





# Black Turtleneck, Round Glasses

Expanding Planning Culture  
Perspectives

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# Foreword

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In the last three years, the social discourse on equal opportunities for women and other marginalized groups has gained in speed and intensity. It seems as though a tipping point has been reached and the discussion about structural disadvantages has now filtered into the mainstream of society.

Whether it's about gender-care, gender-pay, or the gender-pension gap, the careers of local female politicians, or the disadvantages faced by women in the arts and literature, everyone is talking about the "gender issue."

The number of publications, initiatives, and measures on the subject of equal opportunity has increased in the planning and building industry. The status quo is being uncovered, scrutinized, and discussed. Discriminatory structures in universities and offices are being made public. Publications, podcasts, and illustrated books are explicitly focusing on the forgotten or overlooked work of women planners and architects. Especially on social media, initiatives have emerged and are actively addressing their own content—not just from the perspective of raising awareness about the problem, but proactively and as a matter of course—and forming new networks. This is where the title *Black Turtleneck, Round Glasses* comes in. It evokes associations with Corbusier, Mies, and their coevals, in a way that may tempt us to lapse into a certain nostalgia; but do our heroes still represent today's diverse (architectural) world? Who has a voice, and who is allowed to speak? What is relevant, and who

gets to decide? The current debates aim at opening up new perspectives as well as revising old ones. In this instance, the debate is not so much about “adding” in the lived experiences of women, which are largely absent from current perspectives on planning. Instead, it’s a matter of adopting an intersectional stance and making it the basis of systemic change in planning culture.

It’s even dawning on the mainstream professional discourse, hailing from academia, media, institutions, and firms, that the issue of equal opportunity is not going to automatically be resolved, despite the prevailing openness to solutions. Well-educated women are still missing from the job market, leading to increased pressure to take action and examine the underlying causes. Are there a lack of role models in teaching and in practice? Is the tradition of the profession as it has historically developed not compatible enough? Why aren’t women taking up the professional positions they’re entitled to?

Now that we’ve entered a fourth wave of feminism—which is increasingly committed to an intersectional orientation—and a third wave of feminist debates in architecture, it has become virtually impossible to engage in dialog around the professional culture without also engaging in societal discourse.

At issue here is the perspective itself. An environment planned chiefly via a male gaze often disregards the needs of women, whether Black, white, or of color, as well as the requirements of elderly people, children, or those using a baby stroller or wheelchair. What is more, architectural high culture is still defined as the architecture and urban planning that originated in Western industrial nations and which set the perspective of Western thinking as the norm. In order to understand the views and actions explicitly of women, both in the context of the past and the present, it makes sense to examine the systemic causes of discrimination that have had a heightened effect in architecture, and the impacts of being socialized as a woman.

*Black Turtleneck, Round Glasses* also addresses the voids resulting from the perspectives that are omitted in architectural planning. What is lost when the lived experience of *others* is missing? Is it pos-

sible to establish a causal link between these absent perspectives and a built environment that manifests correspondingly less diversity? Don't we live in a neutral, ready-made city that provides the same backdrop for everyone's everyday life?

Achieving equal opportunity is not simply something that is *nice-to-have* for the industry in Germany or Europe. There are many indications that the reorientation of the entire building industry here vis-à-vis climate change—and, indeed, worldwide—is closely linked to the debate on gender equality. Those courses of action not taken by architects—a practice with a historically androcentric design mindset—as well as the question of who spends what money (and on what), have had a decisive influence on the rather faltering pursuit of climate objectives in recent decades.

In the last few years, initiatives, collectives, and networks have developed, often from within universities, many of them calling for a reorientation of teaching and a professional discourse that embraces diversity. They get along without tradition—and seem to have few points of intersection with “classical professional discourse.” Afaina de Jong, the architect of the Pavilion of the Netherlands at the 2021 Venice Biennale, addresses issues of space and society within her work, and in a conversation published in this volume where she discusses her stance on the relationship between activism and architecture.

The professional debate on equal opportunity in architecture is in full swing. May *Black Turtleneck*, *Round Glasses* contribute to making the discussion and the negotiation processes in planning culture deeper and broader. May a shared love of architecture and a sense of humility toward the privilege of shaping our built environment serve as the common denominator for further development and mutual understanding.

May one-dimensionality turn into diversity!



# Young Women and Young Women Architects

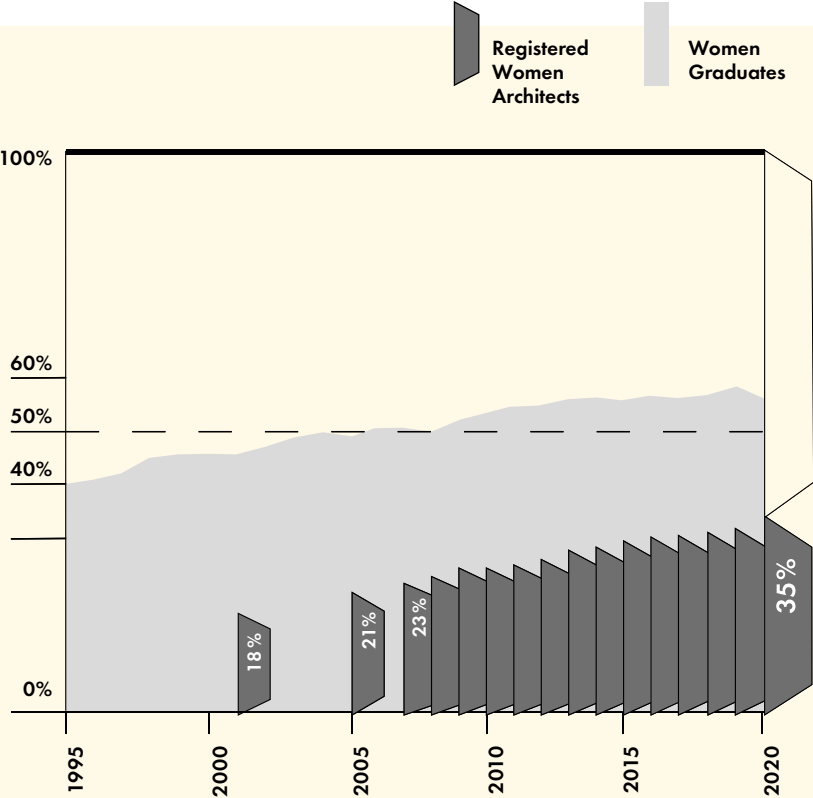
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*“I wasn’t a feminist. But after entering the architecture profession, I became one.”*

Anna Heringer, Studio Anna Heringer

After graduation, architecture students can expect to encounter excellent opportunities on the job market. The industry is booming, and good people are in demand. It’s very likely that they will be able to pursue the profession in a fulfilling way, develop their skills, and advance to a leadership position. The trend shows, however, that after entering the profession, the careers of male architecture graduates tend to follow a different path than that of their female colleagues—despite having the same qualifications. Since 2006 more women than men have been graduating from architecture programs. Even so, they are less likely to pursue a career in the profession and more often remain in non-leadership positions. They earn less and are promoted less frequently. In many cases, they turn their backs on architecture altogether in the course of their professional career. Or, alternately, they opt for non-construction architecture-related areas and take up positions in specialist media, foundations, associations, or mid-level teaching. This development, and the prognosis concerning female graduates, increases the professional opportunities that are available for male graduates. Statistically speaking, their female colleagues don’t represent much competition. On the contrary, the prospective dropout of women graduates only seems to improve their career prospects.

Why is that? After all, gender equality legislation has been in place for a long time. Although urban planning has been preoccupied with the issue of women architects' invisibility since the 1970s, the effects have remained the same: women architects are less likely to gain a foothold in the architectural profession, often remaining stuck in mid-level positions. While investment in diversifying the STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) is intended



**Fig. 1: Women graduates in architecture versus registered women architects 1995–2020**

Source: Federal Chamber of German Architects/Federal Statistical Office of Germany H201 / Kaufmann/Ihsen/Villa Braslavsky 2018/Analysis: Karin Hartmann/Infographic: PAPINESKA



to motivate women to study in these fields, keeping them in the profession seems to be an additional problem in architecture.

### **The Atmosphere in Architecture**

According to the 2020 statistics published by the Federal Chamber of German Architects, women make up 35 percent of the country's employed or self-employed registered architects.<sup>2</sup> Only 28 percent of the professorships in architecture are held by women. More than half of women architects, but only one quarter of male architects, work in a non-managerial position, be it in architecture or urban planning offices, public service or business economics.

At the European level, the percentage of women architects has increased in the last decade. According to the Sector Study by the Architects' Council of Europe, the number of women architects in Europe increased from 31 percent in 2010 to 42 percent in 2020. This is an astonishing development, which is chiefly a result of the very high proportion of women architects in Serbia, Croatia, Sweden, and Poland.<sup>3</sup> One percent of respondents described themselves as non-binary or preferred not to comment on their gender.<sup>4</sup>

### **Structural Disadvantages**

According to the study *Frauen in der Architektur* (Women in architecture) by the Technical University of Munich, both sexes are very satisfied with their choice of study and engrossed in their subject.<sup>5</sup> What happens then with the well-educated women university graduates afterward? Time and again, they are hit by a kind of "practice shock" after starting their jobs. It's likely that, like many disadvantaged people in other fields, they experience structural discrimination when they enter the labor market. Very little data is available for Germany and Europe on the extent and systemic nature of structural discrimination against women and marginalized groups in the architecture sector. In North America, there is a great deal more information available. Whereas in Germany the degree of discrimination in the mainstream has been, at best, only partially recognized, in the United States differentiated data on gender- or race/

ethnicity-based patterns of *bias* in architectural practice is now finally available, published in a January 2022 study by the American Institute of Architects (AIA) and Center for WorkLife Law. “A simple definition of bias,” the study states, “is when two otherwise identical people are treated differently because of their membership in a social group; indeed, bias is often measured by giving people identical resumes and documenting how people from different social groups are treated differently.”<sup>6</sup> Within its 192-pages, the report surveyed 1,346 architects of all ages, positions, ethnicities, and genders, identifying, defining, and analyzing the various *biases* that are found in architecture specifically. The findings are striking and gave the study its name: “We found an elephant in the room: White Men are having a different experience than all other groups in architecture workplaces.”<sup>7</sup> In thirteen work areas that were examined—from “Belonging” and “Long-term future” to “Fairness of promotions”—the study identifies the specific disparities that it found between Black men and women, men/women of color, and white men and women. The study not only provides a detailed account of the grievances in the industry; with the *Bias Interrupters* it also delivers a differentiated instrument for dismantling discrimination and systematically increasing diversity in companies. Evidence- and data-based, these tools offer an easy-to-use working aid through which processes can be structured more sustainably.

The study is a milestone in the architecture industry. It is unparalleled in both its scope and the depth of its investigation. Although the economic, social, and work-culture situation in North American architecture differs from that in Germany, many aspects of professional-culture in the two countries coincide, since they share the same origin—one which applies to and has been adopted across the profession worldwide. The study thus sets new standards and liberates the industry from its state of ignorance. It takes a differentiated approach toward analyzing the working situation of those being discriminated against and gives them options for action—but also arguments for not wanting to work in such a highly discriminatory industry in the first place. The study repeatedly points out that discrimi-