Interlacing Architecture with Gender Studies
Lucía C. Pérez-Moreno

INTERLACING ARCHITECTURE WITH GENDER STUDIES

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In 2013, Ealasaid Munro published the article "Feminism: A Fourth Wave?" in *Political Insight*. This text questioned whether we are living a new feminist wave: a fourth wave characterized by the diversity of purposes and by the Internet's role in its proliferation and social acceptance. In the field of architecture, more and more often, professionals are questioning whether it is possible to talk about feminist architecture, whether the gender of the designer influences a design and whether gender is relevant to urban planning and design. This is a subject of some complexity that has been present in architectural culture for years but still generates a certain bewilderment in some architects as well as in university students, teachers and in society in general.

In Spain, and especially since the Law on Equality of 2007 came into force, research on the meaning and scope of equality has been encouraged in higher education centers. Especially in areas linked to the humanities and the social sciences, this issue has had a significant impact. Analyses from a gender perspective are common in studies related to history, literature, cinema, visual arts or social work, among others. In the field of architecture, however, perhaps because of its status as a technical discipline, the inclusion of the gender perspective has been somewhat slower in coming.

However, it is undeniable that social networks and blogs specialized in architecture are acting as forums for discussion and vindication. Thus, the Internet is used to make gender inequalities in architecture visible and to demand effective equality between women and men in the profession, in a context where inequalities are often increased by other axes of oppression. Social networks and web platforms are also used to defend the humanizing of architecture and to remind us that the experiences of all kinds of people – regardless of their gender, social class, race, religion, sexual identity, functional capacity, and age – should be taken into consideration when designing a space, from the design of a home to the planning of a city. Initiatives such as the blog "undiaunaarquitecta", the websites *Pioneering Women of American Architecture*, *Women in Architecture*, and *Die Architektin*, the Italian association Donne Architetto, the Association for Women in Architecture + Design in the United States, or the recently founded Association of Women Architects of Spain (AMAE) are all examples of this reality. In parallel, there are an increasing number of books and articles that delve into these issues. Each of these writings responds to a heterogeneous and plural group of professionals and researchers who engage with architecture in diverse social realities, either because of their cultural backgrounds or their personal circumstances. Without a doubt, these actions are having a broad impact and, consequently, they are creating a culture of social awareness of difference which is, to a large extent, a legacy of the values claimed by the second and third feminist wave of the 20th century. All in all, these writings, social networks, websites, and women's

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associations respond to the postmodern condition of our Western culture. In the words of Lyotard, "Postmodern knowledge is not a simply an instrument of power. It refines our sensitivity to differences and increases our tolerance of incommensurability."

The book *Perspectivas de género en la Arquitectura* reflects on the need to incorporate the gender perspective into the discipline of architecture. This book compiles four lectures by four female voices that raise awareness on the relevance of equality in the architecture profession: the Spaniards Josenia Hervás y Herás and Inés Sánchez de Madariaga, the Argentinian Zaida Muxí, and the American Martha Thorne. Through four perspectives – historical reviews, academic policies, urban planning and lived experiences – these authors delve into the anthropological value of gender studies, showing how they can enrich and strengthen technical disciplines whose essential objective is to create a fair and equitable society.

As the texts point out, the interlacing of architecture with gender studies is diverse and plural, although it mainly posits gender as a category of oppression in two particular moments: in the agent – that is to say in the person who exercises the architecture profession – in the preparatory stages as a student, as well as in the full exercise of the profession as a liberal professional, employee, teacher, researcher or otherwise; and in the user – in other words, in the people who experience any architectural or urban design.

Focusing on the first moment, we have witnessed a high proliferation of publications – books, articles, exhibition catalogs, conference proceedings, blogs, websites – whose objective is to analyze and visualize the work that has been done by women in architecture, design, and urbanism throughout history. There is a growing range of 'historical revisions', which, on the one hand, show the hegemony of the patriarchy in the historiography of architecture and, on the other hand, analyze the social reality in which female architects have studied and worked. The Spanish architect Josenia Hervás y Herás explains her research on women who were educated at the Bauhaus in Weimar, a crucial moment in history for the birth and development of Modernity in Europe. This chapter delves into the educational changes that took place at the school, the gender biases that existed in the classrooms, the different conditions of access for female and male students, among other questions. In short, it highlights the inequalities suffered by female students seeking to be educated in similar conditions to their male schoolmates.

The agent remains the main character in the second chapter, although this time in the immediate present. The extensive research and academic management experience of the Spanish architect and urban planner Inés Sánchez de Madariaga brings the reader into the reality of architectural

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education and the architecture profession in Spanish society. Her chapter is derived from her long experience as coordinator and director of various research projects, publications, and academic actions focused on gender equality, both in Spain and in the European Union. Through statistical data and field analyses, she is able to point out that many of the inequalities and biases of the past still remain, and others are unfortunately proliferating. Sánchez de Madariaga's chapter offers solutions: a set of academic policies that could help to prevent inequalities, visualize biases and raise awareness among teachers and professionals regarding the still-present necessity of taking action to promote effective equality.

The third chapter situates gender in the second moment: that of the user. In this text, the Argentinian and Spanish-based architect, urban planner and designer Zaida Muxí argues for greater attention to the plurality and diversity of citizens, incorporating the broad range of social realities that people experience. She advocates for the consideration of the "discourse of others" – referring to the well-known essay by Craig Owens. As she explains, gender urbanism derives, to a large extent, from the active critique of many of the founding approaches to modern urbanism, such as zoning, car hegemony, and the absence of different urban scales, as Jane Jacobs already pointed out in the 1950s. Therefore, the gender perspective in urbanism calls attention to what the experiences of women, and other groups of citizens who suffer from oppression, can contribute to improving the quality of our cities. Interlacing gender studies with urban planning and urban design involves thinking about the city from the real needs of those who inhabit and experience urban space.

In the three previous chapters, gender studies are interlacing with architecture from different perspectives. Among other conclusions, the three authors highlight the current deficit of female role models. Josenia Hervás y Herás describes how female designers and architects have been relegated, preventing their work from being included in the official history of Modernity. Inés Sánchez de Madariaga emphasizes the low proportion of female teachers in architectural studies departments at Spanish Universities and how the discipline turns out to be more oppressive in academia than other equally technical careers, such as engineering. Meanwhile, Zaida Muxí advocates for giving a voice to women when it comes to designing any space or urban planning. All of these authors agree on the need to attend to the female experience. The fourth chapter is a first-person narration of the life experiences of the American Martha Thorne. Born and educated in the United States, Thorne's professional career has strong ties to Spanish architecture culture. In the 1980s, she became a well-known architecture critic for her writing in specialized magazines and her work as a curator. Currently, in addition to being the executive director of the Pritzker Prize, she is one of the few women in charge of a Spanish higher education institution, as dean of the IE School

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of Architecture & Design.

Summing up, these four chapters, from four perspectives, articulate different discourses that are relevant to the development and strengthening of architecture, recognizing the anthropological value of gender studies for the architecture profession. The postmodern condition of our Western culture, or the liquid modernity in which we inevitably live, should lead us to avoid silence, to struggle for the coexistence of cultures, to interlace purposes, to visualize difference, and to accept difference as a positive matter, in order to understand it as a breeding ground to offer a better response to our society. As Audre Lorde told us, “It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences.”

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