



DRIENDL*ARCHITECTS

Austrian School Budapest
Senior highschool
Orban Hegyi Ut. , Budapest / Ungarn
2001
Reinforced concrete skeleton, low energy house,
recycling of rain water

The Austrian School in Budapest is an obviously contemporary, open, light-flooded glass appliance that slides up beside a banal school building dating from the 19th century. The project is planned as a three-wing building placed on an approximately north-south axis. The side-wings are occupied by classrooms, teacher's offices and a stairway on the west-side. The side-wings are more bulky, whereas the middle section of the building containing hallways, toilets and elevators for handicapped students is more narrower. The uncovered concrete surfaces are most dominant in the middle section, which is the solid core of the building. The structures get lighter towards the front walls. The central core is a 3 storey-high hall which is completely glazed. It is also where the roof plates meet (they jut out above the wall surfaces, which make them appear light).

The logic of the arrangement is that architectural structures get lighter towards the facades. Parallel to this, the floor space of the various sections gets bigger and bigger as one approaches the external world through the front walls. This is a highly symbolic architectural path connecting school and life. It is the result of a future-oriented approach, in contrast with the isolating tendency in traditional school buildings. Partly due to this gesture, and partly for the purpose of loosening up the tube-like central section, the roof structures behind the steel-supported glass facade open into each other, creating an atrium. It is a smart solution that the elevator shaft has a glass wall in the direction of the facade with the atrium, following the opening-up-from-inside arrangement and showing the mechanism of the elevator in full.

The classrooms are large, with full-height windows letting in much light, shaded by sturdy aluminium lamellas in three rows on the sunny side, together with galvanized-lattice passage galleries, the first layer of an enthrallingly new-constructivist frontal composition. The classroom partition walls do not run solid up to the curtain wall plane, but connect to it via a window section. Another window, at the top, makes the connection to the ceiling, and yet another, above the inward-reaching wide reinforced concrete frieze, in the direction of the corridor. This gives a feeling of openness and transparency.

The building itself is a low energy house with several environmentally conscious features, unusual in Hungary, such as the recycling of rain water. The balconies in front of the classrooms (this is probably the only school in the county where classrooms have balconies) are not only a very popular place for students to take their brakes, they also make the rooms seem wider and – due to the two balcony doors – provide a special ventilation system.

As a result of all this it is no surprise that most of the pupils of the senior high school feel extremely well in this building. According to the headmaster, the new building has increased the delight in learning to an unbelievable extent, a fact also confirmed in the school exams.

A Magic Cube

The contrast is extreme: an obviously contemporary, open, light-flooded glass appliance slides up beside a banal school building dating from the 19th century. Georg Driendl decided to formulate his Austrian School in Budapest as part of an architectural discussion that is not conducted in Hungary.

STEPHAN TEMPL / ARCHITEKTUR.AKTUELL 5/2002

“...the new school lays beside the old one like a granny in her grey coat, with her punk-grandchild next to her, colourful, full of metal fittings.. “

Bojár Iván András / Népszabadság
Budapest, 14.11.2001

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Zeros and ones
Chaos and beyond
the Budapest Austrian School building

Text by: Istvan Musai

By looking at the faces of the passengers, it is possible to identify the moment when the 21 bus goes past the new Austrian foundation school: everybody's head turns. The sight is arresting. Mixed feelings and emotions spring forth, an ambivalence with roots going back to the nineteen twenties – and going forward, into the future, via the temporal non-linearity of Architecture. The Bauhaus building debased to the property market level of the Adidas shoe is a saleable item among inventors that do not like the sight of wood, or that are perhaps in search of purer spaces. It is a style has been rewarmed as an alternative to post-modern stuttering, its representatives typically picking up some of the formal elements with a false reverence that results in pizza-architecture. A fake, fossilised Bauhaus. In the seventy years that have passed, the rhythm of the world has changed fundamentally. If we went back to the nineteen twenties and projected an action film from today, the audience would find it impossible to follow purely because of its speed. "Static architecture is a kind of constructivist prison of the white man" argued Johannes Itten in his 1921 essay, "Contrast and movement" on the White Man's House. He later had a scrap with Gropius over it. Acceleration has taken its place as a device in the arts. Video arts and the use of the computer has intruded on serenity.

To disdain CAD and computers now is to be cut off from the possibilities that have diffused into our brains at synaptic level from constant exposure to the digital world, pervading the new philosophy of everyday life.

The equipment for dynamic picture creation consists of layers, webcams, monitoring.

Copy, Save and Delete. We are in the age of copyability, visual emotional manipulation and permanent monitoring, the age of the distinct binary morals of zeros and ones. György Kepes (born 1906, painter, designer, photographer, teacher in the North American Bauhaus) wrote in his book *Language of Vision*, that we are now living beyond chaos.. "Inherited visual language has fossilised events by means of a static system of signs. The revolution in the visual arts has restored a dynamic approach to us in the realm of the sense. These structures must, without abandoning the qualities of visual austerity, expand to absorb the images, charged with significance, of concrete social experience... this goal will only be achieved when art one again lives in "It might just be possible to pick up the threads of art- and architecture-history that became broken and lost in one regime, perhaps by hypothetical reconstruction of the all-arts thinking of Bauhaus (or even de Stijl) via an unbroken evolutionary process where political forces did not cause a break. Maybe, but only by proper understanding of painting, design, architecture and music. By a renaissance man, or an Artistic Architect or Architectural Artist. Sure foundations are essential to improvisation.

And to original creation. New creation must precede the NOW moment that moves along the time axis according to our clock. It must be possible, via the structure, to see and feel what is coming a good few years before the design is made. If it is still interesting when the building is completed, then something has really been "done". A criterion of great architectural work is that it requires some "understanding time" after completion. It may even give rise to a new rhythm. But in every case, for its beauties to be appreciated, the work has to be served up with its new values wrapped in universal proportions. It must have a universal system of proportion deriving from primitive consciousness, it must resemble "something", something beautiful, so that even a guest worker coming down the hill on a 21 bus grunts his berry but genuine appreciation. Among critics and the profession, then, the new school building will generate more myopic jealousy than praise, because it goes beyond the visible boundaries of present domestic reality. It is a radical and courageous building. So an outsider can do what he likes?

The architect picked out by the Austrian School Foundation for the job, Georg Driendl, chose a co-architect – at the suggestion of Hans Knoll, the proprietor of the Knoll Galleries – Andras Bordas, who completed artistic studies in Vienna in the Eighties. They also brought their friend Pal Paulin (who spent several years in the US) into the work. Submitted with a fine set of visualisation plans, the design dazzled the chief architect of the district, Gyulane Kaldi, whose insight and understanding was much appreciated by the architects. The plans were passed and the building was constructed by contractors Herosz Rt. Andras Bordas is a modest man, and estimated the success level of the house at 80%, just like the designers of the German school featured in the previous issue. This new school was built on a flat site,

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occupied by the already successfully running Austro-Hungarian elementary school, in symbiosis with the Austrian School Foundation. It is also joined physically, by the shard gymnasium, to the old four-storey neo-classicist building, which has gained a first-floor running terrace for the younger children, who will be playing spacemen on the critically wide-meshed gallery extension. The new building has a very simple layout. Its central corridor is perpendicular to the main entrance on Orbanhegyi ut. The classrooms, staff rooms, music rooms and library are arranged along each side of this corridor. The first sight on entering the ground floor is the student and staff WC block in the middle of the corridor, which passes through it like a yellow neon stripe. With its doors open, they take up half of the corridors on each side, education those passing through them to a Zen state of unwavering attention. The interior materials are highly varied: the bare concrete staircase, plastered surfaces, industrial wooden flooring, horizontal larch panelling, eggshell grey ceramic and variably-laid bare clinker brick, lending an visual-tactile individuality to the surfaces.

The classrooms are large, with full-height windows letting in much light, shaded by sturdy aluminium lamellas in 3 rows on the sunny side, together with galvanised-lattice passage galleries, the first layer of an enthrallingly new-constructivist (or proportionalist?) frontal composition. The classroom partition walls do not run solid up to the curtain wall plane, but connect to it via a window section. Another window, at the top, makes the connection to the ceiling, and yet another, above the inward-reaching wide reinforced concrete frieze, in the direction of the corridor. Giving fine opportunities for ogling, as well as the feeling of openness and transparency. The might have copied from there for the buildings of the Dessau Bauhaus teachers, like Klee's studio. The right-hand teaching wing is much shorter, so that the plane of the corridor reaches the full height of the curtain wall, making a fortunate opening from the closed corridors, and avoiding the corner of the turn-of-the-century building that would otherwise be a little too closer. The honesty of the structures is such that the lift could be a teaching model of its own operation. The interesting floor structure was inspired by the bubble sheeting places in the shuttering panels. Very coarse and very fine materials, the aluminium sliding doors and the music room, the bare concrete and visible welds. The basic Buckminster Fuller prison building type has given rise to a more friendly "school machine", apt to set off utopian analogies, to stand as a model, showing the time digitally. Its functionality is thorough: the atrium is designed as a passive solar chamber, the lungs of the building, the ventilation system. The water collector basins under the enormous gutters of the curved, inward-sloping roofs are no self-indulgence either: the rainwater will be used to flush the toilets. Andras Bordas talked somewhat regretfully of his desire to have used the Kerto laminated wood structural frame instead of metal, as was later brought to Hungary by the architects of the new German-Hungarian school, but it was not fulfilled. Nonetheless, the proportions of the materials are kept in balance in each room, the warm brick covering and the pine working very well. As for the execution, it is of course easier to throw up an average office building than a real work of architecture, full of difficult-to decode artistic references...

There always comes a breaking point when the contractor, however professional and well-intentioned, finds it all too much and, squeezed by the constraints of feasibility, takes independent decisions. But the resulting aesthetic dissonances serve to highlight the harmonious parts. Like the heavy white radiators in the corridors. These visible minor gaffs are insignificant alongside the effect of the building as a whole. This is the first completed public building for decades that has produced a true synthesis between contemporary art and architecture. Its frontages are structuralist, neoconstructivist spatial compositions that in two dimensions would have given satisfaction to Piet Mondrian or Theo van Doesburg. The multiple planes, the "layers" produce constantly-changing lights and shadows, reflections and transparencies, proclaiming the birth of a new architectural concept: the dynamic frontage.