Karola Bloch in East Germany (GDR, 1950-55). Standardisation of Childcare Facilities as a Women's Emancipatory Tool

Karola Bloch en la Alemania del Este (RDA, 1950-55). La estandarización de guarderías como herramienta de emancipación para las mujeres

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Abstract

The architect Karola Bloch, who was working for the Deutsche Bauakademie in the GDR after World War II, aimed to meet the goal of gender equality according to socialist principles by realising numerous crèches and kindergartens through the development of schematic plans and guidelines for building construction. For the newly founded socialist state of the GDR, this was a way to free women from domestic unpaid care work in order to integrate them into wage-earning labour, which was considered crucial for women to become equal members of society. The implementation of a nationwide network of childcare centres via typification and standardisation promised to realise these ambitious goals quickly and cost-effectively.

Keywords

Care Work, Women Architects, East Germany, Socialism, Feminist Practices, Childhood

Resumen

La arquitecta Karola Bloch, que trabajaba para la Deutsche Bauakademie en la RDA después de la Segunda Guerra Mundial, se propuso cumplir el objetivo de la igualdad de género según los principios socialistas realizando numerosas guarderías y jardines de infancia mediante el desarrollo de planos esquemáticos y directrices para la construcción de estos edificios. Para el recién fundado Estado socialista de la RDA, esta era una forma de liberar a las mujeres del trabajo doméstico no remunerado de cuidados, e integrarlas en el trabajo asalariado, lo cual se consideraba crucial para que las mujeres se convieran en miembros iguales de la sociedad. La puesta en marcha de una red nacional de guarderías mediante su tipificación y estandarización prometía hacer realidad estos ambiciosos objetivos de forma rápida y rentable.

Palabras clave

Cuidados, Mujeres Arquitectas, Alemania del Este, Socialismo, Prácticas feministas, Infancia

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> "We should have to study not only the history of space, but also the history of representations, along with that of their relationships – with each other, with practice, and with ideology. History would have to take in not only the genesis of these spaces but also, and especially their interconnections, distortions, displacements, mutual interactions, and their links with the spatial practice of the particular society or mode of production under consideration".[1]

Fifty years ago, the American art historian Linda Nochlin[2] asked the notorious question: "Why have there been no great women artists?", a query many architectural scholars are still asking regarding their profession. This article attempts to find an answer by looking beyond the notion and idealisation of 'the architect' as a stand-alone genius, into other modes of producing architecture.

To unravel the opportunities and possibilities of such different approaches towards the production of architecture that go beyond single authorship and focus more on a collective approach within a group of experts from different disciplines, this paper suggests that it is worth looking at the newly founded state of East Germany after World War II for several reasons: On the one hand, here, schematic plans and guidelines for various building tasks were developed collectively, often even involving experts from other disciplines. On the other, the architect as designer and master builder, as existed in the West, did not however exist in such a form in the GDR. Furthermore, East Germany not only, directly and indirectly, supported women in choosing a male profession but also used their female perspective for its advantage.

And indeed, encouraged by the newly founded socialist state of East Germany, many women decided to take up a profession that until then had been considered a rather masculine one. This also meant an increase in female architects. And even though it is sometimes implied that women architects sort of tried to overcompensate their newly found vocation with a distinctively female-gendered approach,[3] this paper claims that it is perhaps precisely where to find the strength of their work and their contribution to the architectural discourse in general.

Moreover, this paper aims to unmask the method of standardisation as a feminist tool towards the built environment. To unravel the opportunities and possibilities for woman architects as well as the feminist potential that lies within architecture and urbanism, it is worth looking at different approaches towards the production of architecture and space. For this reason, the paper looks at ways of producing architecture and space that go beyond the notion of the "masterpiece" and focuses more on alternative ways of producing space as well as buildings outside the canon. How such an understanding might look like can again be seen in some architectural work in East Germany after the Second World War.

Karola Bloch was one of many women architects joining the architectural workforce of the newly founded socialist state after World War II. The architectural work by Bloch (born as Karola Piotrkowska), has only recently come under focus again.[4] Her eventful life as an active resistance fighter against the Nazis, where she was even working as a spy, her family history, and not lastly her role as the wife of the famous German philosopher Ernst Bloch (1885-1977), overshadowed her work as an architect.

Observing the October Revolution in Moscow in 1917, Karola Bloch had her earliest contact with the communist movement as a child, and this was to continue and shape her communist commitment for the rest of her private as well as her professional life. Furthermore, her political and architectural thinking has been in constant interplay throughout her relationship with Ernst Bloch.[5] Because of his philosophical work and her Jewish origins, the couple spent most of their lives in exile. After stays in Switzerland, Paris, and Prague, among other places, they

1 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford, OX, UK; Cambridge, Mass., USA: Blackwell, 1991), 42.

2 Linda Nochlin, *Why have there been no great women artists?* (New York: Thames & Hudson Inc., 2021). Anniversary Edition, 2021.

3 Harald Engler, "Between state socialist emancipation and professional desire. Women architects in the German Democratic Republic, 1949-1990," in *Ideological Equals: Women Architects in Socialist Europe 1945-1989,* ed. Mary Pepchinski and Mariann Simon (London: Routledge, 2018), 15.

4 Claudia Lenz, "Karola Bloch and the 'Future of the Nation', a Weekly Childcare Facility," in *Frau Architekt: Seit mehr als 100 Jahren: Frauen im Architekturberuf,* ed, Mary Pepchinski, Christina Budde, Wolfgang Voigt and Peter Cachola Schmal (Tübingen: Ernst Wasmuth Verlag, 2017), 153.

5 Bettina Siegele, "The Interplay of Philosophy and Architectural Aesthetics in the Work of Karola and Ernst Bloch," *SITA* 8 (2020): 83–94.

finally fled to America to escape Nazism and World War II, where Karola worked for various architectural firms and was even able to carry out a few individual commissions. During this time, she was the family's sole breadwinner. After the war, their decision to move back to East Germany was politically motivated. Driven by deep trust and belief in socialism and communism, and the urge to be actively involved in the construction of the newly founded state, they settled in Leipzig, where Ernst Bloch took on a professorship and Karola Bloch a job at the *Deutsche Bauakademie* (German Academy of Architecture).[6]

Karola Bloch as an Architectural Advocate for Gender Equality

Following Lenin's agenda to liberate women from their status as 'domestic slaves', who are according to him trapped by "petty housework [that] crushes, strangles, stultifies", which "degrades her, chains her to the kitchen and the nursery", and makes her waste "her labour on barbarously unproductive, petty, nerve-wracking, stultifying and crushing drudgery",[7] the GDR tried to reduce the burden for women, at least in theory. In order to achieve a rather contradictory goal of increasing the birth rate and at the same time integrating more women into the workforce, the newly founded socialist state set itself the goal of building 40,000 places in crèches and a whole 160,000 places in kindergartens between the years 1950 and 1955.[8] For this undertaking schematic plans and guidelines for childcare facilities were developed and Karola was an assigned architect and collaborator for this task. In a document called *Abschlußleistung lt. Plan: Weiterentwicklung der Richtlinien und Schemapläne* (*Final output according to plan: further development of guidelines and schematic plans*) by the *Forschungsinstitut für die Architektur der Bauten der Gesellschaft und Industrie* (Research Institute for the Architecture of the Buildings of Society and Industry) from 1953, she was named as the "scientific-technical operator responsible for the complete work".[9] However, the development of those schematic plans enabled the promotion of gender equality according to socialist principles. As the term 'schematic plan' already suggests, the mode of producing architecture in the GDR has been a different one than in capitalist countries. With individual artistic genius pushed to the side, space was mostly produced in a collective and collaboration with experts from other fields. One central organ to do so was the already mentioned *Deutsche Bauakademie*. Based in Berlin, with very good connections to the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED), it was commissioned to do extensive research on architecture and urbanism. As architecture historian Mary Pepchinski states: "Private Practice was abolished in 1952, and standard typologies, for the planning of cultural buildings became a key component of architectural practice under socialism, as a collective production in the state offices replaced the creative labour of the individual architect".[10]

Standardisation of Buildings for Children

Karola Bloch's role within the *Bauakademie* was important, even though she had never been a fixed employee but rather worked more akin to what we would define today as a freelancer. Commuting between Leipzig and Berlin, Bloch also travelled around East Germany to study and review relevant buildings for childcare. She worked on the development and design of schematic plans and translated international standards for buildings into German. For the development of the specific building guidelines and drafting of the schematic plans, Karola Bloch collaborated not only with colleagues from the *Bauakademie* but also with experts from the Department of Mother and Child, which was part of the Ministry of Work and Public Health, and the Ministry of National Education.[11]

6 Karola Bloch, *Aus meinem Leben* (Pfullingen: Verlag Günther Neske, 1981), 168, 183-191, 230-231; Ernst Bloch and Anna Czajka, ed. *Das Abenteuer der Treue: Briefe an Karola 1928-1949* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005), 54; Mary Pepchinski, "Gender and return migration. Karola Bloch and the development of standard childcare typologies in the German Democratic Republic, 1949-1961", in *Ideological Equals: Women Architects in Socialist Europe 1945-1989,* 109.

7 Tithi Bhattacharya, "Introduction: Mapping Social Reproduction Theory, " in *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, ed. Tithi Bhattacharya (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 10. Original: Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, "A Great Beginning," in *Collected Works, Vol. XXIX* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1965), 429.

8 Pepchinski, "Gender and Return Migration," 109.

9 *Abschlußleistung lt. Plan: Weiterentwicklung der Richtlinien und Schemapläne,* Bundesarchiv, Standort Berlin, DH/2/3353, document, 1953.

10 Pepchinski, "Gender and Return Migration," 109.

11 Pepchinski, "Gender and Return Migration," 109-112.

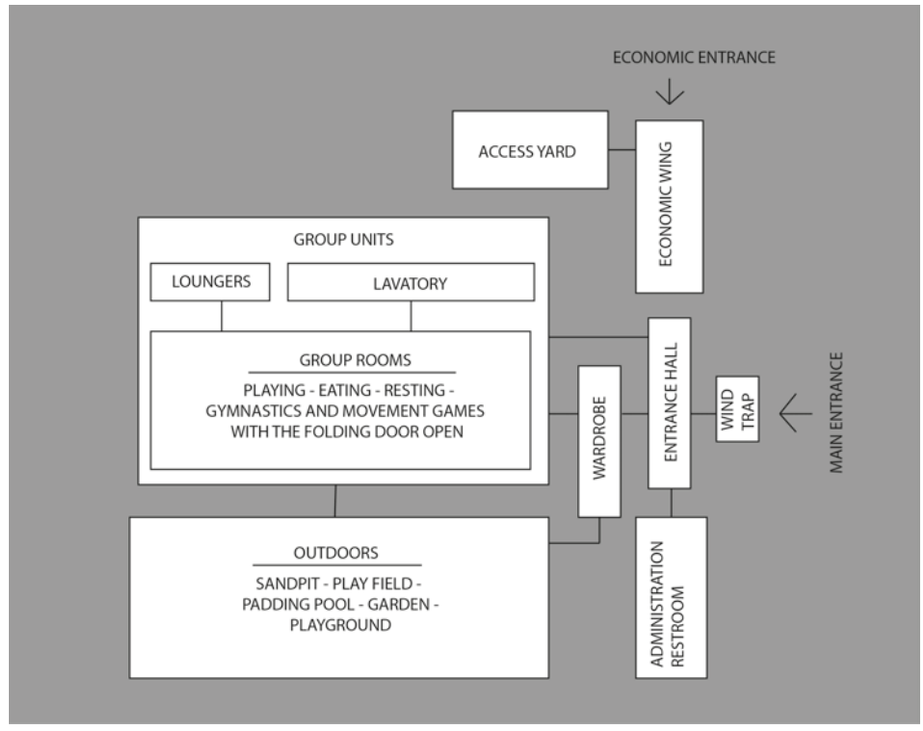

Figure 1. Representation of an operational scheme for a kindergarten by Karola Bloch redrawn and translated by the author.

Contrary to what one might expect, the Deutsche Bauakademie and the GDR, tried to go another direction than Moscow did at that time regarding typologies for childcare facilities. After conducting extensive research on different building typologies for childcare facilities in the Soviet Union, the *Bauakademie* and the team around Bloch decided to create their facilities to be more spacious and were keen to create a family-like environment. The general tenor among the commissioned experts was quite open towards more developed spatial programs based on operational schemes by Bloch (figure 1).

The more or less finalized guidelines, done around 1954, determined the buildings for childcare to be not higher than two stories and defined references to traditional and local building practices as additional guidelines. Particular emphasis was placed on the children's group rooms facing south. These rooms represented the most important part of the buildings. They were mostly connected to half-open terraces, which – following the modernist principles – were intended to allow eating, sleeping, and playing in the fresh air.[12]

Bloch was herself a committed modernist, and very much influenced by her teacher Bruno Taut, whom she considered to be a politically progressive person. In Karola Bloch's essay *"Der Kindergarten"* (*"The Kindergarten"*), dated 16 February 1953,[13] she mentions Taut's interest in the demand of childcare facilities and their architectural implementation. In this text, she also refers to a seminar she visited as one of his students in Berlin at the beginning of the 1930s, in which the need for facilities for children in a settlement was evaluated.[14] Furthermore, Bloch saw Bruno Taut's building activities in the Soviet Union as a kind of hope, which, however, was completely banished under Stalin. From a progressive and original independent architecture at the beginning of the Soviet Union, with representatives such as Talin, Wessnin or Lissitsky, the post-war Russian art of building degenerated in her eyes into a completely non-functional architecture.[15] In the end, however, it seems that she was not able to fully assert herself. She recalled: "Thank goodness my kindergartens had to be cheap, so that such ornamentation was not possible anyway but still, designing freely and modern with large windows, and irregular floor plans was neither possible nor allowed".[16]

12 Pepchinski, "Gender and Return Migration,"116; Claudia Lenz, "Karola Bloch and the 'Future of the Nation', a Weekly Childcare Facility," 156.

13 Karola Bloch, "Der Kindergarten", Bundesarchiv, Standort Berlin, DH/2/3052, Leipzig,16.02.1953.

14 Karola Bloch, "Der Kindergarten", Bundesarchiv, Standort Berlin, DH/2/3052, Leipzig,16.02.1953.

15 Bloch, *Aus Meinem Leben,* 77-78.

16 Bloch, *Aus Meinem Leben,* 203. Original quotation: "Gottlob mussten meine Kindergärten billig sein, so daß solche Ornamentik ohnehin nicht möglich war, aber frei modern entwerfen, mit großen Fenstern, unregelmäßigen Grundrissen, durfte man nicht."

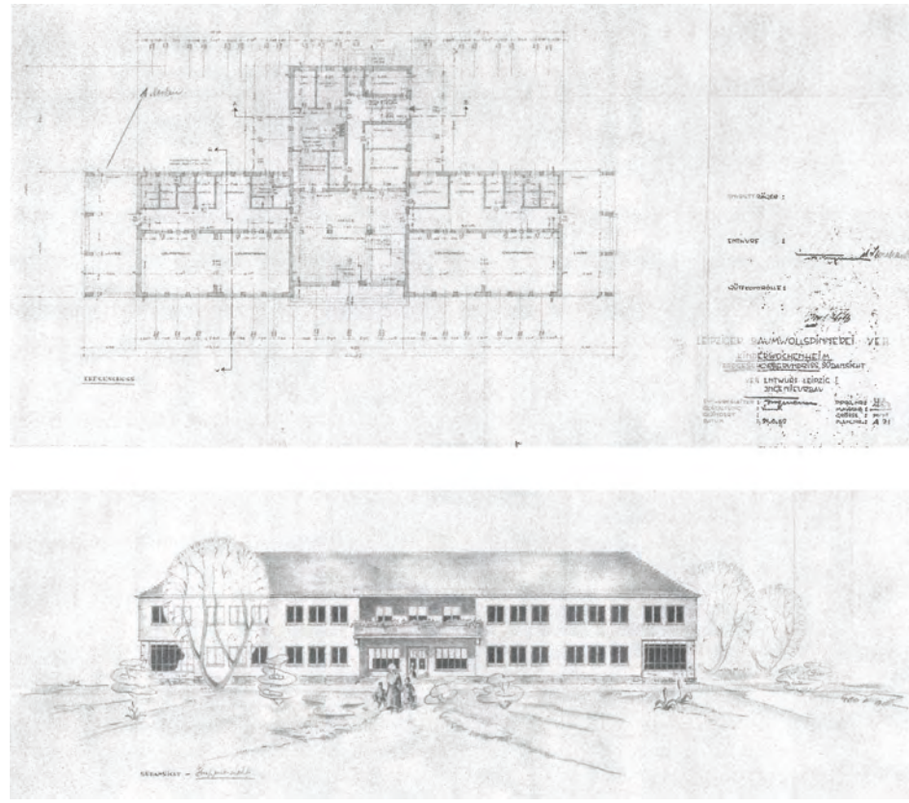

Figure 2. Weekly Childcare Facility *"Future of the Nation",* Ground Plan & South View, 1952.

Between 1950 and 1957 a multitude of typologies and floor plan schemes emerged, not all of which were made by Bloch; nevertheless, she was responsible for coordinating and supervising the various building guidelines. Likewise, she had a certain degree of influence on the design implementation of the schemes. Once all the responsible authorities had approved the schematic plans that were developed, they became norms that were legally binding in the construction of children's facilities.[17] In the next step of this process of developing standardised building typologies in the GDR, those developed schemes were implemented. Experts then examined the realised buildings in order to make eventual adjustments to the schemes. An example of this procedure is the weekly care home "*Future of the Nation"* at the Leipzig cotton mill, which was realised as a flagship project by the Fugman Brigade and supervised by Karola Bloch.

At this point, it should be emphasized that counter to popular belief, it appears that Bloch was not the designing architect of this building. Regardless, the weekly care home follows her scheme B1/60 and offers space for up to 60 children and was completed in 1954. A subsequent evaluation of the children's home came in September of the same year from the Austrian architect Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky, who had already gained relevant experience in the construction of children's facilities both in the Soviet Union and in Europe. In a letter held in the *Bundesarchiv, Standort Berlin* (Federal Archives, Location Berlin), it can be seen that Schütte-Lihotzky was aware of the difficulty in developing such typologies for children. She attributed this to the lack of tradition of such buildings, as, unlike for example schools, they represented a completely new building task. At the beginning of the letter she points out the high standards of the weekly care home *"Future of the Nation,"* especially in comparison with the childcare facilities she had been visiting in Berlin. Concerning the physical and psychological development of children she underscores the importance of the connection of architecture with nature implemented by adjoining gardens, or the windows with the sill at such a height that children can easily reach them and look outside. Further in the document, Schütte-Lihotzky notes the very good quality of the theoretical documents she had been given in advance and advises the *Deutsche Bauakademie* to continue

17 Pepchinski, "Gender and Return Migration," 109-116.

Figure 3. Weekly Childcare Facility *"Future of the Nation",* Exterior View.

Figure 4. Weekly Childcare Facility *"Future of the Nation",* Interior View.

with the working method and schemes that had been developed up to this point. On the other hand, however, the Austrian architect criticised the generous space calculation of the facilities in the GDR, which were in comparison to the Soviet Union apparently too big, hence, not economical enough. The reason for this inefficiency, however, was not poor project planning, but rather, according to her, overly demanding requirements of educators and hygienists.[18]

Standardization as a Tool for Feminist Architecture

Karola Bloch was not only in charge of the practical development but also of the theoretical examination of the development of schemata and typologies as well as their promotion and mediation within the profession and the public. In 1953 she became the first woman to be published in the East German Journal *Deutsche Architektur* (*German Architecture*). Bloch's article titled "*Grundrißschemas von Einrichtungen für das Kleinkind"* ("*Floorplan scheme for facilities for toddlers"*) was, according to Mary Pepchinski, "significant, because it was featured in an issue which presented architects with a theoretical and practical framework for socialist architectural practice",[19] as well as it introduced standardisation as a method

18 Margarethe Schütte-Lihotzky, Letter to the *Deutsche Bauakademie,* Bundesarchiv, Standort Berlin, DH/2/3214, September 24, 1954.

19 Pepchinski, "Gender and Return Migration," 113.

of architectural production.[20] Bloch introduced the article with a quote by Lenin implying that nurseries and kindergartens were an exemplary tool, as social services and public buildings, to abandon current gender inequalities within society in the public realm and the social production. Bloch made this assumption because in her near future, the typified buildings were to be implemented quickly (at least they were conceived as such), and thus reduce the double burden of wage labour and reproductive work that weighed on women. State-funded childcare for all, from a very early age, should make it possible that women should not be tied to the home longer than necessary. The importance of the emancipation process to enable women to earn their own wage has been emphasized by feminists throughout history. One of the most renowned feminist thinkers on this topic is Silvia Federici, who stated that "[t]o have a wage means to be part of a social contract".[21] Being able to work and earn a wage is therefore a basic requirement for women to be able to fight for their own rights in the first place. Acknowledging this, Bloch stressed that the realisation of the childcare facilities she was working on would help women to emancipate by offering them the possibility to be fully integrated into the wage-earning labour market. Further in the article, she referred to the Soviet Union and how working with standardisation there had proved helpful in coping with the urgent and quantitatively enormous building tasks. Anticipating the expected objection of some architects that this working method would stifle creativity, Karola Bloch pointed out that the creation of such types was an interesting task for architects themselves and that it remained an ongoing undertaking. To support her argument, she continued by naming some of the most important benefits such schematic plans could offer to the realisation of nurseries and kindergartens, ranging from the guarantee of certain pedagogical and hygienic standards to the possibility of using standardised components, which of course should also reduce costs. Regarding the current state of the development of standardised buildings, she wrote that by then, schemes had been developed that instructed the size, function, and facilities of the individual rooms and their functional interrelationships. By applying equal spatial spans and simple roof determinations, the further step towards standardisation should be initiated also from a technical point of view. And in what can almost be read as a claim to legitimacy, Bloch then also mentioned that all the schemes she presented in the article as a precondition for standardisation were based on guidelines that were developed in close cooperation with a commission of experts.[22]

At a symposium a year earlier,[23] Karola Bloch had explained and justified the choice of standardisation as a building method in a similar way. She noted that the major benefits lay in the research of functional connections of the separate rooms and their conditions, and already here she emphasized the importance of hygienic and pedagogical standards developed with experts. Speaking from a structural engineering point of view, she said that typification goes in the direction of creating standardised construction elements. As mass construction elements, they are more economical, and technically more advanced than the corresponding individual ones. Bloch went one step further to legitimise the schemes she had developed by comparing them to 'normally' designed crèches and kindergartens, citing Neufert's building design theory in their design, a reference she disapproved of for the task of building for child-care because it did not take the children enough into account as the actual users.[24] And indeed, Neufert's regulations and norms were mainly thought for a normative man.

The critique on Neufert's standardisation on the basis of a white cis male, just like Le Corbusier's *"Modulor"* nota bene, are today an integral part of a feminist theory of architecture. Professor Dörte Kuhlmann of TU Vienna, for example, noted in her critique, that referring to the male body as the benchmark has a long

20 Karola Bloch, "Architektin, Sozialistin, Freundin: Eine Neuentdeckung des Wirkens der Bauhaus-Schülerin," in *Talheimer Sammlung kritisches Wissen,* ed, Irene Scherer and Welf Schröter (Mössingen-Talheim: Talheimer, 2010), 175-188.

21 Silvia Federici, "Wages against Housework", in *Burn It down! Feminist Manifestos for the Revolution*, ed, Breanne Fahs (London ; New York: Verso, 2020), 128.

22 Karola Bloch, "Grundrißschemas von Einrichtungen für das Kleinkind (DDR 1953)," in *Karola Bloch, Architektin, Sozialistin, Freundin: Eine Neuentdeckung des Wirkens der Bauhaus-Schülerin, Talheimer Sammlung kritisches Wissen.* ed. Irene Scherer and Welf Schröter (Mössingen-Talheim: Talheimer, 2010, 175-188.

23 Karola Bloch, "Paper for the type-development of nurseries," held at the meeting of the Ministry of Health in Berlin. Bundesarchiv, Standort Berlin, DH/2/3052, June 26, 1952.

24 Bloch, "Paper for the type-development of nurseries."

history going back even until the anthropomorphism of the Renaissance,[25] and reached a peak with Neufert's "*Bauentwurfslehre*" that has been very problematic in regard of representation of gender roles and stereotypes. Women typically were shown in spaces like kitchens, and always depicted doing care work.[26] Thus "women were assigned to the kitchen, to children and to consumption, a sign language that did not disappear from Neufert's book until 2005. If we consider that Neufert's 1936 *Bauentwurfslehre* [English title: *Architects' Data*] has by now been published in more than 30 editions and has become a standard work for architects worldwide, it becomes clear how much his influential opinion about the ideal dimensions and proportions of the human body in relation to architecture reverberates even today (…)".[27]

It is remarkable that Karola Bloch criticised this as early as the early 1950s, showing that in her position as an architect she was consistently interested in considering the actual user of her architecture and thus demonstrated a very empathetic approach. This can be seen not only in the fact that she herself had drawn on dimensional diagrams for children,[28] in counterpart to Neufert, but also in the realised buildings themselves. In the case of the weekly care home "*Future of the Natio*n" in Leipzig, as already mentioned, the windowsills are at such a height that they are easy for the children to reach and also to look out of the window.[29] In the same way, a special colour scheme ran through the building to make it easier for the children to find their way around, complemented by small drawings on door frames and furniture for a child-friendly identification.[30]

All of this shows that the development of regulations and norms for the production of architecture was a multi-layered and complex process in which theory and practice were constantly in dialogue with each other. The schematic plans Bloch collaborated on could be defined as an in-between step between theory and practice in the production of space. Similar to this, the architectural historian and author Koos Bosma identified the practice of the Dutch architect John Habraken as an intermediate step between theory and practice as well. Bosma said: "This step consists of a series of design-related decisions that can be interpreted as the combination of a concept – otherwise defined as the direction that leads to a solution – and a method for converting this solution into concrete rules of play".[31]

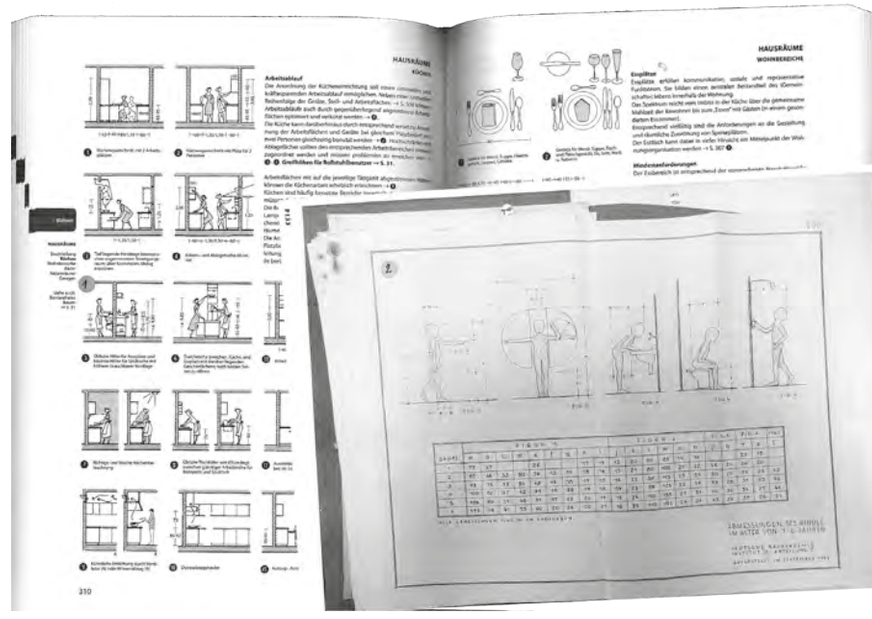

Figure 5. Ernst Neufert's "*Bauentwurfslehre"*, 310-311. Dimensions of the child aged 1-6, *Deutsche Bauakademie*, 1953.

25 Dörte Kuhlmann, *Gender Studies in Architecture: Space, Power and Difference* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2013), 103.

26 Kuhlmann, *Gender Studies in Architecture,* 105.

27 Kuhlmann, *Gender Studies in Architecture,* 105.

28 The documents found at the archive are unnamed but architecture historian Mary Pepchinski links them to Bloch in: Pepchinski, "Gender and Return Migration," 111.

29 Claudia Lenz, "Karola Bloch and the 'Future of the Nation', a Weekly Childcare Facility," in *Frau Architekt: Seit mehr als 100 Jahren: Frauen im Architekturberuf,* ed, Mary Pepchinski, Christina Budde, Wolfgang Voigt and Peter Cachola Schmal (Tübingen: Ernst Wasmuth Verlag, 2017), 156.

30 Karola Bloch, 'Das Kinderwochenheim "Zukunft Der Nation" Der Leipziger Baumwollspinnerei (DDR 1955)', in *Karola Bloch, Architektin, Sozialistin, Freundin: Eine Neuentdeckung Des Wirkens Der Bauhaus-Schülerin,* ed. Irene Scherer and Welf Schröter (Mössingen-Talheim: Talheimer, 2010), 198.

31 Koos Bosma, Dorine van Hoogstraten and Martijn Vos, ed. *Housing for the Millions: John Habraken and the SAR (1960-2000)* (Rotterdam: NAi Publishers. 2000), 7.

The Cultural Significance of Standardisation

Karola Bloch was convinced about the emancipatory potential within the development of schemes and guidelines for the construction of childcare facilities; this becomes particularly evident when she is referring to Lenin and the efforts of his doctrine to unburden women from care work and to integrate them into the world of wage-earning labour (something that has already been mentioned above). Old documents and records from the Federal Archives Germany in Berlin, consulted and quoted for this essay, show that the development of building typologies and the method of standardised building have been seen as an important tool for the development of a new socialist society with a new definition of the family since the realisation of numerous child care facilities had precisely the purpose to relieve working mothers of their reproductive duties.[32] Bloch even went so far as to write in a document for the *Deutsche Bauakademie* that for the very first time in the history of Germany, gender equality would be realised in every aspect of life.[33] She believed that this goal could not be reached with single buildings; it called for standardised buildings that shall be built all over East Germany. These brought a clear advantage in terms of time compared to a more traditional architectural production. Originally, the GDR authorities planned for a quick constructional implementation after a research and development period of the types. Schematic plans and standardised construction methods were supposed to lead to a very short construction time and cost-effective realisation.[34] These two factors of time and money were crucial for this rather big vision of constructing and building, in a double sense – political/social as well as architectural – (for) this new socialist society. Within such an approach Karola Bloch even attempted to integrate Ernst Bloch's concept of utopia into her work, in the sense of his principle of the Not-Yet, the yet to come.[35]

From an additional contemporary feminist point of view, Karola Bloch's contribution to architecture and urbanism can also be interpreted as a continuation of the legacy of the material feminists from the *Grand Domestic Revolution*.[36] This work by the architectural and urbanist historian Dolores Hayden is regarded as one of the earliest works that bridges urban planning and architecture with feminist and socialist agendas. A crucial aspect of this thinking is the link between the development of the built environment and the organisation of society that it proposes. As Hayden claimed, they were activists working on "a complete transformation of the spatial design and material culture of American homes, neighbourhoods, and cities".[37] Similarly, Bloch was also concerned with reducing the daily burden of women's care and reproductive labour. In the documents titled *"Richtlinien und Entwurfsnormen für die Projektierung und den Bau von Kindergärten in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik"* ("*Guidelines and design standards for the planning and construction of kindergartens in the German Democratic Republic"*), such an approach towards a women-friendly spatial planning becomes clear. For example, it was stated that the distance from the place of residence to a childcare facility must not be more than a fifteen-minute walk, which, considering the average walking time of a child, corresponds to a distance of one kilometre.[38] This anticipates what some contemporary scholars with a feminist agenda are still criticising in today's urban planning: the daily distance travelled by women in the course of their care work is not only longer but also more inconvenient than the routes men usually take within a day.[39]

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, a certain feminist potential lies within the contribution to the development of the standardisation for childcare facilities by Karola Bloch. Although the method of standardisation has been practised before by male architects

32 Deutsche Bauakademie, Abteilung Bauten für Lehre, Erziehung und Sport: Zur Typenentwicklung der Kindertagesstätten und Kinderwochenheime in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, (On the development of types of day-care centres and children's homes in the German Democratic Republic), Bundesarchiv, Standort Berlin, DH/2/3052, no date.

33 Karola Bloch, Zur Typenentwicklung der Kindertagesstätten (On the type development of the day care centres), Bundesarchiv, Standort Berlin, DH/2/3052, no date.

34 Due to problems in sourcing of building materials East Germany was facing as well as an extremely bureaucratic state apparatus that slowed down a lot of working processes the initial ideas never got realised in such a manner as it was planned to.

35 Siegele: "The Interplay of Philosophy and Architectural Aesthetics in the Work of Karola and Ernst Bloch", 92.

36 Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1982).

37 Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution*, 3.

38 *Richtlinien und Entwurfsnormen für die Projektierung und den Bau von Kindergärten in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik,* (Guidelines and design standards for the project planning and construction of kindergartens in the German Democratic Republic) Bundesarchiv, Standort Berlin, DH/2/3204, no date.

39 Caroline Criado-Perez and Stephanie Singh, *Unsichtbare Frauen: Wie eine von Daten beeinflusste Welt die Hälfte der Bevölkeriung ignoriert* (München: btb Verlag, 2020), 52-64.

without any feminist intention, noted earlier in the example of N. John Habraken, it has nevertheless been shown here to promote feminist agendas. In other words, standardisation was thus not carried out from a purely feminist motivation per se but was rather seen as a suitable means of building as quickly and cheaply as possible for the new society of the newly founded state of the GDR. However, the method of standardisation and typification was certainly appropriated as an instrument for feminist concerns, since a quickly established, comprehensive network of childcare facilities also benefited the women of the GDR because it enabled them to participate in wage earning employment and thus also made them financially independent.

Through her awareness and belief in the emancipatory potential of urbanism and architecture, Karola Bloch was convinced that good and thoughtful planning is important for women as it is they who must deal with the disadvantages of badly designed floor plans and cities in their everyday lives. Furthermore, Bloch believed women needed to understand urban space and architecture to become truly equal users of it. Within her last years in the GDR, she held lectures and worked anonymously on a contribution about building and construction for an encyclopaedia for women. She continued with this educational work for women concerning building and space after she and Ernst Bloch fell into disgrace in the GDR for not making a secret out of their growing displeasure with the political regime.[40]

Despite their relatively short time in East Germany (the couple emigrated to West Germany shortly before the construction of the Wall in 1961) Karola Bloch's contribution and work for the development of schematic plans for the *Deutsche Bauakademie* was significant not only from an architectural point of view but as it has turned out, also from a feminist one. Within the course of the GDR, more and more people started to live outside of conventional nuclear family units, and with the growing number of places for children in nurseries and kindergartens a growing number of children grew up in a socialist, communitarian context beyond the traditional mother and housewife model. Whether the citizens of East Germany were aware of it or not, the general picture and structure of how a family could look changed significantly towards alternative concepts, especially since a divorce or illegitimate children were no longer a social stigma.[41] In comparison, in West Germany children born out of marriage were placed under the guardianship of the child welfare until 1970; it is only since 2011 that there is no further differentiation between children born in and out of wedlock in Germany.[42] But even if all these changes in the GDR were more the result of citizens' own decisions about the structure of their lives and relationships in changing employment and socio-political context than the official ideas about the role of the family as the smallest cell of socialist society,[43] the extensive integration of women into the labour market and the establishment of necessary means for this, such as childcare facilities, played an important role in the progression of emancipation, despite the fact that the double burden remained heavy for many women.[44] Surveys repeatedly reveal that Eastern European women perceived their situation as better under socialism, albeit, according to American ethnographer Kristen R. Ghodsee, this is to be understood as an expression of dissatisfaction in the current system rather than a real longing for the past.[45] However, many women were pushed back into a nuclear family structure that was still prevalent in the West, since most of the state kindergartens and day-care centres of the GDR were closed after the reunification of Germany.[46] And it is precisely this that illustrates the importance of Bloch's vision and belief that the development and construction of an extensive network of childcare centres can have a lasting emancipatory effect on women's life.

40 Bloch, *Aus Meinem Leben,* 223-244.

41 Mary Fulbrook, *Ein ganz normales Leben: Alltag und Gesellschaft in der DDR* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2008), 138.

42 Evke Rulffes, *Die Erfindung der Hausfrau: Geschichte einer Entwertung* (Hamburg: HarperCollins, 2021), 242.

43 Fulbrook: *Ein ganz normales Leben: Alltag und Gesellschaft in der DDR,* 138.

44 Kristen R. Ghodsee, *Why women have better sex under socialism: and other arguments for economic independence* (London: Vintage, 2019), 9.

45 Ghodsee: *Why women have better sex under socialism,* 13.

46 Fulbrook: *Ein ganz normales Leben,* 161.

Figures Sources

Figure 1. The author.

Figure 2-4. Archiv Leipziger Baumwollspinnerei [Archive of the Leipzig Cotton Mill].

Figure 5. [1] Ernst Neufert, Johannes Kister, and Mathias Brockhaus, *Bauentwurfslehre*, 40th ed. (Wiesbaden: Springer Vieweg, 2012), 310-31. [2] Bundesarchiv, Standort Berlin, DQ/1/3307, Abmessungen des Kindes im Alter von 1-6, Deutsche Bauakademie Institut IV, Abteilung 2, September 1953.

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