

The Gender-Eye Approach: Eleven Tales from KTH School of Architecture in Stockholm

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This is a story about listening to students, making gender norms visible, and working practically with pedagogical and societal values. It is also about how I, as the new Program Director of KTH School of Architecture in 2014, inherited “problem emails” directed to the former leadership of the school and was told “the students are not happy concerning gender equality within the school.” As an educator, I asked myself, how do women recognize themselves in the education conducted here at our school today? Part of this story is about how I, together with students, started a “Gender Equality Society” and made pamphlets that we distributed to everyone at the KTH School of Architecture workplace. This work went on to the publication of the booklet “Enough is Enough” on architecture and gender equality, which currently serves as our statement of aims. Everything is about developing a Gender-Eye Approach in education.

Working with gender equality in the practice of architectural education, not as a studio project or course subject but within the structure and teaching practices of the institution, is my task as Program Director at the KTH School of Architecture in Stockholm. I wish to share here my experiences, including challenges, in developing methods, tools and rhetorics for advancing a more equal learning environment, and provide external and internal information concerning my work. Let's say the external information is the toothbrush and the internal is the toothpaste and the actual brushing. By this I mean that there is the Swedish law on gender equality, as an instrument, which has to be used to become instrumental. Or that, without both, there will be no clean teeth, no wonderful smile. Regarding the actual brushing, I am referring to all of the actions we – the students, the staff and the school's steering group – made happen in a very conscious approach, knowing that it is not only important to do them but also crucial how you achieve them.

In undertaking this work, there was one door I took care to shut immediately, the one I call the boring "quality discussion door." This door was opened most often by male professors, preferably in front of a huge audience, with the question: "But what about quality? Isn't architecture about quality, not about women or men?" My tactic for shutting that door was to simply answer quickly, "yes exactly," and then smile and move on. Prior to beginning this work, I studied the Swedish law and the KTH regulations stipulating gender equality in order to have something to lean on, since I was "just" an architect and a teacher, without specific knowledge or education within the history or theory of gender studies. I suspect that this fact made the other teachers listen to me.

I started the whole process by introducing what I call a Gender-Eye Approach to the School of Architecture by presenting my own shortcomings in the area of gender equality. I was not just pointing a finger at the other teachers but in fact investigating myself as well, which turned out to be a smart move. From day one, I created a new gender tool, a "50/50 policy," which suggested a representation of 50% men and 50% women among the references used during lectures and tutoring or among invited critics when organizing a critique. I also proposed mandatory gender equality education for all staff at the school, in order to create a platform and common point of reference for these issues. People came to these sessions. They were curious and maybe afraid to miss out on something. In addition to this opportunity for further education, I also started a process of suggesting "Rules for Gender Equality" for our school, which could translate the Swedish law into action. A gender equality action plan had not previously existed here. The rules were produced in a series of workshops with the students in the new "Gender Equality Society," the faculty, the staff, the administration and the management team. I also created forms to conceive action plans and self-evaluations of these actions, on an individual level.

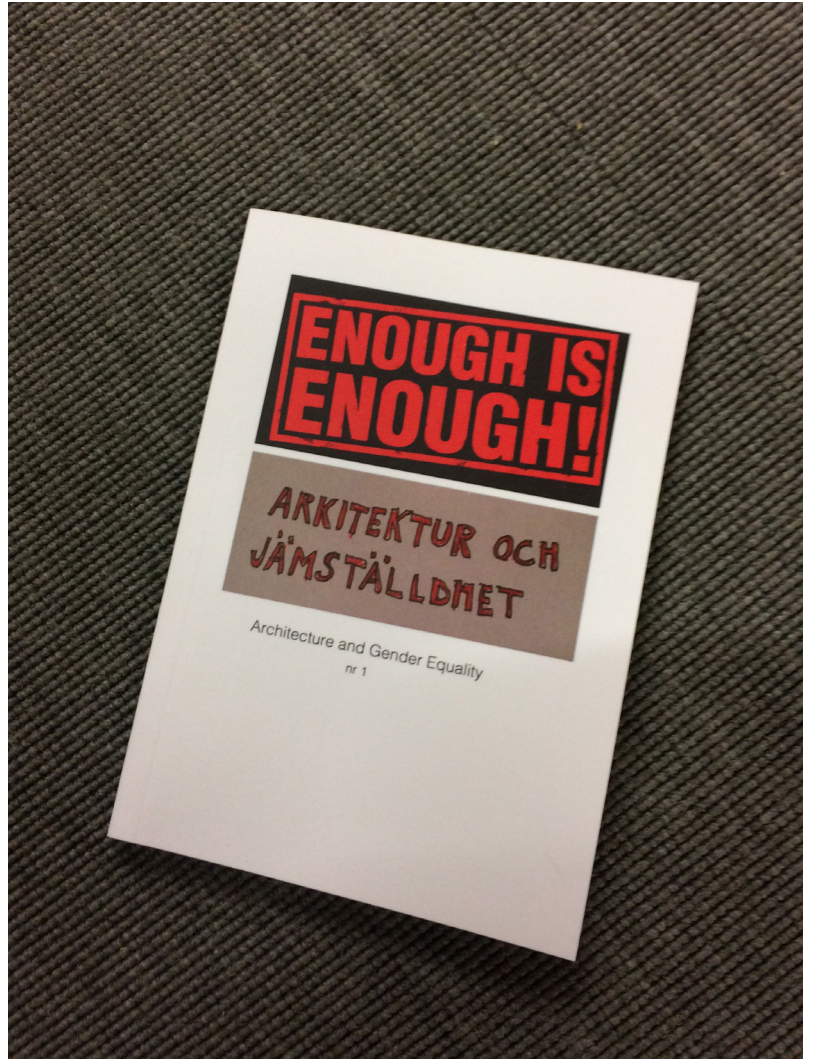


Fig. 1, Fig. 2 and Fig. 3 The Booklet “Enough is Enough”, by Malin Åberg-Wennerholm, 2016; and launch of “Enough is Enough”.

- ¹ KTH's 'Vision 2027' (published 15 December 2011), available online: <https://www.kth.se/vision2027/vision-2027-1.293654> (accessed 20 June 2017).
- ² Ana María Fernández García, "On Women Architects. Looking for a Room of One's Own: On the Visibility of Professional Women and Associationism in Europe," in *MoMoWo. 100 Works in 100 Years: European Women in Architecture and Design, 1918-2018*, ed. Ana María Fernández García, Caterina Franchini, Emilia Garda, and Helena Serazin (Ljubljana and Turin: France Stele Institute of Art History, 2016), 16-21.
- ³ UKÄ, Rapport 2016:16, *Kvinnor och män i högskolan*.
- ⁴ Malin Åberg-Wennerholm, 'Lyssnar för att förbättra,' interview in *Utbildningskatalog 2017/2018*, 14-15. https://www.kth.se/polopoly_fs/1.524991!/KTRN0078_KTH_Utbildningskatalog_HELA_LOW.pdf
- ⁵ Viktoria Kalonaityté, *Normkritisk pedagogik: för den högre utbildningen* (Växjö: Studentlitteratur, 2014).
- ⁶ Malin Åberg-Wennerholm. *Enough is Enough, Architecture and Gender Equality*, nr 1 (Stockholm: KTH, 2016).
- ⁷ Despina Stratigakos, *Where are the Women Architects?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 23.
- ⁸ Katja Grillner, 'Det arkitekturfeministiska genombrottet', *Osqledaren #4* (Stockholm: KTH, 2013/14), 30-33.
- ⁹ Högskolelagen (1992: 1434) §5.
- ¹⁰ HR Department, KTH. Guidelines: Equal terms (2015-11-19).
- ¹¹ KTH, gender equality policy and gender equality plan 'A KTH for everyone', studies and work on equal terms, University Board decision 2003-09-24.

We, as educators, are obliged to make sure that each individual student receives a proper education in relation to her/his own person. This, of course, should not be dependent on a student's sex. We, as educators, must follow the law. We at the School of Architecture want to make a better world, following the Higher Education Law and our internal documents. We are creating an education that is a mirror of a future society, not the face of the society of today. In the policy document for KTH Vision 2027, KTH states that as an institution it is working for a "brighter tomorrow" and that issues of gender and equal opportunity have an obvious role in development activities.¹ Great. In fact, a majority, 51%, of the Swedish architects today, are women.² Likewise, women have become part of architectural education in Sweden; 66% of all the first year Swedish architecture students in year 2014/15 were women.³ Women are welcome in schools of architecture today.⁴ Despite this, "the academy has retained much of its excluding and exclusive character,"⁵ where hierarchies between women and men are still in place. It is clear to me that gender equality in higher education is an issue of fairness for individuals, and about a brighter future for Swedish society.

In my opinion, representation of women alone is not enough to change the male norm: within the School of Architecture we all must change the approach to our education. We must understand that gender conditions our architecture students in the educational space. As educators, we need to explore methods and working materials within this education to create conditions that give our students the same opportunities for development, new knowledge, challenges and the experience of joy, regardless of gender.⁶ Regarding the existing gender imbalance in the architectural discipline, e.g. as demonstrated by the male majority among Pritzker Architecture Prize winners, we, as practitioners and educators, must ask ourselves what determines quality or excellence in architecture. Is quality still measured against the male norm? "Where are the women architects? Students are rarely exposed to the historic roles of women in architecture, whether as builders, clients, or critics."⁷

I propose that feminism in architecture should be not only an option but a conscious focus. It is important that feminist issues are not treated parallel to architecture; they should be central.⁸ What is a "woman architect"? It was helpful to us to start by changing our educational world in line with Swedish law⁹ and the internal documents of KTH.¹⁰ In these documents KTH states, "major efforts are needed to provide the students with role models of both sexes in teaching and course materials."¹¹ Love it. I follow the Gender Equality policy at KTH that states, "As an educational organization, KTH emphasizes the importance of women as role models in teaching and in broadening and updating perspectives on knowledge so that space is given to the experience of both sexes." In other words, we must educate architects who have the ability to work in a culture of

¹² KTH, Development Plan 2013-2017.

¹³ Critical Studies and the FATALE research group at KTH-A, has offered Architecture and Gender courses and have had a feminist-based master's studio for several years. Many of my (mostly female) colleagues have worked explicitly with these issues at the school for a long time which culminated in holding the AHRA Architecture and Feminisms conference in November 2016 at the KTH School of Architecture.

¹⁴ Iris Bohnet. *What Works - Gender Equity by Design* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2016).

gender equality, even if society is not equal.¹² This is KTH's official policy; it's neither my private opinion nor my hobby horse.¹³

Swedish higher education is in many respects a model of gender inequality, despite the fact that women and men have formally had equal rights and opportunities in the academic system for some time. My advice is: do not sit back patiently; do not let time run its course! I do not believe that gender equality will happen by itself over time without effort. We need to make gender equality a reality, since "reality by default is biased." A call to action is needed.¹⁴

What pedagogical tools do we have to create conditions that offer students the same opportunities in their education? Are we, as educators, actually curious about all our students regardless of their gender? How do we acknowledge both men and women without unnecessarily emphasizing their gender? These were some of the relevant questions that arose when I began to work with gender equality within the School of Architecture. If we at the School of Architecture understand ourselves as morally and ethically aware, why has so little happened in terms of gender equality over the last hundred years?

As the Program Director, how can I contribute to accelerating change in that culture?

What follows are eleven tales about our gender equality work:

"The Monday caramel," or, "Merry Christmas and Happy New Year"

I already mentioned that I inherited some of the so-called "problem emails" directed to the former leadership of the school, and "The Monday caramel" was such an email. It was sent on a Monday morning, and in a nice tone it encouraged all our teachers to consider gender equality in their teaching. But my personal favorite is the email with the subject line Merry Christmas:

We, the first-year students, like our lectures and lecturers a lot. But we feel that there are too few women who lecture, and that almost all the examples of architecture given in these lectures are the work of men. We have discussed extensively why it's positive that women are properly represented in academia, and we will continue this discussion. What we all, as first year students, have in common is that we would like to see a change towards more gender-equal representation as soon as possible. The future starts now!

Year 1 wishes you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Our gender equality checklist: “5 items on gender equality,” or, Yeah, it is a quality matter

Gender equality is not only about fairness for all but also about obtaining better quality of architecture. It brings variety to the table and in turn, encourages broader and more diverse understandings of the world. If you want to change something, you need to speak with both students and teachers.¹⁵ I drew up this checklist first in co-operation with the students of the “Gender Equality Society” and then it was communicated to our teachers, guest lecturers and guest critics and to all our students and staff. It consists of five items:

Consider what/who you display as a reference, and why.

Consider what/who the image/lecture/review omits and why.

Move outside of your usual network in order to create an equal mix of participants in your activities.

Remember that work towards referring to architects of both sexes is seamless, and avoid “next we have a woman architect”; do it in a natural way without a lot of fuss.

Mention or cite men/women in the same way and remove any unnecessary value words or gender-specific expressions.

¹⁵ bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

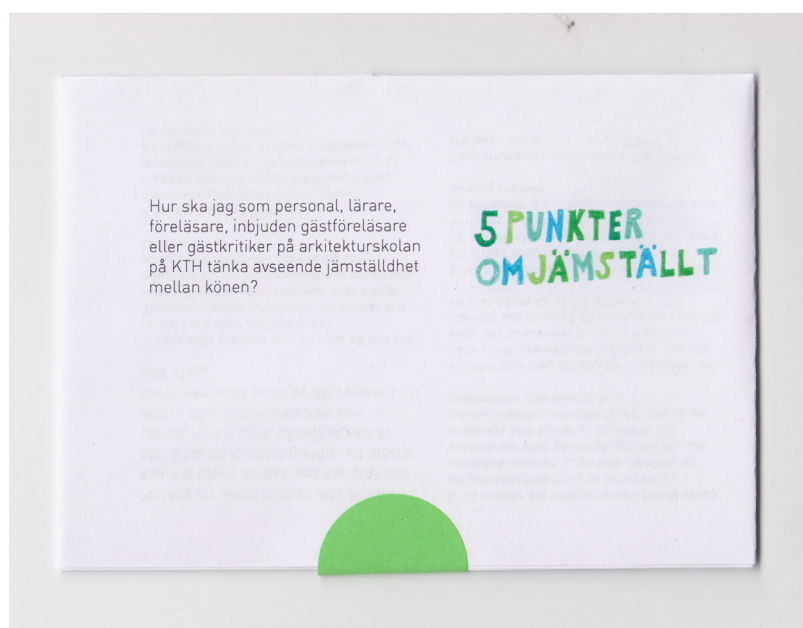


Fig. 4 Pamphlet No 2, by Malin Åberg-Wennerholm, distributed all over KTH School of Architecture, 2015.

We are in the room now, or, Historiography is unfair

Until 1921, a law prevented women from becoming architecture students at The School of Architecture at the Royal Institute of Technology, KTH, in Stockholm.¹⁶ Our program was only open to “young men.” Gender constituted a legal exclusionary instrument against women training as an architect. The first time a woman was allowed to enter architectural education in Sweden was in 1897, when Agnes Magnell, as the first woman student at university level ever, was granted exception and accepted into KTH.¹⁷ What effect has this had on our education? We are here now. We are all welcome under Swedish law.¹⁸ Nice to know. But still, the dominant view is that women have designed fewer buildings than men. Is this really true? For a long time, women have been excluded from the opportunities that existed for men. Likewise, women were seldom considered when history was written.¹⁹ History is shaped by how we describe the past, what is included and what is left out. A glance through existing history books tells us that women architects have not been considered important for the development of architecture. How have ideas of masculinity and femininity, as well as hierarchies of power, expressed themselves, both in the past and our present everyday life?²⁰

“My daughter goes to your School of Architecture,” or, Business as usual

“My daughter goes to your school of architecture,” a male Nordic dean said to another male Nordic dean after having dismissed my talk on “Gender equality within architecture education” with a slightly bored facial expression. “Darling,” I wanted to whisper to him, “this is what I was talking about earlier when you almost nodded off. It’s all about your child. It is all about her right to be treated equally, regardless of her sex. It’s not something that should send you to sleep.”

Within our educational system and our teaching, gender inequality is invisible to most of us because of its constant presence; where gender is perceived as constant as the sea. At the KTH School of Architecture, we have developed a gender-eye approach to our daily business based on our new “Rules for Gender Equality”²¹ and our new “Forms for Gender action and self-evaluation.”²² Now our students and faculty have tools available to them, in order to help reorganize our education from the perspective of gender. I can see very well with my gender-eye. Can you?

Wolf in sheep’s clothing, or, All that glitters is not gold

Some of our faculty have over the years learned to camouflage their ugly feelings when it comes to their stance relative to gender equality in general or to the women working at the school. Many who deny the impact of gender forces in architecture education and practice have understood that

¹⁶ Helena Werner, *Kvinnliga arkitekter- om byggpionjärer och debatterna kring kvinnlig yrkesutövning i Sverige* (Göteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 2006).

¹⁷ Anna Karlqvist, *Från eftersatt till eftersökt* (Stockholm: Avdelningen för teknik- och vetenskapshistoria: KTH, 1997).

¹⁸ Högskolelagen (1992:1434) §5.

¹⁹ AnnaSara Hammar, ‘Om kvinnors villkor 1600-1800’, *Rötter: En trasslig historia*. Umeå: Kvinnohistoriskt museum, 2014.

²⁰ Caterina Franchini, ‘History Does not Stand in a Single File. 100 Works, 100 Years, 100 Creative Women in Architecture,’ in *MoMoWo. 100 Works in 100 Years: European Women in Architecture and Design, 1918-2018*, ed. Ana María Fernández García, Caterina Franchini, Emilia Garda, and Helena Serazin (Ljubljana and Turin: France Stele Institute of Art History, 2016), 14-15.

²¹ *Internal policy documents for KTH-A* (2015-06-16) and *Program development program concerning sustainable development, KTH-A’s education* (2017-01-20).

²² KTH School of Architecture, forms for gender equality actions and self-evaluation, internal material. KTH-A, 2015.

²³ Despina Stratigakos, *Where are the Women Architects?* (Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016), 20.

²⁴ hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁶ Gunilla Lundahl, ed., *Byggeforskningsrådet, Kvinnor som banade väg: porträtt av arkitekter* (Stockholm: Formas Byggeforskningsrådet, 1992).

it is not so smart to allow one's gender biases to pop out in broad daylight. Not so good for your career. We need to discuss the importance of actually picking up our own dirty clothes and washing them, not just spraying them with gender-equality perfume to avoid giving them a decent wash; otherwise the "professional gendered borders remain intact."²³

Is it safe to be critical? or, Is your pedagogy radical?

According to bell hooks, in order to create safe learning environments it is important to make a classroom where critical questions about the pedagogical process are allowed. The classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy. Any radical pedagogy must insist that everyone's presence is acknowledged. This insistence must be demonstrated through pedagogical practice. Everyone in the classroom should be able to contribute. These contributions are resources that an open learning community can embrace.²⁴ It's all about pedagogy, right?

As a teacher, it is a fantastic experience to become aware of how your own norms and values affect your teaching and treatment of your students. As a teacher, you need to make visible, problematize and develop the students' performance and be aware of gender myths, so that students can choose according to their own will and their personal interests. Teachers need to watch out so they do not just "exercise power and authority within their mini-kingdom, the classroom" claims bell hooks.²⁵ Your pedagogy is still the issue.

The dangerous single story, or, It is all about references

The term architect, and the idea of architecture, are limited by stereotypes. These shape our thinking. References are important, since they say something about who has created places and buildings, as well as those who may create places and buildings in the future. It is important to broaden and question our choice of references. As Gunilla Lundahl points out, women's experiences have hardly been considered in a profession characterized by patriarchal values, where a similarity sign is set between human and male.²⁶

I call this "the awakening of the educator," which means that with the gender tool I have called the "50/50 policy", all of us are in charge of this high-speed change towards a correct balance regarding attitudes, references and the distribution of power.

I never think about it, or, Watch out for the "neutral" category

For centuries women have been excluded as architects. Some teachers and architects say things like "Well, gender equality doesn't interest me" or "I never think about it." Well hey, that is part of the problem. Architecture schools in most Western countries now have a high representation of

- ²⁷ Amanda Roan and Naomi Stead, 'A "New Institutional" Perspective on Women's Position in Architecture: Considering the Cases of Australia and Sweden.' *Architectural Theory Review* 17, no. 2-3 (2012): 378-98.

women students.²⁷ Working practically with gender equality in the workplace means engaging in a process of change.

In this process, I urge you all to watch out for those individuals, often thought of as "neutral," who dismiss gender-related issues. Be aware that showing an active disinterest is definitely also a form of involvement. You will recognize them because they are quietly or loudly engaged on the surface, but they do nothing to improve the situation below the eyelevel.

The "Gender-eye approach" in everyday life, or, "Just not *this* woman"

In which ways do we, as university teachers in architecture schools, interact with the students and with each other? The effects of gender inequality can be seen in everyday life, and it is in those situations that changes must be made. More than half of our students risk being deprived of the opportunity to develop their courage and initiative. And having knowledge of gender is not enough; we all participate in a "gender drama" every day. To keep an eye on yourself, your unconscious behaviour and the role you play in this drama is necessary, difficult and fun.

Statements such as "I don't mind women as leaders of something, but just not *this* woman," are a tell-tale sign. Do listen to yourself. History as we know it is often about the male architect as genius. Women are rarely afforded the same role. Especially the role of the genius. Although there are women in architecture, the huge white fluffy cloud called "homosocial culture" tries to make us all blind.²⁸

Even a small needle hurts, or, Fresh stuff

Many men and women are quick to dismiss the problems of gender, but gender matters everywhere in the world. The school of architecture's mission used to be to educate men.²⁹ Now we must teach our students differently, both our male and our female students. It is exciting to study critical pedagogical practices in architectural education that engage in the world in order to change it. "Critical pedagogy is concerned with how a society re-produces its school systems. Highlighting the politics of the everyday, critical pedagogy unravels and critiques the experiences of the students and teachers as they find themselves in asymmetrical relations of power, tempered by class, race, gender, ethnicity and others."³⁰ If you are a teacher and you suspect that your colleague treats a student unfairly because of the person's sex, then raise your voice and comment on it.

Creating posters of gender inequality experiences, or, How are you doing?

We, The Gender Equality Society, were creating posters from our personal

- ²⁸ Boel Berner, 'Crossing Boundaries, Building Bridges: Comparing the History of Women Engineers, 1870s-1990s' *Technology and Culture* 43, no. 1 (2002): 175-177.

- ²⁹ Thomas A. Dutton, 'Introduction: Architectural Education, Postmodernism, and Critical Pedagogy,' in *Voices in Architectural Education, Cultural Politics and Pedagogy*, ed. Thomas A. Dutton (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 1991), xv-xxix.

experiences of gender inequality at the school. We put up the posters all over the school and called on both teachers and students to share their experiences concerning gender equality within education. The posters featured phrases like “The teachers expect a gold medal as soon as they mention an architect that is a woman,” or “My teaching colleague is always explaining what I just said,” and they were put up all over the school. Notably, by early the next morning all of the 35 A2 posters had been torn down.³¹ It was an aggressive act.

³¹ This happened during the night of March 30, 2017, but only a few days later the Gender Equality Society had already replaced all of the A2 posters.

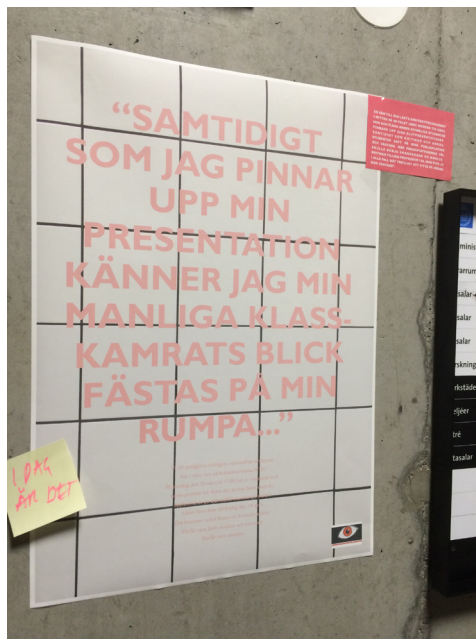


Fig. 5 and Fig. 6 Examples of posters made by a student group together with the author, The Gender Equality Society, 2017.

We arranged a special event where we inaugurated a mailbox, and forms to fill in and post there. We emptied it two weeks later, and I would like to share with you some of the comments submitted: “Somehow you attract ‘help’ from your male student colleagues without asking for it when building or doing something ‘handy’.” “When male teachers become mates with my male classmates but hardly say hello to me.” “When male lecturers show projects by women but do not remember their names.” “Female teachers do more work but get less attention.” “Our male teacher’s joke takes more space than our female teacher’s criticism at pinups.” “It is always the guys who present when there is group work.” “Our male teachers arrive late and then take over.” “Once when we were having presentations of architectural projects in the studio, a guy who did not belong to the group interrupted the girl who was presenting to tell ‘how it really is’. The studio teachers let him go on.” “I feel that there is a high level of awareness about the problem of gender equality at school and yet at the same time problems persist.”



Fig. 7 The mailbox which was installed in the entrance of the School of Architecture to collect students' and teachers' experiences of gender (in)equality within education, 2017.

³² Biennale Architettura, "Meetings on Architecture," May 28, Biennale Channel Youtube, published May 31, 2016.

³³ 'Reporting from which Front? Aravenas sexist opening panel', May 28, 2016, Blog *Die Architektin, women+architecture/women in architecture*.

³⁴ Jill Julius Matthews. *Good and Mad Women: The Historical Construction of Femininity in Twentieth-century Australia* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1984).

³⁵ Iris Bohnet, *What Works*.

Is there more to see? or, Welcome to a better world

At the opening panel of the Architecture Biennale 2016 in Venice and the first "Meeting on Architecture," a popular dish we can call "Eight architects on stage" is served.³² What these chosen 'outstanding' architects all have in common is the fact that they are male.³³ Hmm. This order based on our sex is called gender structure or gender order.³⁴

A common and popular misconception is that "women need to become better at building networks and supporting other women." I do not believe so. Women do not need to become better at anything. It is the men who need to become better at opening up to others than their own sex. Deal? We must admit that unconscious biases exist in each one of us. Unconscious bias holds us back and changing people's minds has proven to be difficult. By de-biasing organizations instead of individuals, we can make smart changes that have a big impact at low cost.³⁵ This is about running a school of architecture, in not only a fairer way, but with regard to improving quality. Welcome to a better world!

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