publisher and the editors clearly worked to minimize these issues, creating a final product that brings a decisively new and exciting contribution to Pre-Columbian studies. Most surprising are the generative conjunctions of ideas and directions for further research that this volume decidedly conveys. The Art of Urbanism successfully communicates the excitement of the Dumbarton Oaks Pre-Columbian Symposium that produced this volume. Auspiciously, the symposium was held at the Museum of the Aztec Templo Mayor in Mexico City in 2005, thirty years after Eduardo Matos Moctezuma, one of the volume’s key contributors, initiated the excavations that recovered the Aztec sacred center. This volume will positively influence research on Aztec and earlier manifestations of Mesoamerican urbanism.

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Thomas Müller and Romana Schneider
Das Klassenzimmer vom Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts bis heute / The Classroom: From the Late 19th Century until the Present Day
Tübingen, Germany: Ernst Wasmuth Verlag, 2011, 304 pp., 400 color and 400 b/w illus. $65, ISBN 9783803033482

Jonathan Zimmerman
Small Wonder: The Little Red Schoolhouse in History and Memory

All of a sudden, architectural historians are thinking about schools. I hope this is evidence of a new trend to document educational landscapes, because for too long, far too long, places made for children to learn (and live and play) have received short shrift from our scholarly community. The encouraging evidence of interest includes a new history of children’s spaces in Denmark, several of open-air schools in Europe, and one study of British schools. In the United States, architectural historians have started to consider spaces for children, including in this journal. But the absence of book-length works on school design in the U.S. is puzzling, because schooling is the central experience of modern children and schools the central site where modern childhood is lived. For many reasons, the social construction of childhood changed in the nineteenth century, prompting parents to treasure children for their emotional contribution to family life and child savers to insist kids deserved to learn and play, rather than work. The transition was not easy or smooth, but as education came to be the job of every child, communities built public schools and hired architects to design many of them.

Imagine the extent of this public works project, as important as any other in shaping a modern nation. Architects, some well known, others less so, designed buildings that, coupled with compulsory education, fulfilled the state’s interest in teaching children to read, write, and calculate. In the nineteenth century, this significant claim on the public purse demanded construction of hundreds of thousands of buildings in the U.S., from one-room schools in the country to grammar and high schools in cities and suburbs, and the manufacture of huge quantities of equipment, including desks. Immediately, these and other artifacts showed the cultural landscape of public education to be a tangible measure not only of adult hopes for childhood but also of failure to execute them. Taxpayers (many of them parents) expected schools to uplift children, yet accepted dilapidated and decrepit buildings; educators used schools to experiment with progressive reform including the use of modern architecture, yet organized classrooms to discipline and punish children; politicians defined schools as essential building blocks of a democratic society, yet used them to advance children to specific social futures, conditioned by race, gender, and social class. Consequences matter. Children learn from three teachers, according to Loris Malaguzzi, Italian leader of the movement for child-centered education: the instructor, their peers, and the classroom space.

This point, that space is the third teacher, runs through Small Wonder: The Little Red Schoolhouse in History and Memory. Historian Jonathan Zimmerman is not an expert in architectural history, but this remarkable book, one of a kind, has much to offer architectural historians, even if thinly illustrated and intended for a general audience. Small Wonder, which benefits from the author’s highly regarded book, Whose America? Culture Wars in the Public Schools, opens with this anecdote: in 2002, a conservative politician used images of the one-room schoolhouse to promote the controversial federal program No Child Left Behind, and a progressive used the same image to criticize it. It is telling that each called on “America’s most enduring educational symbol” to stand for competing goals (1). Zimmerman goes on to explain how and why the little red schoolhouse turned into such a capacious cultural icon. “Across the political and ideological spectrum,” he writes, “everyone envisioned the schoolhouse they needed to see” (4). He insists, though, that politics and ideology cannot on their own explain the appeal of the image, including in consumer culture. A wide array of textual, visual, and material sources, notable in a book of modest length, supports the claim that nostalgia for the one-room school helped make sense of recurring themes in U.S. history. Zimmerman highlights hope for and ambivalence about progress, faith in individualism and desire for community, and demand for an enduring emblem of the nation, and he shows the image of this building proved especially useful when enduring inequalities and searing disputes, including those about race, fractured the polity in a nation hell-bent on imperial expansion.

Regardless of clashes or locale, the building type didn’t change much, although country children did not attend schools of equal quality. The first section, “History,” describes the small one-room building, “static in appearance, layout, and organization,” usually built of log or wood frame with a pitched roof, sometimes but not...
always painted red, and most often located on the cheapest available building lot (17). Vivid descriptions, backed up with first-hand accounts, help to compensate for lack of illustrations. In an ungraded classroom, first furnished with crude benches, then with uncomfortable desks, heated with a smoky potbelly stove, equipped (maybe) with a blackboard, decorated profusely with graffiti, poorly lit by leaky windows, and serviced by an outhouse, one teacher taught up to forty children at one time. She started the school day by ringing a bell, leading children in recitations, and with any luck, finished the day without physical assault—either by the teacher hitting a pupil with a switch or unruly kids attacking the teacher.

The second section, “Memory,” analyzes the appeal of the little red schoolhouse as it fell out of everyday use. The assault began in the 1840s by advocates of common schools, and escalated in the Progressive Era, when reformers who favored consolidation of rural schools insisted that country children deserved better than a single-teacher school. In 1913, half of the schoolchildren in the U.S., some 212,000 in number, attended a one-room school; by 1960 the percentage dropped to one percent (17). As numbers dwindled, the symbolic value of this icon skyrocketed. Poets used it starting in the 1880s to represent lost rural life in an urbanizing nation, New Dealers to portray the devastating effects of poverty on children; Cold Warriors to symbolize a democratic heritage, and in the 1960s advocates of child-centered education praised its contribution to group learning and pedagogical innovation. Zimmerman contextualizes each competing claim, refusing to accept any one at face value. Without turning into a scold, he counters assertions with historical evidence. The evenhanded portrait describes bickering over pedagogy, discipline, and funding and nasty disputes about language of instruction, religion, immigration, childhood, and race. Even when assigned to a poorly equipped one-room school, white children fared better than children of color, be they black, Mexican, or Native American. Even in Hannibal, Missouri, Mark Twain’s hometown, taxpayers squabbled about cost. “It’s not a real saving,” one farmer insisted during a debate about closure, “for every time you stop a school you will have to build a jail” (45). The point still holds.

The Chicago Schoolhouse: High School Architecture and Educational Reform, 1836–2006 complements Small Wonder, but sadly without its finesse. Like Zimmerman, architectural historian Dale Allen Gyure offers a study of an ignored building type, in this case secondary schools. Organized chronologically and amply illustrated, the goal is to relate school buildings to educational reforms. In seven chapters, packed with details, Gyure traces the development of the high school in Chicago; he gives welcome attention to buildings, curriculum, and policy from the 1850s to the present and draws comparisons with other cities. Architects, some well known, such as Dwight H. Perkins, figure prominently in the narrative, as do public officials who collaborated with designers to make the high school an emblem of community.

The story begins in 1856, when Chicago followed Boston’s example to build the first public high school in the city—an austere, three-story masonry building. Compelled by custom but not by law to enroll, 114 children recited lessons in large classrooms, the preferred method for developing “the mind muscle” (xx, 24). As the city built more schools, the old-fashioned schoolhouse, with identical floors, lost its hold on the spatial imagination of educators even though the classroom, with desks bolted to the floor, remained for decades the building block of all graded schools, including the urban high school. In the twentieth century, the high-school building type became a large structure, usually built with a steel frame, designed with a crenellated plan, entered on axis, equipped with many classrooms (generously fenestrated on one side to prevent eye strain), an auditorium, gymnasium, cafeteria, and laboratories, and serviced by modern mechanical systems. I do not agree with Gyure’s assertion that nineteenth-century high schools treated students equally, but appreciate his point that the differentiation of spaces inside twentieth-century buildings mirrored the differentiation of curriculum (xxiii). One effect was to exaggerate class privilege. In Chicago, business leaders supported public vocational education to save themselves the expense of training industrial workers and to counter labor’s power in the workplace, where workers traditionally took charge of apprentice education (84).

That insight is important, as is the discussion of rampant corruption, exaggerated in the rush to build so many schools. However, the social construction of space, a methodology that has been applied very successfully to other children’s places, deserves more consideration in The Chicago Schoolhouse. Gyure gives much attention to typology, style, pedagogy, and even urban politics—but where are the children, teachers, and parents? The limited discussion of race is especially troubling. Even if black and white students studied in high schools of similar design, is it really the case that “race had little effect on architectural progress” (6ix)? In Chicago? There are other dubious assumptions. Architectural elements in 1950s high schools may have resembled 1920s buildings, but goals changed radically during the Cold War. Plus, there are errors, for instance the claim that design innovation began at the secondary level (xviii). The first high school in Chicago may have been a unique building (13), but the design was modeled on grammar schools. Low-slung pavilion-style schools, the “Californian school” of the 1910s and 1920s, inspired 1950s reforms, but usually these were elementary schools, not high schools. In no small measure, the international movement for open-air schools, not given its due in the volume, inspired interest in innovation. The international embrace of open-air schools is one of many topics discussed in The Classroom: From the Late 19th Century until the Present Day. Thomas Müller and Romana Schneider put together this marvelous book to accompany the exhibit The Classroom at the VS School Museum in Germany, a leader in the industrialization of school furniture manufacture, sponsored both the book and the exhibit, calling on its remarkable collection of examples from Germany, other European countries, and the United States. Written in German and English, the volume opens...
with the phrase “Gemeinsam die Schulbank drücken,” literally, “to share a desk,” but an idiom for having gone to school with someone else (6). This point sets the tone for the ensuing one-hundred-year history of the school desk. The first three chapters discuss its development as an industrial product, the struggle for child-friendly schools in Germany, and the museum collection. The fourth chapter, organized chronologically, constitutes the bulk of the book and serves as a catalog to an exhibit, rich in examples. The last chapter, arranged as a timeline, chronicles VS history.

Taken together, the essays, catalog entries, and lavish illustrations (half in color) show the history of school furniture is directly linked to the history of school architecture and the history of childhood. Inspired by Malaguzzi’s point that space is the third teacher, Müller and Schneider keep children front and center in a story focused on the material culture of education. They also document collaboration among architects, educators, designers, and manufacturers and uncover unexpected diversity in design. Consider this point: the rectangular classroom was favored in Prussian schools because it, like the wooden desk bolted to the floor, directed children to face the teacher. Two-seater desks were typical and designed to encourage better posture as well as to allow a child to stand up to recite (and step out to use the toilet). In the late 1890s Wilhelm Rettig, the architect who headed Munich’s planning department, designed an adjustable model that could be turned on its side, without ink spilling out of the well. Offered in eight sizes, it sold millions and prompted the formation of VS in 1898 (17–18, 79). As urban in-migration filled classrooms with sixty, even eighty students, VS and other furniture manufacturers replaced seats with benches (modeled on church pews) to hold up to six children.

The sea change, which began in Wilhelm Germany and exploded in the Weimar Republic, forced furniture makers to reconsider the authoritarian legacy of the nineteenth century. In cities governed by the Social Democratic Party in the 1920s, progressive politicians hired avant-garde architects to design schools that met the demand for child-centered education. A “joyful school” needed a square classroom (best if generously fenestrated and placed in freestanding pavilion), filled with fresh air, sunshine, and movable furniture. Fabricated from tubular steel and plywood (or plastic), a child could easily carry the lightweight desk outside. After the Nazi takeover in 1933, innovations in school and furniture design occurred elsewhere as chapter 4.3, “Focus on the Child,” makes clear. The history of the company offered on the website jumps from 1924 to 1945—and in the human rights document on the same site, it is claimed, perhaps rightfully—that VS did not participate in the war effort. The catalog explains that although the Nazi regime discounted Weimar experiments it found useful one innovation—flexible seating. One illustration, a photograph from a catalog of a competing company, captioned “The Joyful School of the Nazi period,” shows boys walking out the front door of a traditional Prussian school, each carrying his modern desk. After the war, VS became a leader in developing stacking chairs and other furniture for flexible classrooms. However old habits die hard, especially on a continent torn by political upheaval. In many schools, not only in East Germany, students continued to sit at old-fashioned two-seater wooden desks—a point underscored by Robert Doisneau’s haunting photograph of French schoolchildren in the 1950s, used as cover illustration.

Nostalgia, always a risk in the history of childhood, is avoided in The Classroom, even if the objectification of children in child-friendly schools is not assessed. Other historians are less optimistic about forging a progressive relationship between design, technology, objects, routines, pedagogy, and health in schools, but they are likely to agree with this important point. Historical comparisons, Müller and Schneider insist, help us understand how social actors imagined the good school of the past, be it furnished with a desk designed by Rettig, Jean Prouvé, or Charles and Ray Eames. That knowledge is critical if we are to advocate for quality in educational environments in the present—as we must if we agree with Loris Malaguzzi, that around the world, students learn from the school building itself as they learn from teachers and peers.

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Notes
8. VS is the abbreviation for the full company name, Vereinigte Spezialmöbelfabriken; it was originally called Vereinigte Schulbankfabriken,
then Vereinigte Schultmöbelfabriken. The museum is located in Tauberbischofsheim.


Jean-Louis Cohen
Architecture in Uniform: Designing and Building for the Second World War
New Haven and Montreal: Yale University Press and the Canadian Centre for Architecture, 2011, 448 pp., 300 color illus. $50. ISBN 9782754105309

Through the ages, war has been a font of architectural innovation, spurring new techniques and materials, transmitting ideas about style (through cultural contact), form, and space making (through experiment), and shifting professional attitudes and training. War has also been architecture’s muse, as the Futurists or Erich Mendelsohn’s sketches from the front during World War I attest. When nations have tilted toward conflict, moreover, their home fronts have been transformed, and architecture has responded—often self-consciously. How strange that historians of twentieth-century architecture have only in recent years come to study this enduring and enormously fruitful relationship.

In his book Architecture in Uniform: Designing and Building for the Second World War, Jean-Louis Cohen nods to this tradition in previous generations, writing “there is nothing new about the relationship between architecture and armed conflict,” pointing out that Vitruvius was a military engineer (11). He then exceptionalizes the experience of World War II, when total war and the forces of modernity mobilized everything, altering the very dynamic of social relations and communication. This idea of totalization is neither a new theme nor a novel claim for what happened during World War II—or more broadly, modernity. One need only turn to imperial Rome, Leonardo’s Italy, or, as William Leuchtenburg has demonstrated, to the United States between the two world wars, to see the extent to which war has been the central dynamic of Western society, and martial language its conceptual framework. Indeed, one is hard-pressed to find a moment when war, the forces of production, and culture have escaped dialectical transformation.

The historiographical lacuna is more interesting. Cohen notes the strange omission of the war years in major texts on modern architecture, although the propensity of the architectural history canon to seek out exceptional and photogenic buildings helps explain the gap. Cohen, one of the most prolific and accomplished historians of twentieth-century architecture, lays out the terrain of elision, but shies away from explaining the historiographical reasons behind it. It is fair to wonder whether any of the projects or buildings in this book will enter a canonical text. Far from an indictment of Cohen’s work, it reflects the nature of the canon and pedagogy in the field.

One of the virtues of the book is to put all of the World War II belligerents into comparative perspective, where previous studies have focused on single nations or figures. We learn about architects, both well known and obscure, from nearly every major nation involved in the war. The cultural whiplash that results is a small price to pay for this geo-historical panorama. Few corners of the globe escaped the war and architects everywhere had to respond to the changing conditions. Most attempted to find relevance for themselves and the profession by reasserting or redefining the architect’s role, to “fight as architects,” as one writer put it. This meant distinguishing themselves from those in other professions, especially engineers, and articulating their expertise in a moment when the profession itself was often at a loss to define itself. Architects who could not enlist found work in expected pursuits: planning and logistics, military building and housing, and camouflage. They also were called on to protect historic monuments, redesign machines and production lines, and serve as experts.

Cohen’s work joins a growing literature on war and culture. He focuses on architecture in its most generous sense. We hear about domesticity and war, the effects of rationing on innovation, victory gardens, factories, war housing, prefabrication, intellectual migrations, and numerous other topics that have been more thoroughly treated elsewhere. But they have never been assembled together, which is Cohen’s primary achievement. Who else has the range to work with equal facility with the Anglo-American, French, Italian, German, and Soviet scenes? The book is, indeed, a formidable act of assemblage and synthesis. The images alone, the most exquisite range on the subject ever gathered together, make it a valuable resource.

Cohen is most provocative in his examination of how war created a new urban geography, forcing new focal points, boundaries, movements, spectacles, theories of defensible cities, and actual agglomerations into being, especially in war zones, where the home front melted into the military front. This transformed cities as both engines of war and shields for citizens. “The cities were mobilized into the economy of a war that starved their inhabitants, that used them as theatres for great battles,” and as targets for aerial bombardment (35). As the city became a target, architects immediately began seeing this as a design problem. This theme could be a book in its own right, as any number of topics in this wide-ranging study could be. In this sense, rather than providing the last word, by design Cohen has opened up the field for future research, something he modestly notes in the preface. In fact, since most of the material, aside from the images, is drawn from magazines and secondary sources, rich avenues of primary research remain open for future scholars.

Cohen’s mode of telling this story makes the book difficult to summarize. Thematically divided, its overzealous use of subheadings, leaving many sections only two paragraphs long, creates a staccato rhythm that makes for stop-and-go reading. Names, projects, and places fly by. A hefty-sounding section such as “The Significance of Planning,” which could