

# Thinking, Feeling and Willing the Schoolhouse Anew

A Renewal of Foundations, Paradigms and Perspectives

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## Summary

When one observes the currently predominant and most heavily publicized architecture found in kindergartens and other public school buildings, with its sharply defined cubes and edges, and its smooth, reflective surfaces, it reveals itself as barely distinguishable from that of modern office buildings, prisons and crematoriums. Convincing of the inevitability of negative repercussions on the development of children and school communities, the author attempted to jolt the awareness of the public with the publication of a 'Manifesto of the School as a Living Space' in 1998. To this day, a response has failed to materialize. The following eight years were partly spent in search of the underlying causes of this contemporary phenomenon with the goal of giving the architecture of school buildings a **fresh impulse based on new, sustainable foundations**. This time was also spent developing suitable tools for use in educational facility planning and construction as well as testing them in practice.

In **Part I**, the results of preliminary studies, particularly those of a critical survey of existing literature regarding the pedagogical demands made on public school buildings (2003), are summarized and found to show that the influence of educational facility planning on children, adolescents and teachers remains underestimated in most countries, including Switzerland, Germany and Austria, despite the assertion of architectural psychology that, in terms of its overall impact, the constructed environment is to be understood as a 'Third Educator'. As to how pedagogical-functional and emotional criteria should be selected and prioritized, there are to date only a few corroborated findings and virtually no qualified discussions. In the formulation of bid invitations for and the evaluation of school construction projects, for example, differentiated pedagogical-functional and emotional criteria are disappointingly absent as, in Europe at least, there exist no research institutes specialized in examining the relationship between pedagogy and architecture capable of compiling and making them available.

In **Part II**, the underlying causes of the previously indicated discrepancy between architectural and pedagogical models are sought after. According to a theory of Ernst Bloch, all the architectural styles in the European cultural sphere orient themselves either towards the utopian 'Crystal of Death', typified in the ancient Egyptian necropolis, or towards its polar opposite, the utopian 'Tree of Life', typified in the gothic cathedral. Viewed in relation to the human biography, the 'Crystal of Death' is connected with the idea of an afterlife spent in the realm of the dead while the 'Tree of Life' is bound with the theme of the triumph of life over death, i.e., with the notions of resurrection and/or (re-)birth. Following a presentation of the periodically reoccurring phenomenon of Egyptomania in architecture, running parallel to the 'fascination with death' in occidental philosophy and coupled with the simultaneous 'obliviation of death' as first noted by Hannah Arendt, the search for motifs representative of birth in the history of architecture allows a differentiated anthropological dimension to appear. The struggle to express an emerging level of consciousness, the full spectrum of which the author, following the work of Jean Gebser, sees as comprising archaic, magical, mythical, mental-rational and integral dimensions, is clearly linked to the birth of a new component in man's being which can itself be objectively experienced in the innovative architectural designs and structures of its corresponding age. The Greek temple is an expression of the vital or etheric body; the Roman bathhouse expresses the body of sensation; the early Christian baptistery expresses the individualized soul; the domed

constructions of the Renaissance express the ego, the 'I' of the expression of a new component, which the author terms the 'communal body'. The birth of the physical body in architecture represents a future task, the completion of which could manifest itself through the medium of birthing houses, kindergartens and public schools.

In **Part 3**, the most significant trends in architecture from the modern to deconstructivism are characterised according to their orientation relative to the polar models previously discussed. In the process, it becomes clear that another dichotomy is at work beneath the surface: architecture as an expression of power versus mundane or anonymous building. Whereas the former is dominated by the themes of death, spiritualization and eternity, the latter is guided by the notions of birth, materialization and changeability. The contemporary architecture of school buildings is also found to oscillate between these two utopian dreams. When viewed in relation to the human biography, however, the function of the school is more closely related to birth and mundane building and stands in a distinct opposition to the 'Crystal of Death'. Time and again, necrocentric languages of architecture have inspired architecture up to the modern and through to the present day. Natocentric languages of architecture have the task of providing a protective space in which children can enter an active, lively and reciprocal relationship with their bodies, their family members and their immediate environment. This task has hitherto been undertaken by anonymous public architects and only rudimentarily treated under theories of architecture.

In **Part 4**, which is directed primarily towards the future, questions are posed regarding the challenges and opportunities which present themselves to the planning and construction of public schools in light of global urbanisation and its attendant scarcity of space, time and natural resources, as well as in light of the increased blurring taking place between actual and virtual realities. What can an educational facility contribute to the process of children training their sensory organs and their neurological maps and connections in accordance with their biogenetic program so that they will be in a position to establish an open, attentive and sustainable relationship to themselves, to nature and to their actual environment?

The recent movement involving eco-villages may be an adequate form of self-help for especially sensitized and strong-willed individuals and couples. Viewed from a global perspective, however, the impoverishment of peripheral zones and the migration to metropolises, unless checked by radical reforms of our economical and financial systems, will continue unabated. It is to the children of these 'megacities' that the new models of school planning and construction are especially dedicated. The newly established and newly understood task of space allocation and spatial organization of public schools in a metropolitan milieu is given special treatment.

Drawing upon the discoveries made in Parts I and II, **Part 5** presents sources of inspiration for and models of a future architecture of public schools as the actual result of the present work. The school grounds become not only a sensorial, living and educative space, but also a designed experiential space embodying multileveled, differentiated processes of development in children, adolescents, teachers and administrators. A developmental space, in the planning and design of which all involved parties participate, becomes manifest.

In **Part 6**, the findings regarding the initially posed questions are again summarized and discussed. From this, valuable conclusions are drawn and recommendations regarding research on the relationship between pedagogy and architecture at both the strategic and the institutional levels are made. The work concludes with the refined, graphically visualized documentation of the most important axioms which serve as the foundation of the entire paper.