Introduction

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The exhibition *Frau Architekt. Over 100 years of women in architecture* (29.09.2017–08.03.2018) at the Deutsches Architekturmuseum (DAM) Frankfurt-am-Main recounted the history of 20th century architecture from the perspective of women architects, focusing on their past and present, their contributions to architecture, the reality of their lives and their struggle for existence and giving a face and a voice to these previously "invisible" designers. The exhibition was one of DAM's most successful in recent years, not only because it was "long overdue," as was evident from visitor comments, but also because architecture stands *pars pro toto* for the struggles that women still have to negotiate in male domains. Fortunately, this attracted visitors who do not necessarily belong to the regular audience of an architecture museum.

To create an alternate account of modern architecture history in Germany, *Frau Architekt* presented the biographies and buildings of 22 women architects. A profound desire for personal emancipation is at the heart of these stories, although this striving had specific meaning for each protagonist and was particular to her context. As the sociologist, Ulla Bock, observes: "It follows that emancipation can gain a different face for each woman, a specific accentuation in each case, and for one and the same woman it can prove to be something different today than tomorrow."[1] *Frau Architekt* also revealed that the path to emancipation required an engagement with politics, or what the feminist writer and activist Kate Millett identifies as "power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another." [2] This includes women who willingly joined movements, embraced political platforms or participated in organized religion; those who found

1 Bock (1988), 85.

2 Millett (orig. 1968; 1980), 31–32.

themselves reacting to greater forces that were seemingly beyond their control; or those who benefitted from the seismic shifts in prevailing political, social and cultural norms as they pursued a career in architecture.

Yet the combination of female emancipation, a desire for architectural professionalism and an entanglement with the political currents that upended the long 20th century does not always lead to comfortable answers. On their way to the first-floor gallery in DAM where *Frau Architekt* was on display, visitors would have glimpsed a poster, hanging in the stairway, with a statement followed by the first names of 22 women. A striking graphic, it consists of words that are rendered in bold capital letters against a bright red background.[3] (Figure 1) At the top, the pronouncement, *Die Zukunft der Architektur* (The future of architecture) appears in black characters, followed by the first names of the women featured in *Frau Architekt*, printed in white. Roughly midway along the left margin, a black line is drawn through the center of "Gerdy," a gesture meant to distance it from this group. "Gerdy" is Gertrud Troost, an interior architect and designer who became Hitler's trusted confidant and wielded extraordinary influence during the Third Reich. The poster, ostensibly conceived to acknowledge women's achievement in architecture, could not possibly include such a figure under this pronouncement. Or should it? And if so, how? The degree to which her name should be revealed and/or obscured not only caused much debate among the curators and the graphic artist who created this image, but also pointed to the limits of all-encompassing assumptions when attempting collective biography.

This incident brings us to another issue concerning gender and the writing of history. Since the Second Women's Movement of the 1970s, much of women's history has focused on unearthing forgotten figures to serve as role models to bring about a more equitable future.[4] How is it possible, then, to include women in the historical record whose actions or political convictions are abhorrent? Or, as Despina Stratigakos asks about Gerdy Troost and other women who were actively involved in the Nazi cause, "could they be considered feminists in any sense?"[5]

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3 The designer, Bernd Kreutz, generously contributed the design of this poster, and also printed posters and postcards with this graphic for the exhibition.

4 Lerner (1993), 274.

5 Stratigakos (2016), 145, especially footnote 139 and the literature referenced there.

Figure 1: Poster Die Zukunft der Architektur (The future of architecture) (Design: B. Kreutz); Stairway at DAM (Deutsches Architekturmuseum), October 2017. Source: M. Pepchinski.

Indeed, the renewed turn towards "politics"—or rather "power structures"—also can be understood as a reflection of our turbulent times. Anyone who lived through late 1960s and early 1970s might be excused for feeling a sense of *déja vu*, as forces that champion long-held beliefs about the acceptable course of private and public life clash with those seeking to eliminate them or identify other ways of being in the world. Recent elections and referendums, from Brexit to the US elections of 2016 and 2020, exert impact well beyond the borders of the nations where their ballots were cast. Grass roots activism, including the Black Lives Matter protests; the Fridays for Future

demonstrations; the #MeToo movement; the Occupy protests for economic justice and many others, now inspire people to speak out and take action. And, as we complete this volume, the COVID-19 pandemic continues its rampage, forcing elected leaders to make wrenching decisions with far-reaching consequences about public health, while war in Ukraine is causing untold destruction and displacement.

In conjunction with *Frau Architekt*, an international conference, "Women Architects and Politics in the Long 20th Century," took place at DAM in January 2018. Speakers and moderators from Austria, Belgium, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Sweden, Switzerland and the USA explored the lives, careers and activism of women architects in relation to emancipation movements; hegemonic cultural and social norms; the dictates of organized religion; as well as contemporary institutional structures and professional practices. The great, overwhelmingly positive response to this event encouraged us to document the conference and to take stock of the current debate on gender equity in architecture. Several texts that were delivered at other events in conjunction with *Frau Architekt* or that were authored by colleagues who contributed to this project in various capacities were included too.

Chapters by Irene Nierhaus and Elke Krasny introduce themes that we hope will resonate with readers not only as they peruse these contributions but also when they pore over other texts about architecture. They pose the question: How do we critically engage with the inherited conceptual "power structures" that restrict, define and convey knowledge? Irene Nierhaus recalls her friendship with Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky, started years before the latter evolved into a feminist icon and the ultimate symbol of a committed political life. She argues for the enduring validity of memory drawn from personal experience to reflect upon the past and warns against the temptation to (over) interpret historical figures, which can skew and even obscure the true essence of their lives and legacy. Drawing upon the work of political theorists Joan C. Tronto and Maria Puig de la Bellacasa Fischer along with architecture historians Catherine M. Soussloff and Despina Stratigakos, Elke Krasny urges a "radical rethinking" of the practice of architecture, away from a knowledge-based endeavor fixated on individual accomplishment, novelty, the dictates of capital and systems of oppressive hierarchies, to one that holds dear the disvalued, "racialized and sexualized" labor of preserving and nurturing life, or "care" work, as a professional paradigm. By extension,

"care" work serves as a conscious, critical ideal for the committed, gendered architect. The notion of architecture as "care" also prompts us to reconsider the telling of (feminine) biography, possibly to abandon the strict division between the private tasks of nurturing (tending to a family or preserving the legacy of a teacher or partner) and the public activity of designing and building to accept all life-sustaining labor as an integrated and continuous condition.

Case studies in the following two sections explore how "power structures", such as class and religion, along with the experience of war, migration, exile and the socio-political landscape of post-war Europe, shaped the lives of women architects. For many of the women architects in this collection, it is not surprising that their perception of the world was profoundly bourgeois. The social status quo, male supremacy and patriarchy were not really questioned and equal treatment with male counterparts was hardly claimed. At the same time, the implicit acceptance of this gender hierarchy also excluded women from the historical record—and continues to do so.

In her chapter about the Zionist architect Gertrud Goldschmidt, Sigal Davidi shows that in Mandatory Palestine, which offered refuge to many architects who fled from Nazi Germany and gave women far more freedom of action than old Europe, the work of female designers was often attributed to male partners or colleagues. Furthermore, the Zionist movement envisioned a physically strong and robust "New Man" to offset the negative stereotype of the "weak" Jew but lacked a clear counterpart for a Zionist woman. As Sigal Davidi observes, a "New Woman" in this context "emerged independently of the Zionist utopia."[6] Edina Meyer-Maril describes the odyssey of another Jewish woman, Judith Stolzer-Segall. Unlike Goldschmidt, Stolzer-Segall was a staunch communist. She spent her youth and young adulthood in different cities in Eastern and Central Europe before going into exile in Mandatory Palestine in the 1930s. Along the way, she took advantage of various professional opportunities, often with remarkable success. After 1945, she returned to West Germany and received her long-sought German citizenship, yet her engagement with architecture abruptly ceased. It is as if the arduous years in flux were more vital and productive to her career than the attainment of her ultimate personal goal, namely a place that she iden-

6 Compare Sigal Davidi's chapter in this collection.

tified as "home." Was this lack of "roots," or the constant state of upheaval and dislocation, a requirement to sustain a desire for architectural practice?[7]

Turning to the period of National Socialism in Germany, Wolfgang Voigt recounts architectural education at the Technical University of Stuttgart under the architect Paul Schmitthenner during the final year of the Second World War. At that moment in time, women, foreigners and "war-disabled" male students were in the majority in many classrooms. Although Schmitthenner had joined the Nazi party, he eventually distanced himself from it for complex professional and personal reasons. A passionate educator whose status had been diminished, this period of crisis and the unusual composition of the student body presented him and his students with a brief opportunity to reinvent the deeply entrenched, power-based binary structures used to disseminate architectural knowledge. In a departure from the typical focus on women architects who hailed from the middle and upper classes, Karl Kiem explores the life of Princess Victoria zu Bentheim und Steinfurt, whose long life appears riddled with contradictions: A member of the German high aristocracy and a prolific architect, she was an early member of the Nazi party who successfully cleared her name after the war. Her class status kept her private life and professional endeavors isolated from the constraints of those "power-structured relationships" that her bourgeois counterparts could not easily escape.

Kerstin Renz recounts a journey undertaken by the young architects Maria-Verena Fischer and Dorothee Keuerleber to the USA in the early 1950s under the auspices of the Cultural Exchange Program, a part of the re-education of West Germany. Both women were fascinated by this nation's innovative school architecture, such as buildings that were flooded with light and air and were touted as the embodiment of democratic ideals. In actuality, these schools were reserved for white children only and the newly built neighborhoods surrounding them enforced a system of social segregation and racial separation. Such facts did not concern these women and went unchallenged and without reflection in their accounts. Although deeply influenced by their American sojourn and committed to careers in architecture, upon their return to the conservative atmosphere, which permeated the post-war years in West Germany, a clear-cut path to professional fulfillment was difficult to find.

7 Compare Ahmed (1999); Otsuka (orig. 2011; 2019).

Indeed, positioning oneself in the public sphere as a woman was highly unusual, even undesirable in West Germany. Most women, anchored in the bourgeois notions of class and gender, would not have thought of claiming it for themselves. As Annette Krapp demonstrates, even Maria Schwarz, the partner of the architect Rudolf Schwarz in both life and work, tacitly accepted that her professional endeavors for the Roman Catholic Church remained subordinated to those of her husband.

Not only West Germany, but much of Western Europe in the post-war years clung to traditional feminine ideals, and several nations, including Switzerland, only granted women suffrage in the 1970s and 1980s.[8] In their chapter about *SAFFA 1958*, a vast, open-air exhibition focusing on the life and work of Swiss women held in Zürich, Katia Frey and Eliana Perotti show how contemporary architecture served as a medium to communicate ideas about gender and national identity. Whereas this event's innovative construction and progressive design masked the conservative model for women that was propagated in Switzerland at that time, it paradoxically launched the careers of hundreds of professional women who contributed to its production and dissemination.

Meanwhile, the socialist nations of Eastern Europe identified gender equality as an intrinsic component of their ideology. Although this bold intention did not lead to parity, it ushered women into the workforce and opened up some opportunities in public life.[9] Mariann Simon examines this ambiguous legacy and reviews the entrance of women to the profession of architecture in post-war Hungary. During the rapid modernization of the 1950s, the growing economy required a well-educated workforce, and women made impressive gains in the professions, notably architecture. In the ensuing decades, however, as the economy slowed, more traditional attitudes towards gender emerged and were amplified by legislation which encouraged young mothers to take a respite from their careers. Combined with the stubborn persistence of traditional attitudes towards women, gender equality remained elusive.

8 Women received the right to vote in Switzerland in 1971; in Portugal in 1974; and in Liechtenstein in 1984. See: https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frauenwahlrecht_in_Europa, accessed on April 12, 2021.

9 For women architects in Socialist Europe, see the chapters in: Pepchinski/Simon (2016).

In the last decades of the twentieth century, global architectural culture has emerged. Supported by elite cultural institutions, it propagates the ideal of a small coterie of internationally active, overwhelmingly male "star" architects whose pronouncements and projects have world-wide impact. In her chapter about Zaha Hadid and Denise Scott Brown, Kathleen James-Chakraborty analyses the careers of these influential women architects and explores how they won access to elite architectural practice. By examining their formative years on the periphery of the British empire, the influence of their families upon their careers as well as their performance and orchestration of professional identity, she considers the extent to which these two extremely different women were able to secure a place on the ultimate platform of architectural power and influence.

As more women—along with many others who have been traditionally excluded from architecture—are studying this discipline or establishing themselves in practice, they question its premises and reimagine its parameters. In doing so, they articulate a critique of disciplinary power structures; for them, the status quo is no longer accepted as an immutable, authoritative standard but a point of departure to be questioned, challenged and reimagined in order for a more inclusive and socially responsive profession to arise.

The profession of architecture has long been considered a masculine domain, and the institutions that have been created to support it tend to perpetuate this idea. How is it possible for long-established architectural institutions to acknowledge a feminine presence and accept women as equals? The chapters by Elizabeth Darling and Lynne Walker along with those by Christina Budde and Mary Pepchinski address this situation and describe the representation of the feminine architect within the framework of a leading school of architecture, the Architectural Association in London[10] or a well-regarded museum, DAM in Frankfurt-am-Main.[11] Pursing diverse approaches at two European universities, Donna Drucker recalls the introduction of a course in Gender Spatial Theory at the Technical University of Darmstadt and Torsten Lange and Gabriele Schaad describe their seminars, "Architectures of Gender," at the ETH Zürich. Both demonstrate that this content is an integral to architectural knowledge. Lange and Schaad also remind us that the recent interest in gender studies at architecture faculties

10 Darling/Walker (2017).

11 Pepchinski/Budde/Voigt/Schmal (2017).

is not new. They note that illustrious institutions, including the ETH Zürich, successfully pioneered such educational offerings in the 1990s, only to have their efforts be forgotten or "made invisible." Demanding access to such courses and avenues of study requires a challenge to institutional structures, which marginalize and dismiss anything related to a gender framework to consider architecture.

Finally, Harriet Harriss and Ruth Morrow look back upon the process of compiling their co-edited volume, *A Gendered Profession*,[12] which sought to identify solutions to make architectural labor and education more socially responsible and equitable. They encourage us to question the universally accepted rules that govern architectural practice, such as attitudes towards time. For example, a feminine life has a temporal dimension, which can require taking a leave from work to bear children or care for a family. Yet such extended absences from a drawing board are viewed as being incompatible with the long hours that young architects are expected to invest in their careers. Furthermore, the assumption that an architect must devote lengthy, exhausting days to architectural work to demonstrate professional commitment is neither productive nor advantageous to one's health. Another unchallenged notion concerns technology, and Harriss and Morrow encourage us to think about the need to invent new processes and products to allow architecture to accommodate a feminine presence. They conclude that change requires activism on many levels if "power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another" can be put aside in favor of equity and access to architecture by all members of society.[13]

The chapters in this collection are not intended as universalizing statements about the relationship between gender, architectural practice and political structures. Written by straight and queer, overwhelmingly cis-gender, Caucasian authors hailing from Europe, Israel and North America, the contributions are a brief historical collage with digressions into the present and the current gender discourses in architecture. There is still much to investigate, and we hope the ideas presented here inspire interest, criticism and revision, particularly by those who investigate the woman architect in

12 The other two editors are James Brown and James Soane. See Brown/Harriss/Morrow/Soane (2016).

13 Brown/Harriss/Morrow/Soane (2016).

diverse geographical and social contexts in addition to grappling with other constructions of power and authority.

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