

# Past the Parapets of Patriarchy? Women, the Star System, and the Built Environment

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**Cynthia Hammond**, Concordia University, has received awards for her writing on the roles played by such women as Florence Nightingale and Catherine Bauer Wurster in the development of institutional and modern architecture, showing how their production was embedded within larger questions of nation, colonialism, and gender. She holds a three-year, Emerging Scholar award (FQRSC) for the study of Montreal's public, modernist buildings and spaces.

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## Abstract

Twenty years after architect Denise Scott Brown challenged the patriarchal exclusion of women from the "star system," what is the status of women in architecture today? Drawing examples from architectural history, recent statistics and current initiatives, the author identifies some of the lingering problems of sexism in architecture, and explores some of the women leaders shaping architectural futures.

## Résumé

Vingt ans après que l'architecte Denise Scott défiait l'exclusion patriarcale des femmes du 'système d'étoiles', quel est le statut des femmes en architecture aujourd'hui? En se servant d'exemples dans l'histoire de l'architecture, des statistiques récentes et des initiatives courantes, l'auteure identifie certains des problèmes de sexisme qui persistent en architecture, et explore ce que font certaines femmes qui sont des leaders qui façonnent le futur architectural.

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On June 10, 2009, the Beverly Willis Architecture Foundation (BAAF) premiered a short documentary at the Guggenheim Museum in New York as part of the events related to the upcoming retrospective on the American architect, Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959). This film, entitled *A Girl Is a Fellow Here: 100 Women Architects in the Studio of Frank Lloyd Wright*, presents for the first time an account of 6 of the more than 100 women who, as architects, helped to build Wright's reputation as the greatest American architect of the twentieth century. The launch was followed by a panel discussion about how such an important omission has endured. The film is a brief but potent counterthesis to the myth of Wright's solitary and unique genius, a narrative that has many echoes in a recent spate of films devoted to individual, male architects. These films are a register of the importance placed on blockbuster architecture of the modern and contemporary periods, represented primarily through a small pantheon of key male figures, many of them North American.<sup>1</sup> The architectural profession relies heavily on this pantheon, which feeds financial benefits back into relatively few practices, represented by individual, "iconic" architects (Jencks 2005b). This process keeps the profession lean, fiercely competitive, and visibly male; it also diminishes the impact that women have had, and continue to have, on the creation of the built environment.

In 1989 the American scholar and architect Denise Scott Brown published an essay on how architectural critics, historians, and professional organizations regularly eclipsed her role in the very successful joint firm, VSBA (Venturi Scott Brown and Associates Architecture), presenting her husband, Robert Venturi as the genius behind the firm's books, buildings and winning designs, even when Scott Brown was clearly identified as the author or lead designer of a project. Referring to the "star system" by which a very

few rise to the top, Scott Brown analyzes the broader currents of sexism and competitive masculinity in architecture against her own experience. She writes, "I watched as [Venturi] was manufactured into an architectural guru before my eyes and, to some extent, on the basis of our joint work and the work of our firm" (Scott Brown 1989, 237). The myth of a lone architectural genius hurt not only Scott Brown in the first decades of their joint practice: as she explains, "as sexism defines me as a scribe, typist, and photographer to my husband, so the star system defines our associates as 'second bananas' and our staff as pencils" (1989, 240). Having seen her work attributed repeatedly to her husband, and her ability as an intellectual and an architect diminished, Scott Brown concludes that, "the star system, which is unfair to many architects, is doubly hard on women" (1989, 242).

Twenty years later, how does the star system in architecture affect women? While more women are entering the profession than ever, the number of female "starchitects" tallies up, perhaps, to only one. Zaha Hadid, principal of Zaha Hadid Architects, rose to international prominence after winning the prestigious 2004 Pritzker Prize (the architectural equivalent of the Nobel Prize). Yet as many commentators have noted (Forsyth 2006; Meade 2008; Stephens 2006), Hadid's exceptional success, while inspiring and well-deserved, does not challenge the fundamental identity of architecture as a masculine profession. Rather, her star status confirms the invisibility of women in this field, as she is the exception that proves the unwritten rule that men create form, while women make way.

Of course, the architectural star system is different from systems of fame in cinema or art. Donald McNeil explains that, "while the image of famous buildings will usually prompt recognition by the general public, the face of the architects would likely pass unnoticed in a crowd. Such is the problem of engaging with the notion of architectural celebrity or reputation" (McNeil 2009, 63). While this lack of face recognition may be true for most architects, the continual evocation in the architectural and popular presses of a select group of male architects suggests that the

name, if not the face, does become famous, as well as the building; for example, Jonathan Meades' comparison of Hadid to a familiar, small group of successful male architects, who are all illustrated in his article with portrait sketches (Meade 2008). To the extent that names and words reveal gender, and attitudes about gender, the scarcity of female names and pronouns in the registers of architectural success - competition selections, lists of tenured faculty in architecture schools, surveys of twentieth-century architecture - is evidence that women remain largely below the parapets of official architectural greatness. Yet for many women architects, the distinction of "woman architect" is demeaning and unnecessarily divisive. From a different perspective, feminist deconstructions of singular, cohesive notions of gender identity provide an important basis to point out the essentialism of this, or any, distinction based on sex (Butler 2005; Fuss 1989). Yet, parity for women architects has not been achieved in the profession, much less in the star system, and attrition is an ongoing concern (Adams and Tancred 2000; Ahrentzen 2003; Anthony 2001; Groat and Ahrentzen 2001; Gürel and Anthony 2006). Given this conflicted situation, my aim in this text is to revisit the question of the star system and the status of women in architecture in North America at the end of the first decade of the new millennium.

### **Form, Matter and Gender**

The 1970s were an important decade in the history of feminist studies in architecture because of the simultaneous rise of feminism in political, academic and artistic circles. Doris Cole's book, *From Tipi to Skyscraper: A History of Women in Architecture* (Cole 1973) and Dolores Hayden and Gwendolyn Wright's major article for *Signs*, on architecture and urban planning (Hayden and Wright 1976), together mark a starting point of sorts for the confluence of second-wave feminism and research on the built environment in North America.<sup>2</sup> Since then, feminists have explored women's contributions to architecture, landscape architecture, planning, and education in these fields, in an impressive array of publications.<sup>3</sup> In 2006, however, in their careful analysis of fourteen

university survey texts of architecture, Meltem Ö Gürel and Karen H. Anthony concluded that published surveys continue to ignore feminist research on the built environment, and retain traditional race and gender biases (Gürel and Anthony 2006).

The most obvious strategy to counter these imbalances is to continue to raise the profile, or identity, of women architects working today or in the past. Yet this method, which Elizabeth Ervin calls the "add women and stir" approach to feminist historiography (Ervin 1993, 94), has been soundly critiqued for its failure to destabilize the very terms by which art (and artists) are judged, and included. While the hope is that high numbers will shatter the glass ceiling, this approach has the drawback of forcing women into a system that is always-already set up to dismiss their creativity and their contributions. Furthermore, it does not critique the terms by which the exclusions originally occurred. Joan Scott's famous essay, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," asks feminists to rethink "the fixed and permanent quality of the binary opposition [between the sexes], a genuine historicization and deconstruction of the terms of sexual difference" (Scott 1986, 1065). Similarly, art historian Griselda Pollock impels feminist historians to "difference" rather than supplement the canon, to interrupt the "naturalized (hetero)sexual division" that research on women inevitably invokes. Pollock suggests that we need to "keep in mind the political collectivity in which feminist work must be founded and, at the same time...refuse containment" (Pollock 1999, 26).

Happily, feminists have proposed other paradigms of writing, suggesting different "rhetorical spaces" (Code 1995) in which to consider the work of women within the restrictions that patriarchal discourse places around creativity and space. These rhetorical spaces rely on relational, rather than biographical conceptual models, and privilege the notion that individuals create, not from the tabula rasa of genius, but from the loaded intersections of complicated and contradictory personal, economic, historical and political circumstances (Grosz 2001). Yet the star system of architecture, symbolized by the

high-profile films mentioned earlier, remains male-dominated, symbolically, literally, and professionally, and so the importance of raising the profiles of individual, women practitioners remains on the table, even if doing so revisits normative gender binaries in an unsatisfying way.

### **Architecture as Cultural Capital**

According to architectural historian and critic, Charles Jencks, western culture and history have privileged star architects since antiquity (Jencks 2005a). Architecture, as "a field that idealizes a particular form of masculinity" (Forsyth 2006, 64), thus makes stardom something very elusive for women. During a lecture I gave in 2005 on women and architecture, one student's response to an image of Eileen Grey's modernist gem, E.1027 (Roquebrune, France 1926-1929) was to insist that Grey had been "influenced by" Frank Lloyd Wright's Falling Water (Bear Run, Pennsylvania 1935), despite the fact that Grey's design predated Wright's by nearly a decade. When I demonstrated the buildings' dates (through various websites - my word was not enough to convince her that Grey had been "first") the student was disappointed to discover that her hunch was incorrect (and remained unconvinced). I take the student's insistence that Wright's distinct aesthetic had to be the basis for the work of a female designer as an indication of the strongly ingrained belief that men (heroically) originate, and women (weakly) copy. It is this same belief that permitted the misattribution of E.1027 to the famous modernist architect, Le Corbusier (1887-1965) until after his death. This misattribution was something that Le Corbusier encouraged, because he deeply admired, if not fetishized the house, virtually "signing" the house during Grey's World War Two exile with a number of murals that Grey apparently never requested (Colomina 1996, 167-82). As Katarina Bonnevier argues, however, even telling this story "victimizes Grey and the attention is pulled away from her architecture to the dominant male architect" (Bonnevier 2005, 178). But what is the story of the house, if not a story of a woman's creativity, and a historiography which only recently has been corrected to rightly

reflect that creativity?

Many cultures prompt deference to the myth of the male originator in matters of matter; that is, turning matter into form. Western culture carries with it a profoundly embedded notion that when it comes to the monumental tasks of shaping matter into buildings, or buildings into cities, men will do the job (Summers 1994). Pollock has suggested that this naturalization relies upon "the category of a negated femininity in order to secure the supremacy of masculinity within the sphere of creativity" (Pollock 1999, 5). Pollock notes Roland Barthes' observation that myths are a form of "depoliticized speech"; absolved of the specificities of history, users of myth locate cause and meaning in that which is supposedly innate, natural, and eternal. In this way, the logistically impossible notion that a 1930s building by Frank Lloyd Wright could "influence" Eileen Gray's 1920s treasure somehow comes to be more meaningful than the wonder of Gray's unique design. These ideas also help to understand other troubling narratives from the annals of women in architecture. Sophia Hayden (1868-1953), MIT's first female graduate, retired from architecture after designing one high-profile building, the Women's Pavilion at the 1893 World's Fair (Paine 1977, 70-72). Alexandra Biriukova (1895-1967), Ontario's first registered woman architect, left the profession after designing a widely-admired modernist home for artist Lawren Harriss (Forest Hill, Toronto, 1930). Harris was one of the Canadian Group of Seven, known for their vigorous paintings of rugged and mystical Canadian landscapes. As Adams and Tancred note, accounts of the house assume that Harris was more or less responsible for the design, despite the fact that Biriukova's name is on the architectural drawings. After her resignation from the Ontario Association of Architects, Biriukova became a nurse (Adams and Tancred 2000, 82 & 163). This woman, who had designed "an icon of Canadian modernism" (2000, 82) died in the same year that Expo 67 would provide "unprecedented opportunities for Canadian women architects in large-scale planning and construction" (2000, 61).

### **The Status of North American Women in Architecture and Related Professions**

To say that architecture is a culturally privileged profession is not to suggest that the majority of architects today enjoy a privileged existence; on the contrary, architects struggle to design in a way that responds to their ideals (such as sustainability), to make ends meet and keep firms alive. Salaries, likewise, tend to be modest for most practitioners (as will be discussed below). Nevertheless, architecture does enjoy an enormous amount of cultural capital in the sense that "great," monumental, or avant-garde architecture accounts for a significant proportion of a place's historic, artistic and cultural value. Yet architecture is, at a very irreducible level, capitalism wrapped up as art. For the legions of idealistic, hopeful, and creative women and men who graduate from architecture schools every year, this reality clashes painfully with the ideals and myths they have painstakingly built up in their years of schooling. For women, however, the myth that greatness is always-already male constitutes extra hurdles, and consequences.

Architecture is not a profession that is known for financial reward. In 2005, the Ontario Association of Architects (OAA 2005) reported on the average salaries in architecture and related professions in Canada, according to seniority. Intern architects made, on average, between \$34,102 - \$41,361, while a senior architect's average salary in Canada reached between \$57,556 - \$67,822 per year. The highest annual salaries did not exceed \$105,298. In the United States, the average salary for a mid-level architect was \$57,700US, while senior members made, on average, \$85,800US.<sup>4</sup> A study conducted for the American Institute of Architects, however, put the average architect's salary at \$65,000US a year (Holland and Knight 2005, 62). Compared to other professions,<sup>5</sup> architects survive on relatively modest means. Despite such prospects, architecture continues to attract students hoping to enter the profession, or related fields.

Although architecture schools tend to have fairly equal representation of male and female students in the classroom, a recent sociological study on Canadian women

architects has shown that a significant proportion of female graduates from architectural programs never formally register as architects, despite success in school (Adams and Tancred 2000, 21-33). The Royal Architectural Institute of Canada (RAIC) also has reported that while approximately 50% of the students in architecture schools are women, only 13% of practising architects are women (RAIC 2005, 17-18). Likewise, a major American study conducted in 2005 shows that rates of attrition for American women are much higher than that of men; Holland and Knight report that, compared to Canadian statistics, American numbers are "virtually identical" (Holland and Knight 2005, 15). In their survey of American architects-in-training, architects and former architects, only 47% of female respondents had completed or planned to complete the final qualifying examinations to become registered architects, compared to 74% of male respondents who had completed or planned to complete these examinations (2005, 34). While both sources cited note that it is possible to practise architecture in a broader sense without having completed the registration and licensing procedures required by the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada (RAIC) or the American Institute of Architects (AIA), the legal right to practise architecture (and the official status of an architect) is retained only by those individuals who have passed the registration examinations.

While the long hours and inflexible schedules (incommensurate with the demands of most young parents) of most architecture firms are the usual reasons noted for this attrition, perhaps there are more subtle causes for the enormous disparity between the number of women who train to become architects, and the number that actually, formally, do. In 2005 a young, Canadian, female student in a school of architecture told me that her thesis project, a design for a woman's shelter, was criticized by members of the school because it occupied itself "only" with homeless women, and not homeless men, and was therefore "limited," and exclusive. Of course, this student should have been encouraged to think through the very real design challenges of her project, without fear that her refusal to include men in her shelter

would result in a poor grade, and diminished professional options. "Architectural work," according to Adams and Tancred, is "totally discriminatory" against women (Adams and Tancred 2000, 99). What will it take to make architecture's history a story of situated struggles, a story of diverse achievements, of diversity itself? And what will it take for young women to feel free to explore issues of concern to other women, and minority groups? One way to ensure that students are not punished for wishing to design for minority groups is to ensure their access to teachers who represent these minority groups. Women, unfortunately, still make up a very small percentage of tenured faculty in schools of architecture in Canada and the United States, as will be discussed below. In the meantime, however, it is important to underscore how women as well as men use, transform and improve our built environment.

### **Raising Profiles**

One important strategy towards this end is to open public discussion about the built environment, who creates it, and how we remember its designers. On November 4, 2005 the Beverly Willis Architecture Foundation (BAAF) hosted the first of a series of public events on the topic of women and architecture ("Fabricating Identity," Centre for Architecture, New York). BAAF, named after its founding member, the prolific architect Beverly Willis, is a non-profit organization that seeks "to expand the historical knowledge and cultural recognition of American women architects of the [twentieth] century, with a special focus on the time period 1950-1980" (BAAF). This mandate, taken directly from the organization's online mission statement, operates through several strategies: the first is to support research about women practitioners in architecture and related fields, including, "architectural and landscape design, the building arts, urban planning and historic preservation, as well as architectural history and criticism." A key purpose of the organization is to create a public legacy of knowledge about women's contributions to these professional arenas. Second, BAAF seeks to raise awareness about these

contributions through the support of publications, a lecture series and special events, such as "Women of Architecture" (9 March 2008, National Building Museum, Washington), "Women in Modernism: Making Place in Architecture" (25 October 2007, Museum of Modern Art, New York). These events, to which I have contributed several times as a speaker or an organizer, aim to create a debate about the state of research on women practitioners, gender, space, and the condition of public memory as it pertains to the role of women in creating the built environment.

Early in the proceedings during the 2005 event, participant Gwendolyn Wright observed that one characteristic of the institutions that shape, house and trouble us is that they have "edges." These edges, she explained, are locations where great change has taken place, particularly in university and educational settings. The idea of the "edge" came up several times during discussion, and indeed liminalities of all sorts have helped to make schools of architecture, architectural firms and practices places which women, and other so-called minorities can now occupy. In my research on women and the built environment, Catherine Bauer Wurster (1905-1964), stands out in this regard. A remarkable agent in the fight for public housing legislation and standards in pre- and post-war United States (US), Bauer Wurster is familiar now mostly to students of planning, housing and to much a lesser degree, architecture, through historians such as Gwendolyn Wright (1995), H. Peter Oberlander and Eva Newbrun (1999). But she was well known in her lifetime for several reasons, including her landmark book, *Modern Housing* (Bauer Wurster 1934), her role in writing the *US Housing Act* of 1937, and her many years of teaching urban planning in the College of Environmental Design at Berkeley, and at the Harvard Graduate School of Design. *Modern Housing*, the result of intense, comparative study of modern architecture and city planning in Europe, sought to establish the most useful lessons to be learned for American housing from European precedents. After publishing her work, Bauer Wurster became highly active in galvanizing politicians, housing committees (national and

local), and powerful unions on the question of a national housing policy.

Bauer Wurster's ability to learn the "languages" of diverse groups and constituencies in the US, were instrumental to her creation of herself as a housing expert and authority on modern architecture, planning, and urban theory. Through these experiences and choices, Bauer Wurster built an identity for herself, and in so doing, helped to enlarge public expectations about who could know about, and make transformations within the realms of architecture, cities, housing and planning. Teaching and public events that make room for practitioners such as Bauer Wurster play a truly significant role for women students and readers who are seeking to create their own professional and creative identities. In the encounter with historical individuals such as Bauer Wurster, the possibility for locating oneself emerges: not just in a history of struggle for inclusion, but also in a history of remarkable achievement, a story of how the margins can become the centre.<sup>6</sup>

As a field, architecture encourages its initiates to think in terms of broad social, environmental and political difficulties, drawing hopeful women and men into its possibilities for change. But at the end of the first decade of the new millennium, it is also a field in which high-budget projects and traces of mastery - the ink sketch dashed off on a paper napkin for a multi-million-dollar building - seem to carry far greater weight than the slow but essential advances made in less glamorous areas: social housing, sustainable design, and design for marginal groups, even ordinary housing for middle-class consumers (all of whom have some wonderful drawn-upon napkins of their own). The architectural star system can leave one with the impression that true architectural greatness does not concern itself with the unmanageable, fractured and messier aspects of existence, or if it does, it is to create broad formal gestures - the deeply contested, "iconic" projects of recent decades come to mind, such as the Montreal Olympic Stadium (Roger Taillibert, begun 1973), which displaced a working-class community, or Studio Daniel Libeskind's Michael Lee-Chin "Crystal," the extravagant extension to the Royal Ontario

Museum, Toronto (2007) which has ravaged the institution's historic fabric in favour of iconicity. Such designs tend to envelop or displace, rather than engage with the unmanageable, fractured mess that most tend to live within.

### **Edges, Margins, Liminalities**

To return to Gwendolyn Wright's observation that edges are where change happens, I now consider the place of women in schools of architecture, where they are still very much in the minority, or on the edge. My own survey of Canada's schools of architecture, urban planning and landscape architecture, conducted through the faculty pages of all Canadian universities with accredited programs in architecture, landscape architecture, and urban planning, reveals that women make up 27.4% of these departments' full-time, tenured or tenure-track faculty. According to the National Architecture Accrediting Board (NAAB), in 2003, only 16% of full-time faculty in American schools of architecture were women (Holland and Knight 2005, 11). Such women faculty members, furthermore, are often marginalized within those schools, teaching history rather than the highly-valued studio courses (Anthony 2001; Groat and Ahrentzen 2001, 241).

As Groat and Ahrentzen suggest, however, "this distancing from the centre enables [women] not only to see the inherent contradictions and inequities at the centre but also to claim the 'space' from which important alternatives may be launched" (Groat and Ahrentzen 2001, 241 & 251). What might these alternatives be? One example might be the aforementioned film by BAAF about the 100 female collaborators of Frank Lloyd Wright. Screened in the context of the Guggenheim, itself a monument to individualistic creative genius (Wright designed the building in 1958), the film brings to light the names of women architects such as Cornelia Brierly, Marion Mahony Griffin and Lois Gottlieb, and dozens more. The naming of such women architects within institutional space is a subversive and profoundly political move.

And, at those times when getting into the Guggenheim to name the forgotten names

is not possible, the alternative is to agitate outside the institution. There, all kinds of actions and strategies are possible: acting out, whining, tugging at the door handle, making a scene. When all routes are blocked, there remains the possibility (although perhaps not at the Guggenheim) of breaking in, looking for side entrances and open windows. The event of exclusion, whether physical, discursive or inferential, can become its own performance, its means own entry, despite - and perhaps even making fun of - the barriers. I believe that women (and men) need to have a lot more laughs as they push their way past the parapets of patriarchy in the field of architecture. London-based public art/architecture firm, muf, combines the occasional, strategically essentialist move with cheeky savvy about how to work the edges. Made up of artists, architects and designers, muf makes proposals that are often designed to be rejected, on the principle that sometimes one can say more by proposing an unbuildable project, or one that critiques the underlying presumptions of a brief. Their work has run the gamut from an installation of a white, breast-like form slowly expanding to fill an exhibition space at the Royal Institute of British Architects ("Purity and Tolerance" 1997), to several winsome and provocative museum projects in England, proving that diversity of physical results can be as much a hallmark of a firm as a signature style (muf 2000). There is nothing like humour to underscore the fact that the Emperor has no clothes, and there is nothing like a temporary alliance - between artists, architects, communities and academics, for example - to create new relationships, effective coalitions, and involve a wider audience in one's concerns. Dolores Hayden's work with the Power of Place collective has set a high standard for how such coalitions can break through disciplinary boundaries while involving a broad constituency in its sites of concern (Hayden 1995). These collectives show by example that there are many sites waiting for the occupancy of intelligent and creative squatters.

Architectural practice can likewise engage with other groups that are habitually rendered invisible within patriarchal society. Vancouver-based Patricia Patkau and John

Patkau, as Patkau Architects, designed The Seabird Island School (Agassiz, British Columbia 1991). Built for and with the First Nation Salish people, the stunning, bird-shaped building is a powerful example of user-integrated design practice, bearing out Patkau's faith in the ability of buildings to unify and strengthen communities within challenging sites. Scholar and architect Tania Martin has made community-based design strategies the basis of her work with students in the architecture program at Laval University (Quebec) and the Innu of Uashat mak Mani-Utenam (Quebec). Her participatory teaching methods led to the design of modern housing prototypes for this community (Martin and Casault 2005). Those women who have succeeded in breaking the glass ceiling in teaching institutions are also a way of bringing the edges to bear upon the centre, and perhaps differencing the institution, to adapt Pollock's phrase. Francis Bronet, principal of Francis Bronet Associates, is also Dean of the School of Architecture at the University of Oregon. Bronet has worked extensively in a cross-disciplinary way, bringing together engineering, dance and architecture in collaborative practice. At the University of Virginia, Karen Van Lengen is Dean of the School of Architecture, where she developed an integrated architecture and landscape program with a strong emphasis on ecological issues. The environment is also a concern of Dean Donna Robertson, of the Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT), where a new landscape architecture program was unveiled under her direction. These women, who have succeeded in their leadership and design careers suggest that the parapets of patriarchy are under siege, if not yet vanquished.

Outside the academy, there is a growing phenomenon of women-run firms. Susanne Stephens' 2006 article for *Architectural Record* interviewed thirty women architects with solely-owned firms across the United States. "While [these women] are not Zaha Hadid," Stephens writes, "her success is helping bring to the public the notion that a lone female architect can indeed create significant, even great architecture" (Stephens 2006, 68). Suman Sorg runs a 40-person office in

Washington, DC, while Deborah Berke heads an office of 25 members in New York. Toshiko Mori balances award-winning design with a full-time teaching position at Harvard. Gisue and Mojgan Hariri are sisters who have successfully run their own firm since 1986, while Winka Dubbeldam's New York firm, Archi-tectonics, employs fifteen architects and designers. These individuals, their designs and their professional successes provide powerful role models for young women in the profession, as does the fact - noted by many interviewees in Stephens' survey - that women clients are on the rise as well.

### **Closing Words and New Verbs**

Every time I prepare lectures and seminars on women and the history of architecture, I find myself searching for a verb, one that would express the kinds of practices that I have described above. After I lead discussions and take student questions, there is often one young woman at the end, who stays behind to tell me (often very shyly) that she would love to be an architect, and to ask me what I think her prospects might be, where she might study. When I answer her, I feel that the verb I seek is one that would describe exactly the situation at hand. Having just heard about all the difficulties that women face, the ongoing misattribution of their work, the challenge of (still) facing a choice between work and family, this young woman still needs to know, can I do it? The answer, always, is yes. This mentoring or fostering of an individual who is not yet part of architecture but one day might be, must be among the most important tasks within the larger project of raising the profile of women in architecture.

About 100 years ago, pioneering feminist and domestic reformer, Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935) wrote extensively about women's roles in American society, championing economic independence, suffrage and alternative social and spatial models. Gilman too sought an alternative language and new verbs, hoping to escape the gendering of language that maintained women's social and symbolic inferiority. Deeply convinced of the importance of work for women's mental and emotional health, she believed that the



challenge that lay before a woman was to "find her work and do it." "Life," she wrote, "is a verb" (Gilman 1989, vii & x).<sup>7</sup> And so I tell the young student who has stayed behind, after my talk, that yes, she most certainly can become an architect. Will she find her place in the pantheon of star architects? She may. But she might also find some wonderful ruins, maybe even some old bones from which to build her own brilliant alternative. For while architectural history is still too forgetful where women are concerned, our architectural present is perhaps too crowded with a few oversized and overly familiar figures. Yet, as architectural historian and critic Charles Jencks suggests, this may not benefit the star system for long. "Most dinosaurs," he warns, "died because they were too big" (Jencks 2005a, np).

### **Endnotes**

1. *My Architect: A Son's Journey* (Nathaniel Kahn 2003) examines the biography and architecture of Louis Kahn (1901-1974); *Sketches of Frank Gehry* (Sydney Pollack 2005), *Infinite Space: The Architecture of John Lautner* (Murray Grigor 2008) and *Sacred Spaces: The Architecture of Fay Jones* (Larry Foley and Dale Carpenter 2009) all treat their male subjects with a similar, near-religious devotion.
2. There was of course an earlier interest in women and the built environment. Charlotte Perkins Gilman published texts on gender and space (Hayden 1981), while in 1948 *Architectural Record* published an article entitled "A Thousand Women in Architecture."
3. For an excellent, critical review of the literature see Ahrentzen (2003). Substantial online bibliographies can be accessed via Hardy *et al.*(2005) and through the Beverly Willis Architecture Foundation ([www.bwaf.org](http://www.bwaf.org)) under "Resources."
4. Numbers have been taken from 2005 to avoid the 6% swell in salaries that paralleled the construction boom of 2005-2008 (AIA 2008).
5. Average salaries for medical professionals in North American are, for example, significantly higher than for professionals in fields related to architecture. Maria Kubacki, citing the Canadian Institute for Health Information for 2005, puts the lowest-paid doctors' salaries - family

practice - at \$212,000 annually (Kubacki 2008); in comparison, the American Association of Family Physicians reports that in the United States in 2005, the salary range for a family doctor fell between \$125,000 to \$200,000US. The highest-paid doctors in Canada (neuroscience) receive \$479,000 per year, on average; and government-funded positions in neurosurgery in the US pay as much as \$325,000US per year.

6. I thank an anonymous *Atlantis* reviewer for pointing out that Bauer Wurster is remembered, in a sense, through Wurster Hall, which houses the architecture and urban planning departments at UC Berkeley. Although the name of the building refers to Bauer Wurster's husband, architect and educator William Wurster, a bust of Bauer Wurster can be found in the main library.

7. I am grateful to the anonymous *Atlantis* reader who pointed out Gilman's interest in verbs, and her use of the manifesto as a feminist political tool.

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