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What a Teacher requires of Architects

by Hanspeter Müller

Basing himself on his role as teacher, the author insists in the first instance on the fact that building a school is, above all, building for the future, for schools are expensive and cannot be renewed with that ease which is open to commercial undertakings in a time when the economy is flourishing. Now, building for the future, from the architect's point of view, is not simply identifying oneself with those who will make use of his work, whoever they may be, but means taking into account in advance the growing importance of technical progress, which is employed in teaching in the form of the tape recorder, the cinema and television, for instance; we can find other examples in lifts for the masters and invalid students or parking areas for cars, bicycles and motor-cycles. Any planning for the future must be as flexible as possible; this also holds good with respect to the various decorative elements. Too much preconceived order stifles the expansion of individual personality. Our open schools are the heirs in direct line of the French Revolution in its Jacobin form and they tend to insist on the equality of all before the law, before authority. But the world has evolved since that heroic age of the bourgeoisie triumphant. To take one from a number of examples, it has less and less need of workers engaged in standardized employment, who are being replaced by increasingly differentiated specialists. The school of today and the future must therefore see its mission in the formation of generations to come who will be able to think for themselves in those instances where private life acts as a brake upon the free development of individual autonomy. Let us make it our main task to democratize our schools. In this respect nothing is more desirable than the setting up of small creches and primary schools; for that matter, a grammar school should not number more than five or six hundred pupils. Let us bear in mind what there is to be learnt in Carl Weiss's "Sociological Instruction" and elaborate better conditions for group work; the example of the United States and Germany where each classroom has an annex for small groups engaged in collective work should be imitated. Extremely instructive, too, is the work carried out in Bremen under the aegis of Wilhelm Berger: the school must not be an intelligence manufactory, where the doors are closed after the day's work, but must act as a cultural centre for the district. Looked at in this way, the heart of a school is a "market" or "bazaar" serving everyone as a yard, a theatre, etc. These are all aims that can be attained by the architect only to the extent that he is energetic enough to transform the various representatives of the authorities who have given him the assignment into a team of moral collaborators.

Schönau Secondary School at St. Gall

1958/60. Architect: E. Brantschen FAS/SIA, St. Gall

This school comprises 18 standard classrooms, 2 art rooms and a number of other rooms for various subjects. It is intended to use the music room for public functions. The complex, which is set like a nipple at the top of a hill, can be reached from all sides and is formed of buildings grouped round an inner courtyard. In the centre there is a sycamore tree, which was there before the school, to act as a living presence in the very heart of the severe architectural forms. Great care has been taken in the planning of the music room as it has to serve as a place of ceremony and dignity. As regards the works of art required as decoration, it should be pointed out that the competition held subsequent to the construction of the school gives rise to certain reserves, general though this custom is. The point of a competition is to allow the works shown to remain provisionally anonymous; for the architect, however, nothing is more desirable than that he should know from the outset with which sculptor or painter he has to collaborate, so that he can arrange with him or her what has to be done.

College at Arlesheim

1959/61. Architects: W. Steib SIA, Basle, and A. Eichhorn SIA, Zurich; collaborator: O. Trottmann, architect, Arlesheim

In 1957 the commune of Arlesheim organized a competition for a project for a modern college combined with a hall seating 650, the complex to provide a new civic centre in this ever-increasing agglomeration. Of this complex it is the school in question that has been completed first as this was the order envisaged. The building as a whole is divided into three cubes; these present a rhythmic fluctuation of apertures and solid surfaces whose play externalizes the respective functions of the various rooms.

Bellach School

1959/60. Architects: B. Haller F. Haller FAS, Solothurn

This school in the suburbs of Solothurn is intended to serve all the primary classes and to act as a secondary school. It comprises a school building for 8 classes and another building for the gymnasium and various other rooms. All the walls within can be dismantled. A complementary building is envisaged.

Riedenhalle School Complex at Zurich-Affoltern

1957/59. Architects: R. Gross, H. Escher, FAS/SIA and R. Weilenmann FAS/SIA, Zurich

This complex comprises a primary school (6 years) and a secondary school (3 years), each with 12 classes, plus a gymnasium, a music room and the caretakers' flat. Number of pupils: approximately 850. The primary school consists of 6 small buildings, each containing 2 classrooms, whereas the secondary school is housed in a four-storey building. All classrooms receive daylight on either side. Sculpture by Hans Aeschbacher, tapestry by Regina Truninger.

The New School of Applied Art, Basle

1956/62. Architects: Hermann Baur FAS/SIA, Basle, Franz Bräuning FAS/SIA and Arthur Dürig FAS/SIA, Basle; collaborator: Hans Peter Baur FAS/SIA, Basle

The first project goes back to 1940 but was rejected in a vote as too expensive, whereas the expenditure finally undertaken is said to be twice as much (19 million). The initial idea—kept in the finished building—was in keeping with that of "parallel co-ordination", in which the tendency is to lend to the structure a total unity functionally articulated in conformity with the characteristics of the several buildings, it being borne in mind that in this school in Basle professional training is given in the crafts and in those subjects which come within the scope of applied art. The complex comprises 4 low-level sets of workshops, a 5-storey building for general instructional purposes and an 8-storey applied art building. The functional character of the various structures is patent, being adhered to with a rigour that is only relaxed in the case of the Great Hall and the masonry hall: form follows function.

Jean Arp's "Column of Interchangeable Elements"

by Maria Netter

Insofar as one sees it at the nerve centre of the Basle School of Applied Art, this sculptural work in the form of a column achieves that integration of the arts (in this case architecture and sculpture) which has so often been demanded and so often discussed. In virtue of this fact the author has no hesitation in acclaiming it a masterpiece on an international level. It may be said to be a symbol of the constructive and creative act proceeding from the elemental forms of the organic and stereometric world. This column is derived from a comparatively small work of 1955, itself composed of elements dating from 1928, and yet its pristine quality has something strikingly new about it. Regrets have been expressed that it was not carried out in a nobler material such as marble, but it is possible, on the other hand, to rate the material it is made of, concrete, more highly owing to the fact that it gains from being the same as that employed in the surrounding buildings.

"Sky Flower", Sculpture in Steel by Walter Linck

by A. Schulze Vellinghausen

In this sculptural work decorating the Steigerhubel school at Berne the artist has produced a mobile that obeys the wind and a motor, as if to show the pupils that technical means can also be invested with spirituality.