Calling all architectural feminist killjoys!

Academic publishers Routledge produce a series called ‘Thinkers for Architects’, introducing philosophical and theoretical ideas to an architectural audience. The fifteen current titles include the usual suspects, Bourdieu, Foucault, Derrida, Merleau-Ponty, with one female thinker, Irigaray. In this publication, we begin to suggest a new series and to outline a book they should have commissioned, ‘Ahmed for Architecture Students’, as a critical revision and architectural killjoy. Based on key texts spanning queer feminist Sara Ahmed’s career as a critical scholar, this master’s seminar course has collectively produced a fanzine to introduce Ahmed’s ideas and concepts, along with possible connections to the discipline and culture of architecture, making them accessible to architecture students and practitioners.

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Dr. Brady Burroughs, teacher

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**DIY FANZINE INSTRUCTIONS!**

**STEP 1:** Print the cover on 120 gsm A4 paper. (We recommend lime green.)

**STEP 2:** Print the inlay on 90 gsm A4 paper. (We recommend newsprint or recycled paper.)

**STEP 3:** Fold and crease the inlay in half, one sheet at a time, to make an A5.

**STEP 4:** Stack the folded sheets together in the correct order and cut right edge of entire inlay, using crop marks on first page.

**STEP 5:** Place the cut inlay into the cover, open to the middle, and staple twice along the spine from the outside.

**STEP 6:** Fold the edges of the front and back cover using the crop marks and tuck the first and last sheet into the folds.

TA-DA! Yes, this!
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If you are interested in critical theory but don’t know where to start, THIS IS FOR YOU.
If you are curious about ‘sticky associations’ and ‘sweaty concepts’, THIS IS FOR YOU.
If you are constrained by unspoken assumptions, tastes, or judgments, THIS IS FOR YOU.
If you are looking for a feminist architectural table to gather around, THIS IS FOR YOU.
If you are concerned about asymmetrical power dynamics during critiques, THIS IS FOR YOU.
If you are questioning ethical, social, or political values of the architect or architecture, THIS IS FOR YOU.
If you are tired of only hearing about dead, white, male architects, THIS IS FOR YOU.
If you are feeling out of place or disoriented within academic circles, THIS IS FOR YOU.
If you are yearning to explore the oblique lines of your desires, THIS IS FOR YOU.
If you are sick of making architectural projects just to please others, THIS IS FOR YOU.
If you are often the one who speaks up and speaks out, THIS IS FOR YOU.
If you are willing to be the killjoy and call out inequitable practices, THIS IS FOR YOU.
If you are ready to collectively re-think, re-invent, and re-imagine architecture, THIS IS FOR YOU.
And, if you believe ‘the personal is theoretical’, THIS IS DEFINITELY FOR YOU.

We are inspired by Sara Ahmed’s call to ‘bring feminist theory home’.1
We have done our ‘feminist homework’!2
We appreciate Routledge’s intention to introduce theoretical ideas to architects, BUT
We think the ratio of male/female ‘thinkers’ is bogus and embarrassing.
We are critical of academic publishing practices that don’t support open access, AND
We believe in breaking academic writing norms that exclude and oppress.
We provide an entrance and open a door to the critical theory of Sara Ahmed.
We connect her ideas to the specific situations of the architecture student.
We write from the heart in personal letters about fictional, but familiar scenarios.
We present key concepts and pose relevant architectural questions for you to consider.
We even include an Architectural Killjoy Survival Kit for when times get tough.
We orient you in more than one direction and ask: Who is Ahmed in Conversation With?
We make the fanzine available for download, with instructions on how to assemble your own.
And we invite you to gather around your own feminist tables and share with your architecture student friends.

A series of personal letters connecting Sara Ahmed’s theoretical ideas to fictional but familiar situations of the architecture student. 

DEAR SARA
Dear Sara,

We are three master’s architecture students at the School of Architecture at the Royal Institute of Technology (KTH) in Stockholm. We have recently participated in a text seminar based on a selection of your writings, where we were responsible for preparing ‘Collective Feelings’ (2004) for the group discussion. Upon reading what you wrote about ‘aboutness’, we experienced a chilling sensation of déjà vu, as it brought one particular story from school to mind.

A few years ago, the influx of migrants from within the EU to Sweden increased dramatically, while debate around the issue, both in media and society, was intense. At the start of the school semester (and at the peak of the debate), we were given an assignment for a two week introductory orientation course. Our task was to interview migrants, identify needs related to the precarious nature of their dwelling, and to respond to these needs architecturally. Thanks to a volunteer who had high credibility within a migrant community in the city outskirts, approximately 200 architecture students had the opportunity to visit the community’s secret temporary settlement.

Many of us approached this task with enthusiasm and felt that the outcome was, in many cases, realized quite successfully. Putting together a well thought-out project left us feeling empowered, like we had done something good for the less fortunate, and had every reason to be proud. But after reading your article, in hindsight, we can’t help but wonder if part of our pride had more to do with what you call ‘feeling fetishism’, where we were perhaps more focused on how doing something perceived as good, or even philanthropic, made us feel. Was it really about the outcome of the project, or more importantly, the people it addressed?

As the two weeks came to an end, some of us couldn’t help but think that little of what really mattered in terms of the migrants’ situation had changed – they were still marginalized and excluded from the rest of society. What also troubled us, was that there had been no discussion going into the project about what we could offer our interview subjects, which in some instances led to groups promising things they couldn’t (and didn’t) deliver. It ended up, like many such projects, as a pure academic exercise.

Looking back, these broken promises feel like a betrayal on our part, from our privileged position as architects and as representatives of the society the migrants are excluded from. Your concept ‘aboutness’ helped us to formulate our feelings about this experience. How it revealed the risks of this type of exercise and the depth of division between our two worlds, us- as temporary visitors with glorified promises coming to ‘help’, and them-fixed in the position as ‘the others’, objects of our aid.

Kind regards,
Petter, Siri and Heléne
Dear Sara,

Together with a group of my peers (master’s architecture students), I read your article ‘Orientations’ (2006). You use the concept ‘straightening device’ to describe how we are kept within certain lines by means of corrections and repetitions that follow a normalized canon of behaviours and ideas (Ahmed 2006: 562). It made me think of a situation in architecture school that a friend and I found ourselves in a couple of years ago.

During a final critique early in our education, we both faced rather harsh criticism from our respective critics. In our housing projects, we had chosen to focus on homes for ‘unconventional’ families and ‘nonconforming’ living constellations, albeit two very different varieties. I was designing for a queer family consisting of four adults and two children, one of whom had special accessibility needs, and my friend for a collective housing situation with four adult platonic life-partners. The critics were swift to ‘correct’ us for imagining a program outside of a straight and/or conventional housing type. I’m not sure whether they were unaware, or just would not admit to being constrained by normalized ideas in their critiques.

I had spent most of my efforts in constructing a flexible plan for the complex family constellation I imagined as my clients. As a consequence of prioritizing the organization of these social relationships, the physical form had taken a secondary position. Now that I’ve progressed in my architectural education, I understand that both the material (form, construction) and the immaterial (idea, organization) in synthesis are important for the realization of an architectural project. However, at this early stage, I wasn’t quite there yet, but was nonetheless enthusiastic and engaged in the idea of challenging conventional housing norms. It felt like the criticism I received responded only to the material aspects of the project, while it ignored the potential in the immaterial ones, which was the part I had developed most.

One critic said outright that form is what he could critique, and since there was very little form present, he couldn’t give any criticism at all. In that moment, knowing about your work would have been helpful for me, to be able to think about what that particular critic might be ‘oriented’ towards architecturally, the ‘inherited lines’ that might lie behind his position, and what assumptions a statement like that made, in terms of the relationship between architectural and social values. Then, it felt like a strong judgment toward my critically social ideas and a correction of my architectural values; now, it simply tells me that that particular critic was perhaps unable (or unwilling) to talk about architecture as anything other than built forms and the representation of them. From his architectural orientation, it wasn’t the ‘right’ way to do architecture.

In a similar manner, the critics rejected the idea of the family constellation my friend proposed altogether,
ignoring the initial premise of the project. Instead, they read and criticized the housing project from a normative position (e.g. the nuclear family) and deemed it unsatisfactory for this normative way of life. All of the specific spatial solutions that grew out of thinking about a collective of four adults sharing one space were met with: ”But no one would want to live like that.” In both of these cases, our concepts were dismissed as arbitrary or contrived, when evaluated in relation to design criteria defined by the needs of a normative home, while more conventional projects did not receive this type of criticism.

I am inspired by what you write about a queer potential in “not following certain conventional scripts of family, inheritance, and child rearing, whereby ‘not following’ involves disorientation” to open up new possibilities and forms of inhabition (Ahmed 2006: 569). I wonder what might happen if we begin to support those who deviate from the ‘straight lines’ of architectural intentions, methods, and conventions, toward a queer orientation? Could we design a world “that gives ‘support’ to those whose lives and loves make them appear oblique, strange, and out of place” (Ahmed 2006: 570)?

Love,
Malin, Axel, Erik
‘promise of [architectural] happiness’, by putting in the hours and enduring a stressful work and study culture. It appears that we will end up killing someone’s joy, whatever we choose to do. How can we ever become happy architects, with this kind of pressure to accept a compulsory workaholic lifestyle that is cultivated in schools and then continues in the workplace?

Your ideas about the political possibilities of the killjoy and the “solidarity in recognizing our alienation from happiness” also made us rethink an incident that happened during a lecture this semester (Ahmed 2010: 592). In reference to a slide, a (male) lecturer compared African huts to women’s breasts. A feminist killjoy student in our class asked if that reference was really necessary, since the huts could be compared to a number of other things with the same shape. Unfortunately, instead of being taken seriously, it felt like the entire class treated them like that annoying feminist who always has to question everything. Come to think of it, this student probably felt quite alienated. The warm fuzzy feeling we usually have in our class was destroyed, and there they were, all alone, standing up for what we all knew was right. But in everyone’s eyes, this ‘affect alien’s’ body became the ‘blockage point’ where the ‘smooth communication’ stopped and the happiness was disturbed (Ahmed 2010: 584).

After reading your article, we were ashamed that we didn’t speak up, as well. We now know that in order to stand up for justice, you sometimes have to be a killjoy, or unite as killjoys, and that happiness isn’t always necessary (or even desirable). We all have the right to be unhappy!

By the way, we couldn’t bear the burden of our friend’s happiness being conditional on our own happiness, so we ended up telling them the truth about life at the architecture school. They seemed disappointed. We knew they would be.

Thank you for your inspiring words.

Killjoy wishes,
Maja & Marie
Willful Parts (2011)

27 February 2019, Stockholm

Dear Sara,

First, I’d like to tell you my willful story. During the first semester of my master’s studies in architecture, I drew much of my inspiration from Zaha Hadid, one of the most prominent female architects in the world, as I was fascinated by the expressive forms and flowing spaces in her architectural work. As I began my project, I read a lot about her approach to architectural design and how her persistence helped her to achieve a successful career. I tried to emulate her strong will in my own design and got plenty of harsh critique about my lack of mathematical knowledge and general aesthetic sense, to support the type of project I was proposing.

I became defensive, as I felt like the critique had more to do with the fact that algorithmic design was not in line with the school’s architectural preferences, where the forms of Hadid were considered ‘difficult’ and unnecessarily complex. At the time, I didn’t even consider the possibility that it might also have something to do with this type of architecture being associated with a female architect.

I held my ground, which caused some friction. In order to achieve these complex forms, the process of curve-creating demanded extra online research and help from friends, as well as additional time spent on drawings. (Time that my classmates spent on required scale models and construction details that I never got around to.) Still, I persisted.

When it came time for final presentations, mine turned out better than I expected and was praised by the critics, so thankfully, it all worked out in the end. As a matter of fact, after the final critique, my professor congratulated me and told me how proud he was of what I had achieved. This was the same professor who had discouraged me from working with these forms and had threatened to fail me throughout the course, if I could not deliver the entire range of required presentation material. I was shocked!

My professor claimed that he was purposefully hard on me, in order to help ignite the fire of my own willfulness. In other words, the threats were ‘for my own good’, and all of my own ambitions of ‘non-alignment’ and rebellious efforts had in fact been willed by the authority of the professor, as a representative of the institution or ‘general will’.

After reading your article ‘Willful Parts’ (2011), I have been reflecting on what I now regard as a manipulative pedagogical approach within my architecture school. It rests on an outdated educational philosophy that aims to achieve compliance of the will through the manipulation of one’s own free will, like the one you describe of Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his fictional work Émile (Ahmed 2011: 237). Like Émile, I was the ‘capricious’ child, who believed that I was exercising my own will, in working with challenging forms and breaking conventions in how the project was represented, only to find out that I had misread the institutional will in the first place. Or did I?

Another interpretation might be that my instincts were right, and that my
professor practiced a harsher educational philosophy, akin to that of James Mill’s, where the alignment of will is achieved through “pain and the fear of pain”, as you describe in your analysis of the Grimm story ‘The Willful Child’ (Ahmed 2011: 238). Only what if it backfired?

What if my professor’s attempts to dissuade me from pursuing the type of design I was interested in, with constant threats of impending failure of the course, were genuine? I was scared about the possibility of not passing the course and of being forced to give up on my own desires and approach to design, just to succeed within the institution. What if the unexpected positive reactions to my project by the critics had an effect on my professor? What if he was Émile and had ended up aligning to the critics’ will, saying that it was his intention all along just to save face?

In either case, I do not regret my willfulness “to deviate from well-trodden paths, to wander, to err, to stray (...) to keep going the ‘wrong way’,” as it is what has made me who I am today (Ahmed 2011: 249). By owning my architectural willfulness, and by “being willing to be judged as disagreeable”, I was able to create opportunities for myself (and others) in the kind of architectural education I want to have, where learning supports my interests and the direction of my desires (Ahmed 2011: 249).

Willfully yours,
Calle, Sophia, Feng

6 March 2019, Stockholm

Dear Sara,

This semester, I attended a seminar course in critical theory, as part of my master’s degree in architecture at KTH in Stockholm. Each and every week, for five weeks, we read and discussed a selected article, representative of five of your nine books, in a group of fifteen people. I was full of enthusiasm after the introduction! It seemed like the others were too, but when we met again after having read ‘Collective Feelings’ (2004), well, let’s just say the collective wasn’t feeling in the best of moods.

Even though we are graduate students, in many architecture schools we tend to work primarily with visual material (drawings and models) rather than written material, so I don’t think most of us would call ourselves ‘scholars’, at least not in the traditional academic sense. Your description of Nirmal Puwar’s concept is fitting here: “how some become ‘space invaders’ when they enter spaces that are not intended for them” (Ahmed 2017: 9). It felt like we were invading the space of critical theory by stumbling through your texts, not knowing what to do with them. Or perhaps critical theory was invading the architecture school, making us all uncomfortable. It was unfamiliar territory and made us feel incompetent, but it also stirred up a bunch of feelings in terms of content.

After reading the first text, I felt clueless. I understood each word by itself, but couldn’t make sense of them
all together. Apart from it being clear that you were out to criticize something, I didn’t really get what you were after. Feeling quite stupid, I even thought about dropping out of the seminar group. But when we met for the discussion, it turned out that I wasn’t alone. While I blamed my own intellectual capabilities, other students blamed you! A few were quite angry! They said that your writing felt exclusionary, like you didn’t want everyone to understand. The academic language and assumptions of previous knowledge and references felt like an impenetrable wall, making it difficult to reach the message you wanted to communicate.

Our teacher played it cool and urged us to ‘work through the pain’. They compared reading critical theory to working-out at the gym, difficult and sometimes painful at first, but rewarding after a while (once we began to build up our ‘theory muscles’). We kept going, but it was like walking up a steep hill to meet someone you don’t like.

The second seminar was similar to the first. A few people seemed to understand the text, ‘Orientations’ (2006), and helped the teacher guide the rest of us ‘in the right direction’ to sort it all out. During the third seminar, where we discussed ‘Killing Joy’ (2010), I finally started to feel a little less out of place. I still didn’t contribute much during the discussions, but at least now I could nod understandingly, instead of just nodding.

The fourth seminar was a blast, because I finally dared to join in on the conversation! I was confident in debating with one of my classmates about a slightly different interpretation of ‘Willful Parts’ (2011). During the fifth and last seminar, we had a lively discussion on the introduction to Living a Feminist Life (2017) and we all loved you! A few of us had even gone out and bought our own personal copies of your book, to have it at home. Reading about your struggles and doubts within academia was a relief. It made us feel like we were not alone and helped us understand why we had such a hard time working through your earlier texts. By revealing a more personal and vulnerable side of yourself, you really brought us home in the end.

Daring to be openhearted about our lack of prior knowledge in the field of critical theory has been one of the key factors to the success of this seminar. Our method of digesting and internalizing your texts has been to bring them closer to home, to take the themes and concepts and connect them to architectural examples that we can relate to. I wish more academic texts would dare to do the same, to use relatable situations based on lived experience, rather than creating a distance through difficult language, abstract definitions and overzealous referencing.

It is hard to be frank about your own feelings. It is easier to be vague, evasive, and not to speak up. Thanks to your articles, we began to share testimonials about our experiences, shedding light on structures of oppression that exist in the contexts where we live, work, and study. In this seminar we have made theory personal, and for many of us, by doing so, we have breathed life into theory and brought theory to life.

With feminist affection,
Agnes, Leopold, Helena
Feminist theory: 'Space Invaders' in school of architecture

Window placing architectural studies on display in the 'loop of the performative'

Compendium: Our 'Feminist Homework'

Microphones for the 'Materialization and Intensification' of architectural associations

Extension cord taking power from the 'general will' for the 'particular will'

Screen for display of 'Happy Objects'

‘Feminist table’ to gather around oblique ‘orientations’

Empty chairs for ‘Willful Characters’

Cake: Part of ‘Feminist Killjoy Survival Kit’

Projection: references describing our ‘Bodily Horizon’

‘Feminist table’ to gather around oblique ‘orientations’

Stacked chairs reinforcing repetition and reproduction of ‘straight lines’

Organic-shaped space as ‘Disorientation Device’

Microphones for the ‘Materialization and Intensification’ of architectural associations

Extension cord taking power from the ‘general will’ for the ‘particular will’

Sink to wash off ‘Sweaty Concepts’

Door: ‘Straightening Device’ in curved wall

HAVE YOU EVER?

CONNECTING KEY CONCEPTS WITH ARCHITECTURAL SITUATIONS

PLAN 01: SEMINAR ROOM
A124, KTH
**Collective Feelings (2004)**

**Loop of the Performative**
Ahmed writes about the *loop of the performative* as a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy. When we read an object or other as the source of our emotion and in turn feel that emotion as a response to the encounter, we confirm the ‘truth’ of the initial reading. In other words, the object or other seems like the cause of our emotion - even though this reading is subjective and based on our own preconceived ideas and past histories. (Ahmed 2004: 32)

Sometimes our preconceived notions (architectural canon, styles, even expectations of critique situations) are so strong that they become self-fulfilling. **Have you ever** experienced the *loop of the performative* in any situations in architecture school?

**Aboutness**
Ahmed explains what she calls *aboutness* as a mode of empathizing with others less privileged than ourselves. She writes: “We feel sad *about* their suffering, an ‘aboutness’ that ensures that they remain the object of ‘our feeling’” (Ahmed 2004: 35).

**Have you ever** experienced a moment in architecture school when your own feelings or commitment to a cause, project, or research subject have been more important than the actual cause or outcome of the project itself?

**Materialization and Intensification**
Ahmed suggests that objects and others *materialize* as we encounter them. Our reading is based on our own affective response, or on how we feel when we encounter these objects and others. That feeling is in turn an effect of our past experiences and preconceived ideas that exist within our own context. In this *materialization of objects or others there is also a process of intensification*. We have an affective response that becomes a conscious thought, emotion, or judgment about an encounter, such that we later come to associate or attribute that object or other as the source of our emotion. (Ahmed 2004: 27-30)

**Have you ever** thought about how your reading of a building is influenced by your previous knowledge of architecture? How would this reading differ from a reading by a non-architect? How does knowing who has designed the building affect your reading?

**Feeling Fetishism**
Ahmed uses the concept *feeling fetishism* to describe the transformation that occurs when a privileged person is moved by the pain of someone less privileged. We don’t really feel *with* those who are in pain, but rather feel *sad about* their pain in a way that makes us feel inclined to help. In turn, we feel empowered for being so generous and kind, establishing an unequal relation of power, where our kindness is dependent on the fixed position of the ‘other’ as the one with pain. (Ahmed 2004: 36-38)

One example of an architectural situation where *feeling fetishism* can occur is when architects are invited to propose projects in more socially and economically vulnerable areas. Even if a project misinterprets, overlooks, or ignores the needs and desires of people living in the area, the architect might still assume they have ‘done something good’ for people who are less privileged than themselves. **Have you ever** been assigned an architectural design task that was situated in a socially and economically vulnerable area? Did it make you feel like a ‘good person’? How did you identify the needs and desires of people living in the area to inform your proposal? Did it give anything of substance back to those it was intended for or to those who participated?

**Global Feelings**
Ahmed talks about *global feelings* and how they create a sense of community, where the members of that community are not geographically located close to one another. The cosmopolitan person is a citizen of the world, rather than a citizen of a specific country or geographic region, who has given up their attachments to home and often has the privileges of capital and mobility, a ‘global nomad’. This person may feel closer to someone on the other side of the world, who shares the same privileges and profession, than they do to their closest neighbor, who is attached to a specific place and *does not or cannot* move. Ahmed points out that this *global feeling* of “‘global nomads require[s] ‘others’ to stay put in order to be differentiated from the locals, and to be ‘like each other’” (Ahmed 2004: 38).

The internet has made this *global feeling* even more common, helping people create groups and collectives spanning the whole world. **Have you ever** thought about who you feel closer to? The engineering students right next door on your own campus? Or the architecture students in a country far, far away? How do architectural blogs and social media accounts like ArchDaily, Architizer, and DeZeen reinforce this feeling?
**Surfacing**

Ahmed introduces the concept *surfacing* to describe the process of creating a surface for both sensations and impressions, whether the skin of an individual body or the skin of a collective, where encounters and associations leave a trace. This process involves emotions formed in relation to ‘other’ bodies and ‘other’ collectives. She writes, “the skin comes to be felt as a border through reading the impression of one surface upon another as a form of negation. Such impressions are traces on the skin surface of the presence of others, and they depend on the repetition of past associations” (Ahmed 2004: 33).

**Have you ever** considered which emotions have generated the surface of the collective body of architects or architectural students? How do these collective bodies contribute to the *surfacing* of other collective bodies, i.e. non-architects or ‘ordinary’ people, in terms of taste, power, capital, artistic skill or knowledge. And what about the *surfacing* of buildings? How do previous encounters, histories, and associations of materials or facades affect a person’s experience of a building?

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**Orientations (2006)**

**Orientations**

Ahmed explains that *orientations* are about starting points in how we approach, view and act within our world, society and life. “Orientations are about how we begin, how we proceed from here” (Ahmed 2006: 545). She reminds us that *orientations* are not only about what direction we are facing, but also what is behind us, including our histories. “Some things are relegated to the background to sustain a certain direction” (Ahmed 2006: 547). According to Ahmed, these histories or previous experiences, as well as the background of the objects we face, affect our *orientation*.

**Have you ever** thought about how your history, or what is behind you, affects your *orientation* toward the field of architecture? Or how you got to architecture school to begin with? In a school of architecture, students are often gathered in the same building. How does our bodily *orientation* toward shared spaces and objects affect how we become or act as architects? What architectural concepts, values, and tastes are put in our reach?

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**Bodily Horizon**

Ahmed writes: “The bodily horizon shows the ‘line’ that bodies can reach toward, what is reachable, by also marking what they cannot reach” (Ahmed 2006: 552). Both physical and conceptual things are included in what is reachable (or not), such as tables, writing tools, other people, sexuality, higher education and so forth. We orient ourselves by moving towards or away from these things that are within our bodily horizon, which can “put some things and not others in our reach” (Ahmed 2006: 552). In turn, these limits act on us, in shaping and forming who we are and who we can become.

In a school of architecture, bodily horizons can be shaped by architectural references, telling us what we can reach for and hope to achieve within the profession, who is included, and what tools, methods, and ideas are accessible. **Have you ever** felt that certain references, tools, ideas, or concepts contributed to expanding (or limiting) your bodily horizon?

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**Disorientation**

Ahmed describes how an encounter with an object, body, or situation that fails to line up with the ‘straight line’ can cause a ‘queer moment’ and the experience of disorientation (Ahmed 2006: 561-66). When things no longer line up, we might feel uncertain, out of place, unable to move forward; however, Ahmed suggests that disorientation opens up for new possible directions that might have otherwise not been discovered. No longer on the ‘straight path’, we have the opportunity to reorient ourselves towards other lines. This can be a source of unease, but in it we might even find delight.

Moments of disorientation might occur whenever something sufficiently ‘other’ or differently aligned enters your horizon. Or, you, your method, or your proposal might act as a disorientation device, if it is not aligned with the orientation of the school, teacher, critic, or even architectural discipline. **Have you ever** experienced disorientation in a critique, a group project, a lecture, or a seminar? Was there an attempt by teachers or fellow students to ‘straighten’ or make things align again?

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**Straightening Devices**

Ahmed describes how sexual orientation is kept in line through straightening devices, such as objects, orientations, assumptions, family lines (Ahmed 2006: 562). Ahmed suggests that we become ‘straight’ as an effect of constant repetition and repro-
duction of these expectations and alignments. Our orientations, even spaces we inhabit, become straight through this performative process (Ahmed 2006: 563). We inherit and reproduce patterns and behaviors that contribute to the formation of ‘the straight line’. It is important to note that ‘straight’, in this context, does not necessarily refer only to sexuality, but may also indicate other normative ideas or behaviors.

If society reproduces straightness in this way, by performing expected actions and perpetuating them generation after generation, have you ever thought about how schools of architecture might reproduce normative behaviors in architects? What types of projects are repeatedly referenced? What specific rites of passage are we expected to perform? What promises of our ‘inheritance’ do we feel compelled to uphold?

Desire Lines
Ahmed uses the landscape architecture term desire lines – “unofficial paths, those marks left on the ground that show everydaycomings and goings, where people deviate from paths they are supposed to follow” (Ahmed 2006: 570), to define a queer line in life that deviates from the straight one, to avoid the reproduction of a more normative path. It is the act of following one’s own desires, rather than a path staked out by others’ expectations. A desire line can therefore become a tool or guideline for others who choose to walk along another line, but need support in deviating from the straight path.

Have you ever considered from where or from who our architectural ‘straight lines’ are inherited? During the design process, do students form any internal lines of desire? What are some potential areas where we, as architecture students, could wander off the straight path? Unorthodox methods, unusual forms, unconventional programs, new presentation techniques or forums of discussion? What desire lines do we explore in the imaginary lives of the inhabitants of our projects?

Queer Phenomenology
Ahmed proposes a queer orientation towards phenomenology, which is the philosophical study that “emphasizes the importance of lived experience, the intentionality of consciousness, the significance of nearness or what is ready to hand, and the role of repeated and habitual actions in shaping bodies and worlds” (Ahmed, 2006: 544). By queering phenomenology, Ahmed seeks to revise this philosophical approach to include criticality and reflection, by looking at what is behind, not only at what is in front, and by embracing moments of disorientation, while resisting re-alignment. “A queer phenomenology would involve an orientation toward queer, a way to inhabit the world that gives ‘support’ to those whose lives and loves make them appear oblique, strange, and out of place” (Ahmed 2006: 570).

As architecture students, every studio project we do plays a part ‘in shaping bodies and worlds’. Have you ever developed narratives that properly attend to the wide variation of different orientations, biographies and histories of those who might inhabit the spaces you propose, including the oblique ones? How has this been received by teachers, critics? At what point does disorientation occur? What would resisting the impulse to straighten that moment look like?

Killing Joy (2010)

The Feminist Killjoy
Ahmed writes that the feminist killjoy is someone who “spoils the happiness of others” by calling out or refusing to take part in sexism, racism, or other forms of oppression (Ahmed 2010: 581). The feminist killjoy refuses to look the other way and isn’t afraid to speak up for justice even if it comes at a cost, where jobs, promotions, social networks, or personal relationships may be jeopardized. “You cause unhappiness by revealing the causes of unhappiness. And you can become the cause of unhappiness you reveal” (Ahmed 2010: 591).

Acting as a feminist killjoy, Ahmed calls out sexism in one of her sources Happiness: A History by Darrin M. McMahon: “Just note how women appear or do not appear in McMahon’s intellectual history” (Ahmed 2010: 571). Have you ever noticed how women ‘appear, or do not appear’, in the history of architecture? How about people of color? How do they appear or not appear in contemporary representations of architectural practice, lecture series, theoretical anthologies, or social media? How do they appear or not appear in architectural education? Have you ever been a feminist killjoy during a critique situation? Have you ever witnessed someone else being a killjoy? What was the general reaction in the room? Was the killjoy supported or alienated?

Affect Aliens
Ahmed explains that in becoming feminist kiljoys, the act of killing the atmosphere can turn us into strangers, what she calls a-
fect aliens. By making things uncomfortable, and speaking up for what's right, we become alienated from the group's happiness and consensus. However, it can be liberating to gather and support one another in our alienation. “In sharing our alienation from happiness, we might also claim the freedom to be unhappy” (Ahmed 2010: 592). Ahmed points out that some bodies don’t need to do anything, in order to become affect aliens. Simply the presence of someone who doesn’t feel like part of the group, a feminist of color in a group of white feminists for instance, may cause tangible tension or a sense that the shared atmosphere’ or ‘enjoyment and solidarity’ of the group is lost (Ahmed 2010: 583). Like the killjoy, the act of revealing violence (sexism, racism, homophobia) within a group, can be understood as a form of violence itself toward that group’s happiness and consensus, shifting the focus to the act of revealing and hiding the original violence. “When the exposure of violence becomes the origin of violence, then the violence that is exposed is not revealed” (Ahmed 2010: 584).

Within the context of architectural studies, a power relation is established during critiques. Have you ever acted as an architectural killjoy during a critique, exposing unhappiness and disturbing the equilibrium of the shared architectural happiness of the group? Did it make you feel alienated from that group? Or have you ever felt like asking a ‘wrong’ question made you into an affect alien in this situation? Was it perceived as a threat to the reputation of the studio and/or the tutors? Or perhaps it questioned the integrity or position of the guest critics?

The Happy Housewife
Ahmed discusses feminist critiques of the figure of the happy housewife, a fantasy representation of women who are happy performing their ‘given’ duties as housewife according to social norms, to show how happiness is used to conceal the labor, or even unhappiness, of being an actual housewife (Ahmed 2010: 572-73). She shows how this figure (and other happy figures- the happy family, the happy couple) can be controlling, functioning as a societal norm to live up to, as well as something to hide behind in order to convince ourselves of our own happiness, even when it doesn’t feel that way. “Happiness translates its wish into a politics, a wishful politics, a politics that demands that others live according to a wish” (Ahmed 2010: 572). In other words, the idea of happiness may protect or conceal what is really going on underneath the ‘happy façade’, such as conflict, labor, shame, or neglect.

Have you ever wondered whether the heavy workload and sacrifices in our personal lives that architecture students often make ‘for the sake of architecture’ is encouraged by a normalized idea of the figure of the architect, where there is a sense of pride in the hardship that characterizes our field? How would you characterize a happy architect and could it be liberating to be an unhappy one? How is happiness used in the study culture of architecture school? How has the commercialization of happiness affected the jobs we do as architects? What are architecture students encouraged to be ‘happy’ toward or about?

Happy Objects
Ahmed uses the term happy objects to describe “those objects that affect us in the best way” (Ahmed 2010: 574). She explains that our experience of something as positive or negative depends on whether or not we have an orientation toward that thing, as well as how it affects us when we encounter it. In other words, we may anticipate an object as a happy one (or not), before even encountering it. Likewise, this anticipation has an orienting effect on us, causing us to orient ourselves towards some objects (and the happiness they promise) and away from others. “The promise of happiness takes this form: if you do this or if you have that, then happiness is what follows” Ahmed 2010: 576).

Have you ever landed an internship in a renowned architecture firm and expected joy, even before starting the job? Have you ever felt compelled to be happy over an internship, because you were supposed to be, even though you didn’t feel that way on the job? If our teachers are oriented towards certain things as happy objects in architecture, and others as unhappy, have you ever considered how we are affected by what they present to us, as happy or unhappy objects? How are our tastes, judgments, and desires affected by the canon and/or famous names in our field as happy objects throughout our education? If the teachers at a school are generally a homogeneous group who think and teach similar things, is it possible that their happiness becomes the students’ happiness? How might it affect what we produce and how we orient our projects?

The Politics of Happiness
Ahmed proposes a politics of happiness to organize around the alienation of becoming a feminist killjoy, where “revolutionary forms of political consciousness involve heightening our awareness of what there is to be unhappy about” (Ahmed 2010: 592). She writes: “We can recognize not only that we are not the cause
of the unhappiness that has been attributed to us but also the
effects of being attributed as the cause. We can talk about being
angry black women or feminist killjoys; we can claim those figures
back; we can talk about those conversations we have had at din-
ner tables or in seminars or meetings; we can laugh in recognition
of the familiarity of inhabiting that place. There is solidarity in rec-
ognizing our alienation from happiness, even if we do not inhabit
the same place (and we do not)” (Ahmed 2010: 591-92).

Have you ever given or gotten support from other architecture
students in a killjoy moment? How can we create places in archi-
tecture school to gather around our killjoy stories and to share our
feelings of alienation? What is necessary to claim the figure of the
feminist architectural killjoy back?

Conditional Happiness
“If my happiness is made conditional on your happiness, such
that your happiness comes first, then your happiness becomes a
shared object” (Ahmed 2010: 578). Ahmed distinguishes between
‘communities of feeling’ and ‘fellow-feeling’, terms borrowed
from Max Scheler, to explain the dynamics of different forms of
conditional happiness (Ahmed 2010: 578). Communities of feeling
represent a shared feeling, because they share the same object
that feeling is directed towards (e.g. A group of architects might
feel sorrow over the sudden and early passing of Zaha Hadid, as
she was one of the few prominent and powerful women archi-
tects. Hadid becomes the shared object of feeling). Fellow-feeling
is when we feel the same feeling for someone who feels a certain
way, even though we don’t share their object of feeling (e.g. I am
sad that you feel sad over Zaha Hadid’s passing, even though I
don’t have any idea who she is or what she has built. In this case,
the sad person’s experience becomes a shared object).

Have you ever heard someone say, ‘Oh, you’re so lucky, I al-
ways wanted to become an architect’? And did you agree, even if
you weren’t sure, so as not to disappoint them? Have you ever
known anyone who was studying architecture in order to make
their family happy? Have you ever changed the way you felt
about your project or someone else’s project, because of the way
a teacher or critic felt about the work?

Willful Parts (2011)

Willful Character
Ahmed defines the willful character as “the one who poses a
problem for a community of characters, such that willfulness
becomes that which must be resolved and even eliminated”
(Ahmed 2011: 233). She offers a reading of “characterization as
a technology of attribution” (Ahmed 2011: 233). In other words,
willfulness is something we are charged with by others, as a re-
result of standing in opposition to the will of the person or group in
authority who is charging us as being willful or causing a problem.
This charge directly affects the way our character is understood
and may be used to manipulate our will, in order to align us with
the will of authority. Ahmed points out that attributing willfulness
to character can also be a way of gendering character, where the
same behaviors in male characters that are understood as be-
ing strong or steadfast, are read in female characters as willful

Have you (or anyone you know) ever been charged as a willful
character by a teacher or critic? Have you ever refused to fol-
low a professor’s methodology, in order to do things your own
way? Have you ever felt like the willful character when doing
group work? Have you ever been told that you should follow the
architectural ideals of the studio or school and postpone follow-
ing your own path until you become a practicing architect? Have
you ever noticed authority figures treating your female peers as
willful characters for exhibiting similar accepted (or even praised)
behaviors of your male peers?

Willful Child
Ahmed uses the figure of the willful child, found in popular narra-
tives and fables, to explore how ‘moral danger’ can be located in
this character (Ahmed 2011: 238). The willful child is the child with
a strong will or a will of its own that challenges the will of paren-
tal, societal or even religious authority through acts of persistence
and disobedience. Ahmed refers to the Grimm story ‘The Willful
Child’ as an example of how discipline and punishment are used
to break the will of the child ‘for its own good’, giving rise to the
expression ‘spare the rod, spoil the child’ (Ahmed 2011: 239). The
willfulness of the ‘spoiled child’ is seen as a moral danger in its
challenge to the ‘good will’ of these authority figures, making it
necessary to correct or eliminate.
Have you ever played the role of the architectural willful child, where you challenged the ideas or policies of your institution, at the risk of punishment or disciplinary action in some form? Have you ever felt like a willful child in the context of the architectural community or study culture, where you were expected to comply or lose your privileges? Have you ever been advised to align with certain architectural norms or tastes ‘for your own good’? Have you ever been threatened with failure as a motivation for developing a project in a different direction?

**Particular Will and General Will**

Ahmed uses the terms particular will and general will to describe the relationship between the will of an individual and the will of a community, as parts to a whole. In order for the whole community to function, it needs all of its parts to follow in line or stay in order. When one part, or particular will, causes ‘disorder and mischief’ within the whole, or general will, it is seen as willful and rebellious (Ahmed 2011: 243). “The rebel is the one who compromises the whole, that is, the body of which she is a part” (Ahmed 2011: 244). Ahmed writes that the reproduction of the general will relies on the insistence of the repetition of willing in the right way, if the particular will wishes to remain a part of the whole. “The conditions of will are thus the conditions of hospitality” (Ahmed 2011: 244). In other words, if you are not “willing to will what has already been willed” you are no longer welcome (Ahmed 2011: 244).

Have you ever felt like your particular will as an architecture student has been in conflict with the general will of your studio, school, or university? Has this ever threatened your membership or sense of being part of these groups? Have you ever experienced a situation where you have been pressured (or pretended) to go along with the general will, even though it didn’t agree with your particular will? At what point does being part of the architectural community cease to be worth the cost of denying your individual will? What or who influences the general will of an architectural culture and discipline?

**Willfulness**

Ahmed proposes willfulness as a feminist political tool and point of connection, in order to turn the charge back on itself by reclaiming it. “To be willful can mean to be willing to announce your disagreement, and to put yourself behind it. To be willful can mean being willing to be judged as disagreeable” (Ahmed 2011: 249). Ahmed takes the charge of willfulness from an authority figure and turns it into an act of criticality, by using it as an alternative way to be in the world, going against the usual order of things. “If we are charged with willfulness, then we can accept and mobilize this charge. (...) To stand up, to stand against the world, to create something that does not agree with what is given, requires willfulness” (Ahmed 2011: 250).

Have you ever thought of willfulness as a political design tool for thinking critically about a studio project? How might you use your willfulness and the willfulness of others to question the authority of a general will, whether a school assignment, program, or an architectural canon? What are some examples of architectural willfulness you might gather or organize around?

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**Living a Feminist Life (2017)**

**Feminist Homework**

Ahmed uses the term feminist homework to describe how living a feminist life is a self-assignment we take home. In calling it ‘homework’, Ahmed emphasizes that feminism and feminist theory should be brought home and practiced in all areas of our lives, not only in an academic context. She writes: “I am suggesting feminism is homework because we have much to work out from not being at home in the world” (Ahmed 2017: 7). Ahmed explains that this work is continuous and extends to all aspects of our life. “Feminism needs to be everywhere because feminism is not everywhere” (Ahmed 2017: 4). She poses the question: “Where is feminism?” (Ahmed 2017: 4).

Have you ever wondered if there is feminism in the architecture school? If so, where is it? For example, is it in your projects, in a course, in a teacher, in the lunchroom or in a policy? Who first helped you find it? In what ways do you take (architectural) feminism home with you? What would feminist homework include in relation to architecture school? Might it mean actually going home, rather than working all night in the studio? Or, a feminist analysis of the architect’s work/life balance? Could reorganizing our architectural priorities help us to be more at home in the world?

**Feminist Movement**

Ahmed writes: “Feminism as a collective movement is made out of how we are moved to become feminists in dialogue with others” (Ahmed 2017: 5). A feminist movement is political, collective, and constantly changing to address the varying issues and injustices that arise. It requires places to gather, as well as offering a space of belonging and solidarity to tell our feminist stories.
Ahmed borrows the words of Flavia Dzodan, “Feminism will be intersectional ‘or it will be bullshit’; reminding us that different systems of oppression (gender, race, sexuality, class, etc.) intersect (Ahmed 2017: 5). She stresses that any feminist claim to an understanding of power must take this as a starting point. Likewise, being part of a feminist movement does not mean that we can no longer oppress others. “There is no guarantee that in struggling for justice we ourselves will be just” (Ahmed 2017: 6).

Have you ever felt like you are part of a feminist movement (or other type of movement) in architecture school? How is the movement organized? Where does the movement gather or meet? What does the movement want to address or change? Has the movement met opposition? How does the movement deal with hierarchies and power relations within the group? If you are not currently part of a movement, would you like to be part of one?

Postfeminist Fantasy
Ahmed describes a postfeminist fantasy as “a fantasy of equality: that women can now do it, even have it, or that they would have it if they just tried hard enough” (Ahmed 2017: 5). Citing bell hook’s definition of feminism, “the movement to end sexism, sexual exploitation and sexual oppression”, Ahmed reminds us that feminist movements are still necessary because of “what has not ended” (Ahmed 2017: 5). She also points out that these areas always intersect with systems of oppression that stem from racism and capitalism. In other words, those that claim a postfeminist position are living in a fantasy, where they do not (or no longer) recognize the existence of sexism, racism or injustices of capitalism. The claim itself can be used as a tool of oppression to conceal the very real problems at hand and to diminish the need for feminism and the work that feminists do.

Have you ever noticed, or come up against, problematic processes, structures and behaviors in the school of architecture that have not ended? Are they recognized as problematic? How do students, faculty, the administration, or the institution address them? Does anyone ever deny that they exist?

Feminist Tendencies
Ahmed suggests that feminist practice involves acquiring what she calls feminist tendencies. These tendencies emerge out of a persistence and repetition of approaching the world from a feminist position and “a willingness to keep going despite or even because of what we come up against” (Ahmed 2017: 6). Acquiring feminist tendencies requires both individual and collective efforts as well as constant work, as we are always in the process of forming and reforming feminist communities and re-evaluating our relationship to the world we live in. “A feminist movement is built from many moments of beginning again” (Ahmed 2017: 6).

Have you ever thought about architectural practice as a process of acquiring architectural tendencies? Or becoming an architect as a constant re-evaluation of our relationship to the world we build in? Ahmed talks of how approaching feminist practice as a continuous process might enable us to not take things for granted and to be more humble in our endeavors. Do you think it could have the same effect on architectural practice? Could tending towards ideas outside of a traditional canon of architecture, such as sustainability or diversity, help re-imagine and re-evaluate what it means to practice architecture?

Feminist Citational Practices
Ahmed proposes a critical re-evaluation of the underlying power structures that determine what is considered theory and a broader scope of what is included in how we make and do theory. Part of challenging these structures lies in how we cite other work as feminists. “A citational chain is created around theory: you become a theorist by citing other theorists that cite other theorists” (Ahmed 2017: 8). In Living a Feminist Life, Ahmed preaches and practices a strict feminist citation policy, by not citing any ‘white men’, where ‘white men’ stands for an institution. Instead, she cites only “those who have contributed to the intellectual genealogy of feminism and antiracism” (Ahmed 2017: 15). She writes: “Feminism is at stake in how we generate knowledge; in how we write, in who we cite. I think of feminism as a building project: if our texts are worlds, they need to be made out of feminist materials. Feminist theory is world making” (Ahmed 2017: 14).

Have you ever thought about what ‘materials’ your proposed worlds are made out of when you reference certain theorists, architects, or projects? Are some sources considered more valid than others? (e.g. an architectural canon might be valued more than personal accounts or experiences.) Have you ever considered which ideas, assumptions, and political views lay behind the references you use, and how they are being reproduced through your selection? Have you ever purposefully used unorthodox or explicitly feminist references? Ahmed discusses “how some materials are understood as theory and not others” in an academic context (Ahmed 2017: 8). What is understood as architecture and what is not? Who decides what is or is not architecture? On what criteria is this decision based?
**Space Invaders**
Ahmed uses Nirmal Puwar’s concept *space invaders* to describe what happens when a person enters a space that is not meant for them (Ahmed 2017: 9). For example, within the academy, a person of color might become a *space invader* when entering a predominantly white space for a department meeting, or someone with a working class background might become a *space invader* when entering the mostly middle class space of a seminar group, or a design student might become a *space invader* in a theoretical course, by bringing up issues or asking questions that seem out of place. Ahmed suggests that being a *space invader* can be used as a strength and resource to generate new knowledge. “We use our particulars to challenge the universal” (Ahmed 2017: 10).

**Have you ever** felt like a *space invader* during a situation in architecture school? **Have you ever** noticed when someone else has become one? When these situations occur, are there any ways to make *space invaders* feel less out of place? **Have you ever** considered how your particular (out of place) position might generate new discoveries that would have otherwise been missed?

**Sweaty Concepts**
Ahmed describes the connection between the work of thinking and doing, and the concepts that come out of this work as *sweaty concepts*, emphasizing the bodily experience of the effort and labor to conceptualize a situation that is difficult. “More specifically, a sweaty concept is one that comes out of a description of a body that is not at home in the world. (...) A sweaty concept might come out of a bodily experience that is trying. The task is to stay with the difficulty, to keep exploring and exposing this difficulty” (Ahmed 2017: 13). Ahmed suggests that generating concepts is something we can do in everyday situations and out of practical experiences, rather than an activity reserved for academic scholars from a distance. “Sweaty concepts are also generated by the practical experience of coming up against a world, or the practical experience of trying to transform a world” (Ahmed 2017: 13-14).

**Have you ever** made up a new concept or term to describe a difficult architectural situation or a difficulty you had in your design process that might qualify as a *sweaty concept*? Do you feel comfortable using concepts as part of your design work or do you assume they are only for researchers? What *sweaty concepts* could you contribute to architecture through design that researchers might not ever imagine in their writing?

**Feminist Killjoy Survival Kit**
Ahmed talks about her *feminist killjoy survival kit* as a set of go-to tools and sources to help along the road of never-ending challenges in living a feminist life. She mentions several ‘companions’, in reference to Donna Haraway’s (2003) work on companion species, that have given her support in her work and life as a feminist, including works of feminist philosophy, literature and film (Ahmed 2017: 16). Ahmed suggests that the *feminist killjoy survival kit* functions as a reference library, a beacon, a companion, or a guide and encourages all of her feminist readers to assemble their own (Ahmed 2017: 16-17).

What would you put in your *architectural killjoy survival kit*?
“What moves [architects], what makes [architects] feel, is also that which holds [architects] in place, or gives [architects] a dwelling place.” (Ahmed 2004: 27)

“In other words, what separates [architects] from others also connects [architects] to others.” (Ahmed 2004: 29)

“If emotions are shaped by contact with [architecture], rather than being caused by [architecture], then emotions are not simply ‘in’ the subject or the [architecture].” (Ahmed 2004: 31)

“One is not born, but becomes [an architect].” (Ahmed 2006: 553)


“To make [architecture] queer is certainly to disturb the order of things.” (Ahmed 2006: 565)

“It is not up to [queer architects] to disorient [straight architects], although of course disorientation might still happen, and we do ‘do’ this work.” (Ahmed 2006: 569)
“[I]f we do not assume that [architectural] happiness is what is good - then we can read the link between female [architects’] imagination and unhappiness differently. We might explore how imagination is what allows women [architects] to be liberated from [architectural] happiness and the narrowness of its horizons.” (Ahmed 2010: 585)


“In sharing our alienation from happiness, we might also claim the freedom to be unhappy. We might even claim a certain [architectural] wretchedness.” (Ahmed 2010: 592)

“To be [a willful architect] can mean to be willing to announce your disagreement, and to put yourself behind it. To be [a willful architect] can mean being willing to be judged as disagreeable.” (Ahmed 2011: 249)

“The willful [architecture student] who does not will the reproduction of the [architectural institution], who wills waywardly, or who wills wrongly, plays a crucial part in the history of feminist [architectural] rebellion.” (Ahmed 2011: 250)

“The very attribution of willfulness to [architects] participates in the gendering of [architects].” (Ahmed 2011: 247)

“To live a feminist life [as an architect] is to make everything into something that is questionable. The question of how to live a feminist life [as an architect] is alive as a question as well as being a life question.” (Ahmed 2017: 2)

“To learn from being a feminist [architect] is to learn about the world.” (Ahmed 2017: 7)

“Feminist [architectural] housework aims to transform the house, to rebuild the master's residence.” (Ahmed 2017: 7)

“[Architectural] feminism is at stake in how we generate knowledge; in how we write, in who [and what projects] we cite. I think of feminism [in architecture] as a building project: if our texts [and drawings] are worlds, they need to be made out of feminist materials. Feminist [architectural] theory is world making.” (Ahmed 2017: 14)

“[Architectural] feminism begins with a premise that is a promise: we do not have to live by other people’s [architectural] assignments.” (Ahmed 2017: 270)
RECIPE

Each week, the hosting group brought “fika” to our seminars. Fika is a big part of Swedish culture and simply means to share a cup of coffee (or tea) and some cakes or buns with friends and colleagues. Here you find the recipe for one of our favorites, a lemon poppy seed cake that Helena baked for the seminar on Living a Feminist Life (2017). We’re not certain where the original recipe came from, but it changed over time as it was emailed from friend to friend, until finally landing in Helena’s inbox in its current form. We have translated this version to English.

Lemon Poppy Seed Cake

Ingredients

Cake:  Topping:
200 g butter (room temperature)  1 dl water
2.5 dl sugar  0.5 dl sugar
3 eggs  1 lemon (the juice!)
3.5 dl flour
1/4 tsp salt
1 tsp baking powder
4 Tbsp blue poppy seeds
1 lemon (the zested peel!)
100 g ricotta
4 Tbsp cream

Instructions

1. Heat the oven to 175° C.
2. Butter the baking tin of your choice (a loaf pan or small round cake pan). Coat it with poppy seeds or flour.
3. Whip the butter and sugar together until they are fluffy.
4. Add the eggs one at a time, while mixing.
5. Add the dry ingredients (flour, salt, baking powder & poppy seeds). It’s best to mix them together first, and then add them to the egg mixture until thoroughly combined.
6. Stir in the lemon zest, ricotta and cream.
7. Pour the batter into the tin and bake for about 35-45 minutes.
8. In a saucepan, combine all of the ingredients for the sauce and simmer until they shrink to about half the original volume.
9. Once the cake is done, pour the sauce over the cake and let it rest before serving.

Photo: Brady Burroughs

WHO IS AHMED IN CONVERSATION WITH?

A selection of key references from five seminar readings


Bano, G. (late 1980’s) Conversation with author’s auntie.


