

Editorial

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Designing the Feminist City: Projects, Practices, Processes for Urban Public Spaces

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Cities are never neutral. As Leslie Kern argues in *Feminist City. Claiming Space in a Man-Made World* (2020), everyday urban life is patterned by intersecting identities – gender, race, class, sexuality, age, and ability – that shape who feels welcome, who is rendered vulnerable, and who remains unseen. The converging crises of recent years, from pandemic care failures to climate emergencies and culture-war backlash, have exposed the inadequacy of one-size-fits-all urbanism. A feminist city insists instead on plurality: spaces that are inclusive, caring, comfortable, sociable, and playful, and processes that are collective, reflexive, and accountable.

This special issue takes up that invitation with a deliberately pragmatic editorial stance. We treat feminism both as a label for finished objects and as a working method – an ethic of relation, a commitment to participation, a reliance on situated knowledge, and a willingness to test ideas at multiple scales. The question is both how a feminist public space looks like and how it comes into being, who is invited to shape it, and how its benefits are sustained over time. The essays gathered here span literature, choreography, collective curating, design practice, and participatory urban research. Read together, they offer a toolbox of concepts, strategies, and tactics for remaking public space with care.

We situate this conversation in this historical and political moment because several issues are converging with renewed urgency: care infrastructures – from public lighting and toilets to shade, seating, safe paths, and maintenance – remain unevenly distributed, shaping who can inhabit public space with dignity and ease; questions of temporal justice have likewise come to the fore, as the rhythms of night work, caregiving, and fragmented mobility destabilize public-space provision which is still calibrated to a normative user; and despite widespread claims of inclusion, participatory processes often stall at the level of procedure rather than transformation, reproducing the inequities they purport to undo. Feminist urbanism gathers these concerns into a shared project and asks designers, researchers, and decision-makers to move beyond representational gestures toward forms of practice that are situated, collective, and accountable.

The volume opens with Isabella Webb’s “Tactical Spatial Interventions: Design for Gendered Spatial Justice in Peri-Urban Victoria, Australia”, which focuses on small-scale, community-led actions that are co-designed, adaptable, and grounded in care ethics. In places marked by car dependency, thin infrastructure, and planning delay, these tactics become testable and transferable methods for addressing gendered inequities, demonstrating how feminist design justice operates as both process and product.

Building on this concern for how care reshapes practice, Marta Maria Nicolazzi and Patrizia Leone’s “Situated Knowledge in Motion: Reconsidering Urban Feminist Methodologies” offers a candid examination of the gap between feminist epistemologies and the structural, temporal, and emotional constraints of fieldwork with marginalised women in Milan and Bologna. Rather than treating contingency as failure, they theorise participation as partial and affective and recast friction as a generative condition for an ethics of care, reflexivity, and relational accountability.

This attention to relationality and the politics of encounter leads naturally to Doris Posch’s “Feminist Worldmaking through Collective Curating: Kaleidoskop’s Relational Urban” which moves the discussion to

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Vienna's Karlsplatz, where CineCollective's open-air film festival activates a surveilled, gentrifying site through shared authorship, horizontal governance, and decolonial programming. Drawing on Glissant's *Poetics of Relation*, Posch shows how curating can reorganise infrastructure and audience into an ethic of encounter, transforming public space into a platform for relational imaginaries.

Extending this exploration of embodied interventions in the city, Anna Rebecca Menslin and Lynn Kuhfuß's "Intervening 'City Horses': Soft Performative Gestures of Protest in Public Space" examines Byström Källblad's roaming performance that encounters equestrian monuments – icons of masculine militarism – through gestures of neighing, trotting, resting, and playful repose. Movement here acts as a counter-monument and soft dissent, inscribing a feminist text in the city through care, presence, and choreographed dissensus.

Finally, building on this reimagination of bodies moving through and narrating the city, Isabel Argüelles Rozada's "Feminist Urban Paideias: The Need for New Imaginaries of the Aesthetic Walk" challenges the endurance of the flâneur and the partial promise of the flâneuse. Through poems, novels, and films, she proposes alternative educations of walking that acknowledge constraint yet cultivate creativity and idleness as resistant, world-opening practices.

Across these contributions, several threads quietly bind the volume. Relationality emerges not as a soft add-on but as the working medium of feminist urbanism, reorganising authorship, redistributing expertise, and shifting evaluation from finished form to ongoing maintenance and care. Situatedness and time matter: feminist city-making proceeds through events, encounters, and cycles – performances that travel, festivals that recur, walks that recalibrate attention, research moments that demand responsiveness to context rather than prescriptive templates. Care, in this light, becomes infrastructural and political: the so-called amenities of comfortable places to sit, protection from sun and weather, accessible public restrooms, adequate lighting, secure pathways, and regular maintenance define conditions of belonging and, by implication, budgetary and governance priorities.

The volume also keeps open a set of debates that future scholarship should not rush to resolve. Process and product continue to press on each other, as tactical or performative practices seek durability without sacrificing openness. Participation raises questions of authorship and redistribution, testing whether inclusion without resource transfer is merely cosmetic. Aesthetics and ethics intertwine but do not automatically coincide; curatorial, choreographic, and narrative strategies attain scale and permanence only when coupled with reforms in policy, ownership, and maintenance. Rather than providing closure, the essays sketch a forward agenda that moves from episodic action to institutions of care, from generic checklists to metrics co-defined with communities, from city centres to peripheries where risks concentrate, and from methodological ideals to accountable descriptions of how work is actually done.

Our intention in assembling scholarship across literary analysis, dance theory, curatorial studies, urban design, and methodology is not eclecticism for its own sake but fidelity to how feminist city-making happens: through coalitions among artists and planners, librarians and activists, students and caregivers, researchers and municipal staff.

If, as Jane Jacobs argued, "Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody" Jacobs (1961) then we must likewise draw knowledge from all those who have taken part in this collective endeavour. The essays in this issue map that multiplicity of voices and perspectives, and act as an invitation to push it even further.

We thank the authors for their rigour and generosity, the reviewers for exacting and collegial critique, and the editorial team for guidance and care. We are equally indebted to the collectives, community groups, and public-sector workers whose often invisible labour keeps public spaces open, safe, and welcoming. Designing the feminist city is not a singular object or fixed endpoint; it is an everyday practice of re-imagining and re-inhabiting our shared spaces – sometimes softly, sometimes tactically, always relationally. We offer this volume as a record of what is being done and an invitation to continue: to design with care, to research with accountability, and to keep the city open to the many who make it.

References

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