

# Herman Hertzberger: an Interview on Education

By Gonalo Canto Moniz

**H**erman Hertzberger is one of the main actors of the debate that relates Architecture with Education. He is not only the architect of many school buildings, but he is also the author of the book *Space and Learning*<sup>1</sup> where he reflects about education and more specifically about how architecture contributes to the education issue and vice-versa.

He was educated in the 50s at Delft where he witnessed, as a student, the fight for a Modern architectural education. As he told us, the debate was politicized by two groups of professors: the left wing was trying to implement Modern pedagogies and Modern models and the right wing was preserving traditional architecture.

This ideological fight was connected to the struggle for Modern architecture spread by CIAM through all its members. After the war, Gropius and Giedion created a new commission to promote a debate on education, considering that schools should have a special role in the process of consolidating Modern ideas, principles and methods. Cornelius Van Eesteren and Ernesto Na-

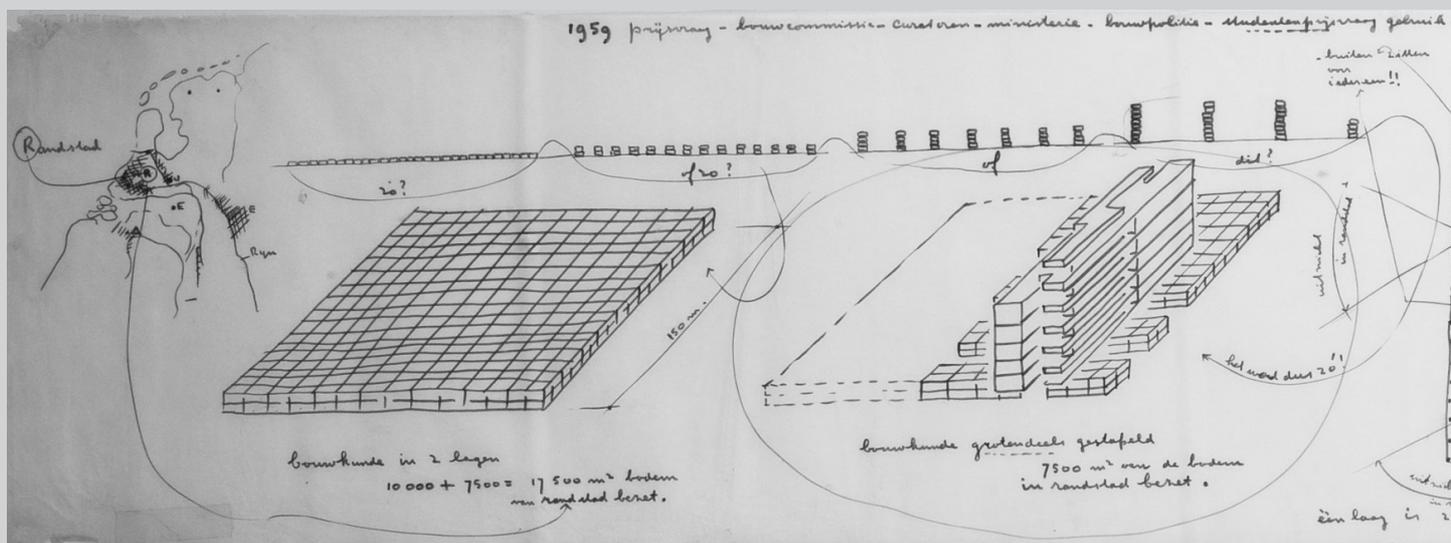
than Rogers joined this commission in 1949 and together proposed to present a Charter of Education at CIAM 8, which never happened.

In the other European schools the problem was more or less the same: how to change the traditional approach to architect's education, based in classical or nationalistic references, supported in *Beaux-Arts* methodologies, specially the copying system?

At Delft, Hertzberger says that the right wing was also divided in two lines—the catholic and the protestant—which created an even more complex problem, although it is still easy to identify these two approaches to architecture, as both were looking for a national Dutch style. He says that this was imposed by the professors: "in one of the first projects I did, the brief was very explicit, '[...] in the roof, the house should have a room for the children[...]' Flat roofs were not done and in this way students were in fact forced to design pitched roofs.

On the other side, the 'left wing', led by Modern architects as Jaap Bakema and Van Eesteren, aimed to

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reconstruct Dutch cities after the War, following CIAM principles, namely the Charter of Athens. This perspective was very present in the school and it was almost orthodox. Hertzberger remembers Van Eesteren's criticism to his work: "I showed him an urban model with big buildings in a large green space which I 'furnished' with public functions such as schools, shops and other facilities." But Van Eesteren obviously still very impressed by Le Corbusier and his open city and big scale, looked at my model and put the small buildings on top of the big ones, wanting to have the green space without any building. I had my doubts, but he was famous, so what could I do?"

Before World War 2 there were two independent architectural magazines, *de 8 en Opbouw* and *Bouwkundig week blad* in which modernists and traditionalists discussed and criticized each other's buildings. Hertzberger followed this debate enthusiastically: "When one published a Modern project, the other, the right wing one, immediately reacted with criticism and vice versa. This was in fact a very creative climate!" Although with any doubt my heart was at the 'left side', there was also to learn from the rightists and particularly from their arguments conversely.

There was also a big discussion on the issue of tall buildings: "the conservative professors made a statement against tall buildings: 'the church should be the highest building in the city' which was, of course, a medievalist perspective of the city against a Modern conception of the urban society".

But the Modern wing won this argument with the construction that was explicitly stated by the new architecture school building by Van den Broek and Bakema. Everybody "loved the building and it was very good for education."<sup>2</sup>

As far back as the design phase, the building was discussed extensively as an educational instrument during the debating society lectures given by Van den Broek, who taught at the Faculty of Architecture at the time.<sup>3</sup>

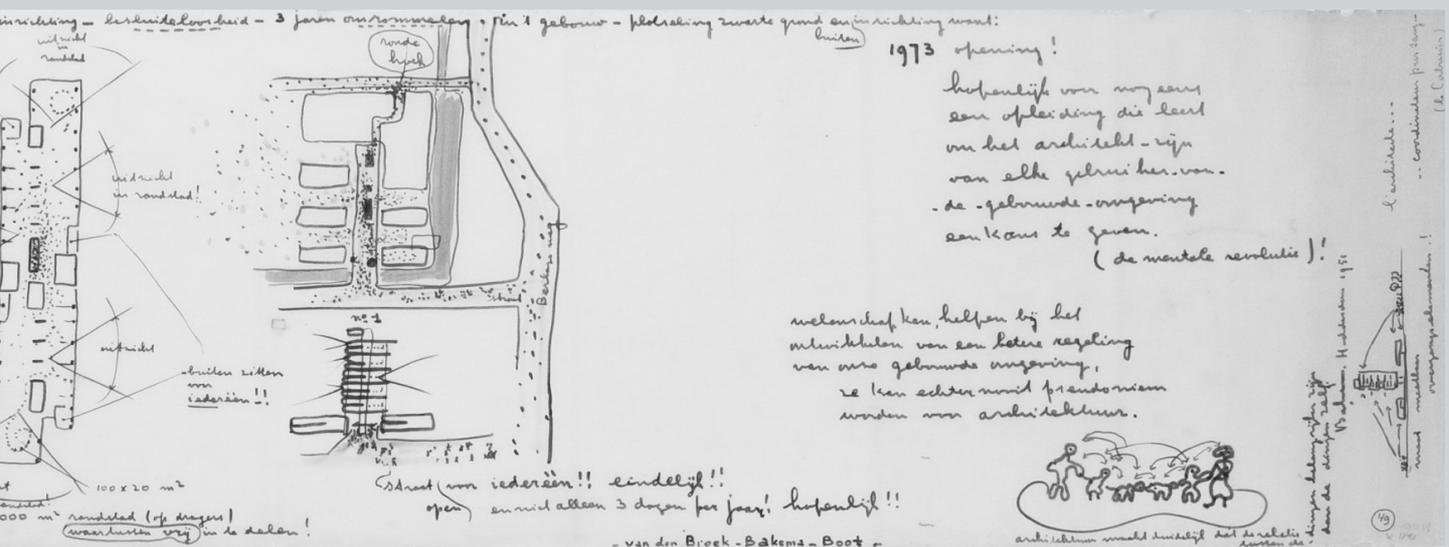
In 2008 there was a fire that destroyed the building. The school moved to a 19<sup>th</sup> century building and curiously "the new adaptations are a brilliant success!"

Hertzberger started to teach after the Van den Broek and Bakema building was inaugurated in 1970, notably in "a period that nobody was interested in architectural design, but only in a political approach." The meeting place became the most important place in the building, for it was the public space.

Hertzberger developed a new pedagogical program in his design studio to integrate history and social problems in the design process, with emphasis on the public realm. The results of this humanistic approach are well reflected in his books *Lessons for Students in Architecture* (1991), *Space and the Architect* (2000) and *Space and Learning* (2008).

In these series of essays, Hertzberger integrates his projects as a laboratory to develop his ideas about space, about education and about the public domain. The Montessori School in Delft (1960-66) and the Central Baheer office building, Apeldoorn (1968-72) are the best examples of a complementary relation between theory, pedagogy and practice.

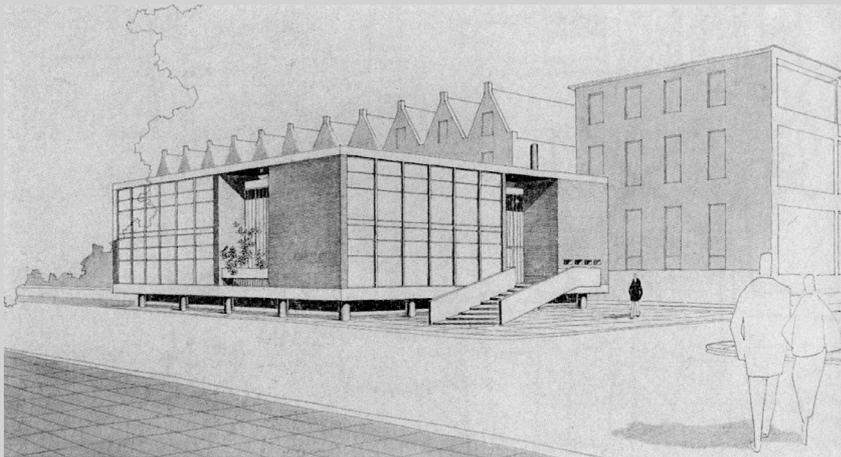
Figure 1. The Faculty of Architecture building at Delft University of Technology designed by Van den Broek and Bakema and completed in 1970. Detail from a drawing by J.B. Bakema that illustrates the train of thought for the design. Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut archive: BROX inv. n<sup>o</sup> 1140r1.



Hertzberger is now developing his educational perspective in the light of structuralism. At the Berlage Institute, the master class "Open Structures" explored the possibility of buildings adaptable to change, extension, and reprogramming, in 2012.<sup>4</sup> This approach is particularly important to think the destiny of Modern buildings and to find design methodologies for transformation.. Hertzberger has just finished the renovation of the Utrecht Music Centre (1973–78) which is to be considered as "more sustainable architecture, in a structuralist perspective," says Hertzberger.

#### Notes

- 1 Herman Hertzberger, *Space and Learning*, Rotterdam, 010 Publishers, 2008
- 2 To learn more about the building visit Nai website, [http://en.nai.nl/collection/view\\_the\\_collection/item/\\_rp\\_kolom2-1\\_elementId/1\\_279382](http://en.nai.nl/collection/view_the_collection/item/_rp_kolom2-1_elementId/1_279382)
- 3 NAI, "Faculty of Architecture Building TU Delft still exists on paper, drawings from the Van den Broek en Bakema Archives", access in [http://en.nai.nl/collection/view\\_the\\_collection/item/\\_rp\\_kolom2-1\\_elementId/1\\_279382](http://en.nai.nl/collection/view_the_collection/item/_rp_kolom2-1_elementId/1_279382)
- 4 Berlage Institute, "Open Structures" (Research Projects with Dirk van der Heuvel and Tom Avermate), [http://www.theberlage.nl/galleries/projects/details/open\\_structures](http://www.theberlage.nl/galleries/projects/details/open_structures)



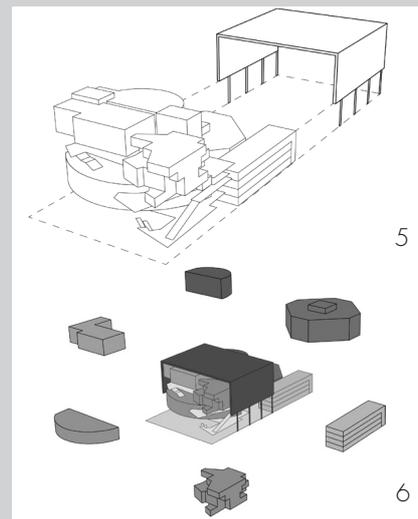
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Figure 2. Weekend sketch of the Achtergracht Office Building at Frederiksplein, Amsterdam, 1955, by **Herman Hertzberger**. ©HH.

Figure 3. Drawing by **J.B. Bakema** showing an impression of the main hall as a meeting place, 1972. Seated on the right a figure that looks like J.B. Bakema. Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut archive: BROX inv. n° 1140r2.

Figure 4. Weekend sketch of the plans of the Achtergracht Office Building at Frederiksplein, Amsterdam, 1955, by **Herman Hertzberger**. ©HH.

Figures 5, 6. In 2005 plans were presented to partially demolish and enlarge the Vredenburg Music Centre (1973-1979) by **Herman Hertzberger** under his own direction. Of the original building only the main auditorium is retained. The new design adds a tower of auditoria, each designed by a different architect (Jo Coenen & Co, NL Architects, Architectuurcentrale Thijs Asselbergs). Diagrams ©HH.