Imagining Spaces of Freedom

As a continuation of the series Feminist Thinkers for Architects, architect/artist Afaina de Jong, in collaboration with CLAIMING*SPACES and master’s architecture students at TU Wien, has developed the second fanzine, Lorde for Architecture Students. Throwing shade at the homogenous selection of thinkers in the 18 current titles of Routledge’s Thinkers for Architects, this publication acts as a comment on- and complement to the original series.

Developed online (w/Covid restrictions) during spring 2021 and concluding with the second CLAIMING*SPACES Conference - Whose History? in spring 2022, the fanzine aims to connect key themes (silence, dismantling, difference, the erotic, anger) from five essays in Audre Lorde’s book Sister Outsider (1984) to everyday situations of the architecture student. It calls for architects and architectural educators to “do the work” to imagine spaces of freedom.

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DIY FANZINE INSTRUCTIONS!

**STEP 1:** Print the cover on 120 gsm A4 paper. (We recommend an intense pink.) For best results score and fold using paper creaser.

**STEP 2:** Print the inlay on 80 gsm A4 paper. (We recommend softer newsprint or recycled paper.) Be sure to print in grayscale!

**STEP 3:** Fold and crease the inlay in half, one sheet at a time, to make an A5.

**STEP 4:** Stack the folded sheets together in the correct order and cut right edge of entire inlay, using crop marks on first page.

**STEP 5:** Place the cut inlay into the cover, open to the middle, and staple twice along the spine from the outside.

**STEP 6:** Fold the edges of the front and back cover using the crop marks and tuck the first and last sheet into the folds.

TA-DA! Yes, this!
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Editor's note: Content in this publication is based on original material by master’s architecture students at TU Wien, in preparation for text seminars within their design studio course: A Space of Freedom, led by Afaina de Jong in collaboration with Claiming*Spaces. As editor/co-author, I have taken liberties in writing and reformulating this material into a coherent publication, with a reader who is new to Lorde’s work in mind. However, I have attempted to retain students’ voices as much as possible.

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In Spring 2021, I was invited by the Claiming*Spaces collective at TU Wien to develop and teach a master’s architectural design studio, as their first visiting professor. I wanted the studio, called A Space of Freedom, to be a space free from the assumed rules, methods, or solutions that students are familiar with throughout their architectural studies. During the first half of the studio, we also read and discussed five essays from Audre Lorde’s book *Sister Outsider* (1984).

Audre Lorde’s writing has had a profound impact on me and my work as an architect. It laid the foundations for me to build my intersectional feminist practice AFARAI that accommodates difference and encourages change on social and spatial levels. The ideas she developed over forty years ago are, in my opinion, indispensable to architectural thinking today. Architecture has unequivocally produced and reproduced structures of inequality, oppression, and extraction. Lorde’s provocation, “I am myself - a Black woman warrior poet doing my work - come to ask you, are you doing yours?” (Lorde 1984/2007: 30) is a question all architects need to ask themselves at this pivotal moment in time. So READER, I ask YOU now: As architects,

**ARE WE DOING THE WORK?**

During the initial phases of the studio, stories of frustration, anger, and abuse from students’ experiences within architectural education and practice surfaced, but Lorde’s writings offered inspiration, language, and most importantly a call to action. With the newfound understandings that emerged from her essays, students formulated their own proposals for a spatial intervention, with the intention to speak up, to embrace difference, to use anger as a source of creativity, and to see the erotic as power.

This fanzine is our attempt to connect Lorde’s ideas to architecture, and to insist on the relevance and value of women, people of color, people identifying as queer, or indigenous people’s lived experience and needs. With gratitude for everything we’ve learned, architecture students and practitioners, we send it out into the world for YOU!

Afaina de Jong
DEAR AUDRE

A series of personal letters connecting themes from Audre Lorde’s essays to familiar situations of the architecture student
The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action

12 March 2021, Vienna

Dear Audre,

We are master’s architecture students at TU Wien. This semester, we attended a refreshing and inspiring course, A Space of Freedom, where we had the opportunity to get to know you through some of your essays in *Sister Outsider* (1984). We read and analyzed your marvelous speech from 1977 “The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action”! Your words really resonated with us, as we began to reflect on and rethink our own silences, two situations in particular, as well as the power of our voices.

A few years ago, three of us (Tammy, Denise, Judy) were working on a project for our Bachelor’s degree in architecture. We found an old abandoned multi-storey car park, where we were really excited about proposing the development of a community center. Full of enthusiasm, we were met with feedback (from an older male authority) that our ideas were “naive and unrealistic” and that our hope for a participatory process would “never work”! Instead of offering us any real advice, he simply encouraged us to abandon our idea. We were very disappointed.

As you point out, silence and fear go hand in hand. What were we so afraid of? Disapproval? A bad grade?

Critique is an important part of the design process and can be extremely helpful, but it also has the power to crush ideas and even mute creative voices. Looking back, we realize that our teacher’s feedback rested on (out-dated) ideas and assumptions of top-down planning, something we wanted to change. We find ourselves regretting the times we did not speak up, “[betraying ourselves] into small silences” (Lorde 1984/2007: 30), and demand more constructive criticism that respects and acknowledges the possibilities of a project with a different approach and values.

Despite our fear, and convinced of the original concept, we ended up developing a comic book with two scenarios - a utopia with our initial “naive” idea, and a dystopia, showing what might happen if an investor were to buy the car park and privatize it. During our final presentation, our teacher praised us for realizing that our “naive” proposal was only possible as a utopia. However, the old abandoned car park is now being used by the community for various projects; urban gardens, workshops and art events, and many of our ideas have been put into practice. The utopia has, in fact, come to life!

As for the other three of us (Ariela, Jakob, Veronika), one is part of an afro-Brazilian music group for women, which often performs outside in public spaces of Vienna. While mixed groups rarely have problems, sharing a bit of culture and music with other people in public spaces, it isn’t always easy for the all-female group, who are constantly harassed.

Recently, our group was performing (with an official permit to perform in the square), when a man verbally attacked us with misogynist and xenophobic words. He was so hostile that he nearly became physically aggressive in his attempt to silence us. Even though we were afraid, we stuck together and refused to leave. We used our voices, our culture, and our instruments to speak up and claim that space. And honestly? It felt great!
You write of the importance of support from other women, “for every attempt I had made to speak those truths [...] I had made contact with other women while we examined the words to fit a world in which we all believed” (Lorde 1984/2007: 30). We realized that we are stronger together and that we also have a place in the city. And if someone tries to silence our voices? Well, then we have to be even louder!

One of us sharing this incident, along with the discussions around your essay, helped change the atmosphere in our design studio, where most of us felt freer to voice our opinions. The fears that often silenced us also became more apparent; the fear of being a woman or an ally within the world of architecture; the fear of “only” being a student in relation to the power of the professors; the fear of being an immigrant and never quite fully belonging in a place.

You inspired us to break our silences, and to use architecture to inspire and empower others to break theirs. And so, architecture, our tool of action, became a powerful way to work with these questions in our studio project, where we developed an intervention on the Danube Island in Vienna that encourages marginalized groups, and any “people who do not fit in”, to use the public space of the beach to feel good about themselves. Thank you for your thought-provoking words!

With gratitude,
Ariela, Jakob, Veronika, Tammy, Denise, Judy
“The absence of these considerations weakens any feminist discussion,” so too does it weaken any design solution for an existing community’s various needs, problems, and concerns (Lorde 1984/2007:105). Architecture is nothing without understanding the complexity of the population it is intended for.

We (Charlotte, Katerina, Victoria D), master’s exchange students, one from Czech Republic, two from France, were struck by the tone-deaf organization and conditions for your participation at an academic conference in NY, 1979. You were invited to comment in a panel about difference, precisely because you were perceived as different.

In our schools, women are still in minority. Whenever there is a group project, the (well-meaning) teacher spreads us out, one woman per group, sprinkling “difference” around like it’s fairy dust. There we are, forced to work with guys that chose to work with each other, because they work well together, while we are expected to bring “a female perspective” to the group. You write: “Women of today are still being called upon to stretch across the gap of male ignorance and to educate men as to our existence and our needs. This is an old and primary tool of all oppressors to keep the oppressed occupied with the master’s concerns” (Lorde 1984/2007: 106).

This practice of “those who profit from our oppression [calling] upon us to share our knowledge with them”, besides making us question our own worth and the value of our contribution beyond difference, also precludes the possibility for us to work together with other women (Lorde 1984/2007: 107). Indeed, by keeping us separate, it even places us in competition with each other, rather than encouraging a real connection and mutual “interdependence”. You talk about how women’s “need and desire to nurture each other […] is so feared by a patriarchal world”, yet it is where “our real power is rediscovered” (Lorde 1984/2007: 104). In this way, the architectural master’s tools prevent us from lifting each other up, while holding us back.

And lastly, we (Tonja, Lisa) are architecture students with different cultural backgrounds. After a long break from studying, one of us was considering starting a master’s degree. Many friends discouraged me, as it would be difficult for a woman my age (and nearly impossible for a single mother), to make it in such a tough profession. Another friend, also an architect and single mother, overheard one of her male colleagues making derogatory remarks about “certain people” (women) who have difficulty with overtime at the office. Statements like: “Hell, I also have children at home.” Did it occur to him that his wife/partner provides support at home, or that these “certain people” often juggle office work with a majority of the caregiving, housework, and childcare?

You remind us that difference is a creative strength that opens up for real change and “new ways of being in the world” (Lorde 1984/2007: 104). Recurring patriarchal assumptions and practices in the culture of architecture; expected overtime, last-minute schedule changes, long hours/sleepless nights, even intimidation, sexism, and termination for “those who can’t handle it”, fail (or refuse) to embrace difference and “seek a world in which we can all flourish” (Lorde 1984/2007: 105).

Kind regards,
David, Charlotte, Katerina, Victoria D, Tonja, Lisa
Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference

26 March 2021, Vienna

Dear Audre,

We (Juliette from France and Lea from Germany) feel frustrated about our futures as architects! The opportunity to study your chapter “Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference”, helped us put this frustration into words. We worry about not feeling represented or heard, when 86% of leadership positions in the top ten architecture offices are held by (white) men. The prospect of being part of architectural designs and commissions that do not represent our concerns or values, scares us. Although female architecture students are in majority at TU Wien (and many other schools), and 42% of employees in these same offices are female, men still hold the power to make the most important decisions.

The “mythical norm”, you describe as typically “white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, christian, and financially secure,” often the most powerful and influential people in our society, exists everywhere in architecture (Lorde 1984/2007: 109). From the head architect who accepts/assigns work and defines the design language of the office, to the world-renowned starchitect who sets precedents and trends, to the design jury member who establishes certain ideas and values, right down to the imagined “standard” user for the very measurements and solutions in everything we build.

The values (and consequences) of a mythical norm begin as early as architecture school. In favor of efficiency, simplicity, and profit, we are taught to design for “the majority”, but what we are actually designing for is the mythical norm!

We hang out in architecture schools with other architecture students and present our ideas to architects, within a “prestigious” and homogeneous architectural bubble. Not only are we formed by a certain vision of architecture, but as white, middle-class women, we now understand that we also cooperate with systems of oppression, without even realizing it. In the homogeneity of our situation, we sometimes forget difference and become accomplices, focusing only on the one way we are different.

Your words helped us see that we have a responsibility to seek out “that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us” and to “work and struggle together with those whom we define as different from ourselves” (Lorde 1984/2007: 116). What if we design for difference, seeing difference as a strength rather than an obstacle? Recognizing and questioning the mythical norm is central to the production of a more equitable architecture that is built for all human and non-human beings.

Yours sincerely,
Juliette, Lea
Dear Audre,

You describe “the erotic” as an empowering lifeforce, connected to an internal sense of satisfaction and fulfillment, often suppressed by a patriarchal fear of female desire. We’re writing to you as part of a new design course called A Space of Freedom. Your essay “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power” has enabled us to reexamine and formulate how remnants of toxic academic culture and hierarchies in architectural education eliminate any erotic value in students’ work and affect their creative energy. From here on, we’re writing as one, so we will use the “I” form.

With experience in both architectural studies and practice, I can say that most architects, particularly those from marginalized groups, have at one time or another experienced the abuse of power. We have all seen and heard teachers/critics belittle students in front of an entire class, or make personal/hurtful comments. A gruesome few going as far as purposefully throwing, altering, or damaging hand-built models and drawings, to emphasize just how much they dislike or disagree with a student’s design proposal. Even though we know this isn’t constructive criticism, or professional behavior, architecture students tend to “take it”, for fear of jeopardizing a passing grade.

Last semester, I ended up in a design studio with a lecturer that had a bad reputation. I thought to myself “How bad can it be?” After all, I’ve seen and heard a lot. But listen, IT WAS BAD!

This guy was the epitome of the authoritarian teacher. He lost his temper, refused to explain the tasks in English for our international students (despite that our university prides itself in its international collaborations and programs and claims to value our exchange students), and even used language that could be interpreted as racist, sexist, and queerphobic during tutoring and critiques. Yeah, he lived up to his reputation!

I needed to pass this class for my degree, so I kept my head down. His actions began to define me, slowly taking away my sense of self, making me fear my own desires, until it became a struggle to think and reach beyond aspects of this external oppression. Instead of embracing my own erotic feeling and knowledge, I adapted “to operate under an exclusively european-american male tradition”, losing the ability to share the “erotic charge” within myself with others, and sacrificing deeper feeling, knowledge, and understanding in the process (Lorde 1984/2007: 49).

Students were on edge the entire course, anxious and tired from the constant existential dread of not knowing if we would pass, and subject to his outbursts and whims. At the end of the semester, he passed everyone with good grades. This is when my anger rose up! How ridiculous and invalidating it felt, realizing that this lecturer’s actions were simply a demonstration of his power, and that he spread fear throughout the studio, just because he could!

This particular experience left me with conflicted feelings, knowing “my silences had not protected me” (Lorde 1984/2007: 30). Why
does change always have to be up to women, queers, and BIPOCs? My existence is bound to these capitalist, institutional structures, and sometimes I lack the energy (and quite frankly the privilege) to be able to speak up. However, as I write this, months later, some things have changed.

For once, because of this new course and your writing, I am not alone with these thoughts. The disciplinary and institutional walls that isolate us in our oppressions are beginning to crumble, and I feel the power in the bridges that are being formed here. Our erotic power feels supported and encouraged, which puts previous parts of our studies in a different, less flattering, light.

Yours,

Anthi, Mary, Mo

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The Use of Anger:
Women Responding to Racism

23 April 2021, Vienna

Dear Audre,

WE’RE ANGRY! We’re master’s architecture students at TU Wien, who recently had the opportunity to read selected texts from your book *Sister Outsider* (1984), beginning with “The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action” and ending with “our” chapter “The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism”. We can’t begin to express how much you have inspired, influenced, and encouraged us in our personal development, especially to learn to find value and make use of the anger we feel. You write: “Anger is an appropriate reaction to racist [and patriarchal] attitudes, as is fury when the actions arising from those attitudes do not change” (Lorde 1984/2007: 123). We agree that learning to express our anger “can be used for growth” (Lorde 1984/2007: 117).

Following your lead, we have tried to focus our reflections around two concrete examples that deal with the relationship between architectural practice and education, where we recognize that “[w]e operate in the teeth of a system for which racism and sexism are primary, established, and necessary props of profit” (Lorde 1984/2007: 121). Although there have been many advances, architecture is still a male-dominated field, where sexist and racist attitudes affect the role of architects in professional practice, in society, and even in *who* can- and how one becomes an architect.

For instance, a well-known historical reference like the Farnsworth House (1951), by world-renowned architect Mies van der...
Rohe, is still, today, placed on a pedestal as an example of good architecture for students to emulate, often without any critical contextualization of this iconic work and its author. However, numerous published critical examinations reveal certain shortcomings, even failures, where it becomes clear that the architect took his female client for granted, neglecting (or ignoring) her personal needs, in favor of an architectural expression that satisfied his own architectural ambitions.

“Do I feel implacable calm? The truth is that in this house with its four walls of glass I feel like a prowling animal, always on the alert. I am always restless. Even in the evening. I feel like a sentinel on guard day and night. [...] Any arrangement of furniture becomes a major problem, because the house is transparent, like an X-ray.” (Barry: 270) – Edith Farnsworth

What would happen if other (and others’) stories were included in the study of these so-called “classic” built works? What is the withholding of these stories supposed to teach us? That architects (preferably old white guys) are to be revered as god-like creatures, who needn’t concern themselves with the needs of their (female) clients? That the planner/architect’s will is more important than those meant to live in the space? And what does it say about our education? That an honest exchange with our teachers and critics around given references is not possible? “I cannot hide my anger to spare you guilt” (Lorde 1984/2007: 123).

The second example (that makes us rage with fury) has to do with the lack of representation of non-normative people in architecture and the space given for them to grow. By non-normative people, we mean anyone who isn’t a white man. Beyond the same old references used in teaching, there are also very few courses offered from different critical perspectives, or within subject areas outside of a traditional canon. If they exist, they are usually not included in the standard curriculum for architects, and considered extra or optional. In our opinion, this limits the definition of what architecture is and what an architect can do. It also establishes a hierarchy between conventional practice, considered “real” architecture, and any related work deemed “less than”.

Architects who do not fit the norm (women) are often perceived as “other” than the figure of the architect/planner, and are directed toward areas of practice that are considered more feminine. Have you heard of Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky, a forward-thinking architect of her time, with great ideas and prize-winning designs? With experience designing social housing and working alongside some of the most prominent male architects in Austria, Lihotzky joined the New Frankfurt project, and was tasked with redesigning and adapting a kitchen prototype for better use, known internationally as the Frankfurt kitchen (1926). Although an important contribution, in interviews she feels compelled to remind us that she designed the kitchen as an architect, not as a housewife.

All this and more makes us angry! Our “arsenal of anger” is loaded, and it is set on fundamental change in architecture.

With affection,
Cosima, Victoria F
HAVE YOU EVER?

CONNECTING KEY CONCEPTS WITH ARCHITECTURAL SITUATIONS

TYRANNIES OF SILENCE
VISIBILITY
LUXURY OF FEARLESSNESS
DIFFERENCE
PERIMETERS OF CHANGE
COMMUNITY
RACIST INTERDEPENDENCE
MASTER’S TOOLS
THE MYTHICAL NORM
HOMOGENEITY
TOOL OF SOCIAL CONTROL
GENERATION GAP
HISTORICAL AMNESIA
THE EROTIC
THE SUPERFICALLY EROTIC
EROTIC FEELINGS
EROTIC KNOWLEDGE
THE SUPPRESSION OF THE EROTIC
LIVING CONTEXTS
ANGER
HATRED
SYMPHONY OF ANGER
GUILT

EROTIC KNOWLEDGE
THE MYTHICAL NORM
THE EROTIC
THE SUPERFICALLY EROTIC
EROTIC FEELINGS
EROTIC KNOWLEDGE
THE SUPPRESSION OF THE EROTIC
LIVING CONTEXTS
ANGER
HATRED
SYMPHONY OF ANGER
GUILT

FEARLESSNESS
The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action

Tyrannies of Silence
Lorde writes about silence not as an absence of sound, but as an oppression of voice. She explains that tyrannies of silence are something we all share, regardless of our differences. It is an ongoing daily battle that resides in fear – “fear of contempt, of censure, or some judgment, or recognition, of challenge, of annihilation” (Lorde 1984/2007: 31). Lorde contends that we often regret our silences, as they alienate and make us invisible, reminding us that “your silence will not protect you” (Lorde 1984/2007: 30). We will all still hurt in different ways at different times, but in death, “the final silence,” we have lost the chance to speak up and speak out. So, what are we so afraid of? Lorde encourages us to put our fear into perspective and to become warriors against this oppression of voice, in order to speak our truth.

Have you ever experienced the tyrannies of silence within your academic studies? At the institutional level? At a school level? At the studio level? At the student group level? Can you identify different methods used to silence within these spaces? Have you ever regretted not speaking up? Are there tyrannies of silence present within the design process? (Design decisions you make, because of what others might think?) Have you ever tried to create spaces that help give “voice” and encourage people to speak up and speak out?

Visibility
Lorde suggests that visibility, being seen for who we are and what we stand for, is likely our greatest fear and number one reason for remaining silent. She also discusses certain groups, such as black women, who are otherwise highly visible, and the “depersonalization of racism” as a key factor in rendering these groups invisible (Lorde 1984/2007: 31). Lorde notes that the struggle for visibility, which is essential for us to thrive, also brings with it a vulnerability that allows us to connect with others and serves as a source of strength.

Have you ever worried about feeling embarrassed for speaking up, saying the “wrong” thing, using the “wrong” words, drawing attention to yourself? Have you ever considered how the vulnerability in speaking your truth might influence your collaborations and design work in architecture? Have you ever thought about how racism affects the visibility of certain groups in architecture and the repercussions of speaking out?

Transformation of Silence
Lorde proposes the transformation of silence as an act of self-revelation and a way to connect, to “bridge some of those differences between us,” and to actively participate in the parts of life that are creative and allow growth (Lorde 1984/2007: 33). She points to language and action as key tools for this transformation; to first find the words and then to say what we need to say. Lorde urges us to overcome our fears, find strength in each other, and do our part, rather than waiting for others to speak for us. She writes: “We can sit in our corners mute forever while our sisters and ourselves are wasted […] and we will still be no less afraid” (Lorde 1984/2007: 31).

Have you ever questioned a design brief in a way that transformed local communities’ silence into language and action, as part of the architectural proposal? Have you ever thought about what silences are already present in the language of architecture and who is responsible for its transformation? Have you ever experienced an empowering moment in architecture school when you and/or your colleagues found your voice and shared your vulnerabilities?

Luxury of Fearlessness
Lorde invokes the luxury of fearlessness as a feeling that will never come in our lifetime, and suggests that we must reclaim our language and find our words, despite that “we have been socialized to respect fear more than our own needs for language and definition” (Lorde 1984/2007: 32). She writes: “We can learn to work and speak when we are afraid in the same way we have learned to work and speak when we are tired” (Lorde 1984/2007: 32).

Have you ever considered the creative role fear plays within the collective body of architects and/or architectural students, both as motivator and as a paralyzing force? Have you ever wondered about the effects of socialization in the ritual of critique and the fear of being judged? Have you ever heard a critic encourage a student to be “fearless” in their design decisions and felt alienated?
The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House

Difference
Lorde explains that difference in terms of race, sexuality, class, and age, is a necessary and important source of creativity and strength. She emphasizes that “[t]he absence of these considerations weakens any feminist discussion of the personal and the political” (Lorde 1984/2007: 103). In order to form powerful connections, particularly between women, despite the racist patriarchal structures that keep us separated, we must reach beyond mere tolerance of difference, to “define and empower” each other and understand the “real conditions of all our lives” (Lorde 1984/2007: 105-106).

Have you ever seen difference (race, sexuality, class, age) taken into consideration during the development of a design proposal? A site analysis? Or in how your group works together creatively? Have you ever been part of a collaboration, where issues of gender were prioritized over those of race, sexuality, class, and age?

Perimeters of Change
Lorde uses the term perimeters of change to indicate the limits of possibility for improving the conditions of women in a patriarchal society when difference is either ignored or neglected. She points specifically to the exclusion and oppression of Black, lesbian, and poor women in academia “when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy,” whether through lack of representation, strategic omissions, or feigned ignorance (Lorde 1984/2007: 103).

Have you ever encountered what felt like narrow perimeters of change for women or BIPOCs in the culture of the architecture studio? Or the crit? Have you ever knowingly or unknowingly used the tools of a racist patriarchy to hold another student or colleague back, while advocating for feminist change?

Interdependence
Lorde points to interdependence or “systems of shared support” as a necessary and mutual alliance between women, where differences are acknowledged and interconnected in a non-hierarchical way that generates “new ways of being in the world” (Lorde 1984/2007: 104). She suggests that it is here we find powerful connection, along with the security and freedom to explore our visions for enacting real change.

Have you ever experienced the freedom interdependence allows, to experiment and even risk failure, within the context of your peers in architecture school? Have you ever wondered if practicing architects might benefit from “systems of shared support” instead of critique and competition?

Community
Lorde writes: “Without community there is no liberation” (Lorde 1984/2007: 105). She describes community as a structure of respect and support, where the recognition of difference between its members is transformed into strength, creativity, and courage.

Have you ever designed a proposal within a community of your peers, where your differences made the proposal considerably stronger than if you had worked on it individually? Have you ever found support or felt the freedom to develop your ideas in a community of your peers, even when your teachers didn’t suggest or encourage collaboration in the design process? There are many activist communities (LGBTQ+, Black Lives Matter, Fridays for Future) that work to bring about change in the world... Have you ever considered joining/starting an architectural activist community?

Master’s Tools
Lorde’s well-known quote, “For the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house,” suggests that the repetition of methods and devices used by racist patriarchal systems of oppression, in the service of dismantling these very same systems, will never bring about real or lasting change (Lorde 1984/2007: 105). Lorde stresses that white women, who find the most support from continuing to live in the master’s house, must work to find strength and knowledge within difference between women, to avoid temporary and superficial advances for some, rather than freedom for all.

Have you ever noticed that certain methods in your architectural practice are embedded within a racist patriarchal system? What are some of the tools used in architecture and planning that could be likened to master’s tools? Have you ever thought about who benefits the most from living in the architectural master’s house? Does an educational institution act as a master’s house and what are some of the master’s tools in the institutional repertoire?
Racist Feminism
Lorde questions feminist theory’s claim to represent and work toward the liberation of ALL women, regardless of age, race, sexuality, or class, when the actions of academic feminists (white women) say the opposite, resulting in racist feminism. She places particular focus on the conditions of black, lesbian, poor women and women of Color, and the failure of academic feminists who allow themselves to be used as a tool and extension of the patriarchy, by ignoring “differences between us, and the resulting difference in our oppressions” (Lorde 1984/2007: 105).

Have you ever noticed a difference in the role white feminists and BIPOC/queer feminists play in the formulation of a more inclusive culture of architecture? Can you think of any examples from your design education where the recognition of difference (and its oppressions) has been sidelined in the name of gender equality? Have you ever called out your institution’s position on equality and diversity as mere lip service, in relation to its actions?

Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference

The Mythical Norm
Lorde describes the mythical norm as an unattainable ideal that is “usually defined as white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, christian, and financially secure” (Lorde 1984/2007: 109). She explains that those closest to these attributes, usually hold the most power and privilege in society. Meanwhile, those who remain outside of this power tend to focus on the one way they are different, rather than the “distortions around difference,” such as race, sexuality, class and age (Lorde 1984/2007: 109). In other words, we should focus on the intersection of all of these differences and how they affect each person differently, including how we (as an outsider) may even be oppressing someone else.

Have you ever thought about what constitutes the mythical norm of “the architect”? How does this affect those who don’t fit the mold? Have you ever considered how the mythical norm is maintained/addressed within architectural education and culture? What role do awards, publications, exhibitions, and representation in other architectural media play in upholding the mythical norm in architectural practice?

Homogeneity of Experience
In the context of the women’s movement (1980) and the idea of “sisterhood,” Lorde talks about the homogeneity of experience as an illusion. She explains that there is no one common experience among all women and that this is a way to “ignore differences of race, sexual preference, class, and age” (Lorde 1984/2007: 109). Lorde suggests our energy is better spent “recognizing and exploring difference” in the pursuit of creative change, rather than pretending it doesn’t exist and allowing it to continue to separate us (Lorde 1984/2007:108).

Have you ever had a discussion in school about the assumption of the homogeneity of experience among architecture students in relation to processes of learning and evaluation? How do you think the assumption of homogeneity of experience affects the design of collective housing or urban spaces? Have you ever questioned what effect presumed homogeneity of experience within the architectural discipline has on the academy and its curriculum?

Generation Gap
Lorde notes the repressive nature of ageism and points to the generation gap as a social tool used to keep younger generations from learning from older ones (Lorde 1984/2007: 110). She suggests that younger generations’ contempt or mistrust for older members of a community prevent them from joining forces, to ask the important questions and learn from past mistakes.

Have you ever made an assumption about a teacher or colleague, based on their age, that got in the way of your learning or a possible collaboration? Has a teacher or client ever underestimated your capabilities, because of your youth?

Historical Amnesia
Lorde describes historical amnesia as a forgetting of what history has taught us (Lorde 1984/2007: 110). She points to the effort and energy lost in having to make the same mistakes over and over again, because we fail to respect, receive, or listen to the work done by previous generations, to question the “institutionalized rejection of difference” that relies on making certain people outsiders (Lorde 1984/2007: 108).

Have you ever taken notice or done your research on efforts already happening within your own architecture environment that question normalized values and positions? How about in other schools? How do you build on a foundation of change, if you don’t...
know what has already been done? **Have you ever** considered how historical amnesia in relation to the architectural canon helps reinforce existing power structures and hierarchies?

**Tool of Social Control**

Lorde explains that women have been encouraged to recognize only the legitimacy of difference in sex, ignoring all of the other ways women are different (age, race, class) and affected by accompanying systems of oppression. She maintains that this focus on “only one area of human difference” (gender) is used as a **tool of social control**, allowing “the distortions which have resulted from the ignoring and mismaking of those differences” (Lorde 1984/2007: 115). In other words, focusing on only one difference, keeps us from relating across our many differences.

**Have you ever** felt that the university or architecture school uses “diversity work” on gender equality as a **tool of social control**, to promote the institution’s reputation and divert attention from other problems like racism, xenophobia, transphobia, etc.? Can you think of similar mechanisms used in design, such as site analysis or perhaps the formulation of project briefs?

**Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power**

**The Erotic**

Lorde describes the **erotic** as a source of power and information, an “internal sense of satisfaction” that in turn engenders “an internal requirement toward excellence” (Lorde 1984/2007: 44). With the knowledge that this feeling is possible, she claims that the **erotic** makes demands on us to experience similar fulfillment in other aspects of our lives, empowering us and giving our life endeavors meaning (Lorde 1984/2007: 44-45). Lorde attributes the **erotic** to a female and spiritual essence that “is the nurturer or nursemaid of all our deepest knowledge,” as it draws on the power of an open and fearless connection in sharing joy with another, in our many pursuits (Lorde 1984/2007: 46).

**Have you ever** thought about the connection between the power of the **erotic** and what architects sometimes call creative desires, intuition, or creative flow? **Have you ever** experienced a heightened sense of joy while working on a project that changes the way you approach your architectural practice afterwards?

**The Superficially Erotic**

Lorde claims that the erotic has been devalued and misconstrued as a trivial sensation, closer to the pornographic, as a way for men to oppress women. She notes that women have been equated with the **superficially erotic**, a shallow, sexualized version of the erotic, lacking any depth of feeling and associated with the obscene, which teaches women to fear the erotic as an important resource (Lorde 1984/2007: 43-44).

**Have you ever** been dismissed by a teacher, critic, or classmate who claims your ideas for a project are superficial or frivolous? If so, did what they consider “serious architecture” have a masculine expression? How is the connection between the **erotic** and the **superficially erotic** similar to the relationship between so-called “real architecture” and ornamentation?

**The Suppression of The Erotic**

Lorde warns that the **suppression of the erotic**, or the fear and distrust of our deepest feelings and desires, is what “keeps us docile and loyal and obedient, externally defined, and leads us to accept many facets of our oppression as women” (Lorde 1984/2007: 48). She claims that the patriarchy’s fear of empowered women, teaches us to ignore or separate “the erotic demand [for excellence] from most vital areas of our lives other than sex” (Lorde 1984/2007: 45).

**Have you ever** disrupted your creative process for fear of exposing too much of your deepest desires? **Have you ever** thought about how the **suppression of the erotic** might keep you from finding your particular area of interest in architecture? How does a teacher’s, critic’s, or discipline’s definitions and expectations of architecture work as a suppression of the **erotic** in your own work?

**Erotic Knowledge**

Lorde speaks of **erotic knowledge** as a deep understanding that comes out of “the sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual,” creating intimacy (despite difference) and acting as a lens we can use to honestly evaluate all aspects of our lives (Lorde 1984/2007: 46-47). **Erotic knowledge** empowers us “not to settle for the convenient, the shoddy, the conventionally expected, nor the merely safe” (Lorde 1984/2007: 47).

**Have you ever** used your **erotic knowledge** to avoid making conventional architectural or spatial planning proposals? What does architectural intimacy look like, and how might its **erotic knowledge** keep you from merely playing it safe in your designs?
Have you ever thought about how the power to uphold certain values in architecture works to eliminate erotic knowledge?

Erotic Feelings
Lorde explains that erotic feelings are knowledge that comes from within ourselves, rather than conforming to the needs of external structures or systems, such as that of “European-American male tradition” (Lorde 1984/2007: 49). She makes a distinction between the using and sharing of erotic feelings, where using leads to objectification, even the abuse of feeling, while sharing forms true connections and gives us “the energy to pursue genuine change within our world” (Lorde 1984/2007: 48-49).

Have you ever noticed a difference between lecturers who share erotic feelings toward a subject, compared to those who merely present expected architectural topics and references? Have you ever tried to develop work based on self-affirming erotic feelings, “in the face of a racist, patriarchal, and anti-erotic [curriculum]” (Lorde 1984/2007: 49)? What’s the difference between what architects call “passion” and what Lorde calls erotic feelings?

The Use of Anger:
Women Responding to Racism

Anger
Lorde suggests that anger is not only an appropriate response to racist (and sexist) attitudes, actions, and assumptions, but also a source of energy and growth. She writes: “Most women have not developed tools for facing anger constructively” (Lorde 1984/2007: 123). Rather than avoiding or deflecting anger, because it makes us uncomfortable, we must learn to express our anger, as well as hear the anger of others, in order to harness its energy for positive change. Translating anger into action is often hard work and a painful process, which includes recognizing the conditions of difference, confronting our own participation and contribution to another’s oppression, and acknowledging the fear of “that virulent hatred leveled against all women, people of Color, lesbians and gay men, poor people” that keeps us from addressing anger head on (Lorde 1984/2007: 121).

Have you ever expressed anger toward racist tendencies in architecture school or practice? Has anyone ever expressed anger toward you, a teacher, lecturer, or critic? How was it received?

How did you respond? Have you ever deflected, discounted, or been silent in the face of someone else’s anger? Have you ever been in pedagogical situations where anger has been heard and used as a catalyst for change? What are some suggestions for making space for anger as a constructive tool in the culture of architecture and design education?

Living Contexts
According to Lorde, we must first recognize and understand the needs and living contexts, or conditions of others’ lives and existences, if we are to have a meaningful dialogue about racism. She lists several examples where white women within the academy propose one thing (in the spirit of inclusivity and interest in addressing racism), while their actions say another; whether microaggressions or an oblivious self-centeredness, or placing the blame and the work on women of Color, to refusing to waive exclusionary conference registration fees (Lorde 1984/2007: 118-120). Understanding living contexts is necessary for us to meet across our differences.

Have you ever noticed situations in architecture school where students are adversely affected, due to their cultural background, skin color, or economic means? Some students’ living contexts require them to juggle working part-time while studying. Others’ living contexts preclude them from working nights and weekends (childcare, caregiving, etc). And some students’ living contexts make it difficult for them to work in certain environments/perform certain tasks (mental illness, neurodiversity, non-normative abilities). In what ways might a more inclusive architectural education support variations of living contexts? How might one’s living contexts affect job opportunities within architectural practice? Have you ever asked how living contexts of a local community are addressed in a project brief or job assignment?

Arsenal of Anger
Lorde writes: “Every woman has a well-stocked arsenal of anger potentially useful against those oppressions, personal and institutional, which brought that anger into being. Focused with precision it can become a powerful source of energy serving progress and change” (Lorde 1984/2007: 120). She also cautions that although this arsenal of anger can be used to radically alter racist assumptions underlying our lives, there is always a risk that this built-up and unexpressed anger may “detonate” from the slightest provocation, at the wrong time and at the wrong target (often women of Color), defeating its purpose.
Have you ever had occasion to use your well-stocked arsenal of anger during your architectural studies? Who or what situations were the main “suppliers” of your arsenal? Have you ever felt that your anger isn’t taken seriously within your institution? Have you ever unleashed your anger toward the people most affected by the oppression or injustice, rather than the institution or authority that created the situation?

**Hatred**

Lorde makes a distinction between hatred and anger, where hatred is the “fury” of those merely out to destroy anyone or anything who is not like or like-minded. Anger, on the other hand, arises out of the struggle to overcome difference between those whose intention is positive change (Lorde 1984/2007: 122). Lorde reminds us that hatred (fear of any difference other than sex) is instilled early on and is the most serious danger we face, while she encourages us not to fear our anger as we work through our differences.

Have you ever thought about the difference between hatred and anger in the type of opposition or critique you receive for a design proposal? Or in conflicts doing group work? As a woman? As a BIPOC? As an out and proud queer person? As a neurodiverse student? As a Muslim woman wearing a hijab? Have you ever thought about who profits within urban design from the perpetuation and threat of hatred? Have you ever considered what happens when teachers/researchers are targeted by hatred, because of their research profile or subject area of expertise?

**Symphony of Anger**

Lorde describes the way women of Color in America have existed in the face of relentless opposition and hate, as a “symphony of anger,” in that they have had to learn to “orchestrate” their fury and work through it, in order to not only survive, but to find insight and strength. She notes: “Those of us who did not learn this difficult lesson did not survive” (Lorde 1984/2007: 122).

Have you ever known students who dropped-out of architecture school, or even abandoned their PhD studies, simply because they never managed to orchestrate their symphony of anger? Have you ever used your anger to discover new insights or boost your creativity? Have you ever hesitated working in teams or choosing certain studios/courses, because of past experiences of feeling like an outsider or being exploited for your difference?
Reading Audre Lorde together with architecture students made it clear that remaining silent is not an option. The overall spirit of the design studio was “The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action”; to speak up about hidden stories, to draw possibilities of different futures, and to apply Lorde’s ideas to the way we practice and think about architectural design. “The Uses of Anger” and “The Uses of the Erotic” are often underestimated and overlooked in architecture. Both are sources of power, when trying out new strategies of collective engagement for a more diverse and feminist spatial practice. We are astonished at just how much these over 40 year old texts still resonate with us today! In Audre Lorde’s words, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House”. That’s why we had to get together, reading, debating, and drawing, through Lorde’s texts. (We recommend you do too!) Architects creating tools and strategies beyond “Age, Race, Class, and Sex” for a more solidarity living together and a multiplicity of the many.

The CLAIMING*SPACES Collective is a bottom-up group of students, graduates, teachers and researchers at the Technical University in Vienna, which seeks to foster intersectional feminist perspectives in architecture and spatial planning. It was founded in 2019 for the first CLAIMING*SPACES conference, which was followed by the first CLAIMING*SPACES Guest Professorship held by Afaina de Jong in 2021, and the second CLAIMING*SPACES conference Whose History in 2022.
“Because I am woman, because I am Black, because I am lesbian, because I am myself—a Black woman warrior, doing my work—come to ask you [architect], are you doing yours?” (Lorde 1984/2007: 30)

“For to survive in the mouth of this dragon we call [architecture], we [BIPOC and queer architects] have had to learn this first and most vital lesson— that we were never meant to survive. [...] And that visibility which makes us most vulnerable is that which is also the source of our greatest strength.” (Lorde 1984/2007: 31)

“And where the words of women [architects] are crying to be heard, we must each of us recognize our responsibility to seek those words out, to read them and share them and examine them in their pertinence to our lives [and to architecture].” (Lorde 1984/2007: 32)

“The fact that we are here and that I speak these words is an attempt to break that silence and bridge some of those differences between us, for it is not difference which immobilizes [architecture], but silence. And there are so many [architectural] silences to be broken.” (Lorde 1984/2007: 33)
“What does it mean when the tools of a racist [architectural] patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same [architectural] patriarchy? It means that only the most narrow perimeters of change are possible and allowable.” (Lorde 1984/2007: 103)

“Those of us who stand outside the circle of this [discipline’s] definition of acceptable [architects]; [...] know that survival is not an [architectural] skill. It is learning how to stand alone, unpopular and sometimes reviled, and how to make common cause with those others identified as outside the structures in order to define and seek an [architectural] world in which we can all flourish.” (Lorde 1984/2007: 105)

“In our [architectural] world, divide and conquer must become define and empower.” (Lorde 1984/2007: 105)

“Women [architects] of today are still being called upon to stretch across the gap of male ignorance and to educate [male architects] as to our existence and our needs. [...] Now we hear that it is the task of women [architects] of Color to educate white women [architects] [...]. This is a diversion of energies and a tragic repetition of racist patriarchal thought.” (Lorde 1984/2007: 106)

“Refusing to recognize difference makes it impossible to see the different problems and pitfalls facing us as women [and as architects].” (Lorde 1984/2007: 111)

“My fullest concentration of energy is available to me only when I integrate all the parts of who I am [as an architect], openly, allowing power from particular sources of my living to flow back and forth freely through all of my different selves, without the restrictions of externally imposed definitions [of who or what an architect is].” (Lorde 1984/2007: 113-14)

“The future of our earth may depend upon the ability of all [architects] to identify and develop new definitions of power and new patterns of relating across difference.” (Lorde 1984/2007: 115)

“For [architects] have, built into all of us, old blueprints of expectation and response, old structures of oppression, and these must be altered at the same time as we alter the living conditions which are a result of those structures. For the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.” (Lorde 1984/2007: 116)
“But the erotic offers a well of replenishing and provocative force to the [architect] who does not fear its revelation, nor succumb to the belief that sensation is enough.” (Lorde 1984/2007: 44)

“For the erotic is not a question only of what [architects] do; it is a question of how acutely and fully [architects] can feel in the doing.” (Lorde 1984/2007: 44)

“The principal horror of [an architectural education/profession] which defines the good in terms of profit rather than in terms of human need, or which defines human need to the exclusion of the psychic and emotional components of that need – the principal horror of such a [profession/education] is that it robs our [architectural] work of its erotic value, its erotic power and life appeal and fulfillment.” (Lorde 1984/2007: 45)

“Our erotic knowledge empowers us, becomes a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our [architectural] existence, forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning within our lives. And this is a grave responsibility [as architects], [...] not to settle for the convenient, the shoddy, the conventionally expected, nor the merely safe.” (Lorde 1984/2007: 47)

“[Architects] responding to racism means [architects] responding to anger; the anger of exclusion, of unquestioned privilege, of racial distortions, of silence, ill-use, stereotyping, defensiveness, misnaming, betrayal, and cooptation.” (Lorde 1984/2007: 117)

“Any discussion among [architects and educators] about racism must include the recognition and the use of anger. This discussion must be direct and creative because it is crucial. We cannot allow our fear of anger to deflect us nor seduce us into settling for anything less than the hard work of excavating honesty.” (Lorde 1984/2007: 122)

“Anger is an appropriate reaction to racist [architectural and academic] attitudes, as is fury when the actions arising from those attitudes do not change.” (Lorde 1984/2007: 123)

“Guilt is not a response to anger; it is a [disciplinary, institutional, or individual] response to one’s own actions or lack of action.” (Lorde 1984/2007: 123)

“The angers of [architectural outsiders] can transform difference through insight into power. For anger between [architectural] peers births change, not destruction, and the discomfort and sense of loss it often causes is not fatal, but a sign of growth.” (Lorde 1984/2007: 124)
**PLAYLIST**

**A Space of Freedom**

**INJUSTICE**
01. Nina Simone – Four Women
02. NENDA – Borders
03. H.E.R. – Fight For You
04. Mono Neon – Breathing While Black
05. Common – Say Peace (feat. Black Thought, P.J)
06. Christine and the Queens – No Harm Is Done (feat. Tunji Ige)
07. Imany – No More Fight Left In Me
08. Ana Tijoux – Vengo
09. Maya Angelou – Still I Rise

**RAGE**
10. Queen Latifah – U.N.I.T.Y.
11. Aretha Franklin – Respect
12. Lisa Simone – Revolution
13. Miss BunPun – Let’s Roar
14. Mavi Phoenix – Fek It Up
15. Yasmo – Wer hat Angst vorm weißen Mann?
16. SAULT – Uncomfortable
17. Saul Williams – Hom OfThe Clock-Bike
18. Les Reines Prochaines – Das Kampflied
19. N. Gold, W. Khalifa, Bob Marley & The Wailers – Justice (Get Up, Stand Up)
20. Ana Tijoux – Antipatriarcha
21. Yasmo & Die Klangkantine – Girls Wanna Have Fun
22. NENDA – Mixed Feelings

**EMPOWERMENT**
23. Lil Nas X – MONTERO (Call Me By Your Name)
24. Beyoncé – Run the World (Girls)
25. Lizzo – Juice
27. Destiny’s Child – Independent Women Pt.1
28. Destiny’s Child – Survivor
29. Ne-Yo – Miss Independent
30. Princess Nokia – Tomboy
31. Todrick Hall – PARADE
32. Alif – Dakamerap
33. Janelle Monáe – Make Me Feel
34. Ebow – Punani Power
35. Queen Latifah – Nature of a Sista’
36. Madame Gandhi – The Future is Female

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**LORDE IN CONTEXT**

**TIMELINE**

of key cultural, political, & architectural events in relation to the life of Audre Lorde
SNAPSHOTS: STUDENT DESIGN PROJECTS

A SPACE OF FREEDOM, TU WIEN, SPRING 2021

CREDITS
1. Wonderwall: A Street Art Area for Women  
   Lea Storz, Juliette Vincens de Tapol
2. Water Pavilion for Children  
   Lisa Schöfer, Tetyana Vorokhayeva
3. Let’s Go Swimming: A Beach for All (Bodies)  
   Veronika Platz, Jakob Eschlböck, Ariela de Oliveira
4. Natural Gallery  
   David Fautel Marco
5. Dates of Freedom: Community Meeting Point  
   Vanya Kolesheva, Marija Vrdoljak
6. A Place for the Transformation of Silence  
   Victoria Duché, Charlotte Le, Katerina Kacetlova
7, 8. Bodies on Water: A Stage Island  
   Anthi Papaevangelou, Me Hartmann, Mary Osibanjo
9, 10. Floating Women's Recreational Shelter  
   Judith Köhler, Denise Pardi, Tamara Knezevic
11. Monument for FLINT persons  
   Victoria Frisker, Cosima Sima
INFO

REFERENCES


Students read the following five essays:
- The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action
- The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House
- Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference
- Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power
- The Use of Anger: Women Responding to Racism

ABBREVIATIONS
BIPOC = Black, Indigenous, People of Color
Az W = Architekturzentrum Wien
C*S = Claiming*Spaces

CONFERENCE
Second Claiming*Spaces Conference, WHOSE HISTORY?
Saturday, 26.03.2022, Architekturzentrum Wien
www.claimingspaces.org

Panel 1 – Educating Architectures. A Feminist Culture of Learning
Panel 2 – Gesturing Invisibilised Histories. On Performative Enactment of Spatial Narratives
Panel 3 – Unseen Realities

Organizers: Carmen Hines, Lauren Janko, Bernadette Kreis, Inge Manka, Susanne Mariacher, Julia Nuler, Sabina Riß, Leon Scheufler, Alina Schönhofer, Carla Schwaderer, Marlene Wagner, Julia Wannenmacher, Elisabeth Weiler, Veronika Wladyga


Guests: Roberta Burghardt, Brady Burroughs, Ofri Cnaani, Marisa Cortright, Afaina de Jong, Michelle Howard, Elke Krasny, Ena Kukic, Zaida Muixi Martínez, Lisa Moravec, Luciano Parodi, Petra Petersson, Raymond Pinto, Eva Sommeregger

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