

Jamie Leake:

Feminism in Architecture... or Lack Thereof



(Image - Feministing, 2011)

Introduction

The author of this essay, Jamie Leake, is a graduate student in the Gibbs College of Architecture. In this response essay, she elaborates on her educational experiences as a woman in architecture. She shares that as a female in the seemingly male dominated industry, the type of competition that the industry provides is unhealthy and counterproductive to gender equality. In light of today's cultural climate, women are slowly standing up in each and every industry to recognize gender inequality and expose it - enlightening and inspiring women of all disciplines to take a stance - the architectural and construction industries are no exception.

Response Essay

"I feel that architecture now seems to be oriented towards power and control rather than principles and sharing" (Ahrentzen, Groat, 1992).

I have been in school for six years. It is not a lot compared to others, but as a female - it is a lot. I felt that I was not taken seriously after I finished my bachelors in interior design, so I decided to obtain my masters in architecture. It has been two of the most uncomfortable and difficult years of my life. Getting a masters degree should be difficult - in the way that the projects are more complex and the theories are of

higher understanding; Not because of “a hidden curriculum of educational rituals which support power, competition and hierarchy” (Ahrentzen, Groat, 1992).

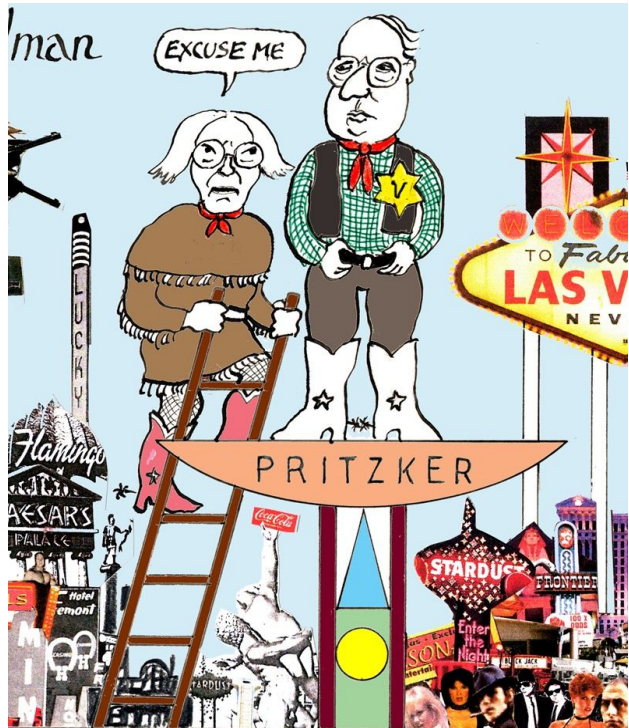
Sexism and The Star System in Architecture was published in 1989, and *Rethinking Architectural Education: Patriarchal Conventions & Alternative Visions from the Perspectives of Women Faculty* was published in 1992, yet these problems have not changed in practice or in education. For the last two years, I thought I was truly alone in my feelings towards my education, but these two articles, especially *Rethinking Architectural Education: Patriarchal Conventions & Alternative Visions from the Perspectives of Women Faculty*, really puts all of my thoughts into words. Ahrentzen and Groat state, “Competition is a major motivator of the design studio where ideas are considered “owned” and unique and should be closely guarded. As a consequence, students believe they must work alone” (Ahrentzen, Groat, 1992). In practice, architecture is a collaborative work environment, but education is still pushing for individual, competitive projects that end up all but destroying any possibility of working relationships between students, as well as faculty. Over the last year of my thesis project, I have noticed that a majority of the females sit alone and separate, working on their projects, while the males all sit together at one table (the round table if you will), helping each other, talking about

everything under the sun, always getting the attention from the professor first.

It is with my personal experience in practice and education that I agree with the authors; “many believe that architecture itself must change before women — and the profession itself — will likely be able to perform to their full potential” (Ahrentzen, Groat, 1992).

Blake Adams:

Bias in the Workplace



(Image - Hellman, 2013)

Introduction

In this response essay, Adams encapsulates both the significance of Denise Scott Brown's career and the constant battle with gender inequality that are referenced in her text, *Sexism and the Star System in Architecture*. He also touches on the star system in the architecture discipline and reminds the readers of two basic human principles - stay humble and give credit where credit is due. Adams concludes with a call to action, inviting everyone to speak up (but mostly listen) to these types industry issues.

Response Essay

Sexual discrimination in architecture was introduced to us by Denise Scott Brown in her essay, *Sexism and the Star System in Architecture*. She starts out by showing some of her credentials and accolades that prove not only is she more than capable, but has ample experience in the field and adds value to any project team. She then goes on to describe ways in which her role was belittled or cast to the side just because she is a woman. Her experiences as the wife of Robert Venturi were very real and they showed that bias was and still continues to be a problem in the workplace. Denise and Robert both worked together on many projects and conducted research as a team, formulated ideas, and truly collaborated in most of what they did. The problem that arose was

when critics and reviewers would come in and act as if Robert was the only one working on these projects. There were some examples that went even further, such as someone asking her if her work was really done by her husband and she just put her name on it, which is very belittling to hear. It makes you wonder, how would it feel to put your all into the work you produce and feel really proud of something, only to have it shot down and all the good credit goes to somebody else.

The star system in architecture was another topic that each article expanded on, and its importance lies in the fact that most of the time only one person, usually the head of the team or the leader, gets credit for the work. The perception that the field of architecture is dominated by males has only been heightened by this “star system” because in the vast majority of firms, the star, or the highest level of management is majority males. After discussion, I feel that we can make a difference if everybody, not just one group or one gender, speaks out and actively listens to one another. Denise Scott Brown had a fantastic approach in that she held seminars for hundreds, even thousands of women to come to and talk about bias and sexism in the workplace. It’s a difficult conversation to have, but is very necessary because regardless of race or gender, everybody is capable of doing work to the highest level and deserves equal credit and compensation.

Alex Bonet

Feminist Theory and Architecture



(Image - Guryan, 2018)

Introduction

In this response, Alex Bonet focused on the article, *Sexism and the Star System in Architecture*, and the struggles that Denise Scott Brown faced throughout her career, her marriage, and her life. Alex explained briefly what women, especially from Brown's perspective, go through everyday to simply be able to practice in architecture and the responses they receive. Alex concludes with what we as a society, both men and women, need to do to move past biases, and focus on what makes architecture great.

Response Essay

The first article we read, titled, *Sexism and the Star System in Architecture* by Denise Scott Brown, was mainly centered around the research aspects of how women are treated in the workplace. The researchers did studies on bias or discrimination based on sex. They found that women make up a small portion of the professional and educational field of architecture and wanted to understand why. They explained that in some cases women can be made to feel like they are undervalued in the field. The women who were featured in these studies suggested that the field of architecture needed to change as a whole for this issue to be resolved but that this would not be

possible currently with how competitive it is.

In Denise Scott Brown's article, she explained her own experiences with bias in the workplace. She explained that being married to a practicing architect brought on a lot of discrimination towards her as a woman and as a wife. She was constantly being talked down to and excluded because she was a woman. She was not chosen for projects because her husband was also a practicing architect with the same credentials. She gave an example of this when she explained the process her and her husband went through to write a book. They collaborated on this project and put in equal time and effort but when this book was written about in the press her name was left out of the articles. This was a huge issue in at that time in the professional field and still is an issue.

Everyone can work to solve this issue by becoming more aware of it. If we educate ourselves on biases we can help end them. We can learn that there are unrecognized biases that we might not be aware that we have. If we make a conscious effort to be respectful to everyone and treat people equally can create an inclusive profession.

Yingtong Zhou

Feminist Theory and Architecture



(Image - Guryan, 2018)

Introduction

The author of this essay, Yingtong Zhou, is a fourth year interior design student in the Gibbs College of Architecture. In this response essay, she elaborates on the articles, *Sexism and the Star System in Architecture* and *Rethinking Architectural Education* and shows how the issue of feminism is very real in the world of architecture; in practice and in education. She closes with her personal experiences as well as her personal opinions.

Response Essay

In the article *Sexism and The Star System in Architecture* by Denise Scott Brown, she wrote about her painful experience of being discriminated against by gender in the star system in Architecture beginning in the 1970s. She also wrote about her efforts to change these unfair situations. Over time she has witnessed a slow increase in the number of females active in the architecture industry, perhaps more slowly than in other fields. Throughout her article Brown writes about her experiences of working with her husband. She found that she and her husband have more opportunities to work together, but after years of fighting for success, she mentioned that she still experiences discrimination at least once a day. She also knew that there were many young people that rarely feel the

gender discrimination because they were still in the early stages of education or practice. She feared that they would soon realize that the opportunities to have a high level of responsibilities are more difficult to rise to and will more often than not, go to the men. She and so many others hope that one day, women don't think this is their own fault, or lose their confidence and self-esteem. At the end of the article, she had a realization that all those who had brought her painful experience over the years were naive and ignorant; She gained assurance from those who understood her. What's more, the confidence in her own work made her gain self-respect.

In the second article *Rethinking Architectural Education* by Sherry Ahrentzen and Linda Groat, provides more details of "the star system", and gives a more academic background of Brown's article. They used a nationwide survey developed by the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture (ACSA) to get a better understanding about the status of women in architecture schools. They combined this data and divided them into three main categories for in-depth exploration specifically related to the situation of women in architecture schools, and the experience and feelings brought to them by these unfair or discriminatory situations. They then discussed what improvements could be made in each of the three categories. Finally, they came

up with a new model for architectural education, which is not male-dominated or design-centric but is "one which is non-hierarchical, multi-focal, diverse, connected to social values, and culturally-based" (S. Ahrentzen and L. Groat, 1992, p15).

In my personal experience in school and in practice, there have been few experiences of sexism, but have heard from other people's experience. I like their concept of the new model for architecture education, which was implied as "a tapestry". Like they said, it is not just for women and architects; the hope is that this network could help to improve society as whole. Do not limit yourself to gender, class or race, let the society be full of diversity, and accept the diversity from the bottom of your heart to enrich our whole culture.

Bibliography:

Ahrentzen, Sherry. Groat, Linda. (1992). *Rethinking Architectural Education: Patriarchal Conventions & Alternative Visions from the Perspectives of Women Faculty, The Hidden Curriculum*. *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research*, Vol. 9, No. 2, Special Issue: Women's Voices in Architecture and Planning, pp. 95-111.

Scott Brown, Denise. (1979). *Sexism and the Star System in Architecture*. *Journal of Architectural Education*, Vol. 32, No. 4, pp. 8-11.

Image - (2013) "Hellman March 2013 - AJ Venturi's cartoon." *Architects Journal*. <<https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/home/from-the-archive-robert-venturis-acceptance-speech-for-the-1991-pritzker-prize/8646423.article>>

Image - (2011) "Women Architects Say, 'Here We Are.'" *Feministing*. <<http://feministing.com/2010/11/23/women-architects-say-here-we-are/>>

Image - (2018) "Sexism Follows Women Across States- and Lives" <<https://www.sesp.northwestern.edu/news-center/news/2018/08/sexism-follows-women-across-statesand-their-lives.html>>

Image - (2012) "Editorial: Yousufzai an example for women: Fight for equality" <<https://baylorlariat.com/2012/10/18/editorial-yousufzai-an-example-for-women-fight-for-equality/>>