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# Gropius the Romantic\*

Wolfgang Pehnt

In his later years Walter Gropius repeatedly disassociated himself from the emphatic proclamations he had published in the spring of 1919 in the pamphlet for the Berlin Exhibition for Unknown Architects and in the first Bauhaus manifesto. In his eighties he explained his two hymn-like utterances at the age of thirty-five as a merely tactical precaution. "A matter-of-fact appeal for matter-of-fact work," wrote Gropius, "would at that time have failed in its purpose, namely, to offer young people full of new ideas a broad basis on which those ideas could be clarified and tested practically."<sup>1</sup> To be sure, students of the Bauhaus and of Walter Gropius's works have not accepted this explanation by the founder of the Bauhaus. Nevertheless, the extent to which Gropius belonged to the Expressionist movement after World War I has not been made clear even by writers who have devoted themselves to the study of Expressionism in architecture.<sup>2</sup> The articles, lectures, notes and letters written by Gropius at that time have not been taken into account; nor have the buildings designed in the Weimar office of Gropius and Adolf Meyer in the years just after 1918 been published. The two exceptions are the Weimar Monument to the Fallen of the March Insurrection and the Sommerfeld House, which have been looked upon as strange episodes but not as characteristic examples of this phase of the architect's creative work.

At the end of 1918 Gropius returned to the troubled city of Berlin. In part he wanted to re-establish his professional contacts; in part he was drawn by the revolutionary climate of the first Post-War weeks: "I came here in order to take part in the upheavals. The atmosphere is highly charged and we artists, too, must strike while the iron is hot," he wrote on December 23, 1918; and fourteen days later he observed: "In the present political situation, it is unavoidably necessary not to fragment our strength but to pull together on a main lever."<sup>3</sup> As the "main lever" he selected the *Arbeitsrat für Kunst*, an association of painters, sculptors, architects and writers founded at the end of 1918, on the model of the workers' and soldiers' councils (*Arbeiter- and Soldatenräte*). With enthusiastic words, he tried to win for the new organization his close friend Karl Ernst Osthaus, "a faithful Eckardt of modern German art," who directed the *Museum für Kunst in Handel und Industrie* in Hagen: "For the time being there is a congenial radical atmosphere

in the *Arbeitsrat für Kunst*, which I have joined, and fruitful ideas are being advanced." "The whole tone of the *Arbeitsrat* is so refreshing and radical, and *work* is really being done there, so that I am sure in a short time we will bring forth some important ideas and produce positive work . . . We now really have almost all of the important artists and art lovers of the radical side with us, and we already represent a power."<sup>4</sup> In Gropius's eyes, the *Arbeitsrat* was a forum capable of replacing the "deeply reactionary" *Deutsche Werkbund*.<sup>5</sup>

During the first half-year of its existence the *Arbeitsrat* showed considerable life. It brought out publications, held lectures, and organized the now famous Exhibition for Unknown Architects in the *Graphische Kabinett*. J.B. Neumann also had plans to publish a new periodical, *Bauen*. The periodical, the first issue of which was to appear in June, 1919, was not intended for specialists but was to be directed to the "Volk." Anonymity was a requirement. The prospectus published by Neumann can stand comparison with the great architectural manifestos of the time, with the text of the leaflet of the Exhibition for Unknown Architects, for instance. The authors of the two were, in fact, the same: the art critic Adolf Behne, who was to be editor of the new undertaking, the architect Bruno Taut, and Walter Gropius. The new periodical was to represent a weapon for "the victory of true socialism." To be sure, its authors did not equate socialism with any of the programs advocated by the political parties: "Socialism – brotherhood – develops of itself through work done in common, and the more this common work is separated from all practical, petty, and restricted goals, the sooner will socialistic feeling, i.e. a true feeling of human brotherhood, develop. An ideal can only be realized through devotion to an idea, through idealism." Needless to say, for the architects this "common work" consisted in building: "If we succeed, brothers, after centuries of impoverishment, in raising a single work of beauty worthy of the Gothic, we will certainly have done no less for the victory of socialism than the politicians and theoreticians who fight with us on the same line but with different weapons. For then we will have furnished visible proof that socialism must lead to all that is good, that socialism is the foundation for all truly satisfactory creation. What is capable of crystallizing into beauty must be good at the root.

\*I am grateful to many people and institutions for information and references, but especially to Professor Fred Forbat of Vällingby. Dr. Herta Hesse-Frielinghaus, director of the Karl-Ernst-Osthaus-Museum in Hagen, and Hans Maria Wingler, director of the Bauhaus-Archiv in Darmstadt, very kindly put the material in their institutions at my disposal.

<sup>1</sup> Walter Gropius to Tomas Maldonado, November 24, 1963. In *Ulm 10|11*. *Zeitschrift der Hochschule für Gestaltung*, Ulm, May, 1964, 64ff.

<sup>2</sup> Dennis Sharp, *Modern Architecture and Expressionism*, London, 1966; Franco Borsi, and Giovanni Klaus Koenig, *Architettura dell'Espressionismo*, Genoa and Paris, n.d. [1967].

<sup>3</sup> Walter Gropius to Karl Ernst Osthaus, December 23, 1918; January 6, 1919, Osthaus-Archiv, Karl-Ernst-Osthaus-Museum, Hagen.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Walter Gropius to Karl Ernst Osthaus, August 3, 1919, Osthaus-Archiv.

Isn't that worth all our work?"<sup>6</sup>

The ideas that inspired the initiators of the periodical, all of them members of the Arbeitsrat, are clearly indicated by the contents intended for the first issue. Bruno Taut wanted to have a "House of Heaven" illustrated by various artists. The indispensable Paul Scheerbart, who, thanks to his Utopian novels and his book on glass architecture, had become the patron saint of the revolutionary architects, was to be represented posthumously by a short story. The Luckhardt brothers wanted to write about handicrafts and the machine, and Gropius about "building brotherhoods" (*Baubrüderschaften*).<sup>7</sup>

On the first of March, 1919, Gropius was chosen by the plenary assembly of the Arbeitsrat für Kunst as chairman of the executive committee. After his election he gave a speech in which he expressly came out in favor of the demands of his predecessor Bruno Taut, and praised "Taut's superb architectural program, which, I wish to emphasize, I endorse in its entirety." He had already declared to Osthaus: "His architectural program appeals to me deeply and is in accord with my own intentions."<sup>8</sup> One can, consequently, assume that Gropius identified himself at this time with every point in Taut's text: the support of "so-called" Utopias, experimental sites with colonies for craftsmen and artists, the undertaking of great cultural and spiritual centers (*Volksbauten*), the encouragement of housing developments, the reform of architectural competitions, the artistic education of young architects in individual architecture studios rather than professional schools, and the close cooperation of the various arts. "The only architect of significance," wrote Taut, "is the one who grasps the entire field of art and understands the radical efforts of painting and sculpture."<sup>9</sup>

Opinions differed concerning the methods by which these partly artistic, partly social, and partly professional requirements were to be carried out. Two opposing parties in the Arbeitsrat faced each other. One urged an art policy that would operate publicly; the other thought it advisable to prepare work quietly. It speaks for Gropius's clear assessment of realities, which always distinguished him, that he chose the second alternative. He saw the Arbeitsrat as the small minority, which in reality it was. "I regard our organization as a conspiracy (*Verschwörung*) . . . . If we want to achieve something strong, we must uphold our program in every respect and tolerate no compromises, least of all among ourselves . . . . We need the other *Spirit*, which, once it has been created, will bring fulfillment of itself."<sup>10</sup> Even when he informed Osthaus that he wanted to get under way something "which has been obsessing me already for many

<sup>6</sup> *Zeitschrift "Bauen". Mitteilung an Alle*, Berlin, n.d. [1919], copy in the Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

<sup>7</sup> See Bruno Taut to Karl Ernst Osthaus, April 28, 1919, October 23, 1919, Osthaus-Archiv.

<sup>8</sup> Walter Gropius, typewritten manuscript in the Bauhaus-Archiv, Darmstadt; Walter Gropius to Karl Ernst Osthaus, February 2, 1919, Osthaus-Archiv.

<sup>9</sup> Bruno Taut, *Flugschriften des Arbeitsrates für Kunst, Berlin. Ein Architekturprogramm*, Berlin, 1st ed., Christmas, 1918; 2nd ed., Spring, 1919.

<sup>10</sup> Walter Gropius, inaugural speech to the Arbeitsrat, typewritten manuscript, Bauhaus-Archiv.



1 Walter Gropius with Adolf Meyer, Stöckle House. Berlin-Zehlendorf West, 1921–22 (courtesy Professor Forbat, Vällingby)



2 Walter Gropius with Adolf Meyer, Apartment House commissioned by Adolf Sommerfeld. Berlin-Lichterfelde, 1920–21 (courtesy Professor Forbat, Vällingby)

years – a *Bauhütte!*”, he asked him – as he later was to ask his colleagues at the Arbeitsrat – to use “quiet discretion.” “Otherwise this idea . . . will perish in the economic turmoil before it can come to life.”<sup>11</sup>

Such remarks were not based merely on practical considerations; they also show the respect Gropius had for art. For him art was not a mere contrivance. “Let us not, for God’s sake, confuse useful and everyday things with art,” he cried in another speech, delivered – probably during the first year of the Bauhaus in Weimar – before craftsmen of Thüringen. “Art is sacred. It is rare, without purpose; it wanders the loneliest ways far in advance, is born and understood in the highest ecstasy.”<sup>12</sup> Practical work in the Arbeitsrat für Kunst and later in the Bauhaus could, therefore, only be a matter of preparing the ground for the art of the future. “A great, all-embracing art presupposes the spiritual unity of its time, it needs the most intimate connection with its surroundings, with living human beings. First, man must be well-formed, only then can the artist create beautiful clothes for him. The present generation must begin anew from the ground up, must rejuvenate itself, must first create a new humanity, a general life form for the people. Then *the art will come.*”<sup>13</sup>

The numerous reports of ritual in the early Bauhaus, the “festive ceremonial,” mentioned in the Bauhaus manifesto of 1919, the romantic ideal of the *Bauhütte*, and the dietary requirements and readings by candlelight take on new meaning in the light of these ideas. Gunta Stölzl, the future director of the weaving workshop, gave the following report of the first Christmas celebration in 1919: “Then great feasting. Over all a solemnity and a presentiment of the symbolic. Gropius carried food to each individually. Like the Foot-Washing.”<sup>14</sup> The sectarian, missionary, sometimes even faddish character of the early Bauhaus was not accidental; it was a necessary part of an undertaking which – in the words of the founder of the Bauhaus – “in the dark night of chaos” was to guard the “fire of faith.”<sup>15</sup> The Bauhaus, like the Arbeitsrat, was a “conspiracy.” It was charged with the creation of “the other Spirit” – whatever might be understood by that – and thereby with smoothing the way for *the art*.

Such an atmosphere of Advent did not come about by chance. It was transmitted in part by the Expressionists’ belief in the New Man, but also in part by the art-historical theory of the time. The concept of *Kunstwollen*, which had been coined by the Viennese art historian Alois Riegl, contained the idea that the will of the individual is powerless against the *telos* of art: not the artist, but art “wills.” Riegl opposed his teleological conception of art to the common nineteenth-century concept of style. Against the arbitrariness of stylistic choice he set the necessity of *Kunstwollen*. To the reformers, the concept of *Kunstwollen*

must have been even more acceptable, because Riegl applied it to the minor as well as to the higher arts. Such a broad conception of art justified the attention which was being given to objects of everyday use, and for this reason alone it was welcome, even if artists like Gropius began by warning against lumping the everyday with art. There is concrete evidence that Gropius was familiar with Riegl. A handwritten note in the Bauhaus-Archiv in Darmstadt has the following text: “Two poles east-west (Riegl) eternal fluctuation.” Riegl’s name is also mentioned in his correspondence with Osthaus.

The happy formulations and eloquence with which Gropius twice addressed himself to a broader public in April, 1919 – in the pamphlet for the Exhibition for Unknown Architects and in the first Bauhaus manifesto – cannot disguise the skepticism that resulted from his eschatological view of history. In the exhibition pamphlet, the exclamation “Let us will, conceive, produce together the new idea of architecture” is followed by the warning that we must distinguish between dream – it was only a “dream” then? – and reality, between “longing for the stars” and “everyday work.” Gropius ends this text with the exhortation that the artists-turned-craftsmen should decorate buildings with *fables* of color (*Farbenmärchen*) and build in the *imagination*. Gropius also expressed misgivings about the “Utopian Correspondence” proposed by Bruno Taut in December, 1919. Like all of Taut’s correspondents, Gropius was invited to pick a pseudonym, and it was no accident that he chose “Mass” (measure). Alongside “Stellarius,” “Prometh,” “Angkor,” and “Zacken,” the *noms de guerre* of other “Utopians,” his alias has the ring of criticism. In the end, despite his acceptance, he took no part in the correspondence. Still, Taut did have some reason to count on the interest of Gropius and his institute. In the Bauhaus program of April, 1919, the “joint planning of extensive utopian building projects – cultural and spiritual centers (*Volks- und Kultbauten*) – with far-reaching objectives” was listed among the basic principles of the school. Taut may have remembered this postulate when he inquired in a circular letter of December 26, 1919: “New architecture: hovering, impractical models: stars and completely absolute phantasy. Pure festival things. Delight through pure being . . . Couldn’t *Mass*’s school of architecture produce something like this?”<sup>16</sup>

There was no place in the teaching at the Bauhaus for the “joint planning of extensive utopian building projects,” nor at first for architectural training in general. Was this due – aside from organizational and financial reasons – to the awe that Gropius exhibited towards art and what he considered to be its highest manifestation, architecture? “Ideas die as soon as they are compromised.”<sup>17</sup> Adolf Behne, Gropius’s comrade-in-arms from the Arbeitsrat für

<sup>11</sup> Walter Gropius to Karl Ernst Osthaus, December 23, 1918, Osthaus-Archiv.

<sup>12</sup> Walter Gropius, handwritten manuscript, Bauhaus-Archiv.

<sup>13</sup> Walter Gropius, “Baukunst im freien Volksstaat.” In Ernst Drahn and Ernst Friedegg, eds., *Deutscher Revolutionsalmanach für das Jahr 1919*, Hamburg and Berlin, 1919, 135.

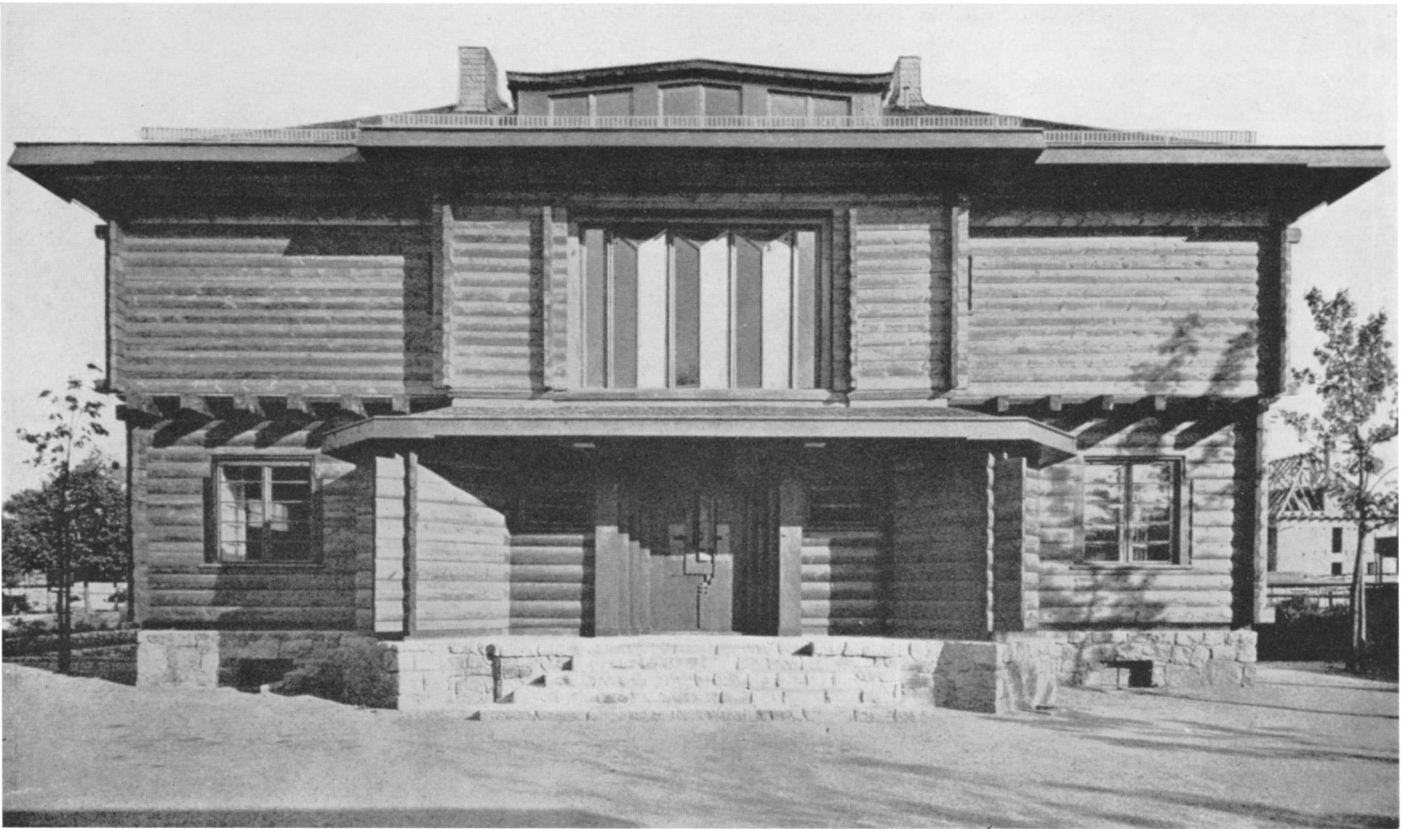
<sup>14</sup> Gunta Stadler-Stölzl, “In der Textilwerkstatt des Bauhauses 1919–

1931,” *Werk*, 1968/11, 745.

<sup>15</sup> Walter Gropius, handwritten manuscript, Bauhaus-Archiv.

<sup>16</sup> *Die gläserne Kette. Visionäre Architekturen aus dem Kreis um Bruno Taut 1919–1920*, exhibition catalogue, Leverkusen, Schloss Morsbroich, and Berlin, Akademie der Künste, 1963, 11f.

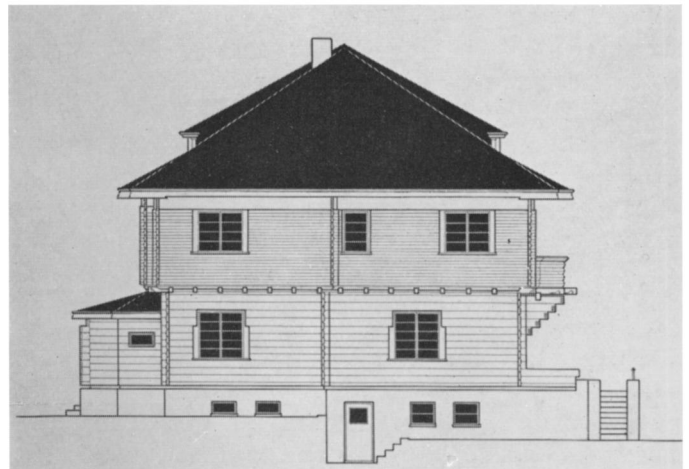
<sup>17</sup> Walter Gropius, pamphlet for the Exhibition for Unknown Architects, Berlin, April, 1919.



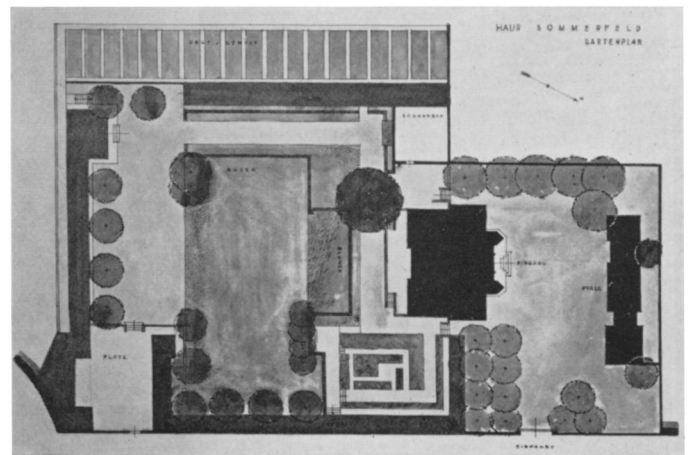
3



4



5a



5b

3, 4, 5 Walter Gropius with Adolf Meyer, Sommerfeld House. Berlin-Lichterfelde, 1920-21 (from *Bauhaus*, 1919-23 and *Wasmuths Monatshefte*)

Kunst, had similar feelings at that time: "In fact, painting today offers us greater hope that the goal of unity will be achieved than does the art which has really been chosen to lead: architecture."<sup>18</sup> Was it better, then, not to build at all than to betray the architecture of the future? In the Bauhaus manifesto architecture appears only on the horizon: "The ultimate, if distant, objective of the Bauhaus is the *Einheitskunstwerk* – the great building in which there will be no boundary between monumental and decorative art." Sculpture, painting, applied art, and handiwork had to be developed separately before they could unite in the "great building" that would house the New Man. Gropius granted the new architectural Utopia less chance of realization than did the hotheads of the "Utopian Correspondence." If his estimation of this vague, distant ideal was too high to allow him to believe in its speedy realization, was he not after all the greater visionary?

*Utopia* was the "crystalline emblem of a coming faith," as Feininger symbolized it in his woodcut for the Bauhaus manifesto. When Gropius assumed his new position in the Thuringian capital, he found it hard to convince the Weimar craftsmen that "a house by Walter Gropius" would not resemble Feininger's cathedral, and to describe "how sensible and unpretentious such a house" would be.<sup>19</sup> But just how sensible and unpretentious were the houses designed in Gropius's office in the first years after 1918?

Immediately at the end of the war Gropius found himself in the desperate situation most of his colleagues still faced many years later. "For 14 days I have been rushing feverishly through Berlin looking for some kind of work, but so far everything has fallen through, and I am already in complete despair at the outcome. In 4½ years, most of one's tracks are simply wiped out behind one," he wrote to Osthaus in December, 1918.<sup>20</sup> Shortly before the war Gropius had already worked on part of the building plans for Osthaus's Gartenstadt An der Donnerkühle near Hagen – a project less well-known but scarcely less important than the earlier housing colony on the Mathildenhöhe in Darmstadt. Now, for a short time, it seemed as if two commissions for houses would follow from this. Gropius also entertained the hope that he would be asked to build a publishing house for Osthaus's Folkwang-Verlag, but this, too, never materialized.

In the years just after 1918, Gropius and his partner Adolf Meyer were chiefly occupied with housing; a few minor additions to the Fagus factory in Alfeld are among the exceptions. Designs for settlements on the Schwansee (1920) and on the Belvedere in Weimar, as well as for a housing development for a shoe factory in Erfurt, shared the fate of

the Hagen projects: they were never carried out. In 1922 they were shown at the Bauhaus in an exhibition of Gropius's work. The Erfurt settlement was to consist of "colorfully treated, gabled houses faced with boards."<sup>21</sup> One has to imagine these projects to be as modest and unassuming as the contemporaneous Reform settlement near Magdeburg by Bruno Taut or the Stöckle House in Berlin-Zehlendorf West (destroyed in World War II; Fig. 1). The latter was designed at the beginning of 1921 in the office of Gropius and Meyer and shows only a few original characteristics, such as the diagonal planking on the gable side and the second-story French window cut into the roof. It could, as Fred Forbat put it, "almost be by Tessenow." The glass veranda, whose modular grid pattern already approaches the International Style, was added in 1922.<sup>22</sup>

A richer design distinguishes the buildings erected by the office of Gropius and Meyer for the saw-mill owner and building contractor, Adolf Sommerfeld. Forbat tells of "a quite fantastic project for an administration building for the Sommerfeld company, . . . completely of wood, which was never made public."<sup>23</sup> The design is not identical to the plan made in 1922 for an office building for Sommerfeld, in which a freer articulation of masses already points in the direction of the Philosophical Academy in Erlangen (1924) and the buildings of the Bauhaus in Dessau (1926). It predates the fall of 1920 and was never executed. However, Gropius and Meyer did succeed in building an apartment house for Sommerfeld (Berlin-Lichterfelde, fall, 1920 – summer, 1921; Fig. 2). Despite the building's traditional character, the recessed bays of the façade and the alternation of materials give it a certain dynamic effect.

In the immediate vicinity of the apartment house stood the often published Blockhaus, a dwelling for Sommerfeld designed before the fall of 1920, completed in 1921, and destroyed in World War II (Figs. 3, 4, 5). For two architects with an established reputation as leading specialists in industrial building, the Blockhaus is a truly astonishing work. One critic was reminded of the "ancient prototypes in old Saxony that still affect us so deeply today."<sup>24</sup> But considering its bold planking and rough granite socle, a closer comparison would have been the North American prairie style. The house gives the impression of a dramatized, rusticated variation of the very earliest of Wright's country houses. Thus, for example, the entrance façade of the W. H. Winslow House in River Forest (1893) has a similarly projecting roof and is laid out according to the same exact symmetry (Fig. 6). It was not for nothing that Ernst Wasmuth's publication of Frank Lloyd Wright lay constantly open on Adolf Meyer's work-table.<sup>25</sup> The deliberate primitivism of the Sommerfeld House is com-

<sup>18</sup> Adolf Behne, *Wiederkehr der Kunst*, Leipzig, 1919, 24.

<sup>19</sup> Walter Gropius, handwritten manuscript, Bauhaus-Archiv.

<sup>20</sup> Walter Gropius to Karl Ernst Osthaus, December 23, 1918, Osthaus-Archiv.

<sup>21</sup> Paul Klopfer, "Die Gropius-Ausstellung im Staatl. Bauhaus zu Weimar," *Allgemeine Thüringische Landeszeitung*, supplement *Deutschland*, Weimar, July 5, 1922.

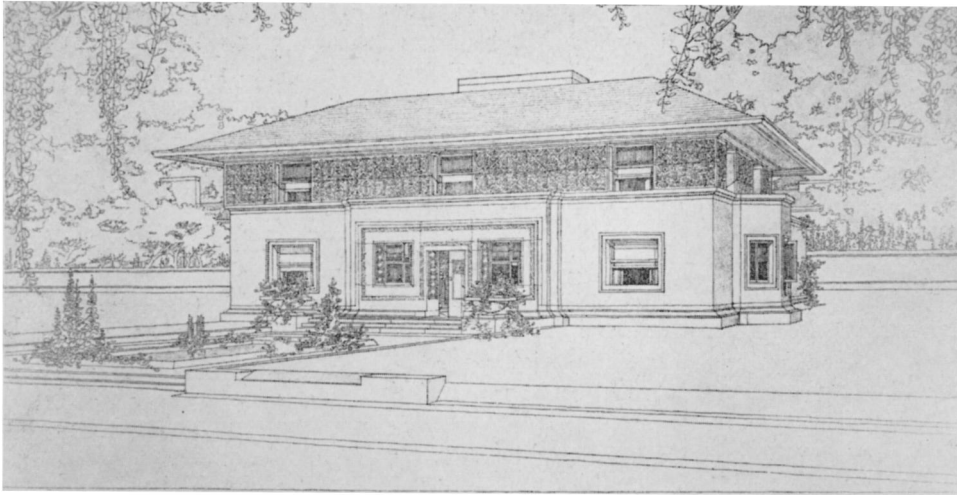
<sup>22</sup> Fred Forbat to the author, July 24, 1969. From September, 1920 on, Forbat was a co-worker in the office of Gropius and Meyer. His nume-

rous references to work done in the office are, consequently, not separately enumerated.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* The rebuilding of a Mendel House in Berlin is mentioned by Adolf Behne, "Entwürfe und Bauten von Walter Gropius," *Zentralblatt der Bauverwaltung*, December 27, 1922.

<sup>24</sup> Paul Klopfer, "Die Gropius-Ausstellung . . ."

<sup>25</sup> Verbal communication from Ernst Neufert, Darmstadt, February 18, 1969; Walter Gropius to Karl Ernst Osthaus, April 3, 1912, Osthaus-Archiv: "Die Wrightschen Sachen kenne ich aus der Wasmuthschen Biographie."



6 Frank Lloyd Wright, drawing of Winslow House, River Forest, Illinois (from *Wright, Ausgeführte Bauten und Entwürfe*, Berlin, Wasmuth, 1910)

bined with studied artistic effects. The stepped wall relief, diagonally projecting entrance, collar of protruding beams, and the horizontal and vertical discontinuities in the overshadowing cornice, break up the volume. Inside, the rooms opened onto a two-storied hall encircled at the second-story level by an angularly broken balcony (Fig. 7).

The building's owner, Adolf Sommerfeld, was an energetic champion of the Bauhaus who supported the school by acquisitions and loans. This private commission to the office of Gropius and Meyer also gave the Bauhaus shops a good deal of work. The herringbone pattern of the woodwork in the hall can already be found on furniture veneer and upholstery designed by Gropius before World War I. In his wood carvings for the doors and staircase, Joost Schmidt opposed to it an intricate geometric ornamentation of equilateral triangles, hexagrams, abbreviated human figures, and hidden allusions to the owner's enterprises. Like Schmidt, Josef Albers chose partly rectangular, partly small splintered forms for the great prismatic stained-glass windows of the upper story. The lights, which likewise came from the Bauhaus, were small glass pyramids. Only Marcel Breuer's blocklike easy chairs gave some indication of an approaching new style.

The Sommerfeld House was the first sizable cooperative achievement of the *Bauhäusler*. For Gropius it meant a step in the direction of that "idea which I have been pursuing for many years: the unification of all the arts in the service of building."<sup>26</sup> The ideal of the architectural *Gesamtkunstwerk* can in fact already be seen in Gropius's early work. During a visit to Paris, he admired the Théâtre des Champs Elysées, begun by Henry van de Velde and finished by the Perret brothers, for "the overall harmony of its architecture, sculpture, and painting."<sup>27</sup> And with his office building for the Werkbund exhibition of 1914 in Cologne, he himself made an attempt to bring the arts together in the service of architecture – even though in Cologne the monumental realism of the sculptors involved, Hermann Haller, Georg

Kolbe, Richard Scheibe, and Gerhard Marcks, only permitted a small degree of integration between architecture and the pictorial arts

The decision to use wood construction and a rich teak decoration for the Sommerfeld Blockhaus can be explained by the owner's business. It would be wrong, however, to interpret the formal appearance of the house purely as a demonstration of the possibilities of building in wood. Gropius himself argued the contrary. One year after Erich Mendelsohn had sung the praises of ferro-concrete before the Arbeitsrat,<sup>28</sup> Gropius proclaimed that wood was the material most suited to the spirit of the times. His essay bears the programmatic title "Neues Bauen."<sup>29</sup> "A new era also needs a new form. We must re-experience wood, rediscover it, re-form it, according to our own spirit and without imitating old forms that no longer suit us. It is no accident that precisely the youngest artists like to carve their ideas in wooden logs and tree trunks; they are the ones who instinctively maintain connection with modern life. Every material has its beauty, its possibilities, and its time. Wood is the building material of the present." The reasons he advances for building in wood are in part practical in nature (wood was available in sufficient quantities) and in part artistic: "Wood has a wonderful capability for artistic shaping and is by nature so appropriate to the primitive beginnings of our newly developing life. Wood is the original building material of men, sufficient for all the structural parts of a building: walls, floor, ceiling, roof, columns, and beams; it can be sawed, carved, bored, nailed, planed, milled, polished, stained, inlaid, lacquered, and painted." Sommerfeld House, the product of the Bauhaus shops, becomes from this perspective the example of a new integration, so far as it was possible at the time. Gropius sets out a kind of historical philosophy of building materials. Stone and iron (!) belong to the "old commonplaces of building," wood, on the other hand, belongs to the new spirit of the present, which, as the "first, most urgent task of a new development"

<sup>26</sup> Walter Gropius to Karl Ernst Osthaus, February 2, 1919, Osthaus-Archiv.

<sup>27</sup> Walter Gropius to Karl Ernst Osthaus, June 19, 1913, Osthaus-Archiv.

<sup>28</sup> Erich Mendelsohn, "Das Problem einer neuen Baukunst. Vortrag im

Arbeitsrat für Kunst," Berlin, 1919. In *Erich Mendelsohn. Das Gesamt-schaffen des Architekten*, Berlin, 1930.

<sup>29</sup> Walter Gropius, "Neues Bauen," In *Der Holzbau*, supplement to the *Deutsche Bauzeitung*, 1920/2, 5, from which the following quotations are also taken.



7 Sommerfeld House, interior (from *Bauhaus*, 1919–23)



8 Vignette for an invitation on the occasion of the completion of the framework of the Sommerfeld House (courtesy Bauhaus-Archiv, Darmstadt)

must “build *Hütten*.” But the material of the future, in accordance with good Scheerbartian usage, is to be glass: “For the longed for material of the distant future – pure glass – we will only be ready when the spirit of building has once again seized the entire *Volk* as it did at the time of the Gothic cathedrals.” The extent, however, to which the modest Sommerfeld House was already considered to be a glittering, faceted creation can be surmised from the vignette on the invitation to the roof-raising ceremony (Fig. 8).

The ceremony, which took place on December 18, 1920, exemplifies the mixture of solemn festivity and mummery that was fostered at the early Bauhaus. Adolf Meyer conceived a ceremony with bonfire, speaking chorus, and procession, for which he may have drawn upon the ideas of the Anthroposophists, to which he belonged. The suggestive words he put into the mouth of one of the speakers celebrate the art of building as the fulfillment and overcoming of opposites. A series of two-part phrases (“Beginning and ground/man and wife/spirit and body/movement and stillness/mass and space/groundplan and elevation”) is answered three times by a three-part formula, in which separate elements are united: “ring-circle-garland.” (“Because being – being! – flows in three ways,” murmured Ludwig Berger, producer, author and friend of Bruno Taut, at that time in his drama *Copernicus*). Finally, six *Bauhäusler* dressed as carpenters drew the garland (*Richtkranz*) up to the rafters. For the occasion, Sommerfeld had presented them with complete brown Manchester suits, including shirts and ties.<sup>30</sup>

A few days before the Sommerfeld roof-raising ceremony, competitive designs were exhibited in Weimar for a Monument to the Fallen of the March Insurrection, which was to be erected in the Weimar cemetery by the Weimar federation of trade unions. In March, 1920, during the Kapp putsch which had attempted to topple the Reich government, a number of workers had been killed in Weimar. Students of the Bauhaus had taken part in burying the victims and so incurred the displeasure of their director, who feared political complications. Gropius, however, did enter the competition for the “Memorial of the Victorious Proletariat.” Even more than the sculptural architecture of the Sommerfeld House, this architectonic sculpture demonstrates how completely at home Gropius was with the formal ideas of Expressionism (Figs. 9, 10). Its form thrusts in a single direction which forces the observer to consider implications that derive from more than its actual substance: it cuts a rift in space. In contrast, the contemporaneous funerary monuments designed by Max and Bruno Taut remain static ceremonial statuary. Only in Tatlin’s design, also made in 1920, for a monument commemorating the Third International, and in the *bozzetto* for a monument made some twenty years earlier by Hermann Obrist, is

diagonal movement similarly exploited for dynamic effect. Photographs of works by Obrist had been shown in the Exhibition for Unknown Architects as a homage to one of the spiritual fathers of Expressionism. That an artist with a pronounced spatial sense was at work here is evident from the spreading concrete platform, which marks out an area and prepares for the sudden eruption of the central mass. The only element that does not share in the dynamic energy of the rest of the monument is the small pyramid which stops the expansion of the horizontal layers. From the beginning, the design was associated by its viewers with lightning, although the thrusting movement was variously interpreted as the suddenly rising power of the Proletariat, as the Republic caught in the lightning of the reaction, or as both. Johannes Schlaf, the formerly naturalistic writer, saw the monument as a crystal shooting aloft, a symbol of life’s craving to ascend from the subconscious rigidity of death to intellectual-spiritual awareness.<sup>31</sup>

“Feeling (*Empfindung*) is truly the source of invention (*Erfindung*), of creative power (*Gestaltungskraft*), in short, of form.”<sup>32</sup> This genuinely Expressionistic credo formulated by Gropius (and put into practice by Johannes Itten in the Bauhaus *Vorkurs*), was only realized to a limited degree in the other, more restricted commissions undertaken by the office of Gropius and Meyer. Nevertheless, individuality was achieved in the Otte House in Berlin-Zehlendorf West (early 1921–22, and still in existence; Figs. 11, 12) chiefly through the use of manneristic devices: the house appears divided on the garden side but unified on the courtyard side; extremely large and extremely small windows alternate on the courtyard side; the entrance courtyard is approached on a diagonal, but the house itself has an axial plan.

In the unexecuted design of a house for Dr. Kallenbach (November, 1921; Figs. 13, 14) diagonals play an even more important role, extending even to the flower beds. Diagonally placed rectangles, laid out as a formal motif in the pavement of the entrance courtyard, govern the design of the groundplan, creating the projecting alcoves with their acute angles on the garden side and the house walls which are broken at obtuse angles. Great significance was attributed to this project in the office of Gropius and Meyer. Adolf Meyer, who was primarily responsible for the design, described it as a chance “for once really to create something without making concessions,”<sup>33</sup> not least, probably, because Kallenbach had a considerable budget at his disposal and offered no objections to a flat roof. Kallenbach’s adviser was Moholy-Nagy, who came into contact with Gropius as a consequence. On Moholy’s advice, Kallenbach invited three architects to submit plans: besides Gropius, Ludwig Hilberseimer and Jacobus Johannes Pieter Oud. Oud’s design turned out to be considerably less fascinating and provided for a less advantageous orientation of the house.

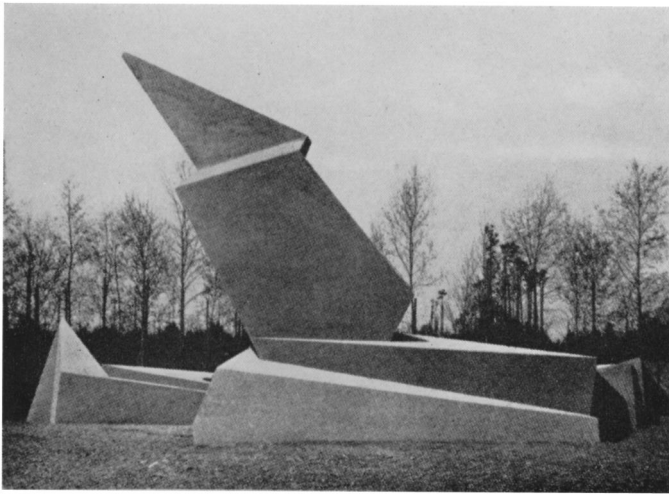
<sup>30</sup> Fred Forbat, “Bauhaus und Stijl.” In *Fred Forbat. Architekt und Stadtplane*, exhibition catalogue, Darmstadt, Bauhaus-Archiv, 1969.

<sup>31</sup> Johannes Schlaf, “Das neue Denkmal in Weimar,” *Frühlicht*, 1921–22, 1/4, 106f. The monument was financed by an assessment levied on the unionized workers. On the events leading to the monuments see Bruno Adler, *Das Weimarer Bauhaus*, Darmstadt, n.d. (1963), as well as the reports in the Weimar daily press: *Das Volk*, December 14 and 23, 1920;

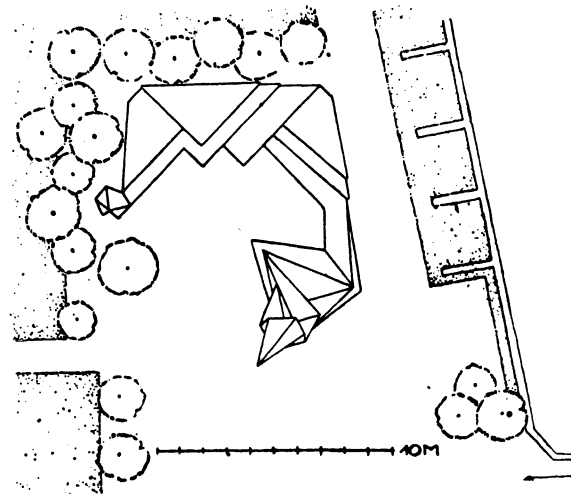
March 24, April 1 and 4, 1921; *Thüringer Volkszeitung*, December 21, 1920; *Allgemeine Thüringische Landeszeitung*, March 27, 1921. The monument was destroyed during the National Socialist era and was reconstructed after 1945.

<sup>32</sup> Walter Gropius, “Neues Bauen.”

<sup>33</sup> Adolf Meyer to Fred Forbat, December 4, 1921. Information from Fred Forbat to the author, August 27, 1969.



9 Walter Gropius, Monument to the Fallen of the March Insurrection. Weimar, 1920–21 (from *Frühlicht*, 1921–22, 1/4)



10 Walter Gropius, Plan of the Monument to the Fallen (from *Frühlicht*, 1921–22, 1/4)

However, it clearly showed the historical lead that the De Stijl architects had over the members of the Bauhaus. Not until the design of another house for a Berlin patron (1922?; Figs. 15, 16), the brilliant solution for the Kappe Brothers machine factory in Alfeld (February–April, 1922; Fig. 17), the often published designs for the *Chicago Tribune*, and the standard housing development designed in the summer of 1922, do we detect the first elements of a new trend: immaterial surfaces; thin, seemingly hovering roof slabs and projecting roofs; rich, asymmetrical exteriors, even in buildings which only allow for slight deviations from the building line.

Meanwhile, in the Bauhaus, talk was circulating about the “Machine for Living,” which was replacing the ideal of the cathedral, and Oskar Schlemmer was trying to preach the idea of *Sachlichkeit*.<sup>34</sup> But most important of all was the propaganda for De Stijl, which Theo van Doesburg had been promoting in Weimar since April, 1921. Gropius, Meyer, Forbat, and several other members of the Bauhaus had met Van Doesburg in Berlin at the house of Bruno Taut some months before, on December 19, 1920, just after the ceremony for the Sommerfeld House.<sup>35</sup> Adolf Meyer appears to have been one of the strongest supporters of Van Doesburg; it is, however, questionable whether he advocated inviting him to the Bauhaus.<sup>36</sup> It is not possible to distinguish stylistic differences between Gropius and Meyer, because in their mutual work both architects were designing within the context of Expressionistic architecture: Meyer apparently had a large part in the Sommerfeld projects<sup>37</sup> and the house of Dr. Kallenbach, whereas the Monument of the Fallen of the March Insurrection was exclusively the work of Gropius; it was modelled by Forbat after a

sketch drawn by Gropius.<sup>38</sup>

Was the “romantic” phase but an interlude irreconcilable with the early work of the two architects? Was it nothing but a tribute to the epoch of “Menschheitsdämmerung”? Admittedly Gropius had already found a formula in 1912 on the basis of which his designs between 1918 and 1922 (but including also his office building for the Cologne Werkbund Exhibition!) look like betrayals: “precise form devoid of all accident, clear contrasts, ordering of all parts, similar parts in series, and unity of form and color.”<sup>39</sup> But this enumeration should not be read with the architecture of the 1920’s in mind. In the articles which contain this catalogue of aesthetic categories, Gropius speaks of the power and majesty inherent in industrial buildings. They are criteria applicable to the epoch of Behrens’s AEG buildings, not to that of the later Bauhaus. Yet, it is significant that even the Gropius of the Fagus Factory derived the functional from the aesthetic properties, and not the reverse. A clear arrangement of the interior, Gropius wrote, simplifies the process of production. The modern worker will work more contentedly in “shops designed by artists”; the impressive silhouette of the factory building will capture the attention of the public. Such expectations were based on a number of assumptions: that the clarity of the groundplan actually constitutes an advantage and not, in some cases, an undesirable simplification of complicated processes; that in aesthetic surroundings workers are more willing to contribute to “great common values,” instead of doubting the mutuality of the “great values”; that the “artistic beauty of a factory building” also has publicity value, and thus, too, that the buying public has an “in-

<sup>34</sup> Oskar Schlemmer, *Briefe und Tagebücher*, ed. Tut Schlemmer, Munich, 1958, 116, 132.

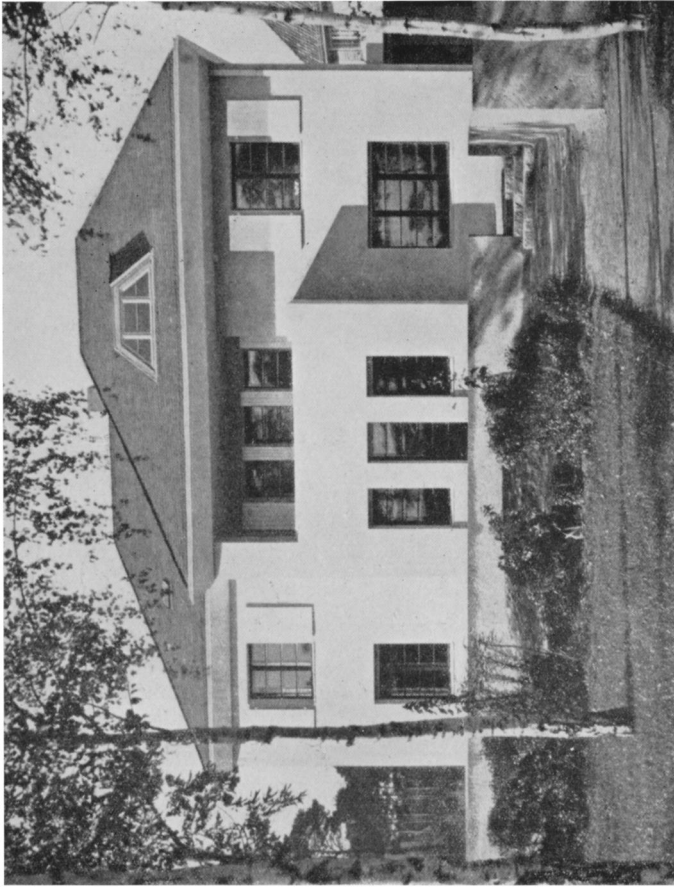
<sup>35</sup> It is Forbat’s impression that this was the first contact between Gropius and Doesburg. Fred Forbat to the author, July 24, 1969. See Fred Forbat, “Bauhaus und Stijl,” and Jan Leering in *Theo van Doesburg 1883–1931*, exhibition catalogue, Eindhoven, Van-Abbe-Museum, 1968.

<sup>36</sup> Fred Forbat doubts it; Werner Graeff, one of the first to take Doesburg’s course, thinks it probable. Verbal communication from Werner Graeff, Essen, December 18, 1968.

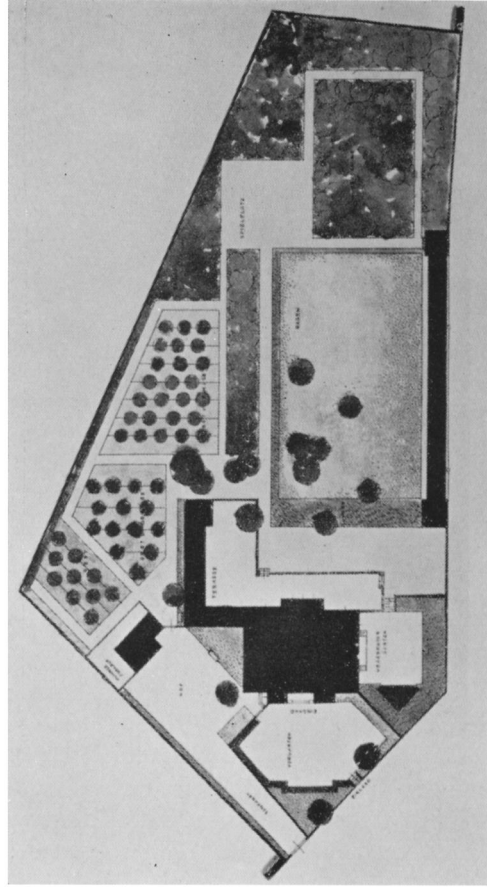
<sup>37</sup> Verbal communication from Ernst Neufert, Darmstadt, February 18, 1969.

<sup>38</sup> Fred Forbat to the author, July 24, 1969.

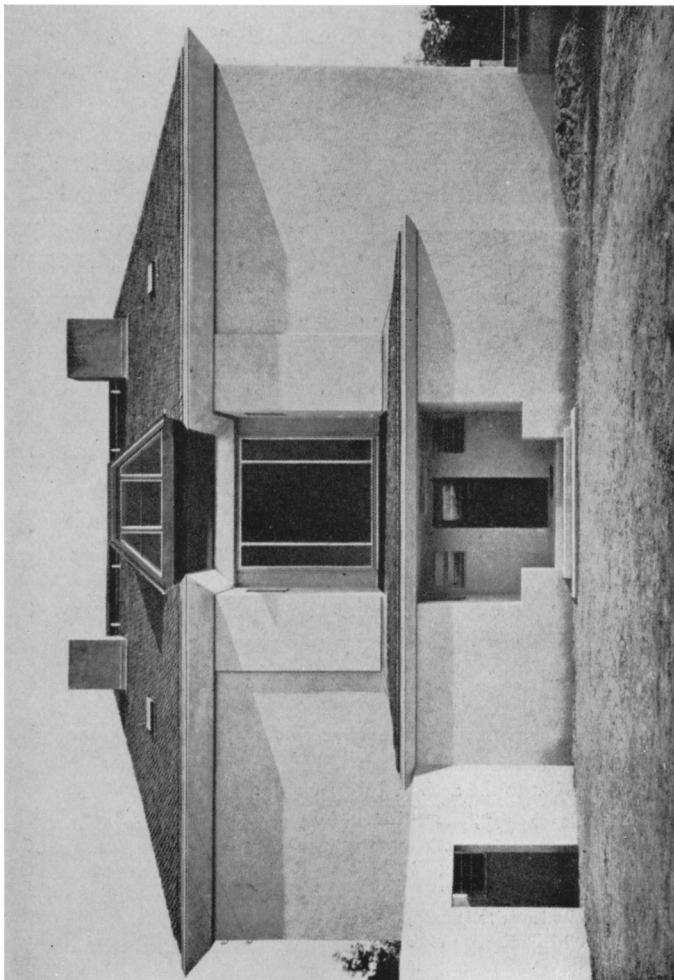
<sup>39</sup> Walter Gropius, “Sind beim Bau von Industriegebäuden künstlerische Gesichtspunkte mit praktischen und wirtschaftlichen vereinbar?” *Der Industriebau*, 1912, III/1 1, 5f.; Walter Gropius, “Die Entwicklung moderner Industriebaukunst,” *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Werkbundes*, 1913, 19f. Both articles have the same content in part.



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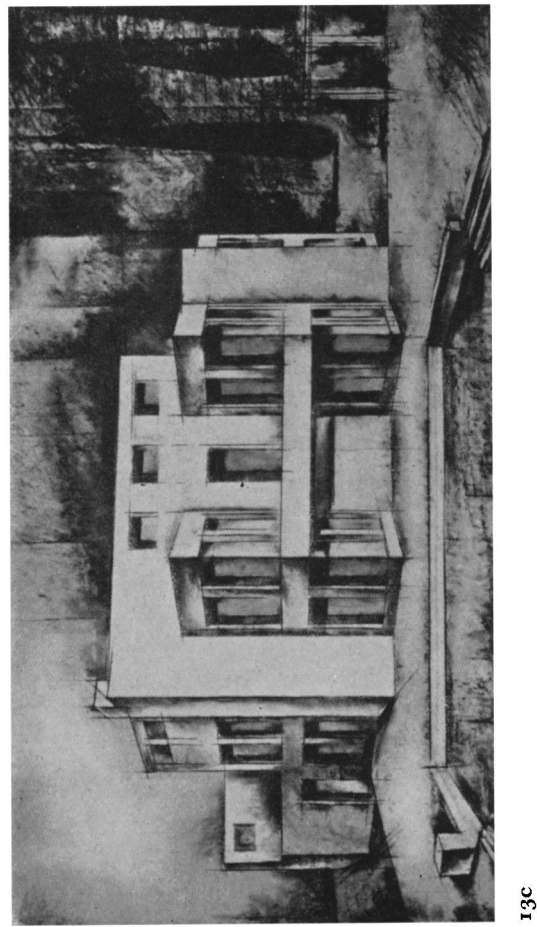
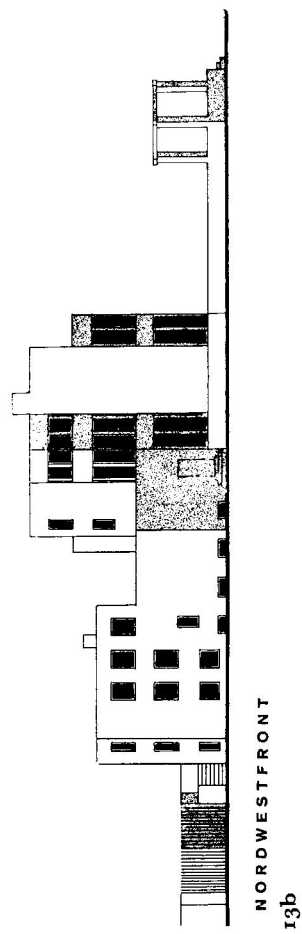
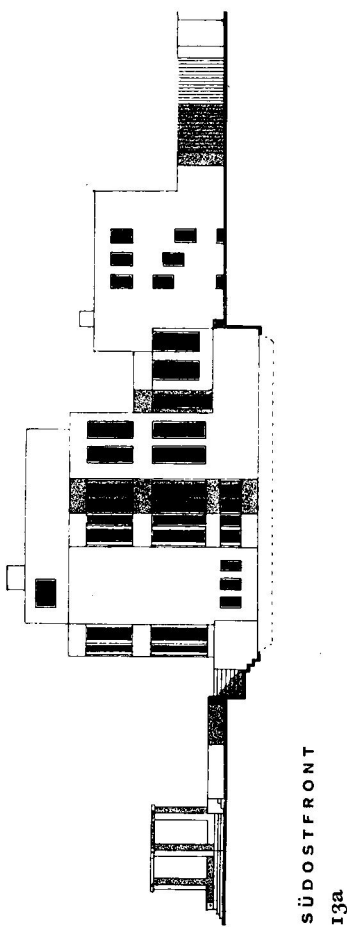
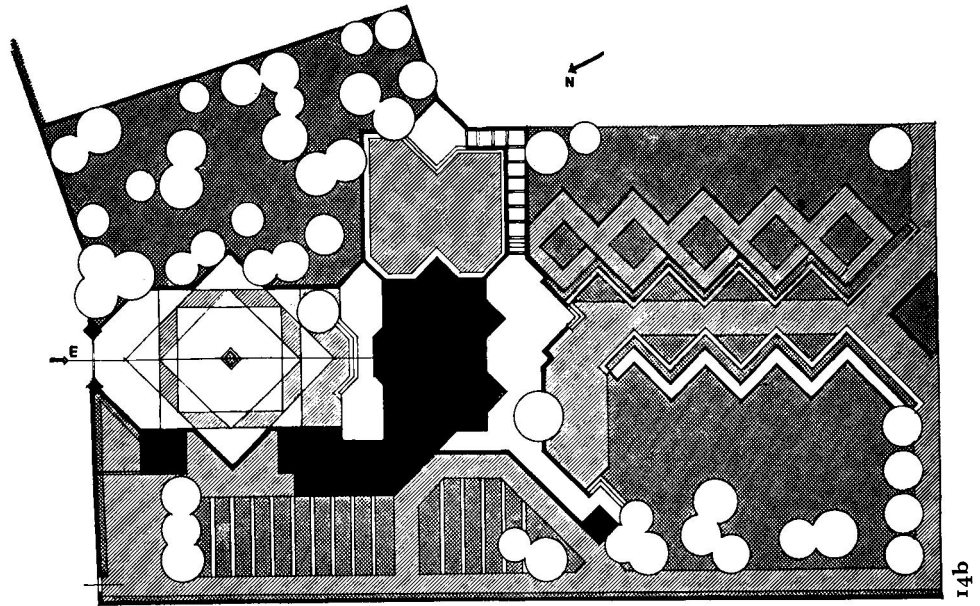
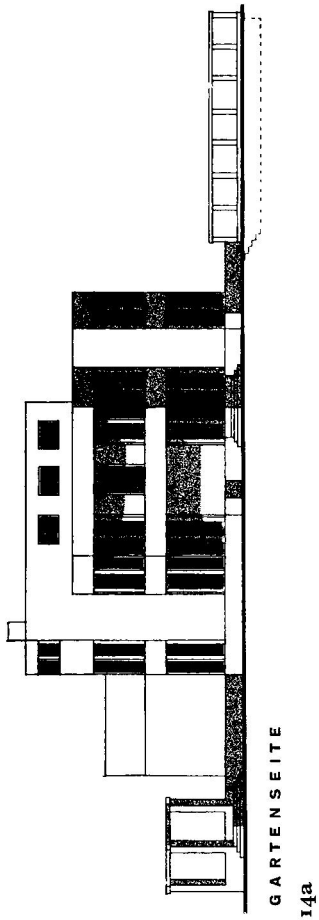


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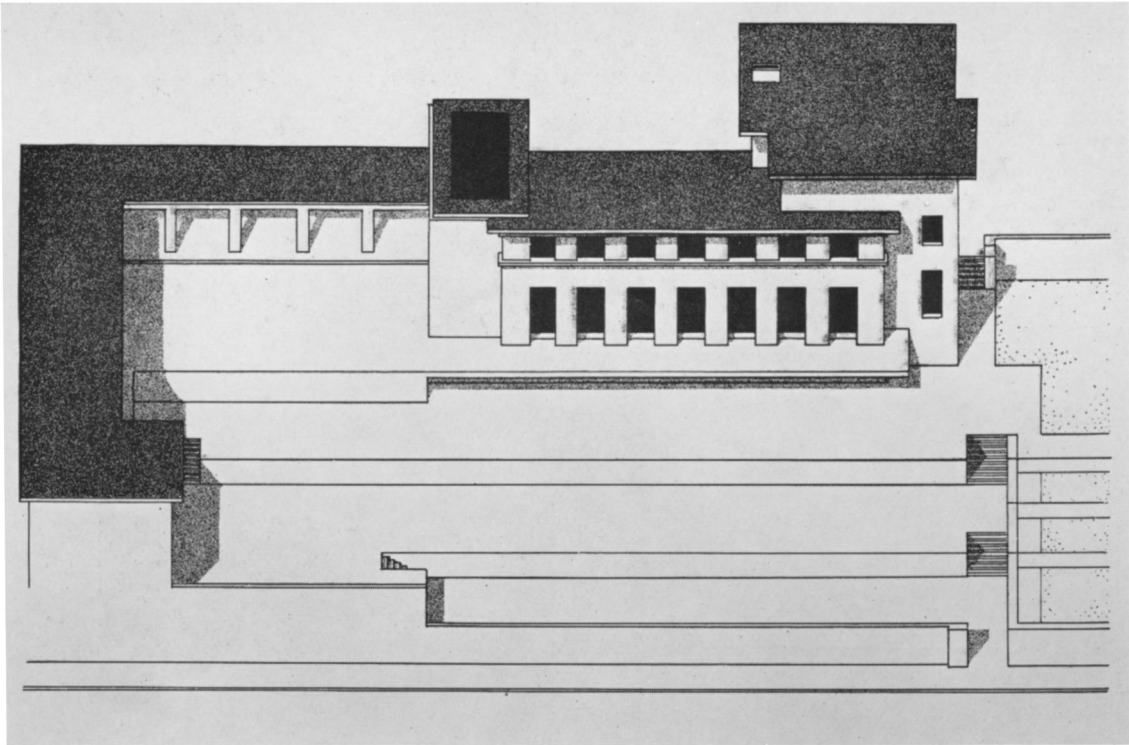


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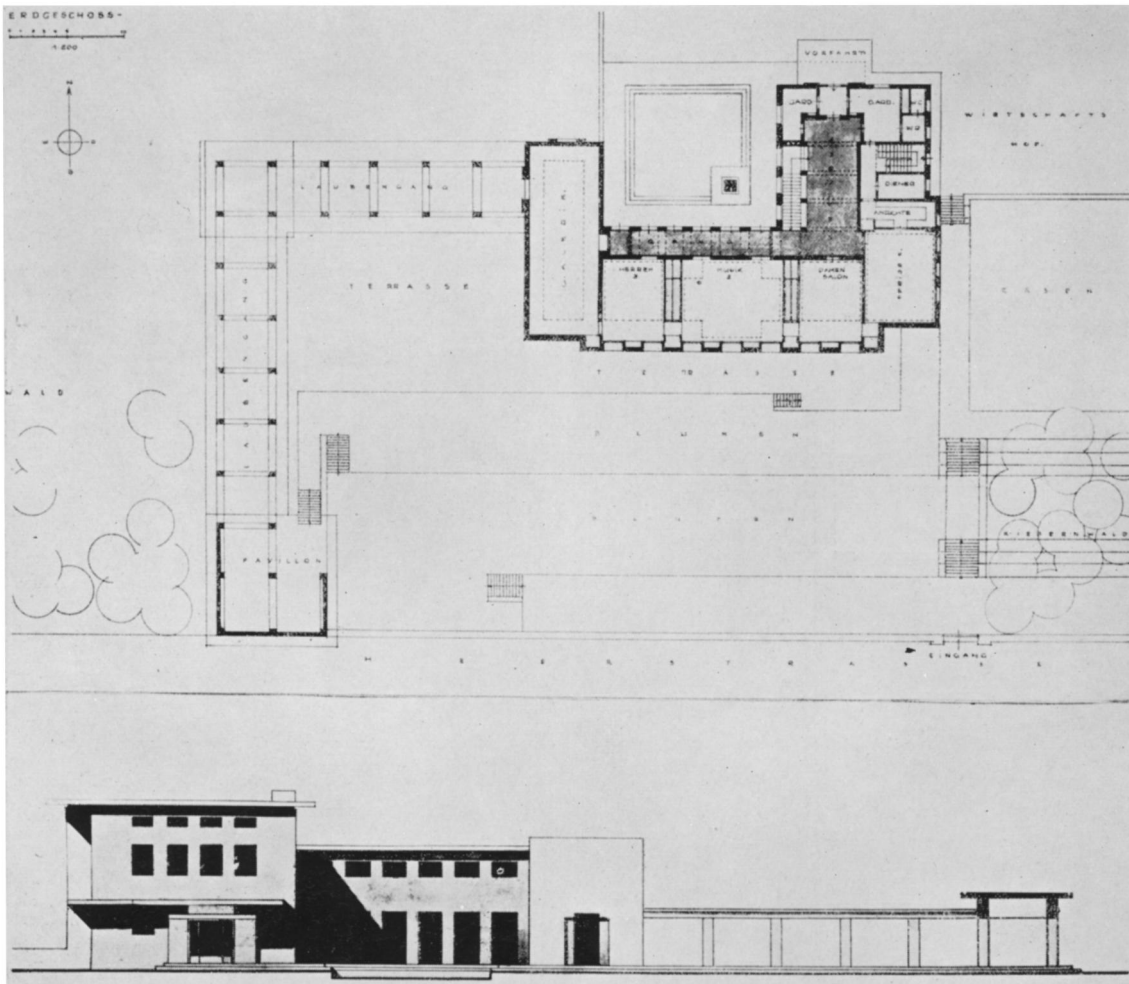
11, 12 Walter Gropius with Adolf Meyer, Otte House. Berlin-Zehlendorf West, 1921-22 (from *Wasmuths Monatshefte*)



13, 14 Walter Gropius with Adolf Meyer, Project for Kallenbach House, 1921 (from *Wasmuths Monatshefte*)

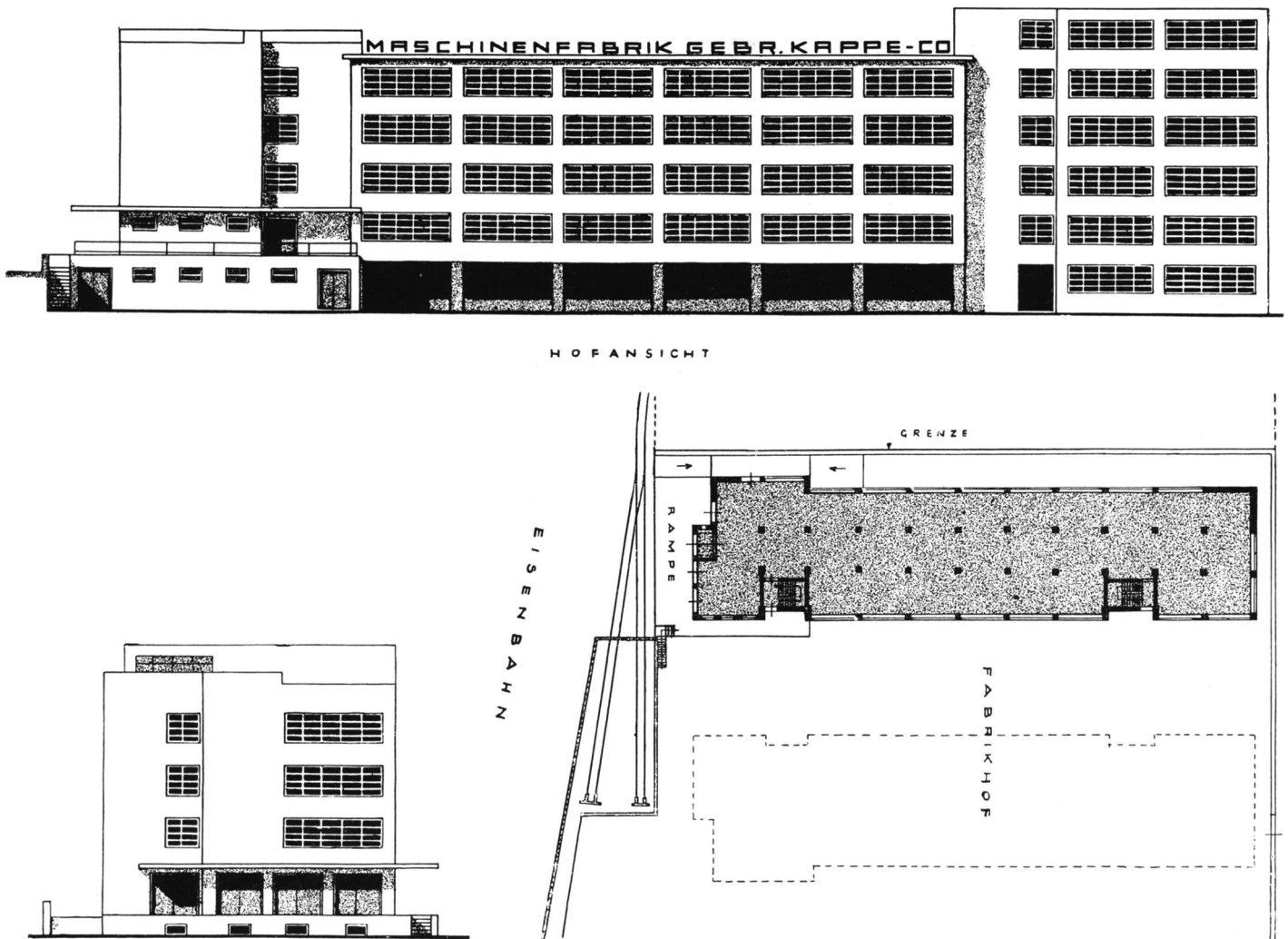


15



16

15, 16 Walter Gropius with Adolf Meyer, Project for House in Berlin, 1922? (from *Wasmuths Monatshefte*)



17 Walter Gropius with Adolf Meyer, drawing of Gebrüder Kappe Machine Factory. Alfeld, 1922 (from *Wasmuths Monatshefte*)

born” aesthetic sense. These are arguments that assume aesthetic values *a priori* and seek to justify them *a posteriori*.

Between 1918 and 1922, when Gropius, in theory and in practice, gave highest priority to form and expression, he was doing no differently than he had in the period before World War I, except that before 1914 expression was connected with objective content: “The architect is able . . . to give worthy expression to the inner value of the organization and method of work.”<sup>40</sup> The material requirements – economy, construction, the organization of movement – are “elements for symbolic representation”; the forms created by the artist accomplish their purpose by a “poetic exaggeration.” In contrast, during the years just after 1918, Gropius made expression absolute: “Feeling is truly the source . . . of form.”<sup>41</sup> But Gropius’s renunciation of purely utilitarian architecture did not first come with the Sommer-

feld House and the Monument to the Fallen: it was already present in his earliest writings and buildings as part of his heritage from Behrens.<sup>42</sup> It was no accident that Gropius substituted the phraseology “*Monumentale Kunst und Industriebau*” for the title of his Hagen speech (in itself already characteristic), “*Kunst und Industriebau*.”<sup>43</sup>

Even the note of pathos directed toward a distant future may be found at an early date: “Not until the great good fortune of a new faith is once again allotted to man, will art again fulfill its highest goal and, as a sign of inner refinement, be capable of inventing serene decorative forms for the austere forms of the beginning.” This sentence does not appear in a proclamation of 1919 by the director of the Bauhaus, but in the *Werkbund Jahrbuch* of 1914.<sup>44</sup>

In contrast to this, the opinions differ which Gropius formed in 1914, 1919, and especially in 1923 in respect to

<sup>40</sup> Walter Gropius, “Sind beim Bau von Industriegebäuden . . .,” 6.

<sup>41</sup> Walter Gropius, “Der stilbildende Wert industrieller Bauformen,” *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Werkbundes*, 1914, 29, 30; Walter Gropius, “Neues Bauen.”

<sup>42</sup> See Stanford Owen Anderson, “Peter Behrens and the New Architecture of Germany, 1900–1917,” Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, New York, 1968. According to Anderson, Gropius showed himself as the *enfant terrible* of the *Werkbund* controversy of 1914, in which he joined

the party of Henry van de Velde and spoke out against Muthesius’s demands for types in design and in favor of spontaneous artistic individuality (page 411). The letters preserved in the Osthaus-Archiv and the Bauhaus-Archiv confirm that Gropius wanted to go further in condemning Muthesius than did Osthaus, for example.

<sup>43</sup> Walter Gropius to Karl Ernst Osthaus, March 12 and 18, 1911, Osthaus-Archiv.

<sup>44</sup> Walter Gropius, “Der stilbildende Wert . . .”

the value of handwork. Before the war Gropius scarcely gave handwork a chance. "One has to accept for better or for worse that today the artisan in the old sense is, so to speak, in his death throes."<sup>45</sup> The exclusion of individual fortuitousness to which handcrafted work is subject and the increase of productivity due to the machine seemed to him to be the inevitable consequences of progress. Characteristically, in a report sent by him in January, 1916 to the Grossherzoglich-Sächsischen Staatsministerium in Weimar, which contained suggestions for the founding of an art-advisory center in Weimar, Gropius spoke of a team of artists, tradesmen, and technicians.<sup>46</sup> The artisan was not included in this triumvirate, despite the fact that the Ministerium had expressly inquired about the possibilities for influencing handicraft.

After the war, however, Gropius's attitude toward handwork changed for a short time. His war experiences had completely shaken his confidence in the positive effects of technology and industry. Handwork profited from it. The Deutsche Werkbund, which had shown an interest in its early *Jahrbücher* in such subjects of future importance as transportation or industrial building, dedicated its *Jahrbuch* for 1920 to "handicraft of the past and present," and Otto Bartning, Heinrich Tessenow, and Josef Hoffmann declared handwork to be the "essential element of a productive *Volk*."<sup>47</sup> The high cost of hand production, which had previously been used as an argument against handwork, was now considered to be an advantage. Raw materials were scarce, and the role of work in the productive process should be increased accordingly. "Every bit of raw material that we possess in this country or import with our last pennies must be increased in value many times over through highly qualified handwork or industry and above all through inimitable individuality of form," wrote Gropius at the time.<sup>48</sup> Like many others then, he recommended handwork to artists as a means of securing a living. This was the answer of 1918 to the old complaint against the threatening rise – or actual existence – of a proletariat of artists.<sup>49</sup> Thus, for example, in a questionnaire circulated in the spring of 1919, the Arbeitsrat für Kunst gathered opinions on how the great masses of artists could be won over to handwork. That handwork would have a profitable future was simply taken for granted. It is in this light that we must also view the role of handicraft training at the Bauhaus. From this perspective a building such as Sommerfeld's Blockhaus loses its exotic, even if not its anachronistic, character.

Just *how* anachronistic this high estimation of handwork was, is shown by the unqualified faith Gropius placed in the "Werkbrüder" of the *Volk*. In those years, handwork represented for him a basis on which a federation of all

creative workers, no matter what their social origins, could be built. It was among the *Volk*, however, and not among the artists that he expected to find new artistic beginnings. "New, spiritually still untapped strata of the *Volk* are forcing their way up from the depths . . . Their fresher, undulled instincts are still rooted in nature. It is to them that the future artist will turn, to the original serene soul of the people (*Volksgeist*), which is not afraid of color, the shimmer of gold, sweetness, of finding childlike joy in beauty."<sup>50</sup> Politicians were more realistic. In the same almanac in which Gropius proclaimed the salvation and renewal of the times from the "original serene soul of the people," the then chancellor of the Reich, Philipp Scheidemann, called for the scientific organization of labor-saving methods and the development of rationalized means of production.

"All of us must go back to handwork!" the first Bauhaus manifesto of 1919 had insisted. "A conscious return to the old handwork would be . . . an atavistic mistake," wrote Walter Gropius five years later when the reorientation of the Bauhaus had been completed.<sup>51</sup> Handwork now meant the training of spatial and plastic imagination, the preparation of the student for the more complicated work methods of industry, and an experimental area for industrial production, but nothing more. This conflict with the older universalist concept of handwork was in full swing at the Bauhaus in 1922 – the same year in which Peter Behrens belatedly and solemnly celebrated "the new romance of handwork."<sup>52</sup>

With the change in the valuation of handwork, the attitude towards the outside world changed as well. Direct participation in the present, active intervention in the world outside us, mastery of every industrial technique – these replaced artistic concern and eschatological expectation of salvation within a small circle. "Nothing can happen to us if we make ourselves independent of the outside world," Gropius had once noted, and in much the same vein he had written in a letter to his friend Osthaus: "Nothing is left for us now but to ignore the real world and to build our own separate inner world."<sup>53</sup> Retreat into an inner world when the external world was out of step with it now seemed out of date. The projects of Gropius and Meyer after 1922 sought no longer to make their occupants and users "independent of the external world," but rather to set them in the midst of it.

Rodenkirchen bei Köln

(translated by Renate F. Franciscono)

<sup>45</sup> Walter Gropius, "Sind beim Bau von Industriegebäuden . . .," 5.

<sup>46</sup> Printed in Hans M. Wingler, *Das Bauhaus*, Braunschweig, 1962, 29f.

<sup>47</sup> Otto Bartning, "Ein Unterrichtsplan," January, 1919, typewritten manuscript, Bauhaus-Archiv.

<sup>48</sup> Walter Gropius, speech to Weimar craftsmen, handwritten manuscript, Bauhaus-Archiv.

<sup>49</sup> See Nikolaus Pevsner, *Academies of Art Past and Present*, Cambridge, 1940.

<sup>50</sup> Walter Gropius, "Baukunst im freien Volksstaat", 134.

<sup>51</sup> Walter Gropius, "Der Baugeist der neuen Volksgemeinde," *Die Glocke*, June 5, 1924, x/10, 314.

<sup>52</sup> Peter Behrens, "Die neue Handwerks-Romantik," *Die Innendekoration*, 1922, xxxiii/10.

<sup>53</sup> Walter Gropius, handwritten manuscript, Bauhaus-Archiv; Walter Gropius to Karl Ernst Osthaus, February 2, 1919, Osthaus-Archiv.