

# Denise Scott Brown and Zaha Hadid

## Peripheries and centers<sup>1</sup>

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Denise Scott Brown and Zaha Hadid are two of the most celebrated architects of the last half century. They would not immediately appear to have much in common besides being among the few women to have achieved that status. Scott Brown is one of the most important theorists of postmodern architecture. She is best known for her advocacy of what she and Robert Venturi term decorated sheds, rather than ducks, and for her championing of the “ugly and ordinary.”<sup>2</sup> Nearly two decades Scott Brown’s junior, Hadid first achieved fame as an apostle of deconstructivism.<sup>3</sup> More recently her parametric approach has resulted in something like the revival of the late modernist duck, albeit in ways that have only been buildable since the onset of digital design, which Hadid consistently pushed to new limits.<sup>4</sup>

Biography is out of fashion as a means of writing architectural history, but when it comes to understanding how some women are able to be influential in the teeth of discrimination, and even harassment, it can still be a useful tool. Among the many things Scott Brown and Hadid shared were privileged upbringings on the fringes of the British Empire, educations that included the Architectural Association in London, careers initially defined more by teaching than by building, temperaments that, as Scott Brown notes

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<sup>2</sup> Venturi/Scott Brown/Izenour (1972).

<sup>3</sup> Johnson/Wigley (1988), 68–79.

<sup>4</sup> Schumacher (2016).

are “called difficult in women and assertive in men,” and belated recognition as crucial role models. They also exploited, although very differently, the way in which their *habitus*, to use Pierre Bourdieu’s term for the social conditioning common across a group, as women raised to believe that architecture and design were appropriate domains for women equipped them to cut across the grain of modernist theory and understand how architecture could be used to construct identity.<sup>5</sup>

A number of the twentieth century’s most celebrated architects, including Erich Mendelsohn and Louis Kahn, came from very modest, even impoverished backgrounds.<sup>6</sup> Such origins posed obstacles that they were able to overcome at the cost of the educational and professional prospects of their sisters. Until very recently, however, almost all women architects were raised in comfortable circumstances. Exploring their family backgrounds, including the patronage of architecture, oppositional political stances and locations on the supposed periphery in which modernism actually flourished helps to explain the attitudes Scott Brown and Hadid brought with them to the Architectural Association, at which they arrived in their early twenties.

The two women came from well-off families who were on the move. Scott Brown was born Denise Lakofski in Nkana, a copper mining town in what was then Northern Rhodesia and is today Zambia. Located close to the border with the former Belgian Congo, today the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nkana is now part of the city of Kitwe, itself founded only in 1936 after the Lakofskis had decamped to Johannesburg, in part because of worries about young Denise’s health. Her parents came from modest backgrounds in what is now South Africa and Zimbabwe to which their German-speaking parents had moved from what had been the Duchy of Courland in Czarist Russia and is now Latvia.<sup>7</sup> Hadid’s family were originally from Mosul and moved to Baghdad only after it became the capital of Iraq, a country formed after World War I from three former Ottoman provinces.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Bourdieu (1977).

<sup>6</sup> Morgenthaler (1999), 10; Lesser (2017), 48–59.

<sup>7</sup> “Oral history interview with Denise Scott Brown, 1990 October 25—1991 November 9,” Archives of American Art, <https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-denise-scott-brown-13059#transcript>, accessed on May 20, 2018.

<sup>8</sup> Hadid (2014), 42.

The badges of family prosperity and progressive politics included the houses in which the two future architects grew up. Scott Brown's mother Phyllis Lakofski commissioned a house from Norman Hanson, her former classmate at the architecture school at the University of Witwatersrand, the program in which her daughter would later enroll.<sup>9</sup> Here the Lakofskis welcomed a wide variety of intellectuals, as well as fellow Jews fleeing even more terrifying persecution than the pogroms that had prompted their own parents to leave Europe. Phyllis Lakofski had not completed her degree because she ran out of money. Hers was one of the first houses in sub-Saharan Africa to display the obvious influence of Le Corbusier and Walter Gropius (Gropius's own house in Lincoln, Massachusetts, was designed only after the Lakofski house was completed).<sup>10</sup> Its architect had been to Europe where he had seen their work for himself. One of the most respected South African architects of his generation, he eventually left the country to teach at the University of Manchester, where Scott Brown later visited him.<sup>11</sup>

Scott Brown grew up assuming that architecture was an appropriate field for women, and she was familiar with cutting-edge design. She said of the house in a 1990 interview:

I don't have the sentimental memories of the attic and the steps up to the attic, and the oak paneling. What I have is strip windows, which have walls that don't come quite up to the window, and there's a little piece between that you can peep through and listen through. I have mild steel columns that are piloti, that you can climb up, and a fantastic deck, which came out like a deck of a ship, with a spiral stair coming down to the ground floor, where I could play ships. And we could climb up on the roof and play on the garage roof and play ...<sup>12</sup>

The house in which Hadid grew up had in the 1930s been as much of a show-piece of modern architecture in Baghdad as the Lakofski house was in Johan-

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<sup>9</sup> Venturi/Scott Brown (2004), 106; Herbert (1975), 136.

<sup>10</sup> Murphy (2011), 308-29.

<sup>11</sup> Norman Leonard Hanson, Artefacts, <https://www.artefacts.co.za/main/Buildings/archframes.php?archid=691>, accessed on April 13, 2018.

<sup>12</sup> "Oral history interview with Denise Scott Brown, 1990 October 25—1991 November 9".

nesburg.<sup>13</sup> Although Badri Qadah's work, which included a house for Kamil Chadirji, one of Hadid's closest political associates and the father of Rifat Chadirji, the most important Baghdad-based architect of the next generation and a friend of Scott Brown and Venturi's, was arguably more Art Deco than International Style, it is representative of the popularity that a clear break with the past had with progressively minded elites across the Middle East, Asia, and indeed also Latin America already in the 1930s.<sup>14</sup>

Hadid's father was representative of this group. His mother and his wife came from the two of Ottoman-era Mosul's wealthiest and most powerful families. Educated at the London School of Economics, where he was attracted to Fabian Socialism, Mohammed Hadid was for many years a leading political figure in Iraq and participated as Finance Minister in the government that assumed power after a bloody coup in 1958.<sup>15</sup>

For Zaha Hadid, architecture was both an appropriate profession for women and a means of expressing modernity. In an interview, she remembered that in Iraq there had been many women architects and the impact upon her when she was six of watching the architect of a house her aunt was building in Mosul present drawings and models of it.<sup>16</sup> She also recalled:

I used to draw a lot. And my father knew many architects, they used to come and visit us. If you think back, there was incredible development and new ideas in the Sixties – it was when they built Brasilia. And there was another issue too – in South America and the Middle East, architecture began to represent a new era, a new level of independence, and move away from colonialism to modernity. We had Gropius building the university campus – there was a lot going on.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Chadriji (1991), 510. I thank Amin Alsaden for his help in locating information about it and explaining its Iraqi context to me.

<sup>14</sup> More work needs to be done on the importance of upper middle class and elite patronage to the dissemination of modern architecture internationally and especially in the Global South. See, for instance, Akcan (2012), and Oshima (2010).

<sup>15</sup> Hadid (2014).

<sup>16</sup> Qureshi (2018).

<sup>17</sup> Barber (2008).

The university was officially the work of The Architects Collaborative, two of whose eight founding partners were women.<sup>18</sup>

Scott Brown and Hadid were born far from the cities in Europe and the United States in which modernism was forged, but Johannesburg and Baghdad were also places where historical and historicist buildings were not as important as they were in most of Europe. Johannesburg was established in Scott Brown's words as "a fast-growing, highly segregated, gold mining center" only half a century before her family moved there.<sup>19</sup> Hadid's hometown, Baghdad, was a much older city, but its population roughly quadruped in the two decades following her birth in 1950.<sup>20</sup> Both architects in consequence approached modernism in ways that were very different from those of Europeans who associated it, not necessarily accurately, with socialist politics between the wars and reconstruction afterwards. Although neither Scott Brown nor Hadid had access growing up to buildings as skilled and subtle as the best recent work of the starchitects of the day, they experienced modernism as the backdrop to daily life.

Moreover, their privileged social positions were supported by the presence of servants, meaning that even as children, they grew up accustomed to commanding others. Furthermore, from an early age they must have been acutely aware of cultural and political difference. Although Scott Brown is Jewish and Hadid Muslim, they attended academically rigorous and socially prestigious private schools, Anglican in Scott Brown's case and Catholic in Hadid's, although Scott Brown remembers that a Jewish teacher gave lessons on the modern history of Judaism, and that she herself prompted the school to invite a Muslim scholar to address the students. Mohammed Hadid was usually in opposition to governments he regarded as insufficiently independent of British influence, while the Lakofskis, like many South African Jews, did not support the 1948 apartheid law.<sup>21</sup>

These experiences informed the positions the two women took as architects. Increasing attention is now being paid, for instance, to the South African roots of Scott Brown's predilection for Pop, which signifi-

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<sup>18</sup> Kubo (2013).

<sup>19</sup> Beavon (2005).

<sup>20</sup> "Population estimates for Baghdad, 1950-2015," [https://books.mongabay.com/population\\_estimates/full/Baghdad-Iraq.html](https://books.mongabay.com/population_estimates/full/Baghdad-Iraq.html), accessed on May 20, 2018.

<sup>21</sup> McGetrick (2012).

cantly preceded her exposure to the Independent Group once she arrived in London. She has written of her youth, “Our racial conflicts degraded and dishonored us all . . . But the clash had another dimension. For me African folk artists’ adaptations of Johannesburg far outstrip European artists’ interpretations of Africa, interesting though these are. ‘Debased’ African folk-pop was an inspiration for our study of roadside America.”<sup>22</sup> The Africa that she experienced while growing up, documented in contemporary photographs by Constance Stuart Larrabee, was far removed from the African architecture fawned over in the 1950s and sixties by Aldo van Eyck and Bernard Rudofsky.<sup>23</sup> The two European men turned to African and other so-called primitive cultures for a supposed authenticity that they believed the industrial revolution, and very specifically its commercialism rather than its industry and engineering, had destroyed. Scott Brown, on the other hand, believed in the modernity of black Africans, and understood that they had the same right to fashionable clothes and to urban space as she did. Having accepted this for them, she could also allow, with help, she acknowledges from the American urban sociologist Herbert J. Gans, that working and middle class Americans, whether or not their taste agreed with her own, should not be dismissed out of hand with the air of cultured superiority that characterized, for instance, Peter Blake’s book *God’s Own Junkyard: The Planned Deterioration of the American Landscape*, published in 1964, at just the time that she was applying her interest in popular culture to Las Vegas.<sup>24</sup> Scott Brown’s experiences growing up in an increasingly racially divided society left her with a respect for the tastes of working and lower middle-class people, which was unusual at a time when advocates of modern architecture tended to espouse it as the expression of the power of the masses, but used it to define their own cultural sophistication.

Scott Brown arrived at the Architectural Association on Bedford Square in 1952; Hadid exactly twenty years later. It is not clear whether either knew at the time that the surrounds of the doors they entered for the next phase of their education had been manufactured by Britain’s most successful eight-

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<sup>22</sup> Scott Brown (2011), 10.

<sup>23</sup> Larrabee in collaboration with Paton (1985); McCarter (1985), 120–21; Rudofsky (1964).

<sup>24</sup> Blake (1964); see also Stierli (2013), 219–23.

teenth-century businesswoman, Eleanor Coade.<sup>25</sup> No matter. Here they acquired some of the tools they needed to become among the most influential architects of their time.

Growing up in and around innovative houses, including some commissioned by female relatives, was certainly empowering, but so was having the means to travel. Scott Brown made her first family visit to Europe as a toddler; Hadid attended boarding schools in England and Switzerland and earned her undergraduate degree from the American University in Beirut. Mobility is too often overlooked as a crucial factor in the careers of successful women artists and architects. In a famous essay written nearly half a century ago, the late Linda Nochlin answered the question, “Why have there been no great women artists?” by pointing to the impossibility of respectable women studying the nude figure, but the ability to travel has been at least of equal importance.<sup>26</sup> Scott Brown and Hadid, scions of families with strong international networks, were thus from a very young age able to go abroad, at first with family, but eventually also unaccompanied. The strong sense of independence that followed directly from their zest for exploration remained with them for life.

Moving from South Africa to London to Philadelphia in Scott Brown’s case and from Baghdad to London in Hadid’s took them to the places that fostered the theoretical discourse about the architecture they had grown up with at home. It also wrenches them away from the gendered conventions of the cultures into which they were born, while leaving them relatively independent of those of their adopted homelands, in which they remained slightly alien. And it left them unusually adept at working in cultural contexts outside of those typical for the architects who had trained beside them in London and, in Scott-Brown’s case, also in Philadelphia.

In London Scott Brown was joined in 1954 by her former South African classmate, Robert Scott Brown, who became her first husband. In 1958, after traveling and working in Europe, and briefly returning to South Africa, the couple went to the United States, where they enrolled at the University of Pennsylvania. Widowed after his death in a car crash, she completed a master’s degree in urban planning and another in architecture. In 1960 she began to teach, holding a joint appointment at Penn in architecture and planning.

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<sup>25</sup> Kelly (1985), 71–101.

<sup>26</sup> Nohlin (1988), 147–58.

In 1965, she headed west to Berkeley, just as the free speech movement was reaching its height, and UCLA. Along the way she stopped at Las Vegas, which her parents had already enjoyed visiting, as her father loved theme parks.<sup>27</sup> The following year she invited her former colleague Robert Venturi to Los Angeles to be a guest critic at her studio jury and took him as well to Las Vegas, to which she had already returned twice. In 1967 the pair married, and Scott Brown returned to Philadelphia to join his practice. Her professional breakthrough came in 1972, with the publication of *Learning from Las Vegas*, based on a studio they had team-taught at Yale. In addition to displaying her fascination with the “ugly and ordinary,” the book also bore the clear imprint of her writing skills.

While most of the other American architects to whom the postmodernist label is frequently assigned eschewed social engagement, Scott Brown has always insisted not only on understanding the way in which architecture conveys meaning but also acknowledged and respected the social context in which this happens. Her sensitivity to race also manifested itself in her “joining with,” as she puts it “and advocating for low-income communities put at risk by Philadelphia’s plan to build an expressway on South Street.” It would have created a barrier between black neighborhoods to the south and the more prosperous, largely white city to the north.<sup>28</sup> Her close observation of the recent American vernaculars can also be seen in her firm’s 1976 exhibition *Signs of Life: Symbols in the American City* at Washington’s Renwick Gallery, on which she collaborated with Robert Venturi and Steven Izenour, who served as the exhibit designer. (Figure 1) The labels argued that “people are more interested in representing their ideals and aspirations through architecture than they are in noticing how well a building expresses its structure and function.”<sup>29</sup> This argument was buttressed by thoughtful analyses of what the critic Ada Louise Huxtable in a rave review published in the *New York Times* termed “a revealing picture of today’s aesthetic standards that has everything to do with what is, and little to do with what anyone thinks should be.”<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> “Oral history interview with Denise Scott Brown, 1990 October 25—1991 November 9”, “Interview with Denise Scott Brown and Robert Venturi: Is and Ought” (2008).

<sup>28</sup> Haumann (2009), 35–48.

<sup>29</sup> Huxtable (1976), 84.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*



Figure 1: *Signs of Life: Symbols of the American City*, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour, Renwick Gallery, Washington, 1976.  
Source: Courtesy of Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates, Inc.

Scott Brown built her career around her ability to take the ordinary seriously and to decode the messages it communicated to those far removed from architecture culture. Some of the skills this required undoubtedly came from being an outsider who did not take row-houses like the ones that clustered near South Street nor the ways in which their interiors were decorated for granted (these houses were as likely to be inhabited by African-American as Polish or Italian-American families). It also indicated an almost uncanny ability to understand how women without either her highly tuned sense of irony or her top-drawer professional training used their culturally sanctioned role in choosing their families' interior decor. Scott Brown acknowledged that they furnished their homes to say something about who they were and what they valued. In taking their choices seriously, she accorded them real respect. This was an unusual position for an American architect in the 1970s, when the specter of the so-called silent majority's support for the Vietnam War still hung over the American left, but this did not deter Scott Brown. The sympathetic Huxtable concluded "This is the kind of show that changes the way you look at the world", but most of the architectural profession, including others who would be termed postmodernists, remained appalled.<sup>31</sup>

In 1976 the connection between this position and female experience went unarticulated except in Huxtable's review, which noted the relationship between the most genteel of the exhibited interiors and the pages of *House Beautiful*. Edited by a series of influential women, including Ethel Power (the partner of pioneering American architect Eleanor Raymond), and Elizabeth

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

Gordon (who famously backed Edith Farnsworth over Ludwig Mies van der Rohe in their conflict about the suitability and functionality of his house for her), for most of the period 1913 to 1969, although less consistently since, this is one of the many magazines that targets women as consumers of interior design as much as architecture.<sup>32</sup> Although, as Gordon's Cold War-infused condemnation of Mies made clear, the shelter press seldom backed cutting edge design, it has, in addition to employing female editors and journalists, encouraged middle class women around the world to view themselves as knowledgeable about an area in which they were often able to assert considerable agency in their own lives.<sup>33</sup>

After the publication of *Learning from Las Vegas* established her as one of the most original and influential architectural theorists in the English-speaking world (it would take time for the book to have a significant readership elsewhere), Scott Brown struggled to achieve similar recognition for her design work.<sup>34</sup> She notes that "though their shared creativity had been beneficial in mutual ways, her husband received most of the credit for their contributions, and she received almost none." Her name appeared in that of the firm only in 1980. In 1989 she published her famous essay "Room at the Top? Sexism and the Star System in Architecture" in which she detailed the degree to which her husband had received credit for her contributions and the other outright sexism she had faced.<sup>35</sup> This made her a feminist icon, a status that was only enhanced when after Venturi won the Pritzker prize in 1991 she declined to attend the awards ceremony, and again two decades later when a grassroots campaign failed to get her the Pritzker but did result in changes to the American Institute of Architects Gold Medal that resulted in their receiving the award jointly in 2016.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Penick (2017); See also: Corbett (2010); Friedman (1997), 140–41 and Gruskin (2003), 146–62.

<sup>33</sup> I strongly believe that these women editors often had real agency that the architecture profession sought to ignore and/or undermine. See: James-Chakraborty (2019), 465–80.

<sup>34</sup> It appeared in German in 1979 as *Lernen von Las Vegas: Zur Ikonographie und Architektursymbolik der Geschäftsstadt* (Berlin: Bauwelt), but in French as *L'enseignement de Las Vegas ou le symbolisme oublié de la forme architecturale* (Bruxelles: P. Mardaga) in 1987 and in Spanish as *Aprendiendo de Las Vegas: El simbolismo olvidado de la forma arquitectónica* (Barcelona: Gustavo Gil) only in 1998.

<sup>35</sup> Scott Brown (1989), 237–46.

<sup>36</sup> Etherington (2013); "2016 AIA Gold Medal awarded to Denise Scott Brown & Robert Venturi" (2015).

Fame, if not opportunities to build, came more quickly to Hadid. After working briefly for Rem Koolhaas, she established her own practice in 1979, when she was only thirty, more than a decade younger than Scott Brown had been when *Learning from Las Vegas* was published.<sup>37</sup> Hadid's victory in the Hong Kong Peak competition three years later quickly established her as among the world's most formidable and original design talents.<sup>38</sup> It would take more than another decade, however, before she completed a building, the Vitra Fire Station in Weil-am-Rhein, here in Germany.<sup>39</sup> Throughout the 1980s and well into the 1990s, she relied upon teaching and lecture gigs in order to support herself and her fledgling practice.<sup>40</sup>

When success came, she found it abroad. The sad saga of the Cardiff Bay Opera House competition, which began in 1994, demonstrates the hostility that Hadid faced in Britain. Nearly twenty years after she won the first of three rounds (she triumphed in the second and third as well) she was not sure whether what she termed the "resistance and prejudice" she had faced had been because she was a woman or because she was a foreigner.<sup>41</sup> She had no major work in Britain until the Glasgow Museum of Transport opened in 2011 and in England until the completion of the Aquatics Center for the London Olympics the following year.<sup>42</sup>

Scott Brown and Hadid faced similar hostility, exacerbated in Hadid's case undoubtedly by the fact that she was an Arab Muslim (long after she obtained British citizenship, newspapers there typically described her as Iraqi), but they addressed them from very different personal situations.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Kimmelman (2016) and <http://www.zaha-hadid.com/people/zaha-hadid/>, accessed on May 20, 2018, which gives 1979 as the date that she established the practice, although most published sources state it was 1980.

<sup>38</sup> Johnson /Wigley (1988), 68–79. See also <http://www.zaha-hadid.com/architecture/the-peak-leisure-club/>, accessed on May 22, 2018.

<sup>39</sup> Márquez Cecilia/Levene/Hadid (2004), 250–61. See also <http://www.zaha-hadid.com/architecture/vitra-fire-station-2/>, accessed on May 22, 2018.

<sup>40</sup> Barber (2008).

<sup>41</sup> Rowland (2013).

<sup>42</sup> For a discussion of local press coverage of the Transport Museum see James-Chakraborty (2018a), 397–405.

<sup>43</sup> For instance, "Z marks the spot for Transport Museum's journey into the future/Glasgow chooses gravity-defying design by Iraqi architect" (2004), and "Work on new £74m transport museum set to begin within weeks" (2007).

Scott Brown both benefited and suffered from being married to one of the most heralded and scorned architects of her generation.<sup>44</sup> Across the twentieth century and into the twenty-first most successful female architects have been married to their professional partners.<sup>45</sup> Hadid, however, remained single, and for all public purposes, unattached. Lacking a man at the helm to reassure nervous clients, she was slow to build, despite being one of the most talked about architects in the profession. Once she finally did begin to receive major commissions, however, her single status played in her favor, leaving her in control of her own image, even after her practice expanded to a scale in which she was no longer responsible for the details of each and every project. Her office eventually far surpassed Venturi Scott Brown in size, but, despite the key role that Patrik Schumacher played in it, it was far less openly collaborative.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, being childless enabled her to be constantly on the move. Scott Brown, by contrast, was for a long time more tethered to Philadelphia, where in the 1970s and eighties she had a son to help raise.<sup>47</sup>

Denied substantive commissions in Britain, Hadid depended in the first decade of this century for work upon three quite different constituencies outside it. All were for “people [who] are more interested in representing their ideals and aspirations through architecture than they are in noticing how well a building expresses its structure and function,” to repeat Scott Brown, although these ideals and aspirations were now more typically conditioned by attentiveness to public relations and corporate identity than Scott Brown could have foreseen when she addressed American domesticity in 1976. The first included European clients in search of imaginative visions of the new. Companies like Volkswagen, whose Auto-

<sup>44</sup> A measure of the low regard in which Venturi was held by many of his American peers is that fact that he was elected a fellow of the American Institute of Architects only in 1978, by which point he was already one of the most influential members of the organization. The American Institute of Architects: College of Fellows History & Directory (2017), 396. Scott Brown shared in the receipt of the 2016 Gold Medal without ever having been elected to fellowship.

<sup>45</sup> Searing (1998).

<sup>46</sup> Schumacher quickly, however, attracted considerable public attention almost immediately after Hadid's death. See for instance, Renn (2018). And for the size of her office, which in 2018 was still the third biggest in the United Kingdom, see Douglas (2018).

<sup>47</sup> “Oral history interview with Denise Scott Brown, 1990 October 25-1991 November 9”.

stadt and original factory, the Phaeno, her science museum in Wolfsburg, Germany, faces, and BMW, for which she built an administration building in Leipzig as well as the founders of the MAXXI, a national museum of contemporary art in Rome, turned to Hadid, much as Vitra already had, to advertise their ability to stay atop art and design trends.<sup>48</sup> This happened at precisely the time when Muslim culture, and particularly its supposed treatment of women, was being widely disparaged in Germany as part of the discussion of *Leitkultur*.<sup>49</sup> Hiring Hadid was not necessarily an expression of support for multiculturalism, but it did have the added benefit of bestowing an air of cosmopolitanism upon clients seeking global recognition.

A second group were attracted to Hadid specifically because, as an Arab woman, she understood the desire of wealthy Middle Eastern and Chinese clients for landmarks that communicated newly achieved modernity at home and abroad. She proved extremely effective at working across cultures, but there were also cases when Muslims clearly cherished bestowing opportunities on one of their own. Furthermore, she understood what they wanted. For instance, on the office website, the Sheik Zayed Bridge is described as being “intended to serve as a catalyst for further growth in Abu Dhabi,” while of the Heydar Aliyev Centre it says, “The Center, designed to become the primary building for the nation’s cultural programs, breaks from the rigid and often monumental Soviet architecture that is so prevalent in Baku, aspiring instead to express the sensibilities of Azeri culture and the optimism of a nation that looks to the future.”<sup>50</sup> Such marketing language masks the conditions of production of these buildings, with allegations of human trafficking and other human rights abuses surrounding the construction industry in both cities.<sup>51</sup>

48 For an expanded version of this discussion see James-Chakraborty (2018b), 231–34.

49 For an introduction to German-Turkish issues at the time see Göktürk/Gramling/Kaes (eds.) (2007).

50 <http://www.zaha-hadid.com/architecture/sheikh-zayed-bridge/> and <http://www.zaha-hadid.com/2013/11/14/heydar-aliyev-center-baku-azerbaijan/>, accessed on May 22, 2018.

51 Wainwright (2014); Ray (2015).



*Figure 2: Zaha Hadid in Heydar Aliyev Cultural Center in Baku, November 2013.*

*Source: Photograph by Dmitry Ternovoy, courtesy of Wikipedia Commons at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Zaha\\_Hadid\\_in\\_Heydar\\_Aliyev\\_Cultural\\_center\\_in\\_Baku\\_nov\\_2013.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Zaha_Hadid_in_Heydar_Aliyev_Cultural_center_in_Baku_nov_2013.jpg).*



*Figure 3: Denise Scott Brown at home, 1978. Source: © Lynn Gilbert, courtesy of Wikipedia Commons at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Denise\\_Scott\\_Brown#/media/File:Denise\\_Scott\\_Brown\\_1978\\_%20Lynn\\_Gilbert.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Denise_Scott_Brown#/media/File:Denise_Scott_Brown_1978_%20Lynn_Gilbert.jpg).*

The final constituency was the fashion industry. Piers Gough, a juror on the committee that awarded the Hedar Aliyev Center the Design of the Year from London's Design Museum, described it as being "as pure and sexy as Marilyn's blown skirt."<sup>52</sup> This is clearly sexist, but in the final years of her career, Hadid willingly exploited the relationship between fashion and architecture, so often used to trivialize women's accomplishments, to her advantage. It helped that she epitomized the star system that Scott Brown scorned. Often described as a diva, a term, of course that is never applied to men, Hadid also garnered attention in ways that were uniquely available to her as a woman, without ever appearing sexual or submissive. Fashion became a means to both build her own brand and to get work.<sup>53</sup> Posing for fashion shoots, being profiled in women's magazines, designing shoes, and working with companies such as Chanel and Louis Vuitton helped offset the blatant sexism that characterized much of the writing and gossip about her.<sup>54</sup>

Hadid's effectiveness as a fashion icon was enhanced by the fact that she clearly enjoyed clothes. Although she favored skirts and tunics over leggings, very few of her outfits were in any way feminine or conventionally revealing. Instead they often appeared to operate as shields, celebrating her engagement with avant-garde design while floating relatively free of her actual body.<sup>55</sup> (Figure 2) They thus announced her talent while denying her availability. In comparison Scott Brown was often self-consciously ordinary, even slightly prim. (Figure 3)

Fashion matters, not because these women's achievements should or indeed can be reduced to the clothes that they wore, but because women schooled to make decisions about self-presentation through dress have also often made decisions about the appearance of interiors and gardens, about what kind of house to buy or build, about the buildings—including public libraries, hospitals, schools, and churches—where their participation has long

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52 Wainwright (2014).

53 McKenzie (2014).

54 For her pavilion for Chanel see <http://www.zaha-hadid.com/architecture/chanel-art-pavilion/>, accessed on May 30, 2018. For a selection of her handbag and shoe designs see Périer (2017).

55 See, for instance, the photograph of her published in Andrew Wilshere and Zahra Hankir, "9 Reasons We Love Zaha Hadid – Introducing the UX Academy Hadid Cohort", <https://trydesignlab.com/blog/9-reasons-we-love-zaha-hadid-ux-academy/>, accessed on February 18, 2021.

been sanctioned, and in other less gender constrained circumstances as well, as in the case of what was originally South America's tallest building.<sup>56</sup> While these possibilities have always been inscribed by class, they are real even if too many historians, like the male architects whose careers they validate, have been reluctant to assign agency to women who were wielded real authority.

Scott Brown and Hadid grew up in families where modernism was simultaneously an expression of social and economic status and of progressive politics. From societies in which class trumped gender, they further expanded their horizons by building careers abroad. Their self-consciousness about the way in which consumerism encouraged many women of their own and previous generations to construct identities through dress and design assisted them in carving out spaces for personal emancipation through creative expression. The challenge before us as historians is to recover the contributions many less celebrated women, including Scott Brown's mother and Hadid's aunt, have long made to architectural culture. As people, however, it is to empower those who lack the privilege required to launch Scott Brown and Hadid and to build the relationship between architecture and substantive political change they shrewdly realized had been much exaggerated.

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<sup>56</sup> The Edificio Kavanagh in Buenos Aires completed in 1936. See Carranza/Lara (2015), 55, 83.

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