

# Narrating Women Architects' Histories. Paradigms, Dilemmas, and Challenges



*Narrando historias sobre mujeres arquitectas. Paradigmas, dilemas y retos*

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**Keywords:**

Gender,  
Feminism,  
Intersectionality.

**Palavras-chave:**

Gênero,  
Feminismo,  
Interseccionalidade.

**Abstract**

Women studies in architecture have been inspired by different ways of thinking, which can be summarized in four 'paradigms': difference thinking, equality thinking, constructionist thinking and intersectionalist thinking. By revising seminal books, articles and exhibitions, this paper explores the historiographical dilemmas and challenges that narrating women architects' histories involves, focusing on two of the most relevant ones: the question of authorship and the canonical understanding of the architecture as the design of new architectural objects. The paper discusses the impact of women studies in art on the methodologies used in narrating women architects, but also presents the differences that should be taken into account when exploring the work of women artist and architects.

**Resumo**

Os estudos sobre as mulheres na arquitetura foram inspirados por diferentes tipos de pensamento, que podem ser resumidos em quatro "paradigmas": o pensamento da diferença, o pensamento da igualdade, o pensamento construtivista e o pensamento interseccional. Por meio de uma revisão de relevantes livros, artigos e exposições, este texto explora os dilemas historiográficos e os escombros que encontramos ao contar histórias sobre mulheres arquitetas, focando dois dos mais relevantes: a questão da autoria e o entendimento canônico da disciplina da arquitetura como a concepção de novos objetos arquitetônicos. O texto analisa o impacto que os estudos sobre as mulheres artistas têm nas metodologias utilizadas para contar histórias sobre mulheres arquitetas, mas também apresenta as diferenças que devem ser tidas em conta ao explorar o trabalho das mulheres artistas e arquitetas.

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**Resumen**

Los estudios sobre mujeres en la arquitectura se han inspirado en diferentes tipos de pensamiento, que pueden resumirse en cuatro 'paradigmas': pensamiento de la diferencia, pensamiento de la igualdad, pensamiento constructivista y pensamiento interseccional. A través de la revisión de relevantes libros, artículos y exposiciones, este texto explora los dilemas historiográficos y los restos que encontramos al narrar historias sobre mujeres arquitectas, centrándose en dos de los más relevantes: la cuestión de la autoria y el entendimiento canónico de la disciplina de la arquitectura como el diseño de nuevos objetos arquitectónicos. El texto analiza el impacto que los estudios sobre mujeres artistas tienen en las metodologías utilizadas para narrar historias sobre mujeres arquitectas, pero también presenta las diferencias que deberían tenerse en cuenta al explorar el trabajo de mujeres artistas y arquitectas.

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## Introduction. Four paradigms

Women studies in architecture have been developing both quantitatively and qualitatively over the last five decades. They have been inspired by different ways of thinking, which more or less coincide with the sequence of four waves in feminism (CHAMBERLAIN, 2017; HEYNEN, 2011; LANGE and PÉREZ-MORENO, 2020). It is thus possible to distinguish four 'paradigms': difference thinking, equality thinking, constructionist thinking and intersectionalist thinking.

Difference thinking was characteristic for the first wave, the suffragette movement which began around the turn of the previous century. It supported the idea that women are equal to, but fundamentally different from men and that society would hence benefit from a more equal distribution of power. This way of thinking animated the 'material feminists', who advocated a 'grand domestic revolution' and thought that feminine principles related to domesticity (care, order, cleanliness, beauty,...) should be applied to the organization of the whole of society. (HAYDEN, 1981) Equality thinking lies at the roots of the second wave of the feminist movement, the so-called 'women's lib' of the 1960s and 1970s. It presumes that men and women are fully equal and share the same capacities. This approach has been fundamental in creating an equal legal rights framework for women. Equal access to education and university studies, including architectural programs, is a strong example. Constructionist thinking, loosely associated with the third wave of feminism in the 1980s and 1990s, focuses more on gender as a cultural construct. It supports the idea that architecture is not a neutral background for discriminatory social practices, but is itself part of the cultural apparatus that establishes and maintains gender differentiations. This approach has been the most dominant one in architecture theoretical publications of the late 20th century that focus on gender. It articulates how architectural hierarchies are constitutive for gender differentiations while gender hierarchies are constitutive of architecture. The fourth, intersectionalist paradigm relies on the idea that gender is but one in a series of parameters that intersect with one another in the individual experience of oppression (CRENSHAW, 1989). This approach, which emerged during the third wave and became fully deployed in the fourth, implies that women, as a social group, cannot be considered a homogeneous unit. Difference of race or ethnicity, of class, of lifestyle, of sexual preference, and so forth, should be considered as well. They are multiple axes of oppression that add to gender convergence

and create specific situations for the career development of women in architecture that must be studied in context.

The use of the term 'paradigm' here, and its linkage to the four waves of feminism, does not imply that these paradigms simply run their course and historically cancel each other out. It rather suggests that in specific periods specific ways of thinking tend to dominate the scene, without however completely disappearing in the next periods. Feminist writers and thinkers are often inspired by different paradigms, and their work cannot necessarily be reduced to one of them. It can thus be argued that difference thinking is not only typical for 'the grand domestic revolution' aimed at by early feminists, but that it made a reappearance in the late 20th century as a possible radicalization of constructionist thinking. Within constructionist thinking the central aim was to understand how traditionally gendered polarities, such as public/private, mind/body, rational/emotional, productive/reproductive or work/care, came about and how they were used to position the feminine pole (the private, the emotional,

(...) as less important and less valuable than the masculine pole. The starting point of constructionist thinking can be located in Simone de Beauvoir's famous statement that "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (DE BEAUVOIR 2010 [1949], p.14) and that 'becoming a woman' requires taking part in the "mysterious and endangered reality known as femininity" (DE BEAUVOIR 2010 [1949], p.23). De Beauvoir and others have clearly shown how traditional conceptualizations of 'femininity' are disqualifying, since femininity is mainly defined as a set of negative values (a lack of rationality, a lack of ambition, a lack of spirituality, ...), which were historically determined by an oppressive patriarchal society and culture. This led some feminist thinkers to move in the opposite direction. For them it is not enough to understand the historical marginalization of women as an effect of the secondary role assigned to femininity - they rather wish to re-think and re-conceptualize the very definitions of femininity. This brings difference thinking back to the fore. Recent sexual difference thinkers thus point out that it is necessary to re-think polarities such as those between rationality and emotion, or between mind and body, and to re-define femininity from a historical materialist point of view. In doing so, empowerment of female subjectivity is a key task in both "positive affirmation (theoretical) and concrete enactment (social, juridical, political)" (BRAIDOTTI, 1994, p.237), since "woman is no longer different from [men] but different so as to bring about alternative values" (BRAIDOTTI, 1994, p. 239).

Even with the caveat that these paradigms are not neatly coinciding with specific historical periods, it makes sense to us to use these distinctions, in order to structure a narrative about the history of writing about women architects. We can indeed detect an evolution in the way feminist architectural historians and critics have engaged in the rewriting of architectural history in order to open it up for the questions of gender and the contributions by women.

### **Pioneer Texts**

Hand in hand with the second feminist wave of the 1970s, several architectural historians began to study the work of women architects. The book *From Tipi to Skyscraper: A History of Women in Architecture* (COLE, 1973) and the catalog of the exhibition *Women in American Architecture: A Historic and Contemporary Perspective* (TORRE, 1977) could be considered the first, pathbreaking works in this respect.

Doris Cole's book, although not rigorous from a scholarly point of view, was pioneering, since it was the first more or less systematic attempt to trace women's contribution to the built environment throughout the ages (HAYDEN, 1975). It addressed how among indigenous tribes women were the ones building tipis, as well as highlighting how women such as Jane Addams contributed to the building of the city through their social work, while not forgetting to tell the stories of important women architects such as Julia Morgan or Eleanor Raymond, or commenting on the work of domestic advisors who designed very sensible home plans (among them Catherine Beecher). Whereas later historians have delved much deeper into these particular histories, it was undeniably Cole's work that opened up this field and that advocated a novel approach to architectural history. As an antidote to a canonical history that focused on 'great buildings by great men', she relied upon unusual sources (women's magazines or domestic advice manuals) to develop a social history of women's impact on the built environment (MERRETT, TOSCANO and VALLERAND, 2020). Her equality thinking thus led her to ask new questions and to show that women's 'herstory' was worth investigating and telling, also in the field of architecture.

Susana Torre's exhibition was an event directly related with the recently established Archive of Women in Architecture in The Architectural League in The Brooklyn Museum in New York. It compiled the work of women practitioners and commentators in the field of architecture, urban planning and design under three main areas: designers and theorists of domestic environments, biographies of professional female

architects and a selection of buildings designed by women architects. "Rejecting the typical focus on the very few "exceptional women" who had been (albeit reluctantly) accepted by that establishment, the installation intended to present a complex, nuanced view of the ideologies that have bound women spatially to the house and socially to nearly invisible professional careers, and also to demonstrate the efforts made by some women to externalize their presence through Women's Buildings at the end of the 19th Century in Chicago and the time of the exhibition in Los Angeles" (TORRE, 2022).

Cole and Torre's works opened important debates, which criticized canonical architectural historiography focusing on two related issues: its emphasis on the careers of individual male practitioners, and the quasi-absence of women's experiences in architecture within its discourses. Thus, the challenge was (and is) double: on the one hand, it was relevant to recognize that canonical historiography is based and framed on masculine experiences, and, on the other hand, it was important to create new knowledge about female experiences.

This criticism was not something new at that time, since feminist historians of women in art were dealing with similar concerns. Two years before Cole's book, Linda Nochlin published her seminal essay 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?' (NOCHLIN, 1971) which focused on an arguably central issue in both disciplines, art and architecture: the identification between authorship and work of art/architecture. This identification is based on a romantic and deeply rooted understanding of both disciplines that positions the artist and the architect as a genius-creator and thus underscores his absolute centrality to the works he creates (BATTERSBY, 1989). In the architecture discipline, this idea was promoted also in the twentieth century with the blooming of modern architecture (SAINT, 1983) and further extolled by the architectural 'star system' of the late twentieth century (HEYNEN, 2012).

### **Methodological Approaches**

From these early years onwards, feminist architectural historians have been struggling with questions as to how to position a history of women architects vis-à-vis mainstream architectural history. In 1975, the historian Gerda Lerner published the article 'Placing Women in History: Definitions and Challenges' (LERNER, 1975), which commented on such dilemmas from a methodological point of view. Lerner differentiated between two levels of writing women's history: Compensatory History

and Contribution History. The first level focuses on “writing the history of ‘women worthies’ or ‘compensatory history’” (LERNER, 1975, p.5). The main research questions to ask here are ‘Who are the women missing from history? [And] who are the women of achievement and what did they achieve?’ (LERNER, 1975, p.5). These questions drive historians to recover the work of ‘notable women’, which are usually exceptional but do not ‘describe the experience and history of the mass of women’ (LERNER, 1975, p.6). From the point of view of equality thinking, it indeed makes sense to look for women architects who might rightfully take their place within canonical discourses and whose capacities and authorship clearly place them on a par with their male colleagues. This leads to historical research on women architects whose architectural designs fit within the accepted values of architectural historiography.

Compensatory history is thus very present in the recovery of the so-called ‘pioneers’, the first generations of architects who, for the most part, had developed their professional careers in the first Modern Movement. These great women were mainly white privileged practitioners who were able to challenge the gender norms of their time, and the expectations of their respective societal contexts, by receiving formal training in design and/or architecture. The recovery of pioneers’ lives and works has been a very important research line within feminist architectural historiography, resulting monographs on pioneer women in modern architecture, like Lilly Reich (MCQUAID, 1996), Eileen Gray (ADAM, 1987; CONSTANT and WANG, 1996) or Charlotte Perriand (VEDRENNE, 2005; BARSAC, 2014), or first official graduate women, such as the Spanish architect Matilde Ucelay (SÁNCHEZ DE MARADIAGA, 2012), among many others such as Julia Morgan (BARNES and BOUTELLE, 1988), Lina Bo Bardi (DE OLIVEIRA, 2006; LIMA, 2013) or Zaha Hadid (BETSKY, 1998).

Whereas this first approach has yielded many valuable contributions to architectural history, it has also been criticized because it considers and explains women’s work from a perspective that takes a male-defined society for granted and thus assesses this work “by standards appropriate to men” (LERNER, 1975, p. 6). The monographs focusing on ‘great women’ thus tend to explain the small number of women architects and their limited contributions before the 1960s as an effect of the dominant patriarchal conditions. A major concern about this approach is therefore that it often depicts women architects as women outside their gender rules, and hence as part of a

minority (WILLIS, 1998, p.57), creating a narrative that boils down to a victimization of women in the profession (ADAMS and TANCRED 2000; LANGE and PÉREZ-MORENO 2020).

In contrast, with this first approach, the level Lerner called ‘Contribution History’ does not simply accept the reigning historiographic value system. This level rather starts from the assumption that women DID contribute to whatever social, political or cultural field one is studying, and asks questions on how and what they could contribute. Also contribution history necessarily has to come to terms with how patriarchal mechanisms of discrimination and exclusion might have hampered women’s impact on the built environment. This approach however casts a much wider net than the first one, looking not only at exceptional women who made it against all odds, but rather at a diversity of women with different roles and reputations. One can argue that ‘Contribution History’ thus brought the field closer to a constructionist way of thinking, because it developed a more fine-tuned appreciation of how these exclusionary mechanisms work - and that is exactly what constructionist thinking is all about.

Cole’s and Torre’s volumes arguably belong in this category of ‘Contribution History’, forming early examples of how a focus on women’s role in architecture opens up the field of architectural history for different questions and innovative methodologies which ultimately lead to a different understanding of what architecture is all about. Many years later Alice Friedman’s seminal work on *Women and the Making of the Modern House* (FRIEDMAN, 1998) offered a fine example of how contribution history can lead to a questioning of authorship - the long-standing foundation on which canonical architectural history is built (WILLIS, 1998; Anstey, GRILLNER and HUGHES 2007; STEAD 2007). Friedman showed how many of the Modern Movement’s most famous houses were commissioned by women clients who played an active role in its design by calling for specific plans and attributes. In the case of the Rietveld-Schröder house, for example, it was on the insistence of Truus Schröder (widow Schröder) that the plan offered flexibility and openness allowing for both collective and individual spaces at different times of day and night. Friedman traced this back to Schröder’s active involvement with feminist ideas and discourses that were at that moment at play in the Netherlands, and that questioned how men and women, or parents and children, should live together. She thus showed how gender constructions long associated with the conventional home could be questioned and

shifted by a modernist plan. Likewise she argued that given the close collaboration between architect and client, the sole attribution of the authorship to Rietveld is questionable indeed. This is constructionist thinking at its best.

## Historiographical Dilemmas

Somehow, however, these historiographical approaches deal with a fundamental dilemma in purpose that continuous to characterize the historiography of women architects until today: both approaches recover the work of these architects, but their sociological situation as women is inseparable from the historical patriarchal roots of the profession, which, indeed, create historical narratives that reinforce the masculine and normative approaches to the discipline (the heroic depiction of the architect as hero). Women architects had to negotiate this given context, and did so by e.g. carving out a space for themselves in focusing on what patriarchal society considered appropriate for them: 'the private sphere'. Hence, historically, women architects can be found dealing with domestic architecture, buildings for children education or buildings for caring, which were, from the point of view of the architectural discipline, considered as minor, less important and definitely less prestigious commissions.

These researches thus inevitably recognize that there is a historical asymmetry between being a woman and being a man in different moments in history, "which is the product of the social structuration of sexual difference and not any imaginary biological distinction" (POLLOCK, 1988, p.55). Feminist historians tend to face this issue in different ways. Compensatory historians will recover the work of women architects by making it fit for canonical (= man-made) discourses on the history of architecture; contribution historians will rather focus on women architects' discontent with dominant masculine discourses, highlighting their agency and capacity to provide significant change in the discipline. These two types of historians sometimes work on the same topic, highlighting different aspects of the same oeuvre. An example of this bifurcation could be found in the literature on Eileen Gray. On the one hand, exhibitions on the House E.1027 focus on how this project "made Gray one of the pioneers of [modern] movement, causing envy even in Le Corbusier himself" (EUSKADI INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTURE 2022). On the other hand, historians such as Leslie Kanes Weisman put the focus on how Gray disagreed with the aesthetics of functionalism and considered it "intoxicated by the machine aesthetic" (WEISMAN, 1992, p. 30). Gray wrote: "their desire for rigid precision makes them neglect the beauty of all these forms: discs, cylinders, lines which undulate or zigzag, elliptical lines which are like straight lines in movement. Their architecture is without soul" (GRAY, 1929, p.17-21). Likewise, current research is reconsidering Gray's personal photo-

graphs on E.1027 house, and providing readings about her creative process closer to her personal approach and different from the canonical one (GONZÁLEZ JIMÉNEZ and RUIZ COLMENAR, 2022).

Gerda Lerner refers to the approach of compensatory historians as 'male-oriented', since their goal is to explain how women's works are suitable to be included in canonical and masculine narratives—which are not questioned in their conceptual apparatus. Contribution history on the other hand is, according to Lerner, 'female-oriented', since the aim is to focus on women's agency and to criticize canonical narratives. The latter approach can also be recognized in the research of Mary Pechinski (PEPCHINSKI, 2018) or Bettina Siegele (SIEGELE, 2022) on the German architect Karola Bloch, because their main goal is to analyze Bloch's contribution for a new type of childcare facilities questioning prior designs.

Other feminist thinkers have also pondered this dilemma in how to deal with women's work in art or architecture. Griselda Pollock e.g. recognized that "feminist art history has a double project. The historical recovery of data about women producers of art coexists with and is only critically possible through a concomitant deconstruction of the discourses and practices of art history itself" (POLLOCK, 1988, p.55). Both Pollock and Lerner thus consider that "'contribution history' is an important stage in the creation of a "true history of women" (LERNER, 1975, p.7). Lerner warns however that it is not enough. Contribution history still doesn't investigate women's work on its own, but reviews it from a point of view that is thoroughly informed by man-made canonical parameters. It still deals "with women in male-defined society and tries to fit them into the categories and value systems which consider man the measure of significance" (LERNER, 1975, p.7). Lerner therefore argues that this kind of historiography should be considered 'transitional', since the ultimate goal needs to be to develop a possibly third level of women's history that would be based on new criteria and concepts that do not consider men the rule and women the exception. Theoretically, Lerner's third level of women's history and Pollock's previous statement are closer to difference thinking, since they assume that women's contribution to history might be different from those of men, thus bringing about alternative values that should be assessed on their own, and not just as deviant from norms and expectations bound up with masculinity.

## Dismantling the Canon

However, how to articulate these alternative values? One can argue that the early feminists, the ones that Dolores Hayden called 'material feminists' (HAYDEN, 1981) made headway in this respect, since they put feminine values such as care central in their struggles. Difference thinkers in the 1980s and 1990s added to these values such as commitment to the social role of architecture, flexibility, respect for context and for the earth, affinity with opacity rather than transparency, inclusiveness, sensuality or playfulness (KAHN 1996; BLOOMER, 1995). This quest for feminine values however also comes with its own challenges. There is a danger indeed that 'femininity' is essentialized, as if all women, everywhere and always already, participate in the same eternal set of attributes that distinguish them from men. This clearly is not the case. It is this line of questioning that is taken up by intersectionalist thinking, which starts from the assumption that the experiences of different women might be very different, based on their class background, their ethnicity, their cultural and religious belonging, their age or their sexual orientation. Intersectional thinking criticizes the fact that most of the 20th century books about women's architects, both in equality and constructionist thinking, deal with white, heterosexual, middle to upper class women. Indeed, most of them focuses on privileged heterosexual white women— either as architects or as clients, activists and critics. Whereas the question of social class has been very present in Social History and Critical Theory since the interbellum (see e.g. Walter Benjamin's essay 'On the Concept of History' (BENJAMIN, 2005 [1940]) and has had quite some influence in art and architectural history, especially in its neo-marxist practitioners (TAFURI, 1990 [1973], TZONIS 1972), it has not registered as an important factor in feminist architectural historiography until the 1990s.

In the 1980s black and/or lesbian thinkers started to question previous feminist discourses — those of Simone de Beauvoir or Betty Friedan for instance —, because they found that these discourses did not represent black women's and/or lesbian women's lives. French white lesbian philosopher Monique Wittig claimed that "lesbian society destroys the artificial (social) fact constituting women as a 'natural group'" (WITTIG, 2016 [1980], p.1) and that many feminist writings were uncritically assuming "that the basis of society or the beginning of society lies in heterosexuality" (WITTIG, 1980, p. 2). In fact, she claimed that the patriarchal concept of 'woman' only made sense in a heterosexual system,

so that "lesbians are not women" (WITTIG, 1990, p.57). In parallel, black feminist pointed out the structural racism embedded in normative narratives, because they were based on

"the belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby the right to dominance" (LORDE, 1984, p.115). Afro-American black lesbian activist and poet Audre Lorde further explained that when 'white women ignore their built-in privilege of whiteness and define 'woman' in terms of their own experience alone, then women of Color become 'other', the outsider whose experience and tradition is too 'alien' to comprehend" (LORDE, 1984, p.117).

Taking into account sexual orientation in architectural historiography broadens and expands the discussion, as becomes visible in current fourth wave feminism. It is adding more layers of diversity to historical turning points in canonical architectural history, as demonstrated in the book *Haunted Bauhaus: Occult Spirituality, Gender Fluidity, Queer Identities, and Radical Politics* (OTTO, 2019), as well as complicating accepted feminine approaches to architecture, such as *Unplanned Visitors: Queering the Ethics and Aesthetics of Domestic Space* (VALLERAND, 2020). Likewise, African American experiences of the built environment are in the process of being recovered in the last two decades, mainly in American academia (WEISE, 2004; AUSTIN, 2018; WILSON, 2012; WEISS, 2011) — in all of them, the intersection with social history is inherent, as race and class oppressions are related to one another in those moments in history. Some of them also focus on black women experiences as educators (NIEVES, 2018) as well as inhabitants of their own 'homeplace' (SIEFERT, 2022). Women architects of color and their contribution to Modern Architecture are the focus of ongoing research (SIDDIQI, 2017, JAMES-CHAKRABORTY, 2022), as are the 'pioneers'.

Typical for this fourth wave historiography is also the reliance on digital resources, exploring non-academic print formats such as specialized websites. An instructive example is the website 'Pioneering Women of American Architecture', edited by Mary MacLeod and Victoria Rosner, where pioneer black women architects are included, such as Beverly L. Greene, the first African American woman architect licensed to practice in the United States (WERLE, 2021).

These recently minted queer and race approaches are questioning, expanding and entangling architecture history, thus dismantling the canon by asking radical questions about 'who is left out?'. Their alliance with feminist thinking is thus clear, and deserves to be embraced. Still, one should be aware that a focus on queerness or on race can, once again, take attention away from women as agents of history. It is not unthinkable indeed that queer and race approaches to history could be gendered in their own inclusiveness, and this is an inclination that one needs to be careful about. As Griselda Pollock points out, the recognition of sexual difference should be "understood as a social structure which positions male and female people asymmetrically in relation to language, to social and economic power and to meaning" (POLLOCK, 1988, p.56). This difference in condition can be recognized in all races and sexual orientations. Another complicating factor is that non-binary individuals are socially being placed in another 'otherness', hence in a social condition different than those who identify themselves as men or women. For the authors of this paper, all these differences need to be taken into account in a fair manner, which is why we think that equality thinking, difference thinking, constructionist thinking, and intersectional thinking should interlock in order to come closer to a full and true history of architecture.

### **Architecture is not (only) an art**

Since the architectural profession is not in all respects similar to that of artists, feminist architectural historians are also confronted with other kinds of challenges and difficulties than feminist art historians. A focus on women architects highlights indeed - even more so than in the case of women artists - how mainstream architectural history is built on a very narrow and very specific - masculinist - ethos of architecture built upon the figure of the architect as (sole) author of an architectural work. This approach tends to ignore architecture's social and political conditions, as well as its professional structuration in offices with partners and collaborations, or its entanglement with other professional fields such as engineering or building technology. To name this specificity is one thing, to change it however is a totally different kettle of fish.

In Europe, thirty percent of architects describe themselves as sole principals, making this the largest employment group in the profession. Another nine percent of architects describe themselves as freelance, with significant numbers in Belgium, Spain

and Portugal (ARCHITECTS COUNCIL OF EUROPE, 2020, p. 15). This data is more or less in accordance with the traditional idea of the architect as an individual practitioner. When researching women architects, however, the question of the solo- authorship becomes problematic. Most of the pioneer women architects indeed did not practice the profession as sole principals or freelance, but in company with male colleagues (Lili Reich with Mies van der Rohe, Charlotte Perriand with Le Corbusier, Aino with Alvar Aalto, Alison with Peter Smithson, ... ). Compensatory women's history in architecture was able to show that many of the buildings previously considered solo-male-master designs, in fact came forth from the close collaboration between the male architect-hero and his female sidekick - leading to the question whether the 'side-kick' was indeed only a helpmate or should better be described as a full-blown co-author. If the latter, however, the very idea of sole-authorship - so central in mainstream architectural historiography - becomes questionable, which means that one of the foundational tenets of the discipline is challenged. This is not something that goes down easily within the field, meaning that a lot of the insights generated by compensatory histories are ignored rather than digested, as a quick overview of survey books easily proves (Fernandez Cardoso 2017).

The question of co-authorship becomes challenging when men and women work together leading an architecture firm or studio. How to differentiate women's contribution in a co-authored architecture design? The challenge increases if the firm has female and male employees. According to the Architects Council of Europe salaried architects make up 29 percent of the profession being countries such as Norway, Sweden and Poland the ones with more employed architects. Is it possible to differentiate the contribution between salaried architects and main partners? Is it possible to do it by gender? In fact, the question in itself always already overlooks the fact "that architecture comes forth from the joint efforts of a large group of people" (HEYNEN 2012, p.338), not only the architects, but also the engineers, the construction site overseer, the contractor, the workers, the clients, and the users contribute significantly to the outcome. As some feminist historians of architecture claim, the question of the authorship in architecture is problematic as such, not only because it tends to privilege male-solo-authorship, as "mainstream architectural history has failed to include the contribution of women within, or even alongside, the canon of great men/great building" (WILLIS, 1998, p. 57) but also because it mis-represents the actual work of doing architecture, which involves much more collaboration, interaction and interdependency than the sole-author modes accounts for.

A second important challenge is traditional identification of architecture with a physical new object (a temporal or permanent building, an architectural intervention, etc.). This means that feminist practices such as e.g. Matrix or Taking Place, whose work

is focused on facilitating women's dealings with the built environment in many different ways apart from building, do not register as important in conventional historiographies (THOMAS 2009). There is indeed a lot of architectural work going on in the background that is mostly ignored in its historiography. As the Architects Council of Europe indicates, the public sector employs 13 percent of Europe's architects, being the largest employer of architects in Denmark and Finland. Most of the architects from the public sector deal with administrative tasks, high levels of bureaucracy, urban planning and design for the city council and other governances, conservation and restoration of architectural heritage, among other fields of practice. Usually, the result of their work is not new architectural designs; however, in our opinion, it is totally part and parcel of what architecture is all about. Fortunately recent tendencies in architectural historiography tend to recognize this, in addressing e.g. the role of bureaucratic administrations (AGAREZ, FLORÉ, and DEVOS 2022) or in addressing the often crucial role of individual civil servants (RUBINO 2018). It is gratifying to see that indeed some architectural historians are expanding the field towards these less visible architectural roles.

Another relevant challenge is to study the contribution to society of women educated as architects who practice other professions. Architecture education is not as monolithic as other pure fields, such as mathematics or physics. Even through its divergence in different traditions (beaux-arts, polytechnical, craft-based...), architecture education provides a wide range of knowledge in relation with arts and humanities, social sciences, and technology which situate architects as professionals with holistic knowledge in an increasingly specialized labor market. This interdisciplinary knowledge is often appreciated in other complex field, offering job opportunities and creative outlets for many women graduates. This might also be understood as a positive contribution, rather than as the sad outcome of discriminatory practices within the profession. Usually, feminist historians of architecture see women that do not practice the profession as a symptom of a inequality in the career development of those women (STRATIGAKOS, 2016; ADAMS and TANCRED, 2000); however not practicing as sole principals, freelance or salaried architecture is not synonymous with desertion. We can find examples of women architects developing their careers as photographers, fashion designers and scenography designers, marketing publicists, among many other possibilities (PÉREZ-MORENO, 2021). Perhaps, as women feminist researchers, we should re-define the traditional understanding of

what it means to become an architect, and embrace the multiple other roles we see wo- men graduates fulfill.

It is however not simple for mainstream historiography to adopt such new approaches, since this would imply a very different master narrative on architectural evolutions during the last centuries, which doesn't focus on heroic figures but rather on other aspects of architecture: the social production of space, its contextualization in terms of economy, politics and culture, the role of different actors, the power dynamics among them, the involvement of architectural agents in other creative fields etc. Many architectural historians would feel that this would no longer be 'architectural' history but something else ('urban history' maybe, or 'fashion history', or 'economic history').

As to the entanglement between architecture and other fields, it has to be recognized that during the last decades, feminist architects and urban planners working in or collaborating with the public sector have gained ground in introducing a gender perspective in urban planning, applying constructionist thinking perspective. Mention could be made of the work of Ursula Bauer and Eva Kail in the city of Vienna in Austria (BAUER 2009; STURM et al. 2019), Zaida Muxí and Inés Sánchez de Madariaga in the cities of Barcelona (MUXÍ, 2011; MUXÍ, 2013) and Madrid in Spain (ROBERTS and SÁNCHEZ DE MADARIAGA, 2016; SÁNCHEZ DE MADARIAGA and NEUMAN, 2020), and Ana Falú in the city of Córdoba in Argentina (FALÚ, 2002), for example. Usually, this work comes along with strong historical and theoretical knowledge about gender and power relations in the man-made environment and the city (PÉREZ-MORENO, 2021), such as the claims and discontents of relevant women thinkers, feminist activist and scholars, such as Jane Jacobs (JACOBS, 1961), Dolores Hayden (HAYDEN 1980, 1995), and Kathryn H. Anthony (ANTHONY, 2001), among many others. Likewise, women urban planners working together with women geographers and women political scientist mainly, are creating new theoretical concepts that are changing policies and governances, in designing methodologies, manuals and guidelines for more liveable, sustainable, safe and inclusive cities and neighborhoods, such as 'Gender Planning' (FAINSTEIN and SERVON, 2005), 'The Feminist City' (KERN, 2020) and 'The Caring City' (TRONTO, 2019; CHINCHILLA, 2020; GABAUER, et. al., 2022). This type of work is impacted by several of the paradigms we mentioned, from equality thinking over constructio-



nist thinking to difference thinking. Most of these protagonists are lecturers and/or professors of Urban Planning in different Schools of Architecture, aligning their teaching methodologies with their professional practices and, in doing so, influencing new generations of women, men and non-binary architects.

The study of this type of work and how architects — without constructing new buildings — contribute to developing the architecture profession in a positive and empowered manner needs to be on the agenda indeed. Often this work is evolving in relation to current worries about climate change, and so, their approaches to architecture and urban planning are running in accordance with theoretical understandings of societies claimed by ecofeminist thinkers (PULEO, 2015), and posthuman philosophers (BRAIDOTTI, 2022), which implies dismantling the canonical dualism civilization-nature, breaking the hierarchy of 'the civilized man' as 'superior' than planet earth, and questioning the actions of 'the great architect' only as part of civilization. As Joan Tronto said in relation to the caring city:

(...) rather than thinking of buildings as things, thinking of them in relationships — with ongoing environments, people, flora and fauna — the exist through time as well as in space, changes the approach fundamentally. (...) we now need an architecture that fulfills the basic tasks of sharing responsibilities for caring for our world, an architecture that is sensitive to the values of repair, of preservation, of maintaining all forms of life and the planet itself (TRONTO, 2019, p.28)

## Conclusion

It is thus necessary to develop, in parallel with and as part of a feminist historiography of women architects, a reconceptualization of what architecture is all about. We take a clue here from philosopher Rosi Braidotti seminal book *Nomadic Subjects* (1994) that argues that it is necessary to turn "women's cultural traditions and ways of knowing into a source of positive affirmation of other values" (BRAIDOTTI, 1994, p.237). We thus advocate researching women educated in architecture in all their diversity, investigating as well their work as professional architects as the many other roles they might chose to play in society. This will make it necessary to develop new criteria and concepts to deal with their career development and contributions to society, inside the traditional gendered understanding of the architecture profession as well as outside of it.

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