

Parlour: The First Five Years

Naomi Stead, Gill Matthewson, Justine Clark, and Karen Burns

Parlour: women, equity, architecture is a group whose name derives from a rather subversive feminist take on the 'parlour' as the room in a house traditionally used for receiving and conversing with visitors. In its first five years, Parlour has grown from a scholarly research project into an activist group with an international reach, but a localised approach to working through issues of equity and diversity in architecture. This paper is a lightly edited version of a keynote 'lecture' given jointly by four of the key members of the Parlour collective.

¹ Please note that the order of authors' names are listed by the order in which we spoke – as opposed to a hierarchical account of importance or contribution.

Some readers may be familiar with the work of the activist group *Parlour: women, equity, architecture*.¹ Some might even know the origins of our name: a rather subversive feminist take on the 'parlour' as the room in a house traditionally used for receiving and conversing with visitors. The name itself derives from the French *parler* – to speak – hence, a space to speak. But even if you knew these things, you might *not* realize that what has become an internationally recognized activist organization, working towards greater gender equity in the architecture profession, began its existence as a scholarly research project.

This paper is a lightly edited version of a keynote 'lecture' given jointly by four of the key members of the Parlour collective. It begins with Naomi Stead recounting some of the pre-history of the original research project, which forms a preamble for Gill Matthewson to discuss the research for her PhD, which formed the core of that project. In turn, Justine Clark discusses the Parlour website (which she edits) and a range of other events and initiatives associated with it, and finally Karen Burns, feminist theorist extraordinaire, concludes.

As a collective, we each bring our own distinct knowledge, interests, skills, and approaches to the pursuit of gender equity in architecture. So while we share many demographic similarities, we are constantly reminded of, and challenged by, the *differences* within the Parlour collective. We see these divergences as a benefit: each of us has different strengths and weaknesses and negotiating these is one of the trials, the pleasures, and the possibilities of working together. In a small way we illustrate the advantages of diversity in any undertaking, and this strengthens our efforts as we set out on the next five years of advocating for equity in architecture.



Fig. 1 Keynote Panel of the conference "Architecture and Feminisms," Stockholm, November 17, 2016: "Parlour: Women, Architecture, Activism." From left to right: Lori Brown (chair), Parlour (Justine Clark, Gill Matthewson, Naomi Stead, Karen Burns). Photo: Björn Ehrlemark.

Naomi Stead – In the beginning, a research project

First, some history. In the summer of 2009, I had just taken up a new, research-only position in the School of Architecture at the University of Queensland. It was an exciting time: a moment to begin grand projects (without, perhaps, realizing just how much work would be involved).

One obvious research project suggested itself, although the circumstances were sorrowful. In the early years of the new millennium Paula Whitman, then teaching at the Queensland University of Technology, undertook an important study, published in 2005 as *Going Places: The Career Progression of Women in the Architectural Profession*.² After that, Whitman fell ill and then, sadly, died in 2006 – leaving her important but still essentially preliminary research incomplete. By 2009, and despite the *Going Places* report having included numerous specific and practical suggestions for change towards greater gender equity, years had passed and few of these recommendations had been enacted. I wondered why that was, and how it could be different.

In fact, it transpired that in Australian architecture there was a long history of commissioning and then ignoring reports on gender equity, a lineage of research and policy ideas left to gather dust. The challenge then was to find a way beyond such impasses and obstacles: a way to extend and expand Whitman's research work, in a project that focused not only on abstract knowledge, but also both assisting, and *insisting* on action on gender equity.

It seemed that there was space for a project that brought together the intellectual power of feminist architecture theory with an agenda to set ideas and research to work – not just to understand the dynamics of the situation for women working in architecture in historic contexts, but also to actively seek to change such dynamics.

This would be an activist project, but clandestinely so: a Trojan horse of impeccably respectable scholarship, which could be wheeled into the architectural establishment, whereupon the feminists would all come pouring out.

The team to make this happen was fairly clear: Justine Clark had been editor of the national journal of record for architecture for a decade, and was an amazingly effective person with one foot in academia and the other in media. Karen Burns was indisputably the leading feminist architectural thinker in Australia. The other members of the team were some of the most highly respected, senior women academics in architecture in Australia. The group was rounded out with the interdisciplinary expertise of scholars from political science and business. At that time, we didn't yet have Gill Matthewson – we had a Gill-shaped space, in the form of a PhD scholarship, and she was later to prove the perfect candidate for that position, and integral to the project.

² Paula Whitman. *Going Places: The Career Progression of Women in the Architectural Profession* (Brisbane: Queensland University of Technology, 2005).

This was a team that not only had the interdisciplinary expertise, but also the track record and credibility, to actually be funded by the Australian Research Council. This seemingly minor detail is actually crucial, since the project as a whole has been characterized by a kind of strategic pragmatism, using whatever powers and resources are at hand, to do what it could, however it could. And what we needed, to begin with, was money – enough to do it properly, enough to be taken seriously.

The vehicle was the Australian Research Council Industry Linkage scheme, which seeks to solve industry-specific problems through co-funding between private and public sectors. For this, we needed industry partners, and duly signed up three large architecture practices, a media company, and the Australian Institute of Architects itself.

Activating the research

So, we applied for the grant, and we got the money.³ Now, stay with me as we rush forward three years, to recap the overall findings of the project.⁴ They are, on the whole, staggeringly unsurprising. They reflect earlier findings in Canada and the UK, and indeed Whitman's own findings in the Australian context.

The findings are, broadly speaking, that women are under-represented in architecture in Australia, and that this is particularly apparent at senior levels. We found that the proportion of female graduates is close to parity, but women are not advancing in proportionate numbers, furthermore that women architects tend to follow 'atypical' career paths, with women tending to leave, step sideways, or not return from a break. Women tend not be credentialed in the same way as men in the industry: twice as many women are active in architecture as are registered. There is clear evidence of gender-based pay inequity, while architects working part-time are frequently sidelined. Overall, we found that while low pay, long hours, and difficulty in reconciling professional and family life are also problems for men in architecture, they impact in different, specific, and compounded ways for women in the profession.

So far, so familiar: it is not the *findings* of our research that have been striking. It is the way we have been able to *mobilize* these findings, and translate them into effective action. For a variety of reasons (some to do with the people involved, the resources leveraged, a certain visual and rhetorical style, the ripe historic moment, the growing influence of the internet, sheer luck), this project has been able to 'cut through' in the way that others, in the past, have not.

So, what have we actually done, during the life of the project? My colleagues will shortly address some of these initiatives, but let me briefly summarize them as a kind of introduction: we have produced a gender

³ Naomi Stead, Julie Willis, Sandra Kaji-O'Grady, Gillian Whitehouse, Susan Savage, Justine Clark, Karen Burns, and Amanda Roan, "Equity and Diversity in the Australian Architecture Profession: Women, Work, and Leadership (2011–2014)" (Australian Research Council Linkage Project LP100200107, 2010).

⁴ Naomi Stead, ed. "Dossier: The State of Gender Equity," commissioned section reporting on findings for the "Equity and Diversity in the Australian Architecture Profession: Women, Work and Leadership" project, *Architecture Australia* (Sept/Oct 2014): 53–69.

⁵ Gill Matthewson, “Dimensions of Gender: Women’s Careers in the Australian Architecture Profession” (PhD diss., University of Queensland, 2015).

⁶ See Parlour for details on these: <http://archiparlour.org/>

equity policy for the Australian Institute of Architects, and a multiple award-winning web interface and online community. Gill Matthewson has produced a highly commended PhD (soon to be a book),⁵ which includes the most comprehensive statistical picture ever produced of women’s involvement in architecture in Australia. We have run an international conference, staged numerous industry events of our own, spoken at even more numerous events staged by others, curated an exhibition, and almost won the creative directorship of the Australian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale.⁶ We have written scholarly essays, reports, and discussion papers, and run two major industry surveys. We have produced eleven Guides to Equitable Practice, which are now widely used worldwide, and we have founded an incorporated association – the activist collective that is Parlour.

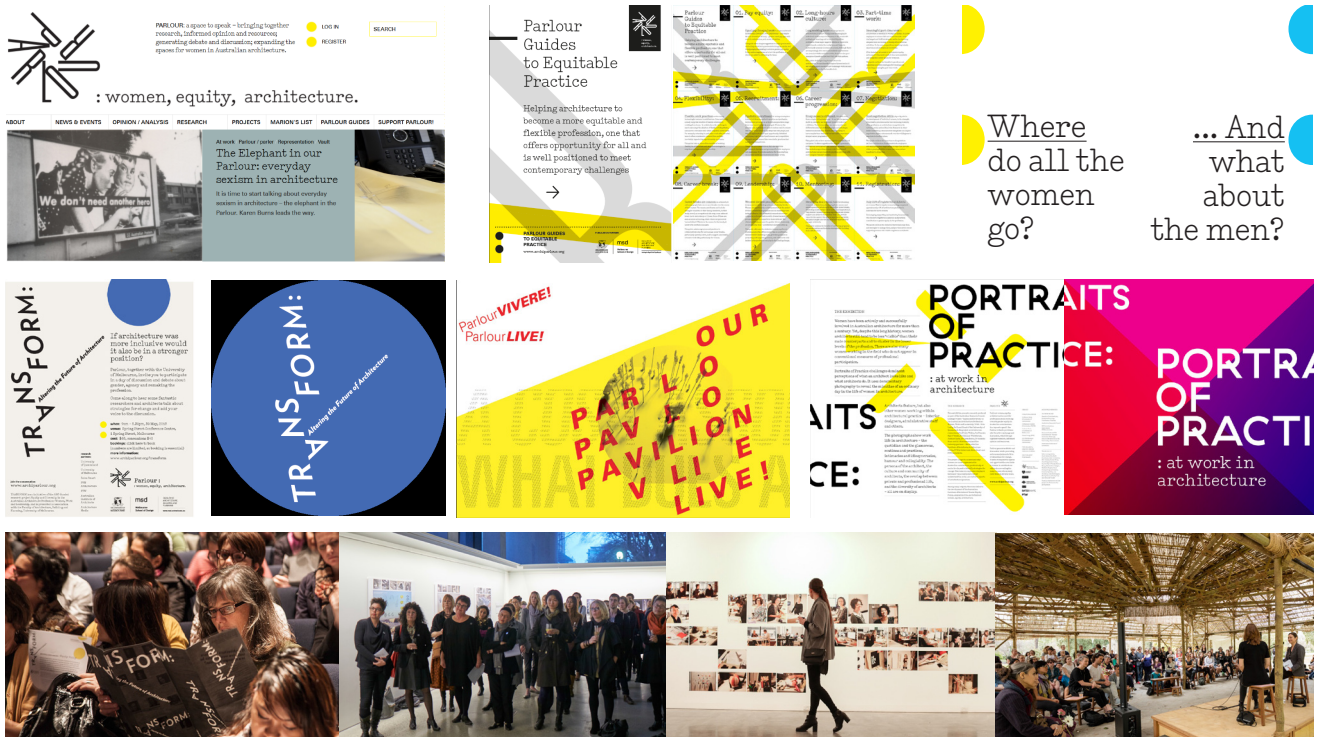


Fig. 2 Overview of Parlour events. By Parlour.

But most of all, we have (re)started a conversation about gender, and feminism, and fair work practices, in architecture in Australia, by setting out the terms and concepts for a constructive, critical, frank discussion about gender equity.

Gill Matthewson’s research has been instrumental here: *demonstrating* that there are systemic, structural, gendered patterns in employment in architecture in Australia. Her evidence, especially when presented visually, has proven to be the most powerful rhetorical instrument in the project. Here, she takes up the story.

Gill Matthewson – The importance and the limits of numbers

I became the self-proclaimed ‘numbers nerd’ for the project. This was, in part, because I encountered resistance when I began the interviews with architects that formed the main part of my research, both for the larger project and for my PhD thesis. Architects seemed to think there just wasn’t a problem, because there seemed to be equal numbers of men and women in architecture school and in offices. As one put it: “I’ve never been in an architectural environment dominated by men.”⁷

⁷ All interview quotes in this section from Matthewson, “Dimensions of Gender.”

Others said that there were really much better topics for me to be researching, such as the marginalization of architects within the construction industry. This was a common theme in the interviews, but the position we have taken in the project is that gender inequality is both a symptom and an indication of other issues and problems in the profession.

When I pointed out that there were very few senior women in the firms of my interviewees, they tended to find this mysterious, but explained it by saying either that they didn’t have the women to start with, or women did not persevere. Many believed firmly that there was no larger story about gender bias. However, one senior woman noted:

It’s very bizarre, because up until this point, I’ve been surrounded by women who were brilliant. And suddenly, they’re not there! That’s one of the things that mystifies me. It’s like if I can do this, there’s half a dozen women that I know that can do this too.

Even so, as mysterious as the lack of senior women was, gender was assumed to not be the problem; architecture was seen to be gender-neutral. So I, and the project more broadly, needed to make inequity visible, and some form of statistical analysis is a good way to do this. Numbers help articulate broad patterns that can only be seen when everybody is counted. They are perhaps the most convincing tool available to those advocating for gender equity.

First, we considered some historical data, which showed growth in the number of women participating in the profession. The proportion of female graduates of architecture schools in Australia grew from just 10% in the 1970s to being consistently over 40% since the mid-1990s.⁸ In Australia (and some other countries) architects are required to undergo further study and work experience in order to become registered or licensed, and there has also been growth in the numbers of women registered architects relative to the population. From the 1920s, when registration began, there have always been women architects in Australia, but their numbers have grown rapidly in the last couple of decades. By 2012, women made up 22% of registered architects.

⁸ All Australian statistics in this section from Matthewson, “Dimensions of Gender.” Also see Stead, “Dossier.”

That information generates the most common comparison when talking about women in architecture in Anglo-American countries: the appallingly wide gap between the percentage of women graduating, and the percentage of registered architects. In Australia in 2012, women were 44% of graduates but only 22% of those who were registered. Those figures are replicated in other English-speaking countries with similar registration regimes: in New Zealand the figures were 53% and 18.5%; in the UK, 43% and 21.5%, and in the USA 44% and 19%.⁹

⁹ New Zealand Registered Architects Board, “Annual Reports” (NZRAB, 2013); Royal Institute of British Architects, RIBA Education Statistics 2013–2014 (RIBA, 2015); UK Architects Registration Board, “Annual Report” (UKARB, 2015); Despina Stratigakos, *Where are the Women Architects?* (New York: Princeton University Press, 2016), 21, 26.

These figures are striking, but in the project we also wanted to produce the most comprehensive picture of women’s participation in the profession. We derived data from *Architecture Schools of Australasia, 1988–2015*, an annual combined register of architects; obtained membership data of the Australian Institute of Architects; and, finally, we purchased data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics Census of Population and Housing for the occupation code Architect (ANZSCO 232111).

All this information is summarized in one of our key diagrams, which we refer to as the ‘circle diagram.’ Here, the larger the solid-color bubble, the greater the participation of women in that category. The scale from left to right shows roles and positions of increasing seniority, so the most senior roles are to the right, and they are noticeably much smaller than the junior ones, shown to the left.

In all of these categories of women’s involvement in the profession, historical data shows definite growth across time. However, while growth is good, it also supports those who say: “Just wait, women will get there. There is no problem.”

The response to this is that the growth is simply not as significant as it should or could be. By cross-referencing between data sources, a different picture appears. We looked at the proportion of women architects in each five-year age band from the Census and compared with the approximate graduation rate for that age group. There is a consistent pattern of contraction, which means that more women leave architecture than men. And they begin to do so within five years of graduation. That’s a strong indication of how gender impacts differentially.

When comparing the overall architecture workforce with the numbers of registered architects, more than a third turned out to be not registered. Broken down by gender, nearly half the women were not registered. This means that the direct comparison of women graduates and registered architects, although hinting at the attrition of younger women, actually obscures just how many women architects that are working, but uncounted by registration.

The Census also gives us the most comprehensive data on the gender-based

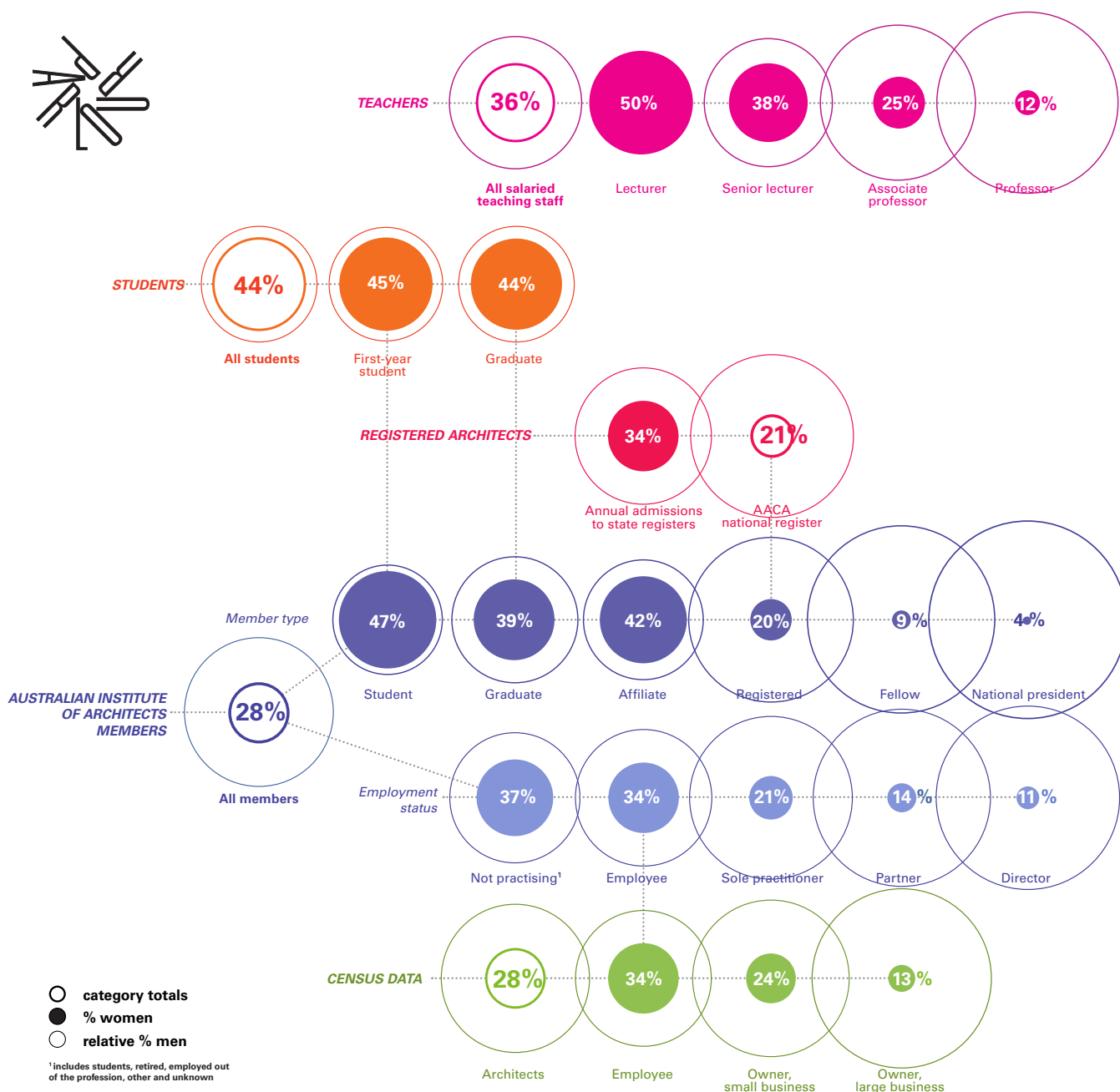


Fig. 3 Women in Australian Architecture – 2012. Graphic by Catherine Griffiths based on original graphic by Georgina Russell and Gill Matthewson. Data collected by Gill Matthewson and Kirsty Volz.

pay gap because it takes into account factors that can cause distortions in calculations. These include the age profile of men overall being much older than that for women and a greater proportion of women working part-time than men. The Census data shows us a gender pay gap for full-time workers that begins straight out of architecture school, and continues to grow. It starts at 6% for those aged 25–34 and rises to 17% for 55–59 year olds.

This empirical quantitative evidence and its visualization (much of which can be found on the Parlour website) made it very clear that gender was an issue that time alone would not heal. And that information gave us traction for policy development and other changes, but importantly it also started people talking.

Listening to architects

Numbers give the big picture patterns but gender equity is about much more than equal numbers. To pick up the nuances you have to listen to architects' stories. I spoke with over 70 architects at all stages of their careers, both women and men. At the time, they were working for large firms, but they had also worked in offices of all sizes, and in locations across the world. Like the counting of architects, collecting their stories shows patterns in how gender silently structures the profession. Quite simply, certain ideologies in architecture determine the culture and structure of the profession and how people are expected to behave. And these impact differentially according to gender.

Sometimes these structural and cultural factors can seem overwhelming, but they are not monolithic and can be changed; this even happened in some interviews. I found people would initially voice the standard line about how architecture *must* be meritocratic, must involve long hours, etc. But in discussion and faced with some of the quantitative evidence, views shifted.

So, one manager began by emphatically declaring that merit determines success, which is a widely shared view in architecture: "It's a meritocracy: you succeed based on your own success, and I think people are genuinely fairly rewarded and progressed for what they do!" But then he started to qualify that statement: "It's about many things, and sometimes it's about potential rather than achievement." Due to gender bias, men's potential is seen, but women's is not; achievement is a much higher bar, and women have to prove again and again their ability to achieve. Then he noted, "There are no tick-boxes that can be filled out, completed, some of it's X factor." This is an admission that the system of appraisals and promotions is not very transparent. Study after study confirms that a lack of transparency in such matters is a sure-fire mechanism for allowing inequity. Finally, he said, "They've upset somebody or whatever." This admission emphasizes the importance of personal relationships in architecture and my observations were that gender played a strong role in

those: I saw senior men mentoring younger ones in whom they could see themselves at that age.

Another sequence involved someone who was not at all sympathetic to the project initially and was adamant that a project-leader role in architecture was highly demanded. Over the course of the interview, this view shifted. First, she described her own experience: “When I was a project architect running teams, I was the last one to leave each day. I wouldn’t feel comfortable setting the team on a task and a deadline and not being there with them.” Then she realized that: “A lot of our senior project leaders who are male have some form of caring responsibility. They’ve done the hard yards and they don’t necessarily feel like they have to be here ’til late every night. They are able to plan.” This is an admission that maybe long hours are not necessary, that ‘proving oneself’ is a strong element of such hours, and planning can remove their ‘necessity.’ Since the interview, this woman has become a champion for equity in the profession.

These were individual changes, but such changes add up and where they add up best is on the Parlour website.

Justine Clark – *Parlour* the platform

I see Parlour as a platform – a space for building community and a site of exchange. We operate in the space between academia and practice, between scholarly and practice-based knowledge, between research and action. This is a place of great possibility and opportunity, and one I am particularly interested in (being myself neither a practitioner nor an academic).

Tightly entwined, these modes inflect and inform each other. Of course, working between these connected but different worlds also brings tensions and complexities. Karen Burns will talk about this further. For now, I am going to describe some of our activities and goals and how we achieved them, from my perspective as editor of the website and associated initiatives.

When we launched Parlour, the website, in 2012, we described our aims as follows:

Welcome to Parlour. A site for active exchange and discussion, Parlour brings together research, informed opinion and resources on women, equity and architecture. It seeks to expand the spaces and opportunities available, while also revealing the many women who already contribute in diverse ways.

As activists and advocates we aim to generate debate and discussion.
As researchers and scholars we provide serious analysis and a

¹⁰ Parlour, “Welcome to Parlour,” Parlour, 2012, <http://archiparlour.org/about/> (accessed November 8, 2017).

firm evidence base for change. As women active in Australian architecture we seek to open up opportunities and to broaden definitions of what architectural activity might be.¹⁰

It is still a fairly accurate description of what we do and why we do it, but things also developed in ways we could not imagine at that time. In hindsight, outlining these multiple roles also set the scene for many of the projects and programs we went on to develop, and provided a coherent approach that has framed many and varied initiatives. There are diverse opportunities for action and distinct types of agency available in different circumstances. This is something we return to consistently – we can’t all do the same thing, but we can all do something. Because everything Parlour does is always, also, a call to action.

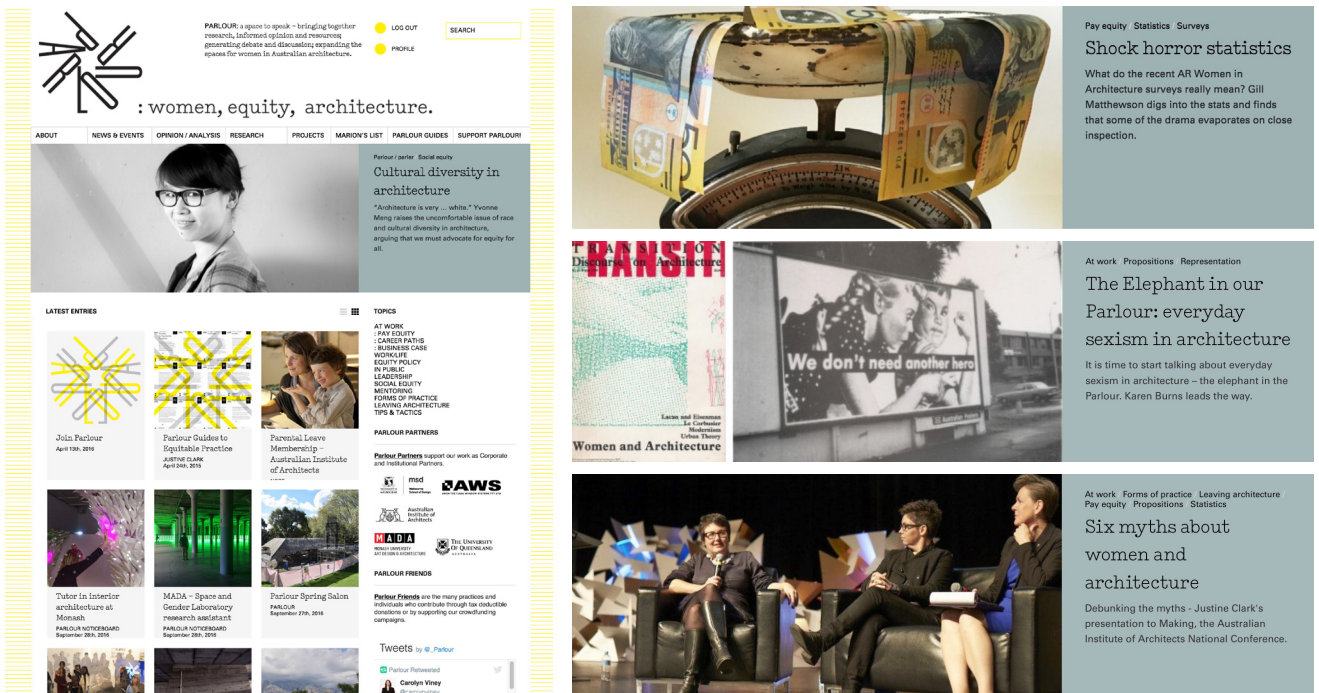


Fig. 4 Website screenshots. By Parlour.

A space to speak

First, Parlour became a ‘space to speak’. The website was launched a year into the three-year research project. The fact this happened while the research was still in process is important. Parlour became a significant tool for disseminating research findings beyond academia. In particular, I can’t overstate the influence and impact of Gill Matthewson’s statistical analysis in demonstrating the need for change, and in forming a community of people emboldened to work for that change.

But Parlour is more than that. It has never been simply a platform for the one-way flow of information from ‘expert’ researcher to receptive audience.

From the beginning we asked our ‘readers’ to participate. We invited our ‘audience’ to become contributors – as writers, as respondents to surveys, as participants in consultation processes, as event attendees and speakers, as guest hosts of our Instagram account, and much more. And in turn Parlour has become an umbrella that also supports and promotes initiatives developed by others.

Since 2012, we have published articles from over 100 contributors. All of this content is carefully and professionally edited. (And that is very important!) Many of the articles offer insight into different means of navigating careers, the variety of challenges faced and opportunities found, and offer suggestions and strategies, tips and tactics. This particularity of experience is an important complement to our own articulation of systemic, structural issues through data and other means.

Recently we have also started publishing material on other equity issues – ethnicity and race, mental health – using Parlour as a vehicle to facilitate important conversations within both academia and the profession.¹¹

¹¹ For example: Yvonne Meng, “Cultural Diversity in Architecture,” Parlour, posted June 8, 2016, <http://archiparlour.org/cultural-diversity-in-architecture/>; Sonia Sarangi, Parlour, posted July 14, 2016, “Who’s Afraid of Ethnic Diversity?” <http://archiparlour.org/whos-afraid-of-ethnic-diversity/>; Sam Perversi-Brooks, “Class and Creed in Australian Architecture,” Parlour, posted July 15, 2016, <http://archiparlour.org/class-and-creed-in-australian-architecture/>; Byron Kinnaird, “An Anxious Discipline,” Parlour, posted September 23, 2016, <http://archiparlour.org/an-anxious-discipline/>; and Naomi Stead and Nicole Kalms “Queering Architecture: Framing the Conversation,” Parlour, posted February 23, 2017, <http://archiparlour.org/queering-architecture-framing-conversation/> (all accessed November 8, 2017).

¹² All quotes in this section are from Justine Clark, “Six Myths about Women and Architecture,” Parlour, posted September 6, 2014, <http://archiparlour.org/six-myths-about-women-and-architecture/> (accessed November 8, 2017).

“Thank God someone is looking at this issue!”¹²

When launched, Parlour tapped into a current of concern that had previously had no outlet. It allowed many women to realize that they were not alone in their experiences, and to recognize these as part of larger structural issues. It allowed many men to say that they, too, wanted change in working conditions in architecture. We know the issues were important, but we were amazed by the almost visceral sense of relief that greeted us:

It’s about time this discussion took center stage. Opportunity, support, and representation of women in architecture is, and has been, abysmal for the 24 years since I started studying architecture at Uni.

Thank you so very much. It is so important to have third party voices out there. I sometimes feel like if I speak up about gender issues, it is perceived as either sour grapes, or an attempt to advantage myself personally.

I was very pleased to see this forum appear. I have been wondering if other women in the profession were having similar issues, or if it was just me...

The rapidly growing, active and very receptive audience opened up new possibilities for us as researchers, and new opportunities for action and activism on the part of the community who drew on this new collective identity to work for change within their own professional contexts.

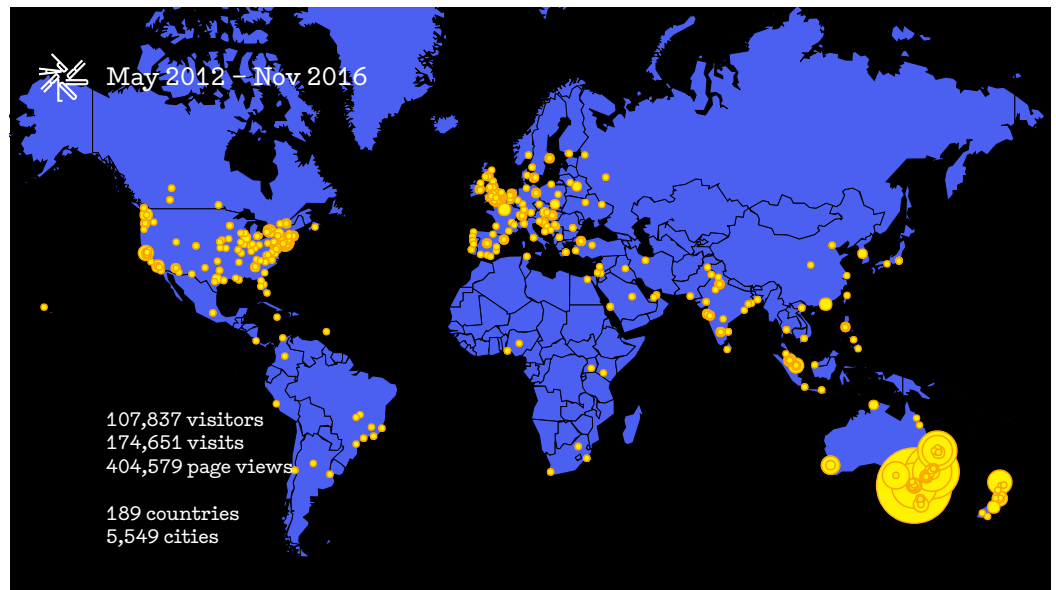


Fig. 5 Parlour website activity. Map by Parlour.

As the site received more and more traffic (both within Australia and across the world), it became apparent that informed, reasonable, productive conversations about equity were needed everywhere. Indeed, they were starting up again in many places. Our online presence enabled us to build and strengthen international networks, which also added further impetus to the campaign within Australia.

Altering the future of architecture

Thank you for doing this work. It could alter the future of architecture, and that's really exciting.

We have worked hard to locate this work at the center of the discussions of the future of the profession, rather than on the margins. Our 2013 symposium, *Transform: altering the future of architecture*, asked, if architecture was more inclusive, would it also be in a stronger position? Equity, we argue, is not a luxury – it is essential to forging a robust profession with some kind of viable future.

We have also worked hard to shift the public conversation from simply telling horror stories. This has worked, in part because we have also provided vehicles for people to articulate the many small and not-so-small experiences that have shaped their careers (for example, in the large-scale surveys we conducted in 2012).

Indeed, one of the most remarkable things about *Transform* was the optimism and ambition, the commitment to driving change, even as we acknowledge it is a long, hard project. This is a constant quality in the events we have run subsequently. People have fun at Parlour events.

Equitable practice

We also provide the tools to help drive change. *The Parlour Guides to Equitable Practice* consolidate the knowledge developed through the research and locate it within broader discussions of workplace change and the business case for gender equity. They present this in a way that can be put to action in everyday working and professional lives.

The guides address eleven topics. Each guide outlines the issue, why it matters and what “we” might do about it. This last section is addressed to different audiences – individual employee architects, employer practices, and institutional and professional bodies.

The guides aim to dispel the myths and articulate the multiple benefits of a more equitable profession. Importantly, they recognize that different parts of the profession have different types of agency – and suggest that we all have a proactive, positive part to play in facilitating change. They arm individuals, companies, and organizations with the skills, knowledge and systems to activate these varying types of agency. They encourage the profession as a whole to attend to the work and labor practices of architecture.

The Guides were developed through extensive consultations with the professional community (led by Naomi Stead) and an intensive process of redrafting and editing. They are also very well designed. This matters. High quality design is essential if you want to be taken seriously by the architectural community. The guides have been very well received and, although written for Australia, they are now making their way around the world – and seem to be generating particular interest in the US.

WikiD: Women, design, Wikipedia

History is not a simple meritocracy: it is a narrative of the past written and revised – or not written at all – by people with agendas. – Despina Stratigakos¹³

¹³ Despina Stratigakos, “Unforgetting Women Architects: From the Pritzker Wikipedia,” *Places Journal*, April 2013. <https://placesjournal.org/article/unforgetting-women-architects-from-the-pritzker-to-wikipedia/> (accessed November 8, 2017).

Parlour has been an important means to forge international connections and collaborations. Many of these are informal, but we have also developed a particular, concrete collaboration through the WikiD initiative. This was initiated by Lori Brown of the US-based Architexx in response to Despina Stratigakos’s essay in *Places Journal* cited above, where she made a clear call to write women into Wikipedia. At Lori’s invitation we staged an initial edit-a-thon on International Women’s Day in 2015. The results were mixed, with many articles and topics challenged by the Wikipedia community for not being ‘notable.’ As Despina says, such challenges raise important questions about how history is constructed and who by.

¹⁴ Parlour, "The wikiD: Women, Wikipedia, Design Project," Parlour, posted June 14, 2015, <http://archiparlour.org/wikiD-women-wikipedia-design/> (accessed November 8, 2017).

A colleague in Berlin, Eleanor Chapman, suggested we apply for Wikimedia funding to take it further. This was successful and the three groups – Architexx in New York, n-ails in Berlin and Parlour in Melbourne – set about increasing the representation of women architects on Wikipedia.¹⁴ Once again we found that providing a context in which others can contribute – and producing guides to help them do so – was very effective. This is another example of the multi-pronged approach we take to all our activities. We aimed to engage with conceptual matters by seeking to influence 'notability' criteria, at the same time as working practically and pragmatically to increase numbers, and making space and resources for others to work alongside us.

Marion's List

Our latest project is Marion's List, named for Marion Mahony Griffin, an American practitioner, who became one of Australia's most significant women architects. Marion's List is an online register of women in architecture. It has two principal aims, the first of which is to provide a richer picture of women in architecture and the built environment (not only those who would be 'notable' enough for a Wikipedia entry). The second aim is to provide a resource for those organizing events, setting up juries and crits, so that we need never again hear 'we asked a woman, but she couldn't come.'

This is an open list, and all women active within the Australian built environment are welcome to submit a profile. We will use Marion's List to push the conversation about the importance of diversity within the public culture of architecture but, once again, we are also making tools for others to use in their own situations.

In all of this, complex questions of identity are at play as we seek to have direct impact and to make change in the world. Our colleague and comrade Karen Burns will now tease out some of these complexities around identity.

Karen Burns – Between theory and activism

I'm a feminist theorist. My work at Parlour has been theoretical and organizational: helping brand concepts with brand names and language (Parlour, Transform), writing, and helping develop ideas for events and essay campaigns. I'm going to talk briefly about the role of language and theory in a tactical project – which is what Parlour is.

To be both a feminist theorist *and* a gender activist in the architectural profession entails a number of shifts in thinking and language. Once I move outside the bubble of progressive feminist circles (defined by feminist gender theory texts, websites and conferences), I have to think

about a public language for gender discussion, because the knowledge I have about gender cannot be assumed to exist across the discipline and industry. If men are from Mars, gender theorists are from Saturn...?

Gender literacy exists in a condition of uneven development across the profession and discipline. Uneven development, you'll remember, is the term Marx devised to describe dramatic differences in levels of economic development.¹⁵ There are dramatic differences in levels of gender literacy in architecture's geographies. Parlour's project has, in part, been educational; shaped by knowledge of the uneven spatial distribution of gender literacy across different architectural sites.

¹⁵ There are other ideas included in the term as well – uneven development as strategy to increase profits.

There are those who think gender isn't an issue because the Academy and Industry are meritocracies – they don't see hidden gender norms. There are those who think the word gender is a synonym for women and that gender discussion and analysis is women's business, et cetera. The Parlour statistics project was an education in gender literacy; it visualized the gender differential in architectural work.

I see Parlour as a temporal project that gathers pace as it makes gains in gender literacy, gains that eventually allow Parlour to start public discussions around the concept that we know as intersectional feminism, to eventually move beyond the gender binary and to discuss differences within the categories of women, men, sexual orientation, gender identification, and fluidity. Parlour has started a debate around diverse ways of practicing architecture and the plural career paths of built environment professionals. Our 'Transform' workshop focused on this. This concept of diversity – What Does an Architect Look Like? – should build a bridgehead for broader discussions of diversity and inclusion.

Parlour is a double-headed project. At the beginning of its life, it looked like a classic liberal feminist project in its commitment to equity and its apparent 'binarization' of male and female identities and work patterns in architecture. But in fact it was 'difference' that Parlour usually offered as the solution to these structural inequities: different modes of structuring work as flexible or part-time, different identities for the workplace gender agent (employer, employee, institutional), different identities for the architect, architectural career and the profession at our 'Transform' workshop.

I believe that organizing women in architecture around the identity of being a woman in architecture still remains critical, as problematic as the unifying term 'woman' is, for theory. (Because 'gender' can be a neutral and routine description rather than a political mobilization. Gender can be the absent-minded tick box on the information form.) We make identity visible and political through organizing.

¹⁶ Joshua Gamson, "Must Identity Movements Self-Destruct? A Queer Dilemma," *Social Problems* 42, no.3 (1995), 391.

¹⁷ Michelle Kuo, "Introduction," *Art Forum*, issue *Art and Identity*, Summer 2016.

In a fantastic essay on identity and organizing in queer politics, Joshua Gamson describes the dilemma of identity politics, where "the logic and political unity of deconstructing collective categories vie with that of shoring them up; each logic is true, and neither is fully tenable."¹⁶ The challenge for analysts is to cope with the fact that both strategies – a clear category of collective identity and deconstructing the category – make sense. Michelle Kuo puts it this way: "The question of identity is as much about asserting one as it is escaping it. Every form of subjectivity is also a form of coercion and exclusion."¹⁷

We need flexible tactics to address the particular, localized instances of gender illiteracy.

Parlour speaks in a number of languages and assumes a number of guises across a number of places. Parlour writes about women, feminism, and gender issues in a public language for intelligent non-experts. That is, non-experts in gender theory, but with plenty of experience and expertise with the everyday gendering operations of architecture.

Parlour borrows other languages to shape and sell its campaign for gender equity. The most surprising of these languages (for some of my friends) is the language of the marketplace. We borrow from those business analysts who argue that gender diversity improves profits and productivity. (Since I opened with a reference to Marx, you'll understand why some of my friends think this is a hoot.)

Selling gender diversity as a public good, something of benefit to many, is an activist tactic. So much academic writing is about clarity of purpose and procedure, but activism requires certain strategies of dissimulation and disguise. For example, in our campaign for gender equity we are smuggling in labor agendas about better workplace conditions. Equity is decent pay and decent hours for workers.

All feminist thinking is directed towards transformation, but we can usefully spatialize those places of transformation; whether our energy is directed towards change in epistemology or change in institutional policies at universities or change in architecture's long-hours culture.

We use our sophistication with language, our ability to speak – to parlar and parlay – in different voices and guises; in different places depending on our specific, tactical aims.

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