

Politics of Learning, Politics of Space
Architecture and the *Education Shock* of the 1960s and 1970s

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Politics of Space**

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Preface

The Covid-19 pandemic amply demonstrated the importance of the spatial dimension of learning. In the course of 2020, the longstanding neglect of educational facilities (public schools in particular)—so often lamented, so rarely overcome, and usually in the periphery of the public eye—abruptly moved center stage. To meet health requirements and hygiene protocols, the scene of learning had to be transformed in an incredibly short time frame. The spatial organization of schools, from preschools to universities, usually goes unnoticed. Suddenly what was always taken for granted assumed hypervisibility as a crisis of spatiality.

Pushed by the pandemic, the functionality and dysfunctionality of built environments, technological infrastructures, and geospatial realities of learning came to the fore. Digital learning tools and online classes, long waiting to be deployed on a larger scale, were now activated as a way out of the potential dangers of physical presence and face-to-face contact. Physical distancing had to be enforced where gestural vivacity and verbal exchange in proximity to others—students and educators—are indispensable to the learning process and to behavioral and intellectual development.

Not surprisingly, the consequences of the closings and the transfer to online instruction are suffered particularly painfully by millions of students around the world without (stable) Internet connections or sufficient private space for classwork and studying. Locked in their rooms, if they have one of their own, students struggle with remote teaching material, often lacking the necessary computer equipment and support. Economical inequalities and ethnic and racial divides revealed themselves even more starkly when, in many places, the private educational sector opened its schools in advance of the public-school system to enable in-person education for the affluent.

Many of the current debates concerning learning and teaching environments, physical and virtual, echo those of the 1960s and 1970s, the “Education Shock” era, which constitutes the subject of a long-term research project and resulting exhibition. Openness and flexibility, integration and desegregation, accessibility and participation have been among the values pursued in the thinking, planning, and experiencing of educational spaces. But the Education Shock decades also proved to be a time of experimentation: with the dispersal of the classroom into extramural realities new communication media, and with charter and free schools, elements of the “new normal” today were foreshadowed fifty years ago.

To engage the long post-Sputnik-crisis decades, with their particular conjuncture of new models of learning, politics, and architecture, was the objective of the 2016–2017 exhibition “Learning Laboratories: Architecture, Instructional Tech-

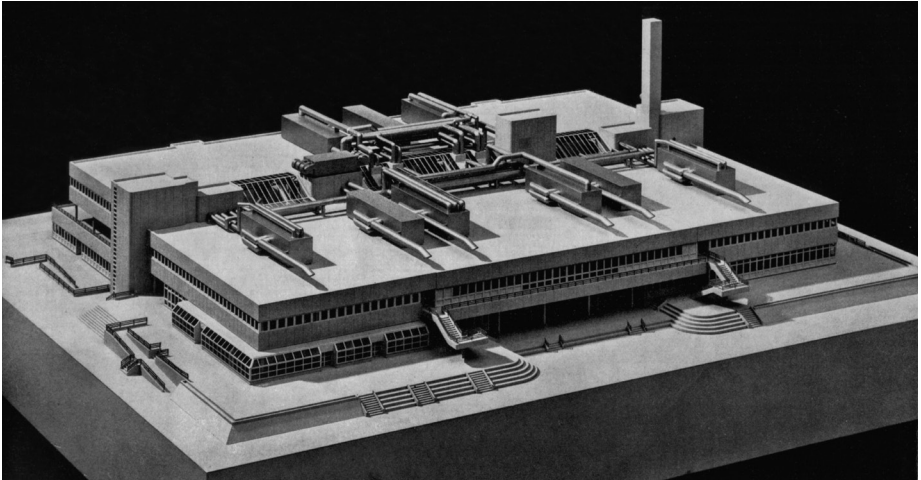
nology, and the Social Production of Pedagogical Space around 1970” at basis voor actuele kunst (BAK) in Utrecht, a first step toward “Education Shock: Learning, Politics, and Architecture in the 1960s and 1970s” at Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW), in Berlin.

This small book complements *Bildungsschock. Lernen, Politik und Architektur in den 1960er und 1970er Jahren*, a resource volume of the eponymous research and exhibition project at HKW. In the absence of a comprehensive English publication on the *Bildungsschock* project, a collection of writings on an assortment of aspects pertaining to the edu-spatialities of the 1960s and 1970s seemed apt to provide some navigational aid. A substantially expanded version of the introductory essay of the *Bildungsschock* publication constitutes its core, supplemented by three shorter, previously published and revised essays, which serve as extended footnotes to the primary text.

Without the support of HKW and the willingness of De Gruyter this rather spontaneously drafted supplementary publication would not have been possible. To carry it into its present form I relied on the competence and cooperation of many colleagues and friends. At HKW, Agnes Wegner, Marleen Schröder, Lena Reuter, and Janne Hagge Ellhöft provided crucial assistance on many fronts; Lina Grumm and Annette Lux at HIT Studio designed the cover and the layout of the book; the indispensable editorial diligence of Leah Whitman-Salkin improved the texts substantially; *e-flux Architecture*’s Nick Axel and Nikolaus Hirsch have been very generous offering me the environment for some of these forays into the territories of architectural and educational history; and, crucially, the numerous experts, scholars, artists, educators, and students who contributed to and participated in the *Bildungsschock* project, without whom hardly any of the ideas presented here would have been possible.

Berlin, October 2020

Open Plan and Limited Access: The Embattled Classrooms of the 1960s and 1970s



PBZ – Planungsgruppe Bildungszentren, scale model for a secondary school building typology in West Berlin, Germany, 1972

Archive of Experiments

How can the history of education be told as a global story? And what kind of history would that be if it were primarily concerned with the spatialities and geographies, the architectures and infrastructures of learning? These two questions guide and structure the project *Education Shock*. Collaborative research, speculation, and artistic research are the methods of choice for addressing them.

To draw together the terms “education” and “shock” seems paradoxical at first. Rather than create lifelong traumas, shouldn’t education, according to a venerable, traditional understanding, enable (through the transmission of knowledge, judgment, empathy, etc.) the student to lead a life as a citizen and to work in a profession? The semantics and etymology of the very German concept of *Bildung* (only insufficiently translatable as “education”) are multivalent to the extreme. They carry aesthetic meanings of plastic and plasticity, of image and imaginability, of the self-cultivation documented in the *Bildungsroman*. And, let’s not forget, the German word is only two letters away from *building*. What’s more, besides such visual and spatial aspects, it’s only a short leap from *Bildung* to *development*.¹

In the nineteenth century, the concept of *Bildung* began to replace earlier, feudalistic, pre-bourgeois types of entitlement and status. However, in its more modern and policy-related meanings, *Bildung* transcends the realm of the individual and pertains to the general terrain of education.² From a certain sociological point of view, the term has provided the educational system with the means to “respond

to the loss of external (social, role-based) indicators to what the individual is or will be.”³

For this reason, Bildung (and education, for that matter) has long held institutional connotations, while the *Bildungssystem* (education system), according to an essentially Western understanding, denotes the totality of public and private facilities intent on forming, training, and qualifying children’s and adults’ preparedness to participate in the economic, political, and cultural proceedings of a society. This said, such a system may produce a shocking effect—for example, when it propels individuals and collectives out of their familiar environments, communal fabrics, and accustomed workplaces, and surely wherever it performs a colonizing function, being put in place to impose universalist ideas of knowledge and personhood, thereby yielding alienation and oppression.

On the other hand, the education system itself can be pushed to the limits of its capacity, can become shock afflicted—when it has to expand unexpectedly and in a very short time, for example. Shocks of both kinds could be observed in the 1960s and 1970s. And this twofoldness was initiated and accompanied by additional shocks: the shock of the Sputnik crisis (*Sputnikschock* in German), the “future shock” (diagnosed by journalists and futurologists in the late 1960s), the *choc pétrolier* (or “oil crisis” of 1973), and others.

Focusing on a period of roughly twenty-five years—beginning around 1957 and ending in the early 1980s—the Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW)-based research and exhibition endeavor *Education Shock* conceives the “long” 1960s and 1970s as an archive of past futures, unfinished projects, abandoned experiments, and forgotten but hugely impactful education reforms. While engaging these essential temporal dimensions, *Education Shock* attends mainly to the spaces and spatialities where education as a pedagogical practice took shape and place, became reconfigured, and where the national (and often transnational) systems of education materialized. Monuments in the shape of Brutalist campuses or open-plan schools, these systems were, however, increasingly confronted and challenged by social and political movements that sought to escape the limiting spatial and pedagogical conditions of mass education. All over the world, radical alternatives that pursued integration and decolonization struggled to find liberating and self-determined ways of pedagogical place-making.

Making accessible this archive of political, architectural, and pedagogical designs and counter-designs hopefully renders tangible and sensible its value as a resource—a resource of materials and tools with which to think and act within and alongside currently existing spaces and temporalities of education, as well as for the political debates and pedagogical practices that aim at rebuilding, if not

overhauling, learning environments that fail to meet the requirements of a given moment.

There are not only examples of best practices in this archive. On the contrary, attempts by those during the global Cold War who sought to make education accessible to an ever-increasing number of people, while expanding it to ever more areas of the social fabric and everyday life, included ample contradictions, aberrations, and failures. Nevertheless, a far-reaching political endorsement of the notion of learning, from above and below, on governmental and grassroots levels, could be discerned around the world. It went beyond the development-aid model of training-based learning, which the radical educator Paulo Freire rejected in favor of creativity and self-empowerment.⁴ There was indeed a widely shared imperative to raise individual and collective levels of education.

This urge to elevate entire populations' skills and knowledge pointed to fundamental transformations of political systems, technological environments, and modes of social and economic reproduction. It was evident in the literacy campaigns in the Global South as well as in the proclaimed activation of untapped *Bildungsreserven* (educational reserves) in the Global North; in the polytechnic secondary schools of the Soviet Union and its allies, such as Poland, Czechoslovakia, and the German Democratic Republic (GDR); in the progressivist experiments with social forms and architectural designs in model welfare states such as the Netherlands or those in Scandinavia; and in the numerous new universities and reforms of higher and secondary education in the United Kingdom, Italy, and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). The zeal for educational reform was also tangible in the fierce commitment of radical pedagogues, students, and architects who opposed the continued existence of institutions of formal education and their architectural casings, while testing alternatives. In many respects, restorative and radical, authoritarian and antiauthoritarian educational stances resembled each other in the 1960s and 1970s, insofar as they both awarded education an absolute primacy.

To what extent this prioritization of education manifested in political and spatial terms is one of the guiding questions of *Education Shock*. What kind of theories and programs—of generative and rote learning, of empowering and disciplining pedagogies—have informed the design and use of classrooms, school buildings, campuses, as well as other learning environments of the 1960s and 1970s? How did educational and spatial politics interact and intersect, be it on the actual site of learning and teaching or on the scale of national and geopolitical educational planning? And what about the materialization of contested spatial concepts such as desegregation, integration, access, or participation?

Pretty straightforward answers to these questions were given by physical architecture—by spatial objects such as kindergartens, playgrounds, schools, universities, libraries, and research institutes, which in the 1960s and 1970s were designed and produced in unprecedented numbers. In Western Europe and North America most of these buildings resulted from public contracts awarded in often elaborate and lengthy competitions and tenders (albeit sometimes in a rush). In the Soviet Union and other countries of the Communist bloc, as different as the mechanisms of competition and commission may have been, the archives likewise contain huge numbers of designs left unrealized.

Often applications were submitted by architects and design teams who were on their way to international renown, as the explosive expansion of the educational realm provided ample opportunity to plan and build. All too customary in the trade, only a few women architects took part in these competitions and building schemes. Still, most of the women involved in the planning and production of educational spaces, among other spaces, have gone uncredited and unrecognized. Those who have been named include Urmila Eulie Chowdhury, Gira Sarabhai, Milica Čolak-Antić Krstić, Jane Drew, Maria do Carmo Matos, Mary Medd, Lucy Hillebrand, Ruth Golan, Sibylle Kriesche, Leonie Rothbarth, Guiti Afrouz Kardan, Josefina Rebellón, and Zohreh Ghara Gosloo.⁵ Their male colleagues, many of whom are far more prominent, in both senses of the word, include Hans Scharoun, Pier Luigi Nervi, Giancarlo De Carlo, Vittorio Gregotti, Herman Hertzberger, Maxwell Fry, Arthur Erickson, Arie Sharon, Oscar Niemeyer, Alfred Roth, Walter Gropius, João Batista Vilanova Artigas, Günter Behnisch, Ludwig Leo, Thomas Vreeland, Cedric Price, John Bancroft, James Stirling, Norman Foster, and Jean Nouvel.

Architects frequently specialized in educational architecture. A case in point is Hugh Stubbins, the Cambridge, Massachusetts-based architect of the Congress Hall in Berlin, HKW's building and the site of the *Education Shock* exhibition. Besides this landmark Cold War building, which from the outset was to embody a particular Modernist, ostensibly universalist Western idea of education, Stubbins designed numerous schools and colleges in the United States—as early as 1963, the magazine *Progressive Architecture* reported on more than twenty-five school buildings by Stubbins's firm in the Boston area alone.⁶

However, while architectural spaces figure as a major subject for discussion and investigation, *Education Shock* is not a project primarily about school and university architecture, nor is it in any way committed to maintaining the canon of great names and historical-building culture. Reluctant with regard to solely aesthetic, formal readings of their respective values or misgivings, the project's interests veer more toward spatial politics that pursue functionality independent of a particular architect's signature. Attending to the spatial production of education—



School built via a modular construction system, Morocco, 1960s

the building of *Bildung*—in terms of the numerous histories of education politics, rather than those of architectural history, *Education Shock* proposes a somewhat undisciplined perspective on the intersections of planning, design, and social struggle. The project is also an attempt to pay tribute and do justice to the scholarly and activist work of feminist, anti-racist, decolonial, indigenous, and disability politics pertaining to the spatial production of education, inside and outside of academia.

Staying within the realm of architecture proper for a moment, it is important to recognize the impact that typological structures, modular mass-produced goods, and prefabricated constructions had on spaces of learning.⁷ They arguably had far greater influence on the everyday life of the steadily growing number of students than iconic school buildings did. The former are often open structures made of simple local materials, such as those built for the experimental schools of the poor and illiterate in the Natal district of northeastern Brazil in the early 1960s;⁸ school buildings in the intermediary period between colonial and postcolonial planning, as in the new urban settlements in Ghana and Nigeria in the 1960s;⁹ a seemingly bucolic campus of green spaces and pavilions, like the “city of pioneers” in a park on the outskirts of Zagreb, a site of pedagogical experiments from the 1950s until the early 1960s;¹⁰ school building systems, like those built nationwide in the 1960s by the Ministries of Education in Mexico and Morocco to promote literacy;¹¹ or the 1970s prefab buildings of the *Escuelas Secundaria Básica en el Campo*, which were intended to support literacy in rural Cuba.¹²