

Chancellor Dharker,

As a deadline creeps closer, and the tension in the design studio rises, it's easy to start having doubts, to grow desperate for a solution that seems just out of reach. At times like these, there's a need for a person who can listen, look from another angle, and suggest a new approach. This speech honours the architect Anne Thorne, who was already this person when she studied here at Newcastle in the 1970s and remained so as a founding member of the Matrix Feminist Design Co-operative, and now as a partner at Anne Thorne Architects.

Across her career, Anne has developed innovative collaborative working practices and helped to create buildings whose eco-friendly materials and thoughtful designs have been nothing short of pioneering. Her friend and ally, Fran Bradshaw, told me of Anne's ability to think what hasn't been thought and told me too of how Anne's thinking runs through all the work of Matrix, including its newly reissued publication, *Making Space*. It is Anne that we see struggling up some stairs with a pram on the cover of this book, and it is her incomplete, first-person draft chapter entitled 'A Day in the Space Of' that Newcastle's Katie Lloyd Thomas quotes in the foreword:

We enter the bathroom I switch on the light which automatically starts up the internal bathroom fan internal bathroom 2 air changes per minute baby's still moaning and wriggling. I can feel a warm ooziess creeping smellily up the back of her baby-gro.

Thanks to Anne's words, we see domestic space through the eyes of a woman and an architect. And we realize how this domestic space is not well designed for the needs of those who live there.

In 1982, a group of Bangladeshi women proposed an educational resource centre in Whitechapel. Matrix won the commission, and Anne was the project manager, making sure that what became the Jagonari Women's Centre met its users' needs. The design process was deeply collaborative, breaking down technical and cultural barriers with things like a 'brick picnic' to inform the choice of brick, a demountable model to bring the plans to life, and a design for protective window grills inspired by Islamic geometric patterning. When the centre opened in 1987, it incorporated accessibility features not mandated until the Disability Discrimination Act of 1995, and it can even claim to be one of the first buildings in London designed by women, for women.

Matrix's work on Jagonari exemplified its vision for a process-oriented, inclusive, self-reflexive design practice. Anne Thorne Architects has continued in this vein. At the turn of the millennium, they were asked by, what is now London Metropolitan University, to investigate why so few students were using a new library on Commercial Road. That investigation identified the maze of subways in this area of Aldgate as a major issue, and the practice planned a redevelopment of the entirety of the 28-exit network. They coordinated a steering group that included everyone from university staff and students to the Metropolitan Police and Transport for London. They held a conference in the shopping centre at the middle of the subways. They showed a computer simulation of the area to local organisations. And Anne, Fran, and others conducted interviews with local businesses, the homeless, and other users of the tunnels. The finished redevelopment incorporates new signage and community-produced artworks to give different areas a distinctive character: in one subway, red and orange patterns, words and images dance across glowing pink and yellow panels. Those who walk there are no longer lost in the dark. This project has since formed the basis for a workshop taken by students here at Newcastle, learning themselves about how to manage complex redevelopment projects with many different stakeholders.

When Anne and Fran were students at Newcastle, staff were beginning to teach the principles of sustainable design. Now our School of Architecture, in its centenary year, offers a whole module on construction and energy efficiency, covering such things as the PassivHaus low energy usage standard. Many Anne Thorne Architects' projects might illustrate such teaching. There are the Retrofit for the Future schemes at Hawthorn Road and St Luke's in London; 1 Meeting House Lane in York (shortlisted for a PassivHaus award); a straw bale house in Norfolk; and the Cannock Mill Co-Housing in Colchester. At Cannock Mill the paints were ecologically safe, and never smelt; no MDF, with its formaldehyde glue, was used; and the units have been designed to conform to Lifetime Home Standards.

These are buildings that meet the needs of the present and the future. These are buildings that bring together big, important ideas and practical solutions. They are also buildings whose paint, whose straw, whose glowing panels, window grills, and bricks ultimately fulfil what William Morris once called the 'great office of decoration': 'To give people pleasure in the things they must perforce use'. One hundred and twenty-seven years after Morris stepped down as Master of the Art Workers' Guild, Anne took up that position, and brought to it what she brings to all her work: her skill, her insight, her determination, and her love of craft and making.

Chancellor Dharker, for her contribution to an architecture that is human and humane, I present to you Anne Thorne as a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Civil Law, *honoris causa*.

*Citation by James Harriman-Smith, Public Orator*

*14<sup>th</sup> July 2022*