
Review

Reviewed Work(s): *Women in Modernism: Making Places in Architecture* by Barry Bergdoll, Beverly Willis, Gwendolyn Wright, Sarah Herda, Toshiko Mori and Karen Stein

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2. De La Warr Pavilion at Bexhill-on-Sea, England. (Photograph courtesy of Regina Stephan, Darmstadt.)

domestic architecture between the World Wars. On close examination, it suggests comparison with Aalto's most radical residential design of the 1930s. The existence of an increasingly sophisticated architectural press in the 1930s broke through barriers of geographic isolation. Having leaned on Johannes Duiker's Zonnestraal Tuberculosis Sanatorium at Hilversum, Holland (1926–1928), for his own tuberculosis sanatorium at Paimio, Finland (1929–1933), Aalto may well have drawn on Mendelsohn's Am Rupenhorn when designing the villa for industrialist Harry Gullichsen at Noormarkku, Finland, and named for his wife Maire as the Villa Mairea.

As I learned from my own encounters with him, conversation with Hitchcock consisted mainly of his opinions, colored by gossip about architects and colleagues whom he disliked. He was, however, the soul of generosity when it came to giving lessons on architectural history. In my case, those "tutorials"

took place at restaurants in London's Soho and South Kensington villages. I was able to assist Professor Hitchcock in exchange by answering questions about Eliel Saarinen, Alvar Aalto, Sigurd Lewerentz, and other architects I had studied while working in Finland 1959–1960.

Why did Hitchcock and Johnson pay such scant attention to Erich Mendelsohn and his consistently high-quality architecture? Mendelsohn was one of a number of Jewish architects practicing modernism in Europe during this period. Another was Arnost Wiesner of Die Brenner Architekten in Brno, Czechoslovakia. Wiesner's Crematorium Chapel at Brno is an ingenious translation of Gothic forms into modernist terms, with more than a nod to Adolf Loos. Hitchcock and Johnson not only failed to recognize Mendelsohn's role in *The International Style: Architecture Since 1922* exhibition but also overlooked other significant German modernist designers such as Robert Vorhoelzer, who remained architect to Das Deutsche Postamt into the Hitler period.

In the August 1951 issue of *Architectural Record*, Hitchcock recalled what he and Johnson had written about the exhibition: "The International Style was not presented in the 1932 book . . . as a closed system; nor was it intended to be the whole of modern architecture, past, present and future.

[Therefore] perhaps in the circumstances the term should simply be forgotten." He must however have felt considerable satisfaction in the knowledge that their creation of the International Style as a label precluded a tabula rasa in any future discourse. If we take account of Hitchcock's errors of misconception, his failure to recognize Mendelsohn's significance comes as no surprise. On page ix of his Foreword to the 1966 edition of *The International Style*, he wrote that Aalto's rise to international fame dates from the Finnish Pavilion for the 1937 Paris Exposition, whereas the Turun Sanomat newspaper building in Turku (1927) and the tuberculosis sanatorium at Paimio (1929) had already established Aalto as a leader in European modernism. Hitchcock stated: "We were certainly aware of the consider-

able difference between his [Aalto's] sculpturally shaped supports in the press-room of the Turun Sanomat building and the slim round or square *pilotis* so characteristic of Le Corbusier."

Art historians tend to take what Hitchcock termed "sculpturally shaped supports" as a matter of appearance. However, the Turun Sanomat columns are a response to actual forces induced by cantilevers that extend the column heads into the pressroom, creating a column-free volume below to accommodate the printing presses. In other words, their form is entirely functional. Hitchcock's "sculptural quality" ignores Aalto's knowledge of Robert Maillart's concrete structures in Switzerland, as illustrated in the architectural press of the time.

Located in Johnson's postmodern, faux-Ledoux College of Architecture, Dr. Stephan's exhibition is tinged with irony. Her archival restoration of Mendelsohn's achievements provides a compelling interface between the profession and the general public. In her hands, Mendelsohn's work shines out as jewel-like evidence of the contribution he made to modern society and our daily enjoyment of its provocations. This exhibit is truly a "Revenge of the Archives."

Malcolm Quantrill

Women in Modernism: Making Places in Architecture

A colloquium presented by the Beverly Willis Architecture Foundation and the Museum of Modern Art, October 25, 2007. Moderated by Barry Bergdoll.

Speakers: BEVERLY WILLIS, GWENDOLYN WRIGHT, SARAH HERDA, TOSHIKO MORI, and KAREN STEIN

Is there anything new to say about women in architecture? It has been thirty years since the publication of *Women in American Architecture* (1977), edited by Susana Torre, with essays by Gwendolyn Wright, Dolores Hayden, and others. This

anthology, and the exhibition that prompted it, sought to go beyond the question, "Why have there been no great women architects?" by recognizing the important role women have played as consumers, producers, critics, and creators of built space in the modern era. It was inspired by a desire to think about architecture not just as the work of a single individual but as the collaborative effort of large groups of people, some "professional" and others not. This rewriting of architectural history did not involve the erasure of canonical figures and histories but opened up new fields of practice to explore and new figures to celebrate.

Following that first wave of feminist critique, a second generation of scholars turned theory loose on the topic, employing post-structuralist analysis to deconstruct the discipline. Three anthologies published a decade ago, each prompted by a conference (*The Sex of Architecture*, 1996, edited by Diana Agrest, Patricia Conway, and Leslie Kanes Weisman; *Architecture in Fashion*, 1996, edited by Deborah Fausch, Paulette Singley, Rodolphe El-Khoury, and Zvi Efrat; and *Sexuality and Space*, 1997, edited by Beatriz Colomina), revealed the important role gender has played in the philosophy of modern architecture, where "feminine" and "masculine" serve as tropes to organize basic relationships between structure, ornament, and decoration. Framed by these two complementary approaches (social history and theoretical analysis), historians and critics have succeeded in making a place for women in architecture by broadening received ideas about how buildings come into being, as well as revealing the culturally contingent nature of architectural ideas.

The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) has played a significant role in the recovery of women designers, particularly those whose high modernist credentials align with the International Style. In 1980, the Museum mounted an exhibition of the work of Eileen Gray, and in 1996, it held a show on Lilly Reich curated by Matilda McQuaid. Through this institutional approbation, Gray and Reich were admitted into the pantheon of architectural heroes

headed by Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, and Frank Lloyd Wright (who have been celebrated with eight MoMA shows each since 1932). The curators of these exhibitions recognized not only the ways in which Gray and Reich were restricted or inhibited in their professional work by their gender but also the ways in which their gender allowed them to work productively between related disciplines (architecture, interior design, product design, furniture design, and store design) and in collaboration with others. It is exactly this freedom to move between different modes of activity that MoMA explored at a recent colloquium entitled, "Women in Modernism. Making Places in Architecture."

Proposed and sponsored by the Beverly Willis Architectural Foundation, the colloquium brought together a panel of distinguished speakers moderated by Barry Bergdoll, the Chief Curator of Architecture and Design at MoMA, to discuss the roles played by women in architecture, both inside and outside the profession. Bergdoll and Sarah Herda, the newly appointed Director of the Graham Foundation, concentrated on the role women played in creating the discourse of modern architecture. For example, the critic and MoMA Curator Elizabeth Mock helped shape a dialogue about what modern design could be through influential shows such as "Built in the U.S.A. 1932-44." Herda revealed the little known history of the Graham Foundation, concentrating on women such as Eileen Saarinen, Catherine Bauer, and Grace Morley, the Director of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA), who were critical in forming the Foundation's early agenda and activities.

Other speakers addressed women architects directly. As Karen Stein noted, the perception of the role of women in architecture does not always accurately reflect the historical reality. Beverly Willis repeated the need for historical recognition of buildings designed by women. Gwendolyn Wright unraveled the interconnected histories of modern women and modern design. She concluded by arguing that the recognition of only dimly remembered diversity in

the past should serve to make us more optimistic about the present. Toshiko Mori of the Graduate School of Design (GSD) at Harvard continued this positive theme, noting that women now make up the majority of students at the GSD, and that this gender balance is paralleled by a new ethnic and cultural diversity among the students. Mori argued that this diversity encourages a new way of understanding design practice as a collaborative activity involving many people and disciplines rather than as an individual and isolated process of form making.

As the first generation of feminist scholars showed us, we cannot raise the topic of "women in modernism" without critically examining the structures of power and influence that decide what gets built and by whom. It may be impossible to recognize the role women play and have played in architecture while at the same time maintaining the traditional idea of the lone architect as the ultimately authority figure in shaping the built environment. One way to perform that critique is through books, essays, and conferences. Ultimately, this particular colloquium did not significantly expand the discussion about women in architecture that has been taking place for thirty years. Its significance lies in its location. As MoMA has successfully demonstrated over the past seventy-five years, public displays of compelling work and ideas can engage large audiences and even change the terms of the debate. Making more room for women in architecture might involve not only exhibitions of the work of female architects but also different kinds of exhibitions. In 1965, the Museum held a show entitled "Architecture without Architects" that recognized the work of nonprofessional designers. If MoMA is to move forward with the agenda suggested by this colloquium, we can look forward to future shows that increase public awareness of the diverse actors involved in creating the built world, and shows that address architecture as a social practice as well as an artistic one.

Joanna Merwood-Salisbury