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**Autor:** Lange, Torsten / Malterre-Barthes, Charlotte

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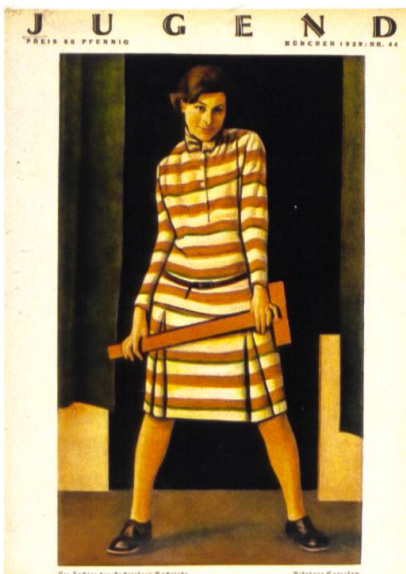
Document 1, n.d.: Poster for 'Parity Talks', designed by Ursina Völm and Martina Walther

# Architects Who Make a Fuss<sup>1</sup>

Torsten Lange and Charlotte Malterre-Barthes  
for the Parity Group

A speculative investigation into the archive of a grassroots initiative for gender parity at the department of architecture ETH Zurich, 2014–2017.

## Prologue



Nikolai Zagrekov, «Girl with the t-square», (portrait of Ursula Nachtlicht, daughter of the Jewish architect Leo Nachtlicht), cover image for «Die Jugend», no. 44, 1929

In 2014, following yet another final critique in a design studio with an all-male panel of guest critics, a group of teaching assistants and students gathered in a café on Höggerberg to give vent to their anger about the persistent gender inequality within the department. This marked the beginning of the Parity Group, an informal grassroots initiative whose goal was to establish greater balance between men and women, especially in leadership positions. Over the course of the past three years, Parity Group members have not only intervened in the department's institutional structures, but they also organized two symposia and workshops with the participation of experts who work at the intersection of gender and architecture (and the design professions more generally). By doing so, the group became part of an international network of similar activist organizations. Through the expertise of these external partners and thanks to the active participation of members from all levels of the department, the Parity Group developed a set of measures, the so-called «9 Points for Parity», aimed at improving gender equity. In May 2017, the Professors' Conference voted unanimously to adopt and implement a Gender Action Plan for the department. This decision included a commitment to institutionalize the work of the Parity Group, so far carried out on an informal and purely voluntary basis, by creating a Parity Board tasked with the delivery of this plan. The task ahead is to formulate and implement a series of concrete measures as part of the department's obligation—as set out by the ETH Zurich Executive Board—to develop such a plan in line with its own specific needs.

This article formulates a situated critique of the department and its structures, as well as of our critical engagement with, and interventions into, these structures in a wider context of gender-based activism within and beyond the architectural discipline. It adopts the form of a «site-writing», an engaged and spatialized mode of writing first developed by feminist architectural historian and theorist Jane Rendell.<sup>2</sup> Drawing on psychoanalysis and autobiography, and by referring to «spaces as they are remembered, dreamed and imagined, as well as observed», site-writing combines «different genres and modes of writing [...] whose critical «voices» are objective and subjective, distant and intimate», in order to put forth «alternative understandings of subjectivity and positionality».<sup>3</sup> In what follows, we seek to reconstruct the site of our involvement in attempting to transform the department into a more dynamic, diverse, and democratic space. The text proceeds as a conversation between distinct voices that cut across time (past, present, and future), real and imagined spaces, and visual and textual registers. Fictitious journal entries by a scholar who visits ETH Zurich for a week in March in 2024 as part of her research on women in architecture are juxtaposed with actual archival documents from the Parity Group, as she discovers them, and with a description of the group's work and its intellectual and institutional contexts.

## I. Taking place, claiming space

*Monday, March 4, 2024. Day one in the archive. 10 am. Meeting with the archivist on Höggerberg. She's a woman, possibly in her late forties. Everything has been perfectly arranged. On the desk are a couple of boxes with the inscription «ETH/D-ARCH Parity Group, 2014–2017», a drawing tube that has the words «posters and prints» written on it, a lever-arch file full of «correspondence», and a hard disk whose label reads «original data/audio and video recordings». She says: «All that's left is here, but feel free to ask if you'd like to know more». She had been a PhD candidate back then. Few of those who were involved in the group's activities stayed in the institution. And almost all of the women who, at the time, held Chairs in the department are either Professors emeriti by now, or have left the school once their appointments as Guest Professors ended. Who took their places?*

Like any act of design, architecture is at its most basic about imagining a desirable future. How is it that today—almost a century after the adoption of the female vote in most European countries—it still is mainly men who plan this future? What's more, it seems to be a very small and homogenous group of men: predominantly white and middle-class. As we've become increasingly aware that ever more people are affected by design decisions, the faction of those who make those decisions continues to expand at an exceedingly slow pace. Architecture thus, by and large, remains a bastion of male exclusivity. Men continue to dominate not only the profession, but also architectural education. Even though there is now near gender parity among students, women's career opportunities in the field of architecture continue to look dire.<sup>4</sup> For instance, at the end of 2013, 44.5% of the student body in our department were female, while only 11.8% of the professorships were held by women.<sup>5</sup> In addition to the shockingly low representation of women among the professors, lecture series and panel discussions with only male speakers are still the norm, and female architects in the curriculum are largely unheard of. Thus, for about half of the student body, role models are lacking.

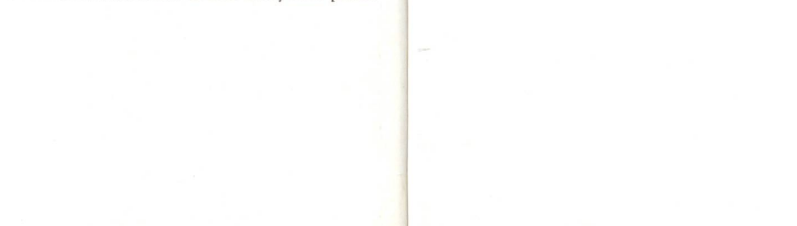
Amidst the recent international resurgence of feminist thinking, calling out persistent injustices as well as pushing back against both new and reemerging sexism, misogyny, and other forms of gender-based discrimination, the Parity Group formed out of a loose network of people who were frustrated about the grossly «unbalanced» state of affairs in their immediate day-to-day environment at our department. With the retirement, among others, of Uta Hassler in 2015, the department embarked on a generation change that would see the appointment of nearly ten professors over the course of a four-year period. We seized this opportunity to address this situation of inequity and demand steps towards equal representation of men and women.

We were, of course, aware of the particularly conservative Swiss social context, where women were granted the right to vote in 1971 and gender equality legislation did not come into effect until 1996. But only through our gradual engagement in this process, we understood just how slow the pace of change had really been: It took 130 years from the foundation of the Federal Polytechnic and 114 years from the enrolment of the first female student, Nadezhda Smeckaja, that, in 1985, with the appointment of the architect Flora Ruchat-Roncati the first woman became a professor at ETH.<sup>6</sup>

But one does not have to go that far back in history to get a sense that progress moves at a snail's pace. Research by Parity Group member Sarah Nichols revealed that more than a third (40 of 108) of all doctoral dissertations at the Institute for the History and Theory of Architecture (gta)—one of four research institutes—were written by women.<sup>7</sup> Ever since the first thesis was submitted by a female scholar in 1986, this number has steadily grown. A success, one might think at first. Yet, since its foundation in 1967, no woman ever held a Chair in the Institute. Hence not a



Document 2, dated March 8, 2016: «Parity Talks» photos



Document 3, dated March 8, 2017: «Parity Talks II» photos



single one of these PhD theses had been produced under a female supervisor. While some of the former doctoral students seem to have literally disappeared after earning their degree, a handful have ended up in positions far below their level of qualification. Many others have pursued careers outside ETH Zurich, whether in Swiss Universities of Applied Sciences or abroad.<sup>8</sup> It seems to be instances like these, in which the otherwise deceptively abstract phrase of the «leaky pipeline», takes on a personal dimension.

Further to the lack of female professors, women architects—both Swiss and foreign—remain conspicuously absent from the curriculum. Compared to their male counterparts, pioneering figures such as Lux Guyer, Flora Steiger-Crawford, or Beate Schnitter are rarely discussed in design studios, lectures and seminars. The same is true for prominent international modernists as Eileen Gray, Charlotte Perriand, or Lilly Reich, to name but a few. In a conversation, a student once reported that Lina Bo Bardi was, in fact, the only female architect whose work was explicitly mentioned. How is one to know one's future, without knowing one's past?

Such collective amnesia is by no means unique to our department. Instead, it points to a wider absence of women from mainstream histories of the discipline, not to say their willful erasure from such histories. Regardless of the requirement to «integrate gender-specific aspects in research and teaching»<sup>9</sup> there remain significant reservations and misconceptions, even anxieties, among faculty members as to the introduction of gender into the curriculum. In a recent interview, the outgoing Dean, Professor Annette Spiro, rejected the need for gender scholarship in architecture. For, in her opinion, there is no «female or male architecture».<sup>10</sup> «I must admit», she adds, «that I am simply not interested in questions of gender. Important are oeuvre and perception, no matter if the author is a man or a woman». Yet does this understanding not precisely overlook the inherent gender bias of such categories as oeuvre and authorship, which have effectively served to suppress within historiography the role and contribution of women in the production of the built environment?

To claim space in favor of increasing diversity in our discipline—both in the act of rewriting its history as well as in its present and future making—means more than just inserting women into an established canon. It requires a wholesale reconstruction of the conceptual and methodological frameworks that underpin this canon—the consequent and sustained undoing of «master» narratives.

## II. Institutional critique

*Tuesday, March 5, 2024. Received a message from supervisor who asks about progress. It was her who recommended coming here in the first place. «ETH Zurich—a very peculiar case», she had warned. A young Associate Professor at the time, she was part of an expanding network of critical architects and intellectuals, who realized that improving social justice and diversity in architectural education—and the wider discipline—required a sustained critique of the academic and professional institutions, as well as their underlying structures and modus operandi. Went through plenty of material in just two days. From the distance, the situation seems surreal. Surprisingly little awareness and great reluctance to take action by the department. One can notice the frustration among students and staff. Yet, there also seem to be a sense of urgency and grassroots activism, rigor, creativity, and humor.*

In their combination, architecture and academia seem to form an impenetrable substance. Like an ultra-hard block of cement, architectural education is exceptionally resistant to cracks and changes. And more often than not, in trying to secure its disciplinary integrity, the internal power structures of this monolith appear to be working against women. Of course, one can always blame some distant outside—an abstract social,

political, or economic context that first has to change in order for academia to follow suit. But this would mean overlooking the inherent contradictions and struggles inside the institution itself.

In our Parity Group meetings, above all the two Parity Talks symposia and workshops in 2016 and 2017, there have often been heated discussions as to what might be the possible structural causes for the often unconscious gender bias. From the way in which job profiles are written to the hard and fast criteria for excellence, there appears to be little awareness about the ways in which the system of the architectural academia is pitted against women. Too often, then, these systemic features are viewed as natural givens that must remain unchallenged if the integrity of good and rigorous scholarship is to be preserved. The fact that the size of an oeuvre is typically understood as an indicator of excellence in the architecture school automatically puts women at a disadvantage, as the former, for different reasons, tend to realize buildings later and at a slower pace than their male colleagues.

Add to this the recent obsession with young age and the ongoing excellence-focused and output-oriented restructuring of academia, and you'll have an especially toxic mix. As philosophers Isabelle Stengers and Vinciane Despret have warned:

«[c]ompetition and the will to excel [...] are today officially on the agenda as unavoidable imperatives. [...] Knowledge worthy of this name must not fear evaluation, they say to us, and this evaluation must be objective: how many articles, published in which journals? How many contracts? How many collaborations with other prestigious institutions, thus contributing to the «positioning» of the university in the European or global market?»<sup>11</sup>

However, numerous studies have exposed how evaluation procedures frequently reproduce, rather than remove, existing gender biases, and thus may, in fact, contribute to sustaining sexism and gender-based discrimination in the academy.<sup>12</sup> For instance, male lecturers are frequently ranked higher by their students than women for no obvious professional reasons.<sup>13</sup> In architecture, such an underlying bias may indeed be further amplified by socially constructed and historically cultivated notions of «mastery» or «creative genius».

### III. Networking and public campaigning

*Wednesday, March 6, 2024. Invitation from one of the Chairs in Architecture and Design to give an impromptu studio talk about my research on «women in architecture». «As required by the curriculum...», the message started. Where to begin? What to tell them? Last night, the archivist took me out for a drink in the city. Met one of her friends, who has been running an office with two other female ETH graduates for nearly a decade. «We were either in the middle of, or just about to, start our Master's projects when that whole Parity Group stuff started», they said. «Only one of us went back to teach as an Assistant for a while.» Decided to take the entire class to their office to see first-hand a «female practice». Impressive work!*

During one of the roundtable discussions at the first Parity Talks, Karin Sander highlighted how important solidarity and cooperation had been in the early stages of her career as an artist. In many ways, the Parity Group was motivated by a similar ethics of self-help and collaboration. In this spirit, and tired of the lazy excuse that there aren't enough talented women out there, two group members—Charlotte Malterre-Barthes and Harald R. Stühlinger—set out on an urgent and immediately practical task: to establish a Swiss database of women in architecture, aimed at all those involved in inviting guest speakers, programming lecture series, setting up search committees for the appointment of Chairs, and drawing up lists of suitable candidates for professorships. This database was then published as a special issue of «Archithese» in June 2016.<sup>14</sup>

Document 4, dated March 3, 2017: NOMAS power lunch «Women in Academia» at MIT

**How many women were on your last review?**

(circle one)

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
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0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
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0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

POWER LUNCH  
WOMEN IN ACADEMIA

CAITLIN MUELLER  
CAROLINE JONES  
JOYCE HWANG  
LAUREN JACOBI

MODERATED BY  
EMILY WATLINGTON

FRIDAY, 3/3 @ 12 PM  
LONG LOUNGE, 7-429  
HOSTED BY MIT NOMAS



Document 5, dated June 8, 2016: special issue of Archithese 'Architektur, die [fem.], Baukultur ist auch weiblich!', no. 2 (2016)

Lacking institutional support as well as discipline-specific knowledge and expertise on gender, we turned to the many like-minded international groups on architecture and gender that had come to flourish over the last few years, eager to learn from them. Their work has been a constant source of inspiration and empowerment. Of those connections, which included links to the Australian association 'Parlour—Women, Equity, Architecture'<sup>15</sup>, and to Justine Clark in particular, or the 'Feminist Art and Architecture Collaborative (FAAC)'<sup>16</sup>, a group of young scholars based at different North American universities, the one to KTH Stockholm became the most lasting. There, in the Technical University's architecture department under Malin Åberg Wennerholm as Director of Studies, an ambitious gender-based curriculum had been launched. Feminist thinking became integral not only to architectural design, but also in history and theory through the work, among others, of Hélène Frichot. Following her invitation, Parity Group members Torsten Lange and Emily Eliza Scott chaired a roundtable about architecture and feminist pedagogies at the 'Architecture and Feminisms' themed annual conference of the Architectural Humanities Research Association (AHRA).<sup>17</sup>

Finally, the research team consisting of Eliana Perotti, Katrin Albrecht, Helene Bihlmaier, Irina Davidovici, and Katia Frey, all engaged in the activities of the Parity Group, that investigates the life and work of Flora Ruchat-Roncati within the framework of a major SNF-funded project, will reestablish a hidden network of connections between actors in Switzerland and abroad.<sup>18</sup>

#### IV. Policy design and development

*Thursday, March 7, 2024. Day four. The tedious side of research: filing an interim research report to my school. Doing this research trip on a grant for emerging female scholars in architecture. Recall how my supervisor recently told me that access to scholarships from this fund helped launch her career. But, the levels of bureaucracy... Must finish this quickly! Only one day left and still got hours of video and audio recordings of the parity workshops to go through. Why on Earth would anyone create such long and complex online forms to fill in? Those useless heaps of data...*

Information is power. Knowledge and data are key to providing arguments for policies. However, what is recorded, and how, is not neutral. Devising plans and formulating goals constitute political activities by default. They need to be publicly debated with those most directly affected by those plans. For, it is they who are the true experts.

Right from the start, our work focused on designing concrete measures to improve gender parity at all levels of the department, but especially in the appointment procedure of professors.<sup>19</sup> As early as June 2015, through a collaborative process among assistants, we identified five key measures. One of them was the production of a directory of female practitioners and scholars, now available as a resource. The others included a double award system for Master and PhD theses as well as doubling guest professorships to ensure parity, a travel fund for incoming and outgoing female assistants, and gathering more precise data about gender in the department beyond the basic monitoring by ETH Equal every two years.<sup>20</sup> For instance, the latter should also include figures about female representation in studio critiques, public talks, and panel discussions, all of which are vital for increasing the visibility of women and their perception by aspiring students as role models.

Those aspects, among others, were then taken up in the so-called '9 Points for Parity', the major outcome of the first Parity Talks in 2016. The '9 Points' represent a comprehensive set of measures, in line with the general principles of the ETH Zurich Gender Action Plan of 2014 as well as in response to the specific needs of our department acknowledging that there exist several distinctively architectural obstacles that need to be

1

BILDUNG EINES PARITY BOARD BESTEHEND AUS JE EINER VERTRETUNG ALLER INSTITUTE DES D-ARCH, DER PROFESSORENSCHAFT, DES FACHVEREINS DER ASSISTENTINNEN UND ASSISTENTEN DES D-ARCH (AAA), DES FACHVEREINS DER ARCHITEKTURSTUDIERENDEN AN DER ETH ZÜRICH (ARCHITEKTURA), DER PARITY GROUP SOWIE EINER EXTERNEN FACHPERSON. DAS PARITY BOARD IST DAFÜR VERANTWORTLICH, DIE GENANNTEN MASSNAHMEN FÜR EINE GESCHLECHTER-PARITÄT, IHRE GRADUELLE UMSETZUNG SOWIE IHRE ENTSPRECHENDE FINANZIERUNG IN ANGRIF ZU NEHMEN UND WEITERE ÖFFENTLICHE VERANSTALTUNGEN WIE DIE JÄHRLICHEN PARITY TALKS ZU ORGANISIEREN.

2

JÄHRLICHES INTERNES WIE EXTERNES MONITORING UND VERÖFFENTLICHUNG DER BISHER ERREICHTEN ERGEBNISSE DER GLEICHSTELLUNG.

3

GESCHLECHTER-PARITÄT BEI PROFESSUREN, DOZENTUREN, OBERASSISTENZEN, GASTVORTRÄGEN UND GASTKRITIKEN.

4

GESCHLECHTER-PARITÄT INNERHALB DER BERUFUNGSKOMMISSIONEN AM D-ARCH SOWIE UNTER DEN EINGELADENEN KANDIDATINNEN UND KANDIDATEN, DIE IN DIESEN KOMMISSIONEN VORSTELLIG WERDEN SOLLN.

5

INTEGRATION UMFASSENDE GENDER-RELEVANTER THEMEN UND VERMITTLUNG GESCHLECHTSSPEZIFISCHER KOMPETENZEN IN DAS CURRICULUM DER AUSBILDUNG AM D-ARCH DURCH WAHLFÄCHER, SEMINARE SOWIE VORTRAGSREIHEN IM BACHELOR-, MASTER- UND IM POSTGRADUALEN STUDIUM SOWIE DURCH EINE BEWUSSTE UNTERRICHTSMETHODIK. EINE MÖGLICHE SOFORTMASSNAHME WÄRE DIE AUFSTELLUNG EINER GESONDERTEN FINANZIERUNG EINES SOLCHEN Kurses AM D-ARCH, DER JEDES SEMESTER VON EINEM ANDEREN LEHRSTUHL VERANSTALTET WERDEN WÜRD.

6

BILDUNG EINES ADVANCED-AWARD-PROGRAMMS, DAS STIPENDIEN AN WISSENSCHAFTLERINNEN VERGIBT, DIE SICH DADURCH GANZ AUF IHRE FORSCHUNG UND LEHRE KONZENTRIEREN KÖNNEN. DIESES STIPENDIUM SOLL IN ERSTER LINIE IN EINER ÜBERGANGSZEIT ZWISCHEN EINZELNEN STUFEN IM AKADEMISCHEN CURRICULUM (DOKTORAT, HABILITATION UND PROFESSUR) VERGEBEN WERDEN, BIS EINE ANGEMESSENE GESCHLECHTER-PARITÄT ERREICHT WIRD.

7

BILDUNG EINES FONDS ZUR FINANZIERUNG VON GASTVORTRÄGEN EXTERNER REFERENTINNEN UND ZUR BEZUSCHUSSUNG DER REISEKOSTEN VON WISSENSCHAFTLERINNEN ETC. DIESER FONDS SOLL IN ERSTER LINIE IN EINER ÜBERGANGSZEIT DIE WAHRNEHMUNG VON AKADEMIKERINNEN UND ARCHITEKTINNEN ERHÖHEN, BIS EINE ANGEMESSENE GESCHLECHTER-PARITÄT ERREICHT WIRD.

8

EINFÜHRUNG EINES STIPENDIUMS FÜR WEIBLICHE UND MÄNNLICHE DOKTORIERENDE, DIE SICH IN IHRER ARBEIT MIT EINER GENDER-THEMATIK IN ARCHITEKTUR ODER STÄDTEBAU BESCHÄFTIGEN.

9

GESCHLECHTER-PARITÄT BEI AUSZEICHNUNGEN AN STUDIERENDE FÜR HERAUSRAGENDE MASTER- UND DOKTORARBEITEN DURCH DIE BEREITSTELLUNG VON JEWEILS ZWEI RESPEKTIVE GERADZÄHLIGEN PREISEN. EINE SOLCHE PARITÄTISCHE AUSZEICHNUNG WÜRD DIE VORBILDICHE PRAXIS DER AUFNAHME JEWEILS EINER STIPENDIATIN UND EINES STIPENDIATEN PRO JAHR IN DEN LAUFENDEN DOKTORATSPROGRAMMEN AM D-ARCH AUFGREIFEN.

Creation of a Parity Board consisting of representatives from each institute of the D-ARCH, a representative of the professors-hip, a delegate from the Association of Teaching Assistants at the D-ARCH (AAA), one representative from the architectural students association at the ETH Zurich (architektura), the representatives of the Parity Group and one external expert. The Parity Board would be responsible for instigating the measures by which gender parity is achieved, their gradual implementation, the connected fundraising tasks, and the organisation of future public events such as the annual Parity Talks.

Annual internal and external monitoring and publication of the achieved parity-related results.

Gender parity for professorships, lectureships, senior research and teaching positions, guest lectures, and guest critics.

Gender parity within the appointment committees of the department, and of invited candidates that come before such search committees.

Integration of broader gender issues or gender-related skills into the educational curriculum of the D-ARCH through elective courses, seminars, lecture series in graduate and post-graduate studies, and explicit teaching tools. This could be immediately achieved for example through dedicated funding for one such course each semester by different chairs within the D-ARCH.

Creation of an Advanced Award Program, comprising research and teaching grants for female scholars pursuing an academic career. This award is specifically aimed at bridging the gap (the leaky pipeline) in the academic curriculum (doctorate, habilitation, professorship) until reasonable parity is achieved.

Creation of a travel fund devoted to inviting female scholars for lectures from outside and to support female scholars of D-ARCH to travel for lectures, congresses, etc. This fund is specifically aimed at bridging the gap in academic and professional visibility until reasonable parity is achieved.

Creation of a fellowship for female and male doctoral students devoting their thesis to gender-related issues in architecture and town planning.

Creation of a fellowship for female and male doctoral students devoting their thesis to gender-related issues in architecture and town planning.

## 9 POINTS FOR PARITY

overcome. Those '9 Points' were published in 'Hochparterre', along with a response by Annette Spiro.<sup>21</sup> Yet, internally a bizarre silence prevailed. Over the course of the year, none of our proposed measures were adopted. No doubt, the department was going through a challenging and difficult phase, as many appointment procedures ran in parallel. But gender parity—which we had argued was fundamental to those appointments—seemed to have slipped down the agenda. «We have too few female applicants», was the Dean's rather matter-of-fact response. At the time, some of us were active in search committees for new Chairs, and so were able to gain insights into the appointment process and its underlying gender bias, from shortlisting and invitation criteria of candidates and committee members alike through to applicant evaluation, and incidents of mansplaining.

As the year drew to a close and it became clearer that none of the '9 Points' would see implementation, the nomination of Parity Delegates from all three faculty groups, students, assistants, and professors the only exception, we decided to organize a second Parity Talks symposium and workshop in March 2017. Again, the department supported this event from the start. The goal was to facilitate an open discussion of our proposed measures, first and foremost with all members from our department and with external experts on gender and diversity. We were eager to hear from both these groups how viable and effective they thought our suggestions would be, and to gather further support for our initiative. In four parallel roundtable discussions, each of them covering two to three measures, the '9 Points' were developed in more detail. The resulting annotated list of measures should now become the basis for the final set of measures that will make it in the department's Gender Action Plan.

## V. «Staying with the trouble»

*Friday, March 8, 2024. Last day on Hönningerberg. Morning coffee with the archivist. Rumors have been spreading, she tells me, that the Executive Board overturned the department's recommendation for a young woman to be appointed as successor of one of the outgoing female design professors. Apparently, it's been decided—another man with a busy practice is going to fill her position. There's a spontaneous walk-out from classes and studios. A leaflet by the staff and student associations is passed around the crowd that has gathered on the square in front of the building. «17% in 170 years—half a millennium to reach 50%? Parity now! Openness, Transparency, Accountability», it reads. Someone had pinned up 'Miss Mies' and her sisters, the old Parity Talks posters. «Here we are, again», the archivist says, «standing together on International Women's Day, talking about the same thing. Denial is no longer an option.»*

It would be futile to add up the countless hours, lunch meetings, and late nights spent on Parity Group work. Being critical of our institution, for most of us, was a call of duty. It meant caring for its past, present, and future. However, there were several situations in which we experienced what we affectionately came to call 'parity fatigue'. Moments when we simply wanted to give up. Making trouble is not much fun. Especially if one's career hangs on a thin thread, employment is precarious and non-permanent, and the pressure to stay focused on one's career as a researcher and teacher, and to fulfil ever-increasing performance and output targets, keeps mounting.

Why even bother? Shouldn't we just «stop that c[rap]», as one angered male student had advised us in an email? In Trump-style capitals, he argued that «WE DON'T HAVE A GENDER PROBLEM», so «stop making problems where there is [sic] none». Yet, we knew, as many others did, that there were problems; that, contrary to the student's assertion, not «every individual, male or female, has the same opportunities to become a professor at ETH». Like many others whom we personally

invited to engage in the discussion, the student chose not to participate in any of our events.

True, we did receive messages of support and expressions of sympathy, too. But were we being coopted? Had we become, without noticing it, a shining example for how well bottom up initiatives function, a fig-leaf merely covering the lack of institutional structures and the absence of decisive and sustained action from above? In an institution like our department that is itself inherently transitory, where fresh cohorts of students and assistants (typically) come and go in six-year cycles, how can one fulfil the concomitant tasks to «make trouble, to stir up potent responses [...] as well as to settle troubled waters and rebuild quiet places»<sup>22</sup> without losing energy, momentum, knowledge, and expertise—without starting from scratch each time?

This is why, on May 3, 2017, we asked the Professor's Conference and the department's Conference the following week to vote on a proposal to introduce a Gender Action Plan in our department, and to create a Parity Board supported by the Board of Deans and department's administrative staff, whose task will be the development and implementation of this plan. Since then, it has been in their hands.

### Epilogue

Isn't it surprising that urgent questions of gender and diversity at ETH Zurich have been left to individual initiatives to be addressed? How come so little was done on these matters prior to our engagement? Is institutional inertia inherent to big institutions? And what will happen now? While «making a fuss» here at the department, one can't help but think about Audre Lorde's famous phrase: «The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.»<sup>23</sup> But the cynicism of that terrifying sentence must not be taken as a shutdown. It is true that many aspects in Swiss society still have to change until women will be able to take their seats at the table, starting with the way family and childcare are understood. The work undertaken by the Parity Group cannot fix that. But a discussion has been launched and there is no turning back now; change must happen.

Many signs are pointing in the right direction. Of the three fixed-term Visiting Lectureships recently awarded to young Swiss architectural firms, two include women. Moreover, a couple of open Professorships were split into four positions, allowing the appointment of An Fonteyne and Momoyo Kaijima alongside Arno Brandlhuber and Jan De Vylder. And with Anne Lacaton another internationally outstanding female architect has now become Professor for Architecture and Design, thus doubling within one year the number of Chairs held by women in the school.

1 This article (and our work more broadly) takes inspiration, among others, from Belgian philosophers Isabelle Stengers and Vinciane Despret, who – as part of a collective of female scholars – call on their colleagues to actively confront persistent injustices within and beyond academic institutions, question their careers, and examine their roles and responsibilities as women intellectuals. See: Isabelle Stengers, Vinciane Despret, «Women Who Make a Fuss: The Unfaithful Daughters of Virginia Woolf», Minneapolis 2014.

2 Jane Rendell, «Site-writing: the architecture of art criticism», London 2010.

3 Ibid., p. 18.

4 On the women in the professional association SIA see: Beatrice Aebi, «Frauen in die Kommissionen! », in: Tec 21, no. 42 (2016), p. 24.

5 Prof. Dr. Renate Schubert and Honorata Kaczykowski-Patermann, «Gender Monitoring 2013/14: Departementsbericht Architektur», [https://www.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/associates/services/Anstellung-Arbeiten/chancengleichheit/Strategie\\_und\\_Zahlen/Monitoring%20und%20Studien/1314/1314\\_Gender\\_Monitoring\\_DE](https://www.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/associates/services/Anstellung-Arbeiten/chancengleichheit/Strategie_und_Zahlen/Monitoring%20und%20Studien/1314/1314_Gender_Monitoring_DE). Retrieved: 01.07.2017.

6 See: «History of women at ETH», <https://www.ethz.ch/services/en/employment-and-work/working-environment/equal-opportunities/strategie-und-zahlen/frauen-an-der-eth/geschichte-der-frauen-an-der-eth.html>. Retrieved: 01.07.2017.

7 This subject will also be explored in a small contribution curated by Sarah Nichols to the main 50th anniversary exhibition «gta 50», which is due to open on September 28, 2017 at ETH Zurich, Hänggerberg.

8 For the profiles of those three female professors at D-ARCH (out of sixteen at ETH during the

## Beschlussvorlage Gender Action Plan des Departement Architektur

In Einklang mit den im Gender Action Plan (GAP) der ETH Zürich von Februar 2014 definierten Verantwortlichkeiten, verpflichtet sich das Departement Architektur (D-ARCH) einen GAP zu entwickeln, diesen zu präsentieren und eine jährliche interne Fortschrittskontrolle durchzuführen. Um dieser Pflicht nachzukommen, wird das D-ARCH zum Herbstsemester 2017 einen eigenen, an die spezifischen Anforderungen des Departements (»9 Punkte für die Gleichstellung«) angepassten GAP implementieren.

Zur praktischen Umsetzung dieses Beschlusses verpflichtet sich das D-ARCH:

- Zur Einrichtung eines »Parity Board«, bestehend aus Vertretern der Studierenden, Assistierenden sowie Professorinnen und Professoren. Es formuliert konkrete Zielvorgaben, Massnahmen und Mechanismen zur Verbesserung der Gleichstellung von Mann und Frau im Rahmen des GAP an unserem Departement.
- Zur jährlichen Fortschrittskontrolle, für welche die Parity Talks als bereits bestehendes Gefäss verwendet werden sollten.

*In line with the responsibilities set out in the Gender Action Plan (GAP) ETH Zurich, dated February 2014, the Department of Architecture (D-ARCH) undertakes to develop and present a GAP, and to put into place appropriate mechanisms for annual progress tracking. To this end, the D-ARCH will implement a GAP that reflects the specific needs and requirements of the Department (»9 Points for Parity«) by fall semester 2017.*

*To facilitate practical implementation of this decision, the D-ARCH commits to:*

- *The creation of a »Parity Board«, consisting of representatives of the student, assistant, and professorial body. It formulates concrete goals, measures, and monitoring mechanisms to improve the gender balance within the framework of the GAP at our Department.*
- *An annual mechanism for measuring progress, and to continuing Parity Talks as a suitable means for doing so.*

- mid-1990s), see: Stelle für Chancengleichheit von Mann und Frau an der ETH Zürich (ed.), *«Wege in die Wissenschaft. Professorinnen an der ETH Zürich – 16 Portraits»*, Zürich 1997. For example, Bettina Köhler, who spent a considerable amount of time at the Institute gta (however, without obtaining her PhD there), first as a Research Assistant, then as an Assistant Professor for History and Theory of Architecture then moved to a professorship at FHNW Murtens. Maia Engeli, former Assistant Professor for Architecture and CAAD holds a professorship in Canada. Their career paths (for reasons that would require further investigation) led away from the school in the early-2000s, when Flora Ruchat-Roncati retired from her Professorship in Architecture and Design.
- 9 See: *«ETH Zürich, Gender Action Plan, 2014»*, <https://www.ethz.ch/services/en/employment-and-work/working-environment/equal-opportunities/strategie-und-zahlen/gender-action-plan.html>. Retrieved: 01.07.2017.
- 10 Rahel Marti, *«Wir haben zu wenig Bewerberinnen»*, in: *Hochparterre* no. 9 (2016).
- 11 Stengers and Despret, *«Women Who Make A Fuss»*, pp. 15–16.
- 12 *«Gender Bias in Academe: An Annotated Bibliography of Important Recent Studies»*, January 26, 2015, <https://www.hastac.org/blogs/superadmin/2015/01/26/gender-bias-academe-annotated-bibliography-important-recent-studies>. Retrieved: 01.07.2017.
- 13 Jules Holroyd and Jennifer Saul, *«Will the Teaching Excellence Framework be sexist?»*, in: *The Guardian*, April 4, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/2016/apr/04/will-the-teaching-excellence-framework-be-sexist>. Retrieved: 01.07.2017.
- 14 *«Architektur, die [fem.], Baukultur ist auch weiblich!»*, special complementary issue with *Archithese*, no. 2 (2016) *«Bildungslandschaften»*.
- 15 <http://archiparlour.org>. Retrieved: 01.07.2017.
- 16 FAAC was founded by Ana Maria Léon, Tessa Paneth-Pollak, Martina Tanga, and Olga Touloumi. <https://www.facebook.com/faacollaborative/>. Retrieved: 01.07.2017.
- 17 Torsten Lange and Emily Eliza Scott, *«Making Trouble to Stay With: Architecture and Feminist Pedagogies»*, in: *Field* (2017) forthcoming.
- 18 See their research blog for further information: <http://www.flora-ruchat-roncati-snf.ch>. Retrieved: 01.07.2017.
- 19 Michael Kuratli, *«Falsch gebaute Karriereleiter»*, in: *ZS – Zürcher Studierendenzeitung*, 14. September 2015, <http://zs-online.ch/falsch-gebaute-karriereleiter/>. Retrieved: 01.07.2017.
- 20 ETH Equal is the organ in charge of «equal opportunities» within the ETH Zurich. However, the structure is underequipped to face the challenges ahead. With 3 part-time staff members and little budget of its own, ETH Equal appears a mere alibi. While giving the impression that gender and diversity are priorities for the institution, the structure simply does not have the means to do much more than basic monitoring and career counseling. ETH female staffs have even criticized the latter, because it appears Equal's efforts are concentrated on prepping women for job interviews rather than tackling structural discrimination and institutional core issues. For instance, Equal leaves it up to the deans of each department to implement the Gender Action Plan it drafted. It also relies extensively on private initiatives and individuals' forces within departments to push the gender and diversity agenda, partially explaining why so little progress has been achieved since its creation in 1991 (as Frauenanlaufstelle).
- 21 Marti, 2016.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Audre Lorde, *«The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House»*, in: Cherríe Moraga, Gloria Anzaldúa (eds.), *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, New York 1983, pp. 94–101.