

Bent on Changing?

Imagining Postmodern Possibilities

BY CAROLINE FUSCO

Dans cet article, l'auteure réfléchit sur les vestiaires sportifs et se demande s'il y a possibilité de repenser et de réécrire ces endroits selon une autre économie. Elle souhaite pour ceux qui les réalisent, une vision plus subjective de l'architecture, de l'espace, vision qui soit radicalement différente pour dessiner les «vestiaires pour femme.»

... architecture and conceptions of space and habitation always contain within themselves an excess, an extra dimension, that takes them above and beyond the concerns of mere functionality, their relevance for the present, and into the realm of the future where they may function differently. (Grosz 2001: 150)



Figure 1, Photo: Caroline Fusco

Although I am not an architect or a geographer I have been fascinated with how architecture and space are produced and how they are intricately connected with the production of subjectivity, desire, power and knowledge. While these areas have been widely theorized by other scholars, I am the first to bring them together to a study of locker room social space. In this paper I review some of the literature that pertains to my theoretical framework(s) and offer (up) a speculative reading of a recreational locker room. I point toward the postmodern possibilities of re-thinking and rewriting locker rooms according to a different economy. My task is to point towards a radically different space, architecture and subjectivity for those who produced, and are produced by, a space designated as “women’s locker room.” I ask: is there a possibility for making locker rooms *changing* rooms in the figurative sense?

Traditionally, architecture has been viewed as the design and production of buildings, which are then discussed by critics as self-contained objects in terms of style and aesthetics (Allsopp; Scruton). However several theorists suggest that there are links between building(s) and architectural practices and articulations of political, social and cultural power (Bloomer 1993; Foucault 1977, 1980, 1997; Grosz 1995; Hollier; Ingraham; Markus; Rendell, Penner and Borden; Wigley). There is a recognition that architecture continues after the moment of its design and construction. Architecture is experienced, appropriated, perceived and occupied. Thus there are intersections between architecture and the construction of subjectivities. For instance, architecture is considered as a form of cultural documentation that contains representations of gender (Rendell), sexuality (Colomina; Foucault 1978; Ingraham), class (Markus) and race and ideologies of empire (Apter; Burns; Celik; Nalbantoglu and Wong; Wilson). These works suggest that techniques of representation and production as well as social, political and economic factors are key to the generative processes of architecture. Considering architectural practices in a multiplicity of ways (as they produce, and are produced by space) is particularly relevant because it allows me to think of locker room space(s) at the intersections of building, design, representation and power.

The archistructure of locker rooms

Western architecture is, by its very nature, a

Well Leave Your Shorts Behind! for Locker Rooms

phallogocentric discourse: containing, ordering, and representing through firmness, commodity, and beauty; consisting of orders, entablature, and architrave; base, shaft, and capital; nave, choir, and apse; father, son and spirit, world without end. Amen. (Bloomer 2000: 371)

Many architectural theorists suggest that architectural history is gendered. Further, architecture and masculinity are mutually reinforcing ideologies, the male body is used to represent the ideal proportions of architectural configurations, and masculinity is collapsed into the “neutral” figures of the “architect,” architectural discourses and building (Agrest; Bloomer 2000; Rendell; Wigley). It is also suggested that the female body is rejected from architecture or suppressed within it (Agrest; Wigley).¹ Many theorists then argue that Western architecture is a phallogocentric discourse, one that orders and contains through representations of firmness and order (equated with maleness) as opposed to curvature and disorder (equated with femaleness) (Bloomer 1993; Wigley).²

Let me return to gender. Irigaray suggests that it is the turning inside-out and containment of the maternal feminine that has facilitated the phallic economy of architecture (Grosz 2001). How does this containment work at/in the locker room? When I reach a locker room, for instance, I, along with all the others that come here, am confronted with two choices, either I enter the Women’s or the Men’s locker room. (Figures 1 and 2). Although feminist poststructuralists and postmodern theorists have deconstructed the artifice of sexual binaries there is “real” materiality to the signs on the locker room entrances. Using Butler I suggest that there is an attempt to circumscribe gender within the narrative frame on the locker room entrance. The materiality of “sex” is forcibly produced and repeated in, and through, the entrance signs. These signs might be thought of as citations that, through a process of reiteration, enable and constitute the subjects of “sex.” Story lines about gender acquisition are “offered”



Figure 2, Photo: Caroline Fusco

by/in/through the signs. Thus there is an attempt to create narrative closure on gender, this falsely stabilizes sexual categories (Butler). These signs (con)strain to exclude from eligibility any transgression that might challenge (hetero)sexual intelligibility (Butler); they are constitutive of “proper” (hetero)sexual space. It is almost impossible to break the rules and enter the “Other(ed)” side. Blum suggests that these kind of signs circumscribe an entrance that corresponds to your (explicitly, if it is so) sexed body, one that marks a refusal of entry to your opposite body. Becoming gendered and sexed at the locker room then can be represented as a spatial event. Blum states “the anatomical, then, appears to be an effect of spatial significations whereby the selection of the door tells you what you *have* (or lack, as the case may be) ... this is part of its structural guarantee” (264-265). Thus locker room entrance signs enable and constrain the sexual organization of bodies and space. Where one can(not) go and what one can(not) do in the space and how one is supposed to use the space and interact with the bodies in it is supposed to be understood. In such a way, all that is not naturalized, normalized or condoned is regulated. Simultaneously this containment of gender enables the architecture to work, and the architecture works to contain gender.

Within the locker room architectural features and fixtures also work to contain the female body.³ For instance, in some women’s locker rooms there are open areas for showering and changing and there are also several



Figure 3, Photo: Caroline Fusco

“privacy” cubicles for these activities. “Privacy” cubicles, I argue, refocus our (in)attention on woman as “... the living representation of corporeality” (Grosz 1995: 122). Although these cubicles allow the body to be closed off from others they do not in fact repress the bodily. I believe that these cubicles in some sense accentuate the body’s visibility: its corporeality becomes (a) matter for attention.⁴ In addition, closing the cubicle door not only hides your body *from others* but it also hides Other(ed) bodies *from you*. “Privacy” cubicles give one the opportunity to avoid a confrontation with the messy bodies of others (or perhaps one’s desire to gaze at those bodies).

The sub-architectural features and fixtures of the locker room also provide an effective means to constantly survey oneself (and the bodies of others) for one’s adherence to the phallic economy of firmness and fitness. Mirrors, bright lights, straight sight lines etc., allow for a particular “art of distribution” (Foucault 1977) through which all locker room clients can be aware of, more or less, what most people are doing. So even though women’s locker rooms are structurally separated from the men’s locker room and the surveillance of the male gaze, the attention on women’s corporeality in “her own” locker room sets up a panoptic gaze between a woman and (her)self and between the other women in that space. In all its states a woman’s body does not escape centrality.⁵ This panoptic

governmentality⁶ “imposes a particular conduct on human multiplicities” (Deleuze 1986: 34). Architectural enclosures, partitions and spatial arrangements:

... establish presences and absences, to know where and how to locate individuals, to set up useful communications, to interrupt others, to be able at each moment to supervise the conduct of each individual, to assess it, to judge it, to calculate its qualities or merits. (Foucault 1977: 143)

I suggest that the governmentality of the locker room produces, and is produced by, the organization of desire. Here I use desire as theorized by Deleuze and Guattari. They understand desire as productive. Desire is “the productive synthesis, the production of production,” it is “inherently connective in nature” (1983: 5). Desire produces reality and the capacity to make connections—*assemblages*—between bodies, surfaces and texts. Social organization requires that desire be codified, inscribed, properly dammed up, channeled and regulated. Identity categories, class, race, sexuality, and gender might be thought of as organizations of desire. Social organization (of which the organization of identity is part) is an “apparatus of capture,” it organizes and defines what is proper and improper for bodies, what connections can be made or are possible. Social organization means that:

You will be organized, you will be an organism, you will articulate your body—otherwise you’re just de-praved. You will be signifier and signified, interpreter and interpreted—otherwise you’re just a deviant. You will be a subject, nailed down as one, a subject of the enunciation recoiled into a subject of the statement—otherwise you’re just a tramp. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 159)

As well as regulating “subjects,” the organization of desire enables the production of “striated” space. Striated space is gridded, movement outside categories or spatial arrangements is confined and limited to preset paths, the emphasis is on fixity and identification. If identities and architecture are understood as particular organizations of desire, is it possible to *rethink* outside these striations? Is it possible to destabilize particular organizations of desire and governance by pointing towards an “improper architectural figure” (Ingraham) in the locker room? Can our conceptualizations of subjects and architecture be forced to become different?

Becoming-woman, becoming-queer

[Queer space is] ... a useless, amoral and sensual place that lives only in and for experience. It is a space of spectacle, consumption, dance, and obscenity. It is a misuse or deformation of a place, an appropriation of



Figure 4, Photo: Caroline Fusco

the buildings and codes of the city for perverse purposes. It is a space between the body and technology, a space of pure artifice. (Betsky 5)

I suggest that the social organization of locker rooms with their emphasis on a phallic economy of order, “straight” lines and geometric forms are fallible in their attempts to represent order. The messy materiality of our bodies can reveal a disorder in locker rooms beyond our wildest imaginings. Locker rooms are designed—with toilets, showers, saunas, hand-basins—to enable the expulsion and cleansing of our bodily excretions. A locker room, on the surface, (con)strains to produce a sense of hygiene and cleanliness. Yet, on, and underneath, the floor, behind the walls and in the piping—not far from the surfaces that we touch, smell, and see—a labyrinth of sewers harbours and flushes around and out, dirt, hair, sweat and excremental matter. Sometimes the rem(a)inders of this “mess” are not washed away and present themselves, however fleetingly, to us in the “out of order” toilet, the hairball in the shower drains, the smell of sweat and excretions, the dripping sponges and bathing suits that touch other and Other(ed) bodies. (Figures 3 and 4). All around a locker room flesh, hair, fluids and excretions collide even though the space (con)strains to organize and govern the boundaries between these rem(a)inders of corporeality in particular

ways (it is also this organizing and governing that produces the space). Can we think of these fluids and excretions as improper architectural figures? Can we force ourselves to think beyond discrete bodily boundaries and towards these queer and obscene excesses? If, as Bataille states, “Obscenity is our name for the uneasiness which upsets the physical state associated with self-possession, with the possession of a recognised and stable individuality” (18), then it may be necessary to engage with these obscene excesses in order to make locker room a *changing* room. How can we do this?

First we might want to engage Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) strategy of “becoming.” This is a strategy to move away from social organization(s).⁷ Grosz (1995) states:

Becoming is what enables a trait, a line, an orientation, an event to be released from the system, series, organism, or object which may have the effect of transforming the whole, making it no longer function singularly. It is an encounter between bodies, which releases something from each and, in the process, makes real a virtuality, a series of enabling and transforming possibilities. (134)

Grosz suggests that the Deleuzian notion of becoming is “what a body is capable of doing, without there being



Figures 5, Photo: Caroline Fusco

any necessity, and without being captured by what it habitually does" (1995: 135). Becoming is a "... desire to escape bodily limitation" (Massumi 94). Deleuze and Guattari (1987) advocate many types of becoming: "becoming-molecular," "becoming-woman," "becoming animal," becoming-homosexual" as ways to resist fixity and organization. These becomings are not particular points to be reached. In fact if one strives to *be* as opposed to *become* one risks recapturing oneself within the system of social organization. Becoming highlights the very incoherency and instability of fixed identity categories. Bodies-in-becoming cherish the leaks, holes, and cracks that exist in striated space. These cracks become sites of escape yet they are not outside the world as we know it, they are "... where bodies in the world but between identities go: liminal sites of syncretic unorthodoxy . . ." (Massumi 105). Although it might not be possible to force one's whole body and identity to become different, perhaps our "waste" products, instead of being relegated to mere rem(a)inders can (be)come to matter. These excessive and obscene excretions make connections with others' excesses—it is in these connections that striated space and social organization is rendered fallible. These uncanny abject objects are most definitely (a) matter for resistance. (Figures 5).

As well as engaging in a strategy of becoming (different) ourselves we might also force the locker room to become postmodern. Historically, geometry and segmentation heralded the triumph of modern sport over the open spaces of unbounded physical activity (Bale). Modern sport is "dominated by the straight line, it is panoptical, creating the impression of a total survey" (Eichberg cited in Bale and Philo 151). Straight-lined, quantified landscapes of sport, often associated with dominant white masculinities, contain, standardize and expand to control and deny irregularities. As a result, modern sport is, what Pronger labels, a *boundary* project par excellence. On the other hand, postmodern landscapes place emphasis on ambivalence, contradiction, they reject the neat tidy worlds which modernist sport seeks to attain (Bale). In order to

realize the postmodern possibilities of locker rooms can a labyrinthine pattern be proposed? Eichberg (in Bale and Philo) states:

... at no place in the classical labyrinth or in the maze can one gain visual control over the situation, and even in the centre of the labyrinth the opportunity for survey is lacking. The labyrinth seems iconographically to tell a counter-history, one running against the hierarchical totalitarianism of the central perspective. (158-159)

For Bataille, for instance, a labyrinth is disorienting, intoxicating, and ambiguous. It is anti-hierarchical; it is a place where one loses one's way, where one never moves ahead (Hollier). Bataille's labyrinth is *against* architecture, against any practice that cements the existing order. Might a labyrinth design be proposed for locker room spaces? What are the possibilities or concerns for this? If it is not possible to build new labyrinth locker rooms can we rethink existing locker room spaces as labyrinths, where straight (sight) lines and geometry are always already failing in their attempt to organize the space? Can we rethink the geometry of a locker room as one that is already riddled with corners, crevasses and bends, fissures to be exploited? Can we "... dally with rough surfaces, unclean edges, muted corners, hazy lines ...?" (Krell). Proposing a new spelling, *archeticture*,⁸ Krell suggests restoring the ecstatic to architecture, in order to engender different sorts of space making to contrast with the "mighty *tec*—that comes to be inscribed in our techniques, technics, technologies, and architectonics" (6). The "tic" turns our attention towards what is concealed in the technical ordering of locker rooms.

Rendell suggests that some feminist designers and architects already challenge phallic architectonics by drawing inspiration from the female body, "designing womb-like and curvaceous forms rather than phallic towers" and by "exploring the relationships between inside and outside (openings, hollows, gaps)" (229). An example of this kind of design is the locker rooms in the Athletic Centre at the University of Toronto. They have a curved streetscape-like main corridor. This curviness punctuates, and contrasts with, the regulating straight lines that intersect with it. This produces, interestingly enough, an ovum shape when the female and male locker rooms are viewed from above—from the architect's plan perspective. In the technical ordering of this locker room my attention then becomes *refocused* on the feminine concealed in the walls of this locker room (Figure 6).

My aim in this paper is to think differently about subjectivity, space and architecture. Thinking is the capacity to act but thought is often captured by forces that aim to restrict innovative thinking (Deleuze cited in Grosz 1995). As I have suggested, at the entrances of most mainstream recreational locker rooms, it is *almost*

impossible to think, act differently and innovatively in regards to gender. Overt transgression(s) *appear(s)* out of the realm of possibility because of the structural separation of the women and men's locker rooms. However, can this be resisted if we force architecture to *become*:

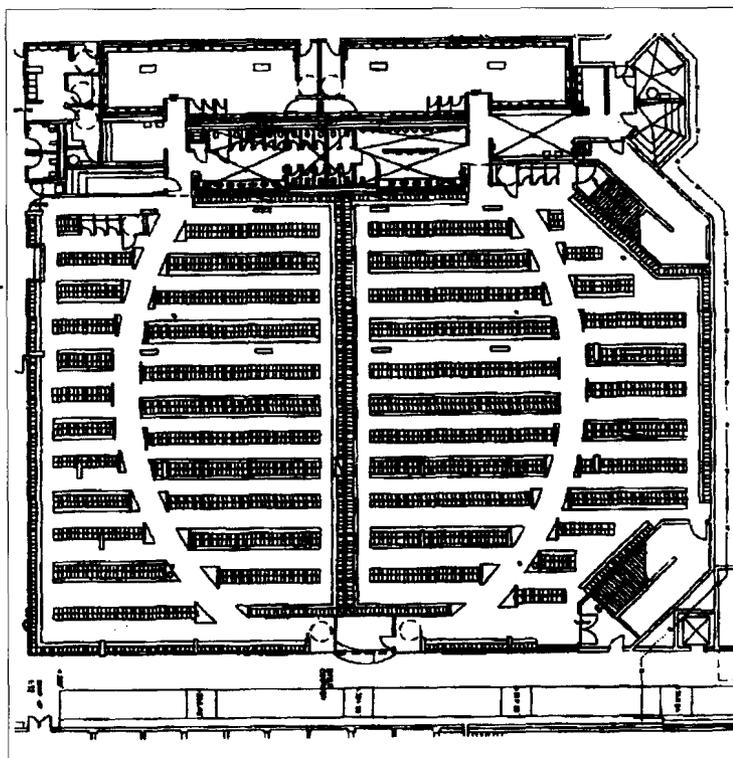
... rethought in terms of the outside, in terms of surfaces, in terms of a certain flatness, in terms of dynamism and movement rather than stasis or the sedentary ... no longer as a whole, a complex unity, but as a set of and site for becomings of all kinds.... (Grosz 1995: 135)

This would open up the possibilities for engaging with "smooth" space. Smooth space is open-ended, it allows for nomadic movement. Although striated and smooth space are not two discrete spaces, simultaneously "... forces at work within space continually striate it, and ... in the course of its striation it develops other forces and emits new smooth spaces" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 500), smooth space highlights resistance and displacement. "Life reconstitutes it stakes, confronts new obstacles, invents new places, switches adversaries" in smooth space (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 500).

Embracing the chaoticness and uncanniness of our own bodies, and Others' bodies can pollute striations and create smooth space. Breasts, (pubic) hair, body fluids, excrement, and (menstrual) blood—this messy assemblage of flows in the locker room—can destabilize the sterility of the architectural process (Bloomer 2000). Furthermore, those bodies that do not fit with the ongoing body projects of the white phallic economy of modernity (e.g., female bodies that are too fat, too old, too hairy, too disabled, too young, too Black, too queer, too dirty) cannot be contained within architecture's "own drives to orderliness and systematicity" (Grosz 2001: 156). Our leaky female bodies become a/the site of/for becomings that challenge self and architectural containment. Our messy corporeality leaks out of, drops onto, seeps into and smears locker room space revealing a/the excess that is outside architecture. Grosz (2001) asks:

Is it possible to actively strive to produce an architecture of excess, in which the "more" is not cast off but made central, in which expenditure is sought out, in which instability, fluidity, the return of space to the bodies whose morphologies it upholds and conforms, in which the monstrous and the extrafunctional, consumption as much as production, act as powerful forces? (162)

The possibility of producing a postmodern architecture of excess has been critiqued (Habermas; Jameson). Likewise, Stallybrass and White (1986) argue that appropriations of excess often constitute a discovery of bourgeois pleasure under the sign of the Other, in the realm of the



Figures 6, Photo: Caroline Fusco

Other. Playful inversions are often constitutive of the very formation of a normative and proper identity. While remaining cognizant of this I suggest that it is important to interrogate the limits of what is thinkable, to upset pre-given categories of subjectivity and point towards writing and building locker rooms according to a different economy. The possibility of a/n (m)other architecture defies the phallic economy and "defies the functionalism, the minimalism, the drive to economy and simplicity in much contemporary architecture" (Grosz 2001: 165). An architecture of the locker room in which "... those excluded, marginalized, and rendered outside or placeless will also find themselves" (Grosz: 166) is needed, and in which all (that) mat(er)s is celebrated.⁹

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with permission from Oleson Worland Architect, the firm that designed the project.

¹For an exploration of how the intersections of gender and architecture have been taken up in sports studies see Vertinsky's analysis of University of British Columbia's War Memorial Gym.

²It is also suggested that western European architectural forms can be read as tropes of White Western nationhood, as signifiers of the propriety of a (White) Western bourgeois order (Wilson). A white Western architectural imaginary, historically, appropriated and reconstructed architectural structures and forms to signal both contempt for disorder, and a desire for an exotic Other (Burns 54). I examine this in my dissertation but will not be discussing this further in this paper. See Celik; Nalbantoglu and Wong and Wilson for an examination of the architect Le Corbusier's concept of social order in terms of its preoccupation with "race" and imperialist practices.

³While many locker rooms have mostly identical features for both women and men's spaces—thus are working to contain all gendered aspects of corporeality—my concern in this paper is only focused on how the architecture works to contain women's bodies.

⁴I acknowledge that these cubicle spaces also provide privacy for women whose religious beliefs and social customs require that they remain covered in public spaces.

⁵Foucault's (1977) theorizing of the panopticon demonstrates how power can work to produce disciplined and docile bodies, bodies that can be regulated in time and space. The Panopticon, according to Foucault, sets up a field of total visibility, it is a system of surveillance, "power (is exercised) through transparency, subjection by illumination" (1980: 154).

⁶Governmentality, a Foucauldian concept, has been defined as "the contact between the technologies of domination of others and those of the self" (Foucault cited in Fox 1994: 32)

⁷In this case we might think of the social organization and stratification of subjectivity and our corporeality, these are "subordinated to the exigencies of property and propriety" (Grosz 1994: 170).

⁸Krell contrasts the Greek word roots—*tecu*—*tec* (technical ordering) and—*tiktein*—*tic* (engendering, procreating, and lovemaking) (6).

⁹Here I mean both *mater* (mother) and corporeal matter.

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MARLENE KADAR

Third Liner

These lines are not straight;
 Making room for long shots and rolling pucks,
 The third line bends around the skating black
 puck, breaking line.

White snow hides the black, falling faster than
 the Zamboni can shave it.
 The third line divides across the blue line,
 straighter now, but broken by
 girls' strong bodies.
 Only young eyes can watch that hiding,
 vibrating puck.

Two young eyes deep in their dark beauty
 chase the puck across the
 goalie's barricade.
 She scores, she scores again, and those dark
 eyes stay.
 Calm, the eyeliner runs at right angles to the
 bent wire mask.

Perfectly plucked eyebrows parallel the curved
 edge of the black Bauer
 HH1000L helmet.
 Partial circles and black liner, unwashed signs
 of a woman's night
 before.
 And now her long padded legs grab the ice,
 pull the winning team around
 the crease.

All I see are those gorgeous painted eyes, the
 beauty of this womanly
 forward in men's skates,
 Easton stick and massive CCM shorts on the
 third line.

Marlene Kadar lives in Toronto. This poem is dedicated to Emma.