

It is widely asserted that buildings have ‘male’ and ‘female’ qualities. Is this true, or is it merely a reflection of stereotypical views on gender?

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Abstract

It is widely asserted that buildings have ‘male’ and ‘female’ qualities. Is this true, or is it merely a reflection of stereotypical views on gender?

by Jimmy Hyunjin Cho BDes

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This dissertation investigates the relationship between gender and architecture, questioning whether architectural forms embody masculine or feminine traits or simply reflect societal constructs. Drawing on contemporary scholarship in history, art, and architecture, it explores whether materials, spatial arrangements, and design approaches are inherently gendered or culturally shaped.

The methodology includes a review of roughly 50 peer-reviewed sources, with five selected for detailed analysis: *Gender Analogy in Architecture* (Niculae, 2014), *Architectures and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain (1878–1895)* (Crout, 2000), *The (Re)Marriage of Penelope and Odysseus* (Bergren, 1993), *Untitled: The Housing of Gender, Sexuality, and Space* (Wigley, 1992) and *The sphere: Reading a gender metaphor in the architecture of modern cults of identity* (Falkenhausen, 1997). Niculae offers a foundational framework, linking architectural forms and ornamentation to metaphorical gender traits that mirror political and social structures.

The study incorporates five case studies to substantiate and critique these claims. Niculae’s argument is tested against the other four case studies, each offering a distinct perspective or theme on the relationship between architecture and gender. Crout associates Victorian masculinity with strength and order, and femininity with delicacy and domesticity. Bergren reads Homer’s marriage bed as a metaphor for masculine authority and feminine resistance within patriarchal structures. Wigley explores domestic architecture as a means of regulating gender and sexuality, positioning masculinity as agent and femininity as subject. Falkenhausen interprets Boullée’s sphere as a metaphor balancing masculine ideals of reason with feminine connotations of nature.

The dissertation concludes that gender analogies in architecture are culturally and historically contingent. While associations of masculinity with order and strength, and femininity with ornament and domesticity persist, they are not fixed. The study challenges essentialist readings and highlights the symbolic and political dimensions of architectural form.

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Introduction

Can the characteristics traditionally associated with masculinity and femininity be applied to architecture? This question arises in the context of examining the Georgian townhouse, a typology that proliferated during a period of significant revitalisation in London's architectural and urban history. The appeal of this architectural form lies in its position at the intersection of two influential historical forces: the classical tradition, imported from continental Europe and firmly embedded in British architectural discourse, and the forces of industrialisation and speculation, which marked a shift in power from the monarchy and aristocracy to an emergent middle class. The Georgian townhouse may therefore be understood as a site where contrasting dynamics such as tradition and innovation, craftsmanship and mass production, and heritage and progress coexist in tension.

Considering these dualities within Georgian domestic architecture prompts further inquiry into whether built form reflects the dichotomy of gender. Although men and women share a common humanity, they have historically been ascribed distinct traits and societal roles. It is plausible that architecture, as a cultural and social artefact, could mirror these gendered distinctions. This hypothesis underpins a broader exploration of the relationship between architecture and gender, a subject that has garnered considerable scholarly attention. The compilation of academic sources consulted in the early stages of this research (see Appendix A) illustrates the extent to which this discourse continues to be regarded as a vital area of architectural and cultural analysis.

The notion of gender in architecture is not a novel idea. Thinkers such as Vitruvius (*De Architectura*), Alberti (*On the Art of Building in Ten Books*), Freud (*Femininity*) and others have all engaged with the intersection of architectural form and gender constructs. Contemporary scholarship continues to build upon these foundational ideas, demonstrating a sustained interest in the ways in which gender is embedded within the built environment. The very existence of such discourse suggests that gender does, in some way, influence architectural expression. But how exactly is this manifested? Are certain materials, spatial arrangements, or design approaches inherently masculine or feminine?

There is an undeniable immediacy in the way individuals perceive architecture. For instance, few would describe Brutalist architecture as 'feminine'. This suggests that architectural elements evoke responses and associations that are deeply ingrained within cultural consciousness. However, in contemporary society, there is a growing resistance to gender categorisation, as the discourse around equality and inclusivity continues to evolve. Increasingly, gender distinctions are viewed as socially constructed rather than inherent,

leading some scholars such as Beatriz Colomina to argue that the classification of architecture as masculine or feminine is merely a reflection of historically embedded biases rather than an objective reality.

This perspective, however, invites further critical inquiry. If gender traits are indeed socially constructed, the persistence of these distinctions throughout history warrants examination. Gender stereotypes continue to be deeply embedded within media representations, cultural norms, and institutional practices. Despite growing awareness and critique, such stereotypes continue to influence perceptions, limit opportunities, and shape individual identities, thereby reinforcing systems of inequality (Priyashantha, 2023). The endurance of this binary framework may also be observed within architecture, a discipline inherently connected to human experience and corporeality, and one which frequently serves as a mirror to prevailing societal structures.

This dissertation seeks to evaluate whether the concept of 'masculine' and 'feminine' architecture represents an objective reality or whether it reflects culturally constructed gender norms. Through a critical analysis of both historical and contemporary academic discourse, the study aims to determine whether architectural forms, materials, or spatial configurations can be said to embody gendered characteristics, or if these interpretations stem from entrenched cultural assumptions. In doing so, this research contributes to the wider scholarly conversation on the intersection of gender and architecture, questioning the extent to which gendered frameworks shape the understanding and design of the built environment.

Methodology

This study employed a comprehensive library and web-based search to identify approximately fifty academic sources, including articles and books, that focus on the intersection of architecture and gender (see Appendix A). The search used keywords such as 'architecture', 'gender', 'design', 'urbanism', and 'feminism' to compile a diverse body of literature that explores spatial design within the context of gender discourse.

From this initial compilation, five key texts were selected based on their recent publication and direct relevance to the research objectives. The aim was to incorporate a range of perspectives and thematic approaches to gender within architectural theory. These works were then categorised into five analytical frameworks: political, formal, philosophical, mythological, and historical.

Among these, Niculae's article *Gender Analogy in Architecture* (2014) served as the foundation for establishing a theoretical structure through which gender distinctions in architecture could be examined. The remaining four texts were analysed to explore how gender is articulated through different disciplinary and thematic lenses. From each source, significant insights were drawn to understand how gendered meaning contributes to shaping architectural space and its representation.

This methodological approach enabled the identification of recurring themes, divergent viewpoints, and conceptual overlaps. By comparing findings across the selected sources, the research maintained analytical coherence and ensured depth in the interpretation of gender in architecture.

Aims and objectives

This research aims to explore whether gendered characteristics can be meaningfully discerned in architecture, either through form, function, symbolism, or cultural interpretation. The study seeks to critically examine whether architecture can reflect, encode, or challenge gender norms, and how theoretical frameworks address this question across different contexts.

- 1. To conduct a comprehensive review of academic literature:** Identify and examine a wide range of scholarly works. Approximately 50 sources through library and web search, addressing themes related to architecture and gender. Special emphasis will be placed on selecting papers that present diverse theoretical, cultural, and disciplinary perspectives, including feminist theory, urban studies, symbolism, and architectural formalism.
- 2. To select and analyse five representative academic papers:** Narrow down the initial literature to five key sources that are both recent and relevant. The selected papers will be chosen for their distinct thematic angles. Categorised as political, formal, philosophical, mythological, and historical; to ensure a broad and multifaceted understanding of how gender is interpreted in architecture.
- 3. To evaluate the theoretical framework proposed by Nicolae:** Using Nicolae's *Gender Analogy in Architecture* as a foundational framework, this study will critically assess its relevance and validity by cross-referencing insights from the four additional selected papers. The aim is to test whether Nicolae's analogical approach holds across different perspectives and to identify any limitations or contradictions.
- 4. To extract and synthesise recurring themes and concepts:** Identify common patterns, contrasting viewpoints, and key theoretical motifs regarding gender representation in architecture across the selected texts. This synthesis will contribute to a nuanced understanding of how gendered meaning is constructed or contested within architectural discourse.

Case Study 1: *Gender Analogy in Architecture*

The first case study focuses on Niculae's paper *Gender Analogies in Architecture* (2014), which explores the historical tendency to represent architecture through masculine and feminine analogies. Drawing on sources such as Vitruvius and Renaissance architectural theory, the paper presents a concise yet compelling argument that architecture has long been metaphorically linked to the human body. Niculae contends that gendering in architecture is evident across multiple forms of expression, encompassing both spatial configurations and built structures. According to her analysis, architectural elements, ornamentation, stylistic approaches, typologies, functions, and spatial arrangements can all be interpreted through binary oppositions, reflecting the broader societal inclination to categorise according to gendered distinctions (Niculae, 2014, p. 474).

Niculae argues contends that buildings are extensions of the human body, serving people as spaces for habitation and rest. Her exploration begins with an examination of how the body has functioned as a pervasive norm throughout architectural history. She highlights the representation of the male body as an ideal earthly creation, symbolising universal harmony and a natural microcosm.

Her historical inquiry begins with Marcus Vitruvius Pollio, a Roman writer, architect, and engineer active in the 1st century BCE, who authored *De Architectura* (1960). Niculae argues that Vitruvius introduced a new paradigm in architectural design by revealing the mathematical symmetry of the male body. Vitruvius believed that good architecture adheres to the laws of nature and demonstrated a system of proportion that applied the measurements of male body parts to the architectural elements of temples:

In the members of a temple there ought to be the greatest harmony in the symmetrical relations of the different parts to the general magnitude of the whole. Then again, in the human body the central point is naturally the navel. For if a man be placed flat on his back, with his hands and feet extended, and a pair of compasses centered at his navel, the fingers and toes of his two hands and feet will touch the circumference of a circle described there from. And just as the human body yields a circular outline, so too a square figure may be found from it. For if we measure the distance from the soles of the feet to the top of the head, and then apply that measure to the outstretched arms, the breadth will be found to be the same as the height, as in the case of plane surfaces which are perfectly square. (Vitruvius, 1960)

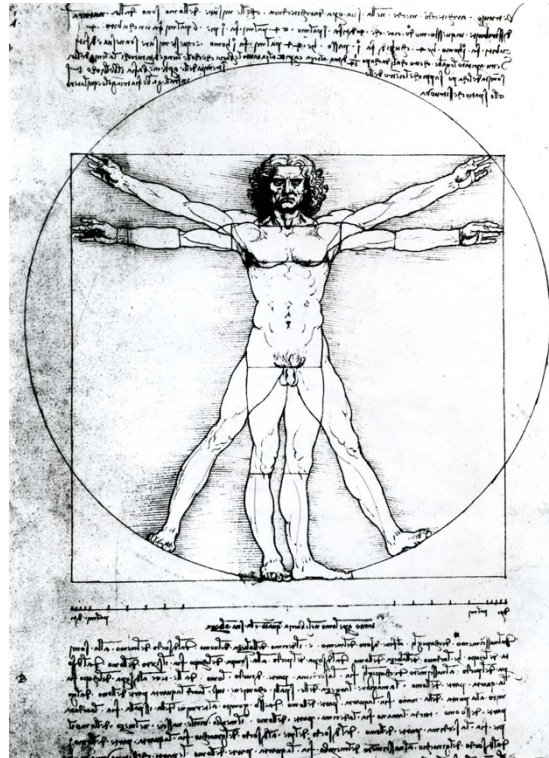


Figure 1 - Vitruvian Man (Da Vinci, c.1490)

Niculae observes ancient civilisations saw significant advancement during the Renaissance. Notably, Vitruvius's theories were further developed by Leonardo da Vinci, whose famous illustration, the *Vitruvian Man*, formed the foundation of Renaissance proportional theory. This theory intertwined art, architecture, human anatomy, and symmetry as mutually influential disciplines. Leonardo aimed to integrate ideas of art, architecture, anatomy, and symmetry, a goal exemplified in his illustration of a young man with rugged hair, pronounced facial features, and a robust physique (Figure 1). Niculae argues that the gendering of architecture is determined by its **forms** (masculine/feminine), **surface decorations**, **ornamental elements** (which, since Vitruvius, have been associated with femininity) (Lico, 2001, p. 34), and **building materials**.

Vitruvius's analogies were also adopted by Leon Battista Alberti, who in his *Ten Books on the Art of Building* (1452), defined the natural architecture of the body. Alberti developed a critical definition of beauty, stating: "*reasoned harmony of all the parts within a body, so that nothing may be added, taken away, or altered, but for the worse.*" He further argued that "*we should erect our building naked, and let it be quite completed before we dress it with ornaments.*" These decorations, he suggested, are akin to clothing tailored to reflect the social status of the building's owner (Niculae, 2014, p. 476).



Figure 2 - Aqua Tower (Hall, 2010)



Figure 3 - Taos Pueblo (Eppen, no date)

Niculae further contends that as Western society developed through a patriarchal framework, anthropomorphism (assigning human characteristics to non-human entities) was predominantly male-centred. This male-oriented anthropomorphism became a foundation for architectural systems, perpetuating the exclusion of women at the relational level between the body and architecture. Citing Agrest, she notes that “Society establishes a certain kind of symbolic order where not everyone has an equal chance of fitting.” (Agrest, 1988) Niculae asserts that systems, including architecture, have been anthropomorphised through the lens of the male body, she claims resulting in the suppression of femininity even within architectural discourse, which she contends that shown through dominance of high-rise buildings.

Niculae suggests that spaces are gendered intentionally, interpretively, and through function. Power dynamics are imprinted within structured spaces, and the gendering of architecture is determined by its forms (masculine/feminine), surface decorations, ornamental elements, and construction materials. She contends that Aqua Tower in Chicago (Figure 2) by Studio Gang and Adobe Pueblo homes in New Mexico (Figure 3) are example of feminine architecture. While the Aqua Tower is primarily a functional high-rise condominium residence, its voluminous forms, exterior ornamentation, and material use distinguish it from the angular buildings of the skyline, imbuing it with femininity. Similarly, Adobe Pueblo dwellings, constructed from earth with rounded corners and soft textures, are described as sensuous both visually and tactilely. The term *Pueblo* refers to Indigenous communal structures built

with stone, adobe clay, and other local materials, emphasising femininity through their tactile and organic qualities. She also introduces the concept of androgyny in architecture, which incorporates both masculine and feminine characteristics. As an example, she cites the Taj Mahal in India (Figure 4), which combines the rounded forms of domes and arches—symbolising femininity—with the masculine form of entrance towers, creating a harmonious blend of gendered architectural elements.



Figure 4 - Taj Mahal (Argenberg, 2007)

Niculae acknowledges that there are no definitive rules for categorising architecture by gender. Instead, she notes that beyond gender relationships shaped by architectural programs, spatial configurations, and usage, the perceived gender of a building is subjectively influenced by individual perception, events, concepts, and symbols traditionally associated with femininity or masculinity. At the same time, she asserts that the most explicit expression of a building's gendered characteristics lies in its form. According to her, elements such as decorative motifs, surface ornamentation, colours, or materials (deemed feminine) can be likened to women emphasising their features through makeup or wearing dresses. This fluid and ambiguous standard, despite its lack of rigour, appears to function as a rhetorical strategy to defend her position. However, as will be discussed later, contradictions frequently emerge within her arguments. The contrasting and dichotomous traits of masculine and feminine architecture, as delineated through her historical research, can be summarised as Table A.

Masculinity	Femininity
Straight line, rigid, angular	Curvilinear line
Strength, solidity and virility	Weakness, slender, fragile, sensual
Projection	Protection
Hard	Soft
Cold	Warm
Artificial	Nature
Functionality	Superfluous
Simplicity	Ornamentation
Industrial Building	Shopping mall, Kitchen
Colourless	Colour
Exterior	Interior
City	Piazza
Glass, steel, concrete and stone	Wood
Static	Movement
Verticality - celestial, divine	Horizontality - Earth, the sea
Dominance, Supremacy	Nurturing

Table A - Traits of masculine and feminine architecture found in Nicolae's article

Nicolae concludes her study by arguing that the symbolic remnants of a phallogentric and oppressive societal structure from the 20th century—manifested in high-rise buildings—remain embedded in our urban landscapes. In contrast, she claims that the 21st century adopts a feminine approach on an interpretative level. This shift, according to her, is reflected in architectural forms that harmonise with the environment, driven by contemporary priorities such as sustainability, energy efficiency, recycling, and respect for nature. She frames this evolution as the culmination of a long struggle, portraying modern architecture as a victory for the suppressed image of women.

Case Study 2: Architectures and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain (1878–1895)

This chapter examines Durham Crout's doctoral dissertation, *Architectures and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain (1878–1895)* (Crout, 2000) as a case study. Crout uses a “dramatic” approach to 19th-century architectural history and theory, exploring how discourse shapes subject formation and is shaped by it. Spanning 1878 (Whistler's libel trial against Ruskin) to 1895 (Wilde's indecency trial), it investigates the feminine body's role in architectural tradition and moments when homosexuality challenged this discourse. It also considers how architectural discourse, linked to British law and sexualised language, produced “deviant” subjectivities and homosexual possibilities. Beyond homosexuality, it offers insights into masculinity and femininity in architectural forms. Crout's first chapter addresses ornamentation's regulation in British architectural discourse. Ruskin states:

As an architect, therefore, you are modestly to measure your capacity of governing ornament. Remember, its essence, its being ornament at all, consists in its being governed. Lose your authority over it, let it command you, or lead you, or dictate to you in any wise, and it is an offence, an encumbrance, and a dishonour. And it is always ready to do this; wild to get the bit in its teeth, and rush forth on its own devices (Ruskin, 1960, p. 116)

Crout links this to a sartorial analogy, expanding it into a gender framework. Ruskin uses dress to support concealment, as in:

The Baptistery of Florence which is, in reality, as much a buttressed chapel with a vaulted roof, as the Chapter House of York; —but round it, in order to conceal that buttressed structure, (not decorate, observe, but to conceal,) a flat external wall is raised...on the surface of which the eye and intellect are to be interested... no more to do with the real make of the building than the diaper of a Harlequin's jacket has to do with his bones. (Ruskin in Lubbock, 1995, p. 287)

Crout states that for Ruskin, the critic's role, like that of the artist or architect, is to regulate ornament and its “wild” attempts to replace an “appropriate” system of meaning. This surveillance reinforces hierarchical binaries: form/content, ornament/education, low art/high art. This Ruskin-style resistance, ironically, takes classical ideas of interpretation and meaning and reinserts them into other anti-classical projects. Even more paradoxically, this classical framework is explicitly outlined in Alberti's *Ten Books on the Art of Building* (1988). For both Alberti and Ruskin, governing ornament is an ethical and moral task.

Crout observes that in *The Stones of Venice* (1960), Ruskin outlines “the three great branches of architectural virtue”: a building must “act well,” “speak well,” and “look well.” He links these rhetorical virtues to the idea that artistic objects signify their mode of production, broadening architecture’s performative and rhetorical dimensions to include self-expression (Crout, 2000, p. 4).

The ideal of appropriateness in dress extended to the concept of the gentleman, embodying an ideal of “masculinity.” When Ruskin was writing *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849) and *The Stones of Venice*, notions of the gentleman were being reshaped through “Muscular Christianity” by figures such as Thomas Hughes and Charles Kingsley. The mid-Victorian gentleman combined chivalric and Christian virtues with the resilience of the early 19th-century English country gentleman.

The concept of the gentleman in early Victorian Britain evolved from the Regency-era “man of taste,” who embodied both masculine and feminine traits. Initially characterised by altruism, courtesy, and temperance, the gentleman became, by the mid-Victorian period, a more overtly masculine figure—industrious, self-disciplined, and committed to “submitting himself to collective ideals, developing his body and muscles, and using this development as a marker of his capacity to embody individual virtue” (Crout, 2000, p. 90).

In Crout, this redefined masculinity closely resembled the physical characteristics. Edmund Burke identified as “sublime” in *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). Burke’s sublime is “vast,” “rugged,” “dark,” “solid,” “powerful,” and “massive” (Burke, 1937, p. 101-102). He asserts that mixing these noble, masculine traits with the attributes of feminine beauty—described as “small,” “smooth,” “polished,” “light,” “delicate,” and “soft”—is “almost impossible” (Burke, 1937, p. 98-102). The masculine qualities Burke identifies align with Niculae’s descriptions of strength, solidity, and virility, while opposing feminine traits of weakness, fragility, and sensuality.

He argues Burke’s aesthetic theory suggests that beauty and sublimity stem from “immediate sensible qualities” and are universally perceived. In contrast, William Chambers, in *A Treatise on Civil Architecture* (1757), applies Burke’s aesthetic categories to architecture while introducing associationism. He argues that responses to visual pleasure are shaped not only by the senses but also by “association of ideas, and reasoning” (Harris, 1967, p. 209).

Although Chambers introduced associationism into architectural discourse, it was Archibald Alison’s *Essay on the Nature and Principles of Taste* (1790) that solidified it as an aesthetic doctrine. Alison argues that beauty is not intrinsic to an object but exists in the observer’s

mind. "Imagination is the power of the given mind to call up associations," and "the artist must strive to create works that are as expressive as possible" (Crout, 2000, p. 32). Within this framework, architecture functions as a "discoursing creature," evoking emotions that generate interwoven associations perceived as increasingly beautiful.

While differing from Burke's theories, associationism remains influenced by his gendered sublime/beauty binary. These aesthetic constructs persist within associationist thought:

The greater part of those bodies in Nature, which possess Hardness, Strength, and Durability are distinguished by angular Forms, while those which possess Weakness, Fragility or Delicacy [...] have winding or curvilinear shapes (Landow, 1971, p. 102).

For Alison, such qualities align with Burke's categories—strength with the sublime and delicacy with beauty.

Ruskin's conception of the masculine sublime reflects classical rhetorical frameworks embedded in his architectural theories. Alberti's opposition between *gravitas* and *festivitas* is mirrored in Ruskin's binary of "control" and "collection." Alberti, following Cicero, ties *gravitas* to propriety: "That which we should praise first in an architect is the ability to judge what is appropriate" (Crout, 2000, p. 41). Ruskin extends the sublime/beauty dichotomy to gendered spatial terms:

Put it in the drawing-room, not into the workshop; put it upon domestic furniture, not upon tools of handicraft (Ruskin, 1849, p. 118).

Crout argues that the prohibition against blending genders was central to Victorian masculinity. He argues, this is exemplified in the 1870 arrest of actors Stella Bolton (born Ernest) and Fanny Park (born Frederick) for "wearing women's clothing in public" (Crout, 2000, p. 46). The *Offences Against the Person Act* (1861) criminalised "unnatural offences," often interpreted to include cross-dressing.

In the second chapter, Crout extends gender to spatial domains, focusing on clubland and the drawing room. He references *The Club and the Drawing Room* (1870) by Cecil Hay explores how these spaces structured gendered subjects. He describes them as "the two poles towards one or other of which all portions of civilized humanity in this highly artificial nineteenth-century existence of ours irresistibly and necessarily gravitate" (Hay, 1870, p. 1–2). The division of these spaces, she argues, upholds homosocial cohesion and distinct gendered domains.

Crout contends that for Hay, the drawing room (feminine, domestic, private) and the club (masculine, public, urban) exist in a complementary relationship. While the club could survive

without the drawing room, she acknowledges that without it, the club would be “incomplete” (Crout, 2000, p. 56). Crout notes that Robert Kerr’s *The Gentleman’s Home* (1865) reinforces this binary through the dining room. Kerr describes the drawing room as “lady-like,” while the dining room “ought to be that of masculine importance.” He asserts that “for the Dining-room to communicate with the Drawing-room, except in some very special case, is quite out of order” (Crout, 2000, p. 65–66).

Kerr’s dining room is heavy, simple, and functional, in contrast to the drawing room, which is defined by ornamentation rather than utility. Orrinsmith (1877) states that in the drawing room, “nothing useful is allowed to enter lest it fail to be ornamental.” Kerr further describes its attributes:

Especial cheerfulness, refinement of elegance and what is called lightness as opposed to massiveness. Decoration and furniture ought therefore to be comparatively delicate; in short, the rule in everything is this - if the expression may be used - it is entirely ladylike. (Kerr, 1865, p. 107)

The contrast between the club (or dining room) and the drawing room reinforces the masculine traits of functionality and simplicity against the feminine qualities of ornamentation and lightness, supporting Niculae’s view that male traits are utilitarian while female traits are decorative.

Crout also examines colour in gendered attire, referencing Charles Blanc, who argues that colour is inherently feminine:

Colours have human affinities and harmonize with our ideas, but essentially with our feelings and our passions. This is why women, who are led by sentiment, attach more importance to colour than men do. [...] And let one premise that this chapter is exclusively addressed to women, for in the great show of life, all colour in the present day is on their side. [...] whenever civilization becomes intricate, and develops, man abandons colour to women, and becomes colourless and somber, and in the present day throughout Europe he is dressed in black. (Blanc, 1877, p. 79)

Blanc’s argument aligns with Niculae’s reference to Le Corbusier, who, in *L’Art décoratif d’aujourd’hui* (1925), associated white with masculinity (symbolising hygiene, simplicity, and truth) while implying that other colours were feminine.

Crout's paper demonstrates that masculinity and femininity have long been central to architectural discourse. At the core of this discussion is the concept of the sublime, which is portrayed as an uncompromising architectural principle. Crout argues that the sublime is realised when ornamentation (associated with femininity) is carefully controlled rather than excessively applied. Thus, masculinity is linked to weight, solitude, and restraint, while femininity is characterised by lightness, elegance, and excess. However, these qualities are not merely decorative but reflect deeper conceptual meanings within architectural theory.

Case Study 3: *The (Re)Marriage of Penelope and Odysseus Architecture Gender Philosophy*

In Anne Bergren's paper, *The (Re)Marriage of Penelope and Odysseus: Architecture, Gender, Philosophy* (1993), the author explores how architectural theory is interpreted through the symbolic lens of gender. The paper is grounded in Homer's *Odyssey* (Published in English, 1614), specifically the episode of The (Re)Marriage of Penelope and Odysseus (Figure 5). Using this context, the *Odyssey* initiates a dialogue with Western architecture, gender, and philosophy. While these domains are conceptually defined by discourses "invented" as distinct from myth, the three frameworks of Western architecture, gender, and philosophy are deeply operative within the archaic Greek cultural and intellectual landscape.



Figure 5 - Odysseus and Penelope on their way to bed (Thurden, 1633)

Just as architecture existed before Vitruvius, gender before Freud or Lévi-Strauss, and philosophy before Plato, the *Odyssey* contains what might be described as a "paratheoretical" interplay of architecture, gender, and philosophy. Together, these elements reflect and shape one another, forming what could be termed "Odyssean architectural theory" (Bergren, 1993, p. 7).

In the *Odyssey*, architecture is the creation of material meaning and the transformation of nature into a material, finite *sêma*—both a marker and a tomb. For example, the tree supporting Odysseus's bed is rooted in the ground, now dead, and Penelope weaves a shroud. Gender, within this framework, serves as a political instance of architecture,

constructing the social significations of sexual difference and framing difference itself as sexual.

The author contends that Odysseus and Penelope are frequently regarded as archetypal figures in the origins of architecture in Western intellectual traditions. Through their *mêtis*, they are mythologised as embodying architectural intelligence and artisanal craftsmanship, respectively. The concept of *mêtis* encompasses mental acuity, technical skill, language, and material transformation. It is characterised by its capacity to convert perceived weakness into tools of power, effectuating continuous transformations of form. This process is facilitated by mechanisms such as deception or traps (*dolos*), strategic manoeuvring to secure advantage (*kerdos*), and the ability to seize opportune moments (*kairos*).

Etymologically derived from a verb root meaning "to measure," *mêtis* conveys notions of calculation and precision. Its intrinsic association with the architect's craft is evident in classical depictions of the goddess Metis's daughter, Athena, who instructs craftsmen in the construction of elaborate chariots and teaches maidens the art of weaving. This connection is further illustrated in the mythological figure of Trophonios, a revered architect within Greek mythology (Bergren, 1993, p. 8).

Within Greek mythology, *mêtis* serves as a lens through which the interrelation of architecture, gender, and philosophy can be examined, symbolised under the patriarchal institution of marriage. As a myth created and perpetuated by Greek men, reflecting their sociopolitical ideologies, *mêtis* is depicted as an eternal feminine power that must be appropriated—or, more precisely, reappropriated—by masculine authority through mechanisms of political and philosophical control. This dynamic is vividly portrayed in the myth of Cronus, who, in his fear of being overthrown, swallows his children to prevent their ascendancy. His wife, Rhea, subverts this cycle by deceiving him: she presents him with a stone wrapped in cloth, mimicking the form of an infant. Cronus, misled by this ruse, consumes the stone instead.

This act of deception enables Zeus's survival and rebellion against Cronus. Zeus forces his father to regurgitate the stone and fixes it "fastened down into the earth... to be a sign (*sêma*) and wonder (*thauma*) for humankind." The stone becomes a symbol of Zeus's authority, rooted in the earth. To sustain this external order of power, Zeus internalises *mêtis*, culminating in his act of swallowing the goddess Metis. In doing so, *mêtis* is confined within a patriarchal framework, foundational yet subsumed within masculine political and philosophical constructs (Bergren, 1993, p. 9).

In the (re)marriage of Penelope and Odysseus, the *Odyssey* presents a myth of architectural origins, moving beyond Vitruvius's primitive architects who imitated swallow nests. Penelope's weaving and Odysseus's (re)marriage bed symbolise key architectural principles: enclosing vertical space and supporting horizontal loads. Their collaboration establishes the immovable (Re)Marriage as an ideal that interweaves architecture, gender, and philosophy. Penelope assumes the role of architect, constrained by structures of authority she did not create but navigating them through clandestine speech, weaving as subterfuge, and strategic tests of their covert *sêmata*.

While Odysseus is absent, Penelope gathers and rejects suitors, reaping "the benefits of *kleos* (fame)." This can be interpreted through philosophical logic: A (the force seeking to displace her) and not-A (the force resisting displacement) coexist. Similarly, architecture relies on opposing forces for stability, yet here, it suspends Odysseus's sociopolitical order (Bergren, 1993, p. 11). The *Odyssey*'s patriarchal system, as described by Lévi-Strauss, operates through the exchange of women, sustaining kinship and symbolic thought. Women function as conduits for male alliances. Penelope, by balancing acquiescence and deflection, disrupts spatial mobility central to social order. She gathers suitors while remaining immobile, accruing *kleos*, even as Antinous's reproach paradoxically affirms her status. Yet, within this system, women must be exchanged. As in Lévi-Strauss's model, a woman moves from her father's *oikos* (Artemis) to her husband's (Aphrodite), only to be exchanged again upon his death.

Through her devotion to Odysseus's father, Penelope signals to suitors how she would act as a wife, making clear that neither her husband nor his father would be left to die without a burial shroud. This filial piety tempers their ambitions through the implicit threat of dishonour. In Homeric society, death is a "shared fate," stripping distinctions and exposing all equally. Regardless of status, clothing is removed, leaving only the shame of exposure. Funerary rites restore dignity, and men seek this covering to shield themselves from disgrace in death.

The honour (*geras*) of death is embodied in the burial shroud and tombstone, preventing corpses from becoming "food for dogs and birds." Within this external shield lies an ambiguous architectural element—materially distinct yet shaped to fit the body. The burial shroud, which "provides form by covering," becomes the material surface of death itself. Men rely on women for this covering, as weaving burial shrouds is a task performed exclusively by women (Figure 6) in the Greek world. Penelope's *dolos*-speech persuades the suitors by offering this emblem of femininity (the burial shroud) as protection from dishonour in death.



Figure 6 - Athena and Penelope weaving (Veit, c.1832)

In Greek thought, weaving signifies gender and race. In *Histories*, Herodotus describes Egyptian men weaving within the *oikos*, making them appear “almost like women” and “transgressing the customs and laws of men,” while their women conduct business in the *agora*. The myth of Pandora explains why weaving is inherently female. Athena teaches Pandora to weave, making her the model for all women, including goddesses such as Athena herself and *Mêtis*. Weaving and *mêtis* share a reciprocal origin, as weaving is metaphorically described as “weaving one’s *mêtis*,” aligning it with wisdom. Within this mythic logic, weaving, *mêtis*, and Pandora embody deception (*dolos*), appearing as attractive exteriors concealing a divergent interior (Bergren, 1993, p. 12–13).

This distinctly feminine practice of weaving parallels ornamentation, a recurring concept in this dissertation’s case studies. Like weaving that envelops the body, ornamentation adorns the structural form of architecture, creating beauty that inspires admiration. Philosophically, this feminine act of concealment (*weaving*) has been interpreted as compensating for the perceived lack or inferiority represented by the “masculinity” of the phallus. Bergren identifies the roots of Freud’s view of weaving as a female invention, asserting that:

The effect of penis-envy has a share, further, in the physical vanity of women, since they are bound to value their charms more highly as a late compensation for their original sexual inferiority. [...] There is, however, one technique which they may have invented—that of plaiting and weaving. If that is so, we should be tempted to guess the unconscious motive for the achievement. Nature herself would seem to have given the model which this achievement imitates by causing the growth at maturity of the

pubic hair that conceals the genitals. [...] The step that remained to be taken lay in making the threads adhere to one another, while on the body they stick into the skin and are only matted together. (Bergren, 1993, p. 13)

Freud suggests that women invented weaving to conceal their genitalia, a site seen as a marker of desire and lack, symbolising the "feminine" condition men fear might afflict them. In Greek thought, covering this area was commendable, as all genitalia were considered "shameful parts" (*ta aidōia*). Concealment demonstrated *aidōs*, or "shame," regarded as a quintessentially feminine characteristic.

While Freud's aetiology of weaving ostensibly relies on women's "inherent sexual inferiority," it paradoxically reiterates the Greek pattern of attributing male creative capacities to an originally female source. Beyond lack and envy, Freud's text implicitly grants women a primordial *mêtis*, suggesting they "invented the final stage of joining threads together." This implies that the act of concealing their perceived lack is itself an invention. Furthermore, weaving becomes a model of creation that Greek men sought to imitate. Yet, as Bergren observes, this creative act not only excluded women from Greek architecture and artistic forms but also perhaps reflected men's envy of women's inventive capabilities (Bergren, 1993, p. 13).

In the *Odyssey*, the "position of women" is governed by masculine power, namely the necessity (*ἀνάγκη*, *anagkê*) that ultimately compels Penelope to complete the shroud. Within this position, women cannot secure stability or honour unless they weave the protection of patriarchy. This constitutes the *mêtis* of Odyssean gender architecture, wherein *mêtis* (subsumed by Zeus's regime of *anagkê*) draws forth its duality from women. To gain protection and acclaim, women must constrain architecture accordingly.

The male-centric programme of Odysseus seeks to reshape and redefine the model of femininity by framing it within the philosophical, moral, and symbolic architecture of The *Odyssey*. Through the lens of Odysseus's journey—a narrative steeped in patriarchal values, heroic ideals, and masculine agency—femininity is often positioned not as an autonomous force, but as something to be interpreted, contained, or transformed in relation to male experience. The epic thus serves as a powerful cultural mechanism through which gender roles are not only narrated but ideologically reinforced, subtly reconfiguring the feminine identity in accordance with the hero's trials, desires, and narrative centrality. This reconfiguration within a male-dominated architectural discourse is a recurring theme, as noted in Crout's paper. The repetition reinforces the notion that femininity, as a gender construct, primarily responds to masculinity. The *sêmata* of the bed in the (re)marriage of Penelope and

Odysseus signifies a conceptual architecture, rooted immovably in the earth as a product of deceit born from fraud. In the philosophy of the *Odyssey*, masculinity and femininity in architecture are distinctly delineated yet intricately intertwined, creating an impression of coexistence.

Case Study 4: *Untitled: The Housing of Gender Sexuality and Space*

In *Untitled: The Housing of Gender, Sexuality, and Space* (1992), architect and author Mark Wigley explores how domestic space is intrinsically linked to gender and traces the evolution of architectural discourse on sexuality within architecture. Wigley argues that discussions on sexuality and space remain marginalised, lacking an established position in architectural scholarship.

He contends that sexuality is displaced across academic disciplines, especially where it is treated most rigidly. Institutional practices transform sexuality into an object that can be concealed or excluded. This exclusion is not merely a defence of institutional structures against the destabilising potential of desire but is embedded within institutional mechanisms themselves, whose strength is most apparent in moments of denial (Wigley, 1992, p. 328).

Although defining space is central to architectural discourse, Wigley suggests this definition cannot be problematised directly within the discourse itself. Instead, space functions as a “protected concept” rather than a subject of critical analysis. Architectural structures resist full incorporation into theoretical frameworks, existing in opposition to such modes of engagement. The perception that architecture precedes theory is itself a theoretical effect, sustained by ideological imperatives. A similar dynamic shapes the relationship between architecture and gender politics: the idea that architecture is distinct from gendered politics is a construct produced by the very political structures that seek to uphold this distinction.

Wigley illustrates his argument through an analysis of Alberti’s *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, a canonical text that helped elevate architecture to a liberal art. In the fifth book, which addresses the design of the *private* house, Alberti explicitly links architecture to patriarchal authority. He asserts that women must be confined to the most secluded domestic spaces, while men remain exposed to the external world. The house thus functions as a mechanism of gendered surveillance, regulating and disciplining women, whom Alberti describes as possessing delicate minds and pathological bodies:

I recall reading in the historian Memilius Probo that it was the custom in Greece for women not to be admitted to table, except for meals with relatives, and the custom too for certain parts of the house, where the women resided, to be out of bounds to all but closest kin. And certainly, to my mind, any place reserved for women ought to be treated as though dedicated to religion and chastity; also I would have the young girls and maidens allocated comfortable apartments, to relieve their delicate minds from the

tedium of confinement [...] The husband and wife must have separate bedrooms, not only to ensure that the husband be not disturbed by his wife, when she is about to give birth or is ill, but also to allow them... an uninterrupted night's sleep. Each room should have its own door, and in addition a common side door, to enable them to seek each other's company unnoticed... (Alberti, 1988, p. 149)

This passage contributes to the construction of *woman* within high discourse, entangled with systems of social control and corresponding forms of resistance. Yet, its placement in Alberti's text is strategic. Wigley notes that it consists of three distinct sentences, separate from the main body of the text. First, Alberti presents it as a recollection. Then, he invokes ancestral customs to legitimise its authority. This circular logic reinforces patriarchal authority by linking it to historical tradition, portraying the house as merely reflecting pre-existing laws—laws assumed to precede architecture itself (Wigley, 1992, p. 333).

Wigley asserts that Alberti closely follows Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* (1897), *which naturalises and spatialises gender distinctions: "The gods made provision from the first by shaping, as it seems to me, the woman's nature for indoor and the man's for outdoor occupations"* (Xenophon, 1897, p. 229). Xenophon's writing forbids men from engaging in indoor activities and women from participating in outdoor activities, arguing that such spatial transgressions are not only unnatural but also actively produce gendered effects: *"compelled to sit indoors, the body becomes effeminate and mind loses its strength"* (Xenophon, 1897, p. 229).

Such transgressions are explicitly linked to femininity and perceived as sexual in nature. The danger is not merely the feminisation of men but the intensification of femininity itself. When a woman moves beyond the domestic sphere, she does not become more masculine; rather, she becomes dangerously more feminine. Her presence in public space signals potential sexual mobility, as her attributes are no longer contained within the home. Within Greek thought, women were considered incapable of the intrinsic self-control attributed to men. This self-control was understood as the maintenance of secure boundaries (Wigley, 1992, p. 335).

Women were believed to struggle with maintaining the boundaries that defined their inner selves and identities. Their fluid sexual nature was thought to exceed these boundaries, disrupting them and threatening male identities. Consequently, female self-control (essential to the formation of womanhood) could only be achieved through adherence to external laws and norms. Since women were deemed incapable of self-regulation, they had to be controlled through boundary-setting mechanisms, with marriage functioning as one such institution. Within this system, the house not only delineated gender distinctions but actively produced and reinforced them.

Wigley cites Xenophon to argue that marriage as a social institution is naturalised through the spatial differentiation of gender. This distinction is embedded in the very definition of marriage as a union *"under the same roof."* The societal purpose of marriage is reproduction, which necessitates shelter—a roofed dwelling. He asserts that marriage thus justifies the construction of a house. While the house appears to provide space for the institution, marriage itself is already spatialised; it cannot be conceived outside the home. Although ostensibly built to protect children, the house's fundamental role is to segregate women from other men, safeguarding paternal lineage. Reproduction is thus the reproduction of the father, with the laws governing the house ultimately amounting to the laws of the father.

Alberti's celebrated theory of harmony—"everything in its proper place"—has been venerated as a sacred principle, yet it ultimately concerns domestic order, tranquillity, and discipline. Xenophon's idea that a household's appearance reflects its interior informs Alberti's argument that architecture publicly expresses cultural distinction. The ability to maintain social order cannot be separated from the regulation of women. The aesthetic ideal that elevates architecture above mechanical arts necessitates discipline. The gaze that appreciates beauty is inseparable from the constraints that confine women. "Proper place" is the rhetoric of nurture.

Alberti argues that architectural elements must be arranged in a "tempered" manner to define place and secure cultural status. The architect's role is to ensure that each component is meticulously positioned, incorporating only necessary elements and maintaining coherence throughout. Any addition, alteration, or removal must be executed with caution to prevent disrupting the structure's integrity (Wigley, 1992, p. 352).

Ultimately, this principle reduces to an economic logic. The notion of the "proper place" stems from the elimination of excess. Within the domestic sphere, excess is linked to sensory pleasure, which is deemed inappropriate and must be regulated, transformed into intellectual gratification. Alberti underscores the necessity of rejecting "disorderly passion for architecture," ensuring that each element remains appropriate and that pleasure, while permissible, is offered only as a final consideration and must itself be devoid of excess. Architecture is thus subordinated to the economic regulations it enforces. Just as the domestic sphere functions as a mechanism for disciplining women, the architectural structure itself is conceived as a disciplined, domesticated female form. In the same way that excessive sexual allure is reconfigured into economic labour, rendering women objects of male control, architecture is imbued with femininity—yet only when its excesses are subdued by the architect does it function as an instrument of surveillance.

Following his analysis of Alberti and Xenophon's classical formulations of gender, Wigley challenges the conventional architectural analogy in which the building is understood as a body. Instead, he argues that it is the body that is conceived as a building. He contends that the discourse on space and sexuality is inherently inseparable. The sexual morality that emerged within fourth-century Christianity—later developed in spatial terms by Alberti—was, from its inception, fundamentally spatial. The public spatial consciousness of marriage underwent a process of desexualisation, whereby the renunciation of sexual play within marriage was understood as analogous to "constructing walls for the city." Once sexual activity was confined within the domestic realm, resistance to such regulation was conceived in architectural terms long before architecture was explicitly divorced from sexuality (Wigley, 1992, p. 357–358).

According to Wigley, the primary function of architecture is the regulation of sexuality. In other words, architecture serves to preserve purity and uphold the ideal of the sublime. This can also be framed as the enforcement of order by ensuring that all objects remain in their designated places. Within this framework, femininity is simultaneously the architectural system itself, the agent responsible for regulating the interior, and the object of possession subjected to the disciplinary structures of domestic order. By contrast, masculinity is positioned as the force that operates externally, designing and controlling the system to ensure its reproduction. Wigley's analysis suggests that masculinity and femininity are not fixed physical attributes but abstract regulatory structures. A case study of *Untitled: The Housing of Gender, Sexuality, and Space* elucidates the ways in which gender is projected onto architectural space. The study highlights the opposition between masculine attributes—control, order, sublimation, propriety, and exteriority—and their corresponding feminine counterpoints: the necessity of being controlled, excessive ornamentation, beauty, disorder, and interiority.

Case Study 5: The sphere: Reading a gender metaphor in the architecture of modern cults of identity

The scholarly work of Susanne von Falkenhausen, a distinguished German art historian and critic, explores the notions of masculinity and femininity as manifested through the symbolism and metaphor of the sphere. Her discourse unfolds from the architectural design of Étienne-Louis Boullée, dated circa 1793 (as determined by Klaus Lankheit and exhibited at the Uffizi Gallery) (Figure 7). The temple in question, which Boullée is believed to have left unnamed, is contemporaneously recognised under two distinct names: the Temple of Reason and the Temple of Nature. These denominations correspond to the two extreme poles of symbolic gender order: reason being equated with masculinity and nature with femininity (Falkenhausen, 1997, p. 238). The potential for such antithetical interpretations is embedded within the very characteristics of the design itself. This architectural configuration radically articulates the gendered duality associated with the metaphor of the sphere and deliberately leaves it unresolved.

Boullée constructed the mythology of the sphere based on 'vision'. Specifically, he perceived the sphere as an eternal polyhedron, where the crucial notion is that the greatest possible diversity originates from the most perfect symmetry. His conceptualisation of the sphere is not solely due to its resemblance to the Earth but rather as an idea derived from the mathematical principles of volume, rendering it a metaphor for totality. This totality possesses no definitive foundation, lacks an up or down distinction, hierarchy, or centre, and exists as an independent form. It is a body severed from materiality, an abstract image, and a symbol of transcendence, appearing to require neither gender nor divine authority (Falkenhausen, 1997, p. 248-249). However, this does not imply a complete exclusion of gender from this image. On the contrary, this representation of world/universe/totality inherently maintains a male-centric structure. This is because it reflects the masculine fantasy of constructing a complete self without the presence of 'the Other'. Within this image, women are not explicitly separated from men, yet they simultaneously lose functionality. As the 'Other' that might challenge or counterbalance the masculine self disappears, masculinity remains dominant, even when no longer visibly represented. Ultimately, while the sphere is not explicitly designated as masculine, it embodies the concept of absoluteness, allowing the male subject to assume universality and implicit superiority.

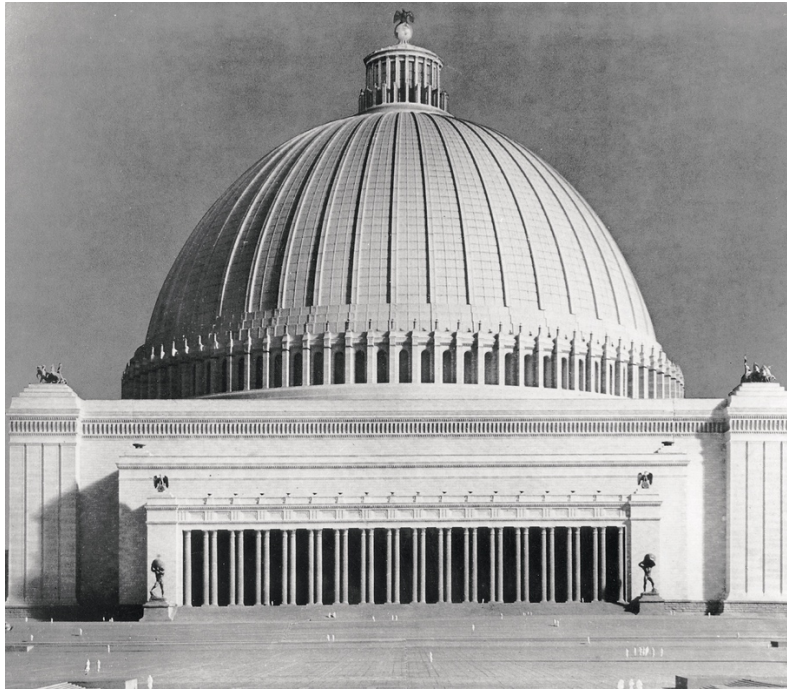


Figure 7 - Ullstein Bild (Known as Temple of Reason and the Temple of Nature) (Glancey, 2017)

In other words, the seemingly 'gender-transcendent', universal, and 'human' concept is, in practice, defined and imagined from a male perspective, thus reinforcing male-centric norms. This process affords men (here understood as a cultural category) two privileges: first, they can occupy the centre of discourse without explicit identification, and second, they can conceive of themselves as complete beings. Conversely, the experience of being a gendered 'Other'—where one's specific bodily and social position renders one 'incomplete'—is thoroughly excluded (Falkenhausen, 1997, p. 248-249).

The author asserts that Boullée's temple presents three potent architectural metaphors: the sphere, the grotto mound, and the submerged dome. The grotto mound and the submerged dome maintain a connection to the earth and traditionally embody 'feminine' connotations. (Falkenhausen, 1997, p. 254) Though originating from the form of the sphere, these structures do not derive from the mathematically abstracted image of a perfect cosmos but rather from the concept of the 'earth' as 'mother'. In 1618, when Matthias Merian the Elder published *Nutrix Terra* (Figure 8), the concept of the globe and the notion of maternal nurturance were still intertwined (Falkenhausen, 1997, p. 254). However, following Newton's discoveries, as the scientifically calculable image of the cosmos became mathematically verifiable, this separation became more pronounced. The mathematical image of the sphere, perceived as the 'perfect body', came to symbolise triumph over terrestrial elements (gravity and matter). Concurrently, the image of the world bifurcated into two distinct forms: one, a purely calculable, immaterial transcendence of the cosmos (a 'genderless' yet implicitly male-centred sphere), and the

other, the image of the earth as tomb, mound, or cave. In essence, the very concept of Nature became divided—one aspect as a mathematical model of cognition, the other as a feminine Nature that defies rational comprehension.



Figure 8 - Atalanta Fugiens (Merian, 1618)

For revolutionary propagandists, the cave was often depicted as the lair of the revolution's vanquished enemies, grotesquely writhing in the form of serpents adorned with crowns and mitres. The fundamental meaning of the cave motif lies in its bodily metaphor as the womb of 'Mother Earth'. The cave is associated with both birth and death, appearing across various functional and figurative contexts, from religious architecture to ornamental garden grottoes. As a corporeal metaphor interpreting the earth as a womb, the cave motif persisted in 16th- and 17th-century scientific thought, preserving animistic conceptions of the world (Falkenhausen, 1997, p. 251-253).

This feminine conception of Nature manifests in two opposing 'faces': one as a demonised femininity symbolising anti-reason, and the other as a positively interpreted womb, promising

a return to the maternal. The cave invokes a different set of feminine associations than Merian's Nutrix Terra, which depicted a nurturing 'Mother Earth'. Instead, the cave is suggestive of the vulva, and this image of the 'tomb as vulva' appears recurrently in 19th-century secular ceremonial architecture, particularly in monumental structures (Falkenhausen, 1997, p. 254, 256).

Citing Georg Simmel, the author posits that femininity is defined as a 'supplementary definition' only after masculinity has been established as the absolute standard. This argument, already articulated in 1911 (Simmel, 1985), sheds light on the gender order as a power relation, which becomes evident in the metaphorical dyad of 'sphere-cosmos' and 'mother's body-earth' (Falkenhausen, 1997, p. 256). The former is considered abstract and universal, detached from gender, whereas the latter is regarded as feminine, material, and particular.



Figure 9 - Völkerschlachtdenkmal (Schmidt, no date)

The author further contends that a polarisation between 'domed ceilings and towers' emerged in the late 19th century. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in significant German national monuments, such as the Monument to the Battle of the Nations (Figure 9), where the verticality of the tower entirely supplants the horizontality of the temple. The symbolic material signifying masculinity thus replaces the temple metaphor. Previously, the sphere, representing popular sovereignty, and the Greek temple, embodying the spirit of national ethics, conveyed a transcendental and abstract vision of community in a male-centred manner. However, the tower now stood as a symbol of German masculinity—one that aligned with the 'robust' colonialist state of the 19th century (Falkenhausen, 1997, p. 258). Masculinity, once implicit and unnamed, now asserts itself explicitly, establishing a dominant norm. In the re-hierarchisation of architectural symbols, the tower stands in stark opposition to the sphere metaphor. It is employed not only in grand national monuments but also in popular memorials

commemorating the countless nameless soldiers who perished in World War I. In this standardised process of constructing an identity for mass military death, the tower comes to represent collective masculinity.

Falkenhausen asserts that the veneration of masculine political collectives has manifested in various ways since the emergence of modern political sovereignty. While metaphors of femininity and masculinity play a crucial role in visually structuring such identities, their form evolves according to historical and political systems. These metaphors reveal how male collectives envision and represent themselves, as well as how they exclude or instrumentalise femininity (Falkenhausen, 1997).

Analysis: Gender and Architecture in Theoretical Discourse

This chapter critically analyses how gender has been theorised and metaphorically applied to architecture across five key academic sources. Through this analysis, it becomes evident that architectural forms and materials have historically been subject to gendered readings, yet such interpretations often contain contradictions and are shaped by cultural, aesthetic, and philosophical paradigms.

Contradictions in Niculae's Gender Analogies

Niculae's attempt to categorise architectural materials and forms into gender binaries reveals inherent contradictions. Her metaphorical association of the home with the female womb, for example, collapses under scrutiny when considering high-rise condominiums made of glass and steel—materials she deems masculine. Further complicating her framework, she associates expansive, horizontal industrial spaces with masculinity due to their link to male-dominated labour. However, horizontality is elsewhere likened to the sea, a traditionally feminine metaphor. Moreover, her case study of Gehry's Fred and Ginger building reveals femininity expressed through movement in glass and steel, directly contradicting her earlier assertions about the masculinity of such materials.

Niculae's arguments are further challenged by comparisons with Wigley's study on domesticity and gender. While Niculae portrays the home as a feminine space, Wigley (1992) argues that femininity within architecture is something to be disciplined through masculine geometries, echoing Alberti's emphasis on order and propriety. These conflicting readings reveal that gendered architectural metaphors are not only inconsistent but also contextually mutable.

Despite these contradictions, not all of Niculae's observations are without merit. Her recognition of recurring gendered patterns—particularly the symbolic association of function and ornament with masculinity and femininity, respectively—does echo broader architectural discourses. However, as this chapter argues, buildings are rarely emblematic of a singular gender identity. Like the human bodies they metaphorically mimic, buildings often display a confluence of both masculine and feminine traits, making any strict binary classification reductive.

The Sublime, the Beauty, and Masculinities

Crout's article contextualises gender within the historical aesthetic dichotomy of the sublime and the beauty. Drawing from Edmund Burke's (1757) theory, the sublime is equated with masculine qualities such as strength, vastness, and ruggedness, while beauty aligns with feminine attributes like delicacy and softness. Yet, Crout also charts the evolution of masculinity over time, noting that shifts in societal attitudes toward homosexuality prompted a reconfiguration of both masculine and feminine ideals.

While Niculae's gender analogies are more material and formal, Crout situates them within broader aesthetic and philosophical constructs. The notion that ornament (traditionally linked to femininity) must be restrained to achieve sublimity aligns with Wigley's interpretation of architectural order as masculine control. Both perspectives converge on the idea that femininity is something to be moderated within architectural expression. However, Crout introduces associationism (via Chambers and Alison), suggesting that architectural meaning—and by extension, gender—is shaped not by intrinsic properties but by cultural and psychological associations. This positions architecture as an expressive medium capable of evoking gendered experiences rather than possessing fixed gender attributes.

Mythology, Masculine Narrative, and Conceptual Architecture

The Odyssey offers a rich metaphorical framework for understanding gender through archetypal figures within western culture. The male-centric journey of Odysseus frames femininity not as an independent force but as a narrative tool shaped by male desire and ideology. Femininity, in this context, exists in response to masculinity. The bed of Odysseus and Penelope—rooted into the earth—serves as a symbolic architectural gesture, reinforcing gender roles through spatial metaphors.

This reading aligns with Crout's and Wigley's analyses, which also view femininity in architecture as reactive and mediated through masculine structures. While Crout focuses on aesthetic values and Wigley on spatial control, *The Odyssey* illustrates how mythology itself contributes to architectural meaning, casting femininity as both foundational and subordinate. This conceptual framing underlines how architecture becomes a vessel for perpetuating patriarchal narratives.

Architecture as a Gendered Regulatory System

Wigley's interpretation presents architecture not merely as a built environment but as a system that regulates gender and sexuality. He posits that architecture's primary function is to enforce order (a masculine principle) by disciplining the excesses associated with femininity. In this view, femininity operates within the interior, subject to regulation, while masculinity governs from the exterior.

This duality is especially evident in the study of *Untitled: The Housing of Gender, Sexuality, and Space*, where architectural space is shown to perform gendered roles. Masculinity aligns with control, exteriority, and propriety; femininity with interiority, ornament, and emotional excess. These spatial binaries mirror not only Burkean aesthetics but also Nicolae's material analogies. Yet, Wigley pushes the conversation further by revealing how gender is structurally embedded in architecture's very function.

Political Metaphors and Identity Construction

Falkenhausen's exploration of gender in political architecture provides a macro-scale perspective. She illustrates how modern political movements employ architectural metaphors of masculinity to consolidate power and identity. Femininity, conversely, is instrumentalised—used symbolically or excluded outright. These metaphors are not static; they evolve with political ideologies, revealing the flexibility and pervasiveness of gendered constructs in architecture.

This argument complements those of Nicolae, Crout, and Wigley by showing that the gendering of architecture is not confined to materials or aesthetics but extends into ideological representation. Whether in domestic spaces or monumental structures, gender remains a key symbolic language through which power is expressed and contested.

Conclusion: Rethinking Gender in Architecture

This dissertation has explored question of gender and architecture through the analysis of five diverse but interconnected studies, each engaging with the relationship between them from a different perspective. The findings suggest that the idea of buildings possessing inherently "male" or "female" qualities is not grounded in any objective reality. Rather, it is a reflection of cultural habits, metaphorical thinking, and long-standing narratives that associate certain traits with gendered identities.

Across the studies examined, gender consistently emerges as a constructed framework, not a biological fact. Traits such as strength, delicacy, order, or ornamentation are often assigned to either masculinity or femininity. Yet, the meaning of these traits shifts depending on the historical moment, the cultural context, and the ideological lens through which architecture is being read. These qualities are not embedded within the materials or structures of buildings themselves. Instead, they are projected onto architecture through language, theory, and interpretation.

This becomes particularly evident in Niculae's work, which attempts to define gendered qualities in architectural materials and forms. While she categorises glass and steel as masculine, her later reading of Gehry's work reveals the same materials expressing fluidity and softness, qualities she associates with femininity. Such contradictions highlight the instability of binary gender classifications and demonstrate the limits of rigid categorisation in architectural discourse.

A similar pattern is visible in Crout's exploration of the sublime and the beautiful. His analysis draws from aesthetic theory to show how strength and grandeur have often been aligned with masculinity, while delicacy and ornamentation are linked to femininity. However, even within these frameworks, there is a sense of ambiguity. When the sublime becomes excessive or overwhelming, it is described as feminine. This reveals that gender attribution in architecture is not fixed but highly dependent on context and interpretation.

Bergren's reading of the *Odyssey* presents another variation, interpreting feminine space as one of concealment and modesty in contrast to masculine action and agency. Wigley and Falkenhausen, meanwhile, delve into architectural history and theory to show how rational design has often been associated with a masculine intellect, while materiality and nature are framed as feminine forces that must be disciplined or controlled. These authors each uncover how gendered metaphors have historically reinforced dominant ideologies within architecture, often privileging the masculine and marginalising the feminine.

One recurring idea throughout these studies is the contrast between the sublime and what is considered its opposite. Whether this contrast is framed as strength versus weakness, reason versus emotion, or control versus chaos, it often carries implicit gendered associations. However, these oppositions are not universally consistent, and they tend to reflect broader social and philosophical concerns rather than anything inherent to the built environment.

It would be inaccurate to say that buildings truly possess gender. Such statements are more reflective of how we think about space, form, and power, rather than something that can be observed or measured. While gendered metaphors can be powerful tools for understanding architectural meaning, they are shaped by cultural narratives and personal perspectives. Without a critical lens, these metaphors risk reinforcing outdated stereotypes or limiting the diversity of ways we engage with architecture.

At the same time, it is important not to dismiss gender entirely as a lens for interpretation. Architecture, like all cultural production, is shaped by the values, identities, and assumptions of the society that creates it. Gender continues to influence how spaces are designed, who they are designed for, and how they are experienced. Recognising this influence allows for more inclusive and responsive approaches to design and theory.

In conclusion, the assertion that buildings are either masculine or feminine is not supported by objective reality, but rather emerges from symbolic and cultural interpretations. Gender, in architectural discourse, is best understood as a spectrum of meanings that shift across time and context. A more nuanced view acknowledges this complexity and invites us to think beyond binaries. This perspective allows architecture to reflect the full diversity of human experience, rather than confining it within narrow gendered categories.

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Appendix A: List of Articles about Architecture and Gender

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