

WALTER GROPIUS AND THE IDEAS OF MODERN GERMAN
ARCHITECTURE 1910-1928

by

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ABSTRACT

The conception of an architecture for the modern world that Gropius developed in his design, writing, and teaching was fundamentally different from the conceptions of his progressive predecessors in Germany, Henry van de Velde and Peter Behrens. Only after experimenting with the expressive qualities of modern materials and forms before 1914, and after pursuing through intuitive design his German dream of a unified-production-of-the-arts in the early Bauhaus years, did Gropius conceive during years of theoretical debate on form and the machine, this architecture of objective values, which he described in his Internationale Architektur of 1925 (here translated), and realized in his Dessau buildings of 1926-27. Gropius's humanitarian plan for a reintegrated culture with art from new roots (conceived in the intellectual controversies of Weimar Germany) drew ideas from Hegel's diagnosis of art's diminishing significance, but defied Spengler's theory of cultural decline.

1927 (1926-27)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
INTRODUCTION	
I The Position of this Study in the Writings on Modern Architecture	1
II Reactions to Nineteenth Century Architecture	2
THE PREWAR ERA	
III The Position of Henry van de Velde	9
IV A Contribution by Peter Behrens	10
V Walter Gropius's Prewar Activity	14
THE EARLY WEIMAR YEARS 1919-1923	
VI The After-War Confusion in Germany	17
VII The Bauhaus Idea	20
VIII Early Work at the Bauhaus	22
IX The Change in Gropius's Vision in 1922	23
X The 1923 Formulation	26
THE CRYSTALLIZATION 1924-1928	
XI A Contribution by Le Corbusier	29
XII Gropius's <u>Internationale Architektur</u> Complete English text	30 31
XIII The New Culture	35
POSTSCRIPT	35
BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE	36
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY	37

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER I The Position of this Study in the Writings on Modern Architecture

The historians of modern architecture, often close in age to the architects about whom they write, have often been themselves supporters of the intellectual programs behind the architecture of their period. In stressing the universal and international qualities that they envisioned for modern architecture, they sought intellectual connections for the modern ideas in the most respectable periods of the past, Classical Greece, High Gothic, and Baroque, in the most promising current of European politics, Socialism, and in the firmest of modern preoccupations, rationalism, science, and technology.

This study asks whether one of the principal formulations of exactly what this modern architecture should be—that of Walter Gropius—was not the creation of a particularly German frame of mind, and the product of a specific era of German intellectual and cultural life, the "spiritual" rebuilding of Germany after the First World War.

The fundamental question to be faced by contemporary writing on architecture is whether modern architecture was merely a new compilation of forms, legitimized by some historians with the word style, or whether it was as Gropius

proclaimed it had to be, the art of a new culture growing from fresh roots, totally independent of the artistic development (or decline) of Christendom,

...the crystal symbol of a new faith.¹

The historian's theoretical answer to this question of the uniqueness and universality of modern architecture will depend on how unique and universal were the philosophy and theory of history from which the intellectual program of modern architecture was formulated.

On the fate of Gropius's philosophy and theory of history will depend the practical fate of Gropius's idea.

CHAPTER II Reactions to Nineteenth Century Architecture

Instinctive hatred was the response that the traditional design fostered by the German academies evoked in the progressive architects of Gropius's generation. It must be remembered that the contemporary architecture of their time was not in the tradition of Carl Friedrich Schinkel's light and refined Greek Classicism, but rather in the German "Romanesquoid" style that became more ponderous in massing and more mirky in detail as the years around the turn of the century progressed. Germans in the nineteenth century had tried many classicizing and Germanizing modes in architecture—

1. Walter Gropius, Programm des Staatlichen Bauhauses in Weimar. Weimar, 1919, p. 1.

none of them could be thought very successful, and none became internationally influential. While German music, and to a certain extent German literature, were vital arts in the nineteenth century, German architecture provided a brilliant example for Georg W. F. Hegel's thesis that the modern world had advanced well beyond the point where the (visual) arts could have a major cultural role. Hegel's analysis of art's diminishing significance is worth quoting at length, for study of the ideas of modern architecture repeatedly brings us back to Hegel's theories about the concept of meaning that classic and post-classic arts had for the cultures that produced them. Not only was Hegel the intellectual giant behind the German educational system in the later nineteenth century (and thus an inescapable formative influence on the thinking of Gropius's generation), but also he was one of the philosophers consciously revived in the hectic post-war period in Germany when the ideas of the new architecture were being formulated. The revival was principally connected with the immensely controversial cultural theories of Oswald Spengler (and less directly those of Marx), which were in part based on vulgarizations or perversions of Hegel's doctrine. For the young artists still seeking convincing answers to the question then already two generations old— what the new art to replace the exhausted traditions should be— Hegel provided a theory of the cultural relevance of a vital art— Greek art— and a

diagnosis of why nineteenth century architectural efforts had come to so little:

Only a certain circle and grade of truth is capable of being represented in the medium of art. Such truth must have in its own nature the capacity to go forth into sensuous form and be adequate to itself therein, if it is to be a genuinely artistic content, as is the case with the gods of Greece. There is, however, a deeper form of truth, in which it is no longer so closely akin and so friendly to sense as to be adequately embraced and expressed by that medium. Of such a kind is the Christian conception of truth; and more especially the spirit of our modern world, or, to come closer, of our religion and our intellectual culture, reveals itself as beyond the stage at which art is the highest mode assumed by man's consciousness of the absolute. The peculiar mode to which artistic production and works of art belong no longer satisfies our supreme need. We are above the level at which works of art can be venerated as divine, and actually worshipped; the impression which they make is of a more considerate kind, and the feelings which they stir within us require a higher test and a further confirmation. Thought and reflection have taken their flight above fine art. Those who delight in grumbling and censure may set down this phenomena for a corruption, and ascribe it to the predominance of passion and selfish interests, which scare away at once the seriousness and the cheerfulness of art. Or we may accuse the troubles of the present time and the complicated condition of civil and political life as hindering the feelings, entangled in minute preoccupations, from freeing themselves, and rising

to the higher aims of art, the intelligence itself being subordinated to petty needs and interests, in sciences which only subserve such purposes and are seduced into making this barren region their home.

However all this may be, it certainly is the case, that art no longer affords that satisfaction of spiritual wants which earlier epochs have sought therein, and have found therein only; a satisfaction which, at all events on the religious side, was most intimately and profoundly connected with art. The beautiful days of Greek art, and the golden time of the later middle ages are gone by.

The reflective culture of our life today makes it a necessity for us, in respect to our will no less than of our judgment, to adhere to general points of view, and to regulate particular matters according to them, so that general forms, laws, duties, rights, maxims are what have validity as grounds of determination and are the chief regulative force. But what is required for artistic interest as for artistic production is, speaking generally, a living creation, in which the universal is not present as law and maxim, but acts as if one with the mood and the feelings, just as, in the imagination, the universal and rational is contained only as brought into unity with a concrete sensuous phenomena. Therefore, our present in its universal condition is not favorable to art. As regards the artist himself, it is not merely that the reflections which find utterance all round him, and the universal habit of having an opinion and passing judgment about art infect him, and mislead him into putting more abstract thought into his works themselves; but also the whole spiritual culture of the age is of such a kind that he himself stands within this reflective world and its

conditions, and it is impossible for him to abstract from it by will and resolve, or to contrive for himself and bring to pass, by means of peculiar education or removal from the relations of life, a peculiar solitude that would replace all that is lost.

In all these respects art is, and remains for us, on the side of its highest destiny, a thing of the past. Herein it has further lost for us its genuine truth and life, and rather is transferred into our ideas than asserts its former necessity, or assumes its former place, in reality. What is now aroused in us by works of art is over and above our immediate enjoyment, and together with it, our judgment; inasmuch as we subject the content and the means of representation of the work of art and the suitability of the two to our intellectual consideration.²

It should be noticed in this quotation, which will serve us later, that Hegel was not greatly disheartened with his conclusion that visual art for us could not be the pure creation of the spirit-of-the-time. He accepted the sophisticated character of our time, although it by nature brings with it the barrier of reflective meaning, of symbolic significance, to artistic experience— a barrier he believed did not exist for the Greeks. For him art was to be inevitably "romantic" in this sense; nothing we could possibly do would return our intellectual character to the elemental spiritual state in which art could be classic.

2. G. W. F. Hegel (1770-1831), university lectures compiled by his students, from The Introduction to Hegel's Philosophy of Fine Arts, tr. by B. Bosanquet. London, 1886, pp. 17-19.

Art inevitably brought reflective meaning— a traditional significance is our habitual and incurable demand of the art object.

It is this conclusion of Hegel that was challenged by the idea of modern architecture that crystallized in the twenties, challenged explicitly in the manifestos of Le Corbusier, of Theo van Doesburg's group de Stijl, and of Walter Gropius's Bauhaus.

The introduction to a study of the ideas of this period could not be complete without mentioning the principal revolutionary force in the German intellectual world, Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche's radical doctrine— which called for the abandonment of everything culture had come to mean— remained a dilettante interest of architects before the war. The architecture done with Nietzsche in mind fell far short of his dreams of the new life. After the war interest in his pseudo-prophetic world of the superman— so very far from what seemed to be actual modern possibilities— seemed neglected in the flurry of new romantic interests on the one hand (medieval German mysticism or Oriental philosophy) and on the other the clearly anti-Nietzschean preoccupations with new political and social systems for Germany.

Even if Zarathustra's actual following among architects had dwindled long before his name became a dirty word in Europe, Nietzsche's obituary of the gods, and his consequent

revoking of the concept of meaning in art, became axioms that progressive German artists darkly, often uncomfortably, accepted, while searching for their own alternatives to the world of the superman. For Nietzsche the very idea of meanings was part of the presence of divinity; his parable was that we could not rid ourselves of God until we had rid ourselves of grammar, that construction by which we think a thing is something. Nietzsche's implication for architecture, unequivocally stated, is that the traditional architecture of Christendom whether it be ⁱⁿ the medieval line with meaning directly ordained by history, or in the classical line drawing solid Christian significance from the Renaissance-Baroque fusion of the new and old religions, was bankrupt not because it was functionally inadequate for modern use, not because new materials and technologies dictated a new way of building, but because

God is dead. ...we have killed him.

THE PREWAR ERA

CHAPTER III The Position of Henry van de Velde

Germany's contact with the Art Nouveau movement that flourished around the turn of the century in a number of European centers (Paris, Brussels, Vienna, Glasgow), came through the Belgian designer and architect Henry van de Velde, Gropius's predecessor as director of the Weimar Arts and Crafts School, and a predominant figure in the work of the Deutscher Werkbund exhibition of 1914.

This "new art" was proposed as a style, first in design and then in architecture, which even if not totally new in form and conception went back far enough in our artistic development to get fresh roots for a vital form of art. It was a way around what appeared the impasse of shallow historicism of the nineteenth century. The spokesmen of Art Nouveau did not produce polemical writing with quite the revolutionary spirit that developed after the war when architects saw the possibility (in Germany at least) of a total cultural and social revolution. The Art Nouveau found traditional detail whether classical or medieval dead; however, the traditional conception of the building remained valid for them, while detail and form were freed from canons of history. Henry van de Velde's Werkbund Theater in Cologne of 1914 was an axial design with heavy,

sculpted walls, highly designed and highly styled detailing—all giving the building a presence as an object very much like the sculpture group with which the facade was juxtaposed. For van de Velde (and for Art Nouveau generally) buildings were still conceived as art objects, poetically embodying special significance, set apart from common experience in every detail by the hand of a master stylist, although of course this traditional nineteenth century artistic presence was not overlaid with iconographic themes from the history of architecture.

Though van de Velde was an admirer of Nietzsche's books (he designed the Nietzsche-Archiv in Weimar in 1903, and did Art Nouveau graphic design for Insel-Verlag editions of Nietzsche's works in roughly the same years) we must conclude in the light of later development that if he sought to create a "new art" for Nietzsche's world beyond traditional values, his actual realizations of an art with a fundamentally new human response— an art with meaning of a different order— are very slight indeed.

CHAPTER IV A Contribution by Peter Behrens

In 1899 the forward looking Prince Ernst-Ludwig established in Darmstadt an artists' colony aimed at reviving the arts as a vital center of life. The notion (which echoes ideas from Schopenhauer and from Nietzsche's The Birth

of Tragedy) was that the role of the aristocrat in the new world which was replacing the collapsing traditional structure would be usurped by the artist. If men were to become subject only to themselves, the artist/s— the most audacious of beings— would be their spiritual leaders. The young Nietzsche's words were

The world is justified only if regarded as an aesthetic phenomena... .

The Prince invited a group of artists, the painter Behrens among them, to personally design for themselves a total environment at the colony, from the architecture of their houses to the design of their carpets, fabrics, china, silver, and clothing. Although the ideological campaign of the colony was deeper and more radical than that of Art Nouveau, these artists in their hothouse atmosphere produced works that were less successful in developing anything more than new personal styles for the traditional art object, than were the Art Nouveau spokesmen Otto Wagner, Henry van de Velde, or Charles Rennie Mackintosh, men in state-supported art academies or international practice.

It was in 1907 when Behrens was contracted by the AEG in Berlin, manufacturers of electrical equipment, that a really influential phase of his ambiguous career began. Asked to design electrical products as well as factory buildings, Behrens turned directly to the forms and methods

of engineering construction which had been developing independent of artistic design. Behrens, in his many architectural moods, not all of them Zarathustrian, had sought meaning for building in many realms, from the adaption of Renaissance church schemes and mystic geometry to personal stylistic mannerisms. In his most brilliant AEG building, the Turbine Factory of 1909, he developed a huge hall spanned with steel frames into a temple for the large machines built within. Massive concrete piers at the corners, vast walls of repetitive steel-framed glazing, and articulated structural connections dramatized the work of the giant cranes and lathes inside; the design played on the characteristic forms and assemblies of engineering work for an aura of correctness which made the building "spiritually" part of its industrial world. The end of this great temple is closed by a concrete and glass wall deliberately manipulated to form a pediment with the profile of an electric motor rotor. Behrens in a mood that by chance seems consistent with the Turbine Factory wrote

Art shall no longer be conceived as a personal thing, with which man serves himself at will. We do not want an aesthetic that seeks its rules, within itself, in romantic dreaming, but rather one that stands in full consciousness of thunderous life. But we also do not want a technology which goes on a course for itself, but rather we want art that has a frank sense of the time.³

3. Platz, G., Die Baukunst der Neusten Zeit, inscription, (tr. my own). Berlin, 1927.

Behrens used the opportunity that the AEG offered to make an architecture of a utilitarian building, capitalizing on utilitarian methods. The great emotional force that the Turbine Factory embodied demonstrated that possibly a new source for architecture existed in the objects of industry. Behrens's AEG work and this theoretical pronouncement took a step away from Art Nouveau. He changed the fundamental presence of the art object by diminishing the play of personal style and by looking to the non-artistic world of industry for the substratum of a supra-personal iconography for the art object.

German artists with a Hegelian turn of mind, dreaming of a spirit-of-modern-times which could make a modern art with unreflective human responses, could have been swayed in 1909 by the quite extraordinary physical presence of the Turbine Factory, into thinking that industry with its engineering discipline had provided "a certain circle and grade of truth" which would again make classic architecture in Hegel's sense:

Only a certain circle and grade of truth is capable of being represented in the medium of art. Such truth must have in its own nature the capacity to go forth into sensuous form and be adequate to itself therein, if it is to be a genuinely artistic content, as is the case with the gods of Greece.⁴

4. Hegel, ibid.

But looking backward, Behrens's great temple strikes us as a consciously contrived scheme, particularly since the expressionist architects a few years later pushed certain of its design ideas to extremes. Nevertheless as a temple to the great machines it remained a convincing monument of a new kind of architecture, although limited in applicability and haunted by the artist behind it.

CHAPTER V Walter Gropius's Prewar Activity

After apprenticing with Peter Behrens from 1907 to 1910, Gropius built in 1911 his first major building, the Fagus shoe last factory at Alfeld an der Leine. The Fagus Works owes a great deal to Behrens's Turbine Factory, particularly in the use of masonry masses in conjunction with steel and glass enclosures; yet the asymmetrical composition in plan and elevation, and the prophetic lightness and transparency of the enclosures immediately distinguished Gropius as a young designer of promise. This work more than any other could be easily misdated in the history of the modern development, and even misdated in Gropius's own development. It is remarkably free of Behrens's formality and heaviness which would date it around 1910; it seems above the expressionism rampant in 1914, and above the new romantic interests of the post-war years. Although Gropius was to spend the next fifteen years working his way around

to an essential, objective architecture with his theory and practice, this small factory, because of its unstylized, unpolemical, and unpretentious directness, is closer to Gropius's mature work of 1926 than any of the more self-conscious intervening attempts.⁵

The Fagus Works won Gropius the invitation to build a model factory at the 1914 Deutscher Werkbund Exhibition in Cologne. By 1914 the progressive architects were growing certain of the future of the new architecture, and were debating among themselves the exact course that should be taken. At the Werkbund meeting the thorny question of how machine production was to be utilized divided the members into a group supporting Herman Muthesius's view that design would be dictated by mass production methods, and an opposing group (Gropius among them) supporting van de Velde's insistence that the designer's artistic creations must be served by the techniques of production. The buildings at the exhibitions— pavilions by Behrens and Bruno Taut, the aforementioned theater by van de Velde, and Gropius's factory— are themselves documents of the collision of these ideas: the collision of design as the artist's willful expression, and design as the mastery of the technical means appropriate for the problem.

5. The apparently advanced character of this design we must admit stems not entirely from the qualities that the building had, but largely from the qualities that it lacked. Gropius took over this really very modest project from a previous architect after the foundations were already in place. Had he taken a more important and freer commission in 1910 he may well have produced a much more dated design.

Gropius's support of van de Velde's side of the 1914 debate is not too surprising if we study his Werkbund building. Unlike the Fagus Works, the spaces are axially organized and deliberately manipulated to produce a forceful external expression. The principal elevations and the character of the masonry are certainly derived from a bank by Frank Lloyd Wright in Mason City, Iowa, which had appeared in German monographs since the design of the Fagus Works. The brickwork of the office wing is elaborately detailed to call our attention to formalistic distinctions between base, pier, and cornice. The glass screening, unlike that of the Fagus Works, curves and bulges to dramatize the scheme. Finally, wall painting was used on the interior and realistic sculpture panels were set directly into the entrance portals, indicating by juxtaposition that the architecture was conceived as an art object with traditional connotations of significance, conceived to have a presence very much like a painting or a piece of sculpture. These characteristics make it clear that in 1914 Gropius conceived the new buildings of steel and glass, however revolutionary technically and spatially, to be bearers of traditional artistic values— values like those of van de Velde's theater in the same exhibition.⁶

6. With the available evidence it does not seem possible to assess the contribution to these designs of Adolf Meyer, Gropius's collaborator until his death in 1924. Meyer could have figured in all of the designs to be discussed, even the Dessau buildings for which planning began in 1924, but it seems doubtful that Meyer's practical contribution to the work could have been, at any time, fundamentally in contradiction to Gropius's developing ideas.

THE EARLY WEIMAR YEARS 1919-1923

CHAPTER VI The After-War Confusion in Germany

Gropius was invited upon van de Velde's recommendation to become, at the conclusion of the war, director of the Weimar art academy and the arts and crafts school.¹ The destruction of the old social and political organization of Germany brought by the war— the end of the "Holy Roman German Empire," a German dream by no means restricted to Kaiser Wilhelm II— put new urgency and new promise into the campaign of the progressive artists. In 1935 Gropius recalled that

After that violent interruption, which kept me, like most of my fellow architects, from work for four years, every thinking man felt the necessity for an intellectual change of front. Each in his own particular sphere of activity aspired to help in bridging the disastrous gulf between reality and idealism. It was then that the immensity of the mission of the architects of my own generation first dawned on me.⁷

We would expect that the extension of Gropius's influence as head of the combined Weimart art schools (which he named the Bauhaus) and his involvement with progressive painters and sculptors would have signaled a brilliant phase

7. Gropius, New Architecture and the Bauhaus. London, 1935, p. 34.

in his architectural development. Just the opposite is true. In the light of Gropius's mature work and writing of the late twenties and thirties, these years seem wasted in ideological cul-de-sacs. Even the ambiguous achievements of his prewar factories seem forgotten in the confusion and uncertainty that raged at all levels of German life. With German aristocracy in eclipse and German Bürgertum in dissolution, the traditional art as well as the progressive art movements that these structures had formerly sustained were left without cultural foundation.

Intellectuals and artists who dreamed of a new culture had as their opponent Oswald Spengler's immensely controversial book The Decline of the West that appeared in 1918. Spengler's then convincing cyclic analysis of history placed Europe in the phase of a frozen civilization in which cultural values would inevitably dwindle. Behind the "materialist" theories of politics and architecture stood Spengler's words:

I can only hope that men of the new generation may be moved by my book to take up engineering instead of poetry, join the Navy rather than an art school, become politicians rather than philosophers.⁸

For the intellectuals who would not accept this "materialism" (Gropius among them) only one thing was certain, that the prewar world was dead and its art (however

8. Oswald Spengler, The Decline of the West, tr. by C. F. Atkinson. London, 1926, vol. I, p. 41.

progressive) invalidated. Their fascinations otherwise found no bounds. Meister Eckhart and Eastern wisdom literature were revived along with histories of ancient and exotic cultures, which had been Spengler's raw material. Although Nietzsche's Nihilismus was infinitely more optimistic about a future for art (of a revolutionary sort) than was the "materialism" of the Spengler era, Nietzsche's books seem to have been relatively neglected in these years as part of the prewar world. Hegel's philosophy was revived, and with it other early nineteenth century productions: the poetry of Novalis and particularly the works of Friedrich Schlegel, who had theorized about a Universal Poesie, an objective, highly conscious literary art not unlike the modern realistic novel, his prescription to meet Hegel's diagnosis of art's romantic ailments.

Immensely popular among those who thought optimistically about Germany's cultural future was Rudolf Steiner, the Viennese founder of the Anthroposophical Movement. Steiner, an amateur architect, wrote articles on the original meaning of the acanthus leaf in Greek architecture, depending very much on Hegel's analysis, while building his fantastic Goetheanum buildings in Dornach, Switzerland.

CHAPTER VII The Bauhaus Idea

In this confused world of revivals Gropius began in 1919 with an inspiration from a weak and short-lived revival— medieval Germany. Dürer's Nürnberg had become the paradigm of German cultural and artistic vitality. Gropius's original conception of the Bauhaus program (and the name, Bauhaus) came from the medieval Bauhütten, the craft guilds that contained in one organization the architects, painters, and sculptors that built the cathedrals. His 1919 proclamation clearly draws the analogy between who he felt the artists had to be in the "cultural reintegration" of Germany, and who the artists were in the middle ages:

ARCHITECTS, SCULPTORS, PAINTERS, WE MUST
ALL TURN TO THE CRAFTS

Art is not a "profession." There is no essential difference between the artist and the craftsman. The artist is an exalted craftsman. In rare moments of inspiration, moments beyond the control of his will, the grace of heaven may cause his work to blossom into art. But proficiency in his craft is essential to every artist. Therein lies a source of creative imagination.

Let us create a new guild of craftsmen, without the class distinctions which raise an arrogant barrier between craftsman and artist. Together let us conceive and create the new building of the future, which will embrace architecture and sculpture and painting in one unity and will rise one day toward

heaven from the hands of a million workers like the crystal symbol of a new faith... .

The ultimate, if distant, goal of the Bauhaus is the collective-work-of-art— the great building— in which no barriers exist between the monumental and the decorative arts.⁹

The knotted ideas of this proclamation, so different from the picture we associate with the later Bauhaus, is a lucid document of the uprootedness of the artists around Gropius in 1919, and it is the manifesto behind the Bauhaus work up to 1922. The hated academic art is associated with the destroyed social system, the new art is to come with the vague classless society that was to arise. At that moment the government had been placed in the hands of the Majority Socialists, who did not desire control. No one could be certain whether the de facto social system of Germany's future would be socialist, communist, or pan-Germanic in its politics. Politically the proclamation is vague; Gropius has always lived the characteristically German role of the Unpolitischen. What is interesting in the proclamation is the state of culture, and state of mind, from which Gropius envisions a new art to come. The art will not be intellectually calculated by the talented genius, but arise from a mass working in a common spirit. The collective-work-of-art (Einheitsk^unstwerk) is not Richard Wagner's consummation of the nineteenth century

9. Gropius, Programm..., tr. adapted from that in H. Bayer, Bauhaus 1919-1928. New York, 1938, p. 16.

dream, the Gesamtkunstwerk, but rather the unreasoned creation of a faith.

Gropius's image of the medieval cathedral as the naïve creation of the developing Christian faith, however, is as overlaid with German romanticism as Lyonel Feininger's woodcut of a cathedral which accompanied the proclamation was overlaid with German expressionism. Where to seek the prophecy of a new faith that would do what Christianity had done in the middle ages was the Bauhaus dilemma of these years— and perhaps its perpetual dilemma.

CHAPTER VIII Early Work at the Bauhaus

The spiritual leader of the Bauhaus in the early years was the mystic Johannes Itten who taught for Gropius the preliminary course in design. It is clear that in these years the search for art was in the subjective rather than in the analytic mind.¹⁰ Itten had his students exercise with Indian clubs to prepare for the act of drawing. Their projects were analyses of medieval German painters, and drawings or constructions that explored the mystery in fragments of natural or man made materials.

Architectural commissions were scarce for the Bauhaus. The only building from the early years was Gropius's and

10. von Erffa, Helmut, "Bauhaus: First Phase," Architectural Review, August 1959, 122:103-5; and "Bauhaus before 1922," College Art Journal, November 1943, 3:14-20.

Meyer's Sommerfeld house in Berlin of 1921, which Sigfried Giedion has deleted from his histories, and from his complete list of Gropius's works. This house which Gropius proudly published in great detail as late as 1923 in Staatliches Bauhaus in Weimar 1919-1923, is the architectural counterpart of Itten's mystic medieval interests. Symmetrically composed, built ^{in a log-cabin} log-cabin fashion upon a rustic stone foundation, this house incorporated interiors and decoration from the Bauhaus wood sculpture studio, all unified by a formal style carried down to the detail of the mysterious symbolic relief panels inside. A modern ^(evolutionary) parody of the work of the old craft guilds, the building is at once an anachronism and a perfect document of the early Bauhaus.

CHAPTER IX The Change in Gropius's Vision in 1922

Johannes Itten left the Bauhaus in 1922, largely because of pressure from students who objected to his intrusions into the craft studios where he was inexperienced.¹¹ Yet in a deeper sense the spirit of the Bauhaus was turning against the point of view that Itten stood for. The architectural projects, furniture, and design after 1922 took on a new look. Critics have been quick to associate the change from the cloudy mysticism to clear elementary forms with the work of the Dutch group de Stijl which worked through

11. Ibid.

the 'teens (largely uninterrupted by the war), toward a style of cubic composition. The presence of the group's leader van Doesburg in Weimar in 1922, whether invited or campaigning for himself, gives body to this analysis. Certainly in many specific details the borrowings from de Stijl were obvious in designs of the time by Gropius or Marcel Breuer, but the new general attitude could have had many inspirations, the most immediate and obvious perhaps simply a reconsideration of the prewar Deutscher Werkbund accomplishments.

A letter of August 10, 1923 from van Doesburg to Gerrit Rietveld, whose work in Holland had been the specific source of Bauhaus borrowing, gives the tone of van Doesburg's contempt for the early Bauhaus approach.

Dear Rietveld,

... This morning when I awoke I found a number of letters, and among the others there was one from Germany; enclosed was a program of the Bauhaus-Week. I was stunned to see in it that you had joined in the exposition of the Bauhaus in Weimar, thus working against 'De Stijl'. That Wils and Oud joined does not surprise me very much; they are constantly advertising themselves. But what advantage can you see in exhibiting there. I feel very miserable and now realize that I must give up the Stijl-idea because I am gradually, due to encircling intrigues, standing alone. This entire Bauhaus display results from the struggle which I had there; the exposition is intended as an immediate revenge against my influence and against my person. Gropius, the director, will use

this demonstration only as a raison d'être for the Bauhaus and as a means of perpetuating it. The affair is thoroughly rotten inside, and whatever little good there may be in it is simply a dilute extraction from De Stijl. And thoroughly cooperating in this dirty mess, my followers over there are made helpless because Gropius can now say: 'see that I accept the Stijl direction; I have the Stijl people also in the Bauhaus!' If you should have ever thought about working against my plans, you certainly did it by cooperating in this stinking intrigue! I am receiving letters from every side; how in god's name is it possible that the 'Stijlbrüder' participate in an exhibition intended to be against the Stijl. The Bauhaus always worked against me to the extent where they had conferences in which the question dealt with was: How can we get van Doesburg out of Weimar, and how can we rid ourselves of the Stijl influence? And these people had, themselves, brought me to Weimar! One of these days there will appear a double Stijl issue including reproductions of your work! And at the same time you exhibit with the opposition. If I had not let you know beforehand about the Bauhaus people I would think that it was a mistake! I still have some hope that you gave only your name and that you will not exhibit anything. ...¹²

Walter Gropius, who periodically has to make answers to these somewhat paranoid accusations of van Doesburg and to critical theories about this Bauhaus phase, said in 1963

Theo van Doesburg wanted to teach in the Bauhaus in 1922. I refused, however, to appoint him since I

12. Brown, Theodore M., The Work of G. Rietveld Architect. Utrecht, 1958, p. 31.

considered him to be too aggressive and too rigidly theoretical: he would have wrought havoc in the Bauhaus through his fanatic attitude which ran counter to my own broader approach. I was determined to avoid narrow one-sidedness and oversimplification until a new totality and unity would grow organically and naturally out of the initial chaos of the Bauhaus melting pot. We all were interested in Doesburg's philosophy, but his influence was temporary and has been greatly exaggerated.¹³

CHAPTER X The 1923 Formulation

It will be shown later exactly what was "temporary" about de Stijl influence (that Gropius had turned against their basic philosophy by 1925), but van Doesburg's impression was very deep in 1923. Gropius's second Bauhaus pronouncement (1923) opened with a peculiar characterization of the coming epoch, a characterization which has no correlation in German ideas of the time.

The dominant spirit of our epoch is already recognizable although its form is not yet clearly defined. The old dualistic world-picture which envisaged the ego in opposition to the universe is rapidly losing ground. In its place is rising the ideal of a world-unity in which all opposing forces exist in a state of absolute balance. This dawning recognition of the

13. Gropius, letter in American Institute of Architects Journal, September 1963, 40:5-6.

essential oneness of all things and appearances endows creative effort with a fundamental inner meaning deeply rooted in us.¹⁴

Gropius is an intuitive thinker, not a student of ideas, but in this case his intuition took him remarkably close to van Doesburg's first de Stijl Manifesto of 1918:

1. There is an old and a new consciousness of time. The old is connected with the individual. The new is connected with the universal. The struggle of the individual against the universal is revealing itself in the world-war as well as in the art of the present day.
2. The war is destroying the old world with its contents: individual domination in every state.
3. The new art has brought forward what the new consciousness of time contains: a balance between the universal and the individual.
4. The new consciousness is prepared to realise the internal life as well as the external life.¹⁵

Gropius's obscure and derived opening lines in the 1923 pronouncement are however not as interesting as the remainder of the document in which he describes at great length how the obscurely defined "dominant spirit" (a Hegelian Zeitgeist, we find) will make a new vital art. The qualities he attributes to the new, however, are analogies

14. Gropius, Idee und Aufbau des Staatlichen Bauhauses Weimar, Munich, 1923, tr. adapted from that in Bayer, loc cit., p. 20.

15. Stedelijk Museum, De Stijl (catalog No. 81). Amsterdam, 1951, p. 10.

of what Germans with Hegel in the background believed the qualities of classic (Greek) art to be.

We perceive every form as the embodiment of an idea, every piece of work as a manifestation of our innermost selves. Only work which is the product of inner compulsion can have spiritual meaning. ...

The character of an epoch is epitomized in its buildings. In them, its spiritual and material resources find concrete expression... A vital architectural spirit, rooted in the entire life of a people, represents the interrelation of all phases of creative effort, all arts, all techniques. Architecture today has forfeited its status as a unifying art. It has become mere scholarship.¹⁶

In 1923, Bauhaus design reflected the obscurity in Gropius's vision of this Zeitgeist: de Stijl forms, which had van Doesburg's own abstruse Hegelian speculations behind them,¹⁷ competed with native Bauhaus developments.

16. Gropius, Idee und Aufbau..., tr. Bayer, loc cit., p. 20.

17. Jaffe, H. C. L., de Stijl 1917-1927. Amsterdam, 1956, p. 53-62.

THE CRYSTALLIZATION 1924-1928

CHAPTER XI A Contribution by Le Corbusier

The original French edition of Le Corbusier's Towards a New Architecture appeared in 1923, supplying or perhaps reflecting a realization that was crucial in the crystallization about 1925 of a conception of the new architecture that was (however briefly) pervasive and international. Le Corbusier presented the airplane, the automobile, the ocean liner, and the vast utilitarian structure to artists with the claim:

These are the things that move us.

Architects had been thinking about the machine for a long time, but Le Corbusier startled them when he published the automobile beside the Greek temple and claimed that machines had for men of the twentieth century the correctness and factual significance that the temple had had for the Greeks. His use of Hegel's analysis, conscious or not, becomes certain in his chapter "Architecture, Pure Creation of the Spirit," where a picture of the Parthenon is captioned:

Here is something to arouse emotion. We are in the inexorable realm of the mechanical. There are no symbols attached to these forms: they provoke definite sensations; there is no need of a key in order to understand them.

The realization was that the methods of engineering came very close to producing art objects, that can be appreciated directly, that are un-symbolic, that carry emotional force without embodying meaning or extra-ordinary significance, in short his claim was that Hegel's conditions of a classic art could again be met.

CHAPTER XII Gropius's Internationale Architektur

Gropius's response to this realization in 1925 is found in his third Bauhaus proclamation, a text totally neglected in English which here appears in full.

It is clear with this document that Gropius rejected the principal tenet of van Doesburg and de Stijl: a philosophy of form. Yet the idea that a building problem has an essence (Wesen) that leads to form— an idea Gropius never takes up again— certainly is a de Stijl contribution.¹⁸

18. Brown, ibid., p. 32-33.

INTERNATIONAL ARCHITECTURE

Second altered edition (four thousand through six thousand)
 Munich, Albert Langen Verlag, 1925
 (No. 1 of the Bauhausbücher)

Text by Walter Gropius
 Translated by K. H. Kaiser

Foreword

p.5 International Architecture is a picture book of the modern art of building. It will in concise form give a survey of the works of the leading modern architects of the cultured countries of the world and make the developments of today's architectural design familiar.*

The works pictured on the following pages carry beside their differing individual and national characteristics, common features that are the same for all countries. This relationship, which every layman can observe, is a sign of great significance for the future, foretelling a general form-will of a fundamentally new kind which is represented in all the cultured countries. *Ornament*

p.6 In the recent past the art of building sank into sentimental decorative conceptions of the aesthete, whose goal was the outward display of motives, ornaments, and profiles taken mostly from past cultures, which were without essential importance to the body of the building. The building became depreciated as a carrier of superficial, dead decoration, instead of being a living organism. The indispensable connection with advancing technology (and its new materials and construction methods) was lost in this

* In order to serve a wide range of laymen, the editor has limited himself to showing building exteriors. Typical plans and interiors will follow in a later volume.

decline; the architect, the artist, without mastering the sovereign possibilities of technology, remains clouded in academic aestheticism, becomes tired and convention-bound; the design of accommodations and of cities escapes him. This formalistic development, mirrored in the "Isms" that have rapidly succeeded one another in the past decades, seems to have reached its end. A new essential sense-of-^{*} building is unfolding simultaneously in all the cultured countries. Our realization grows of a living form-will (Gestaltungswille), taking root in the totality of society (in der Gesamtheit der Gesellschaft) and its life, invests all realms of man's formative activity with a unified goal beginning and ending in building. The consequence of this altered and deepened spirit and its new technical resources is an altered form-of-building that exists not for the sake of form itself, but rather springs from the essence of the building, from the function which it shall fulfill.

The past epoch of formalism perverted the natural law that the essence of the building determines its technology, which in turn defines its form; ^{0.7} the epoch neglected the essential and the causal, for superficialities of form and the means of their exhibition. But the new creative spirit, which is slowly beginning to develop, goes again to the basis of the thing: in order to form a thing, a piece of furniture, a house, so that it functions correctly, its essence is investigated first. The investigation of the essences of a building project is bound as closely to mechanics, statics, optics, and acoustics as to the rules of proportion. Proportion is the concern of the spiritual world, material and construction appear as its medium, through which the spirit of the master is made manifest; proportion depends on the function of the building, expresses its

p.7 essence and finally gives it the intensity of its own spiritual life beyond its utilitarian worth. Among a multiplicity of equally economical solutions— of which there

are many for each building problem— the creative artist, within the boundaries his time sets upon him, chooses according to his personal sensibilities. The work therefore carries the signature of its creator. But it is wrong to infer from this the necessity for emphasis on the individual at any cost. On the contrary, the will to develop a unified world picture, the will which characterizes our age, presupposes the longing to liberate spiritual values from their confinement to the individual and to elevate them to objective importance. Then the unity of the arts, which leads to culture, will follow by itself. In modern architecture the objectification of the personal and the national is clearly recognizable. A uniformity of the character of modern buildings across natural borders, to which peoples and individuals remain bound, caused by world trade and technology is invading all cultured nations. Architecture is always national, also always individual, but of the three concentric circles— individual— people— humanity— the last and greatest encompasses the other two. Therefore the title:

"INTERNATIONAL ARCHITECTURE"

p.8 Study of the photographs of this book will reveal that strict utilization of time, space, material and money in industry and management decisively determine the factors of the physiognomy of the modern building-organism: exactly cut form, singleness in multiplicity, organization of all parts of the building for the functioning of the building complex, the street, and traffic, concentration on typical plan forms, their development and repetition. A new will is discernible, to design the buildings of our environment from inner laws, without lies or gaming, their sense and purpose elucidated by the functional tensions of their own building masses, with anything unnecessary that would mask their absolute form thrust off. The architects of this book

affirm the contemporary world of the machine and its tempo; they strive for ever bolder means-of-design with which to overcome, with action and example, the suspended torpor of the world.

* * * * *

The consummation of this sense-of-building was Gropius's designs for the Dessau Bauhaus buildings: the masters' houses of 1925 and the school of 1926-27. The presence of these buildings is different from the earlier work (the Jena Theater of 1923 for example), in that no part of the buildings is presented to the beholder as meaningful or even artistically interesting in itself. As Gropius's book says, the artistic merit of the design arises from the master architect's study of the essence of the building need. Painting and sculpture are absent. In fact, they could not be successfully introduced into the body of the building because the status of the building as an object was no longer like the status of sculpture but rather something like that of a machine.

CHAPTER XIII The New Culture

Gropius dreamed during these years that this essential and objective architecture would underlie the "cultural reintegration" which was the project of his lifetime. The new life was to be at first an elemental life. Elemental spiritual values would be objectified in architecture, yet architecture was not the only residence of spirit, and not Gropius's only cultural concern. (Bauhaus preoccupation with theater in these years and Gropius's final project as its director, the Totaltheater of 1928, are the other side of this new life of classical simplicity. The theater was to be the focus of the new city and the place where the profundities of the new life would be presented. Its stage, however, has so far been silent.

POSTSCRIPT

The end of the era came rapidly— in 1933 for Germany— and after 1945 the architects of the artistic Diaspora found themselves on foreign land, and in a foreign world. The possibility of Kultur was revoked, Hegelian essential philosophy was erased, and Spengler's theories (already forgotten) had come true. Thus the program of this modern architecture was invalidated.

I am indebted to Professor Stanford Anderson for a great deal of otherwise unavailable information on the ideas of Gropius's predecessors in Germany, van de Velde and Behrens, and for assistance in translating Internationale Architektur.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

This study is addressed against the picture of Gropius in the influential book Space, Time, and Architecture (editions from 1941 to 1963) by Sigfried Giedion, whose enthusiastic interpretations now seem almost hallucinatory, and particularly against his Walter Gropius, Work and Teamwork (1954) which camouflages the fact that Gropius's thinking went through several radical changes before he arrived at a position which Giedion attributes to his whole career. This study is a supplement to Nikolaus Pevsner's Pioneers of the Modern Movement (1936) which locates origins of modern ideas in artists' thinking; and a supplement to Reyner Banham's remarkable (but already dated) Theory and Design in the First Machine Age (1960) which is an internal study of the architectural theories. The suggestion that certain modern buildings might exploit a fundamentally different status as objects comes from Banham's "On Trial: Mies van der Rohe," (Architectural Review, August 1962, 132:125-128), and particularly from William Jordy's "The Symbolic Essence of Modern European Architecture of

the Twenties and its Continuing Influence," (Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, October 1963, 22:177-187); my connection of this essence with remnants of Hegelian thinking, however, would suggest that the essence was, in 1925 at least, un-symbolic. The idea of a ghost of Hegel behind Gropius (later mentioned by Henry-Russell Hitchcock) came from Erich Heller's "Conversation on Magic Mountain" in Thomas Mann The Ironic German (1958).

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