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VOLUME 02 | ISSUE 02

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Fourth Edition, 2020 [Volume 02, Issue 02]
Matter Design Services LLP: Ruturaj Parikh, Maanasi Hattangadi,
Hrushita Davey, Isha Raut, Ankit George and Rishiraj Sarkar

H & R Johnson (India): Dinesh Vyas, Prasun Chowdhury, Alpana Sethi
and Pragati Lapalikar

ISBN: 978-81-933936-59
Published by Matter Design Services LLP, Goa
Imprint: Matter Content Initiative

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Designed by Matter in Goa

Printed by Silverpoint Press Ltd, Kohinoor Estate, 165 Tulsī Pipe Road,
Lower Parel, Mumbai, Maharashtra 400 013

PRICE: ₹1500

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PROLOGUE BY SUPRIO BHATTACHARJEE

Reading Dr Anuradha Chatterjee's piece brought to mind many painful memories. While having escaped a certain systemic bias with my male privilege, I do recall how my time being a 'young' faculty member was clouded by the fact that I had no 'experience', or that I was not 'practicing', or that I had no pedigree –with no 'Masters from abroad'. The 'JJ tag' – or rather the assumed perception of it, made it an uphill task for my achievements and work to be recognized as valid. I remember an incident for example, at the BSSA, where while introducing us faculty members, a Delft-educated colleague's final year dissertation project recognition in the bi-annual Archiprix International document was feted, while my similar achievement, at least half a decade earlier, was overlooked and left unmentioned.

Dr Chatterjee's focus on the institutionalization and normalization of discriminatory practices rings home in many other ways as well. Her emphasis on the recognition of 'liminal space' as valid and of equal significance may perhaps be more accessible to understand for those who are queer – with the fortress of the binary having long been stormed within queer cultures. However within the majoritarian or populist gendered, heteronormative cultural constructs in our country, the occupation of the grey zone as a valid territorial position leads one to face adverse circumstances – an unfortunate and severely limiting fact, considering the richness this space of operation can lend to all forms of practice.

This essay also resonates deeply with my own assertion of the theory-practice schism as an artificial construct – something that I recently highlighted in a talk (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sq1lveLww-U&feature=youtu.be>) where I mentioned about my own personal unease with the binary – having spent equal time 'teaching' and 'building' (I consciously eschew the word 'practice' as much as I can – loaded as it is with the weight of lopsided connotations). In fact I proposed the notion of 'thought' as the practice – which finds fruition in one's chosen space of operation and actualization – one's chosen space of 'tangible practice' if I may call it so – whether that of academia or 'teaching', or that of 'building' or industry.

'I AM DAMNED IF I DO AND DAMNED IF I DON'T'

Architecture, Academia, and Gendered Homelessness

by Prof Dr Anuradha Chatterjee

In a curated series on archival texts, views, discussions and comments on the state of architecture and design education in India, Prof Dr Anuradha Chatterjee discusses the specious, generalised view of academic practice in India. She writes critically of the prevalent discriminatory and discursive structures or biases that this space and contemporary professional discourse have grown to embody.

THE (PROFESSIONAL) ACADEMIC

Academia in India has evolved a lot, from the times when we were labeled as teachers to now being called faculty members. In fact, Pearl Academy in Delhi has started offering postgraduate certificates in Academic Practice, which recognises teaching more broadly as the scholarship of learning and teaching. These changes are no doubt effected through cross-cultural exchanges with UK universities like Edinburgh, Liverpool, York, and Nottingham Trent to name just a few. And while schools like Edinburgh define academic practice aiming to provide “conceptual and theoretical frameworks needed to engage reflectively and critically with the question of how to promote high quality student learning within research-intensive settings,” I take it much further in a recent paper.^[1] For me, academic practice is not just about us becoming better teachers, or reflective teachers, or teachers who craft out a nexus between research and teaching. It is about becoming intentional academics, career academics, whereby the words teaching and academics are linked but not identical.

Not only have I conducted workshops on this at Avani Institute of Design, but I have also developed this further at our Beyond the Given conference in 2019 where I proposed the model of the academic practitioner, as a counterpoint to the exclusive professionalised status of the architect. I defined academic practitioners as those who are part of an institutional and cultural milieu, and often working on projects centred upon the discipline of architecture, which is a collective and a public discourse. What we recognise as architectural practice, I re-badged as industry practice. The reason I made this distinction whilst simultaneously claiming the word practice into my territory is because the word practice is significant, and in fact very sacred.

The lack of access to this word (for academics) is what makes for a space of discursive discrimination, whereby the academy and its inhabitants are seen as being in a constant state of crisis, deserving of being labelled as passive, feminized, out of touch, and ineffective. So, I argue that some of the many things constituting academic practice, in addition to teaching, are intellectual labour, production of knowledge, maintenance of networks of thoughts, innovating methodologies of inquiry pertaining to the discipline of architecture. It is important to keep in mind two things as we proceed:

- 1) it is not that one is a profession and the other is not;
- 2) it is not that academia is ‘academic’ and/or disinterested in the industry.

I argue that academic practice and industry practice, along with the practice of architectural criticism (which is as yet nascent and emerging in India) is the profession of architecture, where we are not using the word profession in its legal statutory sense only.

Academia is the liminal space, which is “neither inside the profession nor outside of it (Chatterjee 2019)”.^[2] How can academia be outside the profession? How would that even be possible? An architect’s learning curve is one of continuum that only begins in the academy. The academy is as real as the industry. It is high time we realised there is no virtual, no real world; no inside, no outside; and no private, no public realm, as much as the discipline thrives on foundations created out of these

binaries that are weighted in favour of industry practice.

Academia is called upon (by industry, and often by itself) to explain its ineffectiveness in training future professionals, shaped in the self-image of the industry. Industry is also unable to ask critical, searching questions of itself, and rarely does academia in India refuse to participate in this discourse of ‘sameness.’ I use the word sameness strategically because I want to now introduce the work of French feminist Luce Irigaray who has championed the idea of sexual difference over equality and sameness. When she argues that women in Western culture could not be said to have an autonomous subjectivity, she did not mean that “women are not conscious subjects.” She meant that the “‘feminine’ is always described in terms of deficiency or atrophy, as the other side of the sex that alone holds a monopoly on value: the male sex.”^[3] To this end, the relationship between academia and industry closely mirrors patriarchal social and sexual structures, which denies academia its own ‘feminine’ subjectivity. Perceptions of academia’s effectiveness and relevance with respect to that of the industry perpetuates a patriarchal “economy based on sameness, oneness or identity with the masculine subject”.^[4] The focus of industry is only its own survival, its own fitness, and academia participates in this, losing itself / herself in the process.

Indeed, I am an architect and (not but) I am an architect who does not ‘practice’ in the industry. I am an intentional academic practitioner, who has spent nineteen years perfecting her craft, in articulating a distinctive trajectory of practice across historical and contemporary theories, histories, and positions in architecture and design; sub-disciplinary fields of teaching, research, curatorial practice, media writing, administration and governance, and pastoral care and mentoring); and institutions, cultural and learning scales and contexts. Yet this idea is elusive in India. I can say with certainty that architecture academia (not academia in general) is still not seen as a real career goal, because it is not professionalised, and it is not seen as a profession. A career in academia is seen as a lesser form of labour: it is not seen as practice.

Industry practitioners are often treated as highly valued academics, floating in and out of architectural colleges, inspiring students with their fleeting presence. Being involved in industry practice is upheld as the real indicator of success. And while architects will continue to work longer hours for lesser pay in an architect’s office, hardly any of them will compare the real pay scales across academia and industry. Despite the numerous pay commissions, greater institutional transparency in career progression pathways, and radical revisions in academic pay scales over the last decade, young architects still do not think of this as a legitimate career option. In fact, many of them are not even aware of what it takes to land top academic appointments and to advance in academia. Clearly, I am not adequate evidence that it is possible to progress far as a career academic!

We have interviewed applicants who have claimed that they want to join academia because it is more flexible and less hectic than practice. We all know that this assumption could not be further from the truth if one were to apply real performance indicators to progression and increments. A number of prospective academics part time late into their career, delaying the decision to pick industry or academia, all along waiting, it would seem, for that path breaking, life changing project to come along. This condition is exacerbated by appraisal systems that are indeed based on PhDs and research papers, but the idea of intention, trajectory, and leadership is almost never emphasised. This makes the idea of academia as a

career unappealing as well as confusing. This is all part of the ‘perception economy’ and it goes to the heart of what I am claiming as the under-professionalised status of architecture academia in India. This stands out in stark relief when we consider for a moment how cut throat the competition is in the Global North to get tenured academic positions, whereas in India, we have a shortage of applicants who can be considered strong prospective candidates who can grow into career academics. However, I wonder where this state of confusion and paradox serves to sustain and is sustained by patriarchal social structures that seek to maintain hegemony in industry and academic practice.

THE IMPOSTER, AT HOME

The idea of academic leadership is a deeply gendered question, which is accessible to me but is also always denied, not by individuals but by discriminatory institutional, discursive systems, and representational systems. While I referred to the liminal space of academia as being “neither inside the profession nor outside of it (Chatterjee 2019)”, this is not an easy space to defend. So, when my students ask me why I do not want to build (a question that my male colleagues, especially senior male colleagues are not asked), it feels very similar to being asked why I never want to have a baby. The strategic use of this question reveals the true complexity of gender in academia and shows that this liminal space I talk about is not easy to defend. Furthermore, the feeling that I am not supposed to be here, is what Pauline Rose Clance and Suzanne Ament Imes identified in 1979 as the impostor phenomenon. In their paper titled “The Impostor Phenomenon in High-achieving Women,” they explain: “Despite outstanding academic and professional accomplishments, women who experience the impostor phenomenon persist in believing that they are really not bright and have fooled anyone who thinks otherwise. Numerous achievements, which one might expect to provide ample objective evidence of superior intellectual functioning, do not appear to affect the impostor belief.”^[5]

It is interesting that 19 years of teaching experience, one PhD, three books, multiple papers, conferences, invited talks, TEDx talk, invited panel discussions, and prestigious appointments later, I should suffer from this. At least now I am acutely aware of the racial and patriarchal politics that exacerbate this. Unjust race relations in Australian academia, media, and society had an enduring effect on me. This is the matter for another paper. I had internalized feelings of inadequacy, which were deepened every time I unsuccessfully applied for an Associate Professor’s job in Australia. At one point, I even started imagining that I was on a ‘blacklist,’ pun intended. The irony is that when I applied for a Professor’s job at Avani, the headhunter advocated my application as that of a Principal/Dean.

The hardest hitting experience was being put down by a visiting faculty that I had helped appoint, who then proceeded to write emails to the management to undermine my Deanship, claiming that the institution was going to hell in a handbasket, advocating that the school should be run by visiting faculty (like him), as if all that I had worked and fought hard to secure for students and faculty was stuff that anyone could do. I felt excessive and invisible at the same time, if that’s even possible. As Dean Academics, I had to prove my worth (read excellence, acumen) as a studio teacher, because I am not an industry practitioner. But

it is perfectly normal, even noble, that industry practitioners should want to theorize about architectural education and pedagogy without having much working knowledge of student learning cultures, or systems and people based academic governance and management. This brings focus back to the under-professionalised space of academia.

When words like open and inclusive are used in relation to the space of the academy, it is worrying. Consider this; Industry practice is viewed as business, a space of private enterprise hence defensible, but the space of the academy is often seen as a space of play and experimentation that can be freely traversed, scrutinised, and ravaged by any and all. Academia is my home (to use a domestic, feminine metaphor) but even at home, I am not safe. Therefore, I refer to the feeling of homelessness at home, a feeling I am sure is shared by many.

DENIAL OF REPRESENTATION

It is one thing to be a part of this so-called feminized space of academia (this should not be confused as me saying that there are more women in architecture academia in general), which is often opened up to male appropriation through strategic violence, the debate of being effaced, at home, is what really needs to be thought through at the level of representation: representation of gender, labour, and leadership. Hence, when someone slips up and emails me as Ms. Chatterjee instead of Dr Chatterjee, especially a female colleague in a leadership position, it is not okay to not be offended. When I address a group of parents at Orientation, and I still get emails to the Dean Academics email address as “Dear Sir,” it is not okay to not be offended. When I am introduced as the Dean Academics to visitors, who then ask “Who is in charge of the college?” it is not okay to not be offended. When I demand certain things from students, who respond “Yes, Sir,” it is not okay to not be offended. While the question here is not one of offense but indignation, it goes to show how deep institutional misogyny runs. While academia is feminized (at the level where real work is done), the seat at the head of the table is already taken, even if it is unoccupied. The leadership position is filled by an imaginary male figure. It is invested in sustaining the longing for lost male figure [phallus].

The question of gender and representation goes to the heart of the phenomenon of the ‘manel’, which is what we fondly call a panel of speakers that are all men, or all men bar one. Feminist wall of shame and their blog: <https://feministwall.tumblr.com/> takes this on as they list architecture events, debates, awards, juries that are “problematically centered around mostly or only male participants.”^[6] I would argue that their list, which includes TU Graz Architecture Lectures 2019; AIA Young Architects Award 2019 Jury; Charles A Birbaum’s piece on Landscape architecture in Dezeen and many more, will be equally matched, if not surpassed, by the curation of the many architecture fora in India as well. When I bring this up with my colleagues, the response often is “apologies, we did not intend to offend anyone;” “we did not notice and it was not intentional;” “didn’t you see we featured one woman?;” “this year, we have more women than before;” “we looked, but there were no women in this field. We will try harder next time;” and worse still, “don’t mention this openly or people will get offended.”

In addition to getting women, and gender minorities, included in contemporary discourse, we also need to think about the media unconscious (and unconscious bias). It is not enough to get gender balance in public discourse right if women are not photographed as often as male speakers; or if they are photographed as listening and not talking; or if they are photographed but not quoted, sufficiently and frequently. Media unconscious has an embedded bias, and if you think I am imagining this let us consider the findings by people who have taken the time to research this. Pew Research Center of Journalism & Media report that “men are more prominent in news images on Facebook. In photos that showed two or more people, men tend to outnumber women. And men’s faces take up more space when shown, with the average male face being 10% larger than the average female face across all photos with people.”^[7] The impacts of this become palpable when we consider Amanda Haraldsson and Lena Wängnerud’s study of media sexism and women’s political careers. Their study suggests that the underrepresentation (less airtime, less print media space) and misrepresentation (being judged for appearance, “trivialised and scrutinised in terms of their competence”) of women in politics “strengthens the glass ceiling for female politicians,” impacting women’s willingness to enter politics.^[8]

With due respect to my colleagues at Avani, if I were to undertake a systematic study of the number of good photos of me, speaking (as Dean Academics), the findings would be very revealing. There are not many, or many that are in the public domain. I have addressed one all Avani open forum, two admissions sessions, one orientation session, one student council installation ceremony, a three-day conference and exhibition, and numerous speaker introductions. Yet the photos that exist are either taken at the wrong moment, angle, or from a distance, or are blurry or dark, or in a group with other people, and far outnumbered by individual photographs of male speakers, speaking, gesticulating. With due respect to my colleagues at Avani, I would also like to recall the first time I had reshaped the academic review into a learning and teaching colloquium back in June 2019. Out of five votes of thanks given by faculty members, only one acknowledged my role in bringing about a structural change in the way discussions happened between faculty, and between faculty and academic council, with the other votes of thanks going exclusively to the senior male visiting professor. If you are still thinking, why is she is making an issue out of nothing, bear in mind that there is an indelible connection between representation and agency.

REPARATIONS

It is strange that discursive structures specifically within the profession of architecture have a way of exacerbating feelings of homelessness, at work. In closing, let us consider what Dana Simmons describes as the “reparative project of [feminist] self-cure or self-care,” which requires us to reassemble that which is “broken, damaged or hurtful.”^[9] Simmons is clear about the fact that feminist self-care is transformative, which “works to make livable worlds.” But, using Maria Puig de la Bellacasa’s work, Simmons also says that care does not “replace criticism with a happy, virtuous and benign form of care.”^[10] Instead, it “calls for forms of care that cut. Caring means to recognise oppressions and oppositions.”^[11] The aim of this paper is to do precisely that, which is to lay bare systemic barriers; barriers that are not always visible, and visible obstacles that we do not choose to fight or fight collectively. Let us do better, now ■

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This paper was first delivered at the Gender and Academic Leadership in Architecture in India Symposium convened by Prof Dr Anuradha Chatterjee, Prof Madhavi Desai and Dr Kush Patel at Avani Institute of Design in March 2020.



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