

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Second-Wave Feminism in Dutch Universities: Revisiting the Work of Feminist Scholars and Its Consequences for Dutch Architectural History

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This article charts the emergence and development of feminist architectural history in the Netherlands by focusing on the activities of six women whose work spans the 20th century. In doing so, it not only situates their experiences in the context of second-wave feminism within Dutch academia, but it also stresses the historical and geographical specificities concerning feminism's impact in the field of architecture. I argue that interdisciplinarity and the connection between grassroots activism and scholarship were defining characteristics of feminist architectural history in the Netherlands. Moreover, I show how the work of these figures has contributed to the formation of two major areas of interest in the field: gendered analyses of the private sphere and of domesticity, and the 'herstory' approach of writing the histories of 'forgotten' women into the canon of Dutch architectural history. Both these approaches remain of great relevance for architectural history in the country.

Introduction

Fourth-wave feminism not only entails the recognition that feminism itself has come of age, but also draws attention to differences within its historical development, showing how specific conditions have shaped women's experiences as well as the movement's core concerns and goals in relation to time and place. Despite the considerable amount of Anglo-Saxon historiographical scholarship on feminist architectural history, much less is known about its development in Europe (Seražin, Garda and Franchini 2018). Reflection on the relationship between the history of women architects and mainstream architectural history has also predominantly occurred in the Anglo-Saxon context. At the same time, the challenges that European scholars in women's and gender studies faced differed from those of their Anglo-Saxon colleagues. In the Netherlands, for example, feminist issues were introduced at a relatively late stage of the second feminist wave, in the early 1980s. This introduction occurred in the context of a European tradition of mass housing which differed from the American tradition of individual houses in the suburbs. In this article, I contribute to a European historiography of feminist architectural history by charting the rise of feminism within Dutch universities and, in particular, by tracing its impact on architectural history. I pay special attention to what, according to Julie Willis, can be understood as the two main contributions of women's and gender studies to architectural history: the research of the private sphere as a material artefact and the attempt to recollect women's 'lost' histories (Willis 1998). This article focuses on the careers and work

of four Dutch feminist scholars of the built environment: the art historians Wies van Moorsel (b. 1935), Ellen van Kessel (b. 1956) and Marga Kuperus (b. 1953) and the cultural anthropologist Irene Cieraad (b. 1952). To a lesser extent, this article also discusses the work of the architect Anna Vos (b. 1952) and the art historian Heidi de Mare (b. 1956). My account relies in part on interviews with these women.¹ In using these oral testimonies, I intend to demonstrate how this article is not only about feminism, but is itself a piece of feminist scholarship. In fact, the feminist embrace of oral history emerges from a recognition that conventional sources often neglect the lives of women and that oral history offers a means of integrating women into historical scholarship (Sangster 1994). By putting women's voices at the centre of this article, I demonstrate how gender can be a category of historiographical analysis and how, from their specific standpoint, the women discussed here changed the research agenda of architectural history in the Netherlands. Finally, using the Dutch situation as a point of departure, this article asks about feminism's place in architectural history today, as well as its agenda.²

The Feminist Movement in Comparison

North American and British architects and scholars played a pivotal role in establishing feminist inquiries in the field of architectural history. In the US feminism in art and architecture took root in the late 1960s in the wake of the broader feminist movement (Gouma-Peterson and Matthews 1987). Against the background of the mechanisms of discrimination that had kept women out of

both architectural education and practice, scholars began to study the careers of female architects of the early 20th century and the role of women in the production of the built environment more generally. This new field of research also involved the introduction of individual women into the grand narrative of architectural history, as the focus of the 'herstory' approach (Heynen and Baydar 2005). The first studies were written by female practitioners, not historians, motivated by the desire to examine their own position within the profession and to advocate for more visibility as architects (Cole 1973; Torre 1977). In the UK, feminist activity also began in the early 1970s. However, arising from Marxist ideology, British feminists engaged with a different set of questions with respect to their North American colleagues, moving beyond the call for equity with men. For example, the British art historians Roszika Parker and Griselda Pollock connected art history to the notion of ideology in the book *Old Mistresses: Woman, Art and Ideology*, thus analysing women's historical and ideological position in relation to art, art production and artistic ideology (Parker and Pollock 1981). As will become clear in this article, developments in the Netherlands have parallels with these countries, as with others across Europe.

The Arrival of Women's Studies in the Netherlands

In the Netherlands, as in the UK, Marxism played an important role in the development of academic feminism. This influence was less pronounced in art and architectural history, however, due to the relatively late introduction of feminism in these fields, though a more general activism did play a role. The second feminist wave first manifested itself in Dutch universities in the autumn of 1973 (Parel and Van de Wouw 1988). That year, the Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht organised a series of events around the theme of women's emancipation. While a number of feminist groups such as 'Dolle Mina' (Mad Mina, named after the first-wave suffragette Wilhelmina Drucker (1847–1925)), 'Rode Vrouwen' (Red Women) and 'Man-Vrouw Maatschappij' (Man-Woman Society) had been active across the Netherlands for a few years, universities were not yet part of the discussion (Parel and Van de Wouw 1988: 33). At the University of Amsterdam students proposed to introduce feminist courses to shake up existing curricula (Parel and Van de Wouw 1988: 36). This resulted in the formation, beginning in 1974, of so-called female consultation groups, in disciplines such as political sciences, legal studies and economics, where female students and teachers studied feminist literature and discussed feminist issues. Most women were part of various activist groups within and outside of university: for example, they were part of the student's movement and the women's liberation movement, and oftentimes they were also Marxists. For these socialist-feminist, or 'sofem', groups, the struggle for women's liberation was an integral part of the wider socialist call for emancipation of the oppressed and marginalised in society (Parel and Van de Wouw 1988: 37).

In the second half of the 1970s, attempts were made to give the women's movement at the universities a more scientific character. Most women agreed that science itself had to be changed. As an early forerunner to Donna Haraway's 'situated knowledge', coined in 1988, they claimed that research was not value-free and objective; instead, scientists had to realize that their work was always already value-oriented since the norms of objectivity, distance and rationality were essentially masculine. Masculinity had to be brought into balance by a scientific approach that stressed the personal, the emotional and the historical: in sum, all of the notions that had so far been discarded as 'subjective' (Parel and Van de Wouw 1988: 44; Weijers 1989).

During the 1980s, the relationship between the women's movement and women's studies became more strained. In the eyes of feminists outside of the university, women's studies had become too intellectual and too focussed on struggles within academia. In the late 1980s, social science, philosophy and humanities faculties opened centres for women's studies where interdisciplinary collaboration among female scientists began to flourish. In these centres the gap between activist and intellectual feminism widened further, as feminist scientists no longer regarded theory as immediately applicable to practice: rather, they described theory as 'complex' and transcending the realm of women's direct experience (Parel and Van de Wouw 1988: 3; Zwaan 1993). The events at Delft Technical University described in this article are an example of this development. In the 1990s, the doctrine of women's oppression as a universal paradigm was increasingly called into question as scholars pointed to the fact that 'being a woman' was dependent upon ethnic and social-economic conditions (Parel and Van de Wouw 1988: 4; Zwaan 1993). The concept of 'gender' was now introduced in women's studies as the construction of both femininity and masculinity. By this time, women's studies had developed into a fully fledged multidisciplinary field that was supported by 300 university posts, including 14 chairs (Brouns and Lavelle 1992).

The Feminist Critique of the Built Environment

Beginning in the early 1980s, at a relatively late stage in the history of the women's movement, architecture and planning became subjects of feminist research in the Netherlands (Brouns 1990). In 1981, an interdisciplinary group of scholars – political scientists, architectural historians, demographers, architects, social geographers and urban and rural planners – expressed an initial interest in the theme of dwelling (De Mare and Vos 1993). This bottom-up initiative was paralleled by the Dutch Ministry of Housing and Spatial Planning's growing interest in the link between the emancipation of women and environmental planning, leading to national funding for research in this field (Van Meijel 1982). It was also in the early 1980s that the first feminist critiques of the urban environment were published in the Netherlands (De Mare and Vos 1993; Van Meijel 1982). At their heart was the recognition that patriarchy had a spatial dimension, palpable in the design of houses and neighbourhoods. The strict separation of

the private sphere from the public meant that women were denied a life outside of the home. Policy making was often exclusively based on the needs of male breadwinners and the implicit premise that women's requirements were synonymous with those of their husbands (Van Meijel 1982). However, at the beginning of the 1980s, Dutch society had progressed to a stage where it was no longer self-evident that women were first and foremost housewives. Earlier in the 20th century, the Netherlands had been marked by a strong family culture in which the role of the woman as mother and housewife was of great importance. In the 1960s and '70s, women gained increasing access to qualified higher education, but the ideal of the woman as mother and housewife remained. This situation changed only when feminism reached its peak in the 1980s. The idea of a male breadwinner and family income disappeared and it became acceptable for married women to pursue paid work. Also, in 1984, women obtained full legal equality under family law – prior to this date the law stipulated the husband's opinion prevailed over that of the wife (Van der Vleuten 2013; Kloek 2009). Therefore, the feminists claimed that women had to become visible in the built environment, not only as users of it but also as active agents in its production (Renoù 1991). These initiatives ran parallel to similar developments in Britain and the US; see for example Leslie Kanes Weisman's 'Women's Environmental Rights: A Manifesto', published in the journal *Heresies* in 1981, or the book by the architectural collective Matrix from London, called *Making Space: Women and the Man-Made Environment*, published in 1984 (Weisman 1981; Matrix 1984).

In addition, there was the conviction that it was time to study the private sphere and 'look behind the front door', as one author put it (Van Meijel 1982: 15). Linked to the study program of the house and the neighbourhood were themes such as power relations within families, the distribution of paid and unpaid labour, and forms of communal living. These studies went hand in hand with pleas for childcare and public transport, in order to end the isolation of women in suburbs (Van Meijel 1982). Although the political activism of the 1970s and, more specifically, women's involvement in the feminist movement made this agenda possible, during the 1980s the experience of women was increasingly regarded as an epistemological source leading to a less activist and more academic form of knowledge production (Brouns and Lavelle 1992). Regarding themes such as communal living, comparisons can be made with developments in other European countries, such as the work of the architect Kerstin Dörhöfer and the sociologist Ulla Terlinden in Germany, which bridged historical studies of dwelling and housing experiments for women in the 1980s (Dörhöfer and Terlinden 1985; Terlinden and Von Oertzen 2006). Housing models tailored to the needs of women also existed in the US – the work of the architect Joan Forrester Sprague is an example – but there was a difference between the European tradition of mass housing in satellite districts and the American tradition of individual houses in the suburbs (Forrester Sprague 1986; Forrester Sprague 1991). In the seminal paper 'What Would a Non-Sexist City Be

Like?', published in 1981, Dolores Hayden also explored the problem of housing in the US from the perspective of women's requirements (Hayden 1980).

Actors and Places

Beginning in the late 1970s, modern architectural history as an academic subject was taught either within the humanities, as a branch of art history, or at the architectural schools of the technical universities in Eindhoven and Delft. The University of Groningen has had a chair of the history of architecture since 1950, and the University of Amsterdam has a chair of 20th-century architectural history. In the 1990s, Amsterdam's Vrije Universiteit installed a chair of nineteenth-century architectural history.

The art historical departments discussed in this article did not explicitly stimulate feminist inquiry into art history; rather, art historians benefitted from developments in other disciplines as well as from opportunities outside of the university. Wies van Moorsel, for instance, while active at the art historical department of the University of Amsterdam, received formation as a feminist elsewhere within and outside the university. The art historians Marga Kuperus and Ellen van Kessel studied at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and were inspired in their feminist scholarship above all through the interdisciplinary lectures of the *Studium Generale*. In contrast to the art historians mentioned above, the cultural anthropologist Irene Cieraad received her intellectual formation at the University of Amsterdam, where she became acquainted with feminist ideas in her own study program. The following paragraphs will also highlight the methodological innovations of these feminist scholars: in the case of Van Moorsel, the study of the inscription of social relationships in space; in the case of Cieraad, the role of interdisciplinarity; and in the case of the Van Kessel and Kuperus, the use of the 'herstory' approach to architectural history.

Modernism and Feminism: The Career of Wies van Moorsel

The interaction between scholarly work and feminist activism had a central place in the life of the art historian Wies van Moorsel (b. 1935) (**Figure 1**). The heir of the estate of Theo and Nelly Van Doesburg – Nelly van Doesburg was her aunt – and the wife of Jean Leering (1934–2005), who was director of the Van Abbe Museum in Eindhoven in the 1960s, Van Moorsel pursued a career that was characterised by a deep engagement with both modernism and feminism (Van Moorsel 2019).

Van Moorsel studied art history at the University of Leiden and graduated in 1963, after which she moved to Eindhoven with her husband (De Vries 1983: 102). As an educator at the Van Abbe Museum, Van Moorsel first heard about feminism through the activities of the *Man-Vrouw Maatschappij* [Man-Woman Society] and its debates about the legalisation of abortion. In 1973 Van Moorsel and her husband, Leering, moved to Amsterdam, where Leering became the director of the *Tropen Museum* (Tropics Museum for World Cultures). Van Moorsel participated in the activities of the local women's movement, primarily



Figure 1: Wies van Moorsel with socialist politician Joop den Uyl and his wife, Liesbeth den Uyl, at the opening of the exhibition *The Legacy of Theo and Nelly van Doesburg – Gift Van Moorsel* at the Gemeentemuseum The Hague, 1983. Credit: Haags Gemeentearchief. Image copyright: AD Nieuwsmedia.

by working for the Kohnstamm Institute, a research centre for childhood education and welfare. In 1976 Van Moorsel learned about the activities of the American architect Susanna Torre (b. 1944) who had started an archive documenting architectural designs by women. Torre's initiative sparked not only Van Moorsel's interest but also that of a group of female architecture students at Delft Technical

College (Van Wijk 2018). These students formed the group *Vrouwen en Architectuur* [Women and Architecture] within the context of a student revolt in the architecture faculty, demanding the democratisation of, and innovations in, design education in light of recent social transformations. Together with Van Moorsel, they tried to found an archive in the Netherlands like Torre's. Although the



Figure 2: Cover of dissertation, published as *Contact en Controle, Het Vrouwbeeld van de Stichting Goed Wonen*, by Wies van Moorsel (Van Moorsel 1992). Photo by Rixt Hoekstra.

initiative did not succeed, in 1982, the exhibition *Women in American Architecture* did travel to Delft as the sole destination outside of the US (De Vries 1983: 102–103). This initial contact with the Women and Architecture group in Delft became the starting point of the action group *Vrouwen Bouwen Wonen* [Women Building Living]. For several years, this group, comprising architects, art historians, sociologists and psychologists, operated as

the principal platform for a feminist critique of the built environment (Van Moorsel 2018; De Vries 1983). It was involved in networking, writing letters to municipalities, offering courses and disseminating knowledge through a newsletter. The group also supported such initiatives as a hospital for women and the development of women-friendly houses.³ As one of its founders, Van Moorsel continued to play a pivotal role in this group's development.

A few years earlier, in 1979, Van Moorsel had applied for a position with the Art Historical Institute at the University of Amsterdam (De Vries 1983: 103). As Van Moorsel recalls, at that time, the institute under the leadership of, among others, Hans Jaffé was relatively open to new developments; for example, Van Moorsel joined a group that studied feminism and Marxism. This open-mindedness was representative of the changes that art history as a discipline underwent during these years. At the Art Historical Institute, Van Moorsel began to develop her scholarly work on architecture and dwelling. She became interested in the history of the Goed Wonen [Good Living] foundation, established in 1949 by a group of idealistic modernist designers (Meijer 2018: 473). Goed Wonen was a classic case of an institution that sought to impose, in a patronizing manner, a 'civilized' behaviour upon the people by educating them about how to furnish and decorate their houses in a modern way. The starting point for Van Moorsel's research was unusual: instead of analysing Goed Wonen from a stylistic point of view, Van Moorsel took the 'critique of ideology' – inspired by Jacques Derrida and Luce Irigaray, among others – as her point of departure (Van Moorsel 1992). She noticed a puzzling contradiction in the philosophy of Goed Wonen: on the one hand, its designers had a passion for modern design; on the other, they advocated socially conservative ideas about the nuclear family and the role of women in the domestic sphere (Van Moorsel 1992: 9). Her dissertation, published in 1992 as *Contact en Controle, Het Vrouwebeeld van de Stichting Goed Wonen* [Contact and Control, the Image of Women in the Foundation Goed Wonen], examined this contradiction and the ideology from which it sprang: the flourishing nuclear family ideal during the post-war decades (Van Moorsel 1992: 10) (**Figure 2**). Despite living in an airy, spacious and terraced house with modern furnishings, women were bound more than ever to 'traditional' roles. These roles were inscribed in the floor plan of a typical family home, which, as Van Moorsel argued, usually did not provide a separate room for the woman – a space for her own interests and activities apart from being a mother and housewife. Van Moorsel's analysis centred around the question of how social relationships become material in the arrangement of domestic spaces. Her publication influenced other feminist scholars in architecture, as it demonstrated how gender roles sediment into architectural patterns that then contribute to the unconscious reproduction of those roles. Moreover, exposing the ways that women were both immobilised and rendered invisible by being hidden in the domestic sphere was an important strategy to counter their invisibility in the built environment.

Van Moorsel's dissertation fused the ideas of the Vrouwen Bouwen Wonen group with an interest in critical theory and interdisciplinary methods. This fascination was a direct consequence of her exposure to, and engagement with, women's and gender studies in the 1980s. In fact, during the 1980s, Van Moorsel was the secretary of the Interdisciplinary Women's Study Group in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Amsterdam (Van Moorsel 2018) (**Figure 3**). In addition to campaigning

for the position of women at the university, Van Moorsel also became acquainted with a wide range of theoretical approaches through this group, from the work of Jacques Lacan to concepts within the social sciences, philosophy and theatre studies, all of which played a role in her dissertation. During those years, such a dissertation was anything but common. In fact, Van Moorsel recalled her difficulties in finding a supervisor; the professors at the Art Historical Institute in Amsterdam felt the topic lacked scientific rigour. Only Ed Taverne, professor of architectural history at the University of Groningen, was willing to supervise her work (Van Moorsel 2018).⁴

Women's Studies in Delft

In the Netherlands, feminist research in architectural history was not confined to the ambitions of individual researchers. In fact, at the end of the 1970s, feminist research had gained a foothold in academia at the Faculty of Architecture of Delft Technical University. At the same time, Delft was also the place where the tension between activist feminists and feminist scholars – between activism concerning the built environment and an intellectual approach – became most apparent. In 1978, after the formation of the Women and Architecture study group by the architect Anna Vos and others, women's studies was included in the school's curriculum. In 1980, Vos successfully advocated for a permanent academic post in the field of women's studies. Thanks to a new university policy that encouraged women to pursue degrees in technical subjects, Vos began to share a fulltime lectureship with the art historian Heidi de Mare in 1984 (Van Wijk 2018; De Mare and Vos 1993). A leading institution for the training of architects in the Netherlands, Delft Technical University was the perfect place to implement the changes in architecture and planning practices that feminist activists had demanded, such as overcoming the isolation of women in suburbs and homes without a place for work and study. However, in the early 1980s, Vos and De Mare chose a path different from a direct concern with architectural practice. Their decision resonated with the renewed interest, among members of the student movement, in the history and theory of architecture in an effort to distance themselves from an architectural education based solely on the principles of orthodox modernism. In fact, the critique of dogmatic and outdated educational methods in design and a demand for more critical theory was at the core of the revolt. In the 1970s and '80s, the students in Delft fought to strengthen architecture as an intellectual discipline, a form of knowledge rather than just a method of building. They were particularly keen on the concept of 'historical critique' (Hoekstra 2013) as championed by such scholars as Manfredo Tafuri and Nicos Hadjinicolaou and the architect Aldo Rossi, whose work also informed the studies carried out by the women's section. Its members became convinced that there was no direct link between social ideals and the world of architecture, hence 'designing for a better world' was an impossibility. As cultural products, works of architecture were 'relatively autonomous constituents of society' for which neither the intentions of the producer nor socio-economic or political

"HET ANDERE"

Interdisciplinaire Collegecyclus Vrouwenstudies Letteren

18/12	Pamela Pattynama:	"Het Ene en het Andere: Introductie Vrouwenstudies Letteren"
8/1	Annemieke Keunen:	"Vrouwen, vrouwelijkheid en het verleden"
15/1	Marjan Schwegman:	"Het schrijven van een vrouwengeschiedenis: Over geheimen, obsessies en biografisch onderzoek"
22/1	Hanneke Willemse:	"Het anarchisme en emancipatie: Mondelinge en collectieve geschiedenis van een beweging"
29/1	Miriam van Rijsingen:	"Zo het lichaam, zo de kunst"
5/2	Wies van Moorsel:	"Goed Wonen's dictaat in filmische verpakking"
12/2	Ingrid van Alphen:	"Meisjes en hun zinnen: De oorzaken van seksespecifieke spreekstijlen"
19/2	Iris Bogaers:	"Vrouwen en de werkplek: De gevolgen van seksespecifieke spreekstijlen"
26/2	Pamela Pattynama:	"Lezen als cultuurkritiek"
5/3	Isabel Hoving:	"Thuis: Literatuur, vrouwen en ontheemding: de postkoloniale context"
12/3	Joke Dame:	"Op speurtocht in Blauwbaards Burcht: Muzikale representaties van vrouwelijkheid"
19/3	Renée Hoogland:	"De stem van het verlangen: Lesbische theorie en tekst"
26/3	Mieke Kolk:	"Theater en deconstructie: Over <i>Wet Features</i> "



2e. Trim. Vrij. 11-13 P.C. Hoofthuis Z1 525,
7 pnt, Vrij of keuze onderdeel,
Inscr. zsm. bij Afdeling Vrouwenstudies Letteren,
Bunghuis, Spuistraat 210, kr.350/2.
Coörd. P. Pattynama (525 3871/2).

Figure 3: Poster for 'Het Andere', a lecture series by the Interdisciplinary Women's Studies Group in the Humanities, Amsterdam, 1990. Credit: Collection IAV – Atria Kennis Instituut voor Emancipatie en Vrouwengeschiedenis, Amsterdam.

goals could be held responsible (De Mare and Vos 1993: 8). Adopting the paradigm of critique meant distancing oneself from the 'simple' concept of female oppression as well as from the idea of social improvement through design. Rather than champion an architectural practice that responded to the demands of the women's movement, the Delft researchers pursued the goal of analysing 'how the mutual dependency of men and women in the social and symbolical community of the city functioned, emphasizing the productivity of power effects' (De Mare and Vos 1993: 10). The approach of the Delft researchers

resulted, for example, in the publication *Urban Rituals in Italy and the Netherlands* (De Mare and Vos 1993). In this book, the idea that the architect is able to design a better world was suspended in favour of an analysis of the city by way of 'urban rituals'. With this term, the authors indicated a sequence of attitudes and actions as collective, repetitive modes of behaviour that give places symbolic meanings (Burke 1993: 29). In essence, their argument departed from the notion that there is no 'natural' causal relationship between architecture and society. Unlike environmental determinism, the link between society and

the built environment was more ambiguous. While the social community used urban space by way of ritualized, repetitive actions that give it symbolic identity, neither these actions nor the identities of spaces are governed by the decisions of the architect but rather co-exist with it (De Mare and Vos 1993: 11–13). In this way, *Urban Ritu-*

als contained a postmodern critique of the determinism that was at the basis of both feminist activism as well as humanist architectural practices, insofar as both posited a direct relationship between architectural form and use (Bollerey 1993: 3) (**Figure 4**). It was this shift away from activism and towards women's studies as an intellectual

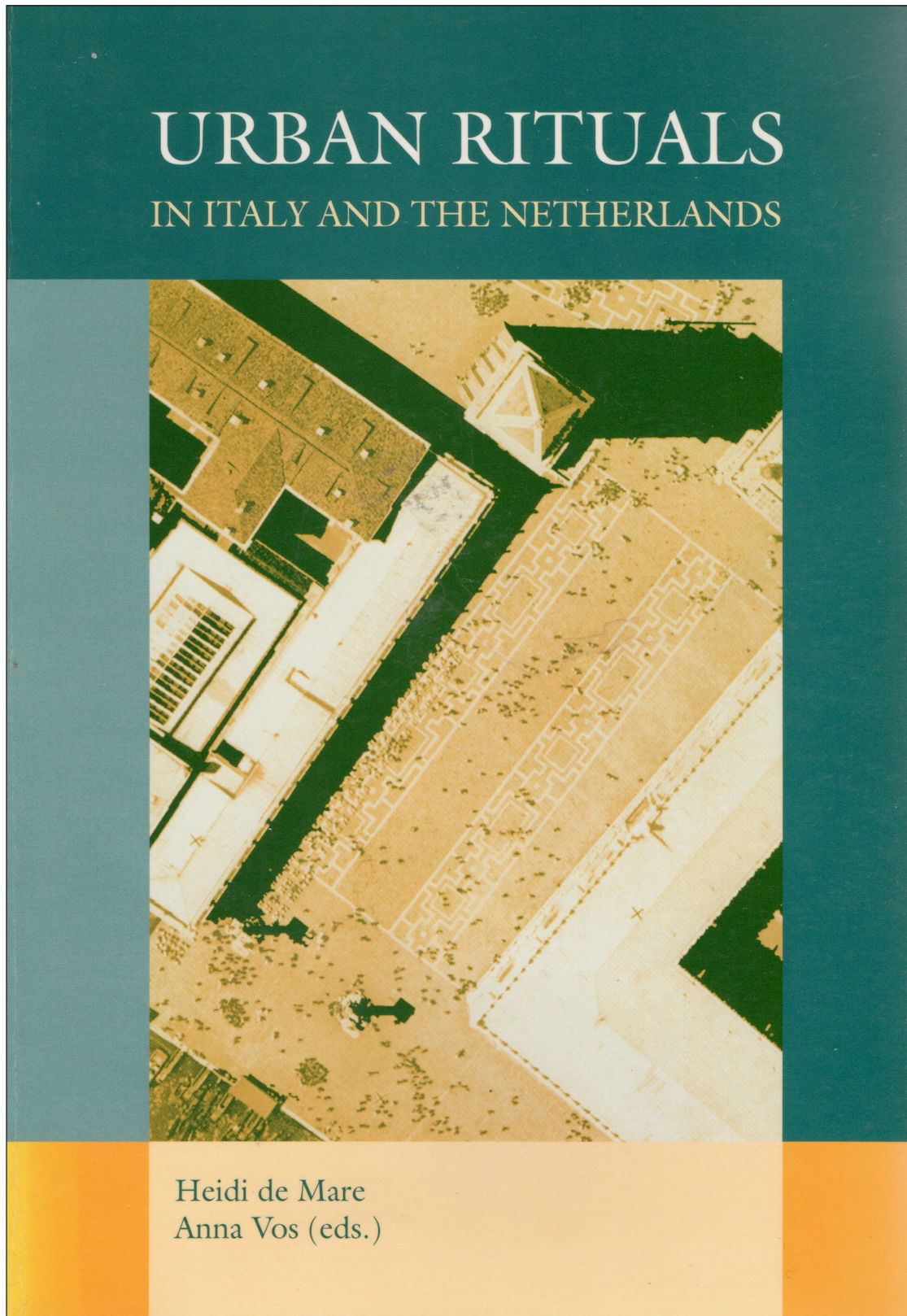


Figure 4: Cover of *Urban Rituals in Italy and the Netherlands* (De Mare and Vos 1993). Photo by Rixt Hoekstra.

challenge that set the scene for the arrival in Delft of the cultural anthropologist Irene Cieraad.

Introducing Interdisciplinarity: Irene Cieraad

Architectural historical research at the women's section in Delft strongly benefited from the theories and methods in other disciplines. Indeed, interdisciplinarity became a hallmark of feminist architectural history. The career of the anthropologist Irene Cieraad (b. 1952) exemplifies this development. Cieraad began her study in cultural anthropology at the University of Amsterdam in 1973 (Cieraad 2019). At that point, anthropology was one of the first disciplines in which feminists made their presence felt. This was not only due to the fact that most of the teaching staff in the cultural anthropology section of the Faculty of Sociology and Anthropology was female; the issues raised by the women's movement – the place of women in society and the definition of gender roles – lent themselves well to cultural anthropological examination, too.⁵ Even though, as Margo Brouns confirms, the binary difference between 'male' and 'female' was understood to be a cultural construct, its revision was not put on the agenda: 'traditional' anthropology did not challenge the status quo (Brouns 1988: 166). As Cieraad stated in the interview I had with her, it was simply accepted that women tended to less important tasks, such as fetching wood for the fire, or were a means of exchange between groups (Cieraad 2019).

Studying cultural anthropology made Cieraad aware of another contentious issue: the deeply engrained colonial perspective within her discipline. In fact, since the beginning of the 20th century, the goal of cultural anthropologists had been to study 'primitive societies' and exotic tribes. For Cieraad this preoccupation with primitivism was yet another form of patriarchy (Cieraad 2017). Instead of locating the 'primitive' far away, Cieraad began to study 'primitive' elements in her own country in the form of traditions in rural Dutch communities. Inspired by such scholars as the British anthropologist Mary Douglas, Cieraad challenged the assumption among anthropologists that only the behaviour of 'primitive' people was symbolically motivated and that people in the West had lost their symbolic drive over the course of the civilization process (Cieraad 2019). Cieraad's ambitions resulted in a thesis about popular culture for her academic degree (Cieraad 2019; Cieraad 1996). However, it was not until after her graduation in 1986 that she found a subject matching her research interests. In the early 1990s, she was approached by the anthropology department of the University of Amsterdam to coordinate a research project on Dutch homes. This project was initiated by the Swiss-French marketing firm RISC (International Research Institute on Social Change), who sought to study changes in domestic culture in Europe. She led a team of students who conducted fieldwork in Dutch homes, interviewing household members and accompanying them on their daily routines. However, the outcome of this extensive research – the students spent several days in participants' homes accompanying household members went about their daily tasks, from grocery shopping to cleaning

– posed a problem for Cieraad. These household routines were not the exotic customs of some faraway tribe; the households all looked familiar, despite differences in age, composition and so on. At this point Cieraad felt she needed to introduce an element of estrangement to make the analysis productive: she needed to look for, as she called it during the interview, 'the exotic in the familiar' (Cieraad 2017). For her, it was history that delivered this estrangement, and so she assumed a historical perspective for her study. As most of the families who participated in the study lived in renovated houses that were built in the 1930s, she began to compare the original floorplans with those of the present. She discovered changes in household practices and family values that were indicative of a different relationship with the world outside of the home; an altered floorplan indicated shifting societal practices (Cieraad 2002; Cieraad 2017). This research revealed how the relationship between society and the built environment was not fixed or strictly determined, but rather was subject to change over time.

As a result of the Swiss-French research project, Cieraad became a specialist in the study of homes and domesticity. Adopting a temporal perspective brought her research close to art and architectural history; at the same time, her anthropological background led to a number of methodological choices that were unknown in these fields. For instance, she made estrangement a central element of her scholarly work and so began to question those domestic elements that appeared so self-evident as to appear meaningless: Dutch kitchens, curtains, children's playpens and wall beds (Cieraad 1997; Cieraad 2002; Cieraad 2004; Cieraad 2005; Cieraad 2013). Moreover, as the basis of her 'anthropology of domestic space', she developed the theory that elements in the home symbolically refer to the world outside of the home (Cieraad 1999: 3). Concerned with the division of spheres and its history, much of Cieraad's work focussed on those elements of the house that expressed this division: the threshold and the window (Cieraad 1999: 2, 4). For example, in the publication *At Home, An Anthropology of Domestic Space* (1999), she describes how during the 18th century, the private sphere became solidified as the wives of Dutch burghers gradually retreated into the house. These women then imbued the transitional spaces of the house with a symbolic quality through such repetitive acts as cleaning, sweeping and polishing the windows – mundane household activities that, through their ritualised character, came to signify women's passage from the outside to the inside world.⁶ Thus, for Cieraad modern domestic space conflated spatial structures with symbolic ones. Similar studies regarding female virtue and the cult of domesticity in the 19th century and earlier were done in the US, by Mark Wigley (1992) and Gwendolyn Wright (1980), for example (Figure 5).

Fighting Invisibility: Marga Kuperus, Ellen van Kessel and Feminist Architectural History

In contrast to the research in Delft, the art historians in Amsterdam seemed to be more focussed on individual objects of study and the recovery of female actors who had not been included in the canon. The careers of Marga

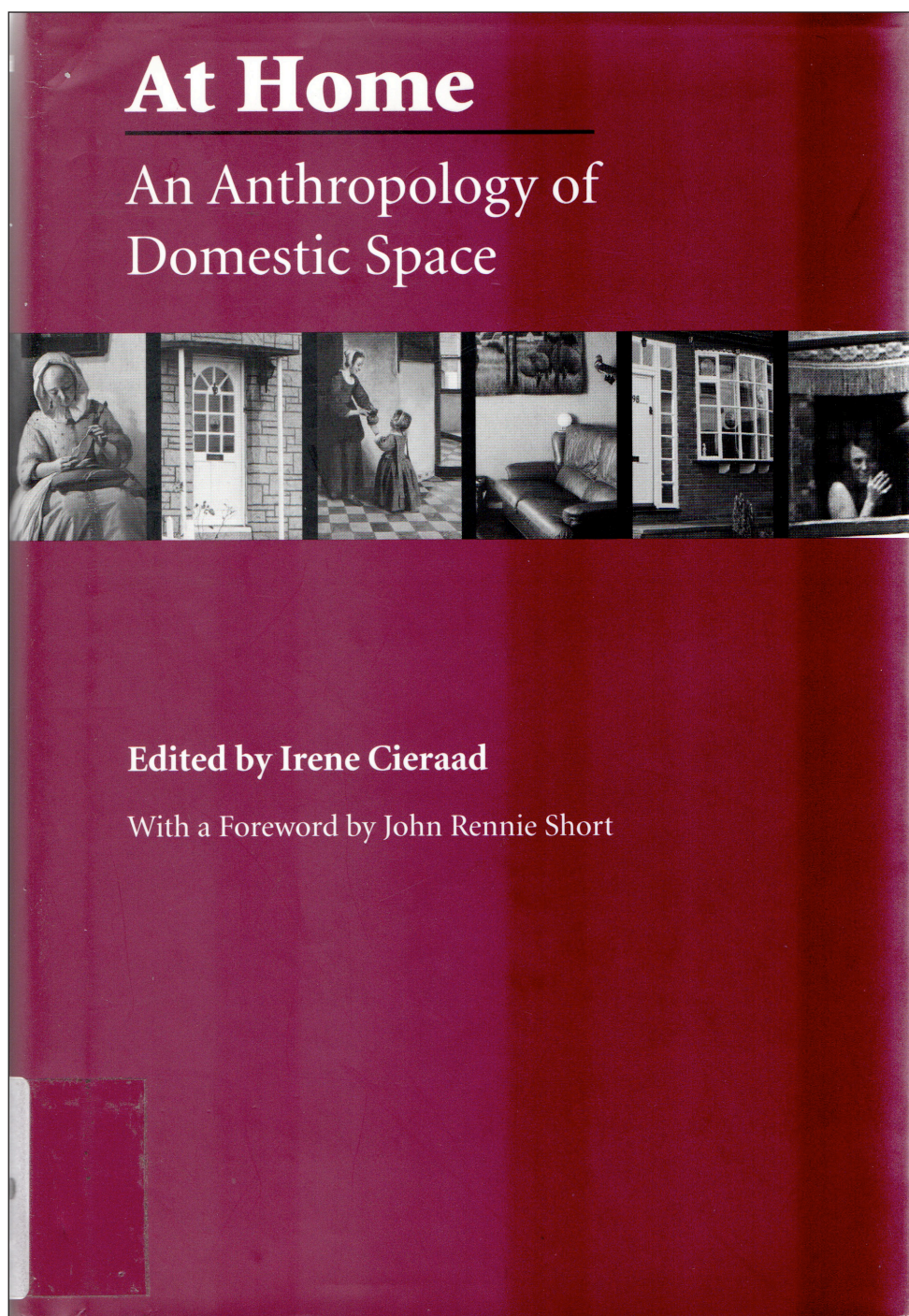


Figure 5: Cover of *At Home: An Anthropology of Domestic Space* (Cieraad 1999). Photo by Rixt Hoekstra.

Kuperus (b. 1953) and Ellen van Kessel (b. 1956) are representative of this development. When Kuperus and Van Kessel began studying art history at Vrije Universiteit of Amsterdam in 1974, none of the faculty in the department pursued women's studies. However, inspired by a subsidiary lecture series in history and by a program of the 'Studium Generale', Kuperus and Van Kessel began to reflect on the presence of women in architectural history (Van Kessel 2019). While art historians had begun attending to the lives and work of female artists, this was not the case for female architects (Van Kessel and Kuperus 1982: 1). In their final thesis, entitled *Vrouwen in de Stedebouw: Dat Doen Jullie Nou? Over Werk en Werkervaringen van*

Vrouwelijk Bouwkundige Ingenieurs in Nederland [Women in Urban Planning, What Do You Do? About Work and Professional Experiences of Female Building Engineers in the Netherlands], they set out to catalogue practising female Dutch architects since 1905 – the year that the Polytechnical School in Delft received the status of a university – and to analyse their conditions of work. To this end, they searched the membership registers of such professional organizations as the Bond Nederlandse Architecten (BNA) [Association of Dutch Architects] for the names of female architects, interior designers, landscape architects and urban planners. They were surprised by the large number of women they found and decided to concentrate their

investigation, and change the period of analysis, to the 239 female building engineers who had graduated from the technical colleges of Delft and Eindhoven since 1920. Van Kessel and Kuperus wanted to discover the degree to which these women had to fight against sexist prejudice, and whether they had to prove themselves within the discipline (Van Kessel 2019). Therefore, adopting a qualitative social science method, they sent these women a questionnaire concerning their work experiences. Based on the initial results, twelve women were then singled

out for a more extensive interview. Work experience was the primary criterion for selection, reflecting art historical conventions as to what constitutes a successful practice as an architect. The survey was contextualized by analysing the history of female students at the technical universities of Delft and Eindhoven (Van Kessel and Kuperus 1982: 1) (Figure 6).

In the art history department of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, however, it was difficult to find a thesis supervisor, much like Van Moorsel's experience; the school's

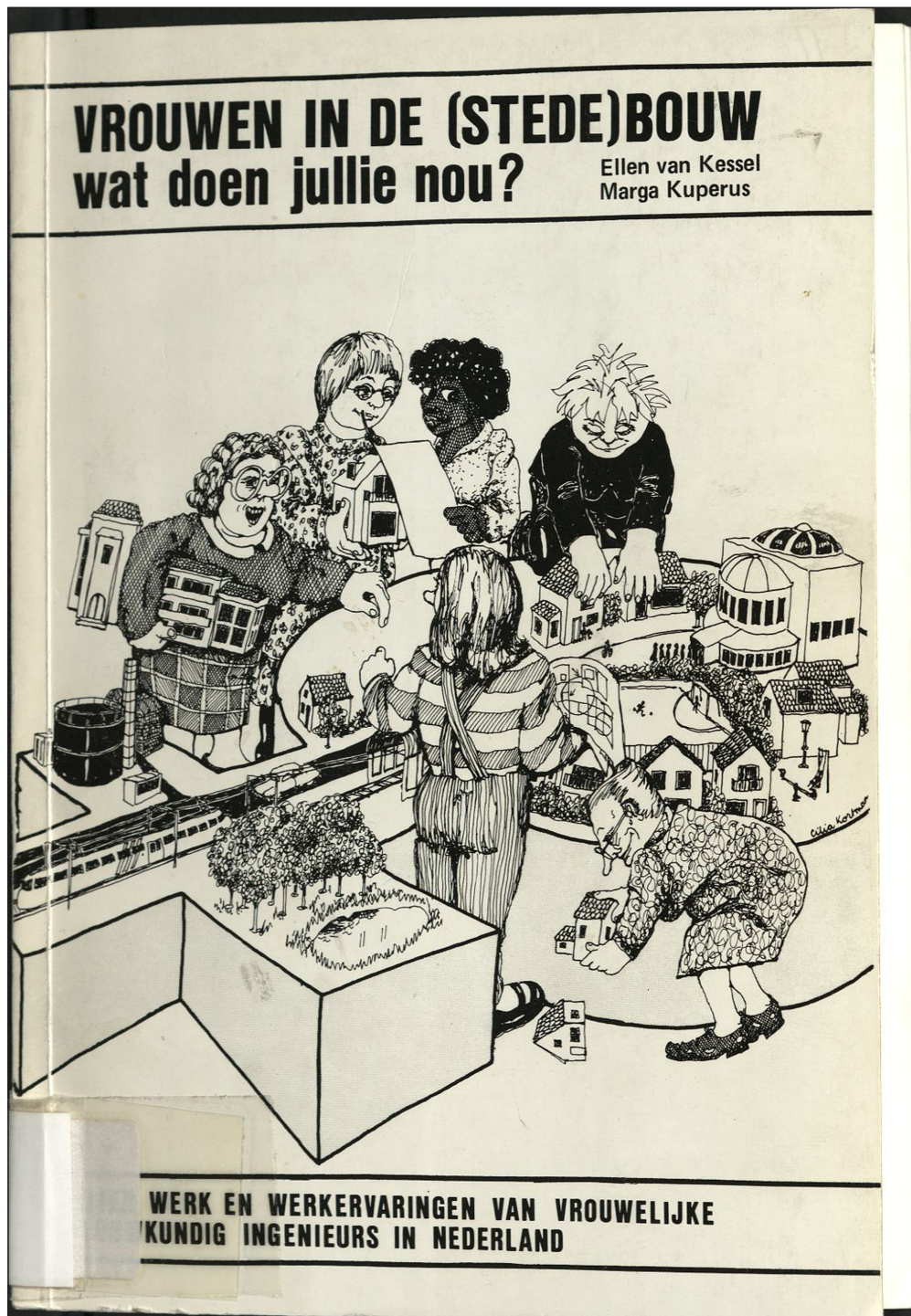


Figure 6: Cover of the graduation thesis by Ellen van Kessel and Marga Kuperus, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (Van Kessel and Kuperus 1982). Source: Library of the State Archive for Dutch Architecture and Urban Planning. Photo by Rixt Hoekstra.

professor of architectural history was concerned that the scope might be too small. However, when Van Kessel and Kuperus showed up a week later with a card-index box with the names of 239 female building engineers, they were allowed to continue the research. Van Moorsel, who by this time was a specialist in women's studies, agreed to act as a second supervisor. Other members of the department criticized the thesis for being too sociological. While this research was at best tolerated within academic circles, it received a positive echo outside of academia. Van Kessel and Kuperus received a government grant from the Ministry of Culture, Office of Emancipation, to cover the expenses of the thesis (Van Kessel 2019). In 1983, a year after their graduation, the thesis resulted

in an exhibition at the gallery of Amazone, a feminist foundation in Amsterdam. The exhibition was called *Van Boschplan tot Bijlmer bajes* [From Bosch Plan to the Bijlmer Prison] and contained information about twelve female designers who had been active in Amsterdam, and included the work of the urban planner Jakoba Mulder (1900–1988), who had designed the landscape park Amsterdamse Bos [Forest of Amsterdam] in the 1930s; the couple Joop Pot (1909–1972) and Koos Pot-Keegstra (1908–1997), who designed the Overamstel prison, also called the Bijlmer prison, in the 1970s; and Margaret Staal-Kropholler (1891–1966), the architect who worked within the architectural style of the Amsterdam School (Figure 7). The show drew the attention of the local and

architekten^s
in Nederland

van Boschplan
tot
Bijlmerbajes

5 maart
t/m 11 juni '83

een tentoonstelling medegebaseerd op de publicatie:
Vrouwen in de stedebouw, wat doen jullie nou?
over werk en werkervaringen van vrouwelijke
bouwkundig ingenieurs in Nederland, door M. Kuperus
en E. van Kessel

In de boekhandel te verkrijgen à f 15,--
Te bestellen door storting van f 16,75 op giro
5417954 t.n.v. E. van Kessel

lezingen op donderdagavond aanvang 20.30 uur
nadere informatie telefonisch verkrijgbaar

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kursussen

open: dinsdag t/m vrijdag 10-16 uur, zaterdag 13-16 uur
donderdagavond 19-21 uur, maandag gesloten
spreekuren: dinsdagmiddag 14-15 uur, donderdagavond 20-21 uur

Figure 7: Poster of the exhibition *Van Boschplan tot Bijlmerbajes*, Gallery Amazone, Amsterdam, 1983. Credit: International Institute for Social History Amsterdam. Copyright: Daphne Duyvelshoff-Van Peski.

national press, and led to a discussion about whether women build differently from men (Van Kessel 2019; Peeters 1983). For the feminist gallery Amazone, the exhibition marked the beginning of a series of publications and exhibitions about female architects in the Netherlands. In 1992, in collaboration with students in cultural history from the University of Amsterdam and the Gerrit Rietveld Academy, the gallery organized the exhibition *Intra Muros*, which displayed the work of twelve interior designers, among them Staal-Kropholler, Truus Schröder-Schräder and Ida Falkenberg-Lieftinck (Expositie Nederlandse interieurarchitectes 1992; Hermes 1992; Personalia 1992).⁷

After graduating, Van Kessel and Kuperus became involved in the foundation of the Vrouwen Bouwen

Wonen group in Amsterdam and worked as freelance researchers (Van Kessel and Middag 1987; Van Kessel and Ottes 1995). Van Kessel was a researcher for one of the district councils of Amsterdam and Kuperus was the editor-in-chief of *Klinker* [Brick], the journal of the Vrouwen Bouwen Wonen Foundation (the group became a formal foundation in 1983). The flow of publications and exhibitions produced by Van Kessel and Kuperus reached its peak with the monograph on Staal-Kropholler in 1991 (Van Kessel and Kuperus 1991) (**Figure 8**).

Completed eight years after their thesis, this monograph was an attempt to deepen their knowledge of female architects. While its method was art historical, focusing on Staal-Kropholler's oeuvre and development as an architect, what distinguished their feminist approach to

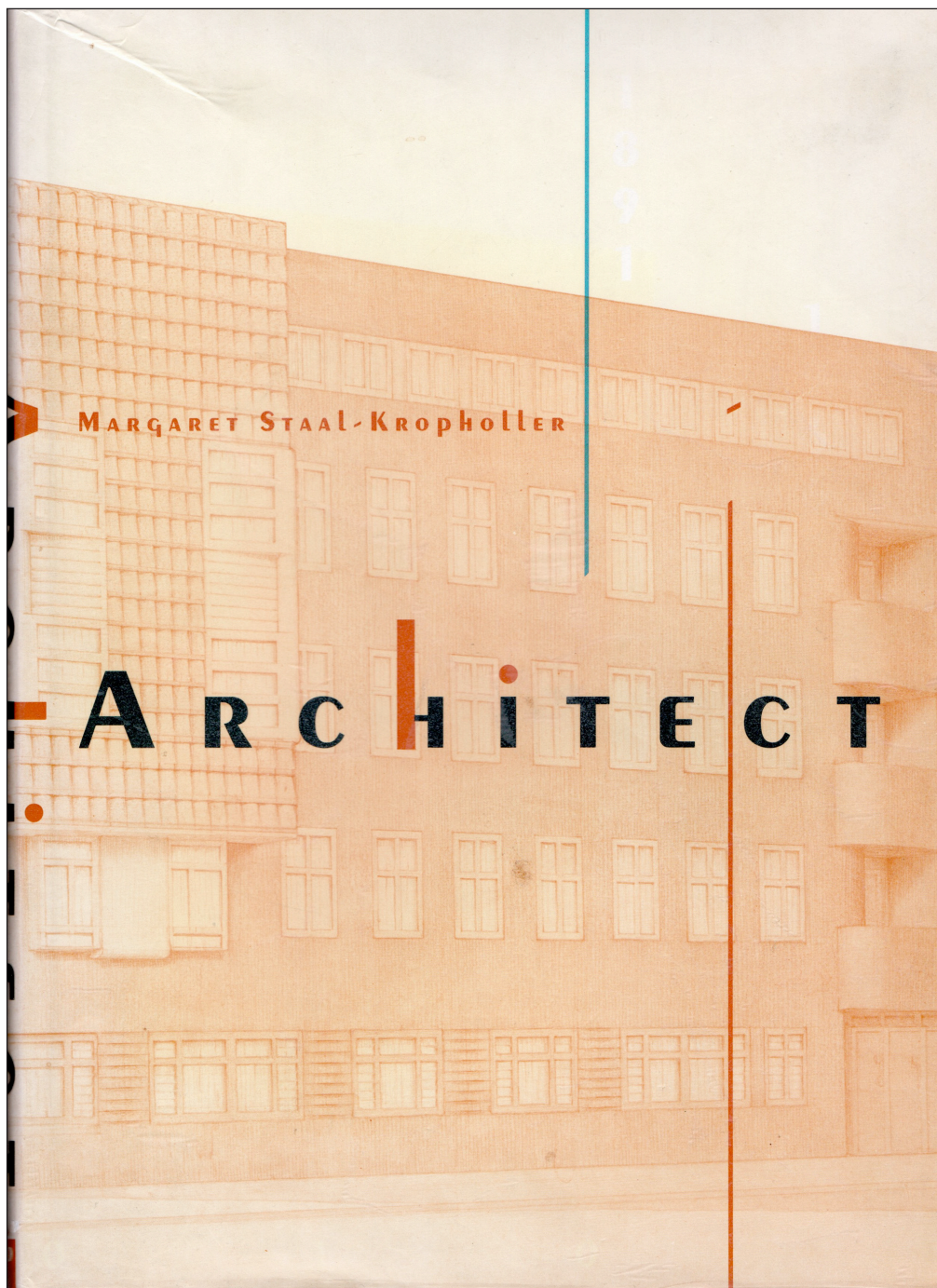


Figure 8: Cover of the monograph on Margaret Staal-Kropholler (Van Kessel and Kuperus 1991). Photo by Rixt Hoekstra.

biography from established (male) forms of biographical narrative was their focus on the architect's unconventional architectural formation. Staal-Kropholler had not attended a school of architecture, and the book explored how the circumstances of her personal relationship with the architect Jan Frederik Staal, and her reflections on life as an architect and housewife, shaped her ideas for the rationalization of the household.

Using documents from the State Archive for Dutch Architecture and Urban Planning as well as family records and interviews with Staal-Kropholler's daughter and granddaughters, the book provides an extensive insight into the career and work of this female architect. Carefully designed, it was published by one of the major Dutch publishing houses in architecture. It was accompanied by an exhibition financed by Amsterdam's Urban Planning Department, which had a strong interest in the position of women and stimulated women's emancipation at the time (Van Kessel 2019). This publication signalled the entry of the first female architect into mainstream Dutch architectural history and became an important point of reference for research on women in Dutch architecture.

Conclusion

In this article, I gave an account of feminist architectural history as practiced at Dutch universities. I have argued that the specificities of time and place as well as disciplinary knowledge – the cultural specific challenges in the field of architecture – matter in histories of feminism. As such, this article raises the question of how the case of feminism in Dutch universities is placed vis à vis other accounts in countries such as Sweden, Germany or the US. Linking historiography with oral testimonies of the first generation of Dutch feminist architectural historians, I have shown not only how gender can be a productive category for historiographical research, but also the ways that the women discussed in this article have shaped architectural history's research agenda. Three different approaches and objects of analysis thus appear as outcomes of feminist research in the Netherlands. Van Moorsel examined how social relationships become material in the arrangement of domestic spaces. Cieraad examined how (dis-)continuities are produced in the appropriation and inhabitation of space through repetitive acts. Finally, the work of Van Kessel and Kuperus introduced the approach of retrieving female actors not included in the canon of architectural history.

The researchers discussed here laid the foundation for later research on women in architecture; however, at the same time, they encountered a set of problems that remain relevant to the present day (Oosterhof 2018; Smeets-Potgieters 2017). One of these is the enduring scepticism about the value of women's and gender studies. While the rise of women's and gender studies in Dutch universities marked the institutionalization of feminism in academia, this wasn't the case for feminist architectural history. With the exception of Delft, the growing societal and cultural interest in feminist issues during the 1970s and '80s resulted at best in a marginal position at the university, or else in freelance practice outside of academic

institutions. We may therefore question to what extent the new avenues of research opened up by feminist research have succeeded in entering mainstream architectural history. In Delft, feminist researchers advocated a new intellectual approach that led them to move beyond their area of specialization. Today, a willingness to learn from such new areas would embrace the question of an inclusive architectural history, with approaches that seek to de-canonize, de-naturalize, de-normalize, de-colonise and so on. For art history, the marginal position of these approaches cannot be understood apart from the trouble it has had in the past decades in relating to such emerging fields as cultural sociology, media studies and so on. Related to this is the fact that in our present neoliberal society, art historical research is increasingly under pressure: chairs have merged or are sometimes left unfilled and senior lecturer positions are increasingly rare. One troublesome development is the absence in the Netherlands of an ordinary art historical chair in modern architecture.

In the Netherlands, feminist architectural history emerged in parallel with the peak phase of the second feminist wave at the start of the 1980s. The passage from activism to a more intellectual approach played an important part in its development. One of the questions raised by today's so-called feminist fourth wave is about the relevance current forms of activism might have for architectural history. Over the past decade – and in line with what Jane Rendell defines as 'critical spatial practices' – intriguing examples of this new activism have emerged (Rendell 2008). For example, in 2011, CASCO Art Institute in Utrecht initiated a research and curatorial project called 'Grand Domestic Revolution', which was based on Dolores Hayden's seminal publication from 1982 which asked what the urgent domestic concerns are of today (Choi and Tanaka 2014). In 2016, the Swedish architect and theorist H el ene Frichot published the book *How to Make Yourself a Feminist Design Power Tool*, and in 2018, the Turkish-German architects Asli Serbest and Mona Mahall began the project 'The House Alice Built', which was concerned with utopian projects informed by feminist theories that radically re-imagined domestic space (Frichot 2016; Serbest and Mahall 2009). Another example is the international, interdisciplinary research project 'Women's Creativity Since the Modern Movement', which mapped female achievements in Europe since the 1920s in a broad array of creative disciplines (Martinez 2018). The question is whether these and other initiatives are able to contribute to a lasting transformation of architectural history as a more inclusive discipline. For example, there is the continuing debate about whether the method of identifying and adding women to the canon should include a critique of its mechanisms of production (Wilke 1992). What remains important is the question about the status of the studies about women: are they to be considered as a supplement to the canon or as a separate history that exists alongside it? Today, the activism of feminist researchers has changed compared to that of the second-wave feminists; the intellectual heritage of women's and gender studies also seems to be more at a distance. Yet without a critical agenda, the research on women in architecture runs the

risk of becoming just another specialization of architectural history (Halbertsma 1993). In the Netherlands, after nearly four decades of research on the position of women in architecture, it has become clear that this subject merits the full attention of architectural historians within and outside of academia. The future of this research will depend on the degree to which universities and cultural institutions are willing to support and include this knowledge as part of a revised architectural history.

Notes

- ¹ In the text the use of these sources is indicated as (Van Moorsel 2018), (Van Kessel 2019) and (Cieraad 2019). I thank the interviewees for their collaboration in writing this article. I planned to interview my last actor, Marjan Groot, in the last week of June 2019. Unfortunately, she died unexpectedly a week before we were scheduled to talk. I dedicate this article to her memory (Groot 2007).
- ² The term 'hidden from history' refers to Sheila Rowbotham's publication from 1975. Here the term is used to indicate the absence of women in architectural history.
- ³ See their website: <https://vrouwenbouwenwonen.weebly.com/30-jarig-bestaan-vbw.html>, accessed on February 19, 2020.
- ⁴ After finishing her dissertation, Van Moorsel continued to work in feminist art and architectural history with the goal – more explicit than in her thesis – of increasing the visibility of women. In 2000, she published a monograph about her aunt Nelly van Doesburg (Van Moorsel 2000; Van Moorsel 2004; Van Moorsel and Segaar-Höweler 2008).
- ⁵ See the work of the feminist cultural anthropologist Cora Vrede-de Stuers (1909–2002), who studied the lives of women in countries such as India and Indonesia, also from the perspective of postcolonialism.
- ⁶ Although Cieraad does not explicitly refer to Butler, it is interesting to link the hypothesis of repetitive acts that are in part unconscious and outside of one's individual will to Butler's theory of performative acts formulated in relation to Austin's speech act theory (Butler 1990). See also the work of Sarah Ahmed, who uses concepts like orientation to discuss how bodies and objects cannot be sharply delineated from each other (Ahmed 2006). See also Cieraad (2018).
- ⁷ Amazone was a national organisation that was created in the year 1977 in Amsterdam to stimulate the position of women in art and culture. Its goals were to change the traditional thinking about women in these domains, to make visible their contribution and to encourage their professionalisation. Its main activity was the organisation of exhibitions, courses and workshops. It ceased to exist in the year 1996 when state funding stopped. More information about this gallery is present in the ATRIA Institute on Gender Equality and Women's History in Amsterdam.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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