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Le Corbusier and Walter Gropius: contacts prior to the Second World War

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Le Corbusier left neither memoirs nor a life history written with his own pen. Nonetheless, he did leave hundreds of boxes filled with diaries, letters, notes, drawings with comments attached, designs and sketches – a wealth of documentary evidence upon which future historians might reconstruct his biography.

When Le Corbusier decided that he was destined to become a great architect and appointed to bring a new architecture into the world, with full deliberation, he therefore meticulously kept every shred of documentation of his life, as had Stendhal and Thomas Mann before him.

Most of this vast body of information is stored at the Fondation Le Corbusier in Paris. The author of this article had the opportunity to examine this material in depth, as well as the sources found at the Bauhaus-Archiv in Berlin and the CIAM-Archiv in Zürich.

The extensive documentation available made it possible to study Le Corbusier's contacts with leading architects in many countries. This paper focuses on one of these contacts – the relationship between Le Corbusier and Walter Gropius.

Early intersections

The personal relationship eventually established between Le Corbusier and Walter Gropius was preceded by a long chain of intersections where their biographies coincided.

In 1903, Walter Gropius, the German architect-to-be, spent the spring term studying in the architectural faculty at the Munich Technische Hochschule. Seven years later, in April 1910, the young Charles-Edouard Jeanneret (later known as Le Corbusier)¹ arrived in Munich to study the architecture and town planning of Germany. Jeanneret studied under the supervision of Theodor Fischer.

In Munich Jeanneret became acquainted with August Thiersch's theory of diagonal proportioning, which he later used extensively in his early projects

in the *L'Esprit Nouveau* period. In 1903, August Thiersch was head of architectural studies at the Munich Technische Hochschule as professor of architectural design, and it is highly probable that Gropius attended several of his lectures. Gropius, like Jeanneret later, encountered the system of diagonal proportioning in Munich, and also made use of diagonal diagrams in his early works.²

The next biographic intersection in the two architects' lives occurred in 1910, when they were both working at Peter Behrens's architectural office in Berlin, although they never met personally. Walter Gropius was employed there from spring 1908 until March 1910, when he left Behrens's to establish an office of his own, sharing his new premises with Adolf Meyer. Jeanneret held a job at Behrens's from

Figure 1. Peter Behrens, Schröder House, Eppenhausen, 1909 (© the Author).



Figure 2. Charles-Edouard Jeanneret, Maison Jeanneret, La Chaux-de-Fonds, 1912 (© the Author).

November 1910 until late March 1911. At the start of their independent careers, both Gropius and Jeanneret were greatly influenced by Peter Behrens's ideas and projects (Figs 1, 2 and 3).³

The next parallel stage of their professional development revolves around the ideology and activities of the Werkbund in Germany. Jeanneret first encountered the Werkbund's ideas in 1910. In June of that year, he made the acquaintance of a number of architects who belonged to the Werkbund at their congress in Berlin. Jeanneret was profoundly influenced by the Werkbund's concepts and continued elaborating upon them, in projects and articles, until the beginning of World War I; one can still detect their echoes in his articles in *L'Esprit Nouveau*, published in the 1920s.⁴ Gropius, for his part, participated in Werkbund activities from 1908





Figure 3. Walter Gropius, Villa von Armin, Falkenhagen, Pommern, 1911–12 (© the Author).

and maintained close relationships with many architects, industrialists and art patrons associated with the organisation (among them, Karl-Ernst Osthaus). In 1914, it was Gropius who built the office and factory building for the Werkbund exhibition in Cologne.

The outbreak of World War I and move to Paris at the end of 1916 meant a detachment from Germany for Jeanneret. In his outline and draft of an unfinished article entitled 'France ou Allemagne' (France or Germany), on file at the Fondation Le Corbusier in Paris, Jeanneret planned to compare the national characters of the French and Germans. Although the article was never completed, a number of its anti-German ideas later appeared in his articles in *L'Esprit Nouveau*.

Gropius first came across Le Corbusier's publica-

tions in 1921. According to Winfried Nerdinger,⁵ it was Lily Hildebrandt (the former wife of the Stuttgart historian Hans Hildebrandt, known for his interest in modern French art and architecture), who sent Gropius, at the Bauhaus, several German translations of articles by Le Corbusier which had appeared in *L'Esprit Nouveau*. Lily and Hans Hildebrandt, therefore, were the link that first connected the Bauhaus and *L'Esprit Nouveau*. It is important to note that the idea of bringing the two together is attributed not to Le Corbusier, but rather to 'a third party'. This can be explained, on the one hand, by a certain tension in relations between France and Germany at the time, and on the other, by the changes in Le Corbusier's attitude towards Germany following World War I.

In any case, Le Corbusier's concepts regarding 'a

house as a machine for living' must have come to the attention of Gropius by the end of 1921 since, in February 1922, he used Le Corbusier's term in his article 'Wohnmaschinen' (Machines for Living).⁶ It should be borne in mind that Le Corbusier also appropriated ideas from Gropius, when he, for instance, published retouched photographs of American grain elevators in *L'Esprit Nouveau* magazine, n.1, in October 1920, and later in *Vers une architecture* in 1923. These photographs were taken from Gropius's article in the *Werkbund Jahrbuch*, 1913.

The next stage in the relationship between Le Corbusier and Gropius opened at the time of the Bauhaus exhibition in Weimar in 1923, when they first started writing to each other. This was followed by a personal encounter.

Meetings and correspondence: analysis of the facts

The Le Corbusier archive in Paris and the Bauhaus-Archiv in Berlin house the extensive correspondence between the two architects. Most of these letters were written between 1923 and 1924. From 1925 on, the architects exchanged letters only occasionally. The last letter available, written prior to World War II, is dated June 1935.⁷

The correspondence took place in two languages: Le Corbusier wrote in French, while Gropius responded in German. Le Corbusier had acquired a good command of German while living in Germany in 1910–1911. The CIAM (International Congresses of Modern Architecture) proceedings, stored at the CIAM archive in Zürich, suggest that Le Corbusier had a comprehensive understanding of German

phraseology, with all the richness of its meanings and nuances. Gropius knew French no less fluently, so no language difficulties hindered the communication between the two. Jerzy Soltan, who had worked for Le Corbusier, noted that in his later years the architect enjoyed imitating the German accent when he was in a good mood.⁸

The correspondence between Le Corbusier and Gropius started in the summer of 1923 regarding the invitation the German architect sent Le Corbusier to participate in the exhibition 'Internationale Architektur', organised within the framework of the Bauhaus exhibition 'Kunst und Technik eine neue Einheit' (Art and Technology – a New Unity). The exhibition was on view from 15th August to 30th September 1923. On the same day it opened, 15th August, 'The Bauhaus Week' was inaugurated in Weimar, incorporating concerts at the Jena Theatre and performances of modern dance and music in which both teachers and students participated. The Week, as well as the Bauhaus exhibition, was a great success with the general German public. As Magdalena Droste remarked, just the newspaper critiques of the exhibition 'filled two fat albums'.⁹

Gropius invited colleagues from Czechoslovakia and Denmark, Le Corbusier from France, Oud from Holland, and the German architects Mies van der Rohe, Erich Mendelsohn and Bruno Taut to participate in the exhibition of modern architecture.

Le Corbusier shipped two packages from Paris to Weimar (on 30th July 1923 and on 4th August 1923), containing detailed instructions and designs for the four panels as well as photographic materials for the exhibition, which are now stored

at the Bauhaus-Archiv in Berlin. At the Bauhaus exhibition he presented the *Ville Contemporaine* (plan for 'A Contemporary City for Three Million Inhabitants'), which he had shown in 1922 at the *Salon d'Automne* in Paris; mass-production houses Citrohan; and the model for 'immeubles villas' that he had developed.

Le Corbusier's works were placed in the exhibition side by side with those of Gropius. A comparison of the two displays reveals obvious differences between the architects' concepts of mass production and types of dwellings. Le Corbusier sought to establish a standard, an ideal for habitation in new shapes and kinds of constructions, as can be seen from his designs for 'immeubles villas' and the Citrohan houses. Gropius, on the other hand, tended to combine basic geometric forms, or types, in mass production. While Gropius was involved in prefabricated, mass-production housing, Le Corbusier chose to adjust an ideal project – a standard-prototype – to each particular site.

Le Corbusier took advantage of the exhibition thoroughly to familiarise the German public with his works, both theoretical and practical. His exhibition panels were carefully thought out and devised, clearly depicting his work down to the smallest details and providing a comprehensive picture of his creative activities.

The display drew a wide response from the German architects. In a letter dated 4 September 1923, Moholy-Nagy wrote to Le Corbusier from the Bauhaus: 'Your works attract enormous interest and greatly enrich our exhibition, please accept our gratitude for the materials you sent us'.¹⁰ In a letter dated 18th September 1923, Gropius requests Le

Corbusier's permission to exhibit his works in other German towns as part of the travelling exhibition:

The international architectural exposition at our Bauhaus exhibition stirred lively interest from all sides, as this is the first time that such a rich exhibition, representing different countries, was held. As you would expect, we received requests from Berlin, Hamburg, Düsseldorf, Hannover to bring the exhibition over, even for a brief period of time. In order better to illuminate our shared architectural aspirations, so that the general public could ascertain that there are parallel trends in all the countries, please give your consent to extending the presence of your collection at the exhibition for another two–three months. Please let us know as soon as possible. I will inform you regarding the time when the exhibition will be presented at the second site. Please accept my sincere gratitude for your participation in the exhibition.¹¹

With his consent, Le Corbusier's panels in the Bauhaus exhibition were shown in a number of German cities.

In their correspondence from 1923–1925, a fascinating discussion unfolds between Le Corbusier and Gropius, regarding both Le Corbusier's articles in *L'Esprit Nouveau*, and Bauhaus publications devoted to the 1923 exhibition, which were forwarded to Le Corbusier by Bauhaus-Verlag at Walter Gropius's request. This discussion reflects, once again, the differences in the architects' concepts of the standard and the type, as well as in issues concerning mass production. Gropius writes in a cordial manner, relating to Le Corbusier as a close confederate, a spiritual

'brother',¹² while Le Corbusier is forthright and markedly cold when it comes to their fundamental differences of opinion.

These letters suggest that Walter Gropius is being influenced by Le Corbusier's ideas at that time. In contrast, Le Corbusier becomes more and more alienated from the German's concepts, and the ideological split between him, *L'Esprit Nouveau*, and the Bauhaus deepens. One can see from his letters to Le Corbusier that Gropius is not eager to acknowledge the disagreements; he is interested in collaboration with the international architectural avant-garde. Gropius writes in his letter of 13 November 1923 (Fig. 4):

I am especially happy that your magazine *L'Esprit Nouveau*, which is the best, to my knowledge, that is published nowadays, has reappeared. To my great interest, I read in the latest issue that your book on architecture is about to appear in print. Would you be so kind as to take the trouble to supply me with a copy, in exchange for the Bauhaus book that, I hope, was sent to you by the publishers some time ago? Since my intentions are very close to yours, I want to take this opportunity to report about the book in the press. Your ideas, which engross me as well, go far beyond professional interests and are relevant to life in general. Soon a work of mine will be printed in Wasmuth; as soon as it is available I will send you a copy.

I would very much like to reach a situation in which the most important contemporary architects would be in touch with each other without personalised polemics, so typical of the Stijl group, as things used to be. You, Mr. Corbusier, with your formidable way with words, have the best chance

of promoting such a situation through your journal.¹³

In addition to their letters, the architects exchange their works published in the *L'Esprit Nouveau* and the Bauhaus editions, and they send each other their newly published books. In their letters, they respond to the works received. In Le Corbusier's opinion, both the Bauhaus school and Gropius personally are headed in the wrong direction entirely. Le Corbusier's main interest in architecture is the manifestation of modernity, technology and perfection – the creation of the standard, not the type. Hence he believes that the Germans' quest for the type that could be industrially reproduced – leading to rationalisation in the building industry – is simply wrong. The best evidence of these conceptual disagreements is provided by the works presented by Le Corbusier and Gropius at the 1923 Bauhaus exhibition and at the 1927 Werkbund exhibition.

This exchange of letters, viewpoints and professional materials constitutes the body of their correspondence in 1923–1924. In this paper, quotations are presented from the letters written during this period, which shed additional light on the nature of the correspondence between the two architects. Walter Gropius writes to Le Corbusier on 7th January 1924:

Having returned from the trip, I am grateful to you for your detailed and nice letter of 6th December 1923. In general, I must admit that I agree with your description of the general situation. As to my remarks concerning the Stijl, you must have misunderstood them. I am against the polemic art of van Doesburgs, which I perceive as being not

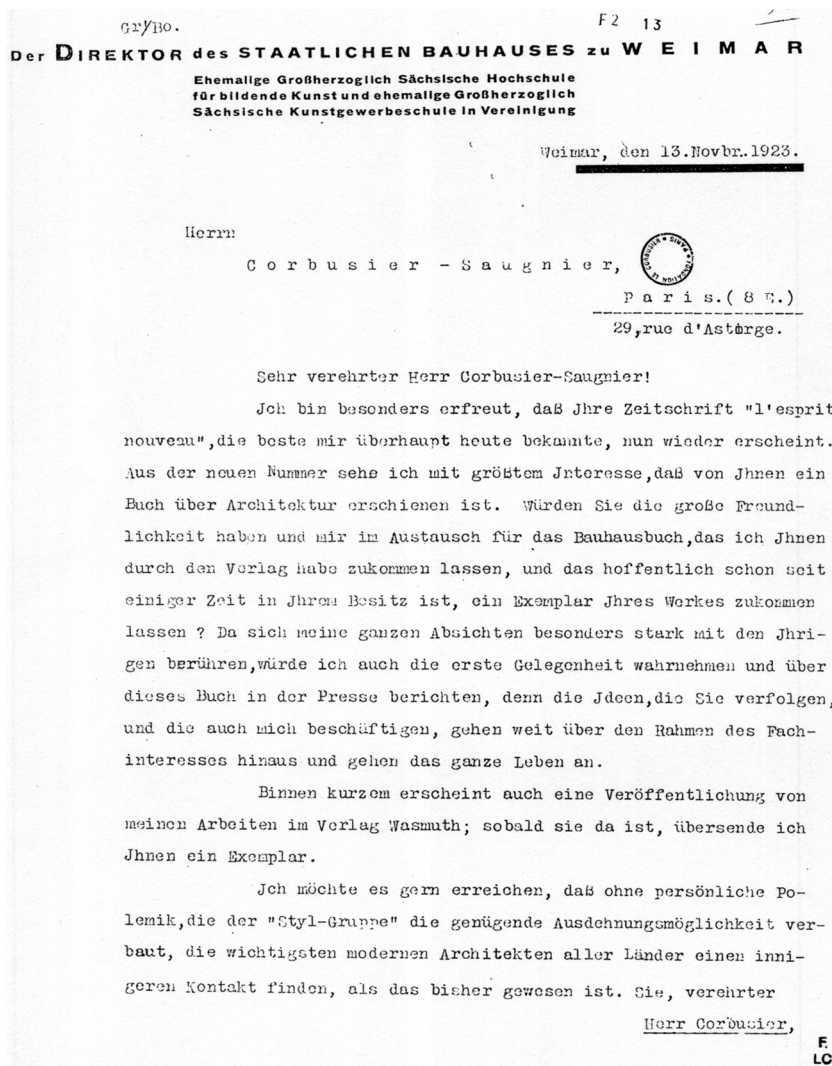


Figure 4. Walter Gropius, Weimar, Letter to Le Corbusier, Paris, 13th November 1923 (© FLC / ADAGP, Paris 2003).

only unbusiness-like, but harmful as well, and would like to establish contacts with determined persons from different countries, contacts that would go beyond personal interests. I am ready to support your initiative and organise a joint exhibition of the best German modern architecture and the masters who are connected to it. I am only asking you to give me some time. I would like to think everything over thoroughly.

The Bauhaus publications were sent to you by the publishers on 8 October. However, the book was misaddressed and returned. After that, at my request, they sent you two copies, one on 27th October and the other on 11th November. The publishers cannot send more copies, so I do hope that you will be able to make do with these copies – Mr. Ozenfant approached us with the same request. Please let me know as soon as the two copies reach you. As to your copy of *Vers une architecture*, which you dedicated to me, I have not yet received it, unfortunately. It interests me immensely.

The sheets placed at the disposal of the international architectural exhibition are at the moment on exhibition in Hannover, and, it seems, are to be shipped to Berlin. They evoke great interest.¹⁴

In his response dated 11th January, Le Corbusier writes:

I have received your letter of the 7th and I am answering you without delay.

I would appreciate it if you would prepare an item for *L'Esprit Nouveau* on contemporary German architecture; be so kind as to do it expeditiously, and include interesting documents.

I received, at different times, the two copies of your very beautiful Bauhaus album, for which I am

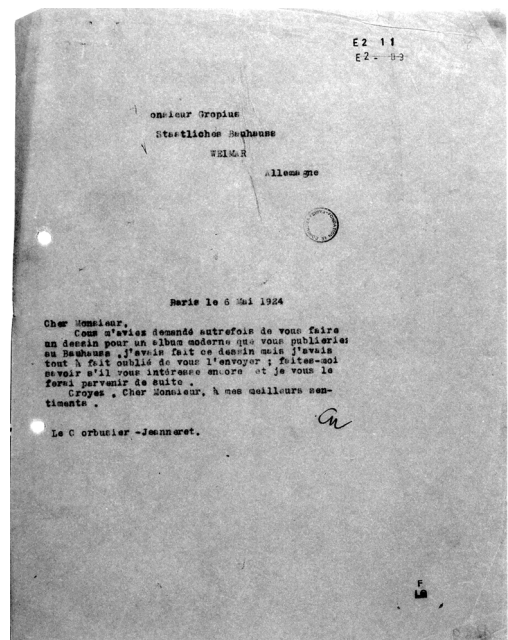
very grateful to you. I compliment you on the magnificent typography of this work, which constitutes in every respect an important document on these questions in our time. I sent the second copy to Ozenfant, who sends his sincere thanks.

I am sending again, together with this letter, my book *Vers une Architecture*, and ask you to receive it with my compliments.

As to the drawings that had been lent for the exhibition, please use them as you see fit.¹⁵

This letter from Le Corbusier typifies the tone he adopted in his missives to Gropius from 1923–1925 (Fig. 5).¹⁶ An analysis of these letters shows that they are officious and stiff, almost to the point of

Figure 5. Le Corbusier, Paris, Letter to Walter Gropius, Weimar, 6th May 1924 (© FLC/ADAGP, Paris 2003).



rudeness at times. For example, in the above letter, the words 'be so kind as to do it expeditiously' have the effect of an order, in no way constituting a polite form of address to a peer. Le Corbusier's next remark in the same letter, duly noting the 'magnificent typography' of Gropius' book while paying only secondary tribute to its contents, is not complimentary either. The letters of the Parisian architect reflect a haughtiness – the condescension of the strong towards the weak – which is hardly the tone in which one would address an equal. Most of his letters of this period are merely brief, formal replies – reduced to a few business-like phrases – and thanks for books and articles received. Le Corbusier's letters are not characterised simply by a lack of graciousness: rather, they often sound blatantly defiant. He permits himself to be an unceremonious correspondent. The Parisian architect, in short, emphasises the distance between his own positions and his German colleague's, without ever trying to ameliorate them.

Le Corbusier's attitude here can be accounted for by his negative chauvinistic feelings toward Germany at that time, which he then projected personally onto Gropius. For Le Corbusier, Gropius is not merely a private individual or colleague, but the representative of the German nation.

The following extract, from a letter Gropius sent on 17th March 1924, is characteristic of his epistles to Le Corbusier, written in the explicative style of a manifesto:

First of all, my gratitude for your *Vers une architecture*. I must confess to you that I have a strong brotherly feeling towards you, although on a number of serious issues you have taken a position

contrary to the intentions of Bauhaus. I have never read any publication that, in its essence, would be close to your book, to what I have thought out and written. Here is the source of my desire to carry on the exchange between us.

I have given your article in *L'Esprit Nouveau* to all our artists here for their edification, and I would like to discuss it with you in greater detail. I am quite positive about your train of thought on the generation of industrial types and the like. I used to write and to say very similar things on the issue. I cannot agree with you, however, when you suggest shutting down the institutes which are seeking ways that could bring about a better situation, since in this case nothing at all will ever happen again. The great world of artistically gifted people is keeping aloof today, being completely removed from the practical life. You couldn't make these people turn to the reality of factories. For this purpose, transitional stages should be created, 'sluices' where the people would be tempered for future cooperation for the benefit of the common cause. Hence – evolution. Nobody believes that some people or institutes are able to create the type, but a trend towards the type, which implies a certain break from 'artistic craftsmanship' is, to my mind, of crucial importance . . .

Currently, however, the task is to refrain from creating schools that cultivate artists – I reject the mere 'profession' of an artist – but, rather, to prepare all the gifted elements for the common industrious life, so that in any circumstances they could actively intervene. A certain amount of a craftsman's work, as a means for reaching this goal, is inevitable. On the contrary, I would

consider organising a purely theoretical school of architecture to be a cruel fate. The architecture capable of reflecting our times is the rarest thing and the least probable from the point of view of feasibility. What has always been a value for a true artist – vocation, but not profession – is even more valuable for a true architect. It is true, though, that several good architects did come out of our school. Nevertheless, one day it will become clear to everybody that practice only can hammer out architects. Come and have a look for yourself! I have heard you are giving a lecture in Prague – so, why don't you visit us in Weimar?

I have been reading your book and your articles with great attention and translating them into German, together with my wife. At the moment we are publishing in Bauhaus-Verlag a series of articles aimed at reflecting our ideas. Your permission to include several of your articles – for example, 'Sur la Plastique' from *L'Esprit nouveau* and 'Pérénité' – in this series would make me sincerely happy.¹⁷

This letter, like many of Gropius' others, is warm and enthusiastic, so characteristic of the German architect. His general tone in the letters is always friendly, always polite. His letters are lengthy, elaborating on his positions through several pages, while Le Corbusier is content with two or three terse phrases in his own notes. Gropius' letters are in the prophetic, polemic style of a manifesto, appealing to Le Corbusier as a foreign colleague with whom he seeks close contact. 'I feel as though I am marching hand in hand with you,' Gropius writes to Paris.¹⁸ True to his own style in the correspondence, Gropius tries moreover to 'approve' his own ideas.

After engaging in debate with his interlocutor, he can subsequently incorporate the 'approved' ideas into his lectures and articles.

A similar manner can be discerned in Le Corbusier as well, but only when he communicates with people whom he feels are kindred spirits.¹⁹ Judging from their 1923–1925 correspondence, Le Corbusier did not regard Gropius as such, and for this reason he resorts to an absolutely different tone in his letters. For example, answering Gropius' letter of 17th March 1924, Le Corbusier says that he is 'very happy to feel the communion of ideas which is being established between us...', but, as to fundamental differences, they remain serious.²⁰ He writes here about their different attitudes towards the concepts of types of dwelling (the ideal standard or the industrial type) and mass production, as well as towards issues concerning architectural schools and architectural education in general.

Commencing in 1925, the correspondence between the two architects becomes infrequent, which can be attributed to two factors. First, *L'Esprit Nouveau* appeared for the last time in Paris in 1925. After the demise of the magazine, Gropius's interest in contacts with Le Corbusier subsided. Second, Le Corbusier refocused his activities from journalism to architecture after 1925, thus becoming less interested, in his turn, in the relationship with his German colleague. According to the documentary evidence available, Le Corbusier did not visit the Bauhaus either in Weimar or in Dessau, although in his letters Gropius had repeatedly invited him to come. It is noteworthy that it was Gropius, not Le Corbusier, who initiated all the personal meetings between the two.

In October 1926 Gropius visited France in order to see Le Corbusier's buildings in Pessac near Bordeaux. 'To my regret, here I am back again, although in Paris I felt so uplifted that I did not notice how time flew. I was so deeply impressed by your creative work and do hope our contacts will never break,' Gropius writes to Le Corbusier. At the end of this letter he sends 'cordial greetings to your respected wife and Mr. Pierre Jeanneret.'²¹ According to the German architect, their 'friendship became solid' from that meeting on. He would later recall:

After his housing colony in Pessac near Bordeaux was built in 1925, I went down there to see it. Enthusiastic about the abundance of ideas and the poetic beauty of their embodiment with simple means, I told Corbu about my reactions. It was then that our friendship became solid, for he had found only very little popular response and felt bitter about it. Such bitterness persecuted him to the very end. He was too passionate, too convinced of his mission to content himself with the all-too-few opportunities given to him to show his architectural genius. Whenever I saw him in later years, he complained to me about the absence of due recognition, charging it to the fact that he was too much ahead of his time.²²

After this meeting in 1926, their correspondence, though still business-like, takes on a more cordial character. But as far as can be seen from the available correspondence and other documentary evidence, it would be a gross exaggeration to refer to this relationship as 'a friendship', as Gropius did after Le Corbusier's death.

In 1927, buildings designed by the two architects

were erected opposite each other at the Weissenhof exhibition in Stuttgart, highlighting the differences in their architectural approaches. This triggered great debate both at the Bauhaus and in the general German press.²³

From 1929, when Gropius participated in the CIAM congress for the first time (he did not take part in the first CIAM congress, 1928), and throughout the years of CIAM's activities, he and Le Corbusier met regularly both at its congresses and CIRPAC (Comité International pour la Réalisation du Problème Architectural Contemporain) sessions in Frankfurt, Brussels, Berlin, Barcelona and London.²⁴ In the Le Corbusier archive in Paris and the CIAM archive in Zürich (CIAM-Archiv, gta, ETH, Zürich) there are numerous photographs taken at these congresses and conferences, in which, among other architects, Gropius and Le Corbusier frequently appear (Fig. 6).

At CIAM congresses, the conceptual conflict between Le Corbusier and Gropius was clearly apparent. The two architects would adhere to positions at opposite extremes. Le Corbusier was the leader of 'the conceptual group' of architects, largely Francophone, while Gropius led 'the analytical group', consisting primarily of German-speaking architects.²⁵ During this period (1928–1935) correspondence between Gropius and Le Corbusier was scarce, and when there was an urgent need, Sigfried Giedion, the secretary of CIAM congresses, who corresponded extensively with both Le Corbusier and Gropius, would act as the middleman. The following quotation from the letter Gropius sent to Giedion in 1935 epitomises the style of these communications: 'As to the

Figure 6. Le Corbusier and Walter Gropius among architects at a CIRPAC conference, Barcelona, 1931 (© FLC/ADAGP, Paris 2003).



French group, everything is going on exactly the way I expected. They keep throwing shit on every decision we make, and knuckle under Corbusier alone . . . It is impossible to raise any major issues within the agenda of the congress, such as economic ones, for example . . . He is interested in social matters only theoretically, but by no means practically.²⁶

During these years the two architects met not only at international congresses. In 1930, for example, they saw each other at the Werkbund exhibition, which was organised and designed by Gropius in Le Salon des Artistes Decorateurs in Paris.

In the Gropius archive in Berlin – part of the Bauhaus-Archiv – there is only one photograph in which Le Corbusier and Gropius appear together. This picture was published in the *'Zeitbilder' Vossische Zeitung*, n.21, on 25th May 1930 (Fig. 7), with the caption: 'Professor Gropius and his wife meet the French architect Corbusier in Paris at the Werkbund exhibition in Salon des Artistes Decorateurs.'²⁷ The architects are depicted, together with Gropius's wife Ise, in a Paris café. In his 'Memories of Le Corbusier' Gropius writes:

When I assembled the Werkbund exhibition in Paris, 1930, in Le Salon des Artistes Decorateurs, I



persuaded the German Ambassador to give a large reception in his embassy, the beautiful Palais Beaux-Arts. This turned into a very gay evening attended by the French *avant-garde*, among them Corbu, Perret, Léger, and, of course, the exhibiting Bauhaus artists, Moholy-Nagy, Marcel Breuer, Herbert Bayer and myself. I never saw Corbu in higher spirits, laughing and joking in a, for him, so rare, carefree mood.²⁸

As noted in the correspondence, professional meetings between the two architects became a routine occurrence in the early 1930s. In his letter of 7th March 1930, Gropius says to Le Corbusier: 'Maybe, you could tell me the exact time when you will be passing through Berlin, and I will do my best to be there in order to talk over a difficult matter that is easier to discuss during a personal meeting.'²⁹

After Gropius left for England in 1934, however, he rarely corresponded with Le Corbusier, and when the German architect moved to the USA in 1937,

correspondence between the two ceased altogether, resuming only after the end of World War II.

Le Corbusier and his personal contacts with Walter Gropius

In summary, it can be seen that the spread of the Le Corbusier mythology (an alloy of the biography and the creative activities) was based, to a great extent, on Le Corbusier's creation of a culture of specific personal and professional relationships with outstanding architects and other key figures in many nations. His efforts were concentrated on two forms: the written (extensive correspondence) and the oral (personal meetings). He engaged in written and oral contacts both with people whom he considered kindred spirits, with whom he maintained 'friendly connections', informal personal contacts, and with professional colleagues, with whom he maintained more formal, business-like relationships, as in case of Walter Gropius.

The propagation of the Le Corbusier mythology through his contacts with Walter Gropius took place by various means.

The correspondence between the two architects helped clarify and disseminate their ideas and provided grounds for the intervention of ideas, and, ultimately, Le Corbusier's influence upon Gropius. Le Corbusier's letters to Gropius are an example of polemic letters, which stand in firm opposition to Gropius's stance on issues of deep concern to the Parisian architect.

Through their personal meetings, during which they discussed their latest ideas, Gropius viewed Le Corbusier's buildings and visited his office in Paris, the German architect became well acquainted with

Figure 7. Le Corbusier with Walter Gropius and Ise Gropius during the Werkbund exhibition in the Salon of decorative artists, Paris, 1930 (© the Author).

the Le Corbusier mythology, which he would later be instrumental in spreading throughout Germany.

Le Corbusier also sent his books (among them *Vers une architecture*, *Urbanisme*, *La Ville radieuse*) and various issues of *L'Esprit Nouveau* to Walter Gropius, who saw to it that they reached other Bauhaus artists and architects. On several occasions Le Corbusier gave Gropius permission to translate and publish his theoretical works in German, and to report on them in the German press. As a result, Gropius himself published a number of works referring to some of Le Corbusier's concepts, and Le Corbusier's works were published in Germany.

This relay race of ideas and concepts was the mechanism through which Walter Gropius assimilated, interpreted and ultimately perpetuated the Le Corbusier mythology. Under the influence of Le Corbusier's ideas, Gropius – via numerous lectures and articles – proceeded to acquaint Bauhaus students and colleagues, as well as the general public in Germany, with his interpretation of Le Corbusier's concepts, outstanding among them: 1) the 'machine à habiter'; 2) the standard (though Gropius refocused on the type); and 3) 'l'esprit nouveau'.

The myth of Le Corbusier's personality, interacting with Gropius – an equally forceful personality – is thus supported, reinforced and transmitted to the general German public and the architectural community also through the myth of Gropius's personality, in addition to other publications of Le Corbusier's ideas and buildings and wide discussions on them in many German architectural journals in the 1920s.³⁰

The dispute between Gropius and Le Corbusier

within the context of CIAM served to emphasise the latter's position, indirectly also affecting the position of the former. Due to their divergent personalities and viewpoints, Gropius's and Le Corbusier's correspondence concerning CIAM took place not directly but through a liaison, Sigfried Giedion, thus drawing a third party and, occasionally, other international figures into the orbit of the Le Corbusier mythology.

In the pattern of the contacts between the two architects, Gropius was always the initiator, never Le Corbusier. The German architect was clearly more interested in these contacts than was his Parisian colleague. It was Gropius who inaugurated both their correspondence and personal meetings, not Le Corbusier – who, after all, never paid a visit to Weimar or Dessau. But even these contacts, however forced they may have been at the start, were successfully employed by Le Corbusier for his own purposes. In this case, it was not to a kindred spirit, but to a strictly professional, formal contact, who was able to open the door to the broad German arena and help to escort into it the Le Corbusier mythology.

Notes and references

1. Le Corbusier is the pseudonym that was used by Charles-Edouard Jeanneret in *L'Esprit Nouveau*, starting in 1920; from 1928 on, Jeanneret signed all his works with this name. In this paper the name Le Corbusier is used to refer to all the periods of the architect's creative activity.
2. Winfried Nerdinger, 'Le Corbusier und Deutschland', *Arch+*, 90/91 (1987), p. 82; Marina Epstein, *The Conquest of the Architectural World: The Spread of Le*

Corbusier's Mythology in Europe between 1918–1939, PhD. diss. (Haifa, Technion, 1998).

3. Nerdinger (1987), *op. cit.*; Epstein (1998), *op. cit.*
4. Epstein (1998), *op. cit.*
5. Winfried Nerdinger, 'Standard und Typ: Le Corbusier und Deutschland 1920–1927', in Stanislaus von Moos (ed.), *L'Esprit Nouveau. Le Corbusier und die Industrie 1920–1925* (Berlin, Ernst & Sohn, 1987), pp. 45–53.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 82.
7. This paper is based on the archive materials stored in the Fondation Le Corbusier in Paris (FLC, Paris), the Bauhaus-Archiv in Berlin, of which Gropius's archive constitutes a part (BHA, Berlin), and the CIAM-Archiv in Zürich (CIAM-Archiv, gta, ETH, Zürich), as well as on the findings of the doctoral thesis by the author: Marina Epstein, *The Conquest of the Architectural World: The Spread of Le Corbusier's Mythology in Europe between 1918–1939*, *op. cit.*
8. Courtesy of Mr. Jos Bosman (personal communication), CIAM-Archiv, Zürich.
9. Magdalena Droste, *Bauhaus 1919–1933. Bauhaus-Archiv* (Köln, Benedikt Taschen Verlag, 1990), p. 109.
10. Moholy-Nagy, Weimar, Letter to Le Corbusier, Paris, 4th September 1923, (FLC, Paris): 'Ihre Arbeiten bilden eine ausserordentlich interessante und wertvolle Ergänzung unserer Ausstellung und darf ich Ihnen unseren Dank für Ihre Beschickung aussprechen.' The letters quoted hereafter are stored in the Fondation Le Corbusier in Paris, in the Bauhaus-Archiv in Berlin and in the CIAM-Archiv in Zürich.
11. Walter Gropius, Weimar, Letter to Le Corbusier, Paris, 18th September 1923, (FLC, Paris): 'Die Internationale Architekturschau auf unserer Bauhaus - Ausstellung hat auf allen Seiten reges Interesse erweckt, weil zum ersten Mal eine solche umfangreiche Schau der verschiedenen Länder zusammen ausgestellt wurde. Wie zu erwarten stand, sind Anfragen von Berlin, Hamburg, Düsseldorf, Hannover eingegangen mit der

Bitte, die Ausstellung auch dort wenigstens für kurze Zeit zu zeigen. Da es für unsere gemeinsamen Architekturbestrebungen wichtig erscheint, dass breitere Kreise sich davon überzeugen können, dass parallele Bewegungen in allen Ländern vorhanden sind, bitte ich Sie, Ihre Genehmigung zu erteilen, dass Ihre Beiträge noch für etwa 2–3 Monate zur Verfügung bleiben, damit die Ausstellung in Ihrer Gesamtheit herumwandern kann. Ich bitte mir, Ihre hoffentlich zusagende Nachricht möglichst umgehend zu geben. Ich werde Ihnen dann Weiteres mitteilen, wo zunächst die Ausstellung an zweiter Statt gezeigt werden soll. Ich danke Ihnen herzlich für die Beschickung der Ausstellung.'

12. Walter Gropius, Weimar, Letter to Le Corbusier, Paris, 17th March 1924 (FLC, Paris): 'Ich muss Ihnen gestehen, dass ich mich Ihnen sehr Bruder fühle.'
13. Walter Gropius, Weimar, Letter to Le Corbusier, Paris, 13th November 1923 (FLC, Paris): 'Ich bin besonders erfreut, dass Ihre Zeitschrift 'l'esprit nouveau', die beste mir überhaupt heute bekannte, nun wieder erscheint. Aus der neuen Nummer sehe ich mit grösstem Interesse, dass von Ihnen ein Buch über Architektur erschienen ist. Würden Sie die grosse Freundlichkeit haben und mir im Austausch für das Bauhausbuch, das ich Ihnen durch den Verlag habe zukommen lassen, und das hoffentlich schon seit einiger Zeit in Ihrem Besitz ist, ein Exemplar Ihres Werkes zukommen lassen? Da sich meine ganzen Absichten besonders stark mit den Ihrigen berühren, würde ich auch die erste Gelegenheit wahrnehmen und über dieses Buch in der Presse berichten, denn die Ideen, die Sie verfolgen, und die auch mich beschäftigen, gehen weit über den Rahmen des Fachinteresses hinaus und gehen das ganze Leben an.

Binnen kurzem erscheint auch eine Veröffentlichung von meinen Arbeiten im Verlag Wasmuth; sobald sie da ist, übersende ich Ihnen ein Exemplar.

Ich möchte es gern erreichen, dass ohne persönliche Polemik, die der 'Styl-Gruppe' die genügende Ausdehnungsmöglichkeit verbaut, die wichtigsten modernen Architekten aller Länder einen innigeren Kontakt finden, als das bisher gewesen ist. Sie, verehrter Herr Corbusier, haben durch Ihr Blatt und Ihre besondere Begabung auch dem Wort gegenüber die beste Möglichkeit, in diesem Sinne zu wirken.'

14. Walter Gropius, Weimar, Letter to Le Corbusier, Paris, 7th January 1924 (FLC, Paris): 'Von einer Reise heimkehrend danke ich Ihnen für Ihren ausführlichen und sehr sympathischen Brief vom 6.XII.23. Ich kann Ihnen in allem, was Sie über den allgemeinen Stand der Dinge schreiben eigentlich nur beipflichten. Meine Bemerkung über den Stil haben Sie offenbar missverstanden. Ich wand mich gegen die polemische Art van Doesburgs, die ich als unsachlich und daher schädlich empfinde und wünschte einen Kontakt der entscheidenden Persönlichkeiten der verschiedenen Länder über die persönlichen Interessen hinaus.

Ich bin gern bereit, Ihre Anregung aufzugreifen und eine Zusammenstellung der besten modernen Architekturen in Deutschland und derjenigen Künstler, die damit zusammenhängen, zu machen. Nur bitte ich, dass Sie mir etwas Zeit lassen. Ich will mir das gründlich überlegen.

Die Publikation des Bauhauses wurde Ihnen vom Verlagsamt 8.X. zugesandt. Das Buch kam aber als ungenügend adressiert zurück. Darauf sind auf mein Betreiben 2 Exemplare, das eine am 27.X., das 2. am 11.XI. an Sie abgesandt worden. Mehr Exemplare vermag der Verlag nicht abzugeben und ich hoffe sehr, dass Sie mit diesen beiden Exemplaren – auch Herr Ozenfant ging uns darum an – sich werden begnügen können. Ich bitte um Ihre Nachricht, ob die beiden Exemplare in Ihre Hände gelangt sind.

Ihr Dedikationsexemplar 'Vers une architecture'

habe ich leider bis heute noch nicht erhalten. Es würde mich ausserordentlich interessieren.

Die für unsere internationale Architektur-Ausstellung zur Verfügung gestellten Blätter befinden sich augenblicklich auf einer Ausstellung in Hannover und sollen dann voraussichtlich nach Berlin gehen. Es ist sehr viel Interesse dafür vorhanden.'

15. Le Corbusier, Paris, Letter to W. Gropius, Weimar, 11th January 1924 (FLC, Paris): 'J'ai bien reçu votre lettre du 7 et j'y répons de suite.

Je vous remercie de bien vouloir préparer pour l'ESPRIT NOUVEAU une note sur l'architecture moderne en Allemagne; vous voudrez bien l'établir sans trop de retard et y joindre des documents intéressants.

J'ai bien reçu à deux dates différentes deux exemplaires de votre très bel album Bauhaus, je vous en remercie vivement et vous fais mes compliments sincères sur la magnifique exécution typographique de cet ouvrage qui constitue à tous points de vue un document important sur ces questions à notre époque; j'ai remis le deuxième exemplaire à Ozenfant qui vous remercie vivement.

Je vous envoie, par ce courrier, à nouveau mon livre 'Vers une Architecture' et suis très heureux de vous en faire hommage.

Concernant les dessins prêtés pour l'exposition d'architecture, je vous laisse toute liberté pour les employer à votre gré.'

16. A detailed analysis of the correspondence between Le Corbusier and Walter Gropius has not yet been conducted as a critique and could be a most exciting subject for research. It would be interesting to compare not only the content of the polemic that the two architects were engaged in, but also the form of the letters, that is, the psychological aspects of their discussions. This work was started by Winfried Nerdinger, who studied Le Corbusier's connections to

Germany in general: Nerdinger, 'Le Corbusier und Deutschland' (1987), *op. cit.*, pp. 80–86, and Nerdinger, 'Standard und Typ . . .' (1987), *op. cit.*, pp. 45–53.

17. W. Gropius, Weimar, Letter to Le Corbusier, Paris, 17th March 1924 (FLC, Paris): 'Zunächst meinen besonderen Dank für 'Vers une architecture'. Ich muss Ihnen gestehen, dass ich mich Ihnen sehr Bruder fühle, wenn Sie auch im Wesentlichen gegen meine Bauhaus-Intentionen Stellung genommen haben. Ich habe noch keine Veröffentlichung gelesen, die im Grundkern dem so nahe kommt, was ich selbst gedacht und geschrieben habe, als Ihr Buch. Ich habe deshalb den Wunsch, mit Ihnen im Austausch zu bleiben.'

Ihren Artikel im L'Esprit Nouveau habe ich allen unseren Künstlern zur Kenntnis gegeben und ich möchte Ihnen Näheres darüber sagen. Ihren Gedankengang über industrielle Entstehung des Typus usw. kann ich bejahen. Ich habe in ganz ähnlicher Weise darüber gesprochen und geschrieben. Ich kann mich aber nicht zu Ihrer Konsequenz bekennen, die Anstalten überhaupt zuzuschliessen, die eine Überleitung zu besseren Zuständen suchen, denn dann geschieht überhaupt nichts mehr. Die grosse Welt künstlerisch Befähigter steht heute vollkommen weltfremd dem praktischen Leben gegenüber. Sie werden niemals erreichen, dass diese Menschen in die wirkliche Praxis der Fabriken gehen. Es müssen also Überleitungsschleusen für sie gebaut werden, um sie allmählich für Mitarbeit im Ganzen zu ertüchtigen. Also – Evolution. Auch denkt niemand an die Anmassung, dass einige Menschen oder Institute einen Typ schaffen können, aber die Richtung zum Typ in bewusster Abwendung vom 'Kunstgewerbe' scheint mir entscheidend zu sein . . .

Jetzt aber handelt es sich darum, nicht Künstlerzuchtungschulen zu machen – ich leugne den 'Beruf' des Künstlers, sondern alle begabten Elemente

für das gesamte Werkleben tüchtig zu machen, sodass sie, wie es auch sei, eingreifen können. Eine gewisse Quantität Handarbeit als Mittel zum Zweck ist dafür unentbehrlich. Eine rein theoretische Architekturschule zu machen, würde ich dagegen für ein Verhängnis halten. Architektur, das beweist gerade unsere Zeit, ist das Seltenste und Letzte. Das, was für den Künstler gilt, – Berufung nicht Beruf – gilt für den wahren Architekten im erhöhten Masse. Wohl aber können aus dem, was wir hier begonnen haben, einzelne Architekten hervorgehen. Jedoch, das muss sich eines Tages erweisen, die Praxis muss es bringen. Kommen Sie und sehen Sie ! Wie ich höre, sprechen auch Sie in Prag. Bitte besuchen Sie uns in Weimar.

Ihr Buch und Ihre Aufsätze lese ich mit grosser Sorgfalt und übertrage sie mit meiner Frau ins Deutsche. Im Bauhaus-Verlag geben wir jetzt eine Serie Schriften heraus, die in unseren Ideenkreis hineinpassen. Würden Sie mir die Freude machen und zustimmen, dass wir einige Ihrer Aufsätze innerhalb dieser Serie in Deutsch veröffentlichen z. B. Ihren Aufsatz 'Sur la Plastique' aus dem Esprit nouveau und 'Pérénnité.'

18. Walter Gropius, Weimar, Letter to Le Corbusier, Paris, 17th March 1924 (FLC, Paris): 'Ich fühle mich Hand in Hand mit Ihnen'.
19. See Marina Epstein-Pliouchtch, 'Le Corbusier and Alexander Vesnin', in *The Journal of Architecture*, London, Volume 7, Number 1, Spring 2002, pp. 57–76.
20. Le Corbusier, Paris, Letter to Walter Gropius, 28th March 1924 (FLC, Paris): 'Je suis très heureux de sentir la communion d'idées qui s'établit entre nous . . . mais quant à nos différences fondamentales, elles demeurent sérieuses'.
21. Walter Gropius, Letter to Le Corbusier, Paris, 26th October 1926 (FLC, Paris): 'zu meinem leidwesen bin ich wieder zurück, denn ich habe mich in paris so wohl gefühlt, dass mir die zeit viel zu kurz erschienen ist. ich

habe einen so bedeutenden eindruck von ihrem werk mitgenommen und hoffe sehr, dass wir in gegenseitiger fühlung bleiben werden . . . ich bitte sie herzlich ihre verehrte gattin und herrn pierre jeanneret von mir zu grüssen.'

22. Walter Gropius, *Apollo in the Democracy* (New York, McGraw-Hill, Book Company, 1967), p. 174.
23. This issue is extensively covered in: Nerdinger, 'Le Corbusier und Deutschland' (1987), *op. cit.*
24. Gropius (1967), *op. cit.*, p. 174.
25. See E. Gol'dzamt, 'Novaya arkhitektura' – potrebitel – traditsiya' ('The new architecture' – the consumer – the tradition'), *Arkitektura SSSR*, 3 (1986), pp. 100–103.
26. Nerdinger, 'Le Corbusier und Deutschland' (1987), *op. cit.*, p. 86, Walter Gropius, Letter to Sigfried Giedion, 1935 (BHA, Berlin): 'Mit der französischen Gruppe läuft es gerade so wie ich dachte; sie kümmern sich
- einen Dreck um alles was wir beschlossen haben und spielen nur Corbusier . . . man kann nicht bei der Kongressarbeit über grosse Fragen wie namentlich die ökonomischen in Bausch und Bogen mit grosser Geste hin (weg) gehen . . . er ist nur theoretisch sozial – aber nicht in der Praxis.'
27. 'Zeitbilder' *Vossische Zeitung*, n.21, 25th May 1930.
28. Gropius, *Apollo in the Democracy* (1967), *op. cit.*, p. 175.
29. Walter Gropius, Letter to Le Corbusier, Paris, 7th March 1930 (FLC, Paris): 'wann sie in berlin durchkommen, dann will ich versuchen, dass ich mich so einrichten kann, sie zu sprechen die sache selbst scheint mir sehr schwierig zu sein, aber das lässt sich wohl nur mündlich verhandeln.'
30. Epstein (1998), *op. cit.*