

Research paper

Feminist Spatial Practices: Queering Rural Periphery Through Spatial Activism

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores feminist spatial practices operating outside traditional boundaries of architectural profession, focusing on self-organised spatial activism in rural Sweden. It centres on the art collective *Not Quite*, operating from the premises of a former paper mill in Fengersfors, Dalsland. Founded over two decades ago by craft-makers, the collective has cultivated a vibrant cultural space in a peripheral region. While *Not Quite* is not explicitly named a feminist collective, its activities are largely sustained by women and non-binary individuals and informed by queer-feminist organisational models. In response to the threatened sale of its premises, the collective acquired and began restoring an abandoned carpentry workshop, using craft techniques and repair to reclaim space and foster community. These acts of maintenance are framed as feminist spatial practices—concrete, collective interventions that challenge capitalist development logics and dominant urban planning models. The paper situates these practices within broader discussions of the ethics of care, commoning, and diverse economies, positioning architecture not as a static form, but an ongoing, relational process. Through participatory action research, the study highlights how collective repair practices serve as both spatial and political strategies, offering grassroots, smaller-scale, community-oriented approaches of living and making together at the margins.

Keywords: feminist spatial practices, maintenance, commons, craft, care

Feminist traditions in architecture have come a long way—not only through theoretical articulations but also through concrete practices carried out by collectives such as Matrix, MUF, Fatale, and others. Within the construction sector itself, numerous initiatives began to emerge in the 1980s that sought to challenge gendered hierarchies and bring feminist perspectives into building industry. In their iconic work *Making Space: Women and the Man-Made Environment*, Matrix (1984) critically examine the social and material conditions that shape the production of the built environment. Their analysis foregrounds two interrelated dimensions: the patriarchal structures that determine who holds the authority to decide and the consequent absence of women from decision-making processes; and secondly how environments are conceived and constructed within the “man-made world”, fail to produce spatial forms that address concrete needs of the groups excluded from the normative process.

In Sweden, one prominent example is the network now known as *Alstra* (formerly *Kvinnors Byggsforum*, or ‘Women’s Building Forum’). Initially, the organization concentrated on issues of diversity within the construction industry and the underrepresentation of women in the field. However, with the growing influence of feminist and

queer-feminist¹ epistemologies, its focus has expanded—shifting toward more critical engagements with space, gender, and power within architectural discourse and tackling large discourse of spatial practices beyond building industry redefining practices.

What makes feminist spatial practices particularly distinct is their consistent reflection on practice itself, articulated through the lens of critical spatial practices (Rendell, 2018; Schalk, et al. 2016; Petrescu, 2007). While engaging with feminist theory, these practices often emphasize a much stronger relationship to lived, material practice—especially in terms of ethics. It is this ethical dimension of practice that is foregrounded here, with a focus on how feminist spatial practices function as forms of “altering practice” (Petrescu, 2007)—actively challenging dominant modes of spatial production by reshaping relationships, responsibilities, and modes of engagement within the built environment.

Feminist nomadic practices, as articulated by Rosi Braidotti (2011), offer a generative conceptual framework for rethinking architecture not as a static or immutable entity, but as a dynamic assemblage of relations, materialities, and affects that continuously evolve. Nomadic theory advances a process ontology that privileges transformation, fluidity, and becoming over fixity and permanence. In this sense, architectural space is understood as contingent and performative—constantly produced through movements, encounters, and negotiations that shape subjectivities and modes of living. As Braidotti notes, “only the majority can be static, self-replicating and sterile” (Braidotti, 2011), a provocation that underscores how dominant, homogenizing systems rely on stasis and repetition, whereas minoritarian or nomadic practices open up spaces for creativity, difference, and ethical transformation.

This reflects a broader understanding of feminist spatial practice, where design and construction are viewed as ongoing, relational processes rather than fixed or final outcomes. This in-between position—between theory and practice, between public and private, and between art and architecture—is also central to Jane Rendell’s early definition of critical spatial practice, where the emphasis lies in navigating and questioning boundaries through situated, reflective work (Rendell, 2006). Schalk et al. (2017) argue that “feminist spatial practice envisions structural and systemic change through social, economic, and aesthetic alternatives on the micro level, and that they act as seeds of transformation”.

As pointed out by Braidotti (2011) that “central to this feminist nomadic politics is the embrace of complexity, situatedness, accountability, and the localization of partial perspectives”. This also means that feminist futures are therefore not restricted to women but encompass alternative future forms of human and non-human relations that imply radical societal transformation of systems and structures that create and sustain patriarchal hierarchies (Schalk et al., 2017). These futures propose radical shifts that are grounded in the relational and situated dynamics of lived experiences, advocating for a world shaped by collective care and interconnected agency. Similarly, Jane Rendell (2018) conceptualised feminist spatial practice drawing connections between de Certeau’s strategies and Lefebvre’s representations of space on the one hand, and de Certeau’s tactics and Lefebvre’s spaces of representation on the other, she suggests a “distinction between practices (strategies) that operate to maintain and reinforce existing social and spatial orders, and those practices (tactics) that seek to critique and question them. It is the latter one that becomes ‘critical spatial practice’ – a term which serves to describe both everyday activities and creative practices which seek to resist the dominant social order of global corporate capitalism (Rendell, 2018).

THINKING FEMINIST SPATIAL PRACTICES THROUGH DIVERSE ECONOMIES AND DEGROWTH PERSPECTIVE

Degrowth represents a paradigm that extends beyond economic systems or critique of perpetual growth, encompassing broader considerations of organizational forms that can lead to societal transformation (D’Alisa et al, 2014; Kallis, 2018; Schmelzer, et al 2022). This societal transformation takes form in two main dimensions - ecological sustainability and social equality. Chertkovskaya (2022), building on work of Write (2012), brings up three modes of transformation within the degrowth paradigm. In this specific case, it is the interstitial transformation that plays an important role. Interstitial transformations involve building new forms of social empowerment on the margins of capitalist society, usually outside of spaces dominated by those in power (Chertkovskaya, 2022). It refers to practices that resist and build alternatives to major power structures by resisting principles of scalability as a feature of perpetual growth promoted by capitalist systems. Instead of standardising and expanding as strategies of growth, this approach embraces smaller-scale, community-oriented practices often initiated, led and sustained by intentional communities (Chertkovskaya, 2022). While interstitial transformations are not directly subversive in the way that insurgent urbanism might be, they occupy a middle ground between

¹ In the Anglo-American context, queer and feminist studies are often treated as distinct fields. However, in the Swedish context, the term “queer-feminist” has a long-standing tradition, particularly in relation to practical, action-based work. Collectives such as FATALE, MYCKET, ACTION ARCHIVE and others have contributed to shaping and expanding this terminology through their practice-based research since the mid-2000s. I use the term “queer-feminist” here in alignment with their articulations and understandings of the concept.

institutionalized practices and full-scale resistance, operating as a "minor gesture" (Manning, 2016) that creates subtle, yet impactful shifts in societal structures.

As Henri Lefebvre (1991) and Michel de Certeau (1984/2022) have shown, everyday spatial practices are not merely passive or habitual acts, but active modes of producing and negotiating space. This specific relationship between everyday life activities and spatial practice is often articulated through feminist epistemologies (Massey, 2005). These frameworks highlight how daily, lived experiences shape and are shaped by space and vice versa. Therefore, feminist spatial practices are often seen as practices conducted by non-spatial or architectural practitioners, on the margins of the professional practice. Those non-architectural spatial practices often respond to day-to-day necessities, and spatial practices therefore are mobilised to produce commons. This perspective also responds to Federici's (2020) claim that as women were historically excluded from financial life and formal economic structures, they had to rely more heavily on the commons. Similarly, Bradley (2014, p.185) argues that peer-based commons production often emerges through everyday practices rather than within formal organizations or political programs. These alternative forms of production are created collectively and informally, and they hold the potential to transform socio-economic systems from the ground up. As a result, practices of commoning—sharing resources, collaborating, sustaining communities—became closely associated with everyday activities (De Angelis, 2017). These seemingly ordinary actions, often overlooked, are in fact central to how space is produced, maintained, and shared. This perspective underscores the importance of the commons as a foundational element for collaborative and low-impact ways of living. It prompts critical reflection on how we inhabit, construct, and organize spaces, advocating for a reimagining of architectural and urban practices through the lens of collective care.

METHODOLOGY: PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH + FEMINIST SUBJECTIVITY + INVENTIVE METHODS

This paper explores a case of a self-organised cultural centre in rural periphery in Sweden. Urbanisation, as a process closely tied to modernisation, has long swept through the rural landscape, reshaping its social, economic, and spatial dynamics. Here, feminist spatial practice extends beyond analysing how spatial order is constructed—it moves toward actively destabilising that order (Schalk et al., 2017). This is achieved through queer-feminist forms of organising that are grounded in craft and maintenance as spatial practices. I argue that these approaches challenge dominant spatial norms by centering care, collaboration, and the everyday actions as tools for reimagining and reshaping rural periphery through queer-feminist spatial practice.

My engagement with *Not Quite* began in 2012, when I first encountered one of its co-founders during a workshop. Since then, my relationship with the collective and its site in Fengersfors has evolved through multiple roles—researcher, collaborator, participant, visitor, and friend. This multiplicity of positions has shaped a situated and reflexive approach, grounded in feminist epistemologies that value subjectivity, relationality, and embodied knowledge (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Not Quite



Note: Image by the author

The research uses mixed-method approach, combining ethnographic and autoethnographic methods with principles of participatory action research. Fieldwork involved multiple visits to the site during both active and dormant periods of the cultural season. These visits included participant observation, photographic and written documentation, and both structured and semi-structured interviews with members of the collective. Walking interviews, workshops, and informal encounters provided additional insight into the rhythms of everyday life at *Not Quite*.

To explore feminist forms of organising and maintenance practices, I employed what Lury and Wakeford (2012) describe as inventive *methods*—approaches that generate knowledge through collaboration and experimentation rather than extraction. Drawing on Law’s (2004) argument that methods do not merely describe but also produce the world, I treated research devices as tools for collective inquiry. Inspired by Phillips’s (2012) discussion of the *list* as a dispositif—a relational mechanism that organizes and enables action—I designed a workshop with women and non-binary members of the collective. Using everyday objects such as seed packets, measuring tapes, screwdrivers, notebooks, and knitting needles as conversational prompts, we reflected on commoning practices and the intersections between artistic, domestic, and maintenance work (Figure 2).

These material and dialogical exercises illuminated how mundane activities intertwine with collective organisation, revealing the micro-strategies through which common space is continually made and sustained (Stavrvides, 2018). In this sense, practice itself becomes a mode of inquiry—an embodied, situated way of thinking that produces understanding through doing.

Figure 2

Workshop at Strands



Note: Image by the author

CONTEXT OF *NOT QUITE*—A LIFE OF THE RURAL ARTIST COLLECTIVE

Fengersfors is a village of approximately three hundred inhabitants situated in the municipality of Åmål, within the Dalsland region of southwestern Sweden. This rural area is renowned for its natural landscapes, characterized by extensive forests, numerous lakes, and agricultural land concentrated in the southern parts. The region has a low population density, which has steadily declined over recent decades. Historically, Fengersfors developed as an industrial settlement that emerged around the Lisefors ironworks at the end of the eighteenth century. In 1882, the ironworks were converted into a wood-grinding mill, and a decade later, in 1892, a company was established to construct a chemical pulp and paper mill. The paper mill initially prospered due to the production of so-called ‘ocean paper,’ a moisture-resistant material widely used for packaging. However, with the increasing prevalence of plastic during the 1950s and 1960s, global demand for ocean paper declined, leading to the mill’s bankruptcy in 1968. The facility was permanently closed ten years later. For several decades thereafter, the site remained abandoned, resulting in significant decay of the premises. It was not until 2000 that the abandoned

industrial complex found new life when the artist collective *Not Quite* was established and began renting the vacant space.

Not Quite is a collective of artists and makers consisting of around sixty members most of whom have educational background in craft. Alongside its industrial heritage, Dalsland also possesses a long-standing tradition of craft education that dates back to the 1920s. Initially established as vocational training for boys during the 1930s, this educational trajectory evolved through the foundation of Stenebyskolan in the 1940s and eventually became integrated into university-level education during the 1990s and early 2000s. This enduring legacy of craft education within the region played a significant role as catalysts in the development of *Not Quite*. Numerous members of the collective are either graduates, teachers, or current students of these institutions, with many choosing to settle in the rural landscape upon completing their education.

Not Quite operates as both an artist collective and an economic association, uniting individual practitioners under a shared organizational framework. The former industrial mill now accommodates a diverse range of enterprises, including a bakery, café, art shop, and printing house, which serve as public-facing components of the site (Figure 3). Complementing these are extensive facilities that support artistic production, including well-equipped workshops for wood, metal, photography, textiles, and ceramics, alongside a large exhibition hall. Within the premises, members maintain a combination of shared and private studios.

Figure 3

A map of *Not Quite*.



Note: Image by the author

ORGANISING AS COMMONING

As *Not Quite* has developed into an established cultural centre in a remote rural setting, both gradually reshaping it and connecting to the industrial history surrounding village and the broader region of Dalsland. The specificity of rural living—marked by physical proximity, shared resources, and limited infrastructure—has fostered forms of interdependence among the members of the collective that differ significantly from urban models of collective engagement. Within this context, *Not Quite* has evolved into what can be described as an *intentional community*—a self-organized collective of individuals united by shared values, mutual trust, and a strong ethic of social support. The community's practices are often characterised by principles of voluntary simplicity, emphasising collaboration, reciprocity, and care over competition or profit. Intentional community is drastically distinct from the more assumed or predefined

notions of “community” often invoked in urban planning discourse, where the term may refer to fixed social categories such as “families,” “youth,” or “skaters,” often defining consumer groups then actual social networks. In contrast, through these relational and ethical commitments, *Not Quite* fosters forms of association and collective work that challenge conventional, market-oriented models of organization.

The notion of the intentional community can be productively situated within the theoretical frameworks of diverse economies (Gibson-Graham, 2006) and degrowth (D’Alisa et al., 2014). Many intentional communities such as co-housing cooperatives, ecovillages, and other forms of collective living – actively experiment with reimagining social and economic relations beyond capitalist and neoliberal logics of production, accumulation, and consumption. While *Not Quite* does not engage in collective living in the traditional sense, it operates as a space for collective working, existing deliberately outside or on the margins of market-oriented agendas. Its organisational ethos reflects a form of economic and social experimentation that aligns with Gibson-Graham’s conception of diverse economies, foregrounding cooperation, reciprocity, and shared stewardship as viable alternatives to competitive individualism.

Within the context of the degrowth paradigm, *Not Quite*’s practices embody a critique of progress-oriented development by emphasising care, maintenance, and sufficiency over expansion and efficiency. The collective’s embeddedness in a rural setting further situates its work within a broader ‘Green Wave’ movement, wherein community groups reimagine the countryside as a site of post-growth living and ecological sustainability. Such rural forms of self-organisation operate both within and at the margins of institutional structures, negotiating autonomy while contributing to local resilience. In practical terms, *Not Quite*’s community-based approach manifests through study groups, collaborative workshops, and shared infrastructures that facilitate collective learning and production. These practices constitute an ongoing process of commoning—creating and maintaining shared resources, knowledge, and spaces through mutual care and cooperation.

As a large collective comprising approximately sixty members, *Not Quite* inevitably encounters the organisational complexities inherent in collective governance. To navigate these dynamics, the group adopts what it terms a ‘do-ocracy’—a self-organising mode of governance premised on action, where authority emerges through participation and initiative rather than through formal hierarchies. This practice of ‘organising through doing’ resonates with traditions of craft and artistic production, privileging embodied knowledge, material engagement, and process-oriented collaboration. Within the framework of commons theory, such an approach can be understood as an enactment of commoning, wherein social and spatial organisation arises through situated, collective labour rather than top-down administration. The do-ocratic model not only mitigates stagnation in decision-making but also sustains a pluralistic mode of operation that accommodates the heterogeneous practices, temporalities, and working methods of its members. In this sense, *Not Quite* exemplifies how participatory and process-driven governance can function as both a pragmatic structure and a form of spatial politics.

The context of *Not Quite* collective helps to frame three specific forms of feminist and queer forms of organising space that I explore in this article - *Homogafiska* museum, *Strands* and *Sniqueeri* – a carpenters duo run by two *Not Quite* members.

MAINTENANCE WORK AS A FEMINIST SPATIAL PRACTICE

Like many other cultural centres that do not own the buildings they occupy, *Not Quite* has been renting its space for years. For nearly two decades, the arrangement had worked well: the mill, though privately owned, was leased under favourable conditions. However, when ownership changed, the situation shifted dramatically. The new owners put the building complex on the market at a price that was simply unaffordable for the collective. This sudden change introduced uncertainty and created significant obstacles, ultimately forcing *Not Quite* to begin seeking alternative spaces for their work and community.

Maintenance has been a central practice at *Not Quite* since its inception. The decaying industrial premises demanded continuous care to sustain the functionality of the building. Over time, however, members of the collective became increasingly reluctant to engage in maintenance work, as each act of repair and improvement effectively raised the property’s market value—rendering the site less attainable for collective ownership and more desirable for sale by the landlord. In response to the fluctuating price of the mill, the collective made several attempts to raise funds and explore various models of collective ownership, but without success. In 2021, the collective decided to acquire its own premises—a smaller, more affordable site only twenty-minute walk from the mill. The maintenance of this new building, which was in poor condition at the time of purchase, became the collective’s primary focus and a key form of collaborative labour aimed at restoring and reactivating the space. Within this new context, maintenance emerged not only as a technical task but as an inherently political and ethical practice. Drawing on feminist materialist perspectives, maintenance can be understood as a form of care labour that resists the extractivist logics underpinning capitalist production and property relations. Through collaborative repair, the collective redefined maintenance as a mode of *commoning*—a shared process of sustaining material infrastructures and social relations over time. Framed through the lens of degrowth discourse, these practices

articulate an alternative ethos of sufficiency, interdependence, and continuity, offering a counter-narrative to the disposability and obsolescence that dominate neoliberal spatial production.

Theorists such as Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) have emphasized care as an epistemic and ethical mode of engaging with the material world—an affective and practical commitment to sustaining interdependence rather than pursuing mastery or growth. Within this framework, maintenance becomes a critical feminist gesture: an act of *staying with* the site rather than exploiting it. Similarly, Silvia Federici (2012) situates reproductive and maintenance labour as forms of invisible work that uphold the very conditions of life, challenging the gendered hierarchies that devalue care within capitalist economies. From a degrowth perspective, feminist scholars such as Bauhardt and Harcourt (2019) argue that re-centering care, repair, and commoning provides an alternative to productivist logics, foregrounding sufficiency and social reproduction as principles of ecological and economic sustainability. In this sense, *Not Quite*'s engagement with maintenance can be read as both a material and conceptual intervention: a reclaiming of care labour as collective praxis and a reimagining of the rural as a site of post-growth experimentation. Through acts of repair, the collective not only preserves a building but also performs an ethics of continuity, reciprocity, and shared responsibility that counters the disposability embedded in contemporary spatial production.

In the context of self-organised cultural spaces, maintenance is often perceived as a *transactional practice*—a means of ensuring access in exchange for labour, to put it simply. This dynamic manifests in various arrangements, such as token rents, agreements with municipalities, or leasing systems specifically designed for decaying buildings. These decaying environments are frequently treated as the sole viable venues for cultural activities, reinforcing the notion that culture must inhabit spaces of decline. In such arrangements, the values assigned to maintenance and the spaces themselves become a critical point of reflection, shaping the dynamics of cultural production and eco-social care of these practices. These collective repair practices not only serve as acts of spatial reclamation but also function as pedagogical sites (Graziano and Trogal, 2017), fostering knowledge exchange and skill development while promoting a more inclusive and sustainable approach to spatial production.

QUEERING THE PERIPHERY

Homografiska, is a queer museum. Constructed in 2020 in the park area of *Not Quite* café by one of the members, Funny Livdotter, *Homografiska* is as an artistic project and one of the smallest museums in Sweden. Built from plywood and shaped like a container, the museum occupies an area of only a few square meters, embodying a minimal yet powerful statement: "History has always been subjective". Encountered for the first time the museum might seem like a temporary installation. However, despite looking as a small container it does indeed operate as a fully functioning institution. It runs exhibitions, it has a director, a board, and it commissions artworks for the museum collection (Figure 4).

Figure 4

Homografiska museet.



Note: Image curtesy of Homografiska museet

In Swedish, the name "*Homografiska*" is a play on words referring to large institutions such as "*Fotografiska*" and other "-iska" museums; this pun intends to emphasise that traditional museum institutions often fail to

acknowledge the inherent biases within their structures, perpetuating patriarchal frameworks and reinforcing existing power dynamics often neglecting alternative narratives. This reflection inspired a playful reimagining, a conceptual "Homografiska", envisioned by Funny around fifteen years ago. The history of the museum starts as such: in 2020 Funny with another member of *Not Quite* collective Emelie Rygfelt Wilander were making a member exhibition at the mill. Paraphrasing Judy Chicago's iconic *Dinner Party*, their project featured a massive table where every member of the collective was given a seat. It culminated in a grand celebration, complete with a performance by drag performer Butcher Queen. In the creative aftermath of the exhibition, a significant amount of plywood material was left over. These conditions, combined with a long-term vision, culminated in the creation of a temporary space for a queer art — *Homografiska*. The material from the table was repurposed into a container, reflecting the common artistic principle of reusing available resources. Nothing is trash for an artist.

Neither Funny themselves, nor *Not Quite* as a collective, had an intention that the museum will become a permanent part of *Not Quite*. It happened by chance. The original concept was to design something mobile, a "museum on wheels" that can travel around. However, the landowner of the mill imposed a peculiar restriction: no structures on wheels were permitted. This unexpected limitation inadvertently transformed the museum into a permanent fixture, diverging from its initial intention of temporality and mobility. The permanence of the museum was accidental. *Homografiska* doesn't pay a rent to be at *Not Quite*'s land—since it is a member's art project it operates rent-free. More than that, there a few maintenance arrangements with *Not Quite* done is exchanged for what can be seen as "consensual pinkwashing,"² where access to land and even minimal utilities is granted in return for the art collective's alignment with LGBTQIA+ initiatives. Within precarious position and constant efforts to obtain institutional grant systems, this alignment often serves as a significant form of leverage for *Not Quite* as a whole. It is a mutual support structure.

Although *Homografiska* is an individual artistic project rather than a formal part of the collective practice, it operates through ethics of care in its organization and approach. The museum aims to provide a platform and physical space for artists who may not hold legitimate status within Sweden's bureaucratic cultural funding systems. This subversive model offers visibility and support to queer artists by commissioning, exhibiting, and archiving their works. Despite its modest container-based structure, the museum's archive is intended to endure indefinitely, serving as both a symbolic gesture and a critique of the institutionalized art world. By establishing a small museum on the periphery, *Homografiska* challenges dominant cultural norms, creating a space for queer representation and fostering a sense of belonging outside mainstream institutional frameworks.

The significance of the periphery takes centre stage in understanding the creation of *Homografiska* Museum. For Funny, establishing this museum in a rural setting was essential. Having grown up in the countryside, they sought to unpack what it means to be an artist on the periphery, particularly within institutionalised and historically centralised art systems. Funny reflects that, while a project like this might gain significant interest in Stockholm—where a queer space within established institutions would be highly desirable—the logistical and financial challenges, such as finding a space and affording rent, would make it far more difficult to realise there. For *Homografiska* this specific rural territory plays a significant role in conveying its message. Both its location and the way it was crafted speak to its purpose. By situating the museum outside urban art centres and embracing a DIY ethos, *Homografiska* not only challenges conventional notions of where art and culture belong but also redefines the possibilities of creative expression on the periphery. This deliberate choice highlights the unique relationship between territory, spatial content form of making and the museum's mission.

As any museum *Homografiska* puts an important focus on archiving the collection. Instead of focusing on uncovering historical queer practices or stories of the past—work already undertaken by other initiatives—*Homografiska* engages with the "euphoric present." by commissioning artworks. In this approach, the material presence of the museum takes on profound significance making it tangible and real. The ability for an audience to physically enter the museum and experience its work provides a stronger, more visceral statement than niche-oriented approaches to collecting stories and works. Plywood alone was enough to create this magical space.

While many cultural spaces embrace self-building as a practice, it often takes the form of experimentation or a playful project. Practices such as tactical urbanism, DIY and pop-up architecture and many others that employ working with temporary, spontaneous hands-on techniques often take an informal nature. In contrast, *Homografiska*, which might look like informal structure from a first glance, represents a purposeful act of subverting institutional restrictions of architectural practice through the act of crafting. It embodies queer use, where use becomes a continuous exercise in reimagining and redefining. As Sara Ahmed suggests, "to use is also to put something to practice" (Ahmed, 2019). The notion of "use" is not always aligned with an object's intended function. Instead, it reveals the properties of the object in action and opens possibilities for its subversion, reinterpretation, and reinvention. *Homografiska* exemplifies this principle, challenging conventional notions of function and space while creating a site for alternative practices and meanings of the queer space.

² Quote from the interview with Funny Livdöter

Often, queer space is understood through the lens of marginalised identities, LGBTQ+ liberation, and underground party culture. While these are important aspects, queer space—when considered in relation to spatial practice—can encompass much more. Queer space is not only about marginal experiences; it can also be a site of resistance and transformation not only engaging with bodies that are different, but in a larger sense as an approach to politics that embodied subjectivities (Jobst and Stead, 2023). Queer space is often understood as a form of disobedience—a hidden, alternative realm that exists outside dominant norms. It is frequently associated with private or domestic spaces, tucked away behind closed doors, away from the public eye. These spaces have historically offered safety, intimacy, and resistance in the margins. In the case of *Homografiska*, however, queer space becomes something more: a space of queer joy, visibility, and self-determination. It takes an opposite approach to queer space; here queer space becomes clearly visible, present and material; however, it does not intend to occupy grand space to create what can be called a formal institution. Rather than functioning as a conventional institution, it is a self-organized initiative that reclaims presence and agency within the context of the rural periphery. It further challenges the notion that queer culture belongs only to urban centres, asserting instead that queer life and politics can thrive—and transform—on the margins in rural periphery.

The form of the museum, and the way it is constructed using concrete craft skills and recycled plywood, connects closely to the concept of *cross-cladding*—a term introduced by Bonnevier (2007). This concept blends the idea of *cross-dressing* from queer theory with *cladding* from architectural theory, offering a lens through which to understand how identity and space intersect. Bonnevier's work, including her analysis of the Swedish author Selma Lagerlöf's house in Mårbacka³, explores how domestic spaces can embody layered meanings—challenging fixed norms of gender, function, and design. In this context, the museum becomes more than a structure; it becomes a spatial expression of queer and feminist resistance, shaped through accessible materials and alternative building practices. The term links the theatrical performance of gender and sexuality with the masking and dressing of architecture. "Cross-cladding" as a perspective on architecture functions in response to, and possibly distorts, expectations and given truths. It operates as an analytical tool for the queer critique of the normative interpretation of buildings (Bonnevier, 2007). Examining *Homografiska* and *Not Quite*, the question arises what defines architecture as architecture? How architectural value is assessed and what is deemed proper or complete. Is architecture measured by a progress-oriented vision of polished, sleek structures, or can meaningful aspects of life unfold within self-build, imperfect spaces? Observing how *Homografiska* subverts the industrial heritage of the mill village reveals a reimagining of its future as a queer periphery, queer as a way of knowing and practicing. Through this lens, architecture becomes more than a physical or material structure—it emerges as a medium for challenging norms, and reshaping narratives tied to place and identity.

The rural periphery is often perceived through a progress-oriented lens as "underdeveloped"—either as a place in transition, on its way to becoming something else, or as a space frozen in time and closely tied to notions of "tradition." It is rarely associated with art, culture, or feminist politics—which are frequently relegated to the status of marginal experiments in such contexts. At the same time, the rural periphery offers the possibility to create alternative spatial practices—practices that might not find space or support within central urban contexts. In these peripheral settings, there is room to reimagine and enact ways of living, organizing, and making that challenge dominant norms and open up new forms of cultural and political expression.

ON THE MARGINS OF ARCHITECTURAL WORK: FEMINIST SPATIAL PRACTICES AT THE INTERSECTION OF MAINTENANCE AND CRAFT

While *Not Quite* is not explicitly defined as a feminist collective, much of its work is shaped by queer-feminist models of organization and collaboration. As a group of craft makers, the collective's activities go beyond cultural production to encompass material practices of shaping and sustaining shared spaces. In this context, relationship between necessary maintenance and craft as an artistic practice and skill, becomes clearly pronounced, as a way of caring for the environment and reimagining rural peripheries through a queer and feminist lens. Although existing literature often emphasises the precarious working conditions and multifaceted roles of women artists in rural settings (Mathisen et al, 2024; Mahon et al, 2018), my focus lies elsewhere. I examine how artistic practices actively contribute to the production of space—how they organise, build, and sustain alternative forms of spatial engagement. From this perspective, these practices can be understood as feminist spatial practices that emerge from outside the conventional boundaries of the architectural profession (Figure 5).

Care has traditionally been relegated to the private sphere and, as a result, separated from the realm of architecture (Tronto, 2013; Krasny, 2022). Similarly, crafting practices—often associated with domesticity—have

³ Selma Lagerlöf is a prominent Swedish author, known not only for her literary achievements but also for her unique presence in Swedish cultural history. Coming from a wealthy background, she inherited an estate in Värmland—a rural farming region in central Sweden, just north of Dalsland. Lagerlöf undertook extensive renovations of the estate, deliberately subverting the traditional cladded timber façades typically associated with the idealized image of "Swedishness." As a queer person, her approach to the redesign of the estate reflected resistance to conventional gender and national norms.

been historically assigned a feminine role, as discussed in post-craft discourse (Coles, and Rossi, 2022). At the same time, another cultural trope persists: the romanticised figure of the male craftsman engaged in “real” work, often associated with manual labour, as seen in narratives by Richard Sennett’s *The Craftsman* (2008). However, crafting is deeply connected not only to “making” of the architecture in terms of productions but often even more important to the upkeep of architecture, playing a vital role in its continued existence. Maintenance, in this sense, is not separate from architecture—it is an act of producing architecture, of keeping it alive.

Figure 5

Tools at Strands



Note: Image by the author

Krasny (2022) describes how the divide between architecture and care is built through the separation of architect and craftsman. Emphasizing Alberti’s perspective, she highlights that the distinction between the skilled workman and the architect lies in the latter’s intellect and creativity—qualities that elevate the architect to the status of a master. When architecture is positioned in this way, the architect is seen as a thoughtful and inventive figure, with emphasis placed on creation through function and shelter.

“Care trouble in architecture points to gendered knowledge power, the division of labour underlying the architecture-care divide as well as the historical exclusion of women from the concept of the architect.”

(Krasny, 2022, p. 32)

Craft, as a practice, becomes juxtaposed to architecture through the lens of care politics. This contrast is not accidental. The community around *Not Quite*, for example, was formed by craftspeople whose practical skills were directly applicable to the creation and maintenance of space. In this context, craft is not only a form of skilled labour—it also becomes a mode of collective organization. It enables communities to gather around creative work that demands certain competencies, shared responsibility, and mutual support. Craft, then, emerges as both a productive and social force—one that challenges traditional divisions between making and maintaining, between design and care. This is illustrated through various examples of practice at *Not Quite*, such as the window renovation workshop that took place during the *Trans Europe Halles* meeting in 2022. This conference is typically structured to provide space for cultural workers to engage in collective conversations and develop shared strategies for the future of cultural centres. In this context, the window renovation workshop served as a concrete example of the everyday challenges faced by many cultural spaces—particularly the struggle to maintain and renovate infrastructure with limited resources and support. The workshop not only addressed a practical need and offered practical skills but also embodied the collective, hands-on spirit that characterises much of *Not Quite* work, bridging the gap between physical labour, cultural practice, and community-building.

Similarly, another initiative driven by members of *Not Quite* is *Sniqueeri*, a duo of “fine carpenters” and artists who regularly organise community workshops specifically for queer groups where participants learn wood carving, woodworking, repairing techniques and more. Woodworking and carpentry, traditionally viewed as male-dominated professions, often remain unwelcoming and exclusive for others. By creating these community events, *Sniqueeri* offers a safe and inclusive space for creative experimentation, collective learning, and queer joy through craft making. Their workshops not only provide access to practical skills but also foster a sense of belonging and empowerment within a supportive, queer-affirming environment. These practices subvert above mentioned assumptions on carpentry work and foster collective action by creating *public sites of repair*. They operate through pedagogies that cultivate a “desire to participate in constructing political alternatives to capitalism” (Graziano and Trogal, 2017) and constructing “other worlds” (Roelvink et al, 2015; Gibson-Graham, 2014; Schalk et al., 2017).

The social nature of collective repair can become a “powerful moment of politicization” (Graziano and Trogal, 2017), particularly when it extends beyond environmental concern and is recognised as a potential site for anti-work tactics, engaging in forms of extra-disciplinary preoccupation. Ultimately, craft also has deep communal roots (Dormer, 2022, p. 94) and the workshop itself (both as a facility and as an activity) is based on cooperation (Coles & Rossi, 2022, p. 148). Within this context, collective and queer approaches to craft can be understood not just as aesthetic or technical practices, but as spatial practices—ones that reimagine how we relate to labour, to each other, and to the environments we inhabit.

Not Quite operates on a seasonal basis, typically from May to September, largely due to practical and infrastructural limitations. The old paper mill, vacant since the late 1970s, remains largely unrenovated and is used in its existing state—without heating or many basic utilities. Despite these challenges, the site continues to thrive as a cultural hub, attracting around 25,000 visitors to the village each year. Maintenance—or more precisely, the lack of it—was a key factor that pushed *Not Quite* to begin searching for new premises. The deteriorating condition of the former paper mill, where the collective had been based, made year-round operation increasingly difficult. Without proper heating and with mounting maintenance issues, the space became unsuitable for continuous use. Although renovations were necessary, the cost was far beyond the collective's means.

The lack of completeness of an “unfinished” built environment transforms maintenance into a daily, improvisational act of survival and adaptation. This highlights the idea that maintenance is not merely reactive, corrective or related to post occupancy (Sample, 2016), but it actively produces and shapes environments. It challenges the notion of maintenance as a secondary or derivative process. Building on Lefebvre’s ideas about the production of space as a social and political process that is continuously created and practiced, maintenance, too, is more than just preserving order or keeping things the same. It actively reproduces space. Through everyday micro-strategies and acts of care, maintenance becomes a quiet form of activism, continually shaping how space is lived and experienced ([Figure 6](#)).

Figure 6

Entrance to strands



Note: Image by the author

SPATIAL ACTIVISM AS A PATHWAY TOWARD POST-GROWTH UTOPIAS IN THE NOW

The relationship between activism and utopian thinking is often articulated through concepts like “utopia in the real” or “nowtopias,” where visions of a better world are enacted through tangible actions in the present. Activism, in this sense, includes not only loud and visible forms of protest but also quieter, subtler actions that intervene in public space and foster meaningful change. These spatial practices challenge the notion of activism as spectacle and instead highlight the significance of collective, often informal modes of engagement. Activism becomes a collaborative process that builds community and solidarity, particularly in the context of social movements. Boys and Dwyer (2017) explore feminist activism in architecture through the lens of craft and anti-consumerist production, emphasizing how even the most radical architectural practices remain entangled within capitalist structures and normative socio-spatial relations that govern the production of buildings. They trace how feminist architectural artefacts traverse the boundaries between production and occupation, positioning these artefacts as carriers of critical spatial intervention. Importantly, they stress the unfinished, processual nature of

these interventions, noting that feminist architectural activism often occupies a liminal space—between leisure and labour, between so-called “proper” work (paid, professional, and status-driven) and activities historically relegated to the realm of hobbies or domestic reproduction. In doing so, they challenge the conventional binaries between work and non-work, and draw attention to the uneven, materially embedded trajectories of feminist spatial practices. This perspective also repositions architecture: rather than an industrial, product-driven discipline, it is understood as a practice embedded in everyday life. Through acts of maintenance—those mundane, often invisible forms of care—architecture becomes a means of sustaining, adapting, and inhabiting space. Such practices bring attention to overlooked aspects of spatial production and propose new ways of living and organizing that are rooted in care, collaboration, and resistance.

Emma Dowling and Joan Tronto, in their respective works, discuss the notions of neoliberal care, care politics accessible only to the privileged few—“wealth care” (Tronto, 2013), and the concept of “compassionate capitalism” (Dowling, 2018) cantered on temporary fixes rather than sustainable solutions. Integrating care into the conversation about maintenance helps to reframe it beyond a purely labour-oriented practice, as understood through social reproduction theory, or a purely technical practice, as explored within science and technology studies. This shift allows maintenance to be seen not just as a task or function but as a practice imbued with social, ethical, and relational dimensions.

“Because care emphasizes processes and relationships that extend back and forward through time, and concerning all of the created relationships, applying care theory to architecture would involve making a fundamental shift in perspective: care does not view the completed “thing”—building, park, city zone, etc.—as its object.” (Tronto, 2019)

Through practices of *collective maintenance*, communities can push back against these structures and reclaim the commons, emphasising care and cooperation over extraction and profit. This perspective ties into the broader crisis of care, where societal emphasis on individualism and market-driven values has marginalised the labour of care. Historically, this led to the creation of the domestic sphere, isolating care work within households and stripping it of its collective and communal dimensions. This also relates to what Silvia Federici says about feminist forms of organising:

“It begins with the realization that, as the primary subjects of reproductive work, historically and in our time, women have depended more than men on access to communal resources and have been most committed to their defense.” (Federici; 2020, p. 143)

MICRO-POLITICS IN ORGANISING FOR THE COMMONS

The study examines how micro-strategies (Stratford, 2007) rooted in feminist spatial practices resist growth-oriented paradigms of urban transformation. Here, transformation is understood as encompassing not only physical modifications but also shifts in social relations, practices, and ethical frameworks, reflecting an eco-social approach of interstitial change (Chertkovskaya, 2022). Drawing on Silvia Federici’s critique of capitalist accumulation and reproductive labour, as well as J.K. Gibson-Graham’s exploration of diverse economies, this study highlights alternative modes of spatial production that challenge dominant neoliberal frameworks.

The emphasis on the micro level can take various forms, including what Sandström (2019) describes as “minor urbanism,” where small-scale, nuanced interventions build towards broader urban change. Micro-politics can be simply defined as small intervention to achieve systemic change. Helen Stratford (2007) discusses *micro-strategies of resistance* as subtle confrontations against dominant powers, framing them as “incremental moves” that act as discrete traces within a larger plurality of resistance. Drawing on Foucault’s concept of micro-politics and extending it with Barbara M. Kennedy’s notion of a “micrology of lived experiences,” Stratford describes these transformations as emerging “across and between the space of any fixed subjectivity.” She contends that approaching resistance from the “micro” level involves engaging with the intricacies of everyday life, offering a different way of conceptualising architectural practice and its relationship to power. Such principles challenge static, universality frameworks by emphasising the fluid and context-specific nature of power and agency.

The *Not Quite* collective is organized in a way that resists conventional architectural narratives—it does not aim to create a finished architectural product or undertake complete renovations. Instead, it engages with space in an ongoing, adaptive manner, often based on seasonal use. This specific temporality reflects a different kind of spatial politics—one grounded not just in flexibility, but upkeep, maintenance, and collective care rather than permanence or completion. *Homografoska*, for example—is a micro-museum with a grand message. Though small in scale, it communicates powerful ideas, echoing the micropolitical ethos of *Not Quite*: that even modest, everyday practices can carry significant meaning. Similarly, *Sniqueeri*, a practice within the *Not Quite* collective, reflects the role of craftspeople in shaping and sustaining the space. Their work represents more than skilled labour; it is a form of embedded engagement—a way of being in and with the space that embodies the principles of care, adaptability, and collaborative creation.

CONCLUSIONS

This article has explored how feminist spatial practices emerge within rural contexts, particularly through the repurposing of abandoned industrial heritage for cultural life. It has focused on specific practices—such as cross-cladding, pedagogical sites of repair, and micro-strategies of queer-feminist organising—that reframe maintenance as a spatial practice grounded in a politics of care. These forms of practice function as spatial activism: collective, feminist acts of resistance that challenge dominant architectural norms and propose new ways of engaging with space.

Not Quite's form of community is intentional, shaped through shared practices, care-based labour, and ongoing negotiations of collective *space* which largely relies on trust-based relationships of mutual support. The case of *Not Quite*, a collective of craft makers—particularly textile artists and carpenters—demonstrates how such practices operate. Their practices, while not always producing traditional architecture, are instrumental in creating and sustaining communal and queer spaces. Crafting is understood here as a spatial practice—a way of shaping the built environment through care, adaptation, and collaboration. Maintenance plays a central role in this process. It is embedded in the everyday and tied to material conditions and power relations. Rather than a static or secondary task, maintenance emerges as an improvisational, creative, and political act, unlearning modernist ideals of linear progress and embracing cyclical, regenerative ways of inhabiting space. By stabilising the broken, transforming the neglected, and embracing the mundane, maintenance offers a radical reimagining of care, responsibility, and becomes a necessary framework for reimagining architecture through feminist spatial practices, activism, and collective life.

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AI disclosure

No artificial intelligence tools were used for data collection, analysis, or text generation in this manuscript.

Biographical sketch

Natalie Novik is an architect, researcher, and maker working transdisciplinarily. Her practice revolves around topics of self-organisation, commoning, collective care, otherness and belonging. In the centre of her research are independent cultural organisations and their practice of (un)fixing space. Through the methodology of urban curating, she is developing interactive collaborative tools and games for expressing nomadic presence in space. She holds a master's degree in architecture and urban planning, and currently she is a PhD candidate in artistic research at HDK-Valand Academy of Art and Design.

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