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Faith in Architecture

Abstract

In “Dreams of Utopia,” near the end of *The Ethical Function of Architecture*, Karsten Harries quotes a familiar passage drafted by Walter Gropius in 1919 as a statement of modernity’s architectural faith. In the manner that renders his work both so refreshing and so provocative, Harries lifts Gropius’s statement out of the narrower framework of its historical context at the origins of the Bauhaus, and exploits it instead as a means of questioning the aspirations of modernity’s architecture more broadly.

This essay returns to that passage, to its assessment by Harries, and to a comparable appraisal offered by Colin Rowe in 1978, with a view to examining more closely architecture’s purported capacities as an expression of faith. It measures modernity’s claims against an older assessment, once equally familiar, offered by the author of the biblical epistle to the Hebrews—this too articulated in the vocabulary of architecture, but entailing strikingly different implications.

Keywords

Bauhaus, Architecture, Modernism, Modernity, Faith, Harries, Gropius, Rowe, Bible