

TOWARD A REDISCOVERY OF 'FEMININE' PRINCIPLES IN ARCHITECTURE AND PLANNING

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Synopsis—Women in most societies were the original builders. Nowhere appears the loss suffered as a result of the suppression of women and the degradation of feminine principles, by society as a whole, as blatantly obvious as in our built environment.

Based on my own experiences and observations as an architect, as well as historic and so-called 'anonymous' examples of an architecture shaped by women, and studies related to genetic, social, and psychological sex differences, it seems safe to suggest that there would be a significant difference between an environment shaped by women, female values and priorities, and our present environment shaped mainly by men, male values and priorities.

This article deals with seven hypotheses. It defines male and female principles in architecture, suggests traits of an alternative architecture shaped by women and discusses some of the main barriers and more recent opportunities which would allow women to rediscover, accept and design according to their specific goals, needs and priorities.

What I am trying to outline here is a new way of looking at architecture based on an identification of 'male' and 'female' principles and their respective chance for implementation. My hope is that this outlook will—like a new pair of glasses—help us to focus and see more clearly one aspect of the present day predicament and crisis of architecture which so far has not been analyzed: the different values and priorities with which men and women tend to relate to architecture.

Architecture and other fields in science and technology have traditionally been considered 'neutral' in respect to sex and gender. Or they have been considered to be the traditional domain of men to such an extent that women have appeared as exotic intruders in the field who would have to expect some difficulties in adjustment. In the architectural field this view has only recently been challenged.

In the studies of architectural history, in general, there is no mention of the fact that women in nearly all the early civilizations have been the original builders (Cole, 1973; Torre, 1977; Reiter, 1975). Nor do we learn that they still fulfill the same role in many so-called developing countries.

Architecture, however, in addition to being a reflection of the technical achievements of a given time also reflects its individual and social priorities and values. If a society is militaristic or technology-oriented, its buildings and cities will reflect this stance: if a society values feelings and emotions, its buildings will elaborate that sensibility (Birkby, 1980). Since building has become a specialized activity dominated by men and male values the result is a growing discrepancy between real social and psychological needs and the planned and built environment.

The shape which an architecture might take in response to female priorities and values cannot be described with certainty. There are, however, some examples of so-called

anonymous architecture as well as some built examples from female architects which speak another language and suggest that there would be a significant difference between an environment shaped mainly by men and male values and an environment shaped mainly by women and female values. In order to provide a basis for discussion of this hypothesis I have recently edited a double issue of *Bauwelt* (No. 31/32, August 24, 1979) in which I have tried to include the evidence available for different architectural approaches by women as designers and builders as seen in history, psychology, archeology, sociology, political science and modern architecture. It presents to the German reader for the first time a summary of the work Paola Coppola Pignatelli has done in order to define what she calls an 'alternative spatial logic'. Based on a comprehensive socio-historic analysis of the use of spaces by man, as a warrior and hunter, who experienced space as an unlimited resource and woman as a producer and home-maker, who experienced space as a practically limited resource, she defines a cartesian abstract relationship to space which is more closely linked to the male perception, and a phenomenological relationship which is more closely linked to the female perception (Coppola Pignatelli, 1979).

The importance of this analysis is shown in respect to its applicability to different design approaches today. Thus Pignatelli observes that women tend to design from inside out beginning with the functions of a building and ending with its form, while men often tend to proceed in the opposite way. This observation coincides with my own experience during my studies and practical work in architectural offices inside and outside Germany, as well as the results of numerous conversations with female architects.

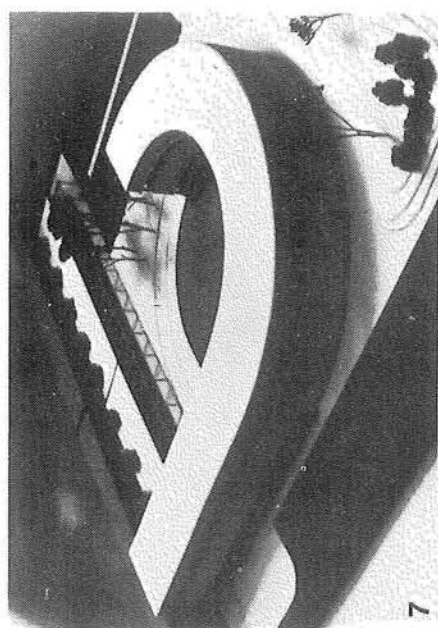
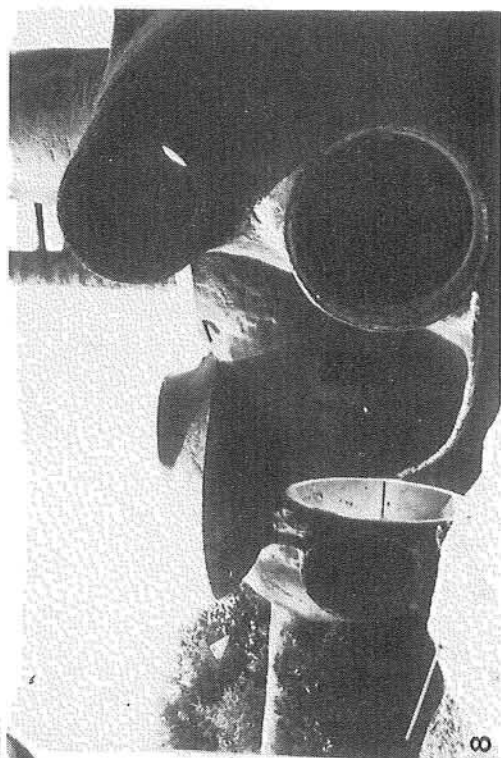
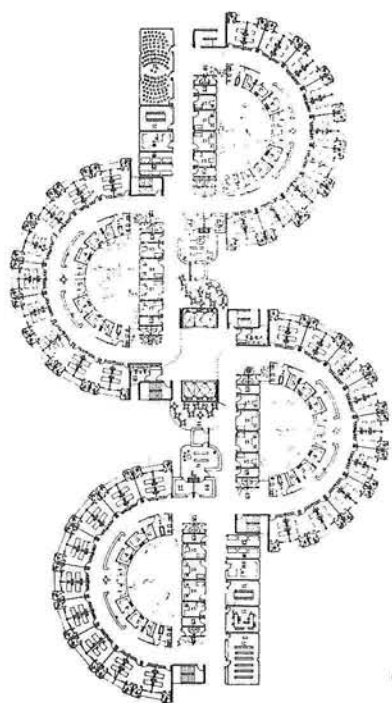
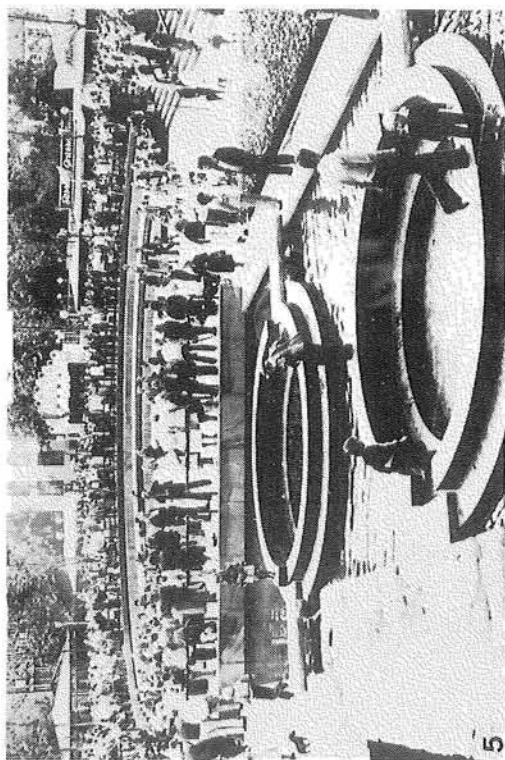
Pignatelli's work assumes in this context a similarly important role as Erik Erikson's discovery that boys and girls given the same building blocks and task to design an exciting scenery for a self-invented story differ greatly in terms of their results. In the second chapter of his book '*Childhood and Society*' Erikson (1963) summarizes his observations of 150 pre-adolescent children who built about 450 scenarios. He states that boys usually constructed towers and streets (Fig. 1) with one of their favorite events being the destruction of these elements, while girls generally built interior settings and rooms with or without walls (Fig. 2) as a background to family life stories.

The reason why Erikson's discovery seems to have never been followed up in respect to the spatial preferences of men and women or male and female architects seems to lie partly in his own preoccupation with the socio-psychological relevance of the experiments as well as the lack of comparable data or examples. I probably would have never thought of it further if I had not come across two cases from another cultural setting relating both to younger children and adults, which fit into exactly the same pattern. One was given to me by the sociologist and film-maker Helga Reidemeister. She observed in 1969, shortly after having read Erikson, children who were playing in similar patterns with empty crates in front of an apple juice factory in Bavaria. More important, however, may be the examples which came from a couple of architects and friends who had both separately produced a design for the same one-family. Figure 3 shows his linear design. Figure 4 the U-shaped design of the woman, which was eventually built. In order to support my point a little further I present

Fig. 1. A typical design by a boy according to Erikson (1950, p. 98).

Fig. 2. A typical design by a girl according to Erikson (1950, p. 99).

Figs. 3-4. Two designs for the same one-family house by an architect couple. Left the linear design of the man, right the U-shaped design of the woman, which was eventually built. (Source: Manfred Hegger and Doris Hegger-Luhmen.)



some architectural designs by female architects from Germany, the United States and France (Figs 5–8).

While there are examples of male architects using round/horizontal shapes, e.g. Gaudi or Kahn, and female architects designing skyscrapers, e.g. Natalie de Blois who designed the Pepsi-Cola and the Union Carbide buildings in New York for Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, it does seem more than accidental, however, that the decrease of round and organic shapes in architecture is paralleled by the growing exclusion of women from the building and design process (Rentmeister, 1979). 'Round' in this context also stands for a more functional and ergonomic architecture, related to our bodily shapes and movements as we are neither built nor move in straight lines or rectangles. 'Organic' also stands for the 'natural' growth and development of human settlements, e.g. the African, American or European villages in whose buildings women played an integral part, in contrast to the planning and design of our 'unnatural' geometrically ordered and systematically divided towns and cities which are the product of men and increasing specialization.

In order to examine the environmental damage which results from the fixation of role stereotypes and the exclusion of women from the design process I propose the following definitions and hypotheses for discussion:

1. Although it is impossible to define clear and exclusive categories for a 'male and female architecture' it may prove helpful to distinguish between 'male and female principles in architecture'. These may be used by both men and women alike. Under equal opportunities for their application, however, (which certainly cannot be said to exist at the moment) women would tend to put more emphasis on the use of 'female' principles, and men would tend to put more emphasis on the use of 'male' principles.

2. In order to be applicable generally a definition of these principles must, therefore, encompass gradual differences instead of exclusive categories. (The stress in these cases will be on *more* and *than*) whereby the 'female' principle opposite the 'male' principle may be defined as:

more user oriented	than	designer oriented
more ergonomic	than	large scale/monumental
more functional	than	formal
more flexible	than	fixed
more organically ordered	than	abstractly systematized
more holistic/complex	than	specialized/one-dimensional
more social	than	profit-oriented
more slowly growing	than	quickly constructed.

3. The intention here is not to state that one approach is 'good' and the other is 'bad', but that it is solely the one-sided dominance of the 'male' principle which is at the root of the problem. Furthermore it would be naïve to strive for a complete about face toward a one-sided dominance of 'female' principles. While possibly necessary for a while in order to restore a balance this would be just as much of a mistake in the long run. Architecture at its

Fig. 5. Fountains and landscaping on a two story inner city garage in Osnabrück by Margaret Bofinger and partners (Wiesbaden).

Fig. 6. Design for a hospital by Margot Marx and partner (Offenbach).

Fig. 7. Design for a factory annex by Aase Eriksen (Philadelphia).

Fig. 8. Studio Unal, an experiment in concrete shell structures by Claude Häusermann-Costy (Paris).

best merges function and form, it is always partly flexible as well as partly inflexible, physically it will fit the individual human scale as well as the larger social context, and serve the user as well as be the creation of the individual designer.

4. Only in the synthesis of all these contradictory demands is it possible to create a true alternative to the present-day architecture dominated by 'male' principles and values. The previous experience of women who enter the architectural field, however, allows them to be prepared in a more comprehensive way to achieve this synthesis. The basis for this assumption is that women architects, during their socialization, have been able to develop their 'female' as well as their 'male' traits. In early childhood they are expected to be person-oriented, they are allowed to be emotional and to express their feelings. During their studies they learn to be rational, logical and abstract. Their male colleagues, in contrast, are often socialized along a one-sided 'male' value scale which is seldom counter-balanced by an education which also includes affective and social learning. Since these values, however, have been paramount in the organization of society along technocratic lines, the above mentioned combination of socialization factors is partly responsible for excluding women from all positions in society in which decision-making power is concentrated (Terlinden, 1978).

5. Since the costs of the one-sided dominance of male values (environmental blight and depletion of natural resources) have begun to outweigh the benefits (higher standard of living) these values are being questioned openly. In the pursuit of alternative holistic approaches including 'male' as well as 'female' principles both sexes, however, encounter the same barriers of thousands of years of devaluation of 'female' principles (Bornemann, 1975). Although women suffer more acutely from the effects of this devaluation, a mere quantitative increase in the number of women practicing architecture will not mean an automatic change in quality of the built environment. This was demonstrated for example by the Russian section of the International Union of Female Architects exhibition in Paris in 1978, which represented the 40 per cent of women among architects in the U.S.S.R. without showing any significant qualitative difference from the Western models of architecture. The percentage of female architectural students has now risen to 35 per cent (in some universities even to 50 per cent) in the German Federal Republic. Similar developments can be found in other countries. Here, however, the quantitative change seems to be accompanied by a change in consciousness and a need to express a different set of values in planning and design.

Starting in the early 1970s the Women's School of Architecture and Planning has been held in various places in the U.S.A. in order to articulate a different vision of architecture. A large travelling exhibition on 'Women in American Architecture' has added a comprehensive historic perspective defining the contributions of women to the field and uncovering a large number of surprising facts (for instance, that the famous F. L. Wright drawings published in 1910 by Wasmuth are actually the work of his female collaborator, Marion Mahony Griffin).

Numerous workshops and exhibitions in Scandinavia, Germany, France and the United Kingdom have been dealing with women and architecture. Alliances of non-professional women voice their increasing concern about their environment; and two female architect groups in New York and Berlin-West have recently succeeded in gaining support for projects of designing and building with an emphasis on the needs of women and children.

All these attempts are a testimony to the fact that the awareness of their situation and contribution is growing among women everywhere. Phyllis Birkby, co-founder of the Women's School of Planning and Architecture (New York) states:

'The health of our society, our very being, depends on providing new models, as well as

visions. It is my hope that women's growing concern and involvement will posit co-operative modes of thinking and action that will produce visible realities as a force in environmental change: that the issues will be approached with an attitude which recognizes the interconnectedness of all phases of living and being; that women will use their unique skills and sensibilities in evolving new methods as well as results—that process and product, form and content, are inseparable realities; that women who feel and recognize this social necessity will make their way into effective positions to help realize the visions we have been confined to dreaming about' (Birkby, 1980; p. 8).

In order to define and use their specific talents, some women may first have to go through a process of isolation from men and solidarity with women. In the long run, however, this can only be a preparation for the mutual recognition of and reaching a synthesis (all too often lacking today) between the 'male' and the 'female' principles which consciously builds upon the specific strengths of both sexes.

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