Exclusive Histories, Unseen Narratives

Klára Brůhová

doi 10.31577/archandurb.2024.58.1-2.1

Women architects from the Ostrava “Stavoprojekt” design institute, 1980s
Source: private archive of Milena Vitoulová
The canon, in cultural histories, is generally understood as a body of the most important personalities and key works in a particular field, evoking for various reasons an impression of objectivity and impartiality. But are canons genuinely objective, or do they unjustifiably exclude individuals or works that should belong? The present study provides a critical reflection on the principles of the formation and reproduction of the canon of 20th-century architecture – specifically its distribution in the academic environment through selected survey literature and university syllabi. First, the text presents arguments and findings by selected foreign and domestic scholars who view the general processes of canon formation mainly through a feminist perspective. Further, the text offers a content analysis of selected survey literature and syllabi for courses on the history of 20th-century architecture taught at Czech universities. On this basis, the study concludes by attempting to answer the research question: What interpretation of architectural history is conveyed in the materials under study, and to what extent is this a history that addresses, includes and integrates the creative contributions of women and the circumstances of their lived experience in the field?
The study provides a critical reflection on the principles of the formation and reproduction of the canon of 20th century architecture – specifically addressing the issue of its distribution in the academic environment through selected survey literature and syllabi of university courses. It is based on the author’s MA thesis defended in 2023 at the Faculty of Humanities, Charles University in Prague and it is a revised and abbreviated version of the chapter “Trapped in a ‘Womanless’ History? Feminist Critiques of 20th-Century Architectural History and Gender Analysis of the Canon through Selected Survey Literature and Syllabi of University Courses” under preparation for the forthcoming book Women in Architecture. The first part of the text presents argumentation and findings by selected foreign and domestic scholars who view the general processes of canon formation mainly through a feminist perspective. The second part of the text offers a content analysis of selected survey literature and syllabi for courses on the history of 20th century architecture taught at Czech universities. On this basis, the paper concludes by attempting to answer the research question: What interpretation of architectural history is this a history that includes and integrates the creative contributions of women and the circumstances of their lived experience in the field?

The key framing concept for the study is gender, used both as a relational concept and an analytical category serving to detect inequalities and exclusivity within canonical surveys. Also central is the very notion of the canon, which is understood as a body of the most important personalities and key works of the field, and which co-generates ideas about its development in the past, but ultimately also speaks to the overall character of the profession with implications for its present and future. For various reasons, the canon evokes an impression of objectivity and impartiality. However, it is the application of gender as an analytical category that can help deconstruct this very notion.

The Canon and Its Constructedness – Argumentation and Findings

The reassessment of canonical overviews of various disciplines can be linked to the second wave of feminism and the development of critical theories. Reflections on the architectural canon were later explored, e.g., by Karen Kingsley from the School of Architecture at Tulane University in the United States. In her text “Gender Issues in Teaching Architectural History” from 1988, Kingsley focuses directly on the problem of teaching architectural history in universities. “Architectural history/theory syllabi invariably utilize the great monuments and/or great men approach, isolating and objectifying designer, group, and work. It is a male-centered curriculum from a male perspective…. Inevitably this monumental approach is exclusive because it provides only a partial view of the making of our environment”, she writes in the introduction to her essay. As an example of “womanless” history, she presents the book Architecture from Prehistory to Post-modernism by Marvin Trachtenberg and Isabelle Hyman, still one of the most recommended publications on the subject. In the book, Kingsley not only notes the absence of female creators, but through a critique of the limited repertoire of canonized works (most of which are representative buildings, with minimal overlap into e.g. industrial structures or rural architecture), she also names one of the problematic historiographical principles - that is, the exclusion of a range of achievements from the canon. In addition, however, she also draws attention to the incompleteness of the descriptions of representational buildings and architectural monuments – in other words, the part of the architectural heritage usually included in the selection of canonical works. Kingsley proves her point, for instance, by using the example of the Barcelona Pavilion, which is presented as the work of Mies van der Rohe and characterised as “… a sumptuous variety of masterfully used materials … contrasting colors and textures of the materials.” As she points out, however, it was not Mies himself who worked on the composition of the interior components, materials and colours: in this area, he collaborated on the project with Lilly Reich - who is not mentioned in the text at all. “… why are significant pieces of furniture (e.g. grand comfort, basculant, chaise lounge) which Charlotte Perriand designed with Le Corbusier attributed only to him in virtually all the textbooks …?” she asks further. The same principle, she argues, applies to the working collaborations of Gertrude Jekyll and Edwin Lutyens in garden architecture, Aino Aalto and Alvar Aalto, and Anne Tyng and Louis Kahn.

Julie Willis, an architectural historian from the Faculty of Architecture in Melbourne, has also been working on the issue of the architectural canon, publishing her thoughts in 1998 in the text “Invisible Contributions: The Problem of History and Women Architects”. “Despite more than twenty years of publications and research on the history of women architects, mainstream architectural history has failed to include the contribution of women within, or even alongside, the canon of great men/great buildings”, writes Willis. The absence of women in mainstream architectural history, she argues, is the result of historiographical methods focused primarily on emphasizing the formal and aesthetic aspects of architectural work and capturing the stylistic evolution of forms. She notes that if the historiography of architecture is primarily focused on recognizing styles and assigning creators and outcomes to particular tendencies or movements, it necessarily excludes those achievements that do not fit the delineated characteristics. Willis also sees a close connection between the principles of the formation of the canon of architecture and the canon of art history – both in the emphasis on the aesthetics of the work and in the tendency to attribute authorship to one (genius) creator. Referring to art historians Cheryl Buckley and Griselda Pollock, Willis points out the same thing.
that Kingsley does – namely, the problematic nature of the “history model which cannot take into account the work of a firm or partners within firms, awkwardly discussing such work until a suitable individual within the organisation can be identified as the designer.”16 Willis believes that this emphasis on the individual overshadows not only the range of collaborating women, but also men – especially in the history of 20th century architecture, where architectural work is typically team-based.

In the new millennium, the topic of the canon has been addressed e.g. in studies by Florencia Fernández Cardoso, Meltem Ö. Gürel and Kathryn H. Anthony, which provide a detailed quantitative and qualitative analysis of selected survey publications on architectural history. Gürel and Anthony’s 2006 essay, “The Canon and the Void: Gender, Race, and Architectural History Texts”, focuses on a comparative content analysis of the publications recommended for students taking architectural history classes in US universities.17 As Kingsley did earlier, the authors of this text focus on, among other publications, Marvin Trachtenberg and Isabelle Hyman’s Architecture from Prehistory to Postmodernity.18 In this book (apart from its exclusive focus on European and North American projects, although the title suggests no such thing), the authors again detected the repeated neglect of creative women, whose contribution disappears in the shadow of the names of great men. They pointed out e.g. the absence of any mention of Marion Mahony Griffin, an important collaborator of Frank Lloyd Wright, or of Mies’ collaborator Lilly Reich, who is absent even from the second edition of the book published in 2002. It thus appears that the above-mentioned criticism of the first edition of 1986 by Karen Kingsley was not reflected. Also missing from both editions are Eileen Gray and Charlotte Perriand, who should appear in association with several works attributed only to Le Corbusier.19 Based on my own analysis of the book, I can add that Natalie Griffin de Blois is omitted from the projects of SOM and Gordon Bunshaft, respectively. Denise Scott Brown encounters the same problem in her essay “Room at the Top? Sexism and the Star System in Architecture”20: she is mentioned only briefly in a list of collaborators, whereas the long text explaining the meaning and ideas of the works she created with Robert Venturi (and others) refers only to Venturi and uses phrases like “Venturi’s vision” and “his architecture”. Gürel and Anthony also note the absence of any mention that women were directly barred for many years from even studying architecture. They draw attention to a passage that speaks of the studies of architecture in the 19th century at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris – quoting that “it was in theory completely open and democratic; anyone, French or foreign, between fifteen and thirty years of age, could take and pass the entrance exam”. “But what about women?”21 Gürel and Anthony ask, pointing out that this openness and democracy certainly did not apply to them. Trachtenberg and Hyman’s publication does not, however, problematise this lack in any way.

Other titles analyzed are Modern Architecture since 1900 by William J. R. Curtis22 and Modern Architecture: A Critical History by Kenneth Frampton.23 For the former, Gürel and Anthony appreciate several moments when women architects are remembered: Charlotte Perriand, Eileen Gray, Alison Smithson, Jane Drew, Denise Scott Brown, Catherine Bauer, and Jane Jacobs, for example, are mentioned. On the other hand, Lilly Reich (in connection with the extensive description of Mies van der Rohe’s work), Ray Eames (when credit for the Case Study House in Santa Monica is given only to Charles Eames) or Marion Mahony Griffin, (whose contribution is overshadowed by Walter Burley Griffin, the author’s husband and work partner) are again completely omitted.24 In terms of the overall balance, very few creative women are included in this publication describing several decades of modern architectural history. Moreover, the vast majority of the women architects mentioned are only cited in connection with their personal and/or creative partners, i.e. male architects.

For the publication Modern Architecture: A Critical History, it is noted that Frampton, in the first English edition in 1980, already mentioned several women architects: e.g. Gertrude Jekyll, Margaret Macdonald (as co-author of Charles Rennie Mackintosh’s works) and Anne Tyng (as a collaborator of Louis Kahn). The 1985 reissue also included Charlotte Perriand, Eileen Gray and Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky.25 The authors of the analysis claim that Modern Architecture: A Critical History represents “a commendable start to incorporate women architects and designers into the historical mainstream or the canonical premises”.26 Florencia Fernández Cardoso is slightly more critical, noting that most of the women architects mentioned appear only once in the book and in many cases only in relation to their partner: “For example, the designer and artist Noémi Pernessin is mentioned only once. Her name appears as a second subject, not the first, and is used as a descriptor of her husband and not as a stand-alone citation. This is her only mention. In contrast, her husband, Antonin Raymond, is mentioned as the main subject in multiple pages. By mentioning only him as a subject, Frampton implies that Pernessin’s contributions were negligible. This is in contrast with historians who have examined the biography of the couple and attribute to Noémi Pernessin an equal role of influencing, economically supporting, and directing her husband’s work.”27

The analysis by Florencia Fernández Cardoso is worth a more detailed insight. A researcher from Université Libre de Bruxelles, she analysed ten survey books on the history of modern architecture published between 2004 and 2014,28 looking at 6,985 pages of text and counting 3,490 individual names, 90 % of which are male and 10 % female. In the set of people who appear more than once and are classified as architects and designers, Fernández Cardoso counted only 5.7 % of women, which she
considers an “extremely low ratio, especially given that out of the ten most cited architects … more than half had significantly collaborated with women architects and designers.” However, only two women are present in the top 100 most cited architects,” Fernández Cardoso continues, adding that “when women collaborators or partners are described in this historical literature, they are almost never presented as equal architects or designers but rather as drafters, assistants or even just simply as wives.”

The author detects the most striking concealment of credit in the case of the Finnish modernist Aino Aalto, who formed an authorial duo with Alvar Aalto. The works on which they both collaborated are mentioned in eight of the ten books researched and are among the ten most frequently featured architectural achievements. Despite this, Aino fails to receive adequate recognition for her work (earning a mere mention within the index in only one of the ten books searched). In contrast, her husband is given a total of more than 140 pages of text and in many cases is even listed as the sole author of projects they collaborated on. “Historians of modern architecture should move on from the naïve male-hero narrative,” Fernández Cardoso concludes. “Recognizing collaboration between architects will result in a better representation of history. Historians value the story of the ingenious male hero who is admired for his unlimited imagination and building abilities. The problem with this hero story, despite its inaccuracy, is that it has become the only story of modern architecture.” A story that excludes.

In the Czech context, a critical view of the architectural history and canon was, for example, presented in the exhibition and catalogue Profession: [Woman] Architect from 2003. In his text in the catalogue, Rostislav Švácha encourages a rethinking of what is considered architecture at all: “Over the past several decades, the standard accepted practice in the Czech lands has been the assumption that only finished constructions can count as architecture. Elsewhere, though, there exists – as there should – a much wider concept of the discipline. Belonging within the bounds of architecture are, at least in my judgement, not only the simple results of construction, but also what occured before and after it: the circumstances of the client’s order; the architect’s own ideas, thoughts, sketches, plans; then let us say the completed building; after it, in turn, the client’s response, its reception among the general public, criticism, reviews, theoretical interpretations; indeed, all of our capabilities of integrating the built structure into the greater cultural context …” Švácha thus extends the criticism of the limited repertoire of canonized works formulated by Karen Kingsley. Drawing upon these reflections, the author then presented a number of women as theoreticians, critics, curators, promoters and popularizers of architecture working in domestic professional and lifestyle media. Monika Mitášová’s text in the same publication, in turn, thematises the use of the generic masculine as a (seemingly) universal form of expression in domestic architectural discourse and draws attention to the fact that (as of 2003) the term architektka is essentially never encountered in architectural texts.

In Slovakia, the reflection of architectural historiography from a gender perspective has been the particular focus of Henrieta Moravčíková. “A cursory recapitulation of Slovak architectural historiography shows that it has not yet dealt with the activities of women. Women architects were a productive heterogeneous group during the second half of the 20th century, which grew significantly with each passing year and contributed their work to the local architectural debate,” claims Moravčíková in her text “Invisible Architects: The First Generation of Women in Slovak Architecture” from 2015 and supports her statement with the results of her own quantitative analysis of several publications on Slovak architecture of the second half of the 20th century. As she further points out, what is also striking is the fact that women “never figure as personalities dynamising the architectural scene and their works are mentioned only marginally as illustrative in connection with the description of a certain trend or phenomenon in architecture.” Moravčíková thus detects similar tendencies in the surveys of Slovak architecture as does, for example, Florencia Fernández Cardoso in the analysed textual corpuses of world architecture.

The History of 20th Century Architecture in the Czech Environment – Gender Analysis of Selected Materials

Given the lack of analytical treatment of canonical materials in the Czech environment, the second part of the text (following the example of studies by Florencia Fernández Cardoso, Meltem Ö. Gürel and Kathryn H. Anthony or Henrieta Moravčíková) will focus on gender analysis. The source material is the survey publications most often included in the syllabi for courses on the history of 20th century architecture taught at universities in the Czech Republic, as well as the syllabi themselves. Content analysis was chosen as the basic research method, using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, which I see as complementary.

Both analysis and interpretations are conducted within the framework of critical theory, i.e. within a paradigm that perceives reality as a construct. Therefore, the research conclusions do not claim normative validity, but are considered to be value-influenced and shaped by the researcher’s positionality. The research is essentially feminist, as defined by Sandra Harding. Among its basic characteristics are an interest in the issue of power and its relevance to knowledge, as well as an effort to deconstruct the normative (patriarchal) order. My ambition is not to convey a new objective truth, but to look at the topic of the architectural canon (through the selected materials) from a feminist perspective, to critically dismantle its supposed neutrality and to highlight specific examples of marginalisation that take place within the materials I examine. The basic research question can be summarized as follows: What interpretation of architectural
history is conveyed in the materials under study, and to what extent this is a history that addresses, includes, and integrates the creative contributions of women and the circumstances of their lived experience in the field?

The initial step to answering the question was to obtain the source material for the analysis. First, a list was compiled of study programmes at universities in the Czech Republic that provide education in the fields of “Architecture and Urbanism” and “Arts and Cultural Sciences” and have included teaching of architectural history.44 The curricula of these programmes were then used to select compulsory courses focused on the history of 20th century architecture. Twenty-eight courses met the criteria, 27 of which have publicly available syllabi – current for the academic year 2022–2023.45 One of the syllabi was subsequently excluded from the analysis because the course instructor is the author of the analysis. As such, the basis for the analysis was 26 syllabi. The vast majority of them relate to the overview lecture series and, with few exceptions, have a similar structure: they contain an annotation and course objectives, a course outline and a list of recommended readings. A frequency analysis of the reading lists subsequently revealed that the syllabi mention 78 titles, with 28 publications mentioned more than once. The most frequently recommended publications are: Kenneth Frampton, Moderní architektura. Krátké dějiny [Modern Architecture: A Critical History], Praha 2004 (18×), Peter Gössel and Gabriele Leuthäuser, Architektura 20. století [Architecture of the 20th Century], Praha 2006 (7×), Felix Haas, Architektura 20. století [Architecture of the 20th Century], Praha 1980 (7×), Rostislav Svácha, Od moderny k funkcionalismu. Proměny pražské architektury první poloviny dvacátého století [From Modernism to Functionalism]. The Transformations of Prague Architecture in the First Half of the Twentieth Century, Praha 199546 (5×) and chapters on architecture from the Dějiny českého výtvarného umění edition [History of Czech Fine Arts] (4–7×). Since the books by Kenneth Frampton and Peter Gössel with Gabriele Leuthäuser have already been extensively analysed by Meltem Ö. Gürel, Kathryn H. Anthony and Florencia Fernández Cardoso, the books by Felix Haas and Rostislav Svácha, along with the thematic chapters from the Dějiny českého výtvarného umění edition, became the basis for the analysis along with the contents of the 26 syllabi.

The aim of the courses is usually described as providing an overview of the development of architecture, in particular its stylistic and formal changes and its relation to the development of technology. Most syllabi also state an attempt to introduce key personalities in the field. Some mention the ambition to convey “a perception of the achievements of modern architecture in a broader perspective” and stress the importance of social, political and historical context. Others emphasize the context related to the “institutional history of the discipline” or note the importance of teaching the ability to “view historical narratives as social constructions”.

The formulation of the aims of the courses shows that, at least in some cases, the courses could move along the lines of the constructivist paradigm and critical theories. The question remains, though, whether (and how) these goals are mirrored in practice. The following analysis of the course outlines and the recommended publications attempts to provide an answer. It should be noted, however, that these materials cannot convey the reality of teaching as such (courses may provide accompanying explanations, critical discussions, etc.). The analysis therefore does not aspire to answer the question of how architectural history is taught, but only to reflect on the materials on which the teaching is based. In doing so, it will focus on the following sub-questions with regard to the gender aspect under investigation: What is the representation of women among the key personalities in the field? How are creative women referenced and what degree of agency is accorded to them? Is the individualistic nature of creative work favoured, or is the role of collaborators and co-workers emphasized? How is the social context related either to the marginalization or emancipation of women inscribed in the curriculum?

Twenty-two of the 26 syllabi mention specific names of architects in their course outlines. In total, there are 579 name occurrences, but only 12 of them refer to women. The remaining 567 names belong to men. The most frequently mentioned women are Zaha Hadid (3×), Alison Smithson (2×, in both cases mentioned together with her husband as “Smithsovovi”), Alena Šrámková (2×) and Věra Machoninová (2×, once alone by her full name and once together with her husband as “Machoninovi”). Růžena Žertová has one mention (however, erroneously listed as “Žertovová”). Eva Jiřičná and Eva Růžičková also have one mention each (the latter, however, only as “Růžičkovi” – i.e. the syllabus refers to the creative tandem of the husband-and-wife Eva and Vladimir Růžičkoví). Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky is also mentioned once (however, only by one surname, which is spelled in the gender-adapted variant “Lihotzká”). Thus, a total of eight female architects are mentioned – three foreign and five with domestic roots. Most of them are women who have been able to obtain an excellent education (Zaha Hadid, Alena Šrámková and Eva Jiřičná graduated from more than one university) and who could rely on their family background. Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky had a privileged position thanks to her family’s wealth and social contacts, and the same can be said of Zaha Hadid. Alison Smithson (father: graphic designer and school principal), Eva Jiřičná (father: architect) or Růžena Žertová (father: surveyor, brother: architect) could draw on their family’s professional background, while the other female architects also seem to have been well networked. Seven of the eight women named married architects (often older and already established) – which may have had an impact on their professional growth. In the case of Alison Smithson, Věra Machoninová and Eva Růžičková, the architects formed close professional tandems with their husbands and worked closely with them in practice – with
a likely impact, for example, on their ability to obtain commissions. Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky also worked with her husband\textsuperscript{49} on a number of projects and Růžena Žertová occasionally collaborated with both her brother and husband. It can therefore be concluded that no woman without a family background and/or professional network made it into the syllabi. An architectural background in the family (or lack of it) is certainly no guarantee of (or obstacle to) future professional recognition, but it may be significant that seven of the eight women who appear in the syllabi had such a background. With reference to Florencia Fernández Cardoso, it can also be pointed out that in the analysed syllabi, a not insignificant number of women are mentioned only in relation to their husbands and/or creative partners (in four of the 12 occurrences).

If we focus on the male names in the syllabi, we find that in addition to the numerical predominance, there is also a predominance in the number of occurrences. Analysis shows that the names of the most frequently mentioned authors are essentially identical to those given by Gürel, Anthony and Fernández Cardoso. Also in the syllabi, the most frequent names are Le Corbusier (17×), Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (15×) and Frank Lloyd Wright (12×). Given that the syllabi do not mention Charlotte Perriand, Eileen Gray, Lilly Reich or Marion Mahony Griffin, the criticism regarding the favouritism of big names at the expense of less famous collaborators and associates can also be applied.

In terms of favouring the individualistic character of the work, it is worth mentioning the architectural studio TAC (The Architects Collaborative), of which the famous Walter Gropius was also a part. As the name suggests, the studio valued a collective way of working and even introduced a unified way of acknowledging authorship within the company culture, recognising the contribution of all those involved. In the syllabi however, the reference to the TAC office appears as “Gropius (TAC)”. The emphasis on the collective nature of the activity was therefore not reflected in the syllabi and was overridden by the “big name” – despite the wishes and intentions of the company itself. Thus, vanishing under Gropius’ shadow are not only Norman C. Fletcher, John C. Harkness, Robert S. McMillan, Louis A. McMillen, or Benjamin C. Thompson, but also Jean B. Fletcher and Sarah P. Harkness. The absence of women can also be detected in the only case where the SIAL (Association of Engineers and Architects in Liberec) appears in the syllabi. After the name of the office, we read: “Hubáček, Masák, Binar, Vacek, Špíkla, Rajniš, Zavřel, Suchomel, Přikryl”. Even in the Czech environment, female architects such as Helena Jiskrová, Lidmila Švarcová or Dana Zámečníková remain in the shadows. Surprisingly, however, the syllabi do not mention even the structural engineers who have a significant contribution to the most important buildings of the association: “Zdeněk Patrman, Zdeněk Zachař or Václav Voda” quite unexpected for a studio that prided itself on innovative technical solutions to its projects. However, it is of course possible that the names and shares in the projects are later verbally specified in the lectures.

Even in the recommended readings, the representation of women architects is far from equal. In Architektura 20. století by Felix Haas,\textsuperscript{50} 454 architects are mentioned with at least one completed building, 442 of these names belong to male architects and 12 to female architects.\textsuperscript{50} With women appearing by name in the syllabi, Haas’s book intersects only in two cases: Alison Smithson and Eva Růžičková. Surprisingly, neither Věra Machoninová nor Alena Šrámková are mentioned. Of course, the early year of publication may play a role – in 1980, many important buildings by both architects were not yet standing. In total, only 22 women’s names appear in the index. In addition to the twelve architects with an ascribed building and two women without any form of agency, three members of the collective of Soviet prognostics (Naděžda Fedajevo-vá, Zoja Charitonovová and Irina Lunkovová) are named, but without information on whether they were architects, sociologists, or persons with other expertise, and without any connection to specific undertakings. Two women are listed as authors of texts: Jane Jacobs is introduced as a “Canadian journalist” and mentioned in connection with the book The Death and Life of Great American Cities, and I. Rjuminová is quoted in a passage on the debates over architecture in the USSR. A certain level of authorship in relation to the architectural realisation is acknowledged to Truus Schröder-Schräder, who is listed not only as the commissioner of the famous Utrecht villa, but also as its co-author: “The owner was an architect, a member of the De Stijl group, and contributed significantly to the design. She was a frequent collaborator of Rietveld from 1920 onwards”, writes Felix Haas.\textsuperscript{8} It is telling, however, that apart from these reference in the body of the text, the co-authorship of Truus Schröder-Schräder is not credited elsewhere in the book (only Gerrit Thomas Rietveld is named as the author of the Utrecht villa in the index and in the highlighted image caption). A similar situation occurred in the passage on Alvar Aalto. At the very end of the six-page chapter devoted to the architect, there is a sentence “Strictly speaking, we should specify the authorship of his buildings by the co-authorship of his first wife Ainio (d. 1949) and his second wife Elissa (since 1954). At least that is how he himself referred to his buildings.”\textsuperscript{52} However, even in this case, these co-authorships were not mentioned anywhere else, and the entire text of the chapter, the index and the image captions mention only the name of Alvar Aalto. The approach pointed out by Kingsley, Fernández Cardoso, Gürel and Anthony, and Moravčíková in their analyses, namely the omnipresence of the pronouns “he” and “his”, which overshadow the contribution of the collaborating women, is clearly evident here as well.

Among the women who are completely absent from the book, but whose ideas and works (or rather, works they collaborated on and ideas they contributed to) are published, one can mention, for example, Lilly Reich (although Mies van der Rohe is given an entire subsection),
Anne Tyng (although Louis Kahn is given two subsections), Charlotte Perriand (although Le Corbusier is given 12 subsections in over 30 pages of text) or Denise Scott Brown (Robert Venturi is also given his own subsection).

Again, the passage dedicated to TAC and Walter Gropius is noteworthy, in which Haas writes directly: “In 1945, the great architect teamed up with some of his students to form TAC (= The Architects Collaborative). The collectivist structure of TAC is interesting, Gropius, though much older, was a regular member of the team. All members ... state their author's name after the TAC name. Each project goes through a discussion within the team ...”53 However, when addressing specific projects and buildings, the writer refers to them as “works by Gropius, developed within the TAC team”. Thus, in Haas's case too, there is a certain reluctance to “take into account the work of a firm or partners within firms” and a tendency to identify one “suitable individual within the organisation ... as the designer”, as Julie Willis has noted in relation to conventional historiography.44

Although Haas discusses architectural education in several places in the book (e.g. the Bauhaus or Vkhutemas), he does not address the issue of women's access to studies. Nor does he name a single woman who worked at the Bauhaus or Vkhutemas. The specific circumstances of women's architectural practice are also not covered.

Rostislav Švácha has a total of 799 names listed in the index of his book Od moderny k funkcionalismu. Proměny pražské architektury první poloviny dvacátého století [From Modernism to Functionalism. The Transformations of Prague Architecture in the First Half of the Twentieth Century].55 It is very clear that 12 of them belong to women and seven of them are women architects. All seven female architects are mentioned in connection with a specific project.56 Of the remaining five women, three are mentioned as owners of villas (Lída Bararová, Grete Reinerová and Vlasta Vostřebalová-Fischerová). Milena Krejcarová-Jesenšká, who is referred to as “the wife of Jaromír Krejcar”, “a former friend of Franz Kafka” and a resident of Krejcar's apartment in Francouzská Street in Prague, is also presented here without agency. However, as Marie Platovská and Vladislava Valchárová recall, “Milena Krejcarová-Jesenšká fervently advocated the ideas of functionalism in the pages of Národní listy” and spoke out strongly on the issue of modern housing.57 All the same, Švácha does not mention this active role in the text. Gusta Fučíková has a stronger voice in this context, although her contribution also refers to the work of the male architect – her description of the apartment by Jaromír Krejcar from her book Můj život s Juliem Fučíkem [My Life with Julius Fućik] is quoted in the text.

It should be added that Švácha's book has a relatively narrow focus – both geographically and temporally, with its focus on Prague between 1889 and 1939. If we take into account that the first female graduate architect left the gates of the Czech Technical University only in 1921 (and female graduates of secondary vocational schools were also scarce at that time), then the relatively small representation of women architects in the book is not entirely surprising. As Denisa Dolanská summarised in her thesis, by 1939 only about 35 women had received a university-level architectural education in Czechoslovakia, of whom 15 graduated in 1935 or later,68 and thus had no time to establish themselves during the period examined by Švácha. Dolanská also states that, for various reasons, some of the women architects did not pursue their profession after graduation. Dolanská agrees with Švácha on the names of active women architects, and she also mentions Zdenka Košáková, Emanuela Kittrichová-Mazancová, Adéla Kopřívová-Bramborová (who, however, worked mainly in Bratislava in the 1930s) and Líbusa Kostelková-Hrubesová (working in Brno). As far as the choice of female authors is concerned, the book thus cannot be blamed for omissions.

In the edition Dějiny českého výtvarného umění [History of Czech Visual Arts],69 the names of women architects begin to appear in the chapter devoted to the architecture of the 1930s [Architecture of the 1930s in Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia]60 by Vladimir Šlapeta, where three women are named among 87 authors and all of them are mentioned in connection with specific projects.61 [Architecture of the 1940s in Bohemia]62 by Rostislav Švácha presents four women architects among 142 names,63 while [Architecture of the 1950s]64 by Pavel Halík includes only one woman architect among 62 names – Hana Stašková, who is listed as a co-author of the construction in Zvírotice. In reality, however, the co-author was Hana Pešková, not Hana Stašková, so the attribution is incorrect.65

Among the 222 architects of the 1960s mentioned in the chapter “Architektura 1958–1970” [Architecture 1958–1970]66 by Rostislav Švácha, there are 10 women, of whom the vast majority are mentioned in connection with specific projects on which they worked alone or in collaboration with other colleagues.67 The greatest attention is paid to the work of Alena Šrámková. In principle, for the first time we meet a woman architect who is presented as an influential figure who set the direction and as one of the leading personalities on the Czechoslovak architectural scene. Her work and thoughts are put in the context of important world trends and projects. From a linguistic point of view, it is noteworthy that in the case of Alena Šrámková, the active feminine grammatical form is used even in instances of collaborative work. This, however, does not happen with other female architects. In addition, Švácha also mentions artists Jaroslav Brychtová and Eva Kmentová (as authors of artworks for architectural objects) and Jane Jacobs as the author of the influential publication The Death and Life of Great American Cities, which was published in Czech in 1975.

The chapter on the 1970s [Architecture of the 1970s and 1980s]68 by Petr Kratochvíl mentions 155 men architects and 11 women architects.69 The text also includes Jaroslava Brychtová as an artist and author of artworks in architecture and Alica Šťančicková, who “organised informal meetings of Czech and Slovak architects in Spiš”.70
Almost all of the domestic female architects are named in connection with a specific project they participated on. Alena Šrámková, who is mentioned repeatedly throughout the chapter, receives the most space. A photograph of the ČKD building at Můstek, which Šrámková designed together with her husband, even introduces the whole chapter. In turn, full page is dedicated to the description and interpretation of this building, which is quite a large space compared to other works and their authors.

The chapter dealing with Czech architects abroad mentions only four women in addition to 66 male architects: Hana Kučerová-Záveská (in the enumeration of emigrants from the pre-war period, without reference to any project), Amanda Levete (as Jan Kaplický’s collaborator in the Future Systems studio, without reference to any project), Marcela Bílková (in the format “Petr and Marcela Bílkovi” as an architect working in Canada, without reference to any project) and Eva Jiřičná. Only Jiřičná is mentioned in connection with specific architectural works, and rather extensively. A photograph of her work (the staircase of a house in Knightsbridge) introduces the whole chapter, and passages about Jiřičná and her works appear throughout the text. She is referred to as one of “perhaps the two most internationally renowned Czech architects” and her work is described in detail and interpreted in the context of the style development of other well-known architects.

The last text examined is the chapter [Architecture 1989–2000. The Renewal of the Discipline] by Petr Kratochvíl, which mentions 130 male and 19 female architects. All nineteen are named in connection with specific projects, although the depth of description varies. Many women architects are only mentioned in parentheses in the list of people who contributed to a particular work, and are subsequently overshadowed by a better known collaborator, to whom the text attributes an active role – as is the case with Lenka Dvořáková: “Ladislav Lábus is one of the most expressively rigorous architects; nevertheless, in the ‘Scandinavian-simple’ complex of nursing homes in Český Krumlov (together with Lenka Dvořáková and Zdeněk Heřman, 1994–1997), he managed to create a very welcoming informal environment.” One can also refer to the case of Jana Vodičková, who collaborated within the AP studio on the project of the town hall in Benešov. In the caption of the photograph, Vodičková is mentioned in the list of authors, but in the text, she disappears into anonymity and is then “absorbed” by the big name of her more famous collaborator. This (and other) projects are referred to as the works of “Josef Pleskot and his studio AP”, and the building is directly mentioned as “his reconstruction and extension of the Benešov town hall”.

However, some women are nevertheless ranked alongside the “great architects” – such as Zdeněka Vydrůvá, who is named as one of the “top authors from all over the country” who were “brought to Litomyšl by the consistently applied principle of the architectural competition”. Eva Jiřičná is listed among the important female architects returning from abroad. The role of the key personality is attributed to Alena Šrámková, of whom the author writes that, alongside Josef Pleskot, she “holds an exceptional position in the architecture of the 1990s” – despite the fact that “in the decade after 1989 she completed only one new building”. However, mention is made of her unbuilt competition projects and the strong idea of the “house with windows”, which is generally understood as one of the defining principles of the local architectural discourse of the time. Thus, Šrámková retains her exclusive position among architects in this text and is the only woman to be named among architects who “also became teachers and fundamentally influenced architectural education at universities”.

It is noteworthy to compare the representation of female architects in the texts across the edition with the statistics of female graduates at the two largest domestic universities providing architectural education. The comparison shows that in the chapters focusing on the first half of the 20th century, the (low) representation of women in the canon broadly corresponds to the (low) number of female graduates at the time. In the second half of the 20th century, however, the scissors noticeably open wider: while the proportion of female graduates in architecture exceeded 30% in the 1960s and even 50% in the 1990s, in the chapters examined the percentage of women mentioned in the texts remained in single digits until the 1990s, and in the last decade of the 20th century, there is only a slight increase to 12.8%.

Women are also absent from international references – for example, Alvar Aalto is always mentioned alone (i.e. without citing his collaboration with Aino and Elissa), and in the context of postmodernism, only Robert Venturi is mentioned – without Denise Scott Brown. Of the foreign duos, only Alison Smithson is consistently mentioned with her partner – Peter Smithson’s name never stands alone.

None of the chapters analysed address the specific experiences of women in the field or the gendered (or otherwise) exclusive nature of architectural education – even though some of the chapters discuss educational institutions.

**Conclusion**

The quantitative analysis of the names in the syllabi and literature shows that the representation of women among the personalities in the canon is indeed rather marginal. In the syllabi, women make up only 2.07% of the named personalities, and when a woman’s name does appear, it is always mentioned in a more detailed description of the topic, never as part of the title of the lecture or class. On the other hand, the names of male architects are quite common in the titles, and many courses even include biographical lectures. It can therefore be concluded that at least some of the courses are based, at a certain extent, on a historiographical conception grounded in the individual names of “great” architects – among whom, not too surprisingly, women are completely absent. As
shown earlier, many of these “great” architects worked in close collaboration with women professionals, who are not mentioned in the syllabi – not only in the titles of the lectures next to the names of their partners, but nowhere else either. The same observation often applies to the publications analysed.

I therefore believe that the same criticism that Kingsley, Willis, Gürel – Anthony or Fernández Cardoso have already made can be applied to the materials under study, i.e. that the emphasis on individuality and the promotion of the names of established architects leads to the overshadowing of collaborators and a tendency to attribute authorship to only one (main and better known) creator – which in the vast majority of cases is a male architect. The only exception in the Czech context is Alena Šrámková – in the syllabi she is mentioned only in more detailed descriptions of the lectured topics among a number of other architects (i.e. no biographical lecture is dedicated to her), but in the analysed literature [History of Czech Fine Arts], she is given considerable attention. In several places even the obligatory pronouns “he” and “his” absorbing the role of collaborators are changed to “she” and “her” in the case of Šrámková. As such, Šrámková is the only architect who has reached the top of the imaginary pyramid and whose fame, due to the influence of conventional methods of creating the canon, even overshadows other collaborators.

As a side note, which, however, also contributes to the (mis)recognition of women and their (mis)inclusion in the canon, it is also possible to mention the social circumstance of surname change, which often occurs among women after marriage. This seemingly trivial matter plays an important role in the process of history-making and forgetting – especially when a woman is active under several different names in the course of her practice. The problem has already been pointed out by Michaela Janečková, Petr Klíma and Barbora Simonová in their text “Požice Růženy Zertové v Architektuře ČS(S)R” [Růžena Zertová’s Position in the Architecture of the ČS(S)R], in which they present several female architects who are mentioned in the magazine Architektura ČS(S)R under different surnames.80 Šárka Malošíková pointed out the same thing when she analysed Czech professional journals from the 1980s and 1990s and noted the case of Jana Vodičková, who is listed under three variants of her name – as “Jana Vodičková”, “Jana Vodičková-Kantorová” and “Jana Kantorová”.81 Multiple variants of the name of one architect also appear in the analysed literature. For example, Augusta Müllerová-Machoňová is referred to both under her hyphenated surname [From Modernism to Functionalism. The Transformations of Prague Architecture in the First Half of the Twentieth Century] and her maiden name “Müllerová” [History of Czech Fine Arts]. It can be concluded that different transcriptions and variants of names can make it difficult to identify the women architects and to capture the continuity of their work.

The authors of the critical texts also suggest that one of the reasons for the absence of women in the canon is the lack of consideration of the supporting professions (without whom the works would hardly have been completed) and the neglect of activities that do not directly consist in the design of objects and spaces (as Kingsley, Willis and Švácha point out). The analysis of the syllabi and literature shows that even in these materials the attention is mainly paid to the realized buildings (sometimes unbuilt projects) and the creators of their forms. Other types of architectural work (such as criticism, popularisation, participation, or activism concerning public space) and the activities of the accompanying professions, authorities and clientele are addressed only marginally.

The history of architecture is presented in the vast majority of syllabi through its stylistic and formal changes, which form the structure of 22 of the 26 syllabi examined (the remaining four are arranged by decade or by the names of architects and studios). In this respect, we can also draw attention to the argumentation contained in some of the texts mentioned in the first part of this study. According to the authors of these texts (especially Willis), the canonization based on capturing the stylistic development of forms is reductive and excludes those works and those creators who do not correspond to the defined stylistic characteristics – which may again have a gender dimension.

And to answer the last sub-question: The context related to the marginalisation and emancipation of women in the field receive virtually no attention in the analyzed materials.

However, it can be perceived as a positive that, unlike the results of foreign analyses, no references to the essentialisation or universalisation of the work of women architects were found in the syllabi or literature. On the contrary, their work is presented as a wide range of projects and structures of different sizes and typological focus. The question remains, however, whether the reason lies the complete absence of gender as a topic or a category through which architecture is considered here.

In the very last point, I would like to add, once again, that the analysis was limited to the syllabi of university courses and selected literature recommended by these syllabi. It did not cover the actual teaching, which may provide contexts that do not appear in the source materials. It should further be noted that seminars and courses that are not compulsory within the study programmes in question (and which may have a quite specific focus) were not included. Nor were a number of more narrowly focused publications that, although not mentioned in the syllabi, are widely available. Moreover, the analysis focused only on the distribution of the canon through learning, and not on its (re)production through other media such as exhibitions, research projects, conferences etc. The conclusions of the analysis therefore provide only a partial insight into an area that is far more complex.

4 In the field of literature, Elaine Showalter, Mary Ellmann and Caroline Heilbrun, for example, have formulated critiques of the canon. In art history, we can cite Linda Nochlin, Cheryl Buckley or Griselda Pollock.


7 TRACHTENBERG, Marvin and HYMAN, Isabelle. 1986. Architecture from Prehistory to Post-modernism. New York: Prentice Hall PTR.


9 Kingsley, K., 1988, p. 22.

10 Kingsley, K., 1988, p. 22.


12 Kingsley, K., 1988, p. 23.


17 The authors selected twenty-one universities in the USA that offer architecture education and have high scores in teaching evaluations. Their architecture faculties were then contacted to provide a reading list for their architectural history courses. Gürel and Anthony then selected the most frequently mentioned titles. See Gürel, M. O. and Anthony, K. H., 2006, p. 69–70.


20 In her essay, Denise Scott Brown illustrates the incorrect attributions for example with the case of “Learning from Las Vegas”: “By the time we wrote Learning from Las Vegas, our growing experience with incorrect attributions [the works have been attributed almost exclusively to Robert Venturi] prompted Bob to include a note at the beginning of the book asking that the work and ideas not be attributed to him alone and describing the nature of our collaboration and the roles played by individuals in our firm. His request was almost totally ignored.” See SCOTT BROWN, Denise: 1989. Room at the Top?

21 Gürel, M. O. and Anthony, K. H., 2006, p. 70.


26 Gürel, M. O. and Anthony, K. H., 2006, p. 72.


29 According to Florencia Fernández Cardoso, it is a case of Le Corbusier (collaborating with Charlotte Perriand), Frank Lloyd Wright (Marion Mahony), Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (Lilly Reich), Louis Kahn (Anne Tyng), Robert Venturi (Denise Scott Brown) and Alvaro Aalto (Aino Aalto). See Fernández Cardoso, F., 2017, p. 234.


35 Czech term for a female architect.


17 of them are women. In the monograph on Slovak architecture throughout the 20th century (DULLA, Matúš and MORAVČIKOVÁ, Henrietta. 2003. Architektúra 20. storočia na Slovensku. Bratislava: Slovart), only 16 women are mentioned among the nine hundred architects. See Moravčíková, H., 2015, p. 93.

40 Fernández Cardoso, F., 2017.


45 A more detailed description of the source material selection process is available in the thesis on which this study is based. See Brůhová, K., 2023, p. 53–58.


47 A detailed analysis of the annotations and study objectives is presented in the thesis on which this study is based. See Brůhová, K., 2023, p. 59–65.

48 Margaret Schütte-Lihotzky married Wilhelm Schütte, who was three years younger, but at the time of their meeting had been professionally active for several years.


50 Sophie Arpová, F. M. Jevejevová, N. Čmutinová, M. I. Grečinová, D. Kadžajová, V. Panovová, T. Polovová, V. A. Pormejstěrová, Eva Růžičková, Olga Drápalová, Alison Smithsonová and Jane Drewová. (The surnames of women are given in the format as they are written by the author of the publication.)


56 Magda Jansová, Hana Kučerová-Záveská, Augusta Müllerová-Machoňová, Elly Oehlerová, Jarmila Lisková, Vlasta Štursová-Suková and Milada Petříková-Pavlíková. (The surnames of women are given in the format as they are written by the author of the publication.)


61 Elly Oehler, Hana Kučerová-Záveská and Augusta Müllerová. (The surnames of women are given in the format as they are written by the author of the publication.)


63 Emanuela Kittrichová, Anna Friedlová, Augusta Müllerová and Alena Šrámková. (The surnames of women are given in the format as they are written by the author of the publication.)


65 I thank Prof. Švácha for pointing out the incorrect attribution.


67 Zdenka Kopecká, Balounová, Zdena Nováková, Dagmar Šestáková, Eva Růžicková, Helena Jiříková, Věra Machoninová, Alena Šrámková and Alison Smithson (as “manželé Smithsonovi”). (The surnames of women are given in the format as they are written by the author of the publication.)


69 Růžena Žertová, Dana Kozumplíková (as “Dana a Vladimír Kozumplíkovi”), Antonie Charvátová, Jarmila Kutějová, Eva Fantová (as “Bohumil a Eva Fantovi”), Jana Novotná, Neda Malá and Iveta Chitovová. (The surnames of women are given in the format as they are written by the author of the publication.)


74 Lenka Dvořáková, Alena Šrámková, Eva Jiřičná, Jana Voříšková, Věra Dubská, Dagmar Velehradská, Zuzana Stašková (as “Jan a Zuzana Stašková”), Pavla Kordovská, Jitka Svobodová, Zdena Havelková, Jitka Svobodová, Markéta Holnová, Šárka Raková, Markéta Holnová, Malá and Iveta Chitovová. (The surnames of women are given in the format as they are written by the author of the publication.)


79 Representation of women architects in individual chapters of the Dějiny českého výtvarného umění edition: Architektura třicátých let v Čechách, na Moravě a ve Slezsku = 3,4 %, Architektura čtyřicátých let v Čechách = 2,8 %, Architektura padesátých let = 1,6 %, Architektura 1958–1970 = 4,5 %, Architektura sedmdesátých a osmdesátých let = 6,6 %, Čeští architekti v zahraničí = 5,7 %, Architektura 1898–2000. Obnova disciplíny = 12,8 %.
