

HOCHSCHULE
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BUILDING FOR

ARCHITEKTURPÄDAGOGIKEN
LUCERNE TALKS

ARCHITECTURE EDUCATION



PARK BOOKS

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PREFACE

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FREE SPACE

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Lucerne Talks opens up a space for critical public discussion on architecture education. Students, faculty, and administrative staff of Switzerland's architecture schools assemble every two years to voice their concerns about the status quo of design pedagogy, the goal being to identify ways of transforming curricula in view of the future vocation of architects and their role in society. With the supposition of equality, all in attendance have a say; everyone participates at eye level; nothing is beyond question.

Inspired by the well-known photograph of a packed student and faculty rally in the atrium of the architecture school at the University of São Paulo, the 2019 *Lucerne Talks* symposium entitled "Building for Architecture Education" focused on the physical settings in which architects are educated as distinct places of learning, teaching, and research. In what spaces should the study of architecture be housed? How might user-interaction with the architectural environment enhance a school's pedagogical vision? And, equally important, to what degree can the university as a site of knowledge production more innovatively engage the broader social and cultural spaces in which it is situated?

At issue in addressing such questions is how much has to be predetermined when specifying the physical framework for architecture education, and whether buildings dedicated to this purpose could not be more open in allowing for indeterminacy of use and unforeseen appropriation. Among the many ideas voiced in the name of freeing up the very spaces in which architecture is conventionally taught, learned, and thus reproduced as convention, what rang out was the call for an unconditional (and unconditioned) spatial surplus worked into the armature of an educational environment. Freed space, it was argued, might free architecture—and architects—from the normative preoccupation with limiting conditions.

The publication of this record of debates coincides with the unexpected onset of a pandemic that has dispersed architecture education (and any other fields of study) far beyond the commons of the campus, in essence reframing the entire discussion about education as a situated, place-based cultural practice. Even though students and teachers are clamoring to get back to school as soon as possible, one wonders if the university of the near-future will require dedicated buildings at all, or whether some unexplored hybrid models might be devised to bridge the gaps between an absolutely local university and the default global university of remotely isolated faculties and stu-

dents. And the role of architecture in these educational models still to come will no doubt be a quintessential issue of design.

This transformative turn of events notwithstanding, the importance of discourse has hardly subsided, as the name of the symposia underscores. Accordingly, the format of this publication is structured around dialogues between participants of the most recent *Lucerne Talks*, each picking up a particular thread of the discussion about building for architecture education. These “talks” are accompanied by essays that intervene on the debate with related perspectives on the future of the university and its associated architecture. What results is a “polylogue” reflecting on the material forms that an architecture of architecture education might take under new and pressing circumstances.

ESSAYS

10-83

SOME KIND OF HYPOTHESIS ABOUT THE WEAK BUILDING



Directors of The Weak Building Architecture School,
Prof. Johannes Käferstein, Dr. Adam Jasper

JOHANNES KÄFERSTEIN: *What is a university?*

ADAM JASPER: A visitor makes a campus visit, and their guide takes them on a tour. First the library, the sports center, some research facilities, then some lecture halls. At the end of a long tour, the guide asks, "Well, what do you think?" And the visitor says, "I'm somewhat disappointed." "Why?" responds the surprised guide. "You promised to show me the university," the visitor says, "and all I saw was a bunch of buildings."

Historical schools

AJ: A lot of the earliest schools are named after the way teaching was physically arranged. Plato's academy was a garden. The peripatetic school of Aristotle was named after the covered walkways where discussions took place. The same is true of the stoics, named after the stoa, the colonnade they hung out under. Philosophy was done in a space both sheltered and public. During the counter-reformation, speculative thinking had to go underground, which is how you end up with institutions like Giambattista della Porta's Accademia dei Segreti, or Academy of the Mysteries of Nature, which met in secret in the caverns below Naples. None of the early societies of science had the kind of spaces we associate with education and research. What they had, though, were rituals. Rituals for beginning and ending meetings, for keeping secrets, or for recalling principles. Rituals that new members had to go through, in order to feel a part of the institutions they were joining. All the early schools were kind of like cults.

Rituals

JK: Throw your mind back to the first days of your studies. When you arrived at the institution, whether it was a university or a polytechnic, what it offered was a kind of freedom, a series of new horizons, of things to learn, and people to meet. But most importantly, you were freed from your high-school identity. You could slough your pre-adult skin. All the awkwardness of high school could be shaken off. At least in theory.

AJ: But identity is never a vacuum. Shaking off your old self was the first step in developing a new self, and this happens with the help of all the small rituals of the school. From small talk before class up to the stress of exams, the school constantly provided you with cues with which you could determine how you were doing, if you belonged, and where you were headed.

JK: For some institutions, it is important to be able to "see" yourself as a group. This was the importance of the graduation photograph, or the yearbook, of processions and assemblies. But this can also be done virtually, through names, logos, or just private self-identification.

The walled garden

AJ: On a campus, there is no single building that you could point to and say, *there* is the institution, like in the case of the disappointed visitor. Rather, what defines the campus are all the things that are not there. For instance, your parents and family aren't there (except on graduation day). It's not a place for shopping. Everyone around you is more or less your equal. Even the power of your teachers is, in many ways, only a shadow of the power of an employer.

JK: The campus is kind of a place of asylum, or more exactly, a kind of *hortus conclusus*, or walled garden, where the everyday is put on hold, in order that other things can take place.

AJ: Those "other things," those events, do not need to be defined in advance. The need for an atmosphere of seclusion, or exclusivity, is one of the reasons why the sites of former prisons or psychiatric hospitals can make very good art schools.

What is a studio?

JK: A studio is a bubble in the school in which even more is excluded than on the campus as a whole. The studio is the center of the architecture school. It runs hot. A good studio culture runs at all hours. When you are in the studio, you live and breathe your projects, as does everyone else around you. There is no such thing as work/life balance. Students sleep under their desks before submissions. It's a kind of torture that forges the group. It can run for weeks like that, but of course it is unsustainable. At a certain point, people need to break apart again.

AJ: It's the studio culture that is in crisis right now.

JK: Up until now, if you didn't have a studio to create a kind of focus, you could turn to a schedule, or a strict timetable, to generate a feeling of community. But with online teaching, that's not completely persuasive either. It's no longer easy to make a case for starting a lecture at eight in the morning, and expecting everyone to "attend" it. A new culture of community has to be negotiated!

The cloud

AJ: Knowledge is now a kind of cloud that you have access to.

JK: That cloud is growing, and moving.

AJ: But the studio is extremely local.

JK: It could be in New Glarus or in Hong Kong.

AJ: The important thing is the intensity of interaction.

JK: And we also need to know what the other studios do.

AJ: There needs to be exchange, and sometimes competition.

The atelier

AJ: As a substitute for the studio, there is always the atelier. Especially now, as retail is collapsing, there is a possibility for architecture students to move into shopfronts, and to form their small groups there. The idea of the atelier as a kind of salon has a history at least as old as the idea of the Beaux Arts academy. Take, for example, the "*Privatgesellschaft*" that figures like Friedrich Gilly and Karl Friedrich Schinkel developed within. These were small, private clubs of architects who came together to solve problems. And there are also contemporary examples of breakaway, self-organized groups that are really good at educating themselves, and each other. But such projects, that run on fumes and enthusiasm, are not always sustainable. They're at their best when they *don't* last forever. But institutions serve their members when they have long-term prospects.

The flipped classroom

JK: The idea of the "flipped classroom" has gotten a lot of press. Imagine that there is no physical institution anymore. The idea would be that lectures, the entire curriculum, could be gathered online. The content could be universally available. But problem-solving (which has previously been imagined as solitary "homework") is something that we come together to solve. Where could that place of problem-solving be?

The weak building

AJ: A hypothesis is, quite literally, a kind of "weak thought," an idea that is not, on its own, totally persuasive, but needs to be fitted out with evidence. A hypothesis leads to research, and to tests. Can a school be like a kind of hypothesis—let's call it "the weak building": on its own, it is not a convincing architecture school.

JK: Perhaps it is a repurposed building of a different type.

AJ: It might be an office building, a prison (like the National Art School in Sydney) . . .

JK: A Georgian townhouse (as in the case of the Architectural Association (AA) School of Architecture in London), a turbine hall (like Winterthur, near Zurich).

AJ: It is not a school of any kind until it has been activated by the students. They transform it into the school, and they are conscious that they cannot be passive. The moment that they stop *making*, the school will collapse. It must always be sliding into ruin.

JK: The AA is a good example of such a weak building. It is both far too much, and far too little. It is too little in that it is too small, too cramped, and constantly needs to be adapted. But it also offers a tremendous variety of spaces. There's the staircase, which everyone uses, and which is far too narrow. The workshops, and some of the intermediate studios,

are in what feels like the basement. It's austere down there. And then you go up, and you have the luxury of carpeted rooms, real drawing rooms, surviving antique fittings. But everything gets repainted, quickly, every year, for the grad show. No inch is precious, because every inch gets used.

AJ: And within the weak building, you have some strong types.

Strong types

AJ: Even a loose building needs to do some things really well. The library, for instance, needs to be strong. The AA library is not huge, but it is probably the biggest space in the building. On the walls are books, and in the middle are the tables. People just go there to read, but it is an amazing atmosphere.

JK: We're coming back to types. The library. The café. The bar. It's just a few spaces that make the school.

AJ: The bar is a space to get drunk, if you had a bad review, or get love-sick. But it is also a place that alumni from all over the world would come to get drunk, and meet each other.

JK: And then there is the workshop, in which people have to be able to think with their hands. Those spaces are not flexible, they have to do that one thing particularly well. The library as a place for communal concentration, the bar as a place for random encounters. Such functions are indispensable.

AJ: *What kind of hypothesis is this?*

JK: We're totally conservative! I started the discussion—especially with you—hoping that by the end of the conversation the architecture school wouldn't exist anymore.

AJ: And we haven't ended up with an archetypal school, or some kind of school of archetypes. It can also be imagined as a kind of monastery on a hill. You have to undertake a kind of pilgrimage in order to get there.