



Discipline and Erasure

Women Architects
and the Making of
Architecture as
'Discipline'

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The History of Women in Architecture as 'Erasure'

- Battle for entrance: 1893 refusal of AA to admit Bettie and Ethel Charles;
- Post-war quotas reimposed on women architects at the AA and elsewhere
- To literal erasures such as the famous image of Patty Hopkins erased from the BBC's *The Brits Who Built the Modern World* photograph
- To the 1991 Pritzker prize being awarded to Robert Venturi alone, despite Denise Scott Brown's contribution
- Continuing erasures: out of fifty-six RIBA-validated UK-based architecture schools women lead only 12%; median hourly gender pay gap being 16.7%




Archival erasures:

- Recent research by Lynne Walker, Elizabeth Darling, and others has sought to reappraise the position of women in architecture but:
- What gets collected/curated/catalogued?
- Minnette de Silva: first Asian woman elected to RIBA 1948 but archive and possessions destroyed after her death
- Archives themselves 'erase' through the cataloguing process: the famous photo of Minnette de Silva at the World Congress of Intellectuals in Defence of Peace 1948 is catalogued exclusively under "Picasso"
- We need new archival practices to challenge the erasures but this brings problems: eg Matrix Feminist Architecture Archive "stuff is just under people's beds and in cupboards in Ikea and Tesco bags"



Return to the "Origin Violence":

- Can we take a Derridean approach to reassessing architectural history?
- *Archive Fever*: Tendency to Fetishization of the archive but we need to be conscious of absences/exclusions and the political power of the archive
- For every "recording" there is a loss or absence
- All that IS can only exist can against a backdrop of returning/excluded *others*
- Eg the state necessitates the stateless, citizen-non-citizen, present-absent, man-woman
- Revenant-revenir-to come back or return to the Origin Violence
- Can we USE this to **IMAGINE, INVENT, and ACTUALISE** a different future!
- To **DISRUPT** the present with (unrealized) pasts!



Firstly, you're asking a ghost
whether he believes in ghosts

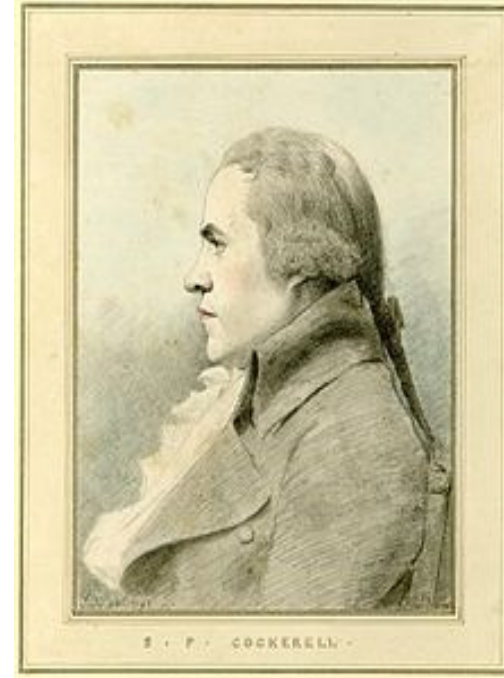
Reflecting on 'Discipline'

- Discipline defined as:
- *“the practice of training people to obey rules or a code of behaviour, using punishment to correct disobedience”*
- *“a branch of knowledge, typically one studied in higher education”*
- This might prompt reflection on Foucault’s concept of *Discipline and Punish*
- The way the technologies of ‘modernity’ shape systems of knowledge, structures, and forms of control
- Professionalisation of practices and pedagogies forms part of this technology of power



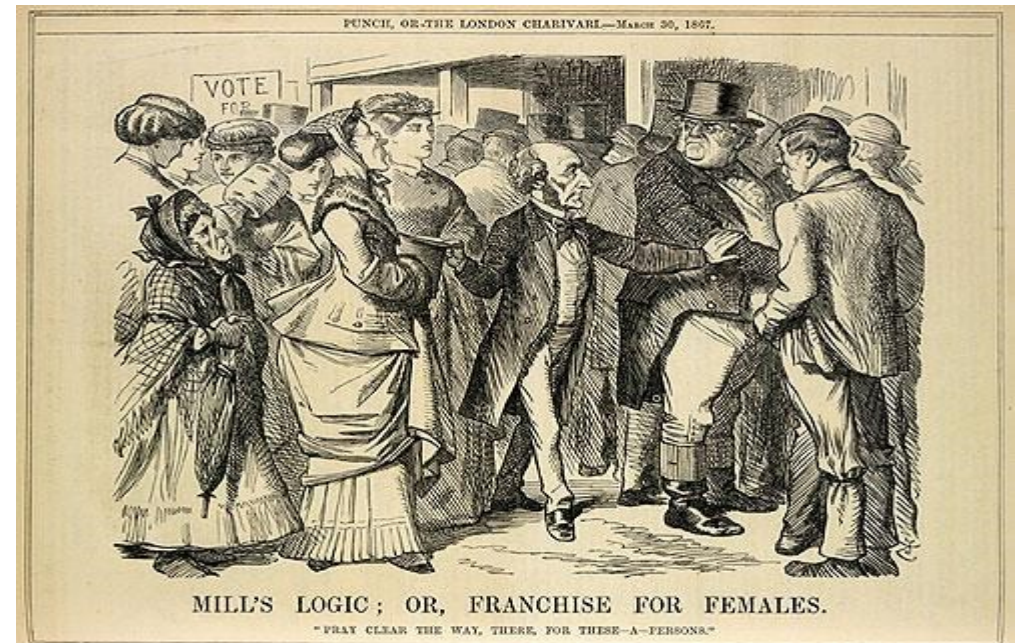
Origins of Architecture as discipline/a discipline:

- The Architects Club 1791-C19th: an all-male, elite, dining club benefitting from the proceeds of Empire
- Samuel Cockerell Pepys: Surveyor to the East India Company
- Society of British Architects: closed to those with 'any interest or participation in any trade or contract connected with building'
- IBA 1834: 'uniformity and respectability of practice'
- RIBA 1837:
- Classical views of 'the architect' seen through the prism of C15th-C16th humanism
- Who is left out of the process of professionalization?



Origins of Architecture as discipline/a discipline:

- The period of architectural professionalization maps onto the period of democratization in Britain
- Historians argue that the UK Reform Acts 1832 and 1867, while on the surface expanding the franchise, for the first time **legislate against** women having the vote
- This is despite instances of women voting **BEFORE** 1832
- Leading women to practice politics in adjacent spheres eg Poor Law, Prison Reform, and Education
- Might the role of women in architecture similarly map into this context?
- Eg the role of amateur women architects: Lady Anne Clifford, Elizabeth Wilbraham, Jane and Mary Parmenter, Caroline Herschel pre-1834
- The role of women in the adjacent sphere of town planning and heritage post 1824 Poor Law Amendment Act eg Jane Whyte, Lileen Hardy, Octavia Hill
- A separation that still to some extent remains: eg women architects moving into interior architecture, landscape architecture, or town planning or combining architecture with all 3



Women's erasure from 'professionalised' space:

- Professionalisation brings with it segregations & erasures
- Battle for women's entrance: 1893 refusal of AA to admit Bettie and Ethel Charles; Florence Hobson, 1899, Regent Street Polytechnic 1902, Bartlett 1915, AA 1917
- University of Liverpool (early champion of women in architecture): Norah Dunphy and Frances Thelma Silcock RIBA Silver medal 1925 and Rome travel scholarship (image)
- Post-war quotas reimposed on women architects at the AA and elsewhere
- Robert Atkinson, director of education at the Architectural Association, that women 'would find a field for their abilities more particularly in decorative and domestic architecture rather than the planning of buildings 10 or 12 storeys high' still manifests itself in more women interior architects



Masculinist praxis of “discipline”:

- Mapping the experiences of women architects from the British Library’s Architect’s Lives archive:
- Arbitrary admittance, brutal pedagogy, all-male panels, pedagogical techniques to ‘toughen up’, all-night working etc
- M.J Long’s an architecture award of a year spent travelling. The judging panel assumed that she was male. Realising their mistake they tried to award to the runner-up as Long ought not to want to travel alone as a single woman.



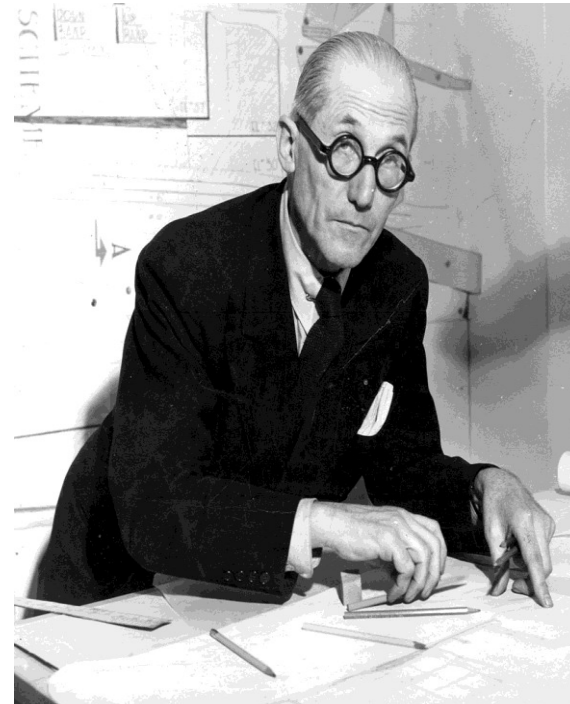
Critique & dismissal of feminine praxis:

- Too **interdisciplinary**:
- Trywhitt critiqued for over-focus on food heritage and cooking and Minnette da Silva for her emphasis on weaving
- Too **intermediary**:
- M.J Long's Jewish Museum London critiqued as drawing too much on its Georgian heritage 'too subtle an intervention' unlike the 'foreboding experience' of Liebeskind's Jewish Museum
- Focus on the **collaborative** nature of architecture contributes to women architect's dismissal:
- Eg Mary Medd 'I didn't build them on my own. I got a hand here and there. There was always people to help. I don't like to take the whole credit for anything at all because always I've been with other people''



Collage versus Controlled Curation: Discipline and inter-discipline

A comparison of Minnette da Silva's 'archive' (published in collage form as *Life and Work of an Asian Woman Architect*) and Le Corbusier's agendas in *Fondation Le Corbusier* offers insight into concepts of 'discipline', the discipline of architecture, and the process of archiving the history of architecture



Minnette de Silva:

- 1996 awarded RIBA Gold Medal but 1998 dies alone, studio and home falls into ruin, archives plundered
- *Life and Work of an Asian Woman Architect: the architect AS an archivist **crafting** the archive*
- Interdisciplinary focus
- Fragmented, scrapbook, collage, approach: creating alternative meanings & counter-narratives while linking architecture, **history**, and autobiography/positionality
- Regional modernism reflected in artisan crafts
- Work as leisure and leisure as work
- Leisure as inspiration: love of gardening influences open courtyards, verandahs, walled garden, gold leaf designs (eg Pieris House Alfred House Gardens); handwoven textiles and handloom studio practice

The Pieris house

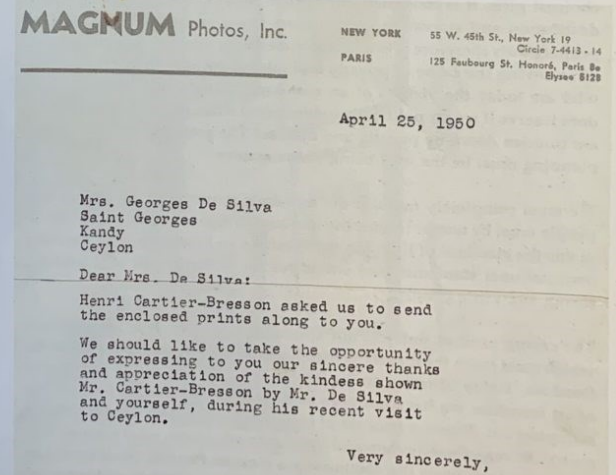


Views of statue of George E. De Silva, my father

narrative stamp



letter from Magnum



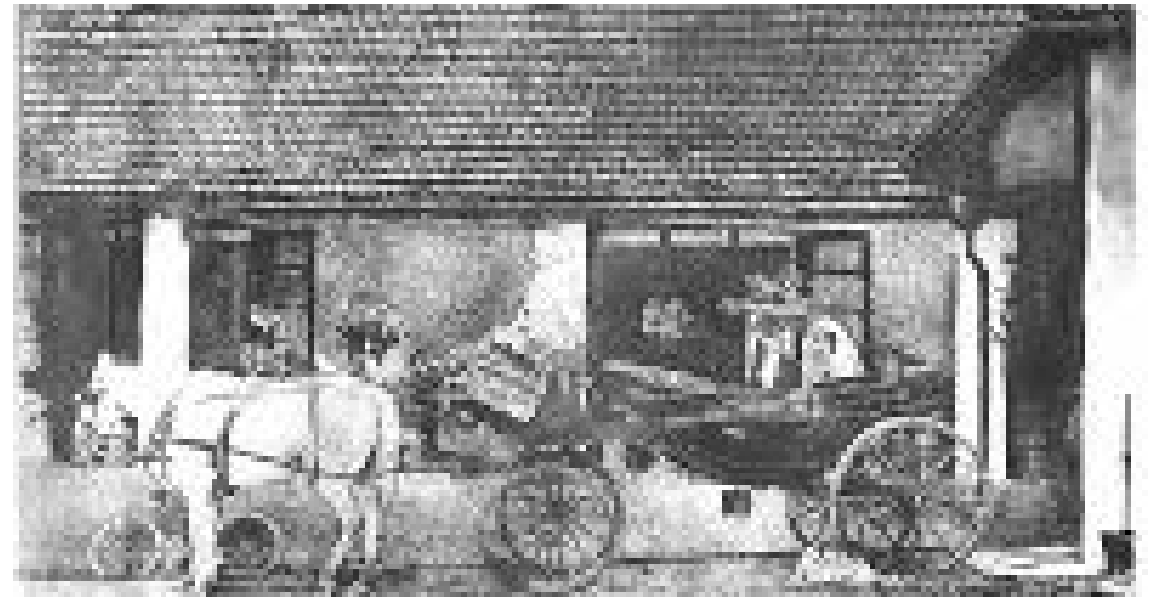
Versus Le Corbusier:

- 400,000 documents in *Fondation Le Corbusier*
- The Architect as conscious of being archived: architect as auteur of their own legacy eg 36 personal diaries 'agendas' from the interwar years as a curation of identity (F3(6)5)
- Disciplinary focus and boundaries
- Divorced from context/history-"objective"-the diaries are notably undated!
- Work as distinct from leisure and as a 'problem' to be solved: leisure 'the menace of modernities' and 'one of the most disturbing problems facing contemporary society' (1933 *La Ville Radieuse*)
- Rationalist approach to the listing of daily life activities: 'rational, progressive, 'Modern Man' and 'daily, **disciplined**, physical activity'
- Condemnation of non-rationalist, non-civic, leisure activities eg gardening



Critical Femininities and feminist praxis:

- **Participatory:**
- Minnetta da Silva's 1950s housing development scheme with consultations and craft-workshops for householders to build themselves
- Matrix Feminist Design Collective Jaganori centre and brick picnics
- **Positionality-focused:** "for us cultural and political developments could not be clearly separated ... encouraging the development of arts and crafts became also a means of uplifting the under-privileged" (da Silva)
- **Interdisciplinary:** focus on bringing together a variety of disciplines for a holistic perspective on architecture



And then life could be at a...

Pedagogic Intervention from the archive: “I thought Le Corbusier was a brandy”

- Jenny Lowe’s mixture of performance art and architecture centring interdisciplinarity and positionality
- Part of the Conceptualists exhibition: Air Gallery 1977
- Later became Architecture & Crime Unit at the AA
- Students tasked with stealing objects from around campus and then disguising them as something else
- Articulating architecture as *disruption* rather than discipline
- How might we use this pedagogy to create future disruptions?



Pedagogic Teaching Intervention II: Architects' Lives:

- Play students select passages from the interviews with Mary Medd, Jane Drew, and M. J Long
- Students asked to reflect on the educational experience of these women architects in relation to their own pedagogic experience today.
- Students compared and contrasted their own experience with those of Medd, Drew, and Long
- Then used this experience to generate discussion on the current position of women in architecture
- Issues for intersectional inclusion such as the lack of understanding over the caring responsibilities of students and the impact for student attendance at evening events came to the fore



To conclude:

- Critical femininities praxis necessitates a *disruption* of 'discipline' and disciplinarity
- This means going back to the 'origin violence' of the professionalization of practice to re-consider exclusionary structures
- We need to consciously disrupt pedagogies, practices, and 'archives' to centre feminist praxis
- A critical femininities pedagogy focused on participatory practice and positionality helps us to do this
- Being conscious of the role of women in the history of architecture enables us to reassess exclusionary structures today

