ERICH MENDELSOHN:
FROM BERLIN TO JERUSALEM

by

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Erich Mendelsohn: From Berlin to Jerusalem

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the creative persona of Erich Mendelsohn's seemingly incompatible bodies of architecture in Europe, Palestine and the U.S. The limits of existing formal analysis to explain his architectural shifts were the impetus for investigating the architectural position that facilitated not only Mendelsohn's iconic architecture in Germany, but its appropriation to Palestine as well. Beside his artistic ambience, is also Mendelsohn's religious faith, national identity and political convictions. Mendelsohn was part of the Jewish post-assimilated generation in Germany - he extended this experience to the art of building. This extension was facilitated intellectually by Martin Buber's (early) teaching about the creative Jewish yearning for unity.

The paper focuses on how Mendelsohn's consistent architectural and political position discloses itself first in the industrial West (Germany), where it engaged the striving architectural debates of the period, and then in the Orient. In Palestine, where he took part in the "cultural Zionist" agenda, he remolded Modern Architecture into a non-Western country.

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Erich Mendelsohn’s oeuvre consists of three seemingly incompatible bodies of architectural production, which correspond to the geographical location in which they were produced: Europe (Germany 1914-1933, Great Britain 1933-1939), Palestine (1934-1941), and the U.S. (1941-1953). Although Mendelsohn’s name appears in almost every survey of early twentieth century modern architecture, a critical account of the entire work of this extraordinary architect is conspicuously missing. There is obvious difficulty in reconciling his expressionist sketches and the Einstein Tower with his urban commercial buildings. Moreover, in the limited criticism of his work there is almost a total disavowal of his Zionist institutional buildings in Palestine as well as his buildings for the Jewish community in the U.S. In fact, Julius Posener, one of the few architectural historians who sincerely discusses Mendelsohn’s work, in spite of and maybe because of his own activity in Palestine during the thirties, continues to argue that Mendelsohn did not make any significant contribution to this century’s architectural development beyond his European years. This statement will be challenged in this paper.²

Posener’s critique is accurate insofar as Mendelsohn did not further pursued the idea that innovative form is a response to the challenge new materials pose. But, beyond its heroic evolution in Europe, Modern Architecture has disseminated throughout the world. Its mobilization to non-industrial societies has induced a growing gap between cultures and arbitrary architectural form. Mendelsohn confronted this dilemma as
early as 1923 when he won a competition for the Business Center in Haifa, Palestine.³ (fig. 4.3) His buildings there, erected between 1934 and 1941 (fig. 4.4-4.22), are centrally focused on the gap between technological progress and local cultural values. Mendelsohn thus addressed not only the gap between technology and architectural form, which preoccupied Modern architects at the beginning of this century, but also the gap between architectural form and culture, which has been the preoccupation of this century's architects ever since.

In this paper I try to reconstruct the architectural position that facilitated the production of such a diverse body of architecture. In order to address both facets of Mendelsohn's endeavor, I will return to his formative years in Munich and focus primarily on his formation as a creative persona. Thus, beside his artistic ambience, I will discuss Mendelsohn's religious faith, national identity, and political convictions. As an explicit contextualist, Mendelsohn insisted that his architecture is inextricably linked to the entire manifestations of his time. Thus, I will try to reconstruct many aspects of the reality, which he aspired to enhance through architectural form. I will discuss Mendelsohn as part of the Jewish post-assimilated generation in Germany, whose experience of marginalization and exile had generated distinct insights into the nature of modern human existence. I will argue that Mendelsohn's architecture in Germany centrally addressed the schism of modern life, while his architecture in Palestine attempted to reconcile it.
Notes Regarding Mendelsohn's Scholarship

Recent scholarship perpetuated the aforementioned classification of Mendelsohn's architecture by dedicating three dissertations to three distinct periods of his work: The Early Sketches, by Hans R. Morgenthaler,4 The Berlin Years (1918-1933), by Kathleen A. James,5 and The Palestine Period, by Ita Heinze-Muhleib.6 All three authors review primary sources and earlier publications on Mendelsohn. They all discuss the limits of previous material, thus further discussion is not required. Here, I will construct my arguments primarily around the published source materials: the recently translated lectures of 1919, "The Problem of a New Architecture," delivered in Berlin,7 and 1923's "The International Consensus on the New Architectural Concept, or Dynamics and Function," delivered in Amsterdam and Rotterdam,8 as well as the 1940's pamphlet "Palestine and the World of Tomorrow," written in Jerusalem,9 and the 1948's concluding lecture, "My Own Contribution to the Development of Contemporary Architecture," delivered at the University of California, Los Angeles.10 Mendelsohn's published letters as well as letters from Ita Muhleib-Greenberg's collection in Haifa will enrich the discussion. The three dissertations I mentioned will be a background for my work as well as an important source due to the extensive use of archival material they include.

Kathleen James and Ita Heinze-Muhleib, covering the Berlin and Palestine periods, did pioneering work in architectural history research. James places Mendelsohn's work into the contemporary European scene as well as the Russian and American avant-garde. She discusses contemporary theoretical trends as well as influential patronage. Heinze-Muhleib is the primary source for Mendelsohn's Palestine period.
Her work includes detailed information of all his Palestine buildings, his patronage, and his status among Zionist architects. Both did not centrally address theoretical issues. Morgenthaler, concentrating on Mendelsohn's early sketches, reconstructs his formative years. Morgenthaler's work provides fascinating insight into the evolution of Mendelsohn's mature formal language. This evolution is described as intertwined with Mendelsohn's 'theoretical' development. Although we are provided with a detailed study of the range of influences he was exposed to (the Blue Rider group, fig. 2.4) Jugendstil (fig. 2.5 and 2.7), the engineering aesthetic (fig. 2.3), the Secessionist (fig. 2.1 and 2.2), and the Werkbund debates (fig. 3.4 and 3.5) among others), the work is limited, I think, in articulating the unique position to which Mendelsohn eventually arrived. In his effort to go beyond the rubric of Expressionist, Morgenthaler emphasizes the contribution of Mendelsohn to the Machine aesthetic and eventually to the "International Style." This terminology betrays an inner-contradiction, because the notion of a uniform international style could not be more foreign to Mendelsohn's philosophy, which disputed both internationalism and the idea of an established style. "Internationalism [concluded Mendelsohn in his 1919 lecture] means the Nationless aestheticism of a decaying world." Right at the beginning of his 1923 lecture he refers to the emerging "international style" which he saw at the Bauhaus exhibition that same year: "to call this apparent conformity simply 'international' [he asserts,] is more verbal indolence than an expression of conviction." Discussing the social-political statements in Mendelsohn's 1919 lecture, Morgenthaler remarks: "All these statements by Mendelsohn simply portray him as a citizen concerned with his own political environment. They cannot be used as interpretative arguments in respect to his designs. His projects are not the result of political and social ideas. They come
out of a genuine interest in the future of architecture." In this thesis, I will argue that Mendelsohn's "philosophical background," as he called it, would not allow for architecture to be a goal in itself, and that religion, social issues, and politics were driving forces in the making of his architecture. He believed that the new culture he strove for could be facilitated with the help of architecture; indeed, architecture plays a major role because of its unique capacity to create man's visual environment. But, as a sensible form, it could not be the final objective. It was for him a means to achieve unity, a notion I will further discuss in this paper. Moreover, Morgenthaler's construction of Mendelsohn's continual dialectic between the material and spiritual aspects of his work revolves around Mendelsohn's own debate whether to launch a career in the "free" art, i.e., painting, or in the "restricted" discipline of architecture. Although new and revealing, this argument is somewhat limited. Mendelsohn's preoccupation with contrasting reality and vision, or reason and emotion, adheres, I will argue, to a deeper dilemma which goes far beyond "a genuine interest in the future of architecture." It goes to the schism of modern human existence.

In 1948 Mendelsohn was given the opportunity to evaluate his own contribution to the development of contemporary architecture. Concluding the long overview, he said: "I just touched thoughts and discussions which this work has automatically produced and unwillingly released - not as the author's theories but rather as philosophical background of his art." Mendelsohn adopts the notion of "unwillingly released" "will-to-form of the new age" as the appropriate motivation for his work. What follows is a reluctance to join the making of authoritarian architectural "theories," which was
common at the time among the "modern masters." The call for the young generation, with which he concludes this lecture, affirms his non-conformist convictions.

The facts of building, [Mendelsohn asserts]...are only part of the facts of life. Life means your life, time means your time, you write the history of your age.

That is to say that you must know the whole extent of the conditions you live under. Must know the principles of your time's total knowledge: technique, politics, economics, artistic and philosophical trends; principles not details! You must make a total survey of our century, acquire a total conception of life, develop a philosophy of your own.16

My investigation of Mendelsohn's architectural position will try to follow this premise, that is, that Mendelsohn's architecture is inextricably linked to the way he experienced the "total conditions he lived under." Furthermore, espousing the notion of "philosophical background" rather than an explicit "theory," I will argue, allowed him to critically re-appropriate his modern architecture when the geographical, technical, social, and political conditions he lived under had changed.

The Jewish Post-Assimilated Generation

Judaism was a thread that ran throughout Mendelsohn's life, guiding his personal destiny as well as his professional career. First, Jews commissioned him to build the largest Modern buildings of the twenties. His Jewish patronage had great confidence in the liberating power of modernism and its secular democratic capitalistic freedom for society at large and minorities in particular. In the early thirties Fascist anti-Semitism forced on Mendelsohn a three-fold exile: as a Jew he was exiled from the German-Aryan population of his homeland, as a "decadent" Modernist he was exiled from the arts as well as from his professional circle of architects in and out of Germany. Gropius, during his own exile in England, objected to the participation of "unpatriotic Mendelsohn" in an exhibition of "pure German architect[s]." He wrote
Maxwell Fry regarding the exhibition in the Royal Institute of British Architects: "Because I myself am no special friend of the Jew," asserts Gropius, we should not break our "agreement that we, when possible, should have the significant work of an entirely and absolutely German citizen." Consequently, after Jewish patronage facilitated Mendelsohn's practice in Palestine, where he could fulfill for eight years his early Zionist inclination, his arrival to the U.S., the last station of his turbulent journey, was marked by his exclusion from 'official' Modern Architecture historiography, written primarily there. In the U.S., seeking security as a war refugee, he was initially offered a position with the New School of Social Research, headed by Jewish German intellectuals. Later, he became the 'contractor of the Jewish community.'

In this paper I will discuss Erich Mendelsohn as a member of a Jewish German-speaking Intellectual environment, which activated pivotal works in philosophy, the arts, and sciences prior to the rise of Fascism in Germany. Among individuals of this generation, who bear direct significance for Mendelsohn, we find Martin Buber, Albert Einstein, and later Theodor Adorno and most of the Frankfurt School's thinkers, who Mendelsohn intended to join as a professor of architecture after his departure from Palestine. This generation's intellectuals, diverse as they were in occupations and social-political convictions, shared a common mistrust in the emancipation which their parents' generation considered they had achieved.

Until the mid-eighteents century Jews in Germany were clearly recognizable by themselves and by their environment as a people. With Mendelssohn and the school
he inspired, began among Jews a conscious process of turning toward the Germans, first to be absorbed by German culture and then by German nationality. "The Jews struggled for emancipation [Gershom Scholem criticizes] not for the sake of their rights as a people, but for the sake of assimilating themselves to the people among whom they lived." In fact, in spite of these efforts, the Germans never fully accepted Jews as an integral part of their nation. This recognition awakened the post-assimilated generation to judge the emancipation as self-deceiving. The price the Germans demanded for Jewish emancipation, "a resolute disavowal of Jewish nationality," did not and would never yield, they claimed, the desired inclusion into German culture. They pointed at the transformation of "the unending Jewish demand for a home" into "the ecstatic illusion of being at home," as the hallmark of the false belief in the unconditional acceptance of Jews by hosting nations. Moreover, the newly awakened Jewish creativity encountered German history in its most fruitful turning point - the golden age of the German bourgeoisie. This encounter produced an image of things German that for a long time remained unshaken. This "happy hour," explained the spokesmen of the post-assimilated generation, stripped the Jews of their critical capacity; they failed to see what Scholem describes as a "one-sided love story."

This critique confronted the Jewish educated young middle class with an unresolved identity crisis. On the one hand they were already divorced from the traditional introverted Jewish practice of diaspora life. On the other hand, they could not enjoy the illusion of an actual integration into the mainstream intense German cultural life. Paradoxically, their marginality activated their progressiveness, to the point at which
in the Bauhaus discussions, the terms 'Jew' and 'progressive' became synonymous.\textsuperscript{21}
Whenever this progressiveness was condemned, it was alluded to as belonging to their Jewishness, but when it was respected, it was in spite of, or in distinction from their identity. Indeed, anti-Semitism often surfaced not only as a popular animosity but as an articulate intellectual position on behalf of artists among others.\textsuperscript{22}

An option many young Jews chose was Marxism, aiming at a total change of social organization and consciousness. This choice would grant them equality as a giant act of dismembering national constructs. Their Zionist opponents reacted against this route toward Jewish self-annihilation. As members of the Jewish national movement, they chose the opposite route. In Zionism members of this young generation found an opportunity to reconstruct their Jewish identity. In it Judaism, their condemned "Otherness," was portrayed as a unique cultural phenomena. Bothered by anti-Semitism and assimilation, they did not care for revolutionizing the bourgeoisie. Rather than changing the world order, they preferred to either incorporate Jews as a nation into the existing nineteenth-century national world structure, or to devise an alternative structure for national communal life.

**Zionism: Background**
German Zionists were a small elitist and well-organized group. They joined a movement whose zealous first impetus was primarily rooted in East Europe as a response to recurring pogroms, culminating in 1881, when a wave of pogroms followed Russian Czar Alexander II's assassination. Initially, the Zionist movement consisted of two major ideologies, the political and the cultural. Political Zionism, inspired by
Leon Pinsker's *Autoemancipation* and Theodor Herzl's *Judenstaat* (literally, The Jew State), saw in anti-Semitism a permanent psychological phenomena of "xenophobia," the enmity with the stranger. Both agreed with anti-Semites that this malaise, caused by national anomaly, made the Jews irretrievably and forever alien. Jews thus provoked a "reasonable" hatred of the unlike. Departing from the premise that the emancipation is irretrievable, the political solution to the Jew's problem should be engineered through the acceptance of the Jews as equals in the modern world. Hence, the attainment of a charter granting Jews near-sovereign rights in the territory that they were to settle, was the first objective of political Zionism. Concerned with the problem of the Jews rather than Judaism, both Pinsker and Herzl did not insist on Palestine as the only territorial solution.

Alternatively, the objective of cultural Zionism, led by Ahad Ha-am, was to resolve the identity crisis of Judaism in the modern world. As an emancipated, secular, enlightened Jew, Ahad Ha-am had to reconcile his belief in the irretrievable loss of religious faith with a community traditionally crystallized around religious notions. He merged the incompatible by displacing the cohesive element of the Jewish people, i.e., religion, with a new construct, nation: rather than Jewish existence for the sake of Judaism, religion was now viewed as an instrumental value enforcing the Jews' essential being as a nation. Ahad Ha-am thus formulated a notion of continuity that could bridge over the faithless age of the enlightenment. Secularized Judaism became the coin for Zionist identity. If this essential nationhood was originated in *Eretz Israel*, that is, in Palestine, then it had to be revitalized on that same land.
Political Zionism shared a negative motivation, anti-Semitism. Therefore, the problem had to be resolved within the community of nations by becoming a nation like every other nation. Ahad Ha-am did not believe in the possibility of a total solution for the Jew's problem, and was aware very early of the potential conflict with the Arab population in Palestine. Cultural Zionism, therefore, assigns to the pioneering Jews in Palestine a cultural leading role as the spiritual core of Judaism, which emanates the cultural significance of Judaism to be absorbed by the world Jewry. All Zionists wanted to break with the image of the diasporic subordinated Jew. This longing was echoed in an apolitical influence on Zionism, which was exercised by the consensus around the personality of A.D. Gordon. A.D. Gordon endorsed the dignity of physical labor and the rootedness of man in his own soil. In Zionism he saw a desperate necessity to create a new Jewish man in the land of Israel to replace the disfigured human being who had been shaped by his misery and alienation from nature in the diaspora.

On November Second, 1917 the British declared themselves to be in favor of the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine. The political achievement of the Balfour Declaration gave a boost to synthetical Zionism led by Hayim Weizman. Weizman, an Ahad Ha-am disciple, worked simultaneously for the immediate needs of Jewish settlers in Palestine, and toward a political charter from the community of nations. He particularly encouraged the cultural enterprise of the Jewish renascence such as the erection of the Hebrew University. Weizman, the head of the world Jewish Organization and the first president of the state of Israel, commissioned Mendelsohn in 1934 to build his representative residence in Rehovot. (fig 4.4-4.5)
**Buber's Judaism and Zionism**

In Germany, Zionism addressed the post-assimilated generation, which was well immersed in the German modern culture. Breaking with the shallow Judaism of their partially assimilated parents, the post-assimilated generation found a new call in Martin Buber's definition of Judaism. Buber's early addresses, *Drei Reden über das Judentum* ("Three Addresses on Judaism" or literally "Three Speeches regarding Jewishness"), were published in 1911 and became the pocket book of the Jewish youth for more than a decade. Erich Mendelsohn sent this book to his wife on April 2, 1915. In reference to it he wrote:

> I am sending the "Three Speeches" of Buber with a letter of 7 September 1914 which contains...the strict confession of my Jewishness. And indeed exactly as the mixture Buber attempts to realize.

What was Buber's call, and why was Buber's particular mixture so attractive to Mendelsohn? Buber, a young philosopher and already a committed Zionist, imbued Judaism with a creative heroic spirit. Operating within the general turn-of-the-century enthusiasm for the East, Buber endowed the Jew with uncontaminated Oriental virtues, which combined constituted a superior alternative to Western rationalism and materialism. Buber on the one hand alluded to Schopenhauer and the problem of individuation, and on the other hand turned what will become the core of modern (or scientific) anti-Semitism, i.e., the inescapable blood connection, into the bearer of a unique Jewish creativity, which can eventually overcome the malaise of modern existence:

> This schism [between the world of constant elements and the world of substance] will seem insuperable to us so long as the insight that our blood is the creative force in our life has not yet become a living, integral part of us. To attain unity out of division we must become aware of the significance of this blood within us..."
Between 1909 and 1911 Buber delivered his "Early Addresses" to a fascinated audience in Prague. The Jew, said Buber, lives the world’s dualism within himself. His most distinguished trait is his longing for unity, achieved within his inner-self and manifested in a deed of an heroic nature. "For the Oriental the decisive bond between man and God is the deed," said Buber, unlike faith for the Occidental. The deed, as the bearer of the world’s unity, gains global significance. Its creative capacity originated in the original biblical Judaism, which contributed to humanity the concepts of "unitary God," "universal justice," and the "Messianic ideal" among others. Buber reconstructed for the young generation a ‘community’ they could identify with, based, he said, on "native surroundings, language, and mores," and reinstated their role as leaders of a world culture. Buber’s Zionism, cultural in essence, desecularized Ahad Ha-am. Buber imbued Ahad Ha-am’s construct of the national cultural substance of the Jewish people with religious dimension. On the one hand, Buber had to resolve the irretrievable break between the emancipation and the religious tradition of diaspora Jewish life and, and on the other hand to forge continuity within a religious realm. Trying to solve this inner contradiction, Buber’s early teaching condemned Jewish law and practice of the diaspora life as a rigid authoritative religion, while his reconstruction of Jewish essence adhered to the religiosity of the original biblical Jew. Palestine thus became the locus of this renewal since in it the original Jew exercised his creative religious and moral contribution to world history.

The appeal of Buber’s mixture was his attempt to merge the constituent elements of Mendelsohn’s own identity: Art, Judaism, and Zionism. Buber held a pivotal position
in the art circles as well as in the Zionist ones because of his unique philosophical contribution to the synthesis of national, religious, and artistic trends, as well as the tributes his early teaching paid to the fashionable enthusiasm for Mysticism and the Orient. Buber himself was a student of Simmel and is discussed as a disciple of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, two thinkers to whom many of the contemporary thinkers and artists owe their inspiration. His Zionist activity started when he was the editor of de Welt, the Zionist publication, starting at the First Zionist Congress in 1897. His subsequent resignation marked his discontent with mainstream Herzleian political Zionism. He remained vocal as an opposition in Zionist debates, as did most German Zionists.

In this paper, I will discuss Mendelsohn's oeuvre against the (early) teaching of Martin Buber. This reliance on Buber's teaching does not suggest that he was Mendelsohn's singular inspiration. On the contrary, when Mendelsohn read Buber in 1915, he had completed his architectural education and was well immersed in contemporary art and architectural debates. Buber thus provided Mendelsohn a structure in which the various arguments he was involved with would be nourished with meaning and provide him with a goal. Mendelsohn's architectural deed became the deed of reconciliation toward a unified world. Rather than prioritizing the spiritual or material aspects of contradictory influences, he could now allocate them on one of the two poles of the world's dualism, which the creative artist had to reconcile.

In the first chapter of this paper, I will demonstrate how Buber inspired Mendelsohn's "program of reconciliation." As a praxis, the yearning for unity provoked an extensive
experiencing of the world, which grasped the tension between its contradictory poles. When the dynamism of the spiritual pole energizes the rationalism of the material one, a unity is achieved within the inner self. It is then disclosed in a unified, holistic form. Mendelsohn's metaphysical world view sees objects in the world only as appearances of deeper truth. "Do not think these are merely external things, [he utters,] the inner things lie behind them." The "inner thing" is a constant, which discloses itself in different forms in different times or under different circumstances. Thus on the rational, material pole, Mendelsohn allocates dormant phenomena, which are waiting to be fertilized by the spiritual strength of the artist. This creative act, the only one which Mendelsohn entitles "a work of art," possesses a spark of truth, it touches the "inner things."

In the second and third chapters of this paper, I will demonstrate how Mendelsohn's program unfolds itself first in the industrial West, i.e., in Germany, and then in the Orient, i.e., in Palestine. In the West, the urge to activate the "dormant" construction materials of tensile steel and reinforced concrete is interwoven with the experience of the industrial metropolis as well as with striving art and architectural debates. In the East, activating the "dormant" country of "biblical Palestine" is inextricably linked to political and Orientalist debates. The capacity of Mendelsohn's architectural program to unfold in such different contexts, I will argue, is due to its basic trait: If the "inner thing" is constant and the "exterior thing" is a flux of changing appearances, then (modern) architecture is a perpetual critique of these appearances, and subsequently, incessantly seeks their reconciliation with inner life.
1. Some may say four. They consider Mendelsohn's "expressionist" period as distinct from the rest of his European production. Mendelsohn himself see this period as one of two poles of his architectural formation. In 1948 he said:

"...I worked parallel with the erection of the Einstein Tower - on my first industrial commission: the Hat Factory near Berlin. This fact, I feel, invites attention. The mystic around Einstein's Universe produces a piece of architecture which even its author cannot fully explain by retrospection.

The clear cut facts of industry produce a building which in its use, structure and shape is clearly intelligible.

Between these two poles - the rational and the irrational - moves my nature, life and work.


3. This was one of unrealized projects of that same year. The others were Rutenberg Power Station, which the British thought was "too European," and plans for a garden city on the Carmel Mountain. From 1934-1941 Mendelsohn built extensively in Palestine. Unlike Le Corbusier or Bruno Taut, he was not an agent of Western progress brought by an imposing elite, but a participant in the erection of "a national home," who was politically in opposition to the dominant leadership.


6. Ita Heinze-Muhleib Erich Mendelsohn, Bauten und Projekte in Palastina (1934-1941) (Munchen: Scaneg 1986, in German)


9. Erich Mendelsohn, Palestine and the World of Tomorrow, (Jerusalem, 1940), reprinted in Heinze-Muhleib


11. Mendelsohn 1919 lecture, p.20

12. Morgenthaler, p.274

13. Morgenthaler discusses this notion, as well as its inspiration from Buber. However, her discussion stays on a rather factual level without any further discussion on the immense influence this concept had on Mendelsohn's philosophical formation. See Morgenthaler, pp. 154-157 and p.170


17. In a letter to Richard Kauffmann from February 23, 1941, Mendelsohn wrote: “I had been offered an appointment as professor of Architecture at the New School for Social Research - New York, which urged me to stop any further engagement here [in Palestine].” from: Muhleib-Greenberg collection, Haifa.


20. Ibid, pp.75-87

21. see Morgenthaler, p.264-265

22. Gropius expressed anti Semitic feelings toward Mendelsohn (see above.)
  Wassily Kandinsky, who influenced Mendelsohn greatly, was anti Semitic as well. His anti Semitic remarks provoked a harsh response from his very close Jewish friend, the composer Arnold Schoenberg: “...For I have at last learnt the lesson that has been forced upon me during this year, and I shall not ever forget it. It is that I am not a German, not a European, indeed perhaps scarcely even a human being (at least, the Europeans prefer the worst of their race to me), but I am a Jew....I have seen that someone with whom I thought myself on a level preferred to seek the community of the lump; I have heard that even a Kandinsky sees only evil in the actions of Jews and in their evil actions only Jewishness, and at this point I give up hope of reaching any understanding. It was a dream. We are two kinds of People. Definitely!...” [19 April 1923]
  Kandinsky, who was deeply moved by this latter, answered immediately. In his caring and emotional response, Kandinsky separates the man, Schoenberg, from his Jewish identity: “I reject you as a Jew, but nevertheless I write you a good letter and assure you that I would be so glad to have you here in order to work together!” [24 April, 1923]
  Schoenberg, in a long letter, explains, laments, contends and condemns. Affliction underlines his response. Distinguishing the Kandinsky he knew from the Kandinsky of today, he leaves no place for response: "...when I walk along the street and each person looks at me to see whether I'm Jew or a Christian, I can't very well tell each of them that I'm the one that Kandinsky and some others make an exception of, although of course that man Hitler is not of their opinion. And then even this benevolent view of me wouldn't be much use to me, even if I were, like blind beggars, to write it on a piece of cardboard and hang it round my neck for everyone to read. Must not a Kandinsky bear that in mind?...And you join in that sort of thing and 'reject me as a Jew,' Did I ever offer myself to you? Do you think that someone like myself lets himself be rejected! Do you think that a man who knows his own value grants anyone the right to criticize even his most trivial qualities?” [4 May 1923]


24. E. Mendelsohn, Briefe, p.35. Translated in Morgenthaler, p.154

  Blood, together with emotion, vision, spirit and such, is a recusing motive in Mendelsohn description of the other pole of material phenomena, that is the dynamic dimension (notice the affinity between Buber's Oriental motor personality and Mendelsohn dynamism as an inwarded creative drive.)

26. Buber, "Renewal of Judaism" in On Judaism p.49

27. Buber, "Judaism and Mankind" in On Judaism, p.28
1.2 Gershom Scholem and his brothers dressed as Orientals for his Zionist uncle's wedding ceremony, 1904.
1.1 Erich Mendelsohn
Only in considering all aspects of life, with the facts of the whole of reality in mind, can a single form be articulated without running the risk of shortsightedness and narcissism. We face reality energetically and are therefore forced to cope with its entirety.¹

Erich Mendelsohn
Mendelsohn insisted that an architectural form should be inextricably linked to all aspect of the reality from which it emerged. His view obliges us to reconstruct as many aspects of his reality in order to understand the architectural form that enhances it. Against the background of recent studies which reveal his artistic sources,² I would like to reconstruct his religious and political foundation and its intricate ties to Mendelsohn's notion of creativity.

Between 1934 and 1941, Erich Mendelsohn built the most conspicuous representative buildings of the Jewish population in Palestine, an unparalleled volume of work for any Modernist of that period. In Palestine, Mendelsohn pursued Modernism of plain cubic volumes, blank exterior walls, and yet, a pattern of repetitive punctuated windows. The compositional equilibrium he achieved incorporated regional typology and a twist of Oriental symbolism. This constituted a conspicuous shift away from his well known architecture in Europe, already canonized and reused in Palestine. In this chapter I want to ask what, in the formation of Mendelsohn as a creative persona, facilitated such a shift. Mendelsohn's work has been discussed as having three distinct periods of production, the German, Palestinian and American.³ Here, I am interested in the architectural position that underlines these seemingly incompatible bodies of work, and the conceptual continuity that is woven throughout Mendelsohn's turbulent career.

This kind of discussion requires a return to his formative years in Munich,⁴ where from 1910 to 1914 he was trained as an architect under the renowned professor
Theodor Fiescher. In Munich, he was inspired by currents in art, engineering, and science. He was exposed to the Expressionist experiences in painting and theater and contemplated a career in stage design. He was involved with and inspired by the work of the Blue Rider group (fig. 3.4). He befriended Obrist, with whom he could re-explore the Jugendstil sources which initially inspired Kandinsky and his circle. (fig 2.5-2.7) The steel constructions of the nineteenth century were an important influence on him (fig 2.3) as well as his fascination with science. His friend Freundlich, an astronomer and the youngest among Einstein's assistants, introduced him to the latest developments in Einstein's theory of relativity. Refraining from any specific architectural ideological affiliation, Van de Velde is the only architect he will address as disciple.  

Buber, Creativity, and the Fascination with the East

The above mentioned Munich influences, although providing Mendelsohn with seeds for his formal language, could not resolve the pressing question of his identity. In architectural circles he did not affiliate himself with ideological groups. On the contrary, he strove for a median position, to advance his own program of reconciliation between conflicting trends (such as attitudes of the Amsterdam and Rotterdam Schools). Surprisingly, when it came to the question of personal identity, Mendelsohn was determined: he chose to identify himself not only with Judaism, but also with radical Zionism, i.e., Zionism which obliged its members to commit themselves to aliyah the immigration and settlement in Palestine. This concordant was a very conscious one since "nowhere was the opposition of Jews to the new movement [Zionism] so widespread, principled, and fierce as in Germany." For Mendelsohn, the choice
of Zionism was more than reconstructing Jewish national identity. For him his artistic, religious and national identity were one.

His commitment to Judaism and Zionism was by no means only circumstantial. In 1933 he wrote to Blumenfeld, his friend and a leader of the German Zionist movement:

I love Eretz Israel and call myself its true child. Whatever work I did, especially my non-realistic outbursts in sketches and conceptions, got its strength from the biblical simplicity which fulfills itself and embraces the whole world at the same time. I know that the inimitable quality of my first construction is of Jewish origin. Early in my youth, I was conscious of it, and that early consciousness made me see the necessity of Zionism. I saw in Zionism the only chance of finding myself and being really creative.9

Yes, [said Mrs Mendelsohn in 1969] he was deeply religious man, though not in the dogmatic sense to the word. He loved the monotheism of the Jewish faith, even though never went to the temple. Eric had great faith in himself as a creative instrument, and felt that his creativity was a religious outlet. In other words, for him the act of creation was a spiritual experience and as such he had great respect for it.10

What was it, then, that constituted creativity for Mendelsohn? How was it connected to Judaism and Zionism? How does the artist and the world interact? In his 1923 Amsterdam lecture, Mendelsohn shed more light on his religious convictions:

A vertical orientation of beliefs and its conflict between the orthodox and the heretic will be replaced by the coexistence of religious elements: Mysticism, secret doctrines, and miracles.
From the mysterious union of order and chaos, of the created and the organic, of the rational and the transcendent, a new religious sense will emerge.11

A fascination with Mysticism had disseminated among "turn of the century" European bourgeoisie. Mysticism, myths and "secret doctrines" were absorbed, it was said, within the uncontaminated Oriental religions and practices. This fascination, enlivened by the growing critique of rationalism and materialism in Western society,
found home within the artistic circle of Munich among other cities.\textsuperscript{12} The young philosopher and theologian, Martin Buber, was a distinct member of these circles.\textsuperscript{13} In this atmosphere he could convert the negative anti-Semitic image of the Jew into a unique Oriental virtue. Through rewriting Jewish Hasidic mythologies as possessing a pre-rational wisdom, he developed a view of Judaism as representative of the spiritual and cultural sensitivity of the East. Longing for unity was the most essential experience of the Jew, said Buber in one of his three lectures on Judaism in Prague (1909-1911). This longing for unity of the political and the ontological makes Judaism into a human phenomenon and the Jews into a general human question.\textsuperscript{14} Buber’s three lectures ("Drei Reden Uber das Judentum") became the pocket book of the Jewish youth for more than a decade. Buber exercised an unparalleled influence on Zionist youth and was the spirit behind the renowned Zionist publication house \textit{Der Judische Verlag} (established in 1902).\textsuperscript{15} His early teaching joined the contemporary Jew with the primal biblical Jew, trying to restore the latter’s essential moral creativity. Furthermore, Buber’s argument continued, this creativity can gain its global importance only when the Jews will be reunited with their primal land. Buber’s persistent emphasis on the essence of the Jew as a creative persona had enormous appeal. His (early) teaching, combining Judaism, mysticism, art and Zionism, found large and enthusiastic audiences among the Munich artistic circles and the Zionist circles to which Mendelsohn belonged. This is a momentous conjuncture, I will argue, for understanding the formation of Mendelson’s creative persona. Thus, I will discuss Mendelsohn’s 1919 and 1923 lectures, as well as his pamphlet \textit{Palestine and the World of Tomorrow} (1940), against the background of Buber’s early teaching.\textsuperscript{16}
Mysticism, Unity, the Motor and the Sensory Persona

"What is to come will only be valuable when it is created in visionary ecstasy," said Mendelsohn in his 1919 lecture, "The Problem of a New Architecture." This statement is in line with his early Expressionistic outbursts (fig. 2.9). Nevertheless, he does not relate himself to any of the Expressionist trends of the time. Rather, he "know[s] that the inimitable quality of [his] first construction is of Jewish Origin." Thus, besides discussing the ideas underlying Mendelsohn's early work, we will have to address the question of how, then, these ideas differed from the convictions of other fantastic, visionary contemporary architects.

Mendelsohn's early letters to his wife reveal mystical experiences:

I live among incessant visions. Their transcendence is such that it often carries me away. It is hard to catch it and impossible to grasp it fully: to express it in solid terms is the task. But I am glad to be subject to its law, because for me it is the truest life..."

The visions are once more behind every ring of light and every corpuscle in my closed eye. Masses standing there in their ripeness flash past in a moment and slip away, so that it is almost impossible for the hand to motle them down even approximately. I lament the fact that hand and vision are not linked together mechanically."

My sketches are data, the contour lines of an instantaneous vision."

Mendes-Flohr is writing on early Buber, who was preoccupied with mysticism. The ecstatic experience as discussed by Mendes-Flohr reveals a similar difficulty as that which mendelsohn found in translating his experience into visual data. The ecstatic, says Mendes-Flohr, cannot communicate his timeless experience into the "spatio-temporal world," (the world of appearances.) "Yet, the ecstatic has an urge to proclaim this oneness to the world, to create for the [traceless] ecstasy a memorial, to tow the timeless into the harbor of time; he wants to make the unity without multiplicity into a unity of all multiplicity."
Rather than "forging a unifying bridge between the I and the phenomenal world." the unity without multiplicity is the inner-self experience of the external world. The oneness of the ecstatic "is realized within the depths of the 'primal self.'" The self absorbs these experiences into unity. It sequesters them from their fragmented contradictory exterior nature.\textsuperscript{23} The urge and the task, though, are not only the experience of the unified inner self, detached from the external world and its contradictions. The task is to bring this oneness back into 'all multiplicity,' to exercise the unique experience of unity within the phenomenal world. This is the "simultaneous religious act" of "finding [the oneness] in the world by giving it to the world."\textsuperscript{24}

Mendelsohn, who at times seems to be arguing with invisible opponents, insists on the one hand, that the only point of departure for the ecstatic experience is concrete reality (i.e., multiplicity) and its demands. On the other hand, he came to the conclusion that the ecstatic experience is meaningless if it is the possession only of the one who experiences it. "...it has to be pointed out," Mendelsohn said, "that the young architects will not get their architectural inspiration from history or from heaven..."\textsuperscript{25} "Owing its existence neither to the benevolence of the unknown, nor to the inventiveness of some constructive genius, the new organizing structure arises as a necessary component to this development as soon as the need arises."\textsuperscript{26} It is neither a detached ecstatic experience, Mendelsohn insists, nor, of course, a rational mind or historical precedent that the artist can rely on as his inspiration.
Of a greater interest is Mendelsohn's own criticism about his sketches for the Einstein Tower, or "Freundlich's mystical building," a term he coined earlier in the same letter:

The "intuition out of Nothing" makes no compromise with regard to reality. It does not violate it, indeed it touches it just as little. The product of an imagination which perhaps works too fast - the result of being bottles up? - it has reality and yet is really only its shadow. It derives from the thing and seeks it at the same time.²⁷

Together with his disappointment that he was unable to execute the Einstein Tower in reinforced concrete, the material in which it was conceived, this quote may serve as a clue for his turning away from visionary architecture and shifting to more engagement with reality. It is indicative, however, of his search for a penetrating experience of the world in which he lives. Thus, the question is: what is it in Judaism that allows Mendelson this experience of reality?

In his second Prague lectures, Buber distinguished between the Christian European as a sensory man and the Jew (among other Orientals) as a motor individual. The former senses the world in a non-integrated manner. Sight tends to be his predominant sense. This most detached and objective sense gathers from the world 'static impressions.' Thus, his world appears "as a multiplicity of things, which is spread before his eyes and to which he and his body belong."²⁸ In contrast, being an Oriental, the Jew "comprehend[s] the world dynamically." Appearances are not imprinted on his soul, rather, his soul generates motion which activates the world's multiplicity. "Though he perceives individual things, he does not perceive them as separate entities, each reposing and complete in itself, but only as an aggregate of nodal points for an infinite motion, which flows through him as well." The world is "something happening to him; he senses rather than perceives it."²⁹ This active
engagement with the world, this flow, is constantly changing. While Buber characterizes the Occidental with terms such as image, form and shape, the Oriental traits are motion, action and doing, that is, becoming. Hence, for Buber, becoming is the essence of creativity. A cognitive practice of life does not possess this capacity. Cognition, Buber asserts, relates "to the movements of world and psyche only through classifying perceptions: forming, grouping, and architectonic evaluation of that which grasps the One from the outside." A detached experience is not a creative one. "Cognition by its very nature has nothing to do with becoming, but only with that which has become."\textsuperscript{30}

Based on this understanding, Buber discusses the Jew, as an Oriental as fundamentally different from the Greek, the Occidental man. "For the Greek the world exists, for the Jew it becomes. The Greek confronts it; the Jew is involved with it. The Greek apprehends it under the aspect of measure, the Jew as intent."\textsuperscript{31}

Bruno Zevi, along this line of argument, evokes Thorlief Boman's Book, \textit{Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek}, and extends this distinction to architecture:

For the Greek mind, it is enough "to be," as a concept, even if fixed and immobile. For the Hebrew mind, this mere "being" is "non-entity" for being without movement does not exist. The same applies to a house or a temple. For the Greeks a building means a house-object or a temple-object. For the Jews it is the object-as-used, a living place or a gathering place. As a result, architecture taking its inspiration from Hellenic thought is based on colonnades, proportions, refined molding, a composite vision according to which nothing may be either added or eliminated, a structure defined once and for all. An architecture taking its inspiration from Hebrew thought is the diametric opposite. It is an organic architecture, fully alive, adapted to the needs of those who dwell within, capable of growth and development, free of formalistic tabu, free of symmetry, alignments, fixed relationships between filled and empty areas, free from the dogmas of perspective, in short, an architecture whose only rule is change.\textsuperscript{32}
The idea of living the constant change, which only nature itself knows its secret, is strongly related to the fascination with the cosmos' constant flux. This fascination with science and the infinity of the cosmos was part of the prevailing intellectual atmosphere. They claim that, unlike the machine, which is "brought to life by a creator," and had "the same daily routine," the cosmos was depicted as "an eternal producer, [which] is in eternal transformation, in eternal self-development." The cosmos was the infinite entity which exemplified the becoming, where "everything, stage by stage, can become everything." Mendelsohn's interest in Einstein's theory of relativity was part of this metaphoric enthusiasm. Moreover, it helped him to challenge the 'solidity' of matter.

Since the realization that the terms energy and matter, which had once been separated by science, are just different conditions of the same fundamental material, and that nothing in the order of the world happens except in relation to the cosmos, the engineer has forsaken mechanics, the theory of dead matter, and has returned to the dutiful service of nature.

For Mendelsohn, nature and the cosmos are interchangeable terms for the sphere beyond mundane time. Machine, on the contrary is the hallmark of an invention which is not creation, i.e., the inventor of the machine articulated "dead matter" as a disengaged entity deprived from the dynamism of the creative impetus. The machine serves the materialistic aspect of modern life without the ambition to transcend it. But, Mendelsohn insists, the Western man tends to endow the machine with meaning, which it does not possess. "Since [the machine] discovery [he said,] we have seemingly come to dominate nature. The true is that we have just come to serve nature with ever new means."
Tension, Orientation, and Realization

How can one make sense of these overwhelming experiences of the changing world? What is the way to ensure an embracing grasp of the multiplicity of the concrete world? Overwhelmed by his ecstatic experiences, Mendelsohn wrote: "I have to compel myself to limit and to transform my over-diffuseness into tension." Mendes-Flohr elaborates on Buber, polarizes the world into its dualities. The experience of both poles allows the individual to live the world to its full extent within himself. In order to achieve unity, one should first extensively experience his reality. Only through "grasping the line of tension" between "being and becoming," between "stillness and transformation," can a unified experience be activated. Only polarizing the world to its full extent, can awaken the I, the unifying subject of the tension. "Can the ebb tide say I? Or the flood tide? But imagine the sea to have a spirit that comprehends in itself the unity of ebb and flood: it could say I." Thus, Mendes-Flohr concludes, "the 'I' that lives and experiences the tension of the world's being and becoming is the "I" of the world. In it unity is fulfilled." According to Buber, one has to live the dualities of the world in order to overcome them, to transform them into unity, that is, to create. Mendelsohn describes this kind of experience as his point of departure:

Despite all my confidence in the dynamics of masses and my intuitive grasp of form, I know that everything is in a state of flux and tension....What compels me to create is certainly this inclusion of wide fields within the circumference of one's own personality. What dominates the artist in the present is at the same time the medium through which he dominates the future. And so the world compels him to shape the world."

For Mendelsohn it is the intensity in which the artist lives his reality and the tension of its dualities that provides his work of art with significance.
The purpose of the artist - that is to say, the form in which is expressed the coming to terms of the individual soul with the cosmos, the everyday with the solemn hour, man with God, the concrete with the abstract, the physical with the metaphysical - gives the work its character, its spirit and its attraction. It alone is of interest, and never simply the concrete or simply the abstract qualities. These are literary trimmings, transcending the reciprocal boundaries of their territories, and they are therefore to be rejected.  

Indeed, for Mendelsohn any partial view, whether materialistic or visionary, belongs to a divided world of transcendental boundaries. Man can come to terms with the world only when he invests his creative energies in 'the whole of reality.' Moreover, this is the only experience with which a creative act becomes meaningful:

Only in considering all aspects of life, with the facts of the whole of reality in mind, can a single form be articulated without running the risk of shortsightedness and narcissism. We face reality energetically and are therefore forced to cope with its entirety.

Here Mendelsohn touches on the main problem of the artist: how can his unique experiences of the entirety of his reality become an all-inclusive form?

In his philosophical book, "Daniel," Buber discusses the dual relationship of man to his experiences: "orientation" or adaptation on the one hand, and "realization" or execution on the other. Orientation is a process of mapping, of compressing the world's multiplicity into a coordinate system. It puts order into objects and experiences and thus situates man in his reality. Consequently, Realization, represents the absorption into pure experiencing, which is not put into a causal chain. This unmediated experiencing of the inner self is protected from conflicts and tension. Only this unified self creates reality from within the inner experience. Thus, the realizing man is the whole unified man, that is, the creative man. The creative man has to realize his experience of the unified world, which is "not merely given to
Mendelsohn applies a similar praxis in his efforts to achieve "the most amazing miracles of calculation: that wonderful reduction of intuitive processes to mathematical figures and geometrical relations." He explains:

Thus for architecture two components are necessary. In the first component--intellect, brain, the organizing machine--spatial possibilities of expression strike with lightning force, as in a vision, in the activity of the subconscious; the second, drawn from the completed organization, is that of the creative impulses, the blood, the temper, the senses, and organic feeling. Only the union of the two components leads to the mastery of spatial elements: the union of the sensuality appreciable mass and the transcendent mass of light. Only their union leads to the enhancement or balance of the mass.43

First Mendelsohn establishes the tension between the rational, cognitive pole - "intellect, brain, the organizing machine" - and the pole of energetic, sensuous experience - "lightning force," "vision," "the activity of the subconscious." In this first component of the architectural act, Mendelsohn orients himself. He orders the world and situates himself in it. Mendelsohn envisions the material world (or architecturally, the world of materials,) with an artist's penetrating vitality, that is, through grasping the tension, he lives the world's multiplicity as unity within himself. Then he can create, he can realize his unified comprehension of reality in built form. This act is always described by Mendelsohn in a passionate way: "blood," "temper," "the senses," "organic feeling." The act of realization, of creation, is that from which form naturally unfolds. In an early letter, Mendelsohn describes this 'organic' moment in biological terms:

Conception means fertilization; it describes the moment when for the first time the idea takes shape, that is, when it takes on the form of the material in which it is conceived.
The intensity of the moment often precipitates conception and birth together and renders tangible what has hitherto only been present in one's subconscious. The sole birthright of the creative man.44

The creative man, the realizing artist, fertilizes the phenomenal world with his dynamic self, and thus fulfills the task of "making the true world an actual world."

A Distinct Modern

Creation, i.e., realization, we are told, is always preceded by grasping the tension embedded in reality, the reality which is intensively experienced by the artist. If nothing is imperishable, if reality is a constant flux running through the creative persona's inner-self, then realization can never be the same, it can never be fixed. Rather, the interminable metamorphosis of the world should be recaptured in an authentic form for every particular moment in history. This view of artistic production contradicts any sense of a-priory order or aesthetic rule. It is the opposite of any academism or institution. It is inextricably linked to the changing conditions of life, to the multiplicity in which the architect lives, i.e., the building's requirements, the building materials and forces of construction, human inhabitants and the modern condition of their life, as well as the economical and political aspects of this dynamic world. With these convictions, Mendelsohn constitutes himself as a distinct Modern. Thus, we come back to the beginning:

Only in considering all aspects of life, with the facts of the whole of reality in mind, can a single form be articulated without running the risk of shortsightedness and narcissism. We face reality energetically and are therefore forced to cope with it entirety.45


3. Different dissertations were written in order to cover each of the periods: See: ibid, also Ita Heinze-Muhleib, Erich Mendelsohn, Bauten und Projekte in Palastina (1934-1941), Beitrage zur Kunstwissenschaft 7, Munchen: Scaneg, 1986.

4. Morgenthaler gives an excellent account of the various art and architectural influences which induced the evolution of Mendelsohn's visual language. James completed the thorough overview of Mendelsohn's early career.

5. See James, pp.1-63. regarding Ven de Velde, see "Interview with Mrs. Eric Mendelsohn," in Susan King, The drawings of Eric Mendelsohn, (University of California, Berkeley, 1969) p.34


8. In 1914 only 1.5 percent of the German Jewry was Zionist, a situation that was about to change radically only when the Nazis seized power. (see Lavsky, esp. p.21) Mendelsohn, however, is mentioned in 1919 in a list of potential immigrants to Palestine. (information given to the author by Ita Heinze-Muhleib in an interview, December, 1992). In his testimony he traced his Zionism to his youth. (see quote in this text.)

9. Mendelsohn to Blumenfeld, 1933, from: Herbert, Gilbert: "The divided heart: Erich Mendelsohn and the Zionist Dream." (italic added) in Erich Mendelsohn in Palestine, Catalog of the exhibition, (Faculty of Architecture and Town Planning, Technion, Haifa)

10. Mrs. Eric Mendelsohn in Susan King, p.30

11. Mendelsohn, 1923 lecture, p.23. (italic added)


13. Weiss Peg, Kandinsky in Munich, The formative Jugendstil Years, Princeton University Press, 1979,

14. Mendes-Flohr, ibid, p.

15. see Scholem and Lavsky.
16. The reliance on Buber's teaching does not suggest him as singular inspiration. Buber himself was a student of Simmel and is discussed as a disciple of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, two thinkers to whom many of the contemporary thinkers and artists owe their inspiration. Buber’s convictions were also part of a larger Jewish and Zionist debate. I discuss Buber because of his pivotal position in both circles and because of his unique philosophical contribution to the synthesis of those national, religious and artistic trends.


18. see above in this chapter


21. Ibid, p.43, a letter to Dr. Freundlich, Oct 29-30, 1917, (italic added)


23. Ibid

24. Buber, ”The Spirit of the East and Judaism,” in On Judaism p.60

25. Mendelsohn, 1919 lecture, p.8


27. Mendelsohn in regard to his sketches for the Einstein Tower, Letters, July 9, 1918, P.44.

28. Buber in Medes-Flohr, p.69

29. Buber in ”The Spirit of the Orient and Judaism,” in On Judaism, p.60. Mendes-Flohr, p.69

30. Buber in Mendes-Flohr, p.62

31. Buber, ”The Spirit of the Orient and Judaism,” in On Judaism p.66


34. Mendelsohn, 1923 lecture, p.24

35. Mendelsohn, 1923 lecture, p.24

36. Mendelsohn in Beyer, p.37, May 28,1917

37. Mendes-Flohr, p.66


40. Mendelsohn, 1923 lecture, p.22


42. Buber, "The Spirit of the Orient and Judaism," p.60

43. Mendelsohn, 1923 lecture, p.31

44. Mendelsohn in Beyer, p.36 April 7, 1915

45. Mendelsohn, 1923 lecture, p.22
2.1 Jose Maria Olbrich, Secession Building, Vienna, Austria, 1898.

2.2 Josef Hoffmann, Stoclet Palace, Brussels, Belgium, 1905-11.
2.3 Ferdinand Dutert, Victor Contamin, Machinery

Hall in Paris International Exhibition,
Paris, France, 1889.
Final sketch for the cover of the Blaue Reiter almanach, 1911.
2.5 Herman Obrist, *Tomb of the Oertel Family*, 1905.

2.7 Herman Obrist, Fantastic Shell, ca. 1895.
2.9 Mendelsohn, selected sketches, 1917
Contemporary man, in the excitement of his fast life, can only find balance in the stress free horizontal. Only by breaking through the will to reality (italic added) can he master his restlessness, only though the most complete rapidity can he overcome his haste. Then the rotating earth will stand still!

Erich Mendelsohn
The artist is that man who has a peculiar way of remaining faithful to what meets him in the world. He seeks its "form" in a creation or image. He answers the demand which this form makes on him to be made into a work... The artist, \textit{qua} artist, perceives the world as figuration, as determinate form that can be brought to the fullness of a completed work. The artist elicits the work of art from the spheres of the senses or of language, He helps bring to completeness what is prefigured in the sense world....The demand placed on him is to realize the full possibilities of form within a given sphere. By doing this he helps bring man into genuine relation with what exists alongside him and over against him in the world.\footnote{2}

Late in his career, in 1948, Mendelsohn was asked to deliver a lecture entitled "My Own Contribution to the Development of Contemporary Architecture."\footnote{3} The guiding principles he discussed were remarkably consistent with his early convictions. Positioning himself as a creative persona in the world, he recollected: "When an architect does not know of or refuses to comply with anything else than his own environment, he automatically tries to visualize and to depict the needs and longings of the life \textit{he} lives, of the time whose child he is."\footnote{4} In this statement Mendelsohn pronounced his belief in the necessity of the architect to "remain faithful to what meets him in the world," in his timely world. This basic capacity allows the architect to unfold "the needs and longings" of his reality, of his age, in spatial form. For Mendelsohn the confrontation of the architect with the "time whose child he is" involves not only cognition, but the whole person. It involves the artist as a unified person, who lives in his inner self the tension (i.e., dualism) of the world. "As creative people, [Mendelsohn already elaborated in his 1923 lecture] we know how very differently the driving forces and the play of tensions work themselves out in the individual"; that is, the tension between being and becoming, or between cognition and inspiration. "It therefore becomes our duty all the more to meet excitement with reflection, exaggeration with simplicity and uncertainty with the clear law." The
responsibility of the artist in face of what 'meets him in the world' is to interact and re-balance this reality which he lives. The artist, according to Mendelsohn, has "to discover once more, amidst the wreckage of energy, the elements of new energy and out of these elements to form a new whole." Modern life and the reality of the industrial metropolis, Mendelsohn is well aware, may seem completely chaotic and incomprehensible. Its contradicting elements in motion put man within a "wreckage of energy." Mendelsohn argues that it is the duty of the architect to gather these contradicting elements and to sort them out. Then, through form, the artist should make them comprehensible again to man, he should "form [them into] a new whole."

This description of the creative act is akin to Buber's definition: "To create [said Buber in his early Prague lectures,] means to gather within oneself all elements, and to fuse them into a single structure; there is no true creative independence except that of giving form."  

**Disclosing Reality in Structural Form: Architecture and Music**

Luise Hammer, writing on "the relevance of Buber's thought to aesthetics", clarifies: "The world [the artist meets] is not represented in art - it is allowed to take on concrete form within the range of one of the senses or of language. Strictly speaking, art is never representational. Painting, for example, realizes the possibilities of what is over and against man (italic added) to unfold itself in color, line, texture, on a two-dimensional surface." Alternatively, architecture's realization unfolds in materials and construction into a three-dimensional space. What is "over and against man" in Mendelsohn's favorite site, the business downtown, the capital of the bourgeoisie, is
the industrial metropolis. He embraces enthusiastically the modern city's life. He writes in 1926 on the occasion of the opening of the Nuremberg store:

...to want to deny our way of life, is self-deception, it is pitiful and cowardly.

...So be brave, be wise! Seize life by the forelock, At the point where its heart beats strongest, in the midst of life, in the midst of technique, traffic and industry.

Take it straight, as it is, take its tasks as it presents them. To you, to us all.

The young Mendelsohn of 1917, whom "the world compelled him to shape the world" is now situating himself in the midst of the most intensified manifestation of modernity, the city and its "technique, traffic and industry." The early preoccupation with reinforced concrete and the tensile capacity of steel was expanded to include the phenomena of the city. The premise is consistent: the starting point for his creative stimulus as well as for the content of his work is reality.

The real [says Hammer] in its sensible manifestation is the very substance of the work of art. The work of art is not...a virtual image reflecting a pattern of feeling. It is figuration, encountered and discovered in the world, and brought to full actualization. In art we are brought face to face, through the mediation of form, with that side of the real that can be given to one of the senses or uttered in language.

Mendelsohn adheres to this definition of the artist's role, that is, to bring the entirety of the reality, which the artist dynamically experiences, to form. In his 1919 lecture in Berlin, he maintains:

This attempt [to give form to cultural function] is a symbol of the human yearning to make something infinite into something finite through form, to adapt something unmeasurable to our measure. This much is clear: from the specificity of the purely utilitarian in industrial buildings some important artistic achievements do develop.

Here, the reality is utilitarian industry, which Mendelsohn experiences dynamically. This "infinite, unmeasurable" experience is then brought back, through the mediation
of the artist, to the "finite and measurable," that is, to form. The mediating capacity of the form does not only emerged from (the industrial) reality, but the artist's emotional experience of this reality is revealed to other man through the artistic sensible media.

The sensible art form Buber thought was the most appropriate to the Jewish sensitivities he portrayed was music. Because "the Jew's sense of time is much more strongly developed than his sense of space....the artistic form of expression most satisfying to the Jew is the art whose specific element is time: music." Some of Mendelsohn's early sketches were named after various composers. Later in his life, he 'intuitively' recognized the ties his work had to his "musical temperament," which was part of his upbringing. Although he was not "prone to confound the limits of our art [architecture] with other artistic media, he parallels his work with "the counterpoint in music where one or several melodies are added as accompaniment to a given melody." What was it, then, the lesson he learned from music, and why did it inspire his architectural work? Hammer provides insight to this media from a Buberian stance:

The [musical] work does not express or symbolize any specific emotional qualities. But in its ordering of sound it can echo any phase of the world's presence to man. Each musical work calls to man as something present to him; it is a complex event from the sphere of sound which demands a response. In responding to the authentic musical work, human feeling, cognition and will are together in the wholeness of the person. The musical work...though a phenomenal object, a pattern of sound, it has been given structure and texture by human agent. Its musical life derives from, and speaks to, personal existence. Both the creation of the musical work by the composer and its perception by the listener involve the total person. Not only his feeling and cognition are engaged, i.e.,
the full extension of his inner tension, but also his realizing force, his deed, his freedom of decision, his will. In other words, this holistic encounter is brought to a sensible sphere by a human agent. Furthermore, the creation of music involves immediacy, which is foreign to the laborious making of architecture. The timeliness of music corresponds, though, to Mendelsohn's intuitive, instantaneous sketches, with which he launched his early career, as well as every subsequent design. Music thus provides Mendelsohn with tools for intuitively grasping the intricate ties between emotion, structure and form, the same constellation which will serve him in the making of a massive architectural form. "The achievement of musical composition is to order sound in structure and texture in such a way that the total person, with feeling, cognition and will, is demanded in the response to the work (italic added)."

The full extension of the inner tension and the artistic will of the composer communes with the listener through "the order of sound in structure and textures". That is, Mendelsohn could not only deeply respond to the entire experience of the composer, but he could learn how such "communing" is realized through sensible structure.

The structural example he finds in music is profound if one understands "the sound [as a phenomena that] does not evoke, embody, represent, or signify a feeling. Rather it has the power to address human beings as an independent other, the other of sound ordered through a human act.... A relation can spring up between the listener and the musical work which involves him to his depths.... The music...is tonal presence, deeply relevant to man's presence in the world." Mendelsohn, whose architecture was postulated as 'dynamics', insists fiercely that his architecture does not embody mechanical motion, a process reserved for the utilitarian machine, nor does it re-
present movement. Architecture is presence, but it is the presence of a static structure, of materials and construction which are produced by a human agent. "Architecture [he says] is only the expression of powers whose effect is achieved through the static gravity of its construction." The reading of his architecture as dynamic occurs not because it signifies, embodies, or represents movement but because it is relevant to modern man. It discloses in form the haste of city life. The building becomes a communing form, mediating the architect's human experience of the city to its fellow modern man. The building is created as a spatial form which is relevant to the life of the city's inhabitants.

Mendelsohn and the Modern Condition

Man in relation to the modern industrial metropolis is the subject matter of Mendelsohn's architecture of the twenties. In his 1926 poem for the Nuremberg store opening, Mendelsohn contends:

Do not let yourself be hurried, master the age.
Do not let yourself be duped. You are the master. Be a creator, shape your own age.
These are your responsibilities...

Mendelsohn calls for a pause, for a reevaluation of how man is related to the overdeveloped reality he created. Man, the everyday modern man, is alarmed here from being duped by the speed in which reality is "progressing," from being overtaken by an exclusively materialistic conception of life. The conjuncture of such a call with the opening of a department store, the temple of materialistic consumerism, is not contradictory in Mendelsohn's view. He is fascinated with the details of modern life but insisted that they are no more than an outer appearances of something deeper. He wrote:

54
Only think back a hundred years:
Crinoline and wig
Tallow candle and spinning wheel
Sedan chair and post coach
General shops and trade guilds.

Then think of us:
Bare knees and short haircuts
Radio and film
Car and airplane
Banana wholesalers and combines that run department stores.

Do not think these are merely external things.
The inner things lie behind them.
A hundred years ago as today. 15

The external manifestations of the modern world there, everywhere, and are not only undeniable, but welcomed. But, "the inner things lie behind them." A failure to recognize it will deny man’s capability to gain control over his life. The call to master the age is a call to contest an uncontrolled utilitarianism under the stigma of technological progress. In 1940, Mendelsohn knows that for him the battle in Europe is lost. "Technology [he wrote] established the predominance of the materialistic conception of life, that puts the question for life’s purpose above life itself. A utilitarianism which destroys the essence of life based upon the unity of mind and matter."16 In other words, Hannah Arendt asserts: "The ‘in order to’ has become the content of ‘for the sake of; utility established as meaning generates meaninglessness.”17

Mendelsohn does not criticize modernity as a prevailing reality, nor does he ever meant to cite romantic conservative views. On the contrary, he embraces technology enthusiastically and endorses progressive bourgeois life style. He admires the inventiveness of the era and manifests his opinion frequently. Moreover, the
possibilities inherent in new technology are the driving force for his creativity. Apparently, it is exactly the overwhelming appeal of the new potentials modernity brought about that obscures their statues. Rather than potentials, they are confused to be the goal. Rather than as means, they are perceived as purpose, as the "for the sake of" rather than "in order to." Mendelsohn's criticism does not target the over-developed reality, but its human practice. Berman, who discusses nineteenth-century thinkers of modernity, finds similar ideas in Marx's fascination with the modern bourgeois as well as in his penetrating criticism of it. Marx, Berman says, "unveils the modern bourgeois as consummate nihilists on a far vaster scale than modern intellectuals can conceive. But these bourgeois have alienated themselves from their own [inventiveness] because they cannot bear to look into the moral, social and psychic abyss that their [inventiveness] opens up." A surrender to the flow of modernity neglects the man within it and overlooks the moral, social, and psychic substance of his life. The abyss Marx describes between man and his reality is Mendelsohn's challenge. He wants to overcome alienation. This is the mission of the creative artist, to be strictly distinct from the inventor, who does not deal with life, but rather, with 'dead matter.' Engaging all aspects of life requires courage because the inventions of the bourgeoisie are two-faced. Berman evokes Marx's "sense of wonder over [this phenomena of] the modern world: its vital powers are dazzling, overwhelming, beyond anything the bourgeoisie could have imagined, let alone calculated or planned. But Marx's images also express what must accompany any genuine sense of wonder: a sense of dread." This threat is the subject matter of Mendelsohn's everlasting dialectic between the two poles of tension, the materialistic and the spiritual. Spirituality, here, is not an escape to an isolated, alternative
reality, it is a call for re-balance, for redeeming society from this deepening abyss. In his 1923 lecture, Mendelsohn certifies: "We face reality energetically and are therefore forced to cope with its entirety. We, the people of today, are not afraid of it." 20

The source for this attempt to face the dualism of the world and to overcome it may be found again in the Buberian reconstruction of Judaism. The vitality of his teaching derives from the correlation between Jewish existence in exile and the condition of modernity. If we discuss the crisis of modernity as a state of exile of modern man from the authenticity of his life, then, Jewish people can claim a long-lived experience of this state of being. Therefore, they are trained to think of exile as a separation rather than a division. A separation is an existential temporality. It can end in redemption only through human work toward reunification. Buber's rather lengthy explanation is revealing:

The Jew, too,...is aware of the world state of duality. But he experiences this duality not as something made known to him in the world,...or in the relation between world and cognitive subject,... or in the relation between world and acting subject,... Rather, and above all else, he experiences it in his innermost self, as the duality of his I...he perceives himself as a battleground of prodigious contradictions....He is the bearer of the world's division, he experiences within himself the fate of the world which has fallen from freedom into bondage, from unity into duality. But it is within his power to be as well the bearer of the world's unification.... His perception of the world's duality within himself as his own duality imparts an overwhelming impulsion to the Jew's longing for unity. He has not merely discerned the world's anxiety, he has suffered it. In his will to unification pulsates the yearning of the world; and a deeply hidden bond links what, liberating and uniting, he accomplished for himself and for the creatures and things that are entrusted to him or that he encounters, to what he effects in the world. Every event reveals to him the Orient's ultimate, vital truth of which I have spoken: that the world's inner destiny depends, to an unfathomable degree, on the doer's deed. It is Judaism's basic tenet that the deed as an act of decision is an absolute value.21
This deed is man's labor toward unification, toward a holistic experience of life, toward freedom. It affects not only the Jew, but the entire world that is entrusted to him as the forerunner of the creative Eastern culture, which will overpower Western civilization. The deed here is the realized reconciliation between the interiority of the 'I' and the exterior world. Because the Jew, according to Buber, can internalize the tension of this conflict within his inner-self, he can overcome it. Then, the act of reconciliation, which occurs within his inner self, can be realized in the deed which thus gains global significance.

The modern condition was often allegorized by this metaphor of interior and exterior. Buber thus provided Mendelsohn with a structure with which he could order the art and architectural theories prevailing at the time and set them under and toward the over-arching longing for unity. Buber addresses Mendelsohn's most salient identity, as an artist and a Jew, and endows this composite qualification with the capacity to reconcile interior and exterior, the problem of the time. Moreover, the deed of reconciliation, with which Mendelsohn was preoccupied, now gains a redeemable power. Now Mendelsohn, who certainly "perceives himself as the battleground of prodigious contradictions," could set on the inner pole of substances the spirituality and vision of art, that is, the influence of the Blue Rider group, especially of Kandinsky's *On the Spiritual in Art*, the Art Nouveau heritage, and Van de Velde. On the outer pole of appearances he allocates reality and its materialistic demands. There he adheres primarily to the German Werkbund on industrial design, to the inspiration from engineering, and to his fascination with concrete and steel.
Throughout his career Mendelsohn opposes trends in the avant-garde that practice either introverted, isolated 'art for art's sake,' as well as trends that exclude any such consideration. On the one pole he opposes the refusal to engage with social life and realistic demands, where art, he claims, became self-referential. "Expressionism per se," which would fit to this category, was condemned by Mendelsohn because it "thought only of itself and basically not of art at all." For Mendelsohn, if art does not engage the practice of life, it does not deserve its title. He does acknowledge achievements intrinsic to the art medium, i.e., the expressionistic "abolition of form." For him, though, art should break and overcome all boundaries, including its own. On the other hand, the idea that architecture is not art, was completely inconceivable. Hans Meyer voiced this idea and disseminates it to Palestine, among other places, through his teaching at the Bauhaus. His enthusiastic will to transform social organization assigned architecture to be no more than the agent for this transformation. Mendelsohn, who later confronted aspects of this approach in Palestine, wrote in 1940: "The arrogance that despises those who prefer spiritual benediction to the blessings of technology leads to the sterilization of human endeavor." Indeed, nobody described better the "sterilization" Mendelsohn condemns than Meyer himself: "Let all life be striving for oxygen + carbon + sugar + protein. All design therefore should be firmly anchored in the world of reality....Building should be an epistemological demonstration....I strove with [my students] toward a single, controlled reality of the measurable, visible, and ponderable."
Both architects share the urge to engage the entire reality. But reality for them is an entirely different thing. While Meyer believes reality is controllable, that is, "measurable, visible and ponderable," Mendelsohn believes that reality is only the appearances of deeper meaning, which cannot be controlled by man. The lose of harmony with the "inner" side of reality, i.e., the false belief in the ability to control the world [nature, life] through its exterior manifestations, will lead to its destruction.

In 1940 Mendelsohn is convinced: "The new world has either to renounce the Dualism in which she is involved, and to be rebuilt on a reunion of matter and spirit or she will not come into being at all."\(^{25}\)

**Architecture as Reconciliation**

How does this understanding disclose itself in form? How can reconciliation become a deed? How can Mendelsohn's deed, architecture, gain significance for other men?

For a possible direction we return to Hammer, who provides us another insight into a "Buberian" understanding of the work of art:

If, as has been suggested, the tendency toward abstraction in art begins in anxiety before the external world, in "a great interior unrest caused by the phenomena of the world," then it may be that the genuine center of art is found where some reconciliation occurs, where some measure of trust is established, so that the artist does not run away from the world, but stands his ground. Here the "medium" springs into action to allow a portion of the world that can be drawn into the sphere of the visual to unfold itself by visual means. The artistic imagination leads the person to the world that has been set at a distance and enables him to retrieve that world. The artist necessarily distorts or abstracts from common-sense objects in their everyday appearance. But, in his genuine moments, he does so to win back the world in its relevance to man.\(^{26}\)

Here, I think, lies the crux of Mendelsohn's architecture and philosophy. While his philosophy remained the same throughout his career, his architecture reveals it best in his urban commissions of the twenties. It reveals a quest to engage modern life
rather than refraining from it within an interior. Rather than a refusal of bourgeois modern life, it is an effort to come to terms with it from an experiential stance, so that the whole person will be involved in the architectural experience of the building or the city. This is neither rejection nor reaction. It is cooperation, creation, shaping its becoming. The artistic intervention, the architectural deed aims at "retrieving the world that has been set at a distance," it helps "winning back the world in its relevance to man." The architect's unified experience of reality becomes, through architectural form, everyman's resource for harmonious life with "what is over and against" him in the world.

This will for reconciliation, this attempt to establish "some measure of trust," occurs in every phenomena Mendelsohn is involved with, in shaping the building, the city and the nation, i.e., the Zionist image of Palestine. Not all these attempts enjoy the same degree of success. In this chapter, however, I will focus on his highdays in Germany. I will discuss production ranging from the forces of construction to the urban environment, while the next chapter will be devoted to his national inclinations.

**Forces of Construction**

In the concluding lecture of 1948, in which Mendelsohn tried to demonstrate the continuity of his architectural philosophy, he argued that "wherever exterior forms express their interior structure, wherever a building's use is expressed in adequate architectural formations - there and there only we may expect good, i.e., timely buildings." While the second part of this statement alludes to the famous formulation of "form follows function," the first is of interest. There, Mendelsohn
extends the interior-exterior metaphor not to interior (protected, private) space and exterior (exposed, public) appearance of the building. Rather, he relates to structure and materials. By so doing, he extends a metaphor, which is usually attributed to the inner self of the artist in relation to the exterior world (or the interiority of the ‘art for art sake’), to the realm of "true to materials," which was strongly advanced by the German Werkbund. His devotion to this concept is well documented. On the one hand "the new material is still waiting for the superior talent who...will give new life to architecture's laws of construction and exterior form." On the other hand, only the artist can answer this demand:

> Only when the compressive properties of concrete and the tensile capacity of steel are known and understood will steel lose its hybrid, purely technical character and achieve the enclosure of a surface, the spatiality of a material, and become part of a new form. Then steel will come into its own, employing strong words, empowering work, and achieving transcendence.

"Transcendence" or the "extension into the absolute" are descriptions of a state in which the creation of form succeeds in fusing and unifying the material with its yet hidden properties.

Mendelsohn, however, does not ignore the other prevailing concept of the time, that is, the 'will to form.' In his 1919 lecture he regards this concept as a given: "An obvious mastery of the mass, however, is the aim of the architectural will-to-form of the new age." Then, Mendelsohn collapses the two arguments, namely the true to materials and the will-to-form, into one:

as long as the will-to-form has not yet found its final expression in steel and concrete, the materials of great achievements, its attempts will divert its accomplishments from the essence of the materials required by the individual construction and its geographical location.
Two important ideas are manifested here. First, Mendelsohn is saying the artist will not suffice as the agent of the "will-to-form of the new age," as was beautifully described by Klee. Only when the artist energizes the inherent potential of the new materials can the will-to-form of the new age find its expression in architectural form. Here, the creative "motor" persona and the unifying concepts that Buber introduces to Mendelsohn are activated. Second, there is not one solution to the activation of the new materials. It is not a goal in itself. Its accomplishment is dependent not solely on form true to material, but it is inextricably linked to the "individual construction purpose and its geographical location." Hence, in order to achieve "good, i.e., timely buildings," this process should be re-activated constantly for every commission and site.

Activating the materials, that is, answering the demands the materials make of the artist, is a moral act for Mendelsohn. The dynamism of a "superior talent" can redeem the materials from being under-treated: "A sense of movement and rhythm is carried over into the existing material and forces it out, or at least frees it from the demoralization of outmoded forms...[all qualified people of this time should be forced]...to liberate inner laws of architecture from a century of overdeveloped growth and set them up newly again." Architecture, Mendelsohn is saying, did not cope with the pace of the world. The architect’s duty is to provide form for the overwhelming reality, which is obscured by outmoded forms. The revision of the "inner laws of architecture" he calls for does not aim at an alternative, updated set of "inner laws," such as Le Corbusier's five points. But, the call departs from a similar realization of the gap between technological capacity and obsolete form. Here I will
not embark on a comparison between the two masters. Suffice it to say that the nature of Mendelsohn's architectural practice did not allow for a new set of rules. After the old rules have been liberated, they should not be set again, they should be always revitalized.

Yet, how does the conceptual merging of will-to-form and true to materials on the one hand reconcile man and his built environment while on the other hand, remain faithful to new age? In his 1923 lecture and in the subsequent letter to Oud, Mendelsohn asserts:

The motion in steel resulting from the revolutionary interplay of tensile and compressive forces causes repeated surprise for the initiate and is as yet totally unintelligible to the layman. It is our task to find the architectural expression for these moving forces, to find a balance for their stresses through architectural design, to arrest the innate, thrusting vitality towards actual movement of the building materials of our own age; to create a floating equilibrium out of this motion.

Mendelsohn is articulating a call of a moral nature to reveal to the layman the way the building "works." (fig. 3.2-3.3) A curtain of an ornamental cladding, which covers a steel skeleton, obscures the play of force in the construction. It is deceiving not only because it veils the materials and forces which constitute the building, but primarily because it is dishonest. It speaks to the layman in a language which is no longer part of his modern life. Hence the call to "free [the material] from the demoralization of outmoded forms." Only a genuine built environment, which copes with the "over-developed" reality, can reconcile man with his modern world.

Mendelsohn constructs his criticism of contemporary architecture against this ideal, namely the degree to which material, forces and form are not only expressed but
interact. He acknowledges Gropius and Meyer's factory of the 1914 Werkbund Exhibition as a high point of the exhibition. (fig. 3.5) Yet, in spite of the use of new technology, he criticizes the inorganic interaction of the factory's constituent materials as well as the lack of interplay of forces. The brick rectangular units do not interact, he claims, with the steel structure and the round edge of the glass. The tower itself, Mendelsohn asserts, does not exhibit a greater coherence due to the lack of interplay of its materials: "The [steel and] glass tower, which was certainly uniformly planned, becomes nothing but a glass cap stuck on top of the stretched concrete newel and on the swinging, helical, reinforced concrete steps." If the materials do not extend their properties from one to the other, than, Mendelsohn is saying, the form that follows is conspicuously incompatible. He applies the same logic to forces. "At the industrial pavilion of the Werkbund Exhibition of 1914 [he further criticizes the same building] the mass is totally passive; in spite of all formal innovations it presses with motionless weight onto its foundation." The emphasis on the interplay of forces and materials is the core of his famous praise of Van de Velde's theater of the same exhibition. "The building's exterior dizziness apart, finally becomes entirely activated and compelling: a contest between the sloping, rising, towering units."

Building in the City

What is true for the forces which are contained within the building is decisively important for the interplay between the building and the city. The building, as discussed above, does not embody or represent the movement of the city, but cooperates with it, discloses its motion in architectural form. (fig. 3.6-3.7) In his 1926
poem Mendelsohn demonstrates how the architect's feeling of the city activates architectural elements into a state of collaboration with the motion of traffic:

Here stands the staircase, here the entrance, here the rows of windows above the spandrels.
Staircase, entrance, rows of windows jut into the rhythm of the speeding motor car, the fast traffic.38

On the occasion of his 1923 lecture, Mendelsohn demonstrated this notion through the example of his early corner building (to be followed by many), the Berliner Tageblatt Building (fig. 3.1):

The Berliner Tageblatt Building is located at the intersection of two very busy and relatively narrow streets in the center of the city. It towers above its neighbors with its two extensive flanks and its eight-story height. An actual attack by some force, such as in the case of the breakers and the jetty, naturally does not take place. Yet, the building is not a disinterested spectator of the rushing cars and of the advancing and receding flow of traffic; rather it has become an absorbing, cooperating element of the motion. The building both visibly encompasses in its overall expression the high speed of traffic, where the tendency toward motion is raised to an extreme, and at the same time the balances of its forces soothes the frenetic pace of the street and of the passerby. By dividing and guiding the traffic, the building, despite all tendencies of its own towards movement, becomes an immobile pillar amidst the turbulence of the street.39

The building is not "a disinterested spectator," that is, its design corresponds to its downtown location, rather than ignoring or resisting the rapid pace of its environment. Yet, the building does not "clash" with the traffic, nor does it embody its motion. It does not represent it, since the building is a presence of "an immobile pillar." Instead of being one element among other contradictory elements in the city, the building "cooperates" with the motion around it. The downtown is not only a location for Mendelsohn, it is a kind of reality he tries to experience fully, i.e., dynamically. He invests reality with his energies in order to reach its extremity. He tries to "break through the will to reality" so that he can experience the full extent of the tension between the two poles: the "frenetic pace of the street and of the passerby"
on the one end, and the repose of human inner life on the other. The actual act of realization in architectural form is a result of the confrontation between what was encountered in the metropolis, that is "the elements of new energy" "admits the wreckage of energy," (elements of the exterior, phenomenal world), and the inner peace of the artist. The building as a deed of unity between the two poles of the tension is on the one hand expressive of the city's rapid life: the gestural rounded corner of its massing, the tendency to a continual horizontality (echoing modern modes of transportation) of its composition, and the rows of window on top of and together with the jutting "extensive ceramic cornice" of its details. On the other hand it has a soothing effect. This is not only because its static gravity balances the flow of traffic, nor only because "it becomes an immobile pillar admits the turbulence of the street." It is pacifying because the architectural form is sharing the same language with the city and its "contemporary man." The city's life is echoing in the building's form, in its continuous soothing horizontality.

Contemporary man, in the excitement of his fast life, can only find balance in the stress free horizontal. Only by breaking through the will to reality [italics added] can he master his restlessness, only though the most complete rapidity can he overcome his haste. Then the rotating earth will stand still!

Before Mendelsohn embarks on his last statement regarding urban planning, he excludes "domestic construction" from his architectural discussion:

Of course, such fundamental realizations [of the interplay of forces in the construction] cannot be derived from the mundane task of domestic construction. Because its small scale is independent of the greater constructive problem, it is slow to follow the reasoning of the great and specialized building programs. It can reinterpret their basic results for its modest purposes for the most part only formally.
This exclusion may have been the result of a few reasons: First, Mendelsohn's private life was rather conservative and his architecture was largely in line with the progressive bourgeoisie. He did not have any inclination to break the nuclear bourgeois family, on the contrary, he is more likely to protect it within a well-defined interior. Second is his explicit reason: the scale. The new technology should be challenged with projects which are capable of exploiting its potentials. Mendelsohn's interest in steel and the plastic properties of reinforced concrete was more appropriate for the execution of large public buildings. In fact, as Colqhoun reminds us, many of the architectural avant-garde experiments were symbolic of a technology which was still immature. The third and most profound reason, I think, is the tendency of Mendelsohn to contrast extremities in order to create the tension which activates his work. His sites, whether urban in Europe or bare-nature in Palestine, were extremely intense. Whatever was the reason, this statement was probably not very appealing to many of the avant-garde architects, who built at that point in time (1923) primarily domestic architecture.

Buildings with Buildings: Urban Design

Mendelsohn's urban agenda, however, is exceptional among modernists' urban planning, most notably Le Corbusier's. In a very concise and sober statement, Mendelsohn applies his understanding of a building to "the multi-cell system of the city."

For even [the city's] smallest unit is not a disinterested spectator but a cooperating agent in movement, and the street becomes, because of the speed of traffic, a horizontal track leading from focal point to focal point. The city seen this way, the biggest city of the modern world is, unlike the spatial miracles of the best old towns, an inorganic agglomeration of the most contrary elements. The cubist repetition of individual skyscrapers does not change this.
But our era has before it, as few others in history have had, the need to create new cities, or at least to plan them. In the old city one could find "some measure of trust" between man and his environment. The old city's protected streets and squares provided security. Defying the wilderness, they were man-controlled environment. The streets and squares were an outcome of the continuous built form, which created well-defined urban spaces, "the spatial miracles of the best old town." In it, the individual gesture of the building could be perceived slowly, in a contemplative way. This visual sensitivity has been changed in the modern city and its rapid modes of transportation. Moreover, the technological ability to erect tall buildings resulted in planes which replaced the horizontal dense continuity of the city with free-standing tall buildings. Mendelsohn criticizes this individuation of urban elements, which creates a technological wilderness rather than a protective urban space. In order to reestablish the sense of security, of man-controlled environment, a continuity should be reconstructed. Mendelsohn does not wish to return to the "miracles" of the old town. "No great age [he says] has ever trusted another age more than itself." He searches for the essence of city life and tries to reconstitute it through the manifestations of "the inescapable vitality of our modern era[']s" metropolis. The urban protective continuity should now be achieved among modern "cells." Both the building scale and the way in which it is grasped has changed due to technology and modes of transportation, where the building is depicted from the stance of the traffic flow. "The street has become, because of the speed of traffic, a horizontal track leading form focal point to focal point." The building thus should be constructed to be grasped in the motion between two focal points, in the midst of which the building's presence is both a sweeping urban gesture and a solid calm self-controlled object. The line of
Mendelsohn’s initial sketches embraces this urban gesture. It is always sharp and vivid in the center of the picture plane, portraying the building as an urban event, and it diffuses into the paper on both sides (fig. 3.8). The rapid movement Mendelsohn depicts does not allow for the eye to detect clear boundaries. The modern city is portrayed as a continuity between clear, simple urban gestures, and the interplay between them (fig. 3.11). Rather than "an inorganic agglomeration of the most contrary elements" such as "the cubic repetition of individual skyscrapers," Mendelsohn suggests a soothing horizontality. He is more responsive to the man within "the frenetic pace of the street," than to the full exploitation of mechanical potential.

Mendelsohn’s criticism of Le Corbusier’s plan praised the traffic solution but attacks the disintegration of the "central city district" with the entire plan, in a way that de devoids the plan from the "inescapable vitality of our modern era. In addition, [he says] the high-rise buildings are placed abruptly upon the plane, without connection to the other ‘cells.’" Mendelsohn’s criticism of Le Corbusier’s city planning reveals a fundamental difference between the two. Both are aware of the necessity to update city form to the new life it contains. Mendelsohn, instead of devising a new formal organization of urban environment, is participating in a new practice of urbanity. It is the city in use. This practice emerges and enhances the already existing modern city, but introduces man’s control over it.

Again, the program of reconciliation between man and his urban environment is activated. The ‘city in use’ lies in the heart of his "less ambitious project" which he
suggests as an alternative to Corbu’s agenda (fig 3.9-3.10). This is a multi-purpose structure in which "terraces, bazaars, street facades, a movie theater, a hotel, and an office building unite into one organism stemming both from the function of their individual purpose as well as from the dynamic of the whole." It is, I think, a very sober prediction of the "cities of the future," one that does not seek utopia but a controlled, intense reality.

Mendelsohn concludes his 1923 lecture with an heroic demand which echos many of the issues discussed above:

Seize, hold, construct, and calculate anew the earth! But shape the world that is waiting for you. Shape with the dynamics of your own vision the actual conditions on which reality can be based, elevate these to dynamic transcendence. Create art out of the real requirements and intangible space out of light and mass. But do not forget that the creation of the individual can only be understood from the entirety of the manifestations of the age. Creativity is bound within the relativity of these manifestations as present and future are bound within the relativity of history.\(^{45}\)

Later in his life Mendelsohn coined the term "elastic continuity" primarily to discuss the properties of tensile steel and reinforced concrete. In fact, this metaphor can serve to further describe the continuity between the building and its environment, as well as the plastic continuity between the individual city’s cells. The same metaphor can be applied to describe Mendelsohn’s belief in continuity between different national identities within a supra-national world structure, where the national sovereignty’s borders are diffused.
why this architecture?

Only think back a hundred years:
Crinoline and wig
Tallow candle and spinning wheel
Sedan chair and post coach
General shops and trade guilds.

Then think of us:
Bare knees and short haircuts
Radio and film
Car and airplane
Banana wholesalers and combines that run department stores.

Do not think these are merely external things.
The inner things lie behind them.
A hundred years ago as today.

Certainly man remains man.
And heaven is broad, as always.

But the world about you is tremendously alive. Cities of millions, skyscrapers,
Eight hours flight from Moscow to Berlin - Napoleon took months to so it and it brought about his ruin.

And you ask, why this architecture?
It is nothing surprising, simply the product
Of life itself, of our life, of our age.

... Do you want to be deceived
By the things that surround you,
By your house, the shops you buy from?
Are they, then, things that do not belong to you,
Your electric cooker, your safety razor -
So functional, so simple and so natural?

So - to want to deny our way of life,
is self-deception, it is pitiful and cowardly.

To want to hold back its development is
Self-immolation, it is foolish and fruitless.

So be brave, be wise! Seize life by the forelock,
At the point where its heart beats strongest, in the midst of life, in the midst of technique, traffic and industry.

Take it straight, as it is, take its tasks as it presents them. To you, to us all.
For each one demands functionalism, clarity, simplicity. Each must be functional, for all work is too valuable to be senselessly wasted.

Clarity, because not only an elite but every man’s reason must understand them.

Simplicity, because the best achievement is always the simplest.

No great age has ever trusted another age more than itself.

And so should we architects, all alone, come limping behind, Wearing wigs, we engineers and master-builders, who build your house? your cities and the whole visible world? Do not let yourselves be persuaded.

... Staircase, entrance, rows of windows jut into the rhythm of the speeding motor car, the fast traffic.

Do not let yourself be hurried, master the age. Do not let yourself be duped. You are the master. Be a creator, shape your own age.

These are your responsibilities.... Hence this architecture. [letters, p.93-95,1927]


4. Erich Mendelsohn in Beyer 1967, 48, p.162

5. Erich Mendelsohn, 1923 lecture, the Beyer translation, p.61, also in p.34 of the complete lecture.


8. Hammer, p.614


10. Martin Buber, "Renewal of Judaism," in On Judaism p.49


12. Hammer (italic added)

13. Hammer, p.623-624

14. Mendelsohn in Beyer, October 11, 1926, p.95

15. Mendelsohn in Beyer pp. 93-94


17. For further discussion on the intricate ties between technology and progress see Arendt, Hannah, The Human Condition University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1958, p.154

18. Marshal Berman All That Solid Melts into Air (New York, Penguin Books, 1988), pp.100-101 I replaced Berman's original word, creativity, with inventiveness, because creativity for Mendelsohn involves non-cognitive operation, while the Berman reference here is to the cognitive invention (industry, traffic and so forth) of the nineteenth century.


20. Mendelsohn, 1923 lecture, p.22

From the root the sap flows to the artist, flows through him, flows to his eye.

Thus he stand as the trunk of the tree.

Battered and stirred by the strength of the flow, he molds his vision into his work.

As, in full view of the world, the crown of the tree unfolds and spreads in time and in space, so with his work.

Nobody would affirm that the tree grows its crown in the image of its root. It is obvious that different functions expanding in different elements must produce vital divergences.

But it is just the artist who at times is denies those departures from nature which his art demands. He has even been charged with incompetence and deliberate distortion.

And yet, standing at his appointed place, the trunk of the tree, he does nothing other than gather and pass on what comes to him from the depths. He neither serves nor rules he transmits.

His position is humble. And the beauty at the crown is not his own. He is merely a channel.

(Mendelsohn 1919 lecture, p.13 (This quote is combined from two sources in which the same ideas is developed. See next note.))
39. Mendelsohn 1923 lecture, p.28
40. Ibid, p.24
41. Ibid, p.27
42. Ibid, p.33
43. Mendelsohn in Beyer, poem, p.95
44. Mendelsohn 1923 lecture, pp.33-34
45. Ibid
3.1 Mendelsohn, Berliner Tageblatt building (1921-1923).
3.2 Mendelsohn, Schocken Department Store (1926-1928), night view.

3.3 Mendelsohn, Schocken department Store, Stuttgart, under construction.
3.4 Henry Van De Velde, Model Theatre, Werkbund Exhibition, Cologne, Germany, 1914.

3.5 Walter Gropius, Adole Meyer, Model Factory Werkbund Exhibition, 1914.
3.6 Mendelsohn, Schocken Department Store, Stuttgart, (1926-1928), aerial view.

3.7 Mendelsohn, Rudolf Petersdorff Store, 1927
3.8 Mendelsohn, Preliminary sketches for the Alteration and Addition to Choen and Epstein, Duisberg, 1926.
3.9 Mendelsohn, Building of the "Woga" A.G., Berlin (1927-1928)

3.10 Mendelsohn, sketch for the building of the "Woga" A.G., Berlin (1927-1928)

3.11 Mendelsohn, sketch for New cut of Lindestrasse, 1928
The unstable urban civilization based upon the
onesided overvaluation of the intellect fails to
appreciate the organic culture of the East rooted
in the unity of Man and Nature. But it is this
culture which produced the Moral Law and the
Visions of the Bible.\textsuperscript{1}

Erich Mendelsohn
Politics and Creativity

Buber's portrayal of creativity as longing for unity echoes in different spheres of the sensible world. No less than in language (the traditional Jewish expressive form), shape or sound, this yearning can disclose itself in the form of public life, which its present deformity Buber identifies as politics. "Public life [Buber clarifies] is a sphere of life; in its laws and forms, it is, in our time, just as deformed as our civilization in general;...But [it] is not deformed in its essence; public life...is redeemable." Remedying this deformity is one facet of the overarching striving for unity. In politics the "three interconnected ideas: the idea of unity, the idea of the deed, and the idea of the future" are inherently inter-linked. The deed of changing the present world order through overcoming divisions within nations as well as between national entities is not only a deed toward a redeemed future; but suffering these divisions has always been the initial impetus for the Jew's yearning for unity. Politics thus becomes a creative sphere, in which elements of public life are gathered in the world and fused into structure, that is, they are given new form within which communities can live.

Mendelsohn entitled his 1940 pamphlet: "Palestine and the World of Tomorrow." The title betrays its authors convictions: Palestine is not only the homeland for the ever-wandering Jew. It has a pivotal role in forming the New World. Why should an architect contribute an ingenious insight to the formulation of the world order? Mendelsohn answers in a quote which precedes his text:

"It seems to be no matter of mere chance but rather natural, that it is the architect - accustomed to the conception of a building as the sum total of all the requirements of his time - who should be among the first to realize the change in the structure of the world because he feels the structural element to be his own personal prerogative."
The broad interpretation Mendelsohn gives to notions such as elements in the world, structure, and giving form betrays a Buberian influence. Moreover, it put Mendelsohn in an authoritative position suitable to his "personal prerogative." A holistic view of architectural production was always in the core of Mendelsohn's agenda. In the concluding statement of his 1923 lecture, he professes:

...do not forget that the creation of the individual can only be understood from the entirety of the manifestations of the age. Creativity is bound within the relativity of these manifestations as present and future are bound within the relativity of history.\(^5\)

Nowhere in Mendelsohn's career did the entirety of "the manifestations of the age" carry such loaded political overtones as in Palestine. Nowhere was architecture so close in his mind to transforming the future. But it was always the present by which the future can be changed. Now as before, it is not a revolution which brings about a totally new form, but a laborious gradual process of transformation which gathers the manifestations of the age and discloses them in a better form. While in Europe the crux of his architecture was reconciliation between man and his ever-distant reality; in Palestine he took part in a global effort to entirely transform this modern condition. Palestine, "where intellect and vision - matter and spirit [genuinely] meet" is on the route "to become a part of the New-World which is going to replace the world that has gone.

Genesis repeats itself.

Jerusalem, February 1940."\(^6\)
Supra-Nationalism

What was this New World, what were its premises, and why was this critique activated? The Jewish post-assimilated generation stood between two worlds. On the one hand their parent’s generation had already broken with the traditional interiority of Jewish life. On the other hand they were not accepted as an integral part of either German culture, or German nationality. In order to survive they could either accept the modern national world order as an undisputable fact and secure the Jew’s position within it, as did political Zionism; or they could reject national constructs altogether. The modern national structure was the one that perpetuated the marginality of Jews in secular Europe. Hence, the critique of nationalism was a quest for holistic life for every man. Marxism offered a materialistic wholeness, to which many Jews warmly subscribed. But it was a uniformity which ignored any existing structure in favor of a total change of social consciousness. It implies Jewish self-annihilation as part of a larger refutation of "obsolete" cultural and spiritual affiliations. The lesson of exclusion and marginalization provoked other Jewish thinkers to recognize the unavoidable differences between various communities. While Marxism denounced these societal traits as obsolete, "Social Utopism" tried to subvert the negative aspect of this difference into a positive one and thus to cherish it. Social Utopists wanted to build a global organization based on the premise that communities and cultures should endure. Ostensibly, they established their position within the prevailing culture-civilization debate. But, the advocates of culture as a critique of modernity among Jews could not share their views with fellow ‘culturalists.’ The latter's argumentation led to German national romanticism, the precursor of fascism, from which Jews were obviously excluded. The alternative "social utopia" thus promoted
was a supra-national order in which pre-national affiliations were given a new form of public life. Those thinkers believed that the vitality of this supranationalist structure of communal life would overpower the declining national-state order which eventually would be dismembered.

In a speech Buber delivered during the Twelfth Zionist Congress (September 1921), he spelled out his convictions regarding forms of social life: the concept of "people," which is the premise of organic social life; the construct of "nation" with which this premise can be fulfilled; and the strategy of nationalism, which fulfills the construct of nation rather than the deficiencies in people's life, for the sake of which the nation was initially constructed. The origin of people, Buber explains, is of greater complexity than the idea of blood relation. He thus defines "people":

The concept "people" always implies unity of fate. It presupposes that in a great creative hour throngs of human beings were shaped into a new entity by a great molding fate they experienced in common. This new "coined form" [gepraegte Form], which in the course of subsequent events "develops as a living substance," survives by dint of the kinship established from this moment on;...The physical factor of this survival is the propagation of the species in more or less rigid endogamy; the spiritual factor is an organic, potential, common memory which becomes actual in each successive generation as the pattern for experience, as language, and as a way of life.

People thus is the natural community, which possesses "physical and spiritual oneness," that is, a unity between man and his social formation. This oneness can be either endured or disturbed, according to the larger global structure in which different people are organized. Devising the appropriate structure requires creativity. Historically, between the dismembering of the church's power (the Reformation) and the rise of nationalism (the French Revolution), Europe faced an instability which invited a new form. First Buber demonstrates how sociologically, rather than looking
forward for new forms to fulfill the insufficiencies of the time, Europe chose the old-fashioned centralized state apparatus. Then, Buber exposes the psychological reasoning of the national awareness at that particular moment:

United Christendom did not merely break in two; it was rent by numberless cracks, and human beings no longer stood on the solid ground of connectedness. The individual was deprived of the security of a closed cosmic system. He grew more and more specialized and at the same time isolated, and found himself faced with the dizzy infinity of the new world-image. In his desire for shelter, he reached out for a community-structure which was just putting in an appearance, for nationality. The individual felt himself warmly and firmly received into a unit he thought indestructible because it was "natural," sprung from and bound to the soil. He found protection in the naturally evolved shelter of the nation, compared to which the state seemed man-made, and even the Church no more than the bearer of a mandate.

For Buber, as long as the nation is an answer to a demand for identity, it is the appropriate accompanying structure to people. In fact, Buber says, "the term 'nation' signifies the unit 'people,' from the point of view of conscious and active difference." This awareness becomes dangerous when it is considered to be a natural phenomena rather than a construct, because then it becomes self-sufficient. Then, Buber clarifies, "the original feeling of allegiance to a people, alive in the depth of [man's] soul long before modern national awareness, changed from a creative power to the challenging will-to-power of the individual as a member of the community." This question will reemerge in Buber's endless debates over the issue of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Buber did believe that "power is intrinsically guiltless; it is the precondition for the action of man....[But] a will to power, less concerned with being powerful than with being 'more powerful than,' becomes destructive." This will-to-power would differentiate arbitrary from legitimized nationalism. For Buber, to draw the "line of demarcation" between the two would be the foremost moral task.
If "a people is a phenomenon of life, a nation one of awareness, [and] nationalism one of overemphasized awareness, [then,] in a people, assertiveness is an **impulse** that fulfills itself creatively; in a nation it is an **idea** inextricably joined to a task; [and] with nationalism it becomes a **program**." The national programs of "a state of cannons, flags, and military decoration," tend to be identical in every nation. Thus, these similar nation-states and their civil, technical and military monotony often get into violent confrontation. Instead of multiple identical, carefully bordered national entities, which constantly clash with each other, Buber calls for nations to give form to the unique "impulses" of different people. Thus nations will compliment each other in a pattern which exemplifies the full extent of human cultural diversity.

Buber subjects national as well as individual relationships to a greater order to which they "must inwardly render an account of themselves." Those who see in the nation a "supreme principle," "ultimate reality," and "a final judge" lack the faith which is the only guide for drawing the moral demarcation line between nation and arbitrary nationalism. Buber thus tries to restore the subjection of human relation to the absolute. His de-secularization of Ahad Ha-am was a reconstruction of the Jewish pre-national affiliation in the national epoch: "In other nations, [he says] the national powers in themselves vouch for the survival of the people....In Judaism, this guarantee is given by another power, which...makes the Jews more than a nation: the membership in a community of faith." Buber thus forges the Jewish continuity not only within a national realm, but within a religious one as well. He asserts:

in the thousands years of its exile Jewry yearned for the Land of Israel, not as a nation like others, but as Judaism *(res sui generis)*, and with motives and intentions which cannot be derived wholly from the category "nation." That original yearning is behind all the disguises which modern national Judaism
has borrowed from the modern nationalism of the West. To forget one’s own peculiar character, and accept the slogans and paroles of a nationalism that has nothing to do with the category of faith, means national assimilation.¹⁷

This is an interesting twist. The fear from assimilation usually refers to breaking with the Jewish faith or with Jewish endogamy. Buber extends this concept to include a moral secular trait: having a Jewish state, he warns, does not guarantee Jewish endurance. If this state will be like every other, Jews will assimilate into the nation-state order and thus will perish spiritually. Buber insists: "If the depth of faith, which is decisive in limiting national action, is robbed of its content of faith, then inorganic ethics cannot fill the void, and the emptiness will persist until the day of the turning."¹⁸ This is, of course, a problematic statement because it undermines any secular attempt to employ moral ethics to politics.

Buber’s critical reflections on the Twelfth Zionist Congress as well as other Zionist matters were published in his journal, Der Jude, which had been published since 1916 and was read by the German Jewish elite.¹⁹ Mendelsohn, who admired Buber’s early addresses, was probably a reader of this publication. He was a close friend of Kurt Blumenfeld, who was one of the leaders of German Zionism. His political statements are perfectly in line with the prevailing thoughts among German Zionists. In the concluding statement of his 1919 lecture, Mendelsohn asserts:

What we desire will go beyond our own country, beyond Europe, and will bless all nations. I am not at all talking about pro-internationalism. Internationalism means the nationless aestheticism of a decaying world. Super-nationalism, however, maintains national borders and delimitations as a requirement, yet frees humanity. Only this act can create a comprehensive culture....It will result in an adequate faith in God only with the final achievement of a fusion of all nations.²⁰
One can easily discern familiar themes: the rejection of nationalism as well as its Marxist opponent, which eliminated cultural boundaries; the support of supranationalism in which communities maintain their uniqueness, and thus are free to practice their physical and spiritual oneness; the over-arching religious motivation; and, the underlining aspiration to advance redemption. In his 1940 pamphlet, which is almost entirely devoted to politics, Mendelsohn is more explicit:

the community will be built upon the law of nature on which families, clans, nations and races establish themselves and stand together. Some of these great entities are already apparent: The American Continent and the British Commonwealth i.e. the English speaking world on both sides of the Atlantic - the Realm of the yellow race between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific, and the Semitic world as a signal of national renaissance of the Mediterranean. Thus the process of the world's remodelling on the basis of great entities has already started, a beginning that the world has not yet known.21

The Buberian concepts of the organic people, and the supernational world structure which accommodate it, is echoing in this statement as well as the praxis of accommodating this structure within larger national entities. Writing it in Palestine was a clear political statement for cultural and political co-existence with the Arabs.22

For Mendelsohn, as aforementioned, politics and architecture possess a "natural" bond. Following his utopian supranationalist statement, Mendelsohn asserts: "The infallible sign of an original beginning is the birth of an original architectural style."23 He criticized the idea of having one new style for the epoch. The Bauhaus exhibition he attended shortly before his 1923 lecture was a precursor to the "International Style" aesthetic, a term which will be coined later, in the MOMA exhibition of 1932. Mendelsohn criticized the international claims of the new style at the beginning of the lecture:
To call this apparent conformity [of the new modern architectural concept] simply "international" is more verbal indolence than an expression of conviction. On the other hand, in such politically tense times it appears to be almost frivolous to impute any kind of congenial agreement to the relations between individual countries; the term "internationality" appears in the history of nations only when their structural bonds are destroyed, and the onset of labor pains indicates the urgent need for a new, original way of thinking.²⁴

Internationality, for Mendelsohn, is cultural and national weakness. It indicates the loss of control. If the structural national bonds are destroyed, then they should be replaced with another structure that does justice to the people within. The "original way of thinking" is not a revolution. Rather, it is the aspiration toward a new form for the existing. Mendelsohn is a contextualist. His raw material is the existing elements of his reality, to which he gives new form. His art is new form, not an agent of new reality. Through the gradual work of devising new appropriate form, Mendelsohn wants to transform the reality so it will not betray the man in it. That is, he wants to restore reality through transformation, not through an apocalyptic revolution. In Europe he could fit the rubric of the "international" aesthetic only because this aesthetic was originated in the Industrial world, which was the context of his architecture as well. When Gropius called him "the unpatriotic Mendelsohn," he probably referred not only to his Jewish incomplete Germanhood, but also to the lack of commitment on the behalf of Mendelsohn to the social and stylistic undertones of the new architecture. While Gropius, who initially supported Van de Velde in his debate with Muthesius against standardization of architectural production, changed his mind during his Bauhaus years, Mendelsohn remain faithful to his initial reservations. Mendelsohn was indeed committed to technological innovation and its relationships to architectural form. But, he did not adhere either to the social ideas that underlined much of the modern architectural production, or to its standardization
and uniformity of style. As a Van de Velde disciple, he could not accept any exterior force as possess the strength to determine architectural form. The exterior world is the raw material, the inspiration, the source for everything an artist does. But for Mendelsohn, the creative act, the birth of new shape is "the sole birthright of the creative man."  

In Palestine he saw the opportunity to restore the "structural bonds" of human communities, and he believed he was the man to take responsibility for this new structure's visual dimension. The "original way of thinking" of national home rather than of nation-state was the one he wanted to give shape to. The disavowal of the state in 1940, when a state was the official aspiration of the Yishuv (the Jewish population in Palestine), was provocative:

The beginning of the 20th century, with the crescendo of its political and economic nationalism which led to the Great War, with the mounting pressure of antisemitism which the social consequences of the Great War caused to explode, presents to the Jews "a national home in Palestine," a gift that only today is seen to be two-edged. Two-edged because it induced the Jewish people to think of a State of their own, of the lesser goal given by the grace of Versailles, and deviated it from the major goal, to become an equal member of the Semitic commonwealth of nations.  

The rejection of nationalistic Europe from which he fled, supranationalism, and Buber's Orientalist utopia, in which the Semitic people are the bearer of the world's revival, are all present in this statement. The Zionist praxis of these ideas was undermining the wished state in favor of a dual-national resolution. Even the celebrated Balfour Declaration of 1917 was accepted by Buber with cautious reservations. The British were agents of the same national-imperial order he objected to. Any alliance with these forces is limited, Buber thought, in its effect. The pioneering Zionist project "must not undertake this task [mediating East and West]
as the servants of a mighty and doomed Europe, but rather as the allies of a weak Europe full of future promise, not as middlemen for a decadent culture, but as collaborators of a creative young one..." Mendelsohn, who kept a practice in England from 1933 to 1939, and became a British citizen in 1939, was not as careful as Buber regarding his alliance with the imperial power. This was his practical compromise, a twist in his critique of modern nationalism.

However, as an architect, Mendelsohn's discussion encounters not only culture and politics, but technology as well. Jeffrey Herf studies the inextricable links between culture, politics and technology in what he terms the "Reactionary Modernist" in Weimar and the Third Reich. His study "examines a cultural paradox of German modernity, namely, the embrace of modern technology by German thinkers who rejected Enlightenment reason." These thinkers claimed that "Germany could be both technologically advanced and true to its soul." The unity of technology and soul was the hallmark of Mendelsohn's belief as well. The vicious twist, though, was the subjection of the soul. It was not any more the soul of the individual or the community, but the soul of the nation - Germany. Herf continues:

In a country of romantic counterrevolution against the Enlightenment, [the reactionary modernists] succeeded in incorporating technology into the symbolism and language of Kultur - community, blood, will, self, form, productivity, and finally race - by taking it out of the realm of Zivilisation - reason, intellect, internationalism, materialism, and finance.

Both sets of vocabularies in their entirety appear constantly in Mendelsohn's writing. He criticizes the onesided "reason" and "intellect" and wants to imbue it with "blood," "will," and "self," which are the producers of creative "form." Mendelsohn as well as Buber share with those thinkers the origin in Nietzsche, and the yearning for the
triumph of spirit.\textsuperscript{32} If the free spirit is identical to the spirit of the nation, then the road to fascism is short. Learning this lesson, the unity of culture and technology Mendelsohn strove for in Germany could not gain a nation-state dimension in Palestine. This was an undermining of his own critique of the culture which invented modern antisemitism. Thus, Mendelsohn’s ambition to update the East technologically could not have been achieved within a nation-state program.

As a praxis in Palestine, the most problematic issue in Mendelsohn’s agenda was the Semitic alliance with the Arabs. While the state was the Yishuv’s aspiration, the everyday reality was dictated by the conflict with the Arab majority and their emerging national consciousness. Yosef Gorny discusses the "The Arab Question," as a "Jewish problem."\textsuperscript{33} On the one hand the Arab existence in Palestine was solid and tangible but their national identity as Palestinians was indefinite. On the other hand, the Jewish national consciousness had already developed into a coherent national structure but their possession of the land was unstable. Therefore they had to rely on an ideological prospect in which an historical tie would guarantee a present right over the land. In order to substantiate this claim, the Yishuv relied on four principles: A territorial concentration of Jews in Palestine, which was followed by the principle of aspiration to become a majority in the land of Israel; (fig. 4.54) the principle of Jewish productivization which induced the ideology of "Hebrew labor" in Jewish settlements; (fig. 4.33) and the Renaissance of the Hebrew culture. The Yishuv activated these principles so that they destabilized the status quo of the Arab-Jewish population. They created an autocracy of Hebrew work, and differentiated the Hebrew culture not only from Yiddish and European cultures, but from the Arab
culture as well. (fig. 4.55) This understanding was part of "a conscious aspiration to build on the land of Israel a separated national society, surrounded by protecting national, social, cultural and even military walls. These walls seem to precondition the growth and strength of the Jewish society, not because of its pridefulness, but primarily because of the sense of weakness accompanying a community's organization toward a national society."

The German intellectual opposition to the Yishuv's leadership agreed with most of the aforementioned principles but not with their interpretation. They supported a territorial concentration of Jews in Palestine, as well as A.D. Gordon's call for the dignity of physical work and Jewish productivity. They certainly promoted the renascence of Hebrew culture. But, they strongly objected to the enclosure within a national entity and encouraged a dialogue between Jews and Arabs. For Buber, who inspired many of these thinkers, the Arab question was the touchstone of Zionism. In the Twelfth Zionist Congress he voiced the conviction he always insisted on:

A strong nucleus of the Jewish people is determined to return to its ancient homeland, there to renew its life, an independent life founded on labor which shall grow and endure as an organic element of new humanity. [This desire] however, is not aimed against any other people....We do not aspire to return to the Land of Israel with which we have inseparable historical and spiritual ties in order to suppress another people or to dominate them. In this land whose population is both sparse and scattered, there is room both for us and for its present inhabitants...34

These intellectuals ardently objected to the Yishuv's aspiration to be a majority in Palestine, because, they said, it would result in a violation of the status quo with the Arab population. The aspiration to become a majority and the objection it provoked originated in the Jewish marginality throughout the diaspora years. For the Yishuv the diaspora was the historical evidence of the danger of being an eternal national
minority. The longing for national majority embodied the will to change the international status of Jews in the world through a pivotal re-entering to the history of nations. While this was a "practical" argumentation, its opposition betrayed "moral" concerns. Hugo Bergman alleged in 1929:

We have known: the Israeli people are the classical people of minorities: all other people have minorities in other countries, we are minorities in all countries. We have thought: from here a conclusion should emerge. Here we were destined by our historical destiny to be the advocates of a change of values among nations. We have thought: all our national energy, all our influence in the world should be directed toward one goal: to shatter the majority spirit in the order of nations, to erect a new national and political morality in the world, that will guarantee the national minority equal rights to that which the majority enjoys, and will totally abolish the political value of numerical relationship among people. We have thought: our dispersion among people has forced upon us this historical mission, we are struggling for our existence among people - the existence of a minority - in our struggle for this new inter-national morality.

In a Buberian spirit, Bergman continues: "Graciousness did the Holy One with the people of Israel that their national home is the homeland of two people." This is the challenge, he says, and this unique situation of two people on one land is the opportunity to devise from it a new order.

Bergman as well as Buber was part of Brith Shalom (literally the Convent of Peace). The association was initiated in 1925 by Arthur Rupin, the principal planner of Zionist settlement policy. Although the members of Brith Shalom were a negligible minority, their intellectual stature was impossible to ignore. The group was united, as Gershom Scholem has noted, by a conviction "that the Land of Israel belongs to two peoples, and these peoples need to find a way to live together...and to work for a common future." In their founding statutes they assert: "The object of the Association is to arrive at an understanding between Jews and Arabs as to the form
of their mutual social relations in Palestine on the basis of absolute political equality of two culturally autonomous peoples, and to determine the lines of their co-operation for the development of the country. This position had far-reaching implications for the political sovereignty of the national future of Palestine. It implies an agreement to limit Jewish population growth, that is, Jewish immigration. This debate will become extremely harsh after WWII, when providing shelter for Jewish refugees seemed to be the most urgent task of the Yishuv.

Arthur Rupin, the founder of Brith Shalom, and the head of the Palestine office of the Jewish Federation, brought Richard Kauffmann to be the architect in charge for the Zionist settlement activity. Kauffmann, who studied with Mendelsohn in Munich under Theodor Fischer, played an important role in bringing Mendelsohn to Palestine in 1923 and 1934. Many members of Brith Shalom were part of the Hebrew University, a circle in which Mendelsohn interacted both socially and professionally as the architect of the Hebrew University. Mendelsohn’s writings of the period reveal the strong influence this circle of thinkers had on him. He regards the Arab question as a pivotal one to the success of the Zionist project. The Jews, he says, "return to Palestine neither as conquerors nor as refugees. That is why they realize that the rebuilding of the country cannot be done except in communion with the original Arab population." In fact, Mendelsohn thinks that the solution of the Arab question is the precondition to the success of devising a new world order. He clarifies:

In the arrangement commanded by this union [of modern civilization and antique culture, of intellect and vision and of matter and spirit] both Arabs and Jews, both members of the Semitic family, should be equally interested. On its solution depends the fate of Palestine to become a part of the New World which is going to replace the world that has gone."
Although Mendelsohn's opinion is similar to that of Brith Shalom, the flavor of his argumentation is different. Mendelsohn's writing betrays the Orientalist utopia which he absorbed from Buber's early addresses on Judaism. Mendelsohn, the idealistic artist, genuinely believes that the Arabs possess visual sensibilities which are intristically Oriental. His insistence on cultural mutuality is not primarily an obedience to a moral imperative. It is first and foremost his will, as a "Western Oriental" to consummate the historical opportunity to combine the sensitivities of the East with the knowledge of the West into an entirely new architectural style.

The Conflict with the Yishuv

In Pre-State Palestine, the process of national-social revival was inextricably linked with the revolt this historical moment constituted: the negation of the Jewish diaspora life in favor of an independent upstanding being, i.e. the erection of 'a national home'; the negation of the European bourgeoisie in favor of an agrarian working society (or social equality in the less desirable urban setting); (fig.4.48-4.50) and, the negation of the romanticism of the East, (due to the growing conflict with the emerging Arab national consciousness,) in favor of an original collective image, which would develop into the myth of the Sabra (the Israeli born). (fig 4.51-4.52) In Palestine, the quest for national identity could not rely on a common national heritage, because hitherto, the nation was an abstract entity, visually immersed in other cultures and their forms of representation. The emergence of the Zionist movement in Europe was remote from the locus of its realization, Palestine. Thus, the change the movement advocated was external to the circumstances of its targeted criticism and negation. Moreover, any attempt to 'invent local tradition' was undermined because of the growing political
hostility between Arab and Jews. The absence of a common visual heritage together with the triple negation mentioned above, allowed for the consideration of the region as a tabula rasa. Thus, the ground was prepared for the positivist Zionist project, a melting pot whose visual mold was Modern Architecture, the consummation of universal rationality. For the uprooted Jew, the plain white modern housing was the proper traceless home. "An apartment free from past memories" as Julius Posener advocated in an editorial for the "Habinyan" (construction), in 1937. (fig. 4.25-4.31)

At the forefront of the Zionist building boom stood the Tel Aviv Chouge, an interest group of organized young European-trained architects, a collective well integrated into and representative of the socialist leadership. Their architecture exhibited an unparalleled consistency of the "International Style." The Chouge operated within the scientific legacy that the Enlightenment initiated. Epitomizing mainstream Zionism in Palestine, the Chouge treated the Zionist project as a scientific experiment, in which architecture was part of the great machinery of the tangible Jewish revival on the historical promised land. "The new village," Posener proclaimed, "is built...on the ground of scientific suppositions, in a modern way, or to put it right, it is based on hypothesis." (fig. 4.46) Articles in the Chouge's (first) architectural magazine "Construction in the Near East" (fig. 4.43-4.44) called for architecture based on absolute reason:

The Jewish builder does not have any original tradition or history of Jewish 'way of building' in Eretz Israel. The Jewish builder brings from his diaspora familiar education and tendency and implements them in his new field of work in Eretz Israel. For this reason, he can rely only on the function, the climate and the material (italics added). For this reason, he has the emphatic obligation to examine thoroughly the foundation upon which he should built, that is the organizational plan and the city plan. Only in this natural and logical way (italics added), will emerge, from the multiple cultural circles of
Eretz Israel's people, the built expression of the new national life. The life of people, who plan to build themselves to an extent and tempo unparalleled in world history.43

Both the Tel Aviv Chouge and Mendelsohn were an integral part of the evolution of the Modern movement in Europe. They were all self-identified Zionists, participants in the creation of 'a national home,' rather than foreign advocates of Western progress. However, the Chouge's Zionism was a combination of secularized Judaism and "real politics," that is, the advancement of a Jewish state both internationally and locally, through step-by-step settlement policy. Mendelsohn's Zionism, on the contrary, exemplified culturally Buber's de-secularization of Ahad Ha-am, and politically, the resistance to the nation-state construct. If for the Chouge Palestine was a tabula rasa, for Mendelsohn it was the bearer of a spiritual truth. He contests:

It has been said, that the re-entrance of the Jews into the Arab world does not mean anything else but civilization fighting the desert. That opinion originates from the political mentality of the rational Western world, which political development since the last war has made obsolete. The unstable urban civilization based upon the onesided overvaluation of the intellect fails to appreciate the organic culture of the East rooted in the unity of Man and Nature. But it is this culture which produced the Moral Law and the Visions of the Bible.44

Mendelsohn, whose inspiration sprang from the biblical land, resisted whole-heartedly the positivist aspects of the Zionist project. The scientific legacy and the absolute reliance on the intellect were similar to the predominance of the materialistic conception of life he criticized in Europe for putting "the question for life's purpose above life itself; a utilitarianism which destroys the essence of life based upon the unity of mind and matter."45 In Palestine it was the unity of mind and national cause, which Buber might have foreseen when he wrote in his early adresses: "the center of the Jewish people would become the center of Judaism as well only if it were
created not for the sake of renewal but out of and through renewal." The post-Europe Mendelsohn was stronger than ever in his undermining of the primacy of "the glaring clarity of the intellect and the inventions it has produced," in favor of its fusion with "the unconscious spirit, the root of the creative power in man." Culture, creativity, spirituality, vision, and the self that constituted Mendelsohn's favorite vocabulary, were foreign words to the members of the Chouge, who preferred reason, science, material, function, internationalism and collectivism.

The Chouge, I argue, was part of a conscious national effort of a society to institutionalize itself. As a collective group it aspired to establish a set of norms with which to regulate architectural production for the national cause. These norms could not comprise a return to arbitrary classical notions nor could they rely on apriori cultural traditions. Rather, the activities of the Chouge would institutionalize the "new," the Modern, a concept which originally stand for a radical challenge of any pre-conceived institutions. What had been the cutting edge of Modernism in Europe, became a classic in Palestine. This urge for institutions was part of a rooting process, which contradicted the insecure, transient Jewish life in the diaspora. The development of myths and norms represented the longing for certainty and portrayed conviction and aspiration for an independent future. Through the mechanism of competitions, struggle for building regulation and architectural publication, Modern Architecture, as aforesaid, became the visual mold for the Zionist melting pot.

Nothing was more foreign to Mendelsohn's conception of art than institution, whether it was the Beaux Arts education he left in 1910, or the attempt to institutionalize
modern architecture under an imposing style, as he foresaw in the 1923 Bauhaus exhibition. In 1914 he sided with Van de Velde, who voiced then the exact formulation of Mendelsohn's belief:

By his innermost essence the artist is a burning idealist, a free spontaneous creator. Of his own free will he will never subordinate himself to a discipline that imposes upon him a type, a canon. Instinctively he distrusts everything that might sterilize his actions, and everyone who preaches a rule that might prevent him from thinking his thoughts through to their own free end, or that attempts to drive him into a universally valid form, in which he sees only a mask that seeks to make a virtue out of incapacity. 48

Mendelsohn negotiated immigration to Palestine in 1923, after he won the competition for a Business Center in Haifa (fig 4.3) and a project for the electrical company (fig 4.2). This was a promising start, "everything else [he wrote to Kauffmann] would be a logical consequence of my own work."49 Mendelsohn believed the visual form of the Zionist project should be cast by his own artistic vision, needless to say how incompatible it was with the prevailing climate the Chouge exemplified.

Shmuel Mastetzkin, (fig. 4.30) a former Bauhaus student, was interviewed in 1992. The broken sentences of the old man revealed the thirties' atmosphere vividly:

The population's logical aspiration in terms of ideology and material condition determined the architecture of the thirties....The character, the life-aspiration of the pioneers, the building of the country....the beauty was not the core of the design, the core was apartment buildings...the demand of the requirements...strong and cheap...modesty....Architecture has never been a Jewish profession. Mendelsohn was among the first. People went to study architecture in order to build the country, like the ones who study agriculture in order to cultivate the land.50

The widespread consensus of the early Yishuv agreed upon two activities, which embrace the most fundamental values: to inhabit the country and to work its land. Notions such as "the culture of the land" endow the land worker with moral significance. The "conquering of the soil," the act of plowing the first furrow in the
virgin land, symbolized the gist of the Zionist dream.\textsuperscript{51} (fig. 4.56) Placing construction and agriculture side by side, Mastetzkin endows the architect with the aura of the pioneer. Architects used to boast about the prestigious commission they got from the "friends in the kibbutz."\textsuperscript{52} The community of the kibbutz, which freed the pioneer from his solitude and endowed him with a new collective consciousness, was considered a "secular priesthood." (fig. 4.49-4.50) The image of the pioneer represented health, strength, enthusiasm, upright bearing, morality and love of life. (fig 4.53) The pioneer was everything the diaspora Jew could never be because the diaspora Jew could never possess land.

The "scientific" experiments of the kibbutz in agriculture and communal life must have attracted Hannes Meyer, when he upgraded Arieh Sharon, a kibbutz member, "straight into 'architecture,'" skipping Gropius' famous Bauhaus workshops.\textsuperscript{53} Sharon, one of three founding member of the Chouge and its most influential and well-connected figure, enjoyed the fame of the kibbutz many years to come. In Palestine he promoted the socio-economical attitude to architecture, which Meyer voiced in his Bauhaus years:

\begin{quote}
Architecture as "an emotional act of the artist" has no justification,...this functional, biological interpretation of architecture as giving shape to the functions of life, logically leads to pure construction: this world of constructive forms knows no native country. it is the expression of an international attitude in architecture. Internationality is a privilege of the period. Pure construction is the basis and the characteristic of the new world of forms.
\end{quote}

The Chouge’s publication, Habynian, (fig. 4.45) was replete with this new world of forms and their "functional, biological" reasoning. Housing and Zionist villages were the favorite topics, and lengthy articles demonstrated alternative layouts for the ultimate apartment with which to accommodate the working family. A form, it was
professed, need not fulfill more than the requirement of its users, who typify the Zionist story. For the Levant Fair of 1933 Sharon designed a story-telling architecture (fig. 4.47) - four pavilions: "red for the unions, green for the agricultural settlements, blue for the urban cooperatives, and orange for the citrus company.... The exhibits were composed of three-dimensional diagrams, built up mostly by natural products - fruits, vegetables and flowers, in the rural pavilion.; bricks wood and tools in the urban cooperatives; oranges and grapefruit in the citrus pavilion." Sharon, who regarded this exhibition as "one of the starting points of avant-garde architecture in Tel Aviv in the early thirties," was very conscious of story telling. He recalls: "My design slogan was "form follows story" - a paraphrase of Frank Lloyd Wright's "form follows function" - maybe a little naive, but judging from the visiting crowd, impressive and convincing." 

Indeed, the "objectified" function and the "subjective" story were strongly interrelated. The story was about "nation among other nations," but even more so. It was the story of civilization, of bringing an international paradigm to perfection. The kibbutz was the evidence of its success and Tel Aviv, the first Hebrew city (fig. 4.25-4.26) and probably the only city which was built during the thirties almost entirely in the "International Style," was its urban consummation. After the eclectic results of the search for a "National" style in the twenties, the thirties marked the break with local traditions. Masteichkin wonders: "Arab rural villages? Maybe it says something to someone. I think the blue was a dominant color there..." Then he voiced the conviction of his generation: "One should not expect a style from Israeli architecture."

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There is no special style of a country. The arch is nonsense. There has never been and will never be a local style."

The inspiration thus was found in the wealth of European publication the Chouge acquired. Mastetzkin confirms: "Everything was published, everybody knew what was new and influential." Thus, everybody used the architectural vocabulary of the Bauhaus, Le Corbusier and Mendelsohn, with which many had first hand experience. There is an obvious gap between the model and the consummation of its image. A particular example is the inheritance of Le Corbusier: The facades of Tel Aviv manifest enthusiastically Le Corbusier's five points, especially the flat roof, the strip windows and the pilots. (fig. 4.28, 4.30, 4.31) Behind this well-composed advertisement for an updated architecture one finds neither flowing space nor liberated facade. The building is not entirely raised on pilot and the roof is rarely in use. The strip windows are converted into balconies and, thus, together with the actual wall, constitute a double screen, i.e., an entirely climatical, functional innovation which disregards the Corbusian call for liberating the facade from the construction, but adheres to the stylistic appearance of a horizontal ocean liner. As in many Middle Eastern countries, Mendelsohn’s European architecture became an essential part of the localized modern architecture vocabulary as well (fig. 4.32-4.41). Mendelsohn the contextualist, whose curved forms emerged out of the industrial metropolitan ambience, was furious to see them all over the residential quarters of Tel Aviv. He came to Palestine in order to find an alternative to Europe, to search for a new beginning, and for him the form of this beginning and its reality were inextricably linked, as he has insisted: "The infallible sign of an original beginning is
the birth of an original style." In Palestine, the search for a local style had already been largely abandoned by the end of the twenties.

Mendelsohn thought the fertilization of Western knowledge with Eastern culture provided the seeds for creating new style. "This fertile soil [he said] needs to be dug with the mature technique of the Western hemisphere," because he believed this soil is the bearer of transcendental truth. This soil, a *tabula rasa* for the Chouge, was for him a spiritual prosperity. Although Mendelsohn mocked the Oriental eclecticism of the twenties, as did other modernists, he did not abandon the search. The results of the search, the character of which I will discuss further in this chapter, were intended to rebalance the Western world. The architectural task of bridging East and West as a message to the world was giving form to Ahad Ha-am cultural Zionism imbued with "Buberian" Jewish faith. Alternatively, the Herzleian will to become a nation like every other nation, found its form in the "International Style," which was not the possession of any particular country, but a "civilized" manifesto of the age. The nationless architecture was the passport of the hitherto stateless nation into the community of nations.

While the Chouge wanted to utilize and perfect the architecture of "civilization" toward their own national end, Mendelsohn wanted to bring the message of a new architectural thinking to civilization at large. Thus, Mendelsohn reinstated for the Jews their religious purpose as the chosen people to illuminate humankind. Here, in fact, the recognized properties of culture are attributed to civilization and vice versa. In other words, a particular cultural heritage is intended to influence civilization
whereas the universalist paradigm of Modernism is entrusted with the creation of a specific cultural project, the one to which the Chouge gave form.

Reversed Orientalism

European Orientalism, as Said has demonstrated, positioned the Orient and the West in two contradictory poles. The Orient was the Other, the foreign par excellence, against which Europe could substantiate its own emerging identity as a cultural entity. Strengthened by the Hegelian postulate, that Europe is "simply" the goal of the world's history, the Orient was illustrated as the world's childhood, from which the spirit moved in its historical march toward the mature European Christian people. As such, the Orient became an object of research, which was pre-postulated by Western scholarship to be inferior and decadent. The Orient thus was foreordained to be subordinate to the domination of the cultivated West.

The subordinated Other at home, the Jew, was reminded now of his Eastern-Oriental roots, which "endowed" him with analogous "esteem" to that of his fellow Orientals. Oscillating between the surrounding xenophobia and occasional confessions of Jewish self-hatred, even the most educated Jew was often viewed as no more than a German-speaking Oriental. The "legitimized" hatred of the unlike, (which the Zionists Pinsker and Herzle thought was undisputable,) gained a boost. From 1879 its practice toward Jews was postulated by Vilhalm Marr as anti-Semitism, fusing the Jew's Otherness with his Semitic decadence.
If Europe's self-formulation induced the construct of the decadent Orient, than Europe's self-criticism provoked its "re-discovery." The-turn-of-the-century aestheticism searched for an uncontaminated cultural and spiritual resource, which would inspire their criticism on Western rationalism and its belief in materialistic progress. Again, for the purpose of its own debate, Europe evoked again its denounced image of the Orient and reversed it to become the bearer of a spiritual prosperity. Against this enthusiasm with the East Buber reconstructed the deformed image of the European Jew: identifying the Jew with the Oriental, the Asiatic and more specifically the Semitic, Buber could now endow the Jew with vital critical potency.

Buber intensified the polarity of East and West to the extreme, and divorced it from the inner-logic of a causal historical progress. The method of polarization was analogous to the aforementioned Orientalism, but it aimed at the opposite direction. That is, he presents the East and West as two comparable but distinct alternatives, and contrasts them only for the sake of dismissing the latter. In the political sphere this dismissal adheres to the world's division into nation-state entities. Buber's alternative relies on the 'Oriental longing for unity,' which now encounters the political scene. "A striving for unity: for unity within individual man; for unity between divisions of the nation, and between nations." The sound of a minority striving for recognition echos between the lines. The same logic that calls for equality among different minorities calls for a dignified co-existing of nations. He criticized Western modernization of the developing world because it erases cultural distinctions and encourages nationalism as a goal rather than a means. Only if Asia can overcome the destructive Western influence, it will salvage itself and the world:

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Our age will one day be designated as the era of the Asiatic crisis. The dominant nations of the Orient have surrendered partly to the external power of Europe, partly to its internally-overpowering influences. They have not preserved their most sacred possessions, their great spiritual traditions; at times they even relinquished them voluntarily. The subjugation of India, the self-Europeanization of Japan, the debilitation of Persia, and, lastly, the ravaging of China where the ancient Oriental spirit seemed to swell in inviolable security, are some of the phases of this process. The soul of Asia is being murdered, and is itself participating in this murder. The world is about to lose something irreplaceably precious, yet it does not care; instead, it applauds the nations that destroy it.\(^6\)

For Buber, it is exactly the wisdom he believed these cultures on the edge of self-annihilation possess that can constitute an alternative to the dead-end Western World order. Buber's "social utopism" believed this age has the capacity to replace the obsolete present Western national organization. The uncontaminated Orient should resist, Buber pleas, the destructive influence of Western civilization; the Orientals should continue their holistic, organic attitude toward life. In it, both East and West can find the key with which to transform the bondage of rational life and divided national entities into a free unified world. However, European power is unbeatable in conventional terms. Buber calls for a humanitarian collaboration between East and West for the sake of this transformation:

> Europe must dare to promote a new era, in which the Orient will be preserved and an understanding between East and West established for their mutual benefit and for the humanitarian work they must share. In this era, Asia will not be overpowered by Europe but will be developed from within, by its own inner resources; and Europe will not be threatened by Asia but will be led by it toward the great vital truths.\(^4\)

In this "Asiatic crisis" the Jew had a major role. The Jew is unique in two ways: on the one hand he possesses the most distinct Oriental traits. Unlike the Chinese, the Indian or the Persian, the Jew experiences the duality of the world "in his innermost self, as the duality of his I." Therefore, "he is the bearer of the world division...But,
it is within his power to be as well the bearer of the world's unification." Buber activates the bitter practice of exile, of the physical separation from substance, and portrays it as a unique virtue. The Jew, said Buber, experiences the division of his exterior life internally and thus he can unify this division in his innermost self. Unfolding this unity back in the exterior world contributes to healing the world's division, and thus approximates redemption. In fact, Buber mobilizes a kabbalistic notion regarding the role of man in redemption. The impetus for these kabbalistic metaphors has always been the separation of exiles.

The second way Buber argues the Jew is unique relates to his familiarity, as an Oriental, with the present power of the West. Buber's audience, we should keep in mind, was the post-assimilated young Central-European Jews, who were well immersed in Western modern culture. Once again, it is the weakness that Buber turns into virtue. Their unresolved identity is exactly the one Buber addresses in this impassioned call to lead the world to a better future. He knows the route to modernization is unilateral and never asks for regression into traditional Jewish values. He thus affirms:

> It would be senseless, for instance, to try to shed the culture of the world about us, a culture that, in the final analysis, has been assimilated by the innermost forces of our blood, and has become an integral part of ourselves. We need to be conscious of the fact that we are a cultural admixture, in a more poignant sense than any other people. We do not, however want to be slaves of this admixture, but its masters.

Presently, Buber acknowledges, the Jew belongs nowhere. He was not excepted by the West, nor is he physically part of the East, where he belongs. Rather than being the "slaves" of this unfortunate situation, Buber suggests this young generation to utilize their 'living in both world' for their own benefit as well as the benefit of the
world. In his Orientalist utopia, Buber assigned the Jews a pivotal role in activating the world transformation. He elaborates:

For this world-historical mission, Europe has at its disposal a mediating people that has acquired all the wisdom and all the skills of the Occident without losing its original Oriental character, a people called to link Orient and Occident in fruitful reciprocity, just as it is perhaps called to fuse the spirit of the East and the West in a new teaching. How this will come about cannot as yet be outlined. But this much can be said: that Jerusalem still is - and today more than ever - what it was considered to be in antiquity: the gateway of the nations....Today...in an even more profound, broader, more threatening and more promising sense than before. It is up to us to seek its salvation, which is the salvation of the nations.¹⁸

no less!

Here Buber encounters a familiar territory: the election of Israel and their subsequent status as the "chosen people." The traditional pre-emancipation role of the Jewish people was to endure Judaism and the Torah. Ahad Ha-am saps the religious content out of this formulation. Thus Buber detects the danger embedded in the secularized notion of the "chosen people" when it encounters the national world structure by which it is now challenged:

Here the question may arise as to what the idea of the election of Israel has to do with all this. This idea does not indicate a feeling of superiority, but a sense of destiny. It does not spring from a comparison with others, but from the concentrated devotion to a task, to the task which molded the people into a nation when it attempted to accomplish it in its earlier history. The prophets formulated that task and never ceased uttering their warning: If you boast of being chosen instead of living up to it, if you turn election into a static object instead of obeying it as a command, you will forfeit it!⁶⁹

Buber delivered this prophetic statement to his fellow Zionists in regard to the standards Jews have to keep in their relation to the imperialist powers and the "Arab question." However, there is a doubt whether for the non-Jewish eye the distinction
Buber draws between being superior as a privilege or being superior as a task is humble enough. After all, according to Buber, it is only the Jew who is qualified to do this task, who can fulfill the mission.

Mendelsohn subscribes to Buber's Oriental utopia with no apparent reservations. For him Palestine is the locus from which the world transformation begins. The fashionable Oriental flavor of argumentation, which was gradually disappearing from Buber's terminology (in favor of a moral-political terminology for a similar political agenda), still prevails in Mendelsohn's writings of the early thirties. For Mendelsohn, Jerusalem, where he resided from 1934 to 1941, is certainly the "gateway of the nations." His ambition is by no means confined to the territory he works within, but to the global signification of his architectural deed. He sees his architectural production in Palestine as part of a mission, a sacred task:

The opponents of Zionism constantly refer to the smallness of the country. They seem to forget that size has nothing to do with significant effort. The Athenians were a small group in a small country but the Acropolis still remains to remind us of the glory that was Greece. Palestine is a country full of magic. It still remains the Holy Land, and that is why there devolves upon us all the sacred obligation to take care of it.70

If one considers the immense influence the Acropolis had over Western architecture, the comparison of the "holy land" to Athens charges Mendelsohn's "sacred obligation" with momentous claim. It is in Palestine where Mendelsohn wants to erect his plan of the Mediterranean Academy (formerly planned for southern France), for the sake of which Julius Posener is brought from Europe.71 From the locus of the 'cradle of civilization,’ Mendelsohn is convinced, civilization will regain its cultural-spiritual balance. "Formerly the image of an uncreative provincial art [he maintains] Palestine of today is symbolizing the union between the most modern civilization and the most
antique culture. It is the place where intellect and vision - matter and spirit meet."

If only both parties of the Semitic people be united in a common effort to consummate this unity, Palestine will "become a part of the New-World which is going to replace the world that has gone.

Genesis [!!] repeats itself."\(^{72}\)

However, some fractures in the Buberian utopia can be discerned in Mendelsohn's pamphlet and letters of that period. The smallness of Palestine was extremely constraining for Mendelsohn, the man of the world. His reluctance to commit himself fully to Palestine by giving up his practice in England was an outcome of a refugee impulse of survival as well as his well-known practicality. On the one hand the political instability in Palestine intimidated him, and on the other hand, the English option granted him some professional independence in Palestine. But it did not contribute to his Zionist status. Chaim Yassky, the Medical Director of the Hadassa Hospital who was a friend and a client wrote Mendelsohn in 1939:

> You must make up your mind to make your home in this country and to do your share toward its upbuilding together with the rest of us, if you are really interested in establishing yourself here permanently. By acting like a "prima donna," you will be unable to attain that end since the only recognized prima donna here is Palestine itself.\(^{73}\)

The constraints the small Yishuv put on him constantly disturbed Mendelsohn, the "prima donna." His professional arrogance could not tolerate on the one hand the architectural collectivism the Chouge institutionalized, especially through the vehicle of architectural competitions, and on the other hand, the obstacles "real politics" put in his way to erect architecturally his ideal. The Zionist dream, which requires collective effort, does not succeed in overcoming his personal ambitions. In a moment
of reflection (1936) he wrote: "I need the world - not for the world's sake but for its big scale. One can reduce the world for the sake of the world, but one can't reduce one's self - one's own scale. Judea is heavenly - but too small for me..."\(^7\)

A more subtle fracture in the Buberian construction of his Zionism is hinted in the following statement, which discusses the position of the Western Jew in the Orient, or, more precisely "their attitude toward the Arabian world in the East to which they immigrated, and toward the European world in the West from which they had emigrated." Mendelsohn admits: "To the first they do not yet belong; to the second they do not belong any more. Thus they stand between two worlds during the first phase of the rebuilding of Palestine."\(^7\) Mendelsohn may have realized that the virtue of belonging to both worlds can be easily substituted with the confusion of pertaining to none. Indeed, Mendelsohn did not take part in "the next stage of the rebuilding of Palestine." From the U.S., where he became the architect of numerous Jewish institutions, he wrote to Julius Posener:

To lift the mind of our people - five synagogues and community centers - and to heal their physical afflictions - two hospitals - is a welcome task for one of them and befits well my present status and Philosophy. Sir Christopher will soon be outnumbered and the ecclesiastic chapter of our Art rewritten. Here and not in Palestine. \textbf{How sad and pathetic!}\(^7\) (bold added)

\textbf{Architecture as Politics}

Mendelsohn's political situation in Palestine was delicate. He was a self-identified Zionist and the architect of distinct Zionist institutions; he supported a dialogue with the Arabs with whom indeed he had a friendly relationships; and he became a British citizen in 1939 after six years of commuting between Great Britain and Palestine.
The common denominator of his social and professional contacts with members of all three parties, Zionists, Arabs and British, was an elitism.

He was brought to Palestine by the "aristocracy" of the Zionist leadership. The letters Kurt Blumenfeld, a Zionist leader and Mendelsohn’s friend, wrote to Berthold Feiwel and Salman Schoken in the early twenties demonstrate his sincere effort to enlist Mendelsohn’s architectural services to the Zionist cause:

> It is our task to have our national representative buildings executed by the few outstanding Jewish artists. I do not know of anybody to be more worthy of building in Palestine than Mendelsohn."
> I was greatly impressed by this unusual man (Mendelsohn). You must meet him. You know I expect much of him regarding Palestine...I want Mendelsohn to realize that there are people in our movement who care how Palestine should be built. Mendelsohn is a true Zionist and helped us through his connections in our work."

Mendelsohn’s return to Palestine, eleven years after his 1923 projects failed to be realized, was marked by a symbolic commission: the representative residence of the head of the World Zionist Federation, Chaim Weizmann (fig. 4.4-4.5). All his subsequent commissions involved distinguished patronage and prestigious buildings. (fig 4.7-4.19) While most Zionist institutions were put into architectural competitions, Mendelsohn managed in more or less legitimized ways to avoid this burden.

On the one hand while Mendelsohn’s architectural stature made him impossible to dismiss, on the other hand his well-known snobisness did not endear him to his fellow architects, whom he largely ignored. Upon his arrival to Palestine, the editors of Construction in the Near East, the Chouge’s architectural magazine, asked him "to send [them] his impression from the country." They "received the following lines:"
Erich Mendelsohn
The hope of the Hebrew people is the construction of their national home in Eretz-Israel.
This construction to great extend call to economical qualities. However, the world will not judge us according to the quantity of citrus export, but according to the spiritual value of our spiritual production. And this spiritual production is primarily expressed in the architectural image of our cities, the image which is visual to all.
The world wants to admire. And the world admires only where a great will creates technique and form into a great whole. A creative whole depends on two factors: the building owner and the architect. Our hopes will come true only if the two sides will have the courage and the responsibility. Only then our project will emerge to be a world’s paragon. Your paper, gentlemen, should give an account of this labor. You should educate our people. Thus you took upon yourself a very important role. 79

Mendelsohn’s discussion (if this paragraph deserves this description) of spiritual production for the world to admire, was obviously foreign to the Chouge’s agenda. His undermining of material achievement, such as the famous agrarian success of the citrus project, was probably offensive. While other renowned architects, such as Richard Kauffmann or Alexander Klein, contributed long, detailed articles, Mendelsohn’s only voluntary-contribution to the magazine was this patronizing piece.

Mendelsohn’s aspiration was the authority to shape the visual image of the Jewish renecance. During one of his long debates whether to launch his practice in Palestine, he wrote to Blumenfeld in 1933: "I saw Palestine built up by my hand, all of its construction brought to a uniform shape through my activity, its spiritual structure brought to order by means of my ability of organization and striving toward a goal." 81

The idea of sharing the architectural responsibility of Palestine’s visual image with other architects was not his "style". His wife, Louise, recalled: 
Eric almost had the opportunity for total regional planning at one point in his career....Israel was culturally immature, and not ready to accept Eric's ideas. Eric hated to be bothered continually with competition and arguments with lesser architects, and if he had been put in charge of all architectural planning, with much more freedom, I know that he would have stayed in Palestine.  

The mechanism of competitions the Chouge institutionalized annoyed Mendelsohn, especially when it affected the Hebrew University project. (fig. 4.10, 4.13-4.15) This was the hallmark of cultural Zionism in Palestine. Its locus on Mount Scopus was the ultimate Oriental site: overlooking the old city of Jerusalem and bordering the desert. This was a peerless project for Mendelsohn, who struggled for it bitterly:

I have told Dr. Yassky [sic] that there is only one national responsibility and that is to allow the disgrace which calls itself the Hebrew University to vanish at last. They want to send a commission to me in order to urge me to take part in a competition limited to five architects. I have replied that the comprehensive design of the University must be in one person's hands. If they still think they must go through with the nonsense of the competition, then I will be the judge, and I am prepared to work on the Hadassah project in collaboration with the winner.  

Mendelsohn's allies in this struggle are none other than the British. He confesses:

As regards the University...we have reached a secret agreement to continue henceforward on the assumption that Mount Scopus shall be regarded as an integrated town planning scheme and shall be built or executed by one hand. This is my counterblast to the Board of Trustees business. So I have called in the Romans - for the sake of an ideal.  

The way to realize utopias would have to be replete with compromises. So, if the Yishuv compromised the Arab question for the sake of the Zionist national cause, Mendesohn would compromise the critique of a colonial national power for the sake of his architectural idea. Even more surprising, against the background of the Yishuv, would be his association with "non-Jewish intelligentsia", against whom he judged Zionist projects. In his letter to Salman Schocken, who became a trustee of the
university, Mendelsohn claims "a full responsibility toward Jewish interests." He is outraged because of the university decision according to which "from the point of view of the University it makes little difference whether the one [building] or the other is built." This architectural carelessness, regarding "the only Jewish University," Mendelsohn protested, "must carry the blame for a great part of the hostile attitude displayed by the non-Jewish intelligentsia of the country and the influential members of the Mandate government, who are mostly well educated in matters of taste, toward Jewish urban development." He then includes himself in a cross-national elitist conspiracy: "I know this from many things that have been said to me, as an eminent artist, in private but very trenchant conversations."

Mendelsohn differentiated the elite into British (mandate officials), Arabs (non-Jewish intelligentsia), and Zionist Jews. Against the achievements of the first and the potential of the second, he wants to measure the Zionist success. "Palestine is not an uninhabited country. On the contrary, it forms a part of the Arabian world." Thus, he says, "the problem that confronts the Jew in Palestine is how to attain equal rank among his neighbors; how to become a cell of the future Semitic commonwealth, to which they in fact belong by their race, tongue and character." For Mendelsohn the Orient is the decisive power. Therefore, the Jew should "reach equal rank" with it. This was thoroughly incompatible with the agenda Habyanian presented, in which Zionism is a bearer of scientific progress against a backward society. So, if at all examined the historical example of the East was shed of any of the present cultural context.
So Mendelsohn sees the world through an artist's eye. In a surprising twist he subjects a great part of the Arab-Jewish hostility to conflicting visual images. On the one hand this entirely elitist argument contains itself within the "well educated in matter of taste" intelligentsia across national boundaries. But also it reflects Mendelsohn's aspiration for an architecture which is not a means for a national end but which yeilds a world's paragon, emanating from the Middle East. On the other hand, it reflects a conviction that architecture is inextricably linked with politics. The political and moral convictions of the producer, Mendelsohn believes, can be read in built form. The words "call," "reaping the real fruit of one's labor," with which he wants to commit Schocken, are similar in his mind to "mission" and "a unified plan," which relate to his own responsibility. The university, Mendelsohn asserts, must be his as well as Schocken's "special mission in developing the country."87

Mendelsohn's architecture is as intricate as his political views. It is located at the middle ground between the Zionist and the British architectural production, whereas he regards Arab architecture as a source for inspiration. In an interview titled "The New Architecture in Palestine," Mendelsohn praises British buildings, respects Jewish ones, and does not mention Arab architecture at all - it belongs in Mendelsohn's mind to the "dormant" country."88

Mendelsohn and the Chouge shared a common origin in the European avant garde, but in Palestine differed in their attitude toward the "romanticism of the East." Alternatively, Mendelsohn's origin in modernism was incompatible with the British conservative attitude toward the avant garde. In fact, the British dismissed
Mendelsohn's 1923 Palestinian design as "too European." However, during the thirties both Mendelsohn and the British shared a romantic outlook of the Orient. (fig. 4.24) Ron Fux, discussing British colonial architecture in Palestine, coined the term "colonial regionalism" to describe architecture which intend to be "faithful" to local traditions. This approach, Fux claims, results in an administration, which preserves an undeveloped society in order to protect it from a change, which is largely the outcome of the colonial rule itself. The will to adjust colonial rule to the horizon of the colonialized society, Fux argues, is reflected in the governmental symbolism of the British architecture in Palestine. (fig. 4.20-4.21) Harrison, whose architecture Mendelsohn admires, developed "abstract Orientalism" based on Middle Eastern traditions, Arab vernacular and British leading architects, using traditional Arab building technique.

While the British wanted to "paternalize" and "preserve" a backwardeed authentic society, Mendelsohn wants to preserve its spirit but to update it technologically. (fig 4.22-4.23) "The return of the Jews to Palestine [Mendelsohn maintains] brings new life into that country dormant since centuries." Rather than preserve, Mendelsohn claims, the Jew wants to revive. The depiction of a dormant country, which is waiting to be revived, is perfectly in line with Mendelsohn earlier discussion of materials. We can recall his 1919 lecture: "The new material is still waiting...for the superior talent who...will give new life to architecture's laws of construction and exterior forms," who will "free [the material] from the demoralization of outmoded forms." The Palestinian soil, for Mendelsohn, is a material pregnant with spiritual potential that has been waiting for centuries to be released. The form, Mendelsohn insisted in 1919,
has to emerge out of the properties of concrete and steel. He follows the same logic in regard to the Holy Land’s soil. One cannot give it a form which does not emerge out of the potentials this unique soil possesses. This is why Mendelsohn endures the Arab culture, which maintained the latent qualities of this place. The difference between steel and soil, though, is paramount. In both the artist has to invest his energy in order to free it from outmoded styles, and both are making demands on the artist to be disclosed in an appropriate form. "The site," wrote Mendelsohn to Schocken, "imposes specific requirements on each building, i.e., specific existing differences of level call for the masses to be developed in specific ways." But, as Mendelsohn learned from Buber in 1915, only the unique engagement of the Jew with the soil of the Holy Land can release the original biblical creativity, which can rebalance the world. Only through this union, Mendelsohn avows not without pathos, "Genesis [can] repeat itself."

Building in Palestine confronted Mendelsohn with conflicting inspirations. On the one hand he was enthusiastic about Judea’s "heavenly" nature and about the rural Arab villages, which followed the topography’s contour. On the other hand, he was inspired by Islamic institutional architecture, which is traditionally built around well-articulated, regulated enclosed spaces, rather than contained within an object. The exterior borders of these buildings are traditionally either fused into the pattern of the city, or gain a fortified presence outside the city. The function of Mendelsohn’s buildings pertain to none of the above. His commissions were institutional and yet were often located in nature. Nevertheless, Mendelsohn’s sketches for the Hadassah hospital and the Hebrew University betray a will to achieve both virtues, i.e., to
enclose regulated, articulated inner courtyards, and to break the mass of the building into the landscape. (fig 4.13-4.14) Some of these sketches demonstrate a continuity between soil, vegetation, and build mass, and some totally reverse Mendelsohn's perspective technique. Instead of depicting the object-building in the center of the picture plane as an urban gesture, which defuses to both sides, as if seen in motion; some of the Jerusalem sketches start at the frame of the picture plane and have one focal point in the center. The patios these sketches depict are spaces which gather the man within, rather than city buildings which generate motion around them, and which "draw life out of themselves."

The conflict of city and nature, of urban and rural and their accompanying forms, coupled with the more typical East-West searches, i.e. the load-bearing heavy walls and the "land possessing" building, versus the light materials of modern architecture and its "floating" image. In this regard, Ada Melamed-Karmi considered the Weitzmann house to be Mendelsohn's most mature work in Palestine, because the different architectural languages are set side by side rather than ostensibly fused. In this house the exterior is an Oriental opaque box-like shell, which is wrapped around an entirely modern core. The core's light construction surrounds a patio, which adheres to local typology. Whether Mendelsohn succeeds in achieving such co-existence in his larger commissions will remain, for now, an open question. A further analysis of Mendelsohn's building is beyond the scope of this paper.

Julius Posener is probably correct in emphasizing the tragic facet of Mendelsohn's post-Germany career. The man who strove to create an artistic and political form
which emerges from the total manifestations of his reality could not read the Palestinian political map accurately. He did not follow the Yishuv, whose Eastern European leadership he thought was visionary against the "realism" of his fellow Central Europeans.\textsuperscript{94} Mendelsohn left Palestine for many reasons. He wanted to become the chief government architect of British-mandated Palestine. Not only did he not get that position, but his effort to join the British army also failed. The recession in Jewish building activity due to the war did not help his practice, which was now located exclusively in Palestine. His nature could not tolerate political instability, and Rommel's army in Egypt did not contribute to his peace of mind. His eventful escape from the Nazis continued. In 1933 he left Germany the day Hitler seized power. Then he left England and his practice there when the war broke out. This long journey had terminated in 1941 when he fled to the U.S., from which later he would try to return to Palestine. His escape at the wrong moment (1941) prevented this hopes for comeback. His friend and client, Yassky, had to put it in "plain language": Mendelsohn was "considered a deserter." He further clarifies:

\begin{quote}
It is up to you to reconcile those two parties, namely, Jewish Palestine and Mendelsohn. You realize that this reconciliation cannot take the form of Palestine's inviting Mendelsohn to come here. The reconciliation may take place when Mendelsohn humbly comes to Palestine as many thousands have done before and many thousands dream of doing now.\textsuperscript{95}
\end{quote}

Yassky, a very strict Zionist, challenges Mendelsohn: "I should be extremely sorry to see that what I mistook for your sincere desire to return to Palestine was conditioned by the number of projects which you might or might not be asked to undertake. That, my dear Eric, is a peculiar Zionism with which I personally can have nothing to do."\textsuperscript{96} Yassky, obviously did not read Mendelsohn correctly, who continued to insist upon his need for support:
I devoted my best efforts to the Palestinian buildings which, I think, are an abiding proof of my love for Zion. I was often asked by my clients and friends whether I would not consider remaining in Palestine permanently. My reply was always and is still the same: I will on condition that the Yishuv will provide for me an official position from which I could authoritatively influence the visual expression of our people in its national renascence. 97

Mendelsohn never received the authority he strove for, nor did he ever return to Palestine.
1. Erich Mendelsohn, *Palestine and the World of Tomorrow*, (Jerusalem, 1940), reprinted in Heinze-Muhleib, pp.365-381

2. Buber, "Gandhi, Politics, and Us," in *Pointing the Way*, p.136


4. the quote in the beginning of Mendelsohn's 1940 pamphlet


6. Mendelsohn, 1940 pamphlet, p.19

7. Martin Buber, "Nationalism," in *Land for Two People* pp.50-51

8. Ibid, p.49

9. Ibid, p.51

10. Ibid, p.49-51

11. Ibid p.50

12. Ibid, p.52

13. A term Stefan Zweig coined in his letter to Buber, regarding the nature of a future Jewish state, to which he reject as contradicting the Jewish fate. The answer in Buber, *A Land for Two People*, p.36


15. Buber, Nationalism, p.53

16. Ibid, p.55

17. Buber, "Nationalism" p.55

18. Ibid, p.57

19. see Simon, p.16 and Mendes-Flohr in *A Land for Two People*, p.64


21. Mendelsohn 1940 pamphlet, pp.13-14

22. Mendelsohn is not very careful about his terminology. To write in 1940 about races, does not sound right. Indeed, the recurrence of the word blood in Buber's early teaching lent itself to tragic misunderstandings, such as the Nazi ideologist Alfred Rosenberg, who evoked Buber for his self-defense. Buber then was quick to announce that every use of blood in his writings does not regard to race, which he thinks is groundless, but to continuity of the birth connection in a people. see Simon p.15

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23. Mendelsohn, 1940 pamphlet, p.14
24. Mendelsohn, 1923 pamphlet, p.22
26. Mendelsohn, 1940 pamphlet, p.15
27. Buber, "Toward the Decision," in *Land for Two People*, p.40
29. Herf, p.1
30. Herf, p.3
31. Herf, p.16
32. Herf elaborates on the dangerous potential of Nietzscbe's heritage:
   From Nietzscbe to Junger and then Goebbels, the modernist credo was the triumph of spirit and will over reason and the subsequent fusion of this will to an aesthetic mode. If aesthetic experience alone justifies life, morality is suspended and desire has no limits.
   In Herf, p.12
34. Buber, "A Proposed Resolution on the Arab Question," in *Land for Two People*, p.61
35. In fact, the German Intelligentsia thought it is unrealistic not to consider the Arab question. See Arthur Rupin in *Land for Two People*
37. Ibid
38. Gershom Scholem interview on Brith Shalom, quoted by Mendes-Flohr in his prefatory note to Brith Shalom's statutes in *Land for Two People*, p.72
39. "Brith Shalom" in *a Land for Two People*, pp.74-75
40. Mendelsohn 1940 pamphlet, p.14
41. Ibid. p.19
42. The Chouge was a collective of private architects. The institutional Zionist building activity was largely in the hands of Richard Kaufmann and less so in the hands of Léofold Krakuer. ......
44. Mendelshon 1940 pamphlet, p.12
45. Ibid, p.9

46. Buber, "Renewal of Judaism," in *On Judaism* p.39

47. Ibid


49. Gilbert Herbert, "The Divided heart: Erich Mendelsohn and the Zionist Dream" in *Erich Mendelsohn in Palestine*, catalog of the exhibition (Technion, Haifa, 1987) p.9, the letter was written in 1923

50. an interview, summer 1992

51. see Batia Donner, *To Live With a Dream*, (1989, Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Dvir publishers) p.20 (Hebrew)

52. Interview with the architectural historian Ran Sh'hory in summer 1992. In his interview, Mastiechkin as well was very careful not to forget the commissions he got from his friends in Kibbutz Naan.


54. Ibid, p.47

55. Ibid

56. Ibid

57. These were mostly eclectic building, trying to incorporate biblical and Oriental motifs. The distinct architect of this period was Alexander Berwald. This "National Style" was heroically refuted by Yohanan Ratner, whose National Institutions Building of 1928 was praised by Mendelsohn in 1937 to be the best Zionsit building. Ratner became the head of the school of Architecture in the Technion after Berwald, together with an heroic military activity. For more on the man, his architecture and writings, see: Silvina Sosnovsky, ed. *Yohanan Ratner: the Man, the Architect and his Work*, (1992, Haifa, Technion: Israel Institute of Technology)

58. Mendelsohn, 1940 pamphlet, p.12


60. Paul Mendes-Flohr "Orientalism and Mysticism: the Turn of the Century aesthetics and Jewish Identity," in *Me’kkarei Yerushalyim Be’mah’shevet Israel*, vol.3, 1984, pp.623-672

61. Paul Mendes Flohr "Orientalism and..."

62. Buber, "Judaism and Mankind" in *On Judaism*, p.27

63. Buber, "The spirit of the Orient and Judaism", in *On Judaism*, pp.77-78

64. Ibid

65. Buber, *On judaism*, p.65
66. The expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492, for example, was a decisive catalyst for the flourishing of the powerful Lurianic Kabbalah in the sixteenth century. Two of its concepts are described here:

Gershom Scholem on the concept of tikkun (restoration):
"...for Luria the appearance of the Messiah is nothing but the consummation of the continuous process of Restoration, of Tikkun. The true nature of redemption is therefore mystical, and its historical and national aspects are merely ancillary symptoms which constitute a visible symbol of its consummation. The redemption of Israel concludes the redemption of all things, for does not redemption mean that everything is put in its proper place, that the original blemish is removed? The 'world of Tikkun' is therefore the world of Messianic action. The coming of the Messiah means that this world of Tikkun has received its final shape."

in Gershom Scholem, Major trends in Jewish Mysticism, (Schoken Books, New York, 1941) p.274

Scholem on the distribution of responsibilities between man and God:
At opposite poles, both man and God encompass within their being the entire cosmos. However, whereas God contains all by virtue of being its Creator and Initiator in whom everything is rooted and all potency is hidden, man's role is to complete this process by being the agent through whom all the powers of creation are fully activated and made manifest. What exists seminally in God unfolds and develops in man...man is the perfecting agent in the structure of cosmos; like all the other created beings, only even more so...man on earth is obviously capable of exerting an influence upon the macrocosm and upon primordial man above...Because he and he alone has been granted the gift of free will, it lies in his power to either advance or disrupt through his actions the unity of what takes place in the upper and lower worlds.

in Encyclopedia Judaica, Vol.10, p.607


68. Buber, "The spirit of the Orient and Judaism", in On Judaism, pp.77-78

69. Buber, "Nationalism," p.56

70. "A New Architecture in Palestine: an Interview with Mr. Erich Mendelsohn" in Palestine Review, Jerusalem, August 20, 1937

71. Posener memoirs, (ask Akos)

72. Mendelsohn, 1940 pamphlet, p.19

73. Herbert, p.10

74. Herbert, p.10

75. Mendelsohn 1940 pamphlet, p.11


77. Kurt Blumenfeld to Berthold Feiwel, early twenties, in Herbert p.9

78. Kurt Blumenfeld to Salman Schocken, Sep, 1924, in Herbert p.9

79. Habinyan, Tel Aviv February 1935, p.4

80. Mendelsohn's Weizman house was published in Habynian, but it was part of a larger survey and accompanied by Julius Posener's text.
81. Mendelsohn to Blumenfeld, 11.7.1933, in Herbert, p.9

82. Suzan King, "Interview with Mrs. Eric Mendelsohn," in Suzan King, The Drawing of Eric Mendelsohn, (Uni. of California, 1969) 39

83. Mendelsohn in Beyer, Jerusalem December 23, 1934, p.139

84. Ibid, Jerusalem August 1, 1936, p.146


86. Mendelsohn, 1940 pamphlet, p.11


   A number of real artists have established a certain level of good taste which, for the first time, allows of a differentiation between what is good and what is bad. In Jerusalem we have Government House and the Rockefeller Museum as examples of excellent craftsmanship and artistic design. The Scottish Church is a beautifully-placed landmark while I consider the Zionist Headquarters building in Rehavia to be the most dignified Jewish building in the country. The Asuta Hospital in Tel Aviv is a fine piece of modern architecture, while the new village school in Degania is so far, I think, the first Jewish building to apply modern knowledge to the climatic conditions of the country and to combine both with mature artistic merit.

Beside the British the architects Mendelsohn mentioned are Yohanan Retner, who became the dean of the architectural school in the Technion, Yoseph Noifeld, who worked for him in Berlin, and was a founding member of the Chouge, and Richard Kauffmann, who is the only one to receive a true compliment. The eliticism is striking again. Conspicuous is his unawareness of the distinct Jerusalem architects. (see also Posener's memoirs and Ita Heinze-Muhleib.)

89. Mendelsohn, 1940 pamphlet, p.14

90. Mendelsohn, 1919 lecture, p.12

91. Ibid, p.13

92. Morgenthaler (p.83) in regard to Mendelsohn's perspective technique, evoke the Hilderbraud text:
   For instance, it something near be placed in the middle of the picture, and on the sides to the right and left things which are more distant, the result will be that the retrogressive movement into depth begins with the central part as being close at hand and proceeds by stretching backwards to either side....Think not of the reversed arrangement,...Our ideas of movement into depth, our retrogressive spatial judgements, begin here with the full extension of the canvas only to traverse narrower and narrower areas as they approach the further distance. From the very start such an arrangement opposed our true and normal relation to Nature. Our feeling for space is curtailed rather than incited to infinite stretches. Intrestingly enough, in Palestine Mendelsohn had often used the opposite technique to his European one, which is the one in Hilderbrand advocates.


93. Mendelsohn in Beyer, Jerusalem, May 12, 1938, p.154

94. Mendelsohn, 1940 pamphlet, p.17
95. Yassky to Mendelsohn, May 21, 1945 in Heinze-Muhleib p.215


4.1 Mendelsohn, Carmel Mt. Town, Palestine, sketch, 1923.

4.2 Mendelsohn, Rutenberg Project: A Power Station in Haifa, Palestine 1923

4.3 Mendelsohn, Competition for a Business Center, Haifa, Palestine, 1923, First Prize
4.4 Mendelsohn, Villa Weizmann, Rehovot, Palestine, (1936-1937):
4.5 Mendelsohn, Villa Weizmann, distant view.

4.6 Mendelsohn, Villa Weizmann, Patio.
4.7 Mendelsohn, Schocken Library, Jerusalen 1937: Sketch and exterior detail.
4.8 Mendelsohn, Government Hospital, Haifa: Various views.
Banca Anglo-Palestinese a Gerusalemme (1938-39)

4.9 Mendelsohn, Anglo-Palestina Bank, Jerusalem (1938-1939)
4.10 Mendelsohn, Master Plan for the Hebrew University of Mt. Scopus, Jerusalem (1936-1938)

4.11 Richard Kauffmann, Master Plan for the Hebrew University of Mt. Scopus, Jerusalem 1945

4.12 Petrick Geddes, Master Plan for the Hebrew University of Mt. Scopus, Jerusalem 1919
4.13 Mendelsohn, sketches for the Hebrew University
4.14 Mendelsohn, the Hebrew University, sketches
4.15 Mendelsohn, model for the Hebrew University

4.16 Mendelsohn, Hadassah Hospital, Mt. Scopus, Jerusalem (1936-1938):
entrance courtyard
4.17 Erich Mendelsohn, Hadassah Hospital, Mount Scopus, Jerusalem, 1936-39
4.18 Erich Mendelsohn, Haddassah Hospital, Interplay of Light and Shade.
4.19 Erich Mendelsohn, Hadassah Hospital, Mount Scopus, Jerusalem, 1936-39.

4.22 Mendelsohn, Hadassah Hospital on Mt. Scopus under construction.

4.23 Harrison, The Rockefeller Museum under construction.
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4.24 Franz Kraus, a British Tourism poster, 1936
4.26 View of Tel Aviv and its beach promenade during the early thirties.
4.27 Arieh Sharon, Cooperative Housing, Tel Aviv 1935
(Architectural competition, first prize)
Zeev Rechter, Engle House, Tel Aviv 1933
4.29 Joseph Neufeld, Kupat Holim Center and Medicine Storeroom, Tel Aviv, 1937.
4.30 Shmuel Mastiechkin, Kiryati house, Tel Aviv (1937-1941)

4.31 Yaacov Yarost and Arieh Elhanani,
Yarden Hotel, Tel Aviv
4.32 Mendelsohn, C.A. Herpich and Sons Fur Store, Berlin, 1924

4.33 Feinstien, residential buil. Tel Aviv, 1934
4.34 Genia Averbuch, Cafe Galina, Tel Aviv, 1930s.

4.35 Philip Hutt, Residential buil., Tel Aviv 1935.

4.36 Leopold Krakauer, Bendori Rest Home, Haifa 1934-35.
4.37 Carl Rubin, Hadar House, Tel Aviv, 1935.
4.38 A. Berger and Y. Mendelbaum, residential buil. Tel Aviv, 1935
4.39 Friedman Brothers, residential buil. Tel Aviv, 1934
4.40 "Acrobatics and Architecture: the Acrobats according to chagall"

in Construction in the Near East, no.4, Nov 1935

4.41 Friedman Brothers, residential buil. Tel Aviv, 1934

4.42 Y. Megidovitch, residential buil. Tel Aviv, 1934
4.43 Habinjan Bamisrah Hakarov (Construction in the Near East), title page.
Introduction

After some preliminary work for over a period of several months, we, a group of architects, have decided to issue a monthly review, entitled "Construction in the Near East." We came to this decision realizing the want of professional intercourse among colleagues, of bringing together the individual research in the field of the profession, of joined professional seeking for solutions to outstanding problems. We also came to this decision, feeling, as we did, a public and professional duty, due to the constant growth of building enterprise now proceeding.

The growth of towns, new quarters, industrial and commercial buildings, appartment houses, workers' constructions, theatres, hospitals etc. we have dealt with all these and are still dealing with them daily. Exhibitions and competitions are held from time to time.

This creates a diverse, proficient and worthy building movement, which, however, Goes on without any attempt of valuation or concentration, without any effort towards analysis, direction or influence.

In order to concentrate this important professional effort for the benefit of colleagues and the public, we have decided to found this architectural platform. We shall, however, be in a position to edit it only with the recognition by our colleagues of its importance and usefulness and with their readiness for a serious collaboration.

4.44 Habinjan Bamisrah Hakarov (Construction in the Near East), editorial of first issue, Dec 1934
PLANNING OF COOPERATIVE HOUSES

A. SHARON

The purpose of this article is to present the initial planning stage of cooperative houses, focusing on the cooperative movement's role in urban planning and architecture. The article discusses the need for collective housing solutions and outlines the principles of cooperative housing as a means to address the housing crisis and promote social equality. The text includes case studies and examples of successful cooperative housing projects, emphasizing collaboration and community participation in the design and construction process. The article concludes with suggestions for further research and development in the field of cooperative housing.

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V. CONCLUDING REMARKS

I have discussed Erich Mendelsohn, who produced seemingly incompatible bodies of architecture. The limits of formal analysis to explain his architectural shifts, encouraged me to explore what Mendelsohn called his "philosophical background." I particularly dwelled on Mendelsohn's religious faith, his national identity and his political convictions and their intricate ties to his position within architectural debates of his time. This has not been a study on the evolution of Mendelsohn's formal language, nor have I intend to give a detailed historical account of his work. Rather I have been concerned with the "the total condition he lived under," (p.11) which "compelled [him] to shape" (p.35) not only his iconic architecture in Germany, but its appropriation to Palestine as well.

Erich Mendelsohn was part of the Jewish Central-European post-assimilated generation, who belonged to a culture in which their identity was disavowed. The equality they were formally granted by the emancipation was practically denied in anti-semitic Germany. Thus, I have examined Mendelsohn's architecture and political inclinations against the longing for identity which is distinct and yet forms harmonious continuity with its ambience. This longing is present in the different strata of Mendelsohn's engagement with reality. The efforts to arrest in form particular forces of construction, which annul each other into a (floating) equilibrium; to present a building as an urban gesture which is woven into the (industrialized) city; to erect a solid built mass which forms continuity with nature and the soil in which it is grounded; and to revive national identity within a borderless community of
nations - all convey an elitist minority's longing for equality and disclose an unresolved question of identity.

Mendelsohn's extension of his post assimilated experience to the art of building was facilitated intellectually by Martin Buber's early teaching, which identified this abyss with the larger phenomena of exile and disengagement with authentic life. Buber wanted to restore in the contemporary Jew the original creativity of biblical Judaism, which contributed the concepts of "unitary God," "universal justice," and the "Messianic ideal" to humanity. Only the creative persona, Buber asserted, can overcome this existential duality. Thus a creative involvement with the world was to encounter reality in its entirety and to invest it with one's own inner energy. This dynamic experience unifies the polarized manifestations of reality within the inner self. A work of art, then, is the disclosure of this unity in a holistic form.

Buber thus endows Mendelsohn's "program of reconciliation" with its hard core, that is, with the yearning for unity. Now, rather than prioritizing the visionary or the materialistic aspects of the artist work, Mendelsohn polarizes them into two counterbalanced poles: on the rational end he allocates materials, building program and the intellect, and on the irrational end emotion, vision and dynamism. When the latter energizes and thus activates the former, a new unified form is "born." This form is inextricably tied with and faithful to the reality from which it emerged, and yet possess the spiritual strength of the artist.
I demonstrated in this paper how Mendelsohn's consistent architectural and political position disclosed itself first in Europe, where it engaged the striving architectural debates of the period, and then in Palestine, where national and Orientalist agendas were at the forefront. My interest and further work lies primarily in Mendelsohn's Palestinian production. There, he touched upon the momentous conjuncture of Modern Architecture and Zionism as well as the opposition of East and West, or of Regionalism and Modernism, which he wanted to reconcile.

The two mythologies of "Modern Architecture" and "Zionism," seem at first contradictory. The "official" Modern Architecture is inherently indifferent or opposed to national differentiation while Zionism is the text book example of a nineteenth century national construct. Both, in the course of writing their own history, were narrowed to an official story with which they could validate themselves as indispensable practices. The conjuncture of the two eclipsed in Palestine during the thirties, where, I argue, Modern Architecture became the visual mold for the Zionist project. By contrasting this phenomenon with Mendelsohn's contemporary architecture and its accompanying political ambience, I seek the multiplicity of voices and forms antecedent to the formulation of the official historiography of Zionism and the Modern architectural movement. Mendelsohn's architecture in Palestine was an alteration to, rather than rejection of Zionism and Modern architecture. Thus, he accepted both as premises but questioned their praxis. Today, these questions are relevant as ever.
The questions of East and West, of Modernism and Regionalism was at the heart of Mendelsohn investigation in Palestine. His architecture lies between British "Colonial Regionalism," and Zionist "International Modernism." Along this line, I suggest the term "Regional Modernism" for Mendelsohn's architectural position. Regional Modernism and not Modern Regionalism because Mendelsohn does not attempt to use modern technology in order to revive the vernacular as an end in itself. Rather, he wants to re-balance the undisputable achievements of modern architecture with local values. It is a critique and alarm for Modernism not to indulge in itself, but to be a technological and functional means for expressing an ever-changing reality. The West, according to this view, is the region where technological knowledge first emerged. Thus, in Germany it took the appropriate shape for the industrial Western world. Once technology is mobilized, this argument goes, it should acquire form which discloses the new condition. In the beginning of his 1919 lecture, Mendelsohn voiced what he believed to be the lesson of this age, that is, its flux and its perpetual renewal:

The simultaneous occurrence of revolutionary political events, and fundamental changes in human relations, economics, the sciences, religion, and the arts is evidence of an always-present belief in a new order. [bold added]
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