
Lynnette Widder

Whose Modernism? The 1953 Bauhaus Debate and the Right to Define Modern Architecture

An American Bauhaus

A contemporary visitor to the museum that was once Walter and Ise Gropius's Lincoln House could be forgiven for thinking that life here would have represented a contraction of its occupants' world: how, after the glamor and intensity of their years at the Weimar and Dessau Bauhaus, could the Gropius's have managed in their tiny suburban house on the hill? In fact, however, the Gropius's move to Massachusetts marked an expansion in influence. The sway held by the Gropius Bauhaus even today in both the disciplinary and popular imaginations has its origins in Gropius's Cambridge years, without which the Bauhaus might have remained undistinguished among the many isolated moments of innovation within the interwar European Avant-Garde. More generally, without the emigration of so many of its protagonists to the United States, the Bauhaus might never have gained its status as the birthplace of modern architecture and design. An under-discussed debate about the Bauhaus's stature within postwar architectural circles, staged in 1953 on the pages of a small-run West German magazine, may help to gauge the stakes of that reputation for both Gropius and his West German counterparts.

The elision of the Bauhaus as historical entity with the role it played in postwar historiography persists. In that regard, its status as German in origin but American in full realization is often glossed over. There are examples of both assumptions in two recent books, both discussed below, the one a popular biography on Walter Gropius and the other, the first scholarly account of the Swiss historian Sigfried Giedion's relationship with the United States. Each book is notably careful to leave ambiguous the problem of emigration and identity. In both Giedion's and Gropius's cases, however, identity was not merely a matter of biography. Gropius moved to the United States in 1937 and became a naturalized citizen in 1944. The Bauhaus's "naturalization" could in turn be dated to Giedion's 1941 *Space, Time and Architecture*, a book based upon lectures given at Harvard University in 1938–39. Giedion's hugely in-

1 Philip Johnson, interview February 6, 1991, by Sharon Zane. Cited in Geiser 2019: 157.

2 MacCarthy 2019: MacCarthy announces her interpretation of Gropius's national identity early. On p.2, in the book's preface, she describes Gropius in 1968 "retaining a Germanic formality of bearing" (2). Several pages later (7), she claims "He continued to feel himself German" even after his emigration to the United States.

3 MacCarthy 2019: 419.

4 MacCarthy 2019: 420.

5 MacCarthy 2019: 470.

fluent book positioned the Bauhaus at the decisive threshold between the protomodern—Wright, Garnier, Maillart among others—and the new architecture that followed. Giedion's was, as Philip Johnson said, "the biggest book in this country."¹

Gropius: The Man Who Built the Bauhaus, and Giedion and America

Fiona MacCarthy's subtitle for her 2019 Gropius biography is indicative: the Bauhaus, an eight-year episode in Gropius's life, serves as shorthand for the significance of his eighty-six years. She describes the Bauhaus as "the high point of Gropius's architectural achievements" and "Gropius's statement of belief in the power of the modern," while insisting throughout her book on Gropius's deeply German sense of self.² By her interpretation, the coterie of Bauhaus and other German expatriates assembled at Gropius's Harvard represented his attempt to reconvene the Bauhaus, an attempt undermined by his failed partnership with Breuer, his struggles with Joseph Hudnut and not least, his wife's affair with Bauhaus graphic designer Herbert Bayer. Accordingly, his decades in the United States are depicted as conflicted and tenuous, a view she supports with quotations from the letters Gropius drafted during his 1946 visit to West Germany on behalf of the US High Command. MacCarthy reads Gropius's descriptions—Berlin as a "disintegrated corpse,"³ his "exhausted" return to the US⁴—as proof of his empathy for his former homeland, not, as might well be argued, the sober judgments of a hired American consultant. It is clear, as she allows, that Gropius was changed by his American experience, reflected in his embrace of an authorless corporate structure for his architectural practice within The Architects' Collaborative (TAC); and of "capitalist confidence" expressed in the built work he produced with TAC throughout the world.⁵ To MacCarthy, however, this internationally active phase of Gropius's professional life, after his retirement from Harvard, pales in comparison to the Bauhaus. By locating the apogee of Gropius's career early, in interwar Germany, she essentially reinforces in biographical form the Bauhaus teleology that emerged from Giedion's book: Germany and Gropius as helpmates in a narrative of progress that, in its American and NATO-backed postwar form, defined modern Architecture.

Reto Geiser's study of Sigfried Giedion's relationship with the United States precisely and circumspectly interleaves personal and professional biography. Inscribed into his book's architecture are Geiser's reflections upon the interactions between his subject's American and Swiss lives—Giedion never emigrated or naturalized, unlike Gropius. Still, Geiser argues, his American sojourn decisively swerved his approach to history writing, not least of all by training his attention on the anonymous contributions made to cultural production through American technologies, from the Chicago School steel frame described in *Space, Time and Architecture* to the material that would become his focus in *Mechanization Takes Command* (1948). Among Geiser's many archival examples of America's influence on Giedion, his description of Giedion's motivations for including Wright, whose work he had earlier considered too

decorative for his narrative, is particularly relevant here: on the one hand, in the US, Giedion became aware of Wright's experimentation with the "modern" material ferroconcrete and on the other, he visited and photographed Wright's Midwestern buildings, including Johnson Wax.⁶ Thus, having verified for himself Wright's pioneering use of materials and technologies, Giedion decided to integrate his work into a line of argument to which the Bauhaus and its rhetoric of material logic had cleaved from the start.

6 Ibid. 162–166.

Photographs, captions, and graphics were, as Geiser's inclusion of early lay-out galleys from Giedion's archive makes clear, as important to the way Giedion communicated as they had been to the Bauhaus. Geiser quotes a letter to Bayer, who, by the late 1930s, was working in advertising in New York and collaborating on Giedion's book design. In the letter, Giedion explains the visual importance of his American examples:

The reason why I insist on an explicit comparison is that only by means of an explicit comparison—as it is by the way in the text—it is possible to point out the connection of the Chicago school with the contemporary movement instantly.⁷

7 Ibid. 114.

In this case, Giedion was particularly insistent upon a graphic juxtaposition comparing Burnham's steel-gridded Reliance Building (1894) to Mies' 1931 glass tower project, and on the overleaf, the upper, undecorated stories of Sullivan's Carson Pirie Scott (1899–1901) with Gropius's Tribune Tower competition entry (1923). The subtext of both juxtapositions: that the technical developments created more or less anonymously in the United States were given cultural status as modern architecture by the European Avant-Garde, particularly by Bauhaus actors. Both Gropius and Mies were, at the moment of publication, fully assimilated into American architecture. While Geiser's research limits itself Giedion's intellectual reciprocity with the United States and his dual affinities to the two continents on which he lived, a quick historiographic analysis of *Space, Time and Architecture*, continuously in print since 1941, leaves little doubt of its effect: it was intended to document a return emigration, from the Chicago Frame to the Bauhaus and Europe, then back to the United States.

Picking a Fight

In 1953, however, the Bauhaus's German-American status might still have been ambivalent. The degree to which it remained fraught was revealed in an unlikely manner. The "Bauhaus Debate," so-called within months of its inception, began with the January publication of Rudolf Schwarz's episodically narrated observations on the relationship between the architect as thinker and as maker, for which he extrapolated on Goethe's axiom "Bilde Künstler rede nicht!" ("create artist, speak not!"). Schwarz, a central figure in prewar and West German architecture whose published texts were characterized by a messianic, exalted tone, began his observations innocuously enough: upon the re-

quest of his friend Alfons Leidl, editor of the *Werkbund* periodical *Baukunst und Werkform*, he had agreed to write a foreword for a special issue dedicated to Leidl's less well-known built work. A chat between the two men over a late dinner in a Cologne hotel, its clubby atmosphere spilling into Schwarz's prose, provided the alibi to a text which made no reference at all to Leidl's architecture but instead descried a progressive evacuation of true moral and humanist values from the architectural discipline over the course of the twentieth century. At the kernel of Schwarz's argument lay an explosive recrimination, that this disciplinary moral vacuum was attributable not only to the intervention of the National Socialist regime into intellectual life, but also to the heroic stature to which the Bauhaus elevated technocratic functionalism.

The January issue of *Baukunst und Werkform* was only the beginning: the magazine's February/March issue was in turn given over to the letters of protest against Schwarz's assertions. The magazine issues served as a heightened microcosm of the territorial and philosophical tensions inherent in the Bauhaus legacy. For the expatriates in the United States, its legacy ensured relevance and continuity; for other architects who had remained in West Germany, its cooption by these expats guaranteed their own exclusion both from a broader German architectural lineage and from the current epicenter of architecture culture, the United States. As such, there was more at stake in the Bauhaus Debate than personal affinity or rivalry.

It is difficult but helpful to decode all the insinuations in Schwarz's meandering article and to put it in the context of Schwarz's other writing. Although the text reiterates many ideas Schwarz developed elsewhere, here he went further: the article was tantamount to a counterproposal on a lineage of modern architecture as represented by the Bauhaus in its new Americanized permutation. Despite the fact that Schwarz's turgid style and encoded references often obscure his essential objectives, the text's reception and the escalated controversy to which it led, speak volumes about just how important the US-revised Bauhaus history was to Gropius and his circle, and how directly it conflicted with an ongoing struggle in West Germany to assert a new architecture that uniquely reflected the post-war condition.

Behind the scenes and beyond the magazine's pages, the short weeks between the initial January publication and the press date of the February/March response issue saw a flurry of correspondence between those who had been outraged by Schwarz's claims and Gropius, the master himself. In January of 1953, Gropius was newly retired from his professorship at Harvard's Graduate School of Design amid accolades and an exit victory in the "battle over basic design" against his former ally Joseph Hudnut.⁸ He was ensconced in a successful professional practice with TAC, the firm with which he, by 1953, had already been tagged for important commissions by the US Department of State.⁹ A leading figure in CIAM, a force in contemporary architectural education and, as the experience of the UNESCO commission of 1951-1952 had shown,¹⁰ an able—if not always fully successful—powerbroker, Gropius had little to fear in assuring his fame for posterity. Nonetheless, Schwarz's argumentation struck a nerve in him.

8 Pearlman 2007: 200–238.

9 Gropius was only one of the "high-class" architects that the Foreign Building Office appealed to in developing an idiom to represent America abroad who "turned out to be foreign-born." See Loeffler 1998: 69. Loeffler cites the House Appropriations Subcommittee, *Appropriations for 1955*, (1954): 305.

10 Gropius was the president of the International Panel of Advisors, which included Ernesto Rogers, Lúcio Costa, Sven Markelius, and Eero Saarinen, appointed to assist in identifying an architect for the UNESCO headquarters in Paris. Despite his advocacy for Le Corbusier, obstructed by the American representative who objected to Le Corbusier's difficult personality and penchant for cost overruns, the team of Zehruss, Breuer, and Nervi was appointed. This nomination could not have been too disappointing to Gropius, given his long-time collaboration and friendship with Breuer, and the fact that all three were CIAM members. See (Comte, 1999), found at <http://www.cca.qc.ca/en/collection/604-portrait-of-architects-and-advisors-of-unesco-headquarters> [October 27, 2014].

Despite the fact that Gropius deliberately chose not “to answer Schwarz directly”¹¹ on this occasion—in fact, there is absolutely no correspondence between Gropius and Schwarz in the former’s meticulous archive – he actively encouraged his advocates to respond on his behalf. His response to the event seems strangely choleric, given *Baukunst und Werkform*’s small and largely domestic circulation. Moreover, it was not a publication that Gropius regularly read: upon learning of Schwarz’s editorial, Gropius had to request of Leitzl that he send the two 1953 to relevant issues by special order.¹²

As Schwarz indicated sardonically in the article’s introduction, he had already made public his criticism of the Bauhaus in a 1929 essay on the *Neues Bauen*.¹³ These earlier critiques, written while Gropius transitioned from his directorship at the Bauhaus to private architectural practice in Berlin, had elicited no response at all from Bauhaus circles. As such, there was no precedent to the bitterness of the confrontation carried out publically, with *Baukunst und Werkform*’s readership as audience, in the first quarter of 1953.

A Different Kind of Modern Architecture

By early 1953, Schwarz had emerged as one of Germany’s foremost church builders and would soon become general planner for Cologne’s reconstruction, a position he used to reimagine entirely the historic city. He was an advocate for the need, and the capacity, to redefine the trajectory of West German architecture, an ambition already expressed in the 1947 preface to *Baukunst und Werkform*’s first issue. The editorial statement, to which Schwarz was signatory, described postwar architecture as a choice between “desperation” and a “return to the foundation,”¹⁴ by which its authors seem to have meant that West German building culture would have to be developed anew from the most basic precepts. Unless they chose desperation, these architects’ only option had been to rescript architecture from its “foundation.”

By 1953, desperation had given way to greater normalcy, and the “return to the foundation” assumed a different cast: on the one hand, modernism had become a style shared across the political spectrum in West Germany’s *Wiederaufbau*, and on the other, the possibility of a nationally specific modern architecture in Germany seemed increasingly remote as America’s cultural agenda in Germany and its related interest in rebuilding German industry wielded an increasingly strong influence on the planning, design, and construction of new buildings, especially larger-scale projects.

Schwarz began his article by noting Leitzl’s apparent irritation at the fact that, while accepted as a journalist and editor, he was completely unrecognized as an architect. Leitzl’s work in the late 1940s and early 1950s, mostly churches, had garnered no attention from architectural publications. By comparison, Leitzl had been established as a journalist for almost two decades, writing about modernist architecture throughout the 1930s and early 1940s for the Berlin-based periodical *Wasmuths Monatshefte für Baukunst*. Apparently seeking to circumnavigate the embarrassment of self-publication,¹⁵ Leitzl appealed to Schwarz to author the texts that were to accompany docu-

11 See Conrads et al. 1994: 60.

12 Walter Gropius Papers, 1925-1969 (MS Ger 208). Houghton Library, Harvard University.

13 See Schwarz’s article “Neues Bauen,” originally published in *Die Schildgenossen* 1927, reprinted in: Schwarz 1979: 121-131.

14 Durth 1986: 59.

15 Conrads et al. 1994: 20.

mentation of his post-war church buildings. This ploy ultimately did him little good. Rather than discussing Leitl's projects, Schwarz argued that recognition of Leitl's achievements as a journalist did not overshadow, but rather, precluded acknowledgement of his ability as an architect:

[...] they [Leitl's readers and fellow architects] apparently cannot imagine that someone can write so well and nonetheless still be an architect who knows how to build as clearly and cleanly as he can write and they counter with the sentence I have used as a title [...]. They would apparently assert that in the discipline of building, there is a division of labor since there are actually quite a few people who can write beautifully and with extraordinary depth [...] [I]ll-meaning people misinterpret the words of Goethe and rewrite them as "Mess around, artist, think not." I tried furthermore to console [Leitl] with the observation that it is probably the fault of these "art historians" if so many clever lads in our line of work think so little of the written word.¹⁶

16 Ibid. 37–38.

In Schwarz's words, the functionalist division of labor within the architectural profession had created disbelief that the practicing architect could express himself with intellectual rigor—and vice versa. Embedded in this early paragraph are Schwarz's four interrelated primary points of critique: the rise of the "art historical" perspective on architecture; a trend Schwarz defined as "Materialism," his shorthand for technocratic tendencies; the loss of cultural depth in architectural training; and the ruptured relationship to history which these three tendencies helped to create. To the Bauhaus, he credited the rise of all four.

The Clever Lads

Continuing the narrative pretense that his initial conversation with Leitl had generated his article, Schwarz immediately launched his attack on what he called the art historical perspective:

We began to ponder why the architects have allowed themselves to be so bowled over by the art historians without even the most quiet of sighs, whereas the physicians have remained the masters of their own homes. It became clear to us that it arose from their inadequate educations - they learn constructive geometry while medical students internalize intellectual discipline. We decided to reconfigure the education of the architect. In the future, they would have to complete a basic course in humanities, to include philosophy, theology, sociology, economy, mathematics, natural science and the German language. That way, no one could intimidate them and we thought, at this glorious moment, of our friend Mies, who openly admitted that he had learned much more from the pictorial orders of St. Augustine and Thomas than from the whole of Functionalism.¹⁷

17 Schwarz in Conrads et al. 1994: 38–39.

It was, Schwarz claimed, the art historians who contributed to intellectual decline among architects, reduced to learning “constructive geometry while medical students internalize intellectual discipline.” In advocating for a humanist architectural training, Schwarz may have had his own biography as much in mind as Leitzl’s: he had interrupted his architecture education to study theology in Berlin. Schwarz and Mies shared a long-term relationship with the Catholic theologian Romano Guardini, with whom Schwarz had edited the periodical *Die Schildgenossen* in the 1920s and whose influence was determinant in Schwarz’s understanding of technology.¹⁸ It was Mies who, in 1958, supported the American edition of Schwarz’s only text to be translated into English, *Vom Bau der Kirche (The Church Incarnate)* of 1947. Mies held an unassailable position among West German architects, despite his emigration and naturalization in the same year as Gropius.¹⁹ Schwarz’s recourse to Mies and his insistence upon spirituality as the basis for spatial thinking was intended to create an alternate line of continuity within German architecture, one not associated with the codified “Bauhaus” style.

On the other hand, to direct vitriol against art historians seemed particularly cruel since the article’s subject, Leitzl, was himself an art historian, albeit one who chose increasingly to practice as an architect. However Leitzl, who came from a comfortable, cultured Berlin family, had acceded to both professions without formal academic training.²⁰ Appearances aside, Leitzl had never been trained to judge the world from a rarified “aesthetic viewpoint” nor had he been subject to mind-numbing “constructive geometry.” By the same token, Schwarz was no more opposed to art history per se than he was to photography: he used their techniques avidly in *Die Schildgenossen*, and in his collaborations with the photographer Albert Renger-Patzsch. What he criticized in the excesses of both, however, could be handily embodied in the Bauhaus’s pedagogy and self-promotion, both during the period of its existence in Germany and thereafter, as its denizens developed career paths underpinned by their years together in Weimar and Dessau.²¹

In their defense of the Bauhaus, the authors who would respond to Schwarz’s essay cited repeatedly the school’s sustained influence on architectural education, discourse, and style. From Schwarz’s perspective, however, this influence spoke against, not in favor, of the Bauhaus. Divesting from architectural education all the traditional humanities in favor of codified visual training had created the mass of “clever lads,” happy to rid their discipline of its intellectual aspirations. By appropriating an architectural idiom and proclaiming its ideology loudly, so Schwarz, the Bauhaus had closed down paths to an alternate, more spiritual modern architecture: “Those others of us were marred for decades, we were thrown into the same tub and cast out at the gutter with the same bathwater, and we were compelled to complete tedious detours in industrial building, urban design, church building, and literature to show that we were entirely different.”²² It must have deeply irritated Schwarz that precisely this ideology had propagated itself abroad at no less powerful institutions than Harvard and Yale, and was now readied for re-importation to its defeated country of origin.

18 See Smolian 2014: 193-209.

19 Widder 2016: 281-85.

20 At the age of 19, immediately upon completing secondary school, Leitzl had joined the staff of the periodical *Die Bauwelt* as an intern and worked his way to an appointment as editor. His path to architecture was equally practical, beginning with a professional partnership in the late 1930s with his friend Hermann Lahm , with whom he had co-authored a book on housing. See Busmann, 1995: 11-12.

21 See, for example, Zimmerman 2014.

22 Schwarz in Conrads/Neitzke 1991: 46.

Nonetheless, Schwarz seemed to distance himself from a common, if banal, line of attack on modern architecture in general, and the Bauhaus in particular—its impracticality, its poor construction, its commitment to untried forms of building. Given the difficulties of building well in early-1950s West Germany amidst material scarcity, this distinction was immediately relevant. But as he unfolded this apparent defense, Schwarz launched another critique, against the use of technological logic to defend an architectural project. The criteria for an architect’s integrity, he pointed out, should not be derived only from his success in keeping out rain or cold:

It is a riveting moment when an architect finally, finally, is permitted to build his glass cube, even if the excuse for it is a factory building, and it is reassuring and almost metaphysically necessary that its roof leak and that as a whole, it perform as if it were a greenhouse. There is nothing aggravating and nothing wrong about that, but the architect should merely not contend that this glass cube has resulted from functionalist calculus.²³

23 Schwarz in Conrads et al. 1994: 44.

Schwarz’s target here might easily be construed to be Gropius’s Bauhaus building, with its concrete structure and glazed façade adapted directly from contemporaneous factory buildings. Even the construction of a factory with architectural aspirations would be “riveting,” Schwarz claimed, as long as its functionality was not mistaken for an intellectual underpinning. Schwarz took Functionalism to task not on its claims to construction integrity, a claim that many early modern buildings were not able to uphold, but instead, on its putative capacity to bridge between intellectual ambitions and their physical expression. By separating the polemic from the physical object it deploys, Schwarz also positioned himself to critique the imperative that true modern architecture must integrally express function, construction, and material. Architectural ambitions, he went on to state, are myriad. The validity of any individual built work was its attempt at *Bilden*, not recourse to a crude functionalist mandate to express the activities it housed and the way it was put together.

The Unification of Existing Forms, Not First Principles

A codification of both technical and artistic thinking, the visual training adopted from the Bauhaus model and developed at the GSD under Gropius relied upon the return to first principles of composition, space, and color. Placing these visual principles at the center of an architect’s training ran counter to Schwarz’s call for an intellectually integrated pedagogy; the implicit ahistoricity of these first principles, and the idea that each student should return to the basic elements of original visual production were equally distasteful. Schwarz developed this critique even more explicitly in a follow-up article with which Leitl hoped to end his magazine’s “Bauhaus Debate.” In that later article, addressing the architects of the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, Schwarz wrote: “Certainly architecture cannot float freely in space as if it were objectless painting; precisely this was the greatest danger of the ‘Bauhaus Style.’”²⁴

24 Schwarz 1953: 194.

In his initial article, Schwarz advocated for a rereading of historical style, the perennial nemesis of avant-garde modern architecture. He dismissed the idea that style could be a proxy for quality, claiming, “I consider it to be a sign of an ignoble and narrow mind to despise a genius only because it makes use of an appropriated language. Genius goes its own infallible way and changes its garb.”²⁵ After urging a reconsideration of the nineteenth century, he proposed that the Gothic and the Antique were the two primary poles around which German architecture developed and which, as he stated, suffused German culture from Goethe and Schinkel to Novalis and Brentano:

25 Schwarz in Conrads et al. 1994: 41.

For the untalented, style is a recipe for making art without actually being able to; for the talented, it is a vocabulary [...]. Perhaps the great historical achievement of the Germans is less in the invention of new forms, but rather in the illumination, amalgamation and unification of existing forms. Gothic and Antique were actually never historical topics for the Germans but rather, intimate potentials. [...] For the young Goethe, the Strasburg Cathedral was not the past but rather, a living sign of German and Christian spirit. It was a matter of making anew everything that had ever been German. [...] Perhaps the two forms of the world have remained until today the German fate, and it is our destiny to be located between both possibilities of existence [...]. Is it so difficult to discover the living Gothic in Bartning’s Star Church or the living Antique in the great works of Mies? What matters to us is that there is a great, living heritage in our art which is sufficient up to the present day and is carried by great architects whose interest was not in making buildings but in offering humanity its great space, and who all speak with one another across time.²⁶

26 Ibid. 41–43.

Schwarz’s position implicitly challenged the central tenet of the modernist telology represented in *Space, Time and Architecture* and fundamental to the storytelling embedded in codified modern architecture: that each era had its own, unique expression, encompassing technology and imagination. Schwarz instead proposed an architectural discourse not of a time but “across time.” Even more striking is his claim that the “German achievement” was that of recombination, not invention. By casting the Antique and the Gothic as “intimate potentials” which gave rise to vocabularies, not raiment, in which the “talented” can work, Schwarz was in clear opposition to familiar characterizations of historicizing architecture as inherently eclectic and retrograde. By claiming that German talent was better suited to work through adaptation rather than invention, he implied that the Bauhaus’s ambitions were misguided from the start. And by ascribing the Gothic to Bartning and the Antique to Mies, he provided examples of the way these “intimate potentials” might come to fruition in the present. These references asserted a different path to modern architecture than the one that ran, via originality, from the Bauhaus to Harvard.

The Zero Hour and Historical Rupture

Schwarz's intention to rewrite the lineage of German modern architecture was not an idle academic undertaking, but a means to reassert modern architecture's historicity *de facto*. The Bauhaus's contribution to the rejection of history, according to Schwarz, was inherent to its curriculum: by expunging the humanities from the education of future architects and designers, the Bauhaus had silenced an architectural discourse that stretched across history and human experience. Schwarz introduced this argument early in the first of his two texts:

As our conversation intensified, I expressed the opinion that the origin of the strange muting of the conversation among architects might be deeper, and perhaps could be sought in a greater break with Western tradition that we had experienced. The master dictated to me that I was to write all this down, and I promised, although with concern. He was still convinced that the break with tradition was the fault of the Nazis; I nurtured in my heart the more terrible conviction that this had occurred when Materialism had entered Western thinking. He was genuinely distressed that I seemed to consider the entire Nazi mess entirely inconsequential; the Reichskanzlei has been taken apart and next year, the Federal Building Department will build an entirely functioning replacement in Bonn. [...] Anyone who allows himself to be seduced by Nuremberg culture is as much beyond help as anyone who is electrified by a parade march; such things will always be, it belongs to the stupidity of nature that such things recur [...]. I said I believed, however, everything that occurred before then was much worse because it was more traitorous and more seductive. The master was truly unhappy when I revealed to him that I had never thought much of the Bauhaus and the activities around it, and had said as much even as a tender youth in my essays.²⁷

27 Schwarz, in Conrads et al. 1994: 39.

28 Pehnt and Strohl, 1997: 100–112 describes Schwarz's work during the NS period.

29 It was Leitzl in 1949 who had chosen a careful stance on his journal's attitude towards what was certainly the most sensitive issue of the day, an evaluation of architects' allegiances "then and now." As the magazine's editor-in-chief, he had justified his position, writing "We all, or most of us, were no heroes, or only very partially. Otherwise, we would no longer be here. We were all somewhere, and we also did work. [...] Our contracts all bore the signatures of military financial ministers, Gau leaders or SS-leaders (even my own)." See Durth 2001: 423–424, footnote 145.

30 Schwarz, in Conrads et al. 1994: 43.

After this irony-filled passage, Schwarz's text abandoned the conceit of a reported conversation. His comments on the Nazi regime, coming in 1953 from an architect who, although never a member of the National Socialist Party, had spent the latter part of the war planning towns for "a new agricultural people,"²⁸ presumably relocated from Eastern Europe, in the Lorraine region of occupied France, were at best irresponsible. His depiction of Leitzl, whose journal had defined a considered position on the activities of architects and planners during the war and in the immediate after post-war period, was simply unfair.²⁹ Why, then, would Schwarz choose to equate the Bauhaus's role in destroying the "great Western conversation" of the interwar period to that of National Socialism? What was at stake when he described the "anti-spiritual terrorism of dictatorial groups, namely the Bauhaus literates and later, of course, the masters of the Thousand Year *Reich*"?³⁰

At several points in his text, Schwarz referred to the insistence of those he called almost interchangeably Bauhaus, Materialist, and Functionalist, “with their appearance dated as the Year 1 and before, everything was barren and empty.”³¹ Only when that temporal marker had been breeched could one “freely view a young Europe, unfurling in a thousand hopes, as it had been in the decades before the war.”³² Even today, so Schwarz, one found the same “charlatans” as one had then, distributed equally between false history and false ahistoricity: “the masters of the Thousand Year Reich have become the keepers of tradition [...]. We want to make their squinches and architraves difficult for them: tradition is ours. Or one might infiltrate the monastery of the Avante-Gardists who today still believe in their Year 1.”³³

31 Ibid. 40.

32 Ibid. 39; Schwarz explains that he intends “to backdate Year 1” to circa 1900, a familiar art historical shorthand for the Jugendstil.

33 Ibid. 46.

With the end of the war had come a new *Stunde Null* (“zero hour”) in Germany. It promised, on the one hand, a clean slate in contrast to the punitive treatment to which the country had been subject in the interwar period but on the other, created a void in terms of national and cultural identity. Schwarz’s conflation of Bauhaus and Nazi regimes can be understood in response to the fact that, to his mind, the actions of both had condemned Germany to this cultural vacuum. The total rejection of history after the war was an immediate reaction to the abuse of history, albeit a fictive history, by the Third Reich. To Schwarz, a perennial critic of Bauhaus modernism, the Bauhaus “year one” elided with the political “zero hour” used to describe both the physical devastation of the postwar landscape and the need to neutralize German culture as part of denazification. This elision, the most controversial part of his article, sensationalized the gravity of the *Stunde Null*; his conflation of Bauhaus modernism and Nazi culture was, in fact, not far from the truth of West German architectural and urban planning practice in the 1950s.³⁴

34 See Durth 1986.

Consonant Images, Dissonant Texts

One might accuse me of stirring up old dirt unnecessarily. But no, there is bitter necessity to do so, so that fronts can finally be dissolved which are not fronts at all. The Bauhaus has achieved a great success, a success of publicity. As reprehensible as its ideologies were, the literarily-inclined lapped them up like milk and honey, and in an instant it was the defined dogma of all writers that vital architecture was indeed that of the Bauhaus and that the truly contemporary architect was only he who had broken with Western tradition. All others of us, however, were marked for decades. We were placed in the same tub and thrown out with the rest of the bathwater into the gutter [...].

Dear Mr. Leitzl, I sincerely believe that my text will not cause you any joy, but I believe that it has to be. We really must return to the space of truly great tradition and divest everything that is counter to its spirit; we must return to true discussion.³⁵

35 Schwarz, in Conrads et al. 1994: 46–47.

36 Alfons Leitl in *Baukunst und Werkform* 1953: 59.

Schwarz was right: his article caused Leitl no joy at all. Leitl's two-page editorial in the February/March issue explained his decision to publish seven different responses to Schwarz. Although at pains to express his admiration for both Gropius and Schwarz and "everything that is vital within our time,"³⁶ he remained silent about why Gropius had not spoken for himself. Gropius was acting strategically: within a week after the publication of Schwarz's article, Gropius had received numerous letters, including some from German architects with whom he was not in regular correspondence. Rather than recognize Schwarz directly, Gropius responded by penning a letter, which his faithful correspondent Richard Döcker then forwarded to both Leitl's modest journal and to *Die Neue Zeitung*, the American occupation newspaper published throughout Germany for a general audience.

37 Conrads et al. 1994: 59; see also letter from Gropius to Döcker dated 3/14/1953 Series III, file 646, Walter Gropius Papers, 1925–1969 (MS Ger 208). Houghton Library, Harvard University.

Gropius's published letter dismissed Schwarz's article as "rude and condescending in tone." Moreover, he wrote, the "contention of Mr. Schwarz that we had 'celebrated our conversion to historical Materialism' is purely invented."³⁷ He did not, however, engage the specific content of Schwarz's critique; even after receiving both the January and February/March issues of *Baukunst und Werkform*, Gropius insisted in an unpublished letter to Leitl that he found Schwarz "extremely confusing and verbose. I don't intend to go into the debate. [...] If you want to publish the material I sent to you, which gives an insight into my thinking and working during the Bauhaus time, please feel free to do so. Let this be enough from my side."³⁸ In a private letter to Döcker accompanying his open letter for publication, Gropius had parried with his own Goethe quotation, "Lass dich nur zu keiner Zeit/Zum Widerspruch verleiten./Weise fallen in Unwissenheit,/wenn sie sich mit Unwissenden streiten"³⁹ ("Never allow yourself to be misled into contradiction/The wise fall into ignorance when they fight with those who are ignorant"). Gropius asserted that to answer Schwarz would be tantamount to recognizing a false argument, to "fight with those who are ignorant."⁴⁰ He nonetheless found it extremely important to encourage others to carry on the battle in his name.

38 Gropius to Leitl, 5/29/1953, in Conrads et al. 1994: 186.

39 Conrads et al. 1994: 59; see also Gropius to Döcker, op. cit., see endnote 37.

40 Gropius to Döcker, *ibid.*

Buying himself time by combining the February and March 1953 issues of his magazine, Leitl assembled seven responses, some commissioned and some spontaneous. He accompanied the seventy-odd pages of text with images representing more than thirty years of Schwarz's and Gropius's architectural production from the 1920s to the present, including photos of buildings completed after Gropius had departed Germany. The images appear independent of specific textual reference: for example, a letter written by Franz Munier, a close associate of Leitl's and the text editor for *Baukunst und Werkform*, was accompanied by two Herbert Bayer images not referenced in the text. One of these images, dating to 1931, shows a still life of a cone, sphere, drafting triangle, and pen, which cast a sharp shadow onto a folded newsletter with the headline "Bauhaus." The overleaf page depicts a 1928 project by Schwarz for a church composed of three tall cylinders, reprinted from the Catholic periodical *Die Schildgenossen*. Cone, sphere, and cylinder—the classical Platonic solids in both images imply formal common ground between these two contemporary strands of German avant-garde.

Several pages later, above a text by former Bauhaus student Paul Klopfer, Leitz chose two photographs of prismatic, white stucco and glass villas, both viewed past a fringe of overhanging foliage (fig. 1). On the left is Schwarz's Volk House in Offenbach (1933–1934) and on the right, Gropius's house for British politician Benn Levy near London (1935). The two photographs' captions, composition, and leafy frames foreground their similarities: garden-side views, pipe railings, flat roofs, and expansive glazing, despite differences in the windows' configurations—tall French doors in Schwarz's building and horizontal band windows in Gropius's.

Throughout the issue, the juxtaposition of consonant images and dissonant text sends up the tried and true International Style practice of eliding the work of radically different architects under the rubric of *Neues Bauen* in order to assert it as a unified style. Indeed, as an alternate to Giedion's carefully constructed image layouts and captions, intended to allow access to his arguments even to readers disinclined to read all of his text, Leitz's illustrations tell a story apart from the texts they accompany. Unlike Giedion's strategy of implicitly relating two formally aligned images of different origin, Leitz seemed intent on creating visual connections between two architectural lineages upon whose difference Schwarz insisted. The tactic emphasized the fact that Schwarz's critique of the Bauhaus was not concerned with appearance at all and could not be reduced to formal or stylistic preference. Instead, Schwarz's contempt for superficial, purely visual argumentation was implicit in Leitz's subtle parody of the visual communication style practiced in the 1910s and 20s at the Bauhaus and later, in Giedion's *Space, Time and Architecture* as designed by former Bauhaus master Bayer.

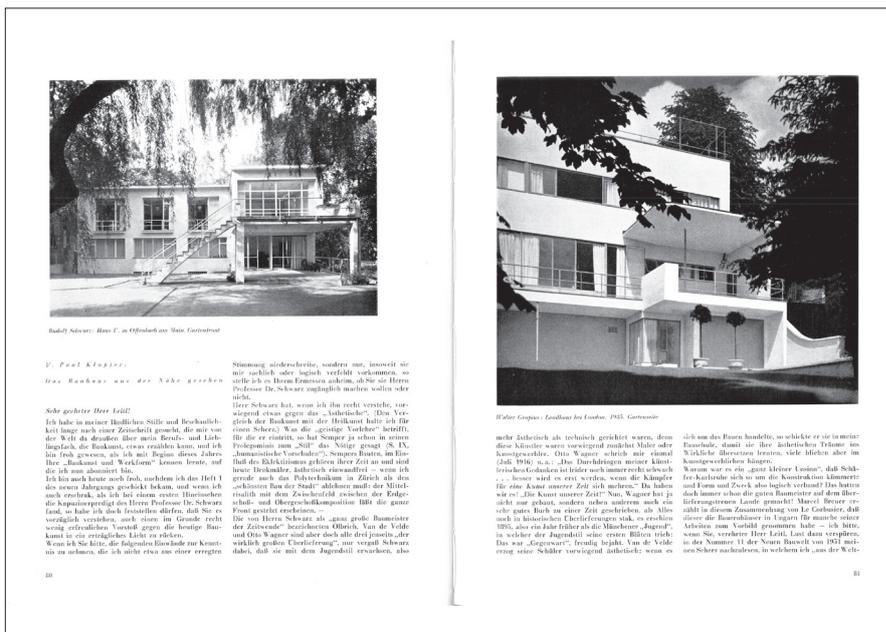


Fig.1 Pages from *Baukunst und Werkform* vol. 7 (1953), no. 2/3: 80–81.

Who's Who, Who's Where

For some of the disgruntled *Baukunst und Werkform* readership, the Bauhaus signified a connection to, not disruption from, a meaningful history.⁴¹ In analogy to the role played in asserting an untainted German cultural identity by recourse to expatriate figures Thomas Mann or Theodor Adorno, the Bauhaus served for many as a reference point of German culture unsullied by association with the National Socialist regime—in fact, by virtue of the school's closure in 1933 under political duress, it came to represent an oppositional culture despite some factual contradictions to that simple interpretation. The reception of the Bauhaus in West Germany after 1945 indicated its importance to general cultural memory, if not to practicing architects.⁴² The apotheosis of the Bauhaus in the writing of modern architecture was, from this perspective, to the credit of German cultural achievement, a position reflected in MacCarthy's 2019 biography.

Hermann Mäckler's letter of response, published in the February/March double issue, reflects this tendency. He countered Schwarz by asserting the ongoing significance of the Bauhaus in Germany, in Europe, and ultimately world-wide. His title "Praeceptor Germanie et Europae?" (Master of Germany and Europe?) accused Schwarz of claiming a dictatorial position "like others before,"⁴³ by which Mäckler can only have meant the Third Reich. By contrast, Mäckler described Gropius as "worthy of affection."⁴⁴ Mäckler made clear that it was not Schwarz, the self-proclaimed master, who could lay claim to Germany and Europe, but rather the Bauhaus, whose teachers and heritage had achieved ubiquitous importance:

What is the state of *your* historical desires? [...] Why, in fact, are you so deeply concerned with the Bauhaus in its historical form? Was it not liquidated almost 20 years ago? [...] Are there not "things that are being decided" and thus offer matter for legitimate discussion? Important and valid things that, nota bene, are fundamentally connected with the past existence of the Bauhaus?⁴⁵

Mäckler's proof was a list of the current positions and locations of the original Bauhaus masters. At the top of his list was Gropius, "Architect, founder, and director of the Bauhaus, most recently Chairman of the Department of Architecture, Harvard University, USA."⁴⁶ The next four names—Albers, Bayer, Breuer and Feininger—were, like Gropius, in the United States. Moholy-Nagy, "photographer, set designer, writer, Director of the Institute of Design, Chicago, deceased 1940 in Chicago,"⁴⁷ appeared at the list's bottom. In fact, of the thirteen men named on Mäckler's list, six had emigrated to the United States and four of those had attained leading academic positions there. As if aiming to add weight to his claim that the Bauhaus was active where "important and valid things" were being discussed, Mäckler concluded his list by asking, "How do things stand, for example, with Johannes Itten, with Gerhard Marcks or with Paul Klee, whose most beautiful pictures I saw in Chicago in the home

41 Betts 2004: 75–100.

42 Ibid. 78; Betts notes that although the "Bauhaus Debate" was reported in the popular press, other architecture periodicals made no report of it. He interprets this reaction as indicative of a relative disciplinary indifference to the Bauhaus legacy at that time.

43 Mäckler, in Conrads et al. 1994: 71–72.

44 Ibid. 71.

45 Ibid. 71.

46 Ibid. 72.

47 Ibid. 72.

of Mies van der Rohe?⁴⁸ With this sentence, too, Mäckler completed his argument for the Bauhaus's importance by virtue of its exportation to where "important and valid things" were happening, the United States.

48 Ibid. 73.

Just as Leitz had used many of the images in his February/March issue to emphasize similarities in appearance between the work of Gropius and Schwarz, he also used photographs to suggest how the German Bauhaus had been transformed to a new, US permutation. The overleaf following the spread juxtaposing the Schwarz and Gropius villas referenced above, showed two Breuer houses in New England (fig. 2). These images are markedly unlike the preceding photos of the two villas, whose white stuccoed surfaces appear in naturalistically gradated shadows within classically composed frames, both using the foreground tree boughs to balance the diagonals of a stair, in the case of the Schwarz villa, or the curved wall and slight perspectival recession of a balcony overhang in the Gropius villa.

The Breuer houses shared with the two earlier images their bucolic contexts; Breuer's own house, like the other two villas, had also been photographed through overhanging foreground trees. Here, however, the similarities end. The Breuer houses are not stucco but instead are clad in unpainted vertical and diagonal wooden siding, and sit on fieldstone bases. The photographs emphasized the houses' dynamic forms, not through classical compositional technique but through the use of heavily contrasting shadows and the dramatized perspective.⁴⁹ An error in the captions, locating Breuer's own house in "Canaan, Mass" rather than New Canaan, Connecticut, and dating it a year earlier than its 1948 completion date, indicated the editors' lack of familiarity with contemporary American work, only scantily published by *Baukunst und Werkform*.

49 This photographic technique was associated with new camera technologies. See Zimmermann 2014, chapter 7, "Promise and Threat: American Photographs in Post-war Germany," esp. 219–229.

Nonetheless, the choice of two Breuer buildings in lieu of Gropius's own house in Lincoln, or even one of the several house projects on which Breuer

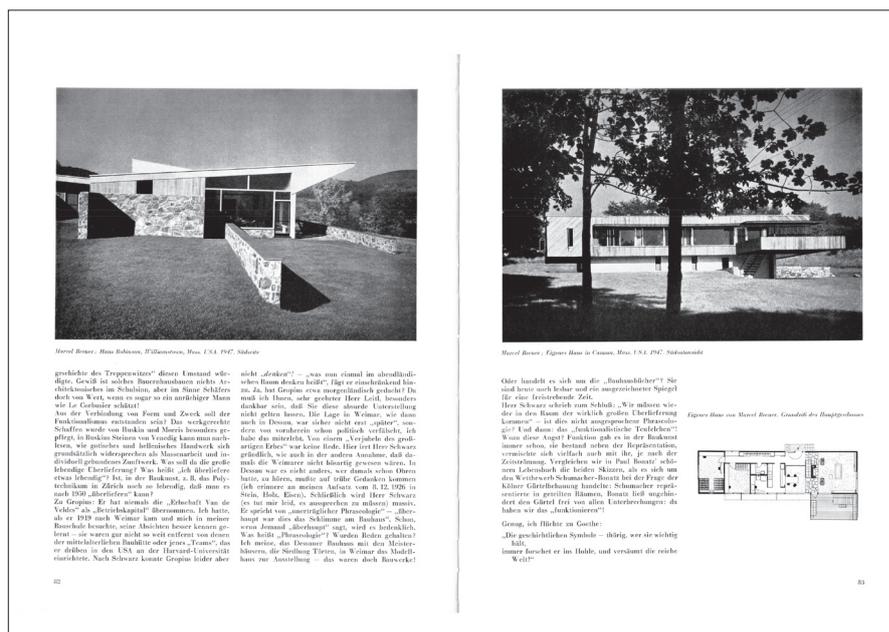


Fig. 2 Breuer houses, *Baukunst und Werkform* vol. 7 (1953), no. 2/3: 82–83.

and Gropius had collaborated, is curious. Gropius's Lincoln house of 1938 (fig. 3) would have been a more obvious choice to create continuity with the villas on the prior page; Gropius's larger projects, which by 1953 included housing and institutional buildings, would have complemented the Siemensstadt housing depicted earlier in the article. Either would have yielded images close to an expected Bauhaus idiom. But perhaps this was Leidl's point: crossing the Atlantic had changed what could be attributed to the Bauhaus heritage. As Mäckler had written, "Who still builds to the letter of the formal laws of that Bauhaus?"⁵⁰ Could the Bauhaus still be legitimately considered part of living German cultural heritage and a plausible constituent of a new West German identity? Or had it become something else, and someone else's, entirely? Leidl's selection of images begged these questions.

"Gropius was not German"

Despite MacCarthy's interpretation, there is much to suggest that Gropius's relationship to Germany in the postwar period was tempered by the manner in which emigration, first to England and then to the US, had redefined the way he understood himself. The American tradition of assimilation, given particular urgency by the fact that his country of origin was an aggressor nation in a world war, was also a factor; his scrapbook attests to his compulsion to remain informed of the way he was seen in Germany but his letters communicate ambivalence about his nationality. This is evident in an exchange from 1946 with Fritz Hesse, mayor of Dessau during the Bauhaus years, a position he regained in the postwar period. Hesse, whose city lay in ruins, was writing to propose an international exhibition of Bauhaus work in the fall of 1946 so that he could contend, as described in a clipping from the Dessau *Tägliche Rundschau* enclosed in his letter, that "the Bauhaus building has once again become a central location of important work." Hesse wrote,

Fig. 3 Gropius's Lincoln house respectively, in a more familiar Bauhaus idiom.



I would like to add that we place inordinate value on the fact that the Bauhaus show have submissions from emigrated *Bauhäusler*, so that the world can see the value of the Bauhaus idea and the work of the Bauhaus in Germany documented as clearly as possible.⁵¹

51 Letter from Fritz Hesse to Gropius dated February 14, 1946, Series III, file 876, Walter Gropius Papers, 1925–1969 (MS Ger 208). Houghton Library, Harvard University.

Gropius responded with several suggestions for the exhibition, then continued:

I have learned much here about democracy. I believe that the United States is closest to what we once anticipated in a true democracy. That, although we do seem reactionary at this instance as a victor nation. You would observe many aspects of life here with particular interest.⁵²

52 Gropius to Hesse, Series III, file 876, Walter Gropius Papers, 1925–1969 (MS Ger 208). Houghton Library, Harvard University.

The “we” of which Gropius spoke is no longer a German “we,” once anticipating a “true democracy” but rather a different “we,” that of a “victor nation.” As strange as it seemed at the time, there was nothing ironic about her response when in 1998, former Gropius GSD student Edith Aujaume expressed surprise at being asked about her studies with a German professor during the war. Her spontaneous answer: “What do you mean? Gropius was not German!”⁵³ And so it was: in a 1951 letter to Theodor Heuss, during a period in which Gropius unsuccessfully attempted to secure civil servant pensions for the families of Bauhaus masters, he referred to himself directly as a “former German,” troubled by the way his country of origin treated the bearers of its cultural heritage embodied by the Bauhaus.⁵⁴

53 Edith Aujaume, in conversation at Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture, Spring 1999. Author notes.

54 Gropius to Heuss, 1951, Series III, file 877, Walter Gropius Papers, 1925–1969 (MS Ger 208). Houghton Library, Harvard University.

By 1951, the date of Gropius’s letter to Heuss, the Bauhaus, like its founder, was arguably no longer German, but rather part of the story of modernism, a story whose prologue was European but whose primary action was American.

Gropius as Advisor in West Germany

It is against this background of self-redefinition that Gropius’s return to post-war Germany should be considered. Gropius seemed publicly to bear only good will towards West Germany in his role as US Army adviser; but his relationship to Richard Döcker revealed a different, more paternalistic and less compatriotic stance. Döcker, whose architectural career had been so aborted by the NS regime that he had taken to the study of biology, maintained his contact to Gropius from the London interlude onward.⁵⁵ The tone of Döcker’s letters is melancholic and resigned, except for a briefly enthusiastic period after the war when he suggested to Gropius the reinstatement of “Der Ring”⁵⁶ and a German delegation to CIAM. Gropius gave vague encouragement to Döcker’s plans, destined only to become another of the major disappointments in Döcker’s life. Overall Gropius ignored his advances, but chose nonetheless to send Döcker to do battle with Schwarz.⁵⁷

55 See, for example, the letter from Döcker to Gropius dated January 26, 1937, Series III, file 646, Walter Gropius Papers, 1925–1969 (MS Ger 208). Houghton Library, Harvard University.

56 Letter from Döcker to Gropius dated September 1, 1948, Series III, file 646, Walter Gropius Papers, 1925–1969 (MS Ger 208). Houghton Library, Harvard University.

57 Letters between Gropius and Döcker dated 1934–53, Series III, file 646, Walter Gropius Papers, 1925–1969 (MS Ger 208). Houghton Library, Harvard University and Durth, op. cit.: 341–351.

For the US occupying forces, Gropius’s professional advantage was that he could represent both cultural and practical positions, advising on the rebuilding efforts. West German periodicals depicted him as a German advocate with the American occupying forces, or as an American cultural imperialist with no

58 Letter from Otto Bartning to Walter Gropius dated August 8, 1947, Series III, file 416 and letter from Richard Döcker to Walter Gropius dated November 19, 1947, Series III, file 646, Walter Gropius Papers, 1925–1969 (MS Ger 208). Houghton Library, Harvard University.

59 Hermann Mäckler, carbon copy of letter dated July 21, 1950, Series III, file 1153, Walter Gropius Papers, 1925–1969 (MS Ger 208). Houghton Library, Harvard University.

60 Letters between Gropius and Döcker dated November 2, 1948, and July 11, 1948, Series III, file 646, Walter Gropius Papers, 1925–1969 (MS Ger 208). Houghton Library, Harvard University.

61 "Professor Gropius gibt gute Ratschläge," Baumeister, August 1947: 389–391.

62 Ibid. 389.

63 Ibid. 390.

64 In a letter dated July 11, 1948, to Döcker, Gropius is specific: it is Neufert's "arbitrary" norms he is criticizing.

65 See, for example, Bonatz 1947: 550.

66 Durth 2001: 312–322.

real understanding of conditions on the ground. His archives preserve only positive responses to his trip.⁵⁸

That Gropius saw himself to some extent as an advocate for his former colleagues is implied by his recommendation to General Clay to finance the reconstituted *Werkbund*,⁵⁹ and in his efforts in 1948 to replace (albeit unsuccessfully) building norms established during the 1930s.⁶⁰ The importance of the tours to Gropius personally, as acknowledged elder statesman, is evident in the countless newspaper clippings from the American paper *Die Neue Zeitung*, which he preserved from 1946–47 onwards, indicating that he subscribed to the paper, which was published only in Germany.

Gropius spoke in Berlin, Frankfurt, and Munich, and focused on American town planning, prefabrication, and standardized house building, and the relationship between technology and human in the built environment.⁶¹ Published as an open letter to General Lucius Clay, his conclusions and recommendations amounted to a combination of advocacy for organizations and people to whom he had personal affinities, such as the German *Werkbund*, CIAM, and what he called the "Bauhaus-Bewegung." Other suggestions, such as the establishment of a private property buy-out mechanism to eliminate preexisting cities in favor of new urban "planning units" of 5,000 to 8,000 people, suggest that he envisioned a remaking of German cities that would overwrite historic fabric in order to configure smaller, agglomerative village-scale units. For the West German context, in which the Allies had seriously discussed punitive re-agriculturalizing of major cities, visions of suburbia were out of place. Over and over, he claimed that the material and technological wealth of the US would be prerequisite to city building, and did not fail to point out that this was missing in Germany—hardly a way of endearing himself to his audience.⁶² His emphasis on the need for patents to stimulate market forces in innovation and his critique of salvaged building materials as a true alternative to fast, high-quality building were inaccurate at best and at worst, thinly veiled advocacy for his own General Panel System, with which he illustrated his open letter as published in Germany. His insistence on the need for architectural libraries, exhibitions, and guest lectures imported from "cultural areas in other countries,"⁶³ like his condemnation of the DIN-norms ratified by "Nazi Ministers"—in other words, the standards developed during the Third Reich by Ernst Neufert, as Gropius made explicit in an unpublished letter to Döcker⁶⁴—conveyed his disdain for his colleagues in West Germany, and his conviction that progress could only come from the United States.

In some quarters, however, Gropius was lionized, most visibly in the magazine *Baurundschau*.⁶⁵ The report's author, Rudolf Hillebrecht, epitomized those architects "between the two fronts,"⁶⁶ who successfully transitioned from a position of prominence within Albert Speer's ministry to one of equal prominence under the Allied government of Germany. Beginning in 1941, Hillebrecht had been second in command for the *Amt für Kriegswichtigen Einsatz*, the city planning and reconstruction agency under the auspices of Speer's ministry. After internment as a prisoner of war in the British sector from 1944–1945, Hil-

lebrecht was “denazified” and released to work with other “German experts” in establishing strategies for the reconstruction of war-damaged cities in the British sector. In 1948, he was elected Hanover’s Head of Urban Planning.⁶⁷ Although not mentioned in Hillebrecht’s report on his meeting with Gropius, the two men had collaborated on a competition in 1934, the year in which Gropius fled the country. Hillebrecht’s article ended on a personal note, perhaps surprising to the average reader not acquainted with the two men’s past affiliation, but nonetheless telling:

Gropius himself, always at pains to keep his intellectual horizon as broad as possible; who on the one hand radiates his influence in all civilized countries of the world; whose thoughts stand at the center of a broad international circle—he is and remains stamped by Germanness. And I was happy to have this impression verified by him.⁶⁸

Hillebrecht’s impression, aligned with MacCarthy’s biographic conclusions, seems strangely at odds with the language Gropius used in the open letter to General Clay, throughout which he used first person plural in discussing the American perspective on German reconstruction. Who knew best whether Gropius was German?

It is impossible to assess Gropius’s political identity without including his position on the way in which, to his mind, an abstract modern visual imaginary intertwined with a new, supranational democracy. As “democracy” gained currency in the form of a Western export product, propagated using the twinned tools of development and reconstruction,⁶⁹ the cultural production in which this exportation was clothed gained currency. For Gropius, the visual training he had long nursed and sought to codify was inherently and indelibly linked to a new democratic agenda. He elaborated his ideas about this relationship in the speech he gave in Hamburg upon receiving the Hansische Goethe-Preis in 1956, and later published a more developed version in the US in a 1968 book entitled, *Apollo in the Democracy*. If his thoughts do not explain directly his proxy tactics during the Bauhaus Debate, they certainly indicate a much larger-scale set of interests which Schwarz’s recriminations might have threatened and which ultimately underpinned the attitudes behind the phenomenal rise of the modernist credo in the postwar period.

Gropius’s speech expressed the opinion he had voiced to Fritz Hesse in 1946 on the value of American democracy and expanded upon it, to propose an all-encompassing ideal, which would supersede history, politics, and aesthetics:

By the word “democracy” I mean neither the antique Greek form of government [...] nor do I mean the politically stressed European, American or Russian special forms of present democracy. I speak of the form of life which, without political identification, is slowly spreading over the whole world, establishing itself upon the foundation of increasing industrialization, growing communication and information services and the broad

67 Hillebrecht’s professional success, and its meaning for his reputation, were clear by 1959, when he would grace the cover of *Der Spiegel*, celebrating the “miracle of Hanover.” See *Der Spiegel*, “Das Wunder von Hannover,” 1959: 56-69.

68 Baumeister op. cit.: 389–391.

69 As per papers presented by Sandrine Kott and Michele Alacevich at the Heyman Center for the Humanities’ Disciplines Series: The Idea of Development—Development and Underdevelopment in Postwar Europe, October 10, 2014, Columbia University. The complexity of resource flows and monetary policy at the end of World War II is also described in (Mitchell, 2011).

admission of the masses to higher education and the right to vote. What is the relationship of this form of life to art and architecture today? *In a long life I have become increasingly aware of the fact that the creation and love of beauty not only enrich man with a great measure of happiness but also bring forth ethical powers* (emphasis original).⁷⁰

70 Gropius 1968: 3-4.

This love of beauty, according to Gropius, depended upon visual training, what he called the ability to “reconstruct [...] the relationships between the individual phenomena of our world.”⁷¹ The Gropius Basic Design course at the GSD, an extension of his Bauhaus program, represented his model for precisely such a visual education. In the context of Gropius’s ethical definition of visual acuity, the Bauhaus heritage had transcended discipline-specificity and assumed the capacity to function as a constitutive element of pure democracy. As a cultural imaginary, the “visual” found wide-spread favor in the US in the postwar period, reflected in the adoption of visual training to fields as diverse as early childhood education teaching methods and efforts to quantify intelligence. To see the Bauhaus legacy as part of this new world order must have been a compelling belief for Gropius, even more so than his own personal success or reputation. It was tantamount to his contribution to world history. In this light, Schwarz’s attack on the Bauhaus’s intellectual integrity took on far greater significance. It was a threat to the transubstantiation of an art school curriculum into a constituent of true democracy.

71 Ibid. 6.

Securing the Bauhaus Heritage by All Means

Well before the Bauhaus Debate erupted, Hermann Mäckler had written to Gropius, expressing his and other’s discomfort at the disequilibrium in the architectural exchange between Germany and the US. In early summer of 1950, Mäckler traveled the US, undertaking a cross-country trip that took him to destinations as diverse as New York, Washington, Chapel Hill, Knoxville, the Grand Canyon, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, and Boston, where he visited Gropius. He visited the group around John Entenza in Los Angeles, including the Eameses, as well as an earlier émigré to a different American architecture, Richard Neutra. In Chicago, he met Serge Chermayeff, who owed his position at the Chicago Institute of Design to Gropius’s recommendation.

Cities and towns, émigrés and Americans, new architecture and broad landscape features: Mäckler’s visit gave him a sense of what was afoot in post-war America. He described what he saw and what troubled him in a report that he sent, with a letter, to Gropius, dated July 7, 1950:

In conversation with Bartning, Eiermann, Leistikow, Schwippert, Schwarz and others, however, it was always ascertained that a connection with America could only then have a serious meaning and enjoy a thorough success if we in Germany had, as a sort of reception station, an independent school. Only then would it be possible, free of harassments of a *Weltanschauung* sort, to do something for architecture within a new generation.⁷²

72 Letter from Mäckler to Gropius dated July 21, 1950, Walter Gropius Papers, 1925-1969 (MS Ger 208). Houghton Library, Harvard University.

Without parity, Mäckler implied, German architects would be susceptible to the “harassments” of an American way of life. Mäckler’s ambivalence is distressing and it extends to the Bauhaus’s status. On the one hand, the Bauhaus heritage offered West Germany the opportunity to be part of an increasingly powerful architectural culture. On the other, once subsumed in American *Weltanschauung*, the Bauhaus was no more than the Trojan Horse that would overpower a nascent architecture inherent to the still-new West German Republic. This concern resonated, too, in Schwarz’s text.

In 1951, Gropius returned to Hanover to see the *Constructa* building exposition. While he was there, he attended a private meeting, planned by Rudolf Hillebrecht, whom he had also met in Stuttgart in 1947 during his tour on behalf of General Clay. Hillebrecht’s purpose in organizing the meeting was to bring together the “two sides”—the Modernists and the former architects of the Third Reich—in an attempt at reconciliation, overseen by Gropius. Such a meeting would, of course, elevate his Hanover *Constructa* to a symbol of Germany’s fresh start.⁷³ Scharoun, Bartning, Schwippert, and Schwarz were among those who declined his invitation. Gropius accepted nonetheless. As Rudolf Wolters, another of Speer’s former staff, reported,

73 Durth 2001: 322.

We met [...] in a private home and grouped ourselves unforcedly around Gropius. [...] Shortly before the meeting began, Bonatz entered the room [...]. He introduced himself to Gropius: Bonatz. To general surprise, it became apparent that the seventy-three year old Bonatz and the sixty-nine year old Gropius, both institutions for German contemporary architecture, met here for the first time in their lives. It was touching to observe how awkwardly and modestly, reserved and yet friendly, the two greeted each other and sat down smiling, their claws retracted.⁷⁴

74 Ibid. 322–323.

The symbolic value of this meeting, although at a private venue, cannot be underestimated. No more than niceties were exchanged, but as a fact, it indicated clearly that the discussion of “then and now,” as Leidl had put it, was no longer particularly relevant. The Americanized Bauhaus ideals that Gropius now espoused could accomplish their purposes even if he were not “engaging directly” and the modernist tradition he represented could make peace with its dubiously traditionalist former enemy. The assertions that Schwarz made two years later were, to Gropius and his claim to posterity, not so terribly wide of the mark, and as such, worthy of extreme reprisal. To correct Schwarz regarding the true intellectual atmosphere at the historical Bauhaus was unnecessary; to speak directly to any of his proposals for an alternate history of Modernism was equally irrelevant. Gropius’s need for the mythical Bauhaus coincided with his vision of “a form of life which, without political identification, is slowly spreading over the whole world,”⁷⁵ and within which “the creation and love of beauty not only enrich man with a great measure of happiness but also bring forth ethical powers.”⁷⁶ The *Pax Americana* meant that wars, even ones on paper, were to be won by any and all means, including covert operations.

75 Gropius 1968: 4.

76 Gropius 1968: 3–4.

Author

Lynnette Widder (M.Arch, Columbia University, 1990; Sc.D., ETHZ, 2016) is a full-time faculty in the Masters of Sustainability Management Program at the Earth Institute, Columbia University. From 1997–2012, she was Associate Professor of Architecture at the Rhode Island School of Design. Her articles have appeared in *Daidalos*, *Bauwelt*, *architecture*, *Manifest*, *Cloud Cuckoo Land*, *Kritische Berichte*, and elsewhere. She co-authored *Ira Rakatansky: As Modern as Tomorrow* (2010) and *Architecture Live Projects: Pedagogy into Practice* (2014); and curated *Kaneji Domoto at Frank Lloyd Wright's Usonia* (2017). She is co-founder of *aardvarchitecture* and was English language editor of *Daidalos* architecture quarterly.

Literature

Baukunst und Werkform, vol. 7 (1953).

Baumeister: Zeitschrift für Architektur, vol. 44, August (1947).

Betts, Paul (2004): The Authority of Everyday Objects: A Cultural History of West German Industrial Design, Berkeley: University of California Press.

Bonatz, Karl (1947): "Anmerkungen zu den Presseinterviews mit Professor Gropius und zu seinem Vortrag im Titania-Palast am 22. August 1947." *Neue Bauwelt*, 2/1947: 550–551.

Busmann, Johannes (1995): Die revidierte Moderne: der Architekt Alfons Leitl 1909–1975. Wuppertal: Müller und Busmann.

Conrads, Ulrich, Magdalena Droste, Winfried Nerdinger, Hilde Strohl (eds.) (1994): Die Bauhausdebatte 1953. Dokumente einer verdrängten Kontroverse, Braunschweig/Wiesbaden: Vieweg.

Conrads, Ulrich, Peter Neitzke (eds.) (1991): Mensch und Raum. Das Darmstädter Gespräch 1951, Braunschweig: Vieweg.

Durth, Werner (1986, 2001): Deutsche Architekten. Biographische Verflechtungen 1900–1970, Braunschweig/Wiesbaden: Vieweg.

Geiser, Reto (2018): Giedion and America, Zurich: gta Verlag.

Gropius, Walter (1968): Apollo in the Democracy: The Cultural Obligation of an Architect, New York: McGraw-Hill.

Loeffler, Jane C. (1998): The Architecture of Diplomacy: Building America's Embassies, New York: Princeton Architectural Press.

MacCarthy, Fiona (2019): Gropius: The Man Who Built the Bauhaus, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Pearlman, Jill (2007): Inventing American Modernism: Joseph Hudnut, Walter Gropius, and the Bauhaus Legacy at Harvard, Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press.

Schwarz, Rudolf (1979): Wegweisung der Technik und Andere Schriften zum Neuen Bauen, 1926–1961 Braunschweig, Wiesbaden: Vieweg.

Smolian, Alexander Henning (2014): "Serie oder Persönlichkeit. Zum Technikverständnis von Rudolf Schwarz," *Cloud-Cuckoo-Land*. *International Journal of Architectural Theory*, vol. 19, no. 33: 193–207, cloud-cuckoo.net/fileadmin/issues_en/issue_33/article_smo-lian.pdf [05.05.2019].

Widder, Lynnette (2016): Ist damit räumliches Bauen zu Ende? Hans Schwippert, Sep Ruf and the Culture of Building in German Modern Architecture 1949–59. ETHZ: Doctoral dissertation.

Zimmerman, Claire (2014): Photographic Architecture in the Twentieth Century, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Figures

Figs. 1,2 Baukunst und Werkform.

Fig. 3 Artstor, photos by Wayne Andrews.

Recommended Citation

Lynette Widder:

Whose Modernism?

The 1953 Bauhaus Debate and the Right to Define Modern Architecture.

In: Wolkenkuckucksheim | Cloud-Cuckoo-Land | Воздушный замок,
International Journal of Architectural Theory (ISSN 1434-0984),
vol. 24., no. 39, *Bauhaus Transfers*, 2019, pp. 35–59.