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Research paper

Outside Architecture: Feminist Manuals, Catalogues, and Services, 1960–1980

Tara Bissett

University of Waterloo School of Architecture, CANADA

*Corresponding Author: tmbissett@uwaterloo.ca
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ABSTRACT

Feminist space in North America between 1960 and 1980 was produced through tools, manuals, and service infrastructures; this article situates these practices within a longer genealogy of feminist spatial and organizational strategies. Drawing on women's centers and their associated networks of handbooks, support collectives, directories, and pedagogical practices, it argues that feminist movements reframed architectural production through repetition and maintenance, positioning service as a spatial practice. Through Nelson Goodman's notion of allographic art, the article interprets feminist how-to resources as scores: iterative notations that could be enacted across different contexts while remaining recognizable as part of a shared repertoire. Through examples including Cell 16's manuals, *The New Woman's Survival Catalog*, and the pedagogies of the Feminist Art Workers and various women's centers, it traces how feminist spatial epistemologies emerged less through canonical buildings than through distributed procedures of enactment, adaptation, and transmission. In doing so, the article proposes a genealogy of service in architecture, showing how feminist practices transformed instruction and maintenance into forms of spatial knowledge.

Keywords: feminist space, care ethics, architectural history, women's centers, women's histories

On 8 March 1971, a collective of women climbed the stairs of a disused knitting factory in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and refused to leave. They demanded rooms for childcare and meetings, a switchboard to provide information on women's services, and a place to learn, repair, and organize. Within months, these demands culminated in the Cambridge Women's Center, home to a Women's School with courses ranging from feminist histories to "fix-it" workshops, as well as a health collective and a hub for women's resource distribution. Though the project was site-specific, its practices were portable. Guides for setting up daycares, templates for self-defense classes, and step-by-step instructions for starting a credit union circulated through women's groups. Over time, these services were shared throughout North America, cohering into a feminist infrastructure grounded in repeatable practice.

This article argues that manuals, catalogs, and women's centers organized space through transferable procedures, constituting an architecture of service largely outside architecture's canon yet decisive in shaping urban life. Service is understood here as a programmatic principle that channeled needs into spatial capacities, turning demands for welfare and knowledge into shared frameworks that others could adopt and repeat. Nelson Goodman's concept of allographic art helps conceptualize how feminist 'how-to' resources were performed across contexts while remaining recognizable as part of a shared repertoire. What is at stake in this distinction is the possibility of understanding feminist procedural tools as architectural acts, where authorship emerges

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through shared repetition rather than isolated creation, much like a choreography performed from a common score. A childcare brochure, a switchboard protocol, or an eldercare guideline was an architectural instrument as much as any drawing or plan. Handbooks, like *The Houseworker's Handbook*, and later the guidebooks by Women's Design Service codified feminist practices into flexible consultative methods that women could perform in different contexts. Catalogs such as *The New Woman's Survival Catalog* represented dispersed initiatives as a legible network. And women's centers, including the Cambridge Women's Center and the San Francisco Women's Building, turned resources into platforms for collective support.

Although I situate these spatial practices within a deeper genealogy extending from nineteenth-century service writing and cooperative networks, this article traces their feminist reformulation between 1960 and 1980. The account is necessarily partial, focusing on Britain and North America. Ultimately, this paper asks how feminist practices mobilized shared epistemologies that organized spatial relations, while exploring what counts as architectural production. These feminist contributions are not marginal supplements to architectural history but a genealogy of service-oriented practice that reshapes how we understand the discipline.

ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIES

Architectural history has centered on designers, patrons, and canonical works, yet recent scholarship has widened its scope to recognize women's contributions to spatial production through migration, administration, social work, pedagogy, and medicine, as well as through the organization and maintenance of space and its everyday uses (Adams, 1996; Awan et al., 2011; Frichot et al., 2017; Siddiqi & Lee, 2019; Burns & Brown, 2020; Steiner et al., 2023). Architectural practice is increasingly conceptualized beyond the building. Menna Agha's work with Nubian women's testimonies of displacement and reconstruction demonstrates how emotional labor is foundational to placemaking. She expands the figure of the architect to include those whose invisible or invisibilized labor sustains and remakes space, framing emotional contributions as a form of 'capital' (Agha, 2020). Sol Pérez Martínez and Anne Hultzsch argue that inclusive architectural histories require new research and reading practices, often engaging texts outside the discipline and written by non-architects. In "Reading-With: A Collaborative Method for Inclusive Architectural Histories", they show how a "radical listening" approach often surfaces unexpected insights into the built world as described by women (Hultzsch & Pérez Martínez, 2023).

Architecture as an expanded field owes much to Dolores Hayden's influential work on women's contributions, which positioned women's work and the labor of care as critical frameworks for understanding architecture (Hayden, 1982). In a similar vein, Gwendolyn Wright demonstrated how philanthropic organizations, popular women's magazines, and architectural pattern books mobilized domestic reform as a way of shaping the built environment. Through these media, women's labor was channeled into the everyday reproduction of architecture, as household upkeep and reform were tied to broader social projects of health, morality, and civic order (Wright, 1980). As Elke Krasny, Joan Tronto, and others have argued, architectural history has privileged autonomy and design while disavowing the temporal nature of maintenance that sustains dwelling and the processes that unfold around architecture's making (Krasny, 2019, p. 13–14; Tronto, 2019, p. 2–18). Sara Ruddick (1980) named these practices of nurturing and sustaining a form of "maternal thinking" that create "distinctive ways of conceptualizing, ordering, and valuing" (p. 359) that were still not "worthy of respect" (Ruddick, 1980, p. 357). However, this disavowal has obscured women's contributions, since some of their historical spatial agencies have taken the form of organizing and maintaining space rather than producing new buildings. Mierle Laderman Ukeles made this critique explicit in Maintenance Art Manifesto (1969), elevating cycles of cleaning and repair as creative practice. Similarly, Doina Petrescu framed Jennifer Bloomer's tropes of "mopping" and "quilt-making" as feminist forms of maintenance, recasting domestic and bodily labor as care acts that hold communities together and incrementally transform daily life (Petrescu, 2023). These scholars have insisted that maintenance and labor are not secondary to architecture but constitutive of it, a dimension through which women have historically shaped and sustained the built world.

Yet maintenance represents only one strand in a broader repertoire of overlooked practices. Beyond sustaining what already exists, women also produced services and resources, including manuals, catalogs, maps, and infrastructures, that codified the 'how-to' of making space and rendered collective action visible. In doing so, they claimed space beyond the home through struggles over safety, movement, housework, sexuality, and civil rights.

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A SPATIAL GENEALOGY OF SERVICE

I use the term "service" to describe the organizational and material practices through which feminist collectives gave spatial form to shared needs, whether through the production of resources, the maintenance of infrastructures, or the provision of shared tools. As a noun, service denotes ongoing activity but also the means that make it possible. It is therefore bound to the mechanics of getting things done and the tools that facilitate events. If maintenance sustains what exists through repair and upkeep, service sets conditions for action by codifying steps, organizing flows, and brokering relations. Where maintenance stabilizes, service enables. This enabling quality rests in instructions and procedures that can be taken up and repeated across contexts. As feminist legal theorist Margaret Jane Radin writes, feminism and pragmatism are not fixed doctrines but "ways of proceeding," committed to finding knowledge in the particulars of experience and in situated, contextual practices (1990, p. 1760). Manuals and handbooks function in this spirit, as working instruments that orient practice and allow it to take different forms across contexts.

Long before the resource movement of the 1970s, women participated in activist networks that provisioned space through collective infrastructures rather than single architectural works. I draw on these histories not to offer a full account but to highlight recurring patterns in how women organized spaces beyond the household. Silvia Federici's *Caliban and the Witch* shows that women's confinement to the home was not natural but produced through enclosure-era restructurings that curtailed common land and tethered reproductive labor to the household (Federici, 2004, p. 21–59). Women historically faced strict limits on movement that made independent life far more difficult. Yet even under these constraints, they generated alternative traditions that imagined social life otherwise (Federici, 2004, p. 38). Voluntary heretical movements across Europe experimented with collective forms of association that offered women new spaces of autonomy. Rejecting clerical authority, these sects created networks of "contacts, informal schools, and safe houses"—what Federici calls the first "proletarian international"—grounded in mutual aid and the local redistribution of resources (Federici, 2004, p. 33). Such infrastructures reshaped daily life and pointed to a broader genealogy in which the production of services became central to women's emancipatory spatial practice. In this sense, these heretical practices bound visions of a new social order to changes in women's everyday conditions, modeling early forms of shared spaces that were provisioned and maintained outside patriarchal systems of rule.

Later, across the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, women's articles and journals used services to define a public beyond the home.[1] Melusina Fay Peirce's *Cooperative Housekeeping* (1884) proposed domestic reform by outlining protocols for pooling labor, sharing meals, and managing collective kitchens, effectively scripting new forms of household association (**Figure 1**). The 'service article' became especially influential, carrying the procedural impulse into everyday advice columns, cut-out patterns, and step-by-step proposals to mitigate the burden of care. Comparable efforts emerged in settlement houses, and women's clubs where pamphlets codified sanitation, nutrition, and childcare routines into reproducible protocols. This literature, however, carried ambivalent legacies. Reformers like Peirce and Jane Addams cast service as a form of emancipation, embedding domestic labor in civic frameworks and reimagining the household as a collective unit of social transformation. Yet, well into the twentieth century, popular magazines such as *Good Housekeeping* or public health manuals like *How We Cook in Canada* reinforced patriarchal norms by presenting the how-to element of domestic labor as patriotic duty (Scanlon, 1995) (**Figure 2**). Thus, service writing did not form a coherent tradition: while some strands sought to liberate women from isolation through cooperative infrastructures, the far more dominant strand reinscribed their confinement within the private sphere. These contradictory tendencies show that literature could serve both emancipatory and disciplinary ends. It is against this backdrop that feminist experiments of the 1960s to 1980s can be read as both return and radicalization. Women's centers, small-press manuals, and feminist planning collectives such as the Women's Design Service brought diverse women's knowledge into the built environment, turning grassroots practices into specialized spatial programs. Unlike earlier reformers, these later feminist initiatives treated service not as a tool for improving women's domestic roles but as a participatory practice through which women produced their own spatial resources and infrastructures.

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Figure 1

Melusina Fay Peirce's Cooperative Housekeeping. How not to do it and how to do it, 1884. Boston: James Rosgood & Co. Public Domain.

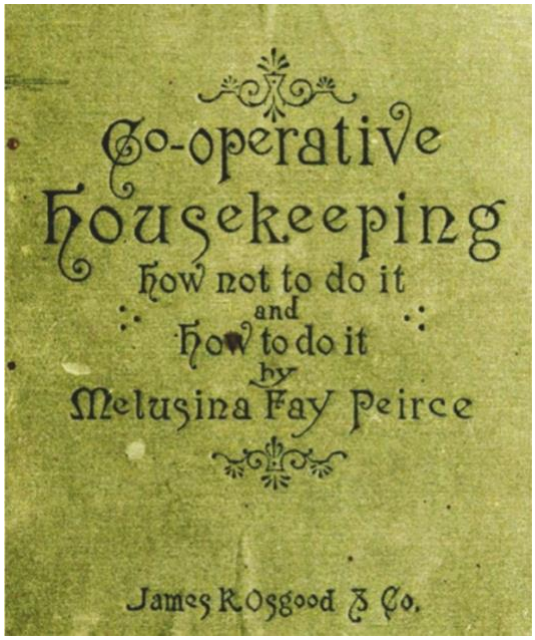
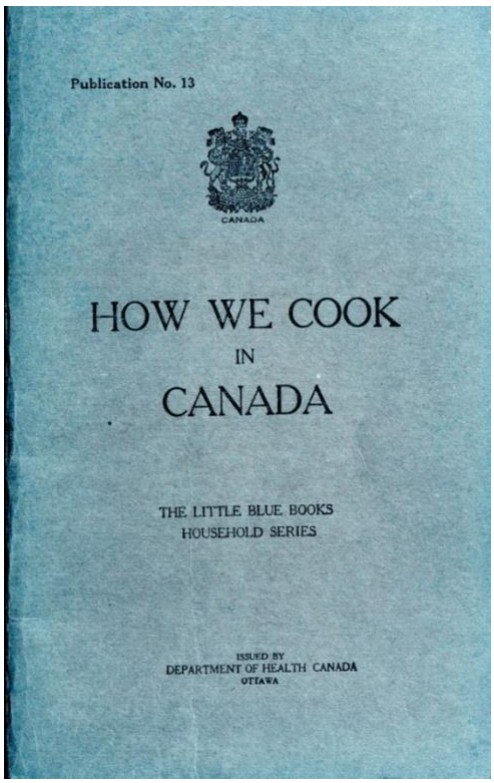


Figure 2

How We Cook in Canada. Published by Helen MacMurchy and Canada. Dept. of Health. 1923. Public Domain.



GRASSROOTING FLOWS: COMMUNITY TECHNICAL AID IN THE 1960S

By the late 1960s, the terms of spatial and political struggle had shifted. As struggles against racial and gender injustice intensified**,** disability activism gained ground, and the welfare state retreated, activists across North America and Britain began building their own infrastructures of survival. Resource-making emerged as a direct form of action. It was within this context that Community Technical Aid (CTA) reframed design as a public service, producing tools that enabled residents to manage and reshape their built environments (Wates & Knevitt, 1987, p. 29; Charitonidou, 2019, p. 41).

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CTA translated professional expertise into locally governed instructions. Selwyn Goldsmith's *Designing for the Disabled* (1963), for example, translated lived experience of disability into guidance for architects and planners. The Black Panther Party's Survival Programs (1967–1982) developed neighborhood infrastructures such as free breakfasts, health clinics, and community patrols that offered models for grassroots provision.[2]

Women-led groups moved directly into this technical aid culture. The small-press boom of the 1970s produced manuals and handbooks as portable infrastructures for organizing meetings, securing space, and navigating the procedures through which space was allocated and controlled. Practice-led feminism codified tacit knowledge as instructions that reorganized daily movement and shifted habits from private households into collective, urban settings. The International Wages for Housework Campaign offers one well-known example, developing manuals for organizing around domestic labor, but countless lesser-known pamphlets likewise displaced dominant knowledge systems through bottom-up action.[3]

MANUALS

Manuals were tactical tools that translated feminist demands into everyday practices, reshaping how space was lived and used. The feminist collectives producing these manuals in the late 1960s and 1970s emerged from a broad political landscape, shaped by civil rights, anti-capitalist organizing, and women's liberation. Their manuals translated these intersecting demands into strategic instructions for daily life. One of the earliest examples was the Boston-based Cell 16, founded in 1968 by Dana Densmore, Roxane Dunbar, Betsy Warrior, Abby Rockefeller, and Jayne West. Cell 16's handbooks combined women's histories with pragmatic directives: they traced global contexts of women's oppression, offered ways to challenge the economics of unpaid domestic labor, and encouraged practices that expanded women's everyday mobility. They urged women to wear practical clothing, confront harassment, and build local cells able to act collectively while remaining autonomous. The first issue was intentionally unstructured, presented as a chorus of women's voices to signal solidarity through difference. The second, *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation* (**Figure 3**), shifted toward action, outlining experiments in communal living outside patriarchal family structures, continuing to pair feminist theory with practical resources. By framing itself as one unit in a broader network of "cells," the collective used the manual to demonstrate how feminist ideas could be replicated and circulated elsewhere.[4] Although Cell 16 dissolved in 1974, members Betsy Warrior and Lisa Leghorn went on to publish *The Houseworker's Handbook* (1975), situating domestic labor within a long feminist genealogy that included Charlotte Perkins Gilman.[5] Cell 16 thus exemplifies a generation of organizations that shaped urban space through directives and manuals, using instructional forms to support feminist organizing across contexts.[6]

Figure 3

Cell 16: No More Fun and Games. A Journal of Female Liberation. 1969. Creative Commons. Courtesy of Duke Digital Collections.

Over time, feminist design groups carried the procedural forms of earlier manuals into planning and architecture, giving women's epistemologies new spatial uses. Feminist collectives such as Matrix Feminist Design Co-operative and the Women's Design Service (WDS) carried this ethos into participatory design methods (Matrix, 2022). Their projects actively tried to engage Women of Color,

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working-class women, and same-sex couples to define the terms of design. In the United Kingdom, Matrix published *Making Space: Women and the Man-Made Environment* (1984), which was geared less to offering a toolkit and more to revealing the problem of the "man-made environment."[7] Their analysis centered women's needs in places that were typically frequented: housing, workplaces, shopping centers, and public washrooms. WDS grew from similar concerns but offered practical guidance for altering the environment at two scales: incremental and infrastructural. WDS foregrounded the idea of "service" to describe a mode of practice that linked community needs to skilled labor (Martin, 2009; Berglund, 2008). Its booklets, including *Shoppers' Creches: Guidelines for Childcare Facilities in Public Places* (1988), *Thinking of Small Children: Access, Provision & Play* (1988), and *At Women's Convenience* (1990), among others, collaboratively gathered evidence from focus groups to develop practical considerations for childcare in public space. WDS's manuals did more than offer technical fixes; they rendered women's diverse experiences of care into shareable forms.

CATALOGS

Tools were central to feminist networks, but these networks also developed epistemologies and mapping practices that made women's services visible as infrastructure. Catalogs and directories reterritorialized cities by charting forms of lived experience onto their landscapes, transforming dispersed initiatives into a legible movement that allowed women to recognize themselves as part of a broader community. Publications such as the *London Women's* Handbook and the *Women's Yellow Pages* remapped cities by indexing services, resources, and meeting places, while projects like *Cora: The Women's Liberation Bookmobile* in Canada extended feminist networks into smaller towns. These listing and connective forms allowed women to see themselves as part of a broader collective terrain rather than isolated groups. As Manuel Castells has argued, grassroots movements gain force when their dispersed sites become legible as a single entity (1983, p. 140). Catalogs and directories were therefore not ancillary but world-making.

One clear example of how catalogs transformed scattered practices into an identifiable movement was *The New Woman's Survival Catalog*, which gathered dispersed feminist resources into a single volume and rendered them visible and navigable (**Figure 4**). In the summer of 1973, drawing on a course syllabus at Barnard College, alumna Kirsten Grimstad and women's center board member Susan Rennie reversed the process of manual making. They undertook a two-month road trip across the United States to catalog organizations and spaces already "aimed explicitly at the development of an alternative women's culture" (Grimstad & Rennie, 1973, p. 7). Inspired by Stewart Brand's *Whole Earth Catalog*, their project gathered women's services and resources that had not yet been understood as part of an interconnected network, compiling them as "tools" within one book (Miller, 2019; Grimstad & Rennie, 1973, p. 7). Over five months, Grimstad and Rennie assembled newspapers, credit unions, "banks, anti-rape squads, art galleries and schools, hospitals, non-sexist playgrounds, and childcare centers, bands, theatre groups, restaurants, literary magazines and scholarly journals," organizing them into nine chapters: communications, art, self-health, children, learning, self-defense, work and money, getting justice, and building the movement (Grimstad & Rennie, 1973, p. 5). The catalog functioned as an instrument for connection, making scattered services visible as a coherent landscape and showing how individual initiatives could be understood as part of a larger feminist movement (Furter, 2019, p. 452).

WOMEN'S CENTERS

Emerging across the United States in the 1970s as a form of technical aid, women's centers materialized feminist resources in urban space, translating demands for safety, childcare, education, and employment into spatial support structures. Notable for their cell-like networks, women's centers sometimes doubled as shelters or spaces where women of diverse backgrounds could seek peer-based support. One of the first such buildings, the Cambridge Women's Center, grew out of a rally on International Women's Day in 1971 (Ruthchild, 1996). Protesters occupied the second story of an old building on Harvard's campus and demanded that the university cede the space to the women's collective or provide an alternative site. They sought a place where women could meet, organize, and access essential services without institutional gatekeeping. Their demands succeeded: funding was secured, and a permanent women's center was established in a new location, where it continues to operate today.

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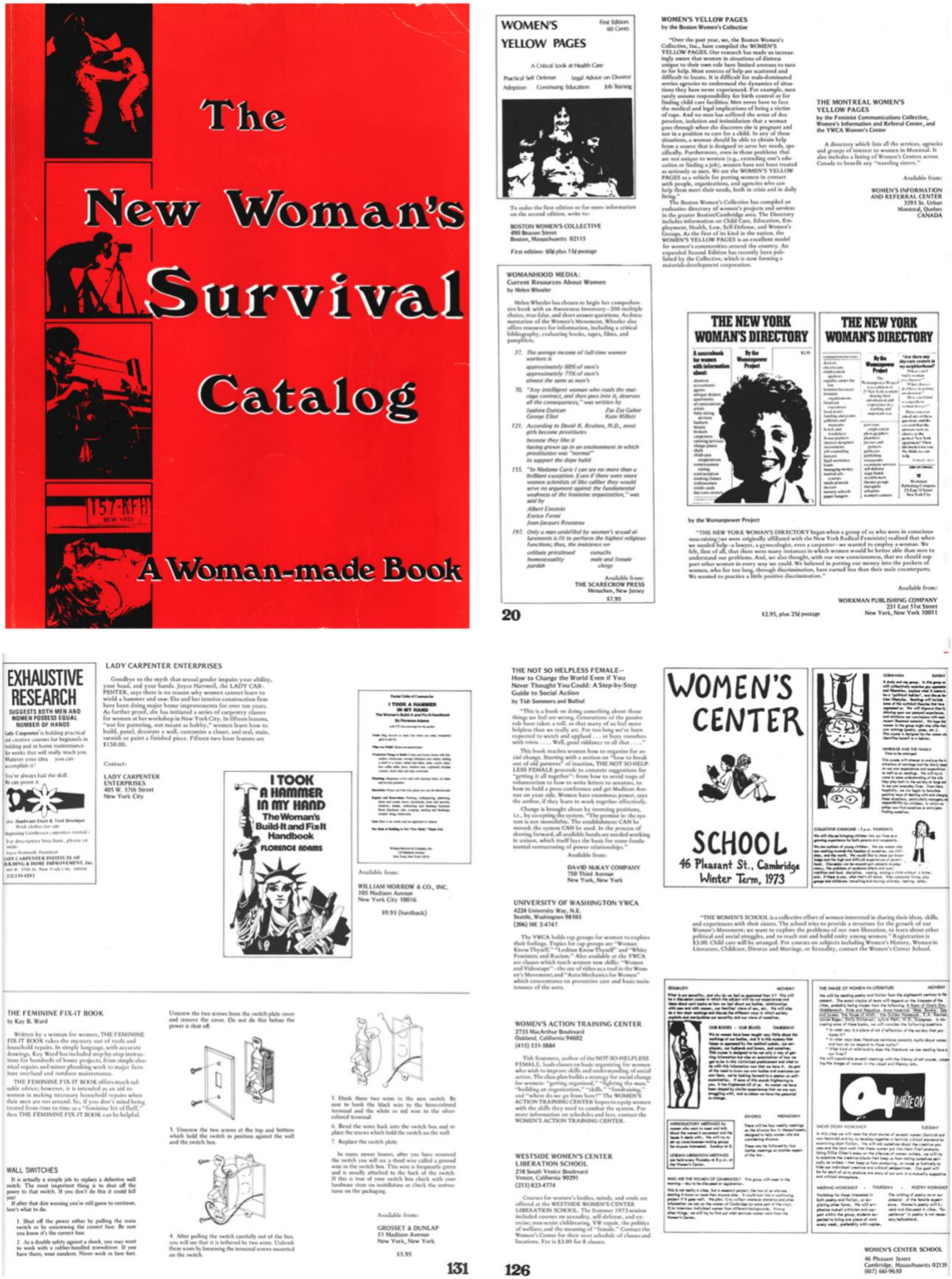
Figure 4

Four pages from The New Woman's Survival Catalog. Brooklyn, New York: Primary Information. 2019. Original published in 1973. Images used with permission from Kirstin Grimstad.



Alongside its role as a resource hub, the Cambridge Women's Center launched the Women's School, conceived as a counter-elite facility for collective education. It was developed in the shadow of Harvard

University by fifteen women committed to rethinking how spaces of learning could be retooled for feminist action. The collective explained its position clearly: "We agreed from the beginning on one important point: we did not want to create just another free university, a supermarket of courses where anything anyone wanted to teach would be offered. We feel this way because we think the women's movement needs to begin to define its goals and priorities" (Northeastern University Archives and Special Collections (NUA), 1972). As Cell 16 had done with its manuals, the courses brought the details of daily life into conversation with loftier social and political aims. The school aimed to demystify technologies such as cars and household repair equipment, while also offering shared knowledge sessions on family, sexuality, and the body. But it also had a political aim to "understand how sexism, racism, and imperialism are connected" (NUA, 1972). They felt it was important to build a movement that allied feminism with other social justice struggles, particularly the Civil Rights movement, and to confront anti-Black oppression more broadly by offering courses on the history of racial subjugation in the United States. The Statement of Purpose explains:

> We wanted the school to include several types of courses: some dealing with specific aspects of women's oppression (health, nutrition, sexuality, the family); others to help us develop our skills and tools for communication (art, writing, fix-it); and others to help us see our own movement in a broader social, political, and historical perspective (economics, women's history, black history, revolutionary movements) (NUA, 1972).

In San Francisco, the first women's center began in a private home in 1970, later becoming the Women's Building, housed in Dovre Hall from 1979 onward (San Francisco Women's Centers (SFWC), 1980). As the first women-owned and operated community building, it began as a "room of our own" and continues to serve as a hub for community outreach supporting women, queer, and immigrant organizations (Guy, n.d.).[8] As Stathis Yeros has shown, women's centers "deliberately invoked a decentralized network of women's spaces in the city," and the Women's Building exemplified this by fostering a service-oriented urban terrain that supported infrastructures such as the Feminist Federal Credit Union of the Bay Area and the Women's Switchboard (Yeros, 2024, p. 79). Among these initiatives founded with the support of the Women's Building was the city's first women's shelter, La Casa de las Madres. Over the years, the center has facilitated a range of initiatives rooted in feminist action groups, including the Women's Prison Coalition and consultancy work by the Gray Panthers, who organized workshops in homes for the aged and independent living centers across California (Sanjek, 2010; Women's Prison Coalition, 1976).[9] A letter from early member Roma Guy describes the first Women's Building as a crowded, bustling space with barely room to take a private phone call (Guy, n.d.).[10] The premises at Dovre Hall were designed to accommodate childcare facilities, offices, a library, and a coffee shop, while also serving as an informal drop-in center. From the outset, the Women's Building pursued a dual agenda: it provided space for events within its walls while also incubating projects beyond them, extending its reach through a networked community.

Flyers advertising events at the Women's Building underscored the aim of creating a multicultural, age-diverse, and accessible space. Guy noted that a "full house" was only possible by working across class and cultural difference and with women with disabilities (Guy, n.d.).[11] The inclusive vision articulated in the flyers and by Guy eventually took visual form on the building's façade. Created in 1994, *Maestrapeace*, now one of San Francisco's most celebrated murals, replaced an earlier work to mirror both the community it served and the shifting demographics of feminist politics (Alicia, 2019) (**Figure 5**). The mural mirrors the transnational reach of the services housed within the building, projecting them outward into surrounding communities as part of a broader global feminist network. Women animate the façade—political prisoners, the Orisha Yemayah, Guatemalan human rights activist Rigoberta Menchú, and Puerto Rican revolutionary Lolita Lebron, to name a few—arranged so that they look toward and touch one another, a visual expression of relationality across difference and distance (Yeros, 2024, p. 92). Another section of the façade embodies the Women's Building's spirit of interdependence and joy: Guanyin (Quan Yin), the Bodhisattva of compassion, overlooks a scene of sculptor Olga Stornaouldo dancing with a woman in a wheelchair wearing an ACT UP T-shirt (**Figure 6**).

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Figure 5

MAESTRAPEACE Mural on the San Francisco Women's Building, 1994, 2000, 2010. Created by Juana Alicia Miranda Bergman, Edythe Boone, Susan Kelk Cervantes, Meera Desai, Yvonne Littleton, and Irene Perez. All Rights Reserved. Pictured: Entire Mural from Corner of 18th and Lapidge Streets.

Figure 6

MAESTRAPEACE Mural on the San Francisco Women's Building, 1994, 2000, 2010. Created by Juana Alicia Miranda Bergman, Edythe Boone, Susan Kelk Cervantes, Meera Desai, Yvonne Littleton, and Irene Perez. All Rights Reserved. Pictured: Quan Yin, Wheelchair Dancers and African Panel

What began as a handful of experiments soon became an urban phenomenon, as the women's center and resource movement took root in city after city. In Philadelphia, the Women's Center opened in 1972 and quickly established itself as a hub. Two years later, the Washington Area Women's Center opened with a similar mandate, offering legal counseling, employment support, and reproductive health resources. One of the best-known women's centers was the Woman's Building in Los Angeles, founded in 1973 by Judy Chicago, Sheila Levrant de Bretteville, and Arlene Raven. It began as workshops in a

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living room before expanding into a community space, first in a warehouse and later in a vacant industrial building that would be crowned with Kate Millett's *Naked Lady* sculpture (Linton et al., 2011) (**Figures 7-8).** Montreal also developed a network of bilingual women's centers that embedded feminist practice within the city's linguistic and political landscape, ensuring access for both francophone and anglophone communities.[12] Together, these initiatives show how women's centers adapted to local conditions while advancing a shared feminist project: grounding feminist practice in the everyday lives of women and transforming neighborhood buildings into visible infrastructures of care, safety, and collective knowledge. In London, Matrix would also carry this model into professional practice, most notably through the Jagonari Educational Resource Center (1987), which materialized Bengali women's community needs within a purpose-built space.

PERFORMANCE AND ALLOGRAPHIC SPACE

This body of work in manuals, catalogs, and centers approached space through procedures as prompts for action. Nelson Goodman's distinction between autographic and allographic arts offers one way to describe this mode of practice and its reliance on repetition and notation (1976). Architectural practice has long been tied to the singularity of the completed building and so aligned with the autographic. Goodman's framework allows us instead to approach these feminist practices as allographic, where the work unfolds through notations and can be realized many times without taking the form of a single object. Understood in these terms, manuals, catalogs, resources, and services become allographic instruments: their identity rests in the instructions they carry, which can be enacted in different situations while remaining recognizable as part of the same practice. These feminist services operated in an allographic mode. Like choreography, they combined a shared score with situated interpretation and held continuity and variation together. Care labor followed a similar form of practice: repetitive, recognizable, and never identical from one instance to the next. Feeding, cleaning, or repairing are recognizable actions, but they are always conditioned by time, context, and relation.

Figure 7

Front of the Women's Building with Kate Millett's "Naked Lady" Statue on Top. Women hold a sign for the building below. Los Angeles, California. Approximately 1978. Credit: The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2017.M.43) Gift of Sue Maberry. © J. Paul Getty Trust.

Collectives from the Los Angeles Women's Building carried the choreographic dimensions of feminist service work into performance art, translating the labor of care into staged, participatory practice. Groups such as the

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Waitresses and the Feminist Art Workers choreographed performances to make the politics of women's work visible, often through humor, interaction, and spontaneous collective participation (Linton et al., 2011). Founded in 1976, the Feminist Art Workers explored how labor, violence, and community shaped space, adapting methods developed within the Los Angeles Women's Building to public settings.[13] In their performance *Heaven or Hell?*, the collective performed as diners struggling to feed themselves with long poles, succeeding only when they fed one another, turning a shared meal into a feminist allegory of reciprocity that reframed service as mutual care rather than isolated labor (**Figures 9-10**).

Figure 8

People carrying Kate Millett's "Naked Lady" sculpture to the Spring Street Women's Building. Los Angeles, California. Approximately 1978. Credit: The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2017.M.43) Gift of Sue Maberry. © J. Paul Getty Trust.

In 1977, the Waitresses performed *Ready to Order?* in restaurants across Los Angeles. Playing with stereotypes of the waitress as nurturer, servant, or sex object, they humorously explored how these roles circulate both socially and psychologically (Moravec, 2008). The Waitresses also organized participatory workshops with women in the service industry, using collective exercises to surface networks of support. A promotional poster for a restaurant performance, *Scheduled Menu of Events*, explains:

> We continue to serve the public, this time offering a new kind of menu. Our feast includes art performances by "The Waitresses." In our exploration of waitressing, we have located these key issues: stereotype, ie., waitress as mother/nurturer, servant/slave, and sex object; women and money; women and work; and sexual harassment. Each performance will focus on one issue while naturally touching upon all of them. To provide a fuller experience during this week, we've included various workshops, panels, and discussions. We hope you'll enjoy our palatable assortment of events. Bon appetit!

Similarly, Alison Knowles and Annea Lockwood's magazine Womens Work (1975) circulated scores and choreographies for women to enact in their own contexts, treating performance as something repeatable across settings (Knowles et al., 2019; Revell, 2022). Its opening page issued a clear directive: "[t]hese are scores ready for you to do. Please notify us of performances" (Knowles et al., 2019). The pieces ranged from concrete and plausible to difficult and absurd. "Write a letter to Ann Landers every day until one is printed." Or: "Spend a whole afternoon driving around the cloverleaf of a major artery. (At least four hours, say I-5)" (Knowles et al., 2019). Bici Forbes' score took the form of a curriculum, not unlike those at the women's centers, with classes nested from Elementary to Advanced. In its Women's Studies component, her Home Economics exercise framed preservation as a mode of meaning-making. She suggests: "[h]ide something you value very much. Keep it tucked away for one year. Throw it out without examining it. (This may also be performed as a potlatch concert:) Invited guests each bring something of their own that they treasure. Items are passed around, with or without comment, and then burned" (Knowles et al., 2019).[14] In these instances, performance carried the same procedural impulse as the resource turn, gaining force through repetition, circulation, and enactment across contexts.

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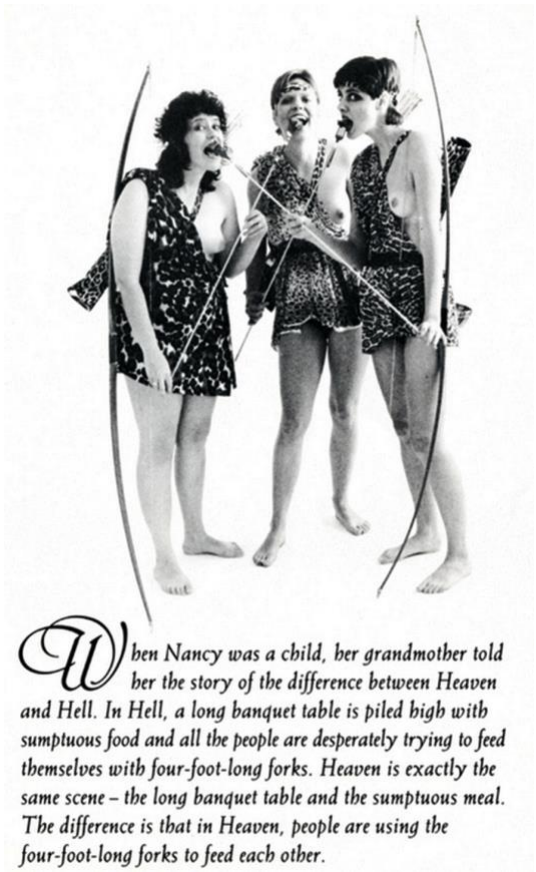
Figure 9

Feminist Art Workers performing Heaven or Hell?, 1979 at the National Women's Studies Association Conference at the University of Kansas. Credit: The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2018.M.16) Gift of Maria Karras, BFA, RBP, MA. © Maria Karras, BFA, RBP, MA.

Figure 10

Feminist Art Workers, Heaven or Hell? promotional poster. Credit: The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2017.M.43) Gift of Sue Maberry © J. Paul Getty Trust.



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CONCLUSION

Although performance art stood apart from the practical aims of the resource movement, it echoed the choreographic qualities of women's labor and service that feminist organizers sought to spatialize and make visible. The rise of women's centers, schools, shelters, and self-defense clubs in the 1970s similarly relied on shared frameworks and instructions, creating an allographic mode of organizing space grounded in collective participation. Across North America and the United Kingdom, these initiatives reshaped cities as grassroots infrastructures took root in neighborhood buildings. Their visibility grew as groups worked to connect these sites as part of a broader movement, establishing recognizable networks of women-led services. As this service-oriented landscape expanded, it carved out new spatial opportunities for women and began to institutionalize practices informed by women's perspectives, long sidelined in architectural planning. These practices offered not only new forms of provision but an alternative conception of architectural work, closer to what Krasny and Tronto describe as an "architecture of care," one that privileges relational practice over formal or object-centered design (Krasny, p. 2019; Tronto, p. 2019).

This article has traced a feminist mode of space-making that works through scores rather than fixed plans: instructions, catalogs, centers, and performances that convert needs into tools for action. What emerges here is a different account of architectural knowledge, one located in the less visible practices through which space is organized, sustained, and transformed. By recognizing these resource-oriented services as architectural instruments, we acknowledge that spatial knowledge is produced not only in studios and offices but also in kitchens, meeting halls, and homes. This widening resituates architecture as a field shaped by processes of coordination and service as much as by its iconic forms. To recognize these as architectural instruments is to approach architecture as a practice unfolding through iteration and adaptation, where care is not an add-on but the ground of spatial production.

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Ethical statement

This article did not involve human participants, personal data, interviews, surveys, or experimental research, and therefore did not require IRB or institutional ethics approval. The research draws on published and archival sources cited in the article.

Competing interests

The author declares no competing interests.

Data availability

No new datasets were generated or analysed during the preparation of this article. The article draws on published sources, archival materials, and historical documents cited in the text and bibliography.

AI disclosure

AI was not used in the course of writing, researching, or editing this article.

Biographical sketch

Dr. Tara Bissett is an Assistant Professor at the University of Waterloo School of Architecture in Canada, where she teaches cultural history and theory. She received her PhD in architectural history from the University

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of Toronto. Her recent work explores the role of women in architectural production across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with particular attention to spaces of welfare and women's reform.

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[1] Feminist debates about rights and citizenship often circulated in novels, tracts, and legal literature, situating women as intellectual and political actors (Bell & Offen, 1983). Alongside this discursive tradition, however, a more practical current unfolded in women's periodicals and household manuals, which translated ideas into procedures for daily life.

[2] The concept of "grassrooting flows" in the section heading positions the actions of grassroots practice as a verb. See Castells (1999).

[3] The campaign was initiated by Selma James, Silvia Federici, and Mariarosa Dalla Costa, but spawned many similar movements across nations.

[4] A letter from Cell 16 titled *Cell 16 Lives* from February 1971 indicates the goals of the collective, particularly the communication goals between members and the greater community. It is held in Folder 5a (MF reel no. 1) in the subfolder female liberation: A radical feminist organization records (1968-1974). *Cell 16/Female Liberation Split: Cell 16 Statements 1970-1971.*

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[5] No More Fun and Games. *A Journal of Female Liberation, 1*(2) is digitized and held with a Creative Commons licence at Duke University Libraries.
[6] Some examples are the Women's Action Alliance (WAA), the socialist feminist group New York Radical Women, the Marxist-materialist collective Redstockings (Willis, p. 1984, 117-150.), and the Chicago Women's Liberation Union (CWLU), and the National Black Feminist Organization (Davis, 1988) among many others. Guides and handbooks published from these collectives include *Non-Sexist Education for Young Children: A Practical Guide* (WAA, 1975) or *Socialist Feminism: A Strategy for the Women's* Movement, (CWLU, 1972).
[7] Karen Burns' introduction to the new edition of *Making Space* underscores this distinction in intention: Matrix was not prescribing a solution but rather demonstrating the problems women face in the urban environment (2022, ix).
[8] Guy, R. (n.d.). *A what? Ah, a [women's] building*. Who We Are Outreach, 1978–1993, Communications, Reel 17, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society (GLBTHS).
[9] A letter written by the Women's Prison Coalition outlines the support and collective initiatives toward prison reform. The letter is found in Women's Prison Coalition, 1976–1978, Sponsored Projects, 1973–1998, Reel 36, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society (GLBTHS).
[10] Guy, R. (n.d.). *A what? Ah, a [women's] building*. Who We Are Outreach, 1978–1993, Communications, Reel 17, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society (GLBTHS). Also see "Fact Sheet" in the same folder.
[11] Guy, R. (n.d.). *A what? Ah, a [women's] building*. Who We Are Outreach, 1978–1993, Communications, Reel 17, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society (GLBTHS).
[12] There is evidence that women's centers emerged throughout most North American cities between 1970 and 1980, some developing from communication with earlier examples (such as the one in San Francisco). Most women's centers contain archives of their inception. Tanya Southcott presented on the Montreal Women's Center in her talk "Reconstructing Sainte Famille Women's Center" at the Domesticity Under Siege International Conference, Brighton, UK, April 2–4, 2025.
[13] Members included Nancy Angelo, Candace Compton, Cheri Gaulke, Laurel Klick, and, later, Vanalyne Green, who joined in 1978.
[14] Primary Information has recently republished *Womens Work*. See https://primaryinformation.org/product/womens-work/

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