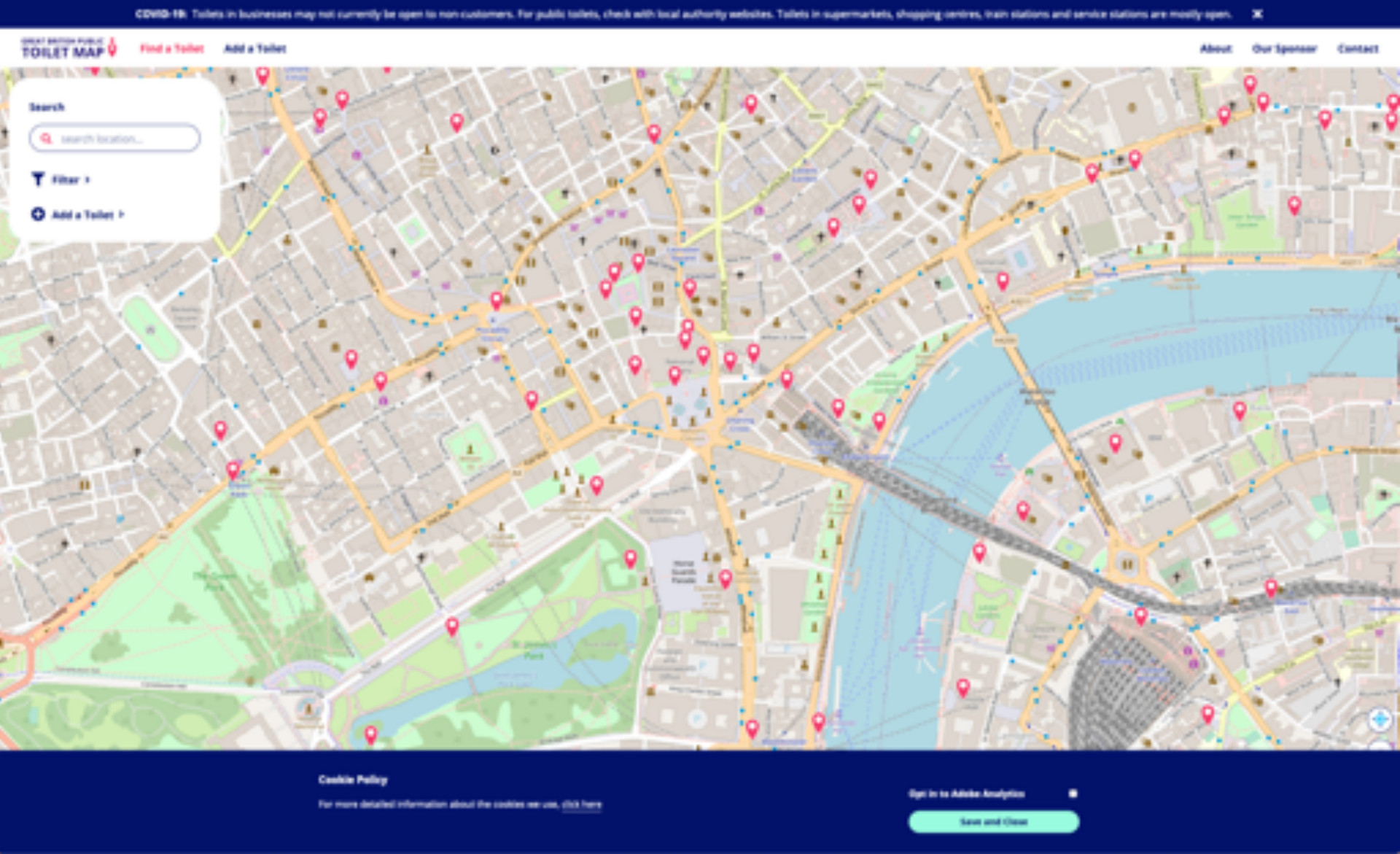


Dolores Hayden 1980 in *Signs: Journal of Women, Culture and Society*

<https://spatialagency.net/database/where/social%20structures/womens.design.service>



https://www.toiletmap.org.uk/



WDS in the service of wider society

PARTICIPATION AND DEMOCRACY

WDS Publications continued

1993 *Accessible Offices*

1997 *The Good Practice Guide on Tenant Participation*

1998 *Making Safer Places*

2000 *Housing for Independence*

2002 *Re-Moving the Goalposts (Perspectives on Women and Regeneration)*

2004 *Disability and Regeneration*

2005 *Involving Women Volunteers in your Organisation*

2005 *Cycling for Women*

2007 *What to do about Women's Safety in Parks*

Post-industrial cities also meant participatory development

- 'Regeneration' created opportunities for WDS
 - Could reach if not represent 'community'
 - 'Being a tenant's friend'
- 'The Five Estates', Peckham, SE London, received the largest single regeneration budget to date
- "All the councillors saw were these horrible tower blocks that just had to go"

Using/changing the built environment



From the 1990s to the 2000s: conservatism and innovation

- Ironic that it was under the Conservative Margaret Thatcher that the ministry began to collaborate with innovative organisations like WDS and think differently about:
 - Urban safety
 - Community work, particularly with 'hard-to-reach groups'
 - Children's access to outdoor space

Just trying to make sense of the 'regeneration maze'

- 'Initiative after initiative has been launched to empower local people and to enhance the accountability of decision making by enlisting their time and skills'.
- Becoming involved – activism – means keeping up with a profusion of new information – it distracts and debilitates
- How could WDS do business in this environment?
(See Berglund 2011)

Using the built environment

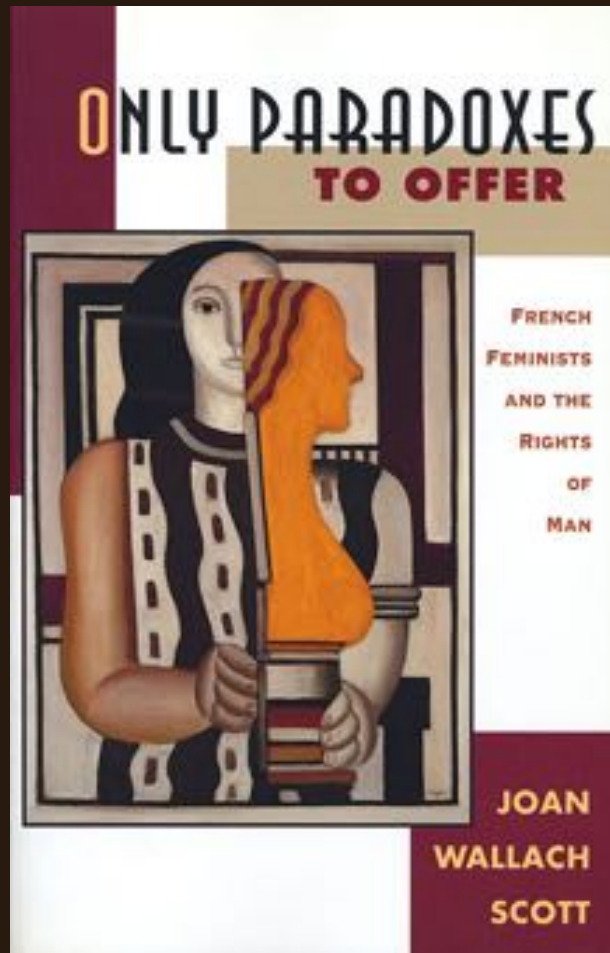
WDS archive/Jennifer Bates



Thinking about WDS through shifts in notions of good citizenship

ARGUMENTS FOR AND AGAINST THE VERY IDEA OF ACTIVISM

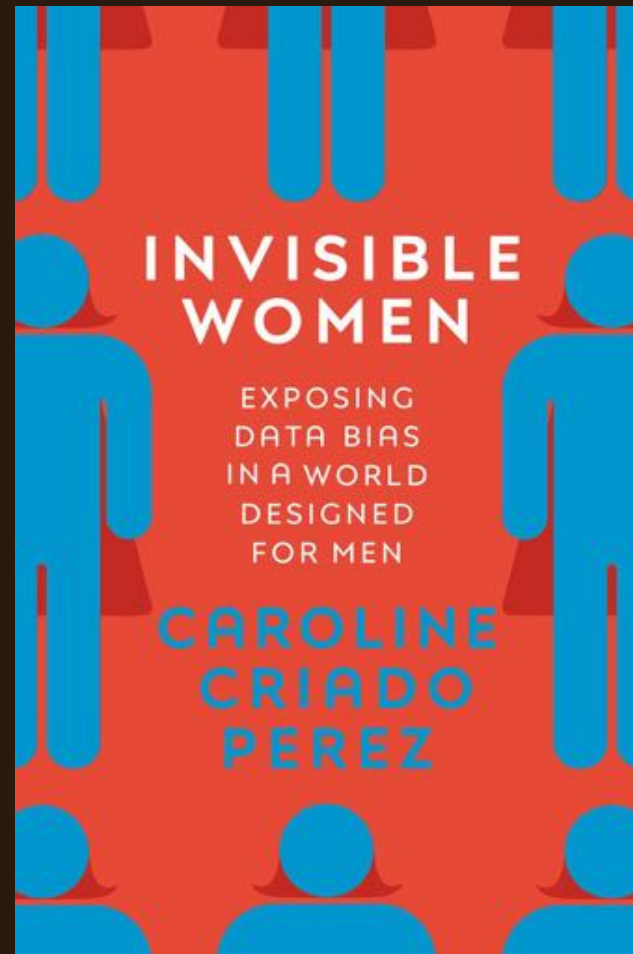
Very old legacies



- The need to accept *and* refuse sexual difference
- Olympe de Gouges (1791) *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and Good Citizen*
- And some inconsistencies and ambiguities in the very notion of the individual and thus the modern political contract

Very live legacies

- Invisible women in Finland
- We inhabit a world where being visible relies increasingly on 'data' of which there is too much
 - binary code: in or out, black or white, same or different, friend or foe



Worsening inequalities

- Across the UK there has been a "... substantial increase in poverty and loss of control over resources for women, particularly low income women. In addition, low income families are experiencing greater food poverty: the use of food banks more than doubled between 2012 and 2014"

Challenge Poverty Week, Scotland:
<https://challengepoverty.wordpress.com/>

Fast-forward to 2020

Rachel Hewitt @drrachelhewitt

Right, I've been doing some reading (and writing) about young women's experiences in public space, and it's made me so angry and upset that I have to share a digest with you all.

3:21 PM · Nov 3, 2020 · Twitter Web App

1.6K Retweets 777 Quote Tweets 3.4K Likes

Rachel Hewitt @drrachelhewitt · Nov 3
Replying to @drrachelhewitt
Globally, during adolescence, 'girls' worlds shrink, while boys' expand'. One study finds that the map of 14-yo girls' day-to-day movements is 2/5 the size of that of their 11-yo selves, and only 1/3 the size of 14-yo male peers' movements.

13 323 1.1K

Rachel Hewitt @drrachelhewitt · Nov 3
The shrinking of teenage girls' access to public space correlates to reduction in girls' ability to exercise. In Texas, teenage girls do 65% less physical activity than boys. Girls drop out of sport clubs in adolescence at far higher rates than boys. This sets a trend for life.

4 96 809

Rachel Hewitt @drrachelhewitt · Nov 3
Numerous factors influence girls' shrinking access to public space. Some are to do with gender roles in families. A study in rural Australia found that boys tend to be given outdoor chores (mowing the lawn), whereas girls are given indoor ones (washing up etc).

4 46 675

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Thanks and
enjoy finding
out more!

