

Understanding space as matrix is to underline space as a complex layering of ever-changing social relations. It is to disrupt the normalcy of some, whilst not necessarily stressing other or new conditions under which these social relations arise – rather altering the terms on which they are founded.

The exhibition *Space as Matrix* brings together artists and architects who stand against a hierarchization of space and the relations within it. On several levels, they contest how space is normally shaped, who it is shaped by, and who it is shaped for. Their fields of action range from acting outside required building specifications to working together with users on design processes to – more fundamentally – breaking with generic representations of space and collapsing divisions between architect and user, artist and viewer, academia and lived experience.

The title of the exhibition is derived from a text by Argentinian-American architect, critic, and educator Susana Torre, who wrote “Space as Matrix” in 1981. In the text, Torre takes building to task that blindly reproduces a fixed set of functions for each room, therefore assuming the relations that are enacted within them. Her critique stems from questioning the typology of the nuclear family home that had often brought with it a gendered division of labor. This example is paradigmatic for a more general critique in her text that scrutinizes normative spatial distribution as defining social hierarchies and the associated systems of belief. As an alternative to an architecture freighted with a fixed ideology, Torre proposed a modular design she named The House of Meanings – neither open plan nor defined plan, but an elementary structure that can respond to change. The House of Meanings is designed together with and partly by the end-user and can adjust to a specific time, place and person. It goes against normative spatial theory, that as per Torre is based on binaries such as interior / exterior, building / nature, private / public. Here, not one but many meanings can take shape, remain elusive, or become layered one over the next to become components of a continuous spatial matrix. These ideas are manifest in Torre’s diagram of The House of Meanings, which is plan, metaphor, and manifesto all in one, and in this exhibition becomes a formal medium – as transparent screens – that represents the actual and metaphoric ties between the works of Matrix Feminist Design Co-operative, Ursula Mayer, muf, Morgan Quaintance, and Susana Torre herself.

The architects and artists in the exhibition are linked by their pursuit of similar methods. Their practices are founded in feminist, queer and/or intersectional approaches: First and foremost, all make space for and with people absent from certain realms – for women in patriarchal spaces, for migrant groups in cities, for children in public environments, amongst others. Some define their practice beyond their profession’s standard services, including publishing theoretical writing, teaching building law, and offering technical support in workshops. They focus not on “prestigious” builds but on the “small” realm of the everyday – on playgrounds, high streets, parks. Others approach the idea of space as continuum more poetically, complicating representations of gender or confronting lived reality with theory. In this, all of them face their own fraught histories, seeking new models of identity and practice – acknowledging collaboration, reflecting upon how architecture can respond to social relations, and seeking alternative historiographies from which to draw from. As Torre and her students posed during the years that make up the beginning of this exhibition’s small historical excerpt, the question being asked, again, is not so much what does it mean, but what purpose does it serve. With this question are mapped changing concerns around the gendering of space that chronicle not only the potential but also the potential pitfalls of feminist, queer and/or intersectional approaches to architecture, and, more generally, space as a whole.

Space as Matrix will be accompanied by a series of events that will expand upon the exhibition’s initial presentation of practices and explore the affective requirements and consequences of such practices: The possible collateral damage that practices determined to “go against the system” expose themselves to, the sense of attachment to certain places and their associated social relations, and what demands seem to be the same now as half a century ago.

Accompanying the exhibition is a book selection presented at our bookstore Madame ETH.

Matrix Feminist Design Co-operative was a collectively run architects' practice working in 1980s London, which grew out of the socialist New Architecture Movement – a movement criticizing conventional architectural practice that saw little contact between architect and user. Though Matrix would continue many principles set out in the New Architecture Movement, they formed in 1978 due to a frustration, on the one hand, with the movement's lack of thought for women in building, and, on the other, with the focus on equality and employment rights for women when issues were addressed. The co-operative came together to pursue a different architectural practice from what they called "patriarchal spatial systems": They held workshops for communities, in particular women's groups, to learn building crafts, architectural drawing and other skills; offered support in finding and assessing premises; and made unfinished models that could be completed in discussions together with end-users. Matrix pursued a non-hierarchical structure in their co-operative, paying everyone the same wage, and worked on building types otherwise often deemed unimportant, such as refuge centres and nurseries.

The Jagonari Women's Educational Resource Centre in East London (1984–1987), for example, initiated by a local group of South Asian women, was to become a meeting place in which courses, childcare, and leisure could take place. Originally conceived as a prefabricated, single-storey building, the group and Matrix brought in funds for a much larger building equipped with a creche and enclosed outdoor space.

The collective also published several books and manuals, including *Making Space – Women and the Man-Made Environment*, in which they set out one of their guiding principles: "Because women are brought up differently in our society, we have different experiences and needs in relation to the built environment." Theoretical writings by Dolores Hayden and Susana Torre were important to Matrix's research, in which they explored notions such as "fragmented time" as part of the specific experience of many women. Matrix was active until 1994, when the group had to give in to the perennial struggle for subsidies, through which much of their practice was funded, as the political climate changed under Margaret Thatcher. In the online Matrix Open – Feminist Architecture Archive, the co-operative's practice has been archived and is being continually added to.

Ursula Mayer's work *Cinesexual* (2014) stages a threshold situation in which not only the realities of its two films but also the filmic realm and the viewers' space dissolve into each other. Based on the 1974 *Two Sides to Every Story* by Michael Snow, regarded as a pioneer of experimental film, *Cinesexual* shares Snow's interest in film's formal possibilities to create illusion: The same space filmed from two sides, projected on both sides of one screen, shows two figures apparently moving toward the camera, to the other, to us. Mayer has however expanded Snow's premise of displaying differing perspectives of the same event and included two performers representing fluid gender identity – transgender model Valentijn de Hingh and the queer icon of pop music JD Samson. In this way, Mayer reshuffles Snow's power dynamics between the male gaze of the two men behind the camera who tell the female performer in front of it what to do. As Mayer puts it in an interview with art historian Maud Jacquin: "I cast two personalities who are standing in as canvases for what they are. They are like screens for the projection of these political myths, but they also discharge the content through the seditious potential of what they stand for in real life." They, in contrast to the performers in Snow's work, interact with each other, literally slicing through the boundary between them so as to share space and switch place.

Mayer undoes the dialectic of the screen, the relationship between subject and object, and conventional cinematic representations of gender. *Cinesexual* – a term based on Patricia MacCormack's concept "Cinesexuality," describing the erotic pull of cinema – epitomizes a complex space in which an unveiling of the material conditions of film go hand in hand with the fiction it performs. Poetically Mayer's work deals with moments of space as matrix – the dissolution of the identities and grammar that make up the history of her medium. She does this also by collaborating with writers such as Maria Fusco, who deals with similar themes, and by making the spectator, having to move around the screen, never able to grasp the full picture, essential player in her work.

In their own words, muf architecture / art describe their practice as "making space for more than one (fragile) thing at a time" and "not to prescribe [a space] with a set of rules, but to almost deliberately under-describe it, to leave some degree of ambiguity, of doubt within the meaning of the space so people can write onto it their own meanings."

muf work mainly in the public realm, in close participation with future users of their built structures. They often approach their work by emphasizing what is already there, connecting previously divided areas or shifting the focus from what the brief says to what the space and its occupants require. For the renovation of Altab Ali Park in Whitechapel, London, in 2011 – a park that has become an important meeting place for Bangladeshi communities – muf made several subtle interventions. They designed a way through an edge of the park instead of along the road, as had been the brief, and highlighted the park's multiple social histories, taking not only the locality's tangible but also its intangible heritage into account – from the racist attack on the Bangladeshi textile worker after whom the park was named, to the fact that it is the site of the Church of St Mary's Whitechapel, from whose materials the eponymous East London district was built, to incorporating personal memories of park-goers into the design.

muf harness the potential of play and imagination, often in small-scale and / or temporary builds such as playgrounds, follies or plantation, but also in their larger built projects, and invest as many resources into workshops, performative interventions and discussions with users as in the design itself. Throughout their processes, the question as to the value of knowledge production – what knowledge they are producing, for whom and at what cost – is present. For their newest ongoing commission, the listed Brixton Recreation Centre in London, local historian Kelly Foster is leading on the gathering of oral histories via an open-call website, Revisiting Brixton Rec, from the communities connected to the centre.

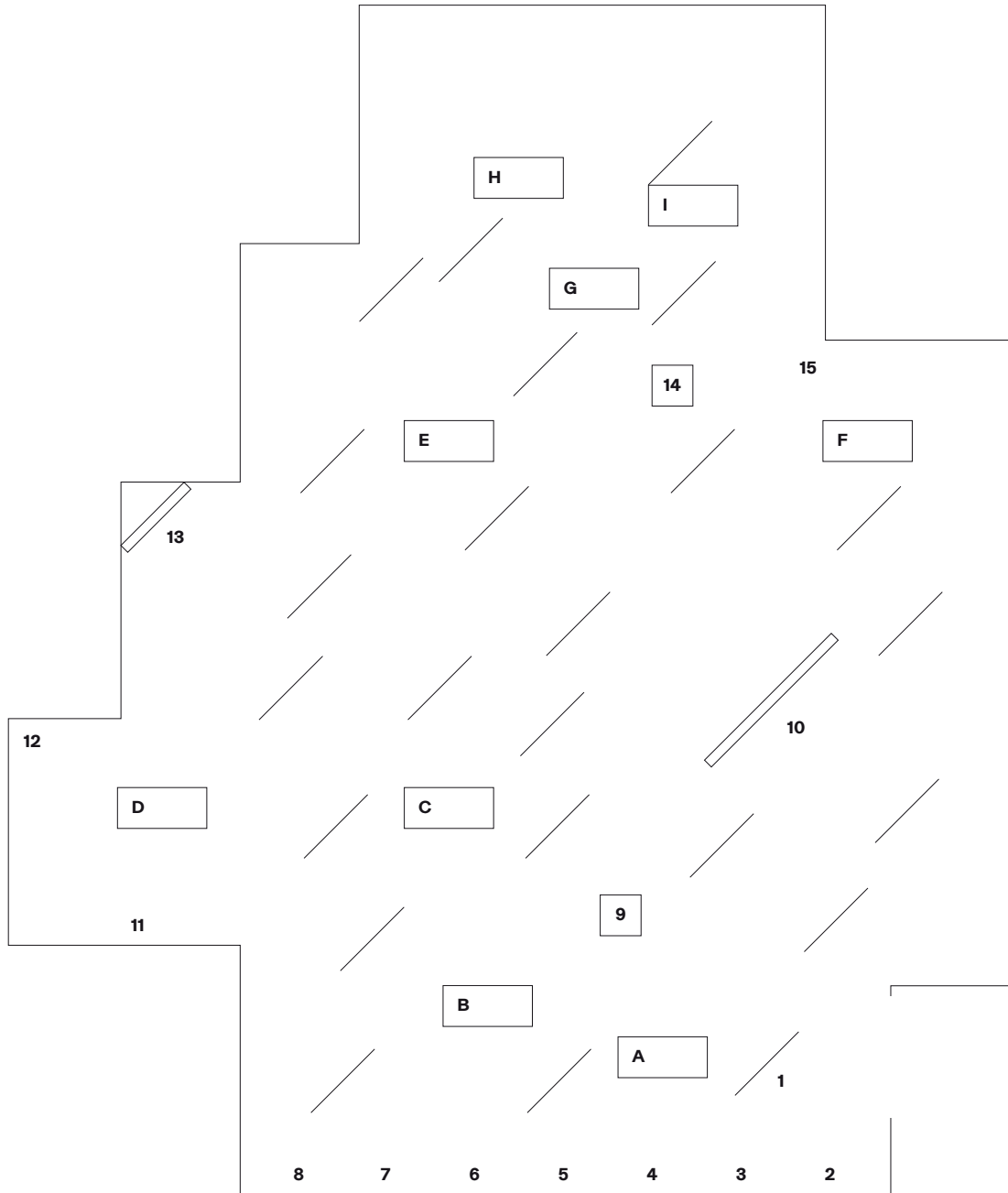
Likewise based in London, muf began practising in 1995, shortly after the work of the Matrix collective ended. Pursuing similar convictions to Matrix, muf was now working under very different economic conditions – those defined by competition in the architectural services market. As their name states, muf positions their practice between art and architecture, frequently operating to subvert these conditions and propose an alternative economy. muf have sometimes advised their clients not to build, which potentially loses them work, or pushed a commission much further than a client had anticipated.

Another Decade (2018) by Morgan Quaintance makes its subject matter clear from its offset: Images of a typical setting for a conference – chairs, microphones, glasses of water – are followed by a person dancing in the street. Throughout the work, the divisions between academia and lived experience are tried. Various art historians and artists call out an only apparently progressive framework, speaking truth to institutional power. Raiji Kuroda, reflecting about his own participation in the 1994 conference "Towards a New Internationalism": "Here there is at least one person who has been kept marginalized because the person is not so good at understanding and speaking English, contradicting the idealism of new internationalism." Others speak of their lived realities as members of marginalized communities and identities in London. Shobna Gulati: "What we have is a cultural resource. And that's what we're using."

Another Decade is a montage of archival footage from the 1990s and newly shot 16-mm film and standard definition video, underlaid with a mash-up soundtrack. The "other" decade is the 1990s of the United Kingdom – a time that is often hallmarked as the period of Britpop, New Labour, Cool Britannia. Quaintance's work gives us a different narrative about the decade, one that is more complicated and bleak, fraught with tension vis-à-vis power structures that are only seemingly non-existent, and that are in fact just no longer as centralized, and with that, accountable. The work asks what, since this other decade, has changed, for the statements made in *Another Decade* seem all to still ring true. The work is in this sense a collaged testament to the forgetful and selective memory of history.

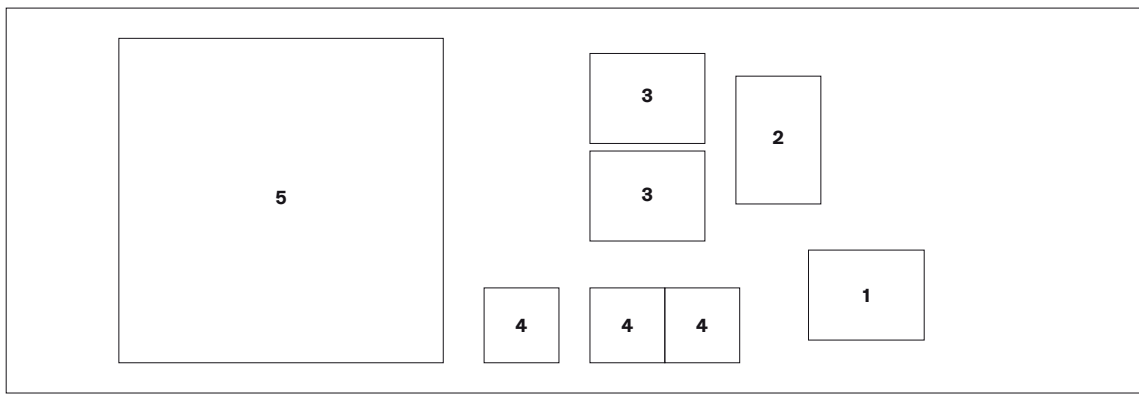
Susana Torre's work challenges normative spatial theory based on binaries such as inside / outside, public / private, building / nature. In her 1981 text "Space as Matrix," after which the exhibition is named, Torre lays out her ideas to dissolve such divisions, proposing a "House of Meanings" that is able to combine, in her words, "the formal integrity and completeness of an architectural object with the changing and temporary patterns that arise in the process of dwelling." Torre's written and drawn sketch for The House of Meanings represents a space as matrix, in which transitions between the natural and constructed, the enclosed and the open, one relation and another are given space – both metaphorically as a structural idea and actually in how Torre builds. The transparent panels distributed throughout the exhibition are a further, spatial manifestation of Torre's earlier drawing, acting formally as a connecting medium between the other works, and conceptually as a lens through which to read them.

In addition to Torre's "Space as Matrix," three of her projects are on display: Fire Station Five, completed in 1987, for which Torre restructured the facilities of a fire station to make "bonding" spaces – important for the profession – accessible to women. Instead of the main communal spaces being the changing rooms and dormitories, Torre's design assigned more significance to rooms where the team could eat together and exercise. The exhibition *Women in American Architecture: A Historic and Contemporary Perspective*, organized by Torre in 1976 for The Brooklyn Museum in New York, presented the work of many previously unacknowledged women architects. The installation, which resembled an array of drafting tables, included a horizontal red line symbolizing the higher standards demanded of women to achieve the same recognition as men. It was solely the paint for this line that could be covered by the budget Torre had at hand. And Carboneras Community (2003–2008) – a residential community of seven dwellings in Almeria, Spain, and the only fully realized design of Torre's The House of Meanings.

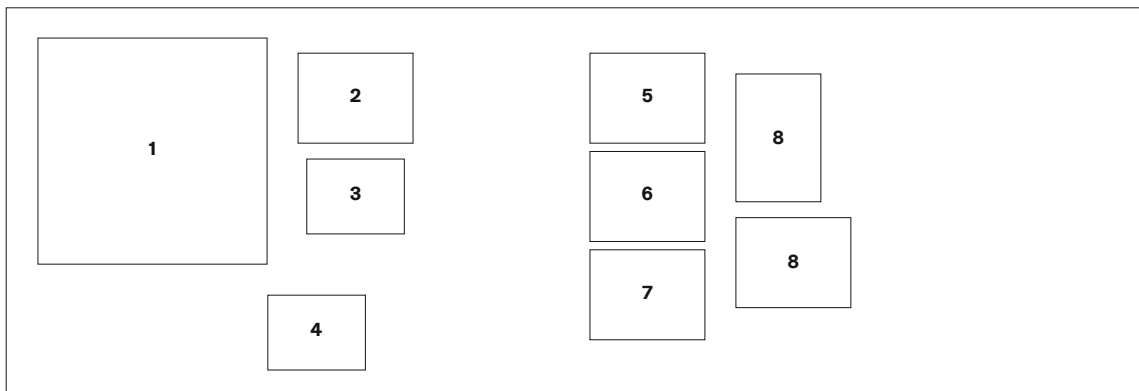


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| <p>1 Susana Torre
Panels based on the drawing
<i>The House of Meanings</i>
(1970-72), 2022</p> <p>2 muf
South Thamesmead, Bexley, London
(ongoing project)</p> <p>3 muf with J&L Gibbons,
ARUP, Objectif, Dekka
Ruskin Square, Croydon,
London, 2018</p> <p>4 muf with Mo Parker
Camel Road Playground, Newham,
London, 2022</p> <p>5 muf
Altab Ali Park, Whitechapel, London, 2011</p> <p>6 muf with J+L Gibbons
Hackney Wick & Fish Island, Hackney,
London, 2010</p> | <p>7 muf
Barking Town Square,
Barking & Dagenham, London, 2008</p> <p>8 muf with Karakusevic Carson Architects,
Henley Halebrown
King's Crescent, London, 2018</p> <p>9 muf with Edward Harcourt,
Bristol 3 Keys Project
<i>Therapeutic Conflicts: Co-Producing
Meaning in Mental Health</i>, 2017</p> <p>10 Ursula Mayer
<i>Cinesexual</i>, 2013
Double projection, SD Digital file,
originally 16mm film, colour, silent, 3 mins
Courtesy of Ursula Mayer & LUX, London</p> <p>11 Susana Torre
Reproduction of <i>The House of Meanings</i>,
1970-72</p> | <p>12 Susana Torre
Excerpt from "Space as Matrix" (1981),</p> <p>13 Morgan Quaintance
<i>Another Decade</i>, 2018
HD Digital file, colour, sound, 26 mins
Courtesy of Morgan Quaintance & LUX,
London</p> <p>14 <i>Paradise Circus</i>, 1988
Directed & produced by Heather Powell
for Birmingham Film & Video workshop
MP4 Digital file, colour / black & white,
sound, 62 mins
Courtesy Heather Powell (Birmingham
Film & Video Workshop) & Vivid Projects</p> <p>15 Matrix Feminist Design Co-operative
Various promotional material, 1978-1994</p> |
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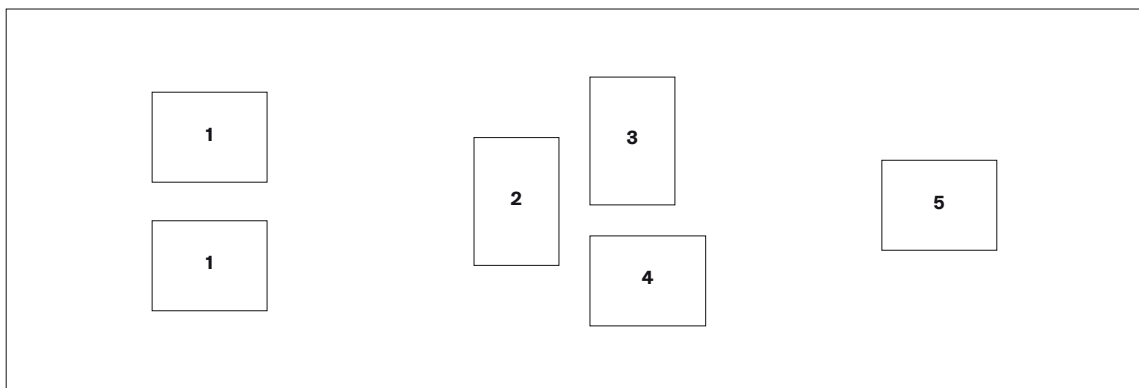


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| <p>1 muf
<i>Horses & Youth</i>, 2005
Workshop with young adults in preparation for Broadway Estate Community Garden, Tilbury, 2005</p> <p>2 muf
<i>Roots & Wings</i>, Fazakerley, Liverpool, 2002
<i>Re-learning a landscape</i>, workshop with young adults, 2002</p> | <p>3 muf
<i>Festival of Toil</i>, 2017
In preparation for Ruskin Square, Croydon, London, 2018</p> <p>4 muf
<i>This is What We Do</i>, A muf Manual, 2002</p> | <p>5 muf
South Thamesmead, Bexley, London (ongoing project)
Research, local testimonies, 2022</p> |
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| <p>1 muf
Model for Altab Ali Park, Whitechapel, London, 2011
Site map with various stakeholders (e.g. East London Mosque, Whitechapel Gallery, Bell Foundry)</p> <p>2 muf
Photograph of Altab Ali Park, Whitechapel, London, 2011
Installed at the British Pavilion, Venice Biennale, 2010</p> <p>3 muf
<i>Community archeology</i>, 2010/11
Gathering of personal objects integrated into park design
In preparation for Altab Ali Park, Whitechapel London, 2011</p> | <p>4 muf in conversation with Shahed Saleem, 2020
About Altab Ali Park, Whitechapel, London, 2011
For "100 Day Studio: The Architecture Foundation"</p> <p>5 muf
Brixton Recreation Centre, Lambeth, London, ongoing, Key Moves</p> <p>6 muf with Kelly Foster
Brixton Recreation Centre, Lambeth, London, ongoing
<i>Revisiting Brixton Rec: documenting living histories</i>, website collecting Oral Histories</p> | <p>7 muf
Brixton Recreation Centre, Lambeth, London, ongoing
Design for storage space</p> <p>8 muf
Brixton Recreation Centre, Lambeth, London, ongoing
Workshop with children</p> |
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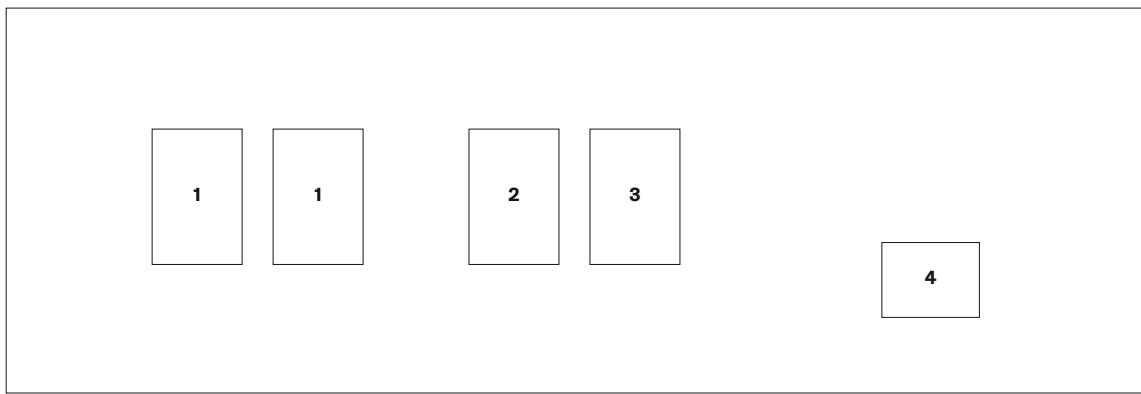
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| <p>1 Susana Torre with Cynthia Rock
<i>Women in American Architecture. A Historic and Contemporary Perspective</i>, 1976-77
Installation of the travelling exhibition at The Brooklyn Museum, New York</p> <p>2 Susana Torre with Anna Zietsma & George Gianakopoulos
Fire Station Five, Columbus, Indiana, 1984-1987
Equipment room</p> | <p>3 Susana Torre with Anna Zietsma & George Gianakopoulos
Fire Station Five, Columbus, Indiana, 1984-1987
Pole tower</p> <p>4 Susana Torre with Anna Zietsma & George Gianakopoulos
Fire Station Five, Columbus, Indiana, 1984-1987
View of main public façade</p> | <p>5 Susana Torre with DA-3
Carboneras Community, Carboneras, Almería, 2003-2008</p> |
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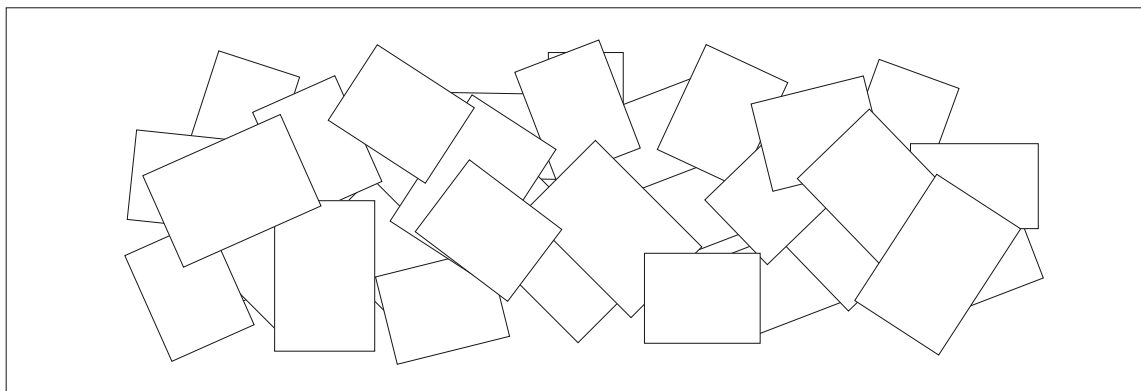
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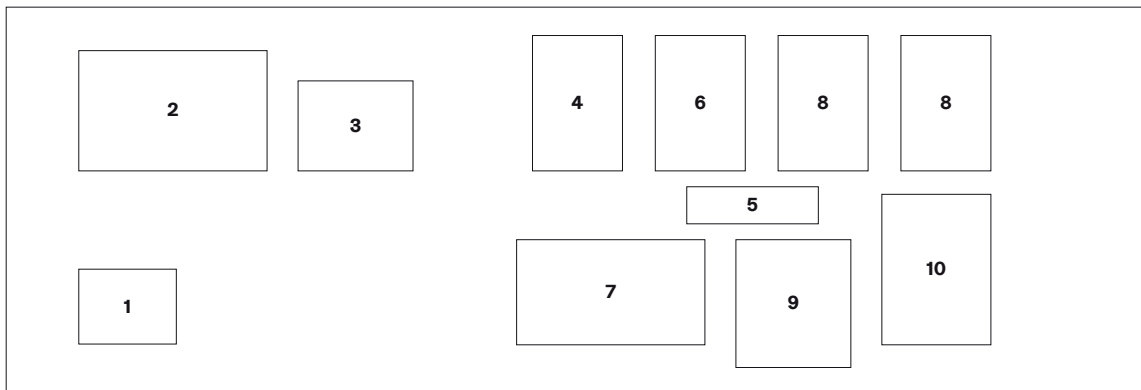
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| <p>1 Susana Torre
"Space as Matrix", 1981
Published in <i>Making Room: Women in Architecture</i>, Heresies 11, 1981</p> <p>2 Susana Torre
Blog entry "Space as Matrix", 2020
Published on https://www.susanatorre.net/space-as-matrix/</p> | <p>3 Susana Torre
Blog entry "Dwelling as Manifesto", 2021
Published on https://www.susanatorre.net/dwelling-as-manifesto/</p> <p>4 Susana Torre
Lecture March 5, 1980
Part 1 & 2</p> |
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Matrix Feminist Design Co-operative
Various promotional material, 1978–1994

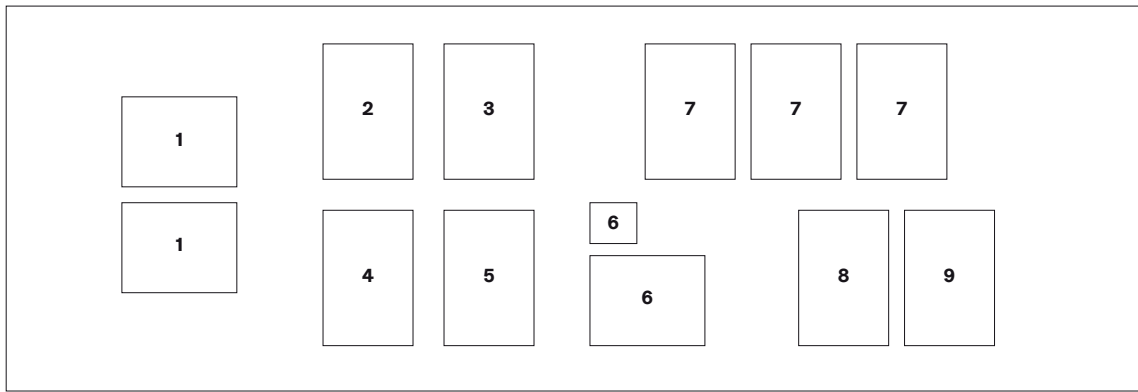
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| <p>1 Matrix Feminist Design Co-operative
Interviews with Ex-Matrix members by
Maria Venegas Raba, 2020</p> <p>2 "Co-operating for Change", article in
<i>Building Design</i> on Matrix Feminist
Design Co-operative, 8th July 1983</p> <p>3 "Kitchen Sink Architecture", feature from
<i>The Observer</i> on Matrix Feminist Design
Co-operative</p> <p>4 "Measuring with the Human Body", WIAB
(Women Into Architecture and Building),
affiliated with Matrix Feminist Design
Co-operative, 1992</p> <p>5 Matrix Feminist Design Co-operative
Cartoon by Louis Hellman, 1975</p> | <p>6 Courtesy Louis Hellman / RIBA Collections
Matrix Feminist Design Co-operative
<i>A Job Designing Buildings</i>, leaflet, 1986</p> <p>7 Matrix Feminist Design Co-operative
<i>A is for Architect</i>, 1980s
Cartoon by Janis Goodman</p> <p>8 "How to read plans and sections", WIAB,
affiliated with Matrix Feminist Design
Co-operative</p> <p>9 Matrix Feminist Design Co-operative
"Women's Design Co-operative",
by Susan Francis</p> <p>10 WEB, Issue 9
Women & the Built Environment:
<i>Good Practice</i></p> |
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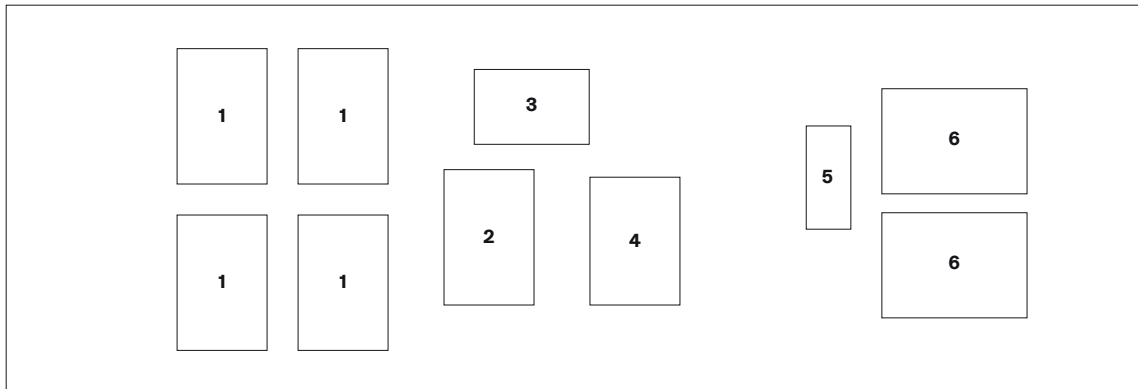
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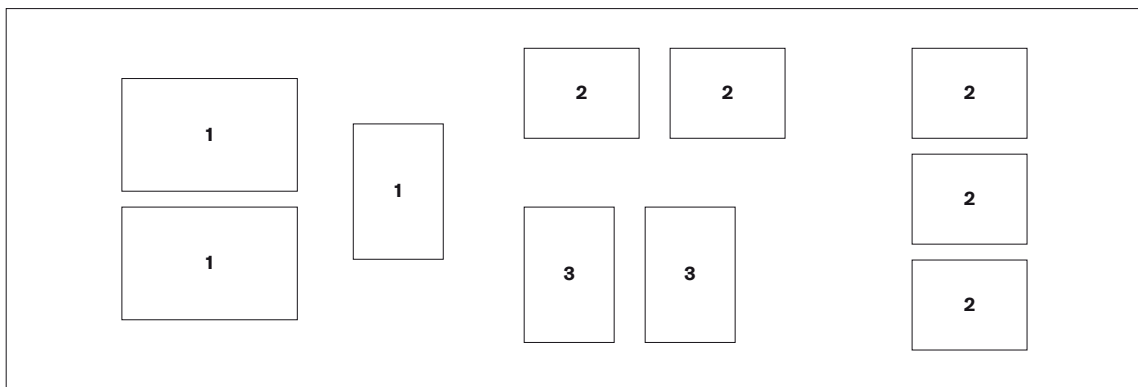
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| <p>1 Matrix Feminist Design Co-operative Information leaflet on services</p> <p>2 Matrix Feminist Design Co-operative Principles on collective working</p> <p>3 Matrix Feminist Design Co-operative Demands made by women at a day conference on "Women in Architectural Education", November 12th 1983</p> | <p>4 Matrix Feminist Design Co-operative Job Description for a Feminist Architectural Worker</p> <p>5 Matrix Feminist Design Co-operative Matrix's Equal Opportunity Policy</p> <p>6 Matrix Feminist Design Co-operative Group portraits</p> | <p>7 Matrix Feminist Design Co-operative <i>Architecture</i>, by Jos Boys</p> <p>8 Matrix Feminist Design Co-operative Developing a Brief</p> <p>9 Matrix Feminist Design Co-operative Working with the client group on the Calthorpe community</p> |
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| <p>1 Matrix Feminist Design Co-operative Jagonari Women's Centre, Whitechapel, London, 1984-87 Information Leaflet</p> <p>2 Matrix Feminist Design Co-operative Jagonari Women's Centre, Whitechapel, London, 1984-87 Demountable model</p> | <p>3 Matrix Feminist Design Co-operative Jagonari Women's Centre, Whitechapel, London, 1984-87 Brick picnic to pick building materials</p> <p>4 Matrix Feminist Design Co-operative Jagonari Women's Centre, Whitechapel, London, 1984-87</p> | <p>5 Matrix Feminist Design Co-operative Publication party invitation for the publication <i>Making Space: Women and the Man-Made Environment</i>, 1984</p> <p>6 Matrix Feminist Design Co-operative "Urban Obstacle Courses", photographs taken from the publication <i>Making Space: Women and the Man-Made Environment</i>, 1984</p> |
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| <p>1 Matrix Feminist Design Co-operative Jumoke Training Nursery, Southwark, London, 1986-88 Information leaflet</p> | <p>2 Matrix Feminist Design Co-operative & the GLC Women's committee <i>Building for Childcare: Making Better Buildings for the Under-5s</i>, 1986 Excerpt, for use by organisations getting new childcare facilities built</p> | <p>3 Matrix Feminist Design Co-operative <i>Everybody's different: Dalston Children's Centre</i> Educational children's book</p> |
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