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Walter Gropius

Letters to an Angel, 1927–35

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The letters of Walter Gropius to his daughter Manon shed light on their relationship and provide new insight into the architect's life as, despite their separation, he tried to cultivate her as an heir and stakeholder in his legacy (Figure 1).¹ Written from December 1927 to February 1935, the letters chronicle years of professional and personal difficulty, at the end of which Gropius was allowed to leave Nazi Germany and his daughter died of the complications of paralytic polio and its treatment.

Manon's mother, Alma Mahler-Werfel, the widow of Gustav Mahler, was the daughter of an Austrian landscape painter, Emil Schindler.² Alma had studied music and composed lieder, but she is best known as a diarist and the so-called "muse to genius." Considered one of Vienna's most beautiful women, she married Mahler in 1902. During a long period of estrangement that followed the death of their first-born, Maria, in 1907, Alma met Gropius, a fellow spa patient and dance partner, in 1910. Their love affair, interrupted by reconciliation with Mahler, resumed after the composer's death on 18 May 1911, Gropius's twenty-eighth birthday. However, by mid-1912, the architect and widow had parted. As a Viennese salon hostess, Alma entertained new admirers—including, eventually, the Austrian Expressionist

painter Oskar Kokoschka—while Gropius, with his collaborator Adolf Meyer, oversaw a growing Berlin architectural practice, whose first major commission was the Faguswerk shoe factory in Alfeld (1911).

When her affair with Kokoschka (recorded in such masterpieces as "The Bride of the Wind") ended with the beginning of World War I, Alma started writing to Gropius, now a lieutenant in the Imperial German Army. Her close friend, the journalist Berta Zuckerkandl, had seen Gropius's model factory at the Deutscher Werkbund exhibition in Cologne in spring 1914 and urged Alma to write her old lover. It was not until February of the following year, however, that the couple reunited in Berlin and took up where they had left off. In August 1915, Alma and Gropius were secretly married and, while on Christmas leave, conceived the child that Alma desperately wanted to give him. Ten months later and overdue, their daughter, Alma Manon Gropius, was born in Vienna on 5 October 1916. She was named for her mother and Gropius's mother, but given the pet name, Mutzi.

For the next year, the new family did not enjoy much time together given Gropius's duties on the Western Front. Alma became increasingly disaffected. At one time she saw Gropius as the embodiment of the Wagnerian ideal, the young knight Walther von Stolzing from *Die Meistersinger*. Looking back in her diary in 1944, she tried to explain why she married him, and like previous attempts, made Gropius seem like the eugenic sire of her "trophy," as Elias Canetti called their daughter:

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"He was a handsome fellow, a talented man of my kind, my blood, we even had the same distant relatives in Hamburg. . . . I even believed I loved him—and in the end—deadly boredom. . . . But the thing that stood for homogeneity, this I experienced in my child with Gropius. Everything good about us, our Aryan characteristics had come together in her. A divine capacity for love, a creative energy to express and live it as I have never seen in anyone else. In her was born the miracle of sameness that I was otherwise always getting out of the way of."³

Despite her often-voiced opinions on Jews and race, Alma found she preferred Jewish men and, in fall 1917, fell in love with the newest member of her salon, the poet and playwright Franz Werfel. The premature birth of their son—named Martin Johannes *Gropius*—in August 1918, led to Gropius's discovery of his wife's infidelity. While enduring the personal stresses that Alma inflicted on him by refusing to leave him for Werfel and give up Manon, he founded the Bauhaus at Weimar in 1919 and reestablished his architectural practice.

In October 1920, Alma and Gropius divorced after he agreed to be caught in *flagrante delicto* with a prostitute. He also ceded all rights to Manon and would have to depend on the goodwill of his former wife to have access to her. This arrangement came at a time when he needed to devote himself to what his biographer Reginald Isaacs called the "Bauhaus-Familie," which included the teachers of the new school, their families, the students, and the woman who became Gropius's second wife. He proposed to Ise Frank with the precondition that she first abort another man's child, which she was carrying, a procedure that left Ise sterile, ensuring a childless marriage and that Manon Gropius would have no rival for her father's affections. These factors, however, could hardly be displayed in person. Through the early and mid-1920s, Gropius enjoyed only a few supervised visits with his daughter in Vienna and learned about her progress in Alma's letters. One letter surely troubled Gropius, even with his liberal sensibilities, for the way it revealed Alma's brand of *Freikörperkultur*—her Nietzschean proclivity for aesthetically disrobing Manon: "Our Mutzi is so sweet . . . yesterday the scooter arrived. I stripped her naked for it. Already she is every new thing possible."⁴ Gropius also glimpsed his daughter's life in the occasional photographs from Alma. These had to be both painful and enchanting; one photograph depicted Manon, Alma, and Werfel as a family in St. Mark's Square, another, a studio portrait also taken in Venice, showed Manon dressed in a Renaissance costume dress.

By 1926 the Bauhaus had relocated to Dessau and had a real campus, with a main building, attached workshops—and nearby the row of masters' houses, including the director's

house—also called the Villa Gropius. The enhanced status that came with this new institutional and domestic arrangement may have at last emboldened Walter and Ise Gropius to address Alma and claim, on equal footing, the right to be with Manon on their home ground in Germany. This aroused Alma's fear of losing her daughter—if not to a foreign jurisdiction, then to a daughter's curiosity and reawakened affection for her father. So Alma resisted, accusing Gropius of neglect for not having come to Vienna enough. She insinuated that his work and his new affections for Ise had left no room for Manon. On this count, Ise defended her husband. "Please don't think that someone or something has influenced Walter in his relationship to Mutzi," she wrote Alma. "That he doesn't *know* her is the only obstacle! And until he can have Mutzi here some length of time, this, I fear, will not change. . . . *One should not be so tightfisted with him, otherwise all is naught!*"⁵ Coming to Vienna to visit Manon and "keeping up a correspondence," Ise continued, could not replace the "warmth of contact" with a "growing child."

It took a year for Alma to relent, in the fall of 1927, and she did so only on her terms and at her convenience: Werfel needed to be in Berlin on business, which allowed Manon to be dropped off in Dessau.

Thus in late November 1927, Manon lived with her father for the first time since 1920. Isaacs describes the visit as marked by perfunctory contact with Gropius and a few shy interactions with the children of Bauhaus masters and students—as though the eleven-year-old Manon had been handed off. This, however, may have been an expression of the communal nature of Bauhaus life. That is, Gropius shared her when he could not pull himself away from his official duties at a crucial juncture for the school. A city election approached, which might replace the friendly Social Democrats with proto-Nazi, right-wing leadership. Gropius also had to find a successor to himself as the Bauhaus's director, for he intended to devote himself exclusively to his architectural practice in Berlin.

Manon, like a prospective new student, befriended several Bauhaus figures, and the tenor of Gropius's relationship with her in the letters that follow suggests that she continued, in part, to play that role. This can be seen in the way Gropius allowed the Bauhäusler of his inner circle to add personal notes to postcards he sent to her while on ski trips and other vacations. Manon certainly had memorable initial contacts with Dessau teachers, such as the artist-polymath Xanti Schawinsky who, with Oskar Schlemmer, was responsible for many of the Bauhaus theater projects, with their distinctive costumes, stagecraft, music, and methods of teaching and performance. She already had a precocious ability to act, reprising Amphé's scenes from Werfel's expressionistic

walter gropius
professor dr.-ing. e. h.
berlin w 35
potsdamerstrasse 121 a
telefon: kurfürst 2583

Mil.
20. juni 34.

Mein süßes Mützli,
jetzt habe ich wenigstens eine konkrete
Vorstellung von dir und du wirst im
dir und bin vor allem mit hermiten-
schen Gefühlen zurückgekehrt. Ich habe
so ein niedriges empfinden, daß dir
die engel nicht fallen lassen, so sehr
sie auch deine und unsere feind auf
die probe stellen, ich bin so glücklich,
daß deine krankensüchte heiter ist und
herwürdere auftritt, deine souveräne
haltung gegenüber allen feindschaften
mein süßer! bitte, bitte schaffe dir
deine eigene feindschaft opposition setzen
den heilgeist in dir. du wirst sehen,
die kräfte, die von dir selbst ausgehen
sind noch viel wertvoller, als alle kreuz-
vellen, faraday- und magnetischen
drähte. die wahrheit mit ihren un-
nahelmeinen lebensaufbau und ihrer
liebe zu dir wird dich zu neuen schöpfun-
gen, um die innere mützi zur ak-
tivität zu alarmieren

Autogr. 1313/19-6

Figure 1 (Above and opposite page) Walter Gropius to Manon Gropius, 20 June 1934 (translation on p. 101) (© Austrian National Library Vienna, Picture Archiv+Signature)

Bitte, liebe Dirzire einen Brief an mich,
ich will alles ganz genau wissen, mein
Hafte, angefangen von magacérischen
Fußsprühen bis zu den kleinsten Sen-
sationen!

gleichzeitig möchte ich dir zwei der
geographischen Geschehen, die uns so sehr gut
gefallen, wenn sie dir Spaß machen
lasse ich mehr folgen. in ähnlichem Sinne
mache ich jetzt meine Stadtelien Fibel,
von der ich dir Spaß und bei der mei-
nung, man solle die ganzen mythen-
haften auch volklich wege auf den für dar-
stellung bringen.

Mein liebster Mutzi, die aller-
besten Wünsche für baldigst wieder
beweglichkeit und halbe Reise I. Klasse
mit den Balbon.

innigste grüße für die mami,
mit dem wunsch, wenn er wieder bei dir
ist, für auni und für deine lieben
pflegerinnen, denke ich ein paar von
Gemeinmännern zum trösten und gelben-
fortschreiten heiserellen möchte, um die er-
lebenserinnern zu bringen.

Immer in der Kump!

dein papa.





Figure 2 Manon and Walter Gropius, Villa Gropius, Dessau, November 1927 (Bauhaus-Archiv © 2009 Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn)

Spiegelmensch (1921). Her interest in the stage continued into adolescence in parallel to Gropius's theater designing, from the Municipal Theater at Jena (1922) to his ambitious—and unbuilt—Total Theater concept (1934). However, there is no direct evidence that he was aware of this parallel, which could have led to influencing his child with what she wanted to do in life—or find, perhaps, some daughterly opposition to his theater ideas. There is no evidence that Manon had been impressed by the new theater culture of the Bauhaus, the costumes, the masks, props, and the Aula, her father's simple, boxlike, tripartite platform stage. What is known is that she had conventional tastes as a very young woman, preferring the actors and stagings of the Burgtheater, of Austria's theater establishment.

Although Manon's November visit was far too short, Gropius and his daughter bonded then and they remained psychologically, if not geographically, close over an enormously productive period for him (Figure 2). During this time Gropius and his staff designed numerous housing projects, personal residences, and prefabricated housing that

exemplify the Neues Bauen (New Building), as well as exhibition installations, modular furniture, and even automobiles. This lasted until 1934, when the Depression and Hitler's rise to power made working in Germany impossible. It was in this period that Gropius developed the ideas for urban planning that led to his involvement with CIAM (Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne), with its mission to make architecture socially transformative. The letters he wrote Manon offer evidence of his thinking during this phase of his career. They reveal the architect's personal project to imprint his child with the nature of his work and *Sinn* (meaning or import), while maintaining a relationship of very human scale between them in which Walter Gropius was not the lone subject. The letters also define the living Manon Gropius as she would remain for Gropius throughout his life: not the "angel" of Alban Berg's Violin Concerto or the revenant characters her life inspired in Werfel's later novels.⁶

Not long after Manon departed Dessau in November 1927, Gropius affixed photographs of his little dog Nuschi

to a postcard for her. He had discovered her rapport with animals—which Werfel and others saw as almost mystical—and that she liked to take long drives. He also learned that she had enjoyed reading *Winnetou*, Karl May’s adventure trilogy about an Apache chief, his white friend Old Shatterhand, and his sister Nscho-tschi, whose braids and impossible European features would have reminded Gropius of his daughter.⁷ For her part, Manon would now learn many things from her father, who could not choose for her the progressive schools as he did for his niece and adopted daughter Beate Gropius (who attended the Bertrand Russell School and Black Mountain College). Manon’s progressive education came from Gropius himself in letters, books, and examples of design work. The first thing she would have learned was how the economical and democratic Bauhaus typography—designed by Herbert Bayer, who also made friends with her at Dessau—carried over in her father’s simple cursive handwriting.

Following his resignation from the Bauhaus in early 1928, Gropius wrote Manon from Stockholm, telling her that he would be sailing to the United States at the end of March.⁸ His trip, sponsored by his longtime client and patron Adolf Sommerfeld, the German building and lumber supply manufacturer, was ostensibly to study the American construction industry and market. However, he promised Manon he would also investigate “land of Winnetou.” On May 10, he wrote her on stationery from the Grand Canyon’s El Tovar Hotel, an eclectic fusion of Swiss chalet, Norwegian villa, peeled logs, and the Wild West fantasia—philosophy of such tastemakers as that founder of national parks, the late president and outdoorsman, Theodore Roosevelt. It was designed by the American architect Charles Wittlessey and built in 1905 for the hotelier Fred Harvey.

my dear mutzi,
for ten days i have actually been among indians! we travel by horse and wagon through this god’s country and praise the descendents of winnetou: the navaho, hopi, and supai indians. you ride day after day on horseback in order to visit them. nowadays they are peaceful with the whites, but they still very much have their dress, dwellings⁹ and customs of old! i am sending you some pictures that i made myself in part, others will follow. did you receive that indian book that i sent you from new york? in three days ise and i leave the indians and go to california—los angeles. i am back in germany at the beginning of june. i long for a message from you and mommy. 1000 loving kisses your papa

In the months that followed his return to Germany, Gropius established his new office and home at 121A

Potsdamerstrasse in Berlin. He had numerous projects sponsored by Sommerfeld, including the Fischtelgrund housing project in southwest Berlin; there was so much work that he did not attend the founding of CIAM in Switzerland in late June. The Swiss architectural critic and historian Sigfried Giedion, however, invited Gropius and encouraged him to play a small but influential role in the development of this “international congress,” reflected in the September lectures that Gropius gave in Lausanne and Zurich, describing what he had observed in the United States. The next surviving letter to Manon was written soon after his return to Berlin. Like any separated parent, Gropius used every means to seize Manon’s imagination, describing the lift-off of the airship *Graf Zeppelin* and therein betraying his appreciation for the aesthetics of its metallic surface.

berlin 3.oct.28.
my dearest mutzi,
just got back from zürich and better get cracking to send you a thousand kisses and hugs in time for your first dozen years!!! i have bought you a little wristwatch and hope that you haven’t received half a dozen other such watches already. if that’s the case, send it back to me and i will give you something else that you really want!
right now, this enormous new zeppelin airship is flying away above our house, a glorious sight, like a silver ship glittering in the sun.
are you coming along to berlin sometime in november? i dearly hope so. ask mommy about it so that she brings you, then we can have a couple of beautiful days like we had in dessau and go driving every day in the car, will you? we live quite comfortably in the center of the city and in this greenery where it’s still very quiet and berlin really has much more going on than dessau!
...
most dearly
your papa

From 1929 to 1930, Manon’s life changed. A tall girl with pigtails that came down to her waist, she very much resembled her father, whom she did not see. His paternal role had now officially gone to Werfel, whom Alma had finally agreed to marry. Manon, she felt, needed to “grow up in orderly Western circumstances,” and stop using the embarrassing euphemism “Onkel”—learned to explain Werfel’s presence in her life—at the Insitut Hanausek in Vienna, where she attended boarding school.¹⁰ Although father and daughter wrote to each other, Gropius’s workload and lecture and conference commitments resulted in a letter on 30 July 1929 that starts with an explicit apology for the gaps in

his correspondence. “you are right to berate my heartlessly lax letter-writing,” he pleaded. “i suffer for that, for it’s so terribly seldom that we see each other and this writing-paper life is only a dreary replacement. i have been in berlin for over a year, but you haven’t even seen my new surroundings.” Such admissions of guilt, however, may have been directed at Alma, for he, and later Manon, feared that her mother not only opened and read Gropius’s letters first, but sometimes destroyed them.¹¹

When Gropius wrote the next letter, he had been appointed by the Deutscher Werkbund to mount its first exhibition in Paris’s Grand Palais since World War I. With Bayer and two other former Bauhaus masters, Marcel Breuer and László Moholy-Nagy, he selected exhibits and designed the displays that won the German section considerable international acclaim. Gropius’s contributions included a prototype of his new touring car—the Adler *Sport-Reise Kabriolet*—with Wagenfabrik Jos. Neuss and featuring fold-down seats accessed by dual-handled “suicide” doors—and his modular “standard furniture,” which he had been designing for Berlin’s Feder Department Store since 1927 and whose construction, finishes, and packaging anticipated IKEAs.¹² The car is mentioned in the next letter in the hope that it might foster some of the elusive closeness he sought. He also proposed a gift of furniture that he had designed for the same purpose—and to colonize his daughter’s bedroom with his own principles.

26 february 1930

my dearest mutzi,

finally i have received some small sign of life from you—about egypt via mommy—a note that you wrote *her*. did you know it’s been *six* months since your last little letter to me? you outdo me considerably in my letter-writing aversion and now i must once more give you a loving little push in writing you—how are things going, what are you up to, who do you go around with—everything interests me that concerns you. i only see you from very far away, through upside-down opera glasses, and my entire papahood goes up in smoke if your little hand doesn’t write at least one letter again soon. did you finally get the ring that ise sent you for christmas, which was inexplicably returned undeliverable despite the correct address?

i long for the day when you are done with school and you can divide your time more freely than you can now. then you could surely go with me on my trips from time to time! i am driving around a lot lately because, having become its general director, i am setting up a german exhibition in

paris. perhaps mommy can take you there in the spring!? that would give me the greatest joy!

i would like it a lot to give you something again, what would you want? something for your room? some furniture? write me—and write me soon! otherwise i’ll be hurt.

i kiss you, my darling

your papa

In December Gropius learned that Alma was house hunting and this provided him with a fresh opportunity to furnish his daughter’s room. The house Alma purchased was Villa Ast at Steinfeldstrasse 2, one of the residences designed by Josef Hoffmann in 1911 for his *Villenkolonie Hobe Warte* in Vienna’s 19th district, the suburb of Döbling. Gropius asked Manon to send him an exact floor plan of her room in this “fancy chateau,” “so that we can install everything correctly . . . !”¹³ Gropius wanted to provide a complete set of bedroom furniture as well as fabrics, all of which would have counterpointed their Wiener Werkstätte setting.¹⁴ For the bookshelf, Gropius, like a Prospero to a distant Miranda, promised a copy of *Bauhausbauten Dessau* (Munich: A. Langen, 1930), mentioned in the next letter. The illustrations Manon would recognize from her 1927 visit, further imprinting her identity as the daughter of an architect.

23 december 1930

my dearest mutzi

. . . it pleases me that the furniture arrived and makes you happy; i would like to know *how* it looks in the room and whether the side glass panels for the library are in place? and a mirror over the toiletry chest? . . . we want to plan your room very carefully from the outset and i will send you a bed and dresser as well so that it is uniform and complete.

spain—yes it was brief but delightful. at first wild storms on biscay and soon after that beautiful sun in the interior. i love the people and their language, raw and very manly, sincere without empty phrases, thus different from what one usually thinks, in madrid i saw “don juan tenorio” (spanish drama) not as a youth but as a mature, manly fellow with a deep voice! the ideal of spanish women. spanish music is quite remarkable and beautiful, the so-called *cante jondo* oddly enough arose from the synagogues, from jewish hymns. from madrid we took the most beautiful train in europe, the *côte d’argent*¹⁵ in a proper *schlaraffencar*¹⁶ that would have delighted you.

you will get something tomorrow, write me about it and let me know about your celebrations, my dear. be good at that convent and get along with your old dragon¹⁷ and mommy still worries because of you, something i can well understand.

i will still send you my book today, something you should have for your new library, nearly everything reproduced inside you know all about.

so i must go now, i have to work tonight until 5 in the morning at my office on a large russian theater for 4000 people,¹⁸ a competition, that must go out tomorrow, so you see i stole the time from myself for this letter to you, my dearest, and give you a hug. . . .

your papa

At the Czech resort of Marschendorf in the Riesengebirge, Walter and Ise Gropius took an Easter skiing vacation with two other members of the *Bauhaus-Familie*: Herbert Bayer—Ise’s lover, her “asconia friend,” since the previous summer—and Bayer’s former wife, the photographer Irene Hecht-Bayer. Like other communal Bauhäusler postcards—which could be elaborate (Figure 3)—this one had penciled greetings to Manon from her father and Ise’s request that she learn to ski and enjoy the mountain idylls.¹⁹ Such athletic activity may not have been countenanced by Alma, although she did insist on gym classes for Manon at boarding school to help with back pain and posture throughout 1930. In early 1931, she shared with Gropius an X-ray of Manon that surely bore the implicit message that proposals that would risk fracturing his daughter’s delicate spine were not welcome. Despite the frailties revealed in Manon’s “inner” portrait,” as Gropius called the X-ray, he still persisted in asking her to ski as well as take trips in the Adler “sleep-cabriolet” that, he told Manon, made “a big impression” at Berlin’s international auto show in February.²⁰

During the Depression-beset summer of 1931, German banks closed, a monetary crisis ensued, and unemployment became widespread. A Berlin heat wave intensified the grim mood—and Gropius still did not have his daughter’s new address, where he could send her letters, small gifts and large—her bedroom furniture. This time of year, however, he knew that a letter would reach her at Alma’s retreat, Haus Mahler in Breitenstein, a small alpine resort town on the Semmering Massif in Lower Austria. Gropius had not been there in years, but he could imagine Manon “prowling around” outdoors, living her “Indian life.” What he could not imagine, however, since Alma never told him, was that his daughter’s vacation activities included playing a role in



Figure 3 Postcard of the Ulm cathedral, Walter and Ise Gropius to Manon Gropius, 4 August 1930, with Herbert Bayer’s and Xanti Schöminsky’s greetings and drawings (© Austrian National Library Vienna, Picture Archiv+Signature)

scenes from Verdi’s *La Forza del Destino*, which Werfel had specially adapted for Manon and another girl to entertain guests from the Burgtheater in Vienna. This was staged on the veranda that Gropius designed for Alma in 1916.²¹ Knowing that his humble porch project had contributed to Manon’s enrichment would have added that connection between Gropius’s achievements with those of Manon for which he yearned.

In defiance of the financial gloom, Gropius wrote to his daughter about his undiminished artistic idealism, his controversial designs for high-rise apartments (about which he was writing a book), and his Adler automobile. He also approved Manon’s plan to take a certified translator course after dropping out of boarding school. That career was far removed from acting, which Gropius would have encouraged had he known of Manon’s passion for the stage. (Her plan to be a translator had the full support of Alma and Werfel, who both thought Manon was becoming a shallow teenager.)

sunday 5. july 31

my dearest mutzi,

. . . now i'm lying on our balcony in air that is finally getting cooler . . . you can hardly imagine the difficulties that have beset me in the last months in this battered and impoverished germany. being true to my plan to only live and work for things that seem important to me and worth my effort, i have fought hard to exist, for a "decent" living, the kind we all would love to have, but i can tell you that it's more satisfying in the end to live by ones ideas, to be a pioneer, than to only consider what makes money. i am writing you about terrible grownup things, but i remember you're so smart, i feel i'm more a friend to you than a father, and i already think you will follow after me, when i tell you something about my life. before you know it, you're grown up yourself and you'll construct a picture of the world of your own and have to make your own decisions. . . . i'm astonished to read that you're already out of school! why? it's not time yet, what are you going to do now? i'm very interested in knowing this. call me tomorrow between 8 & 9 o'clock: kurfürst 2583, then i can hear your voice again and feel you close by me, in the flesh. and send me your address finally and your telephone number. i don't know either. . . . i hope very soon to get a new very beautiful car that i designed myself and won top prizes in all the big beauty contests: in wiesbaden the golden ring, in berlin the prize for the most beautiful german car. it will be a lot of fun for me to take you for a ride in it. . . . i would like to give you some advice, do whatever you can to learn other *languages!* i really have come to see the way foreign language is a wall between people. the world is getting smaller and communication possibilities constantly increase. you will be supreme among men if you have a command of their language. . . .

i have here in this major building exhibition an entire array of spaces displaying the principle representations of my concept for people's housing.²² my ideas are the center of interest and have started a big newspaper war in grand style. ise is helping me with this and is already versed in all the issues as i am. right now i am writing a book about these things that will be published in vienna in the fall by schroll.²³ since there is so little work here i am opening a branch office in buenos aires with one of my former co-workers who is traveling there in july.²⁴ also i hope to go to america soon, north america as well to hold lectures that someone has arranged for me.²⁵—recently architects from around the world were in berlin for an international congress that i chaired, whose vice president i am. there were 1000 tongues talking. it was strenuous but very pleasant

and lively working out things in discussions with representatives from every country and learning from so many interesting people. so, my sweet mutzili, this time there is something more than a postcard, pick up the thread and spin it back to me. . . .

your papa

Gropius did receive "something more" in November–December 1931, when Alma let Manon stay with her father in Berlin while Werfel lectured in East Prussia. Gropius took his daughter on an autumn picnic in the Adler and to see her grandmother (Figure 4). The visit was soon cut short. Manon had taken a telephone call concerning her half-sister Anna Mahler in Vienna. Anna, married to Werfel's publisher, was ill from a suicide attempt following an unhappy love affair. Since income was at stake, Alma and Manon quickly returned to Vienna, and Gropius was left with another mirage of fatherhood.

During the CIAM conference in Barcelona in late March 1932, he returned to the topic of foreign language in a self-deprecating spirit. "i lectured in spanish," Gropius wrote Manon in mid-April, "and was mostly garbled by the spanish . . ." ²⁶ He had learned that she had hurt herself sled riding and wrote, "i hope the sled ride damage is all fixed by now without repercussions, you sweet savage!" ²⁷ He must have hoped, too, that once emancipated from Alma, Manon would have no fear of the ski slope—but he ended his letter by asking when they might take a "long automobile trip" together.

In other letters written during the summer of 1932, Gropius shared with Manon his frustration at the difficulty of finding new commissions so that he and his assistants would not end up among Germany's six million unemployed. He did have small and ongoing projects and sent pictures of one of them—the prefabricated copper houses for the firm of Hirsh-Kupfer, which were designed for low-income families.²⁸ His relationship with the Adler company continued as well. In the autumn, he lived temporarily in Wiesbaden to be near the company's Frankfurt assembly plant. It was, however, a mixed blessing. His work as a designer, consultant, and promoter for the German automobile manufacturer put strains on his marriage to Ise and distracted him so that he neglected Manon's sixteenth birthday:

frankfurt 14 october 1932

my dearest mutzi, i just got back in the car from paris, where i had spent 10 days at the salon d'autos, and found your little letter! you certainly doubt my paternal feelings, my precious, since i wrote and sent nothing on your 16th, but you will soon see otherwise. it is, of course, entirely



Figure 4 December picnic: Walter with Ise and Manon Gropius in his 1931 Adler cabriolet (courtesy of Marina Mahler)

wrong of me to be grumbling at you *now* since you have not written for a year. i just feel terrible that the natural relationship that should exist between us is always running into such enormous impediments *because we so seldom get together!* for i know from experience that this *correspondence* life . . . warps relationships . . . but now you are 16 years old, developed by nature from intelligence and by an environment of enormous quality that very few find! so i must make up my mind to see you as a full-fledged adult from now on and, without reservation, treat you *en camarade*.²⁹ i look forward to this for i have this vain belief that i can enrich you out of myself and i have already waited long to create someday this atmosphere between us both that places me outside of the center—. . .
your papa

Gropius soon had the opportunity to treat Manon like a grownup—discussing how she should conduct herself around the Nobel Prize winners who visited Alma and Werfel at Villa Mahler. Since Manon had idealized him—as a child does an absent or dead parent, she may have expressed

herself too freely in her letters and with a sardonic side that Alma rarely noticed in the dutiful and acquiescent daughter whom Manon pretended to be for the “*Tigermami*,” as Alma was known to her two daughters.³⁰

berlin, 17 november 1932

mutzerli, . . . your visitors are a choice lot, you are being spoiled rotten getting to meet this intellectual elite in mommy’s company, make sure you don’t lose proportion, you certainly don’t treat thomas mann with much respect, it’s not always the measure of a man if he glitters in conversation with others. by the way i know the wife of sinclair lewis,³¹ was she with you? i like her a lot.—i have this pressing need to send you something beautiful, but you should tell me what you want! something for your room, perhaps a desk lamp, or something else you feel finishes it off, i still have a birthday debt to you. . . . with a kiss,
your papa

The first weeks of 1933 would be ominous for Gropius, his office, and Germany. His mother, Manon—his earliest

and most ardent supporter and his daughter's namesake—died, and Hitler was appointed chancellor. The call for elections in March ensured a National Socialist majority in the Reichstag. Temporarily forced to pull himself away from his car design work and a lecture to deliver in Leningrad (“High, Middle, and Low-rise Buildings in City Planning”), Gropius buried his beloved “*muttchen*” and suffered his Mutzi's ire for not having told her about her grandmother's ill health or the funeral. He tried to exonerate himself in his next letter, sensing, perhaps, that Alma had tried to weaken Manon's loyalties to him:

26.1.33

my dear mutzili,
you and mommy are thoroughly mistaken if you think i have neglected anything. i was even driving to my mother's since i had things to do nearby; the doctor was of the opinion that she would pull through this illness . . . however, when i visited her . . . i had no more hope of ever seeing her again and wrote to you *straight away*. then, shortly after my visit, came the *sudden* news of her death. . . . i am very sad. of course, she was 78 years old, when life naturally makes its way toward the end, but knowing this is of no help. she was so alive inside, affectionate and full of love, as we are painfully finding out from her loss. it makes me so sad that you can't see her anymore. i read in her diary yesterday the great joy she felt from last seeing you in berlin. she was made of some rare, human superabundance . . . now all that is left is the memory of her. hugs and kisses, when will i see you again?—tomorrow i must go to leningrad for 8 days in the bitter cold. hello to mommy. your papa

Reginald Isaacs describes Gropius in Leningrad as “gray and shaken” by the undercurrent of fear and the banal careerism of his Soviet counterparts. The biographer attributes none of this disquiet to the elder Manon Gropius's death or the younger's shock at the news. Manon, who had corresponded with her grandmother and might have seen her at the family's Baltic retreat at Timmendorfer Strand in the summer, felt that her father had not done enough to allow her to see her grandmother one last time, and she was aggrieved that he did not delay the funeral long enough for her to attend. But Gropius was often unable to provide the emotional vigilance she expected because of the press of his work, which he now pursued in the existential freedom—or vacuum—that was the grim reward of having given Alma a divorce. His fatherhood was reduced to being a glorified pen pal, writing a kind of correspondence diary about his work and himself. This was not the only reason that Gropius was

left in the dark about his daughter's feelings, her life, and what she wanted to do with it. Manon, too, enjoyed the freedom that came from living apart from her father. She could be unintentionally neglectful and self-centered in her own right. Throughout 1933 Gropius still had no idea she wanted to be an actress, a desire that she did express in verse to one of Austria's most celebrated stage actors, Raoul Aslan: “I too would like to tower in the theater—like you! . . . /—She who knows your soul— /but seeks my own way!”³²

While Alma and Werfel knew about Manon's acting, they did not give much credence to her commitment. Werfel even became apoplectic at thought of her on stage when he disallowed Max Reinhardt's offer to cast Manon as the First Angel in a revival of Hugo von Hofmannsthal's “The Great Theater of the World” at the 1934 Salzburg Festival.

In his next letter, Gropius, while admitting his own professional disappointments, reacted with surprising aesthetic appreciation to Manon's conversion to Catholicism. She was taking up the original faith of her mother, who had become a protestant to marry Gropius.

berlin, 17 may 1933

dear mutzili!
your telegram found me in timmendorf where i had been for 3 days in order to rent out my mother's house. please don't be hurt because i took so long in not writing. it's not going very well for me in these bad times and then i have this tendency toward silence. . . . i suffer very much under the circumstances that are now in germany, i am ashamed of what is happening here and to my personal work where every possibility seems to be blocked for now.
i hope, my darling, that things are going very well for you, i would like to know much more about you and your inner person. but then you keep your own company as you wrote me, and arrange your own *cercles*,³³ as i hope with so much gracefulness, as it conforms to mommy's lofty school. mommy and werfel will also be very much saddened by the events in germany . . .
your becoming catholic surprised me, i myself am totally unchurchlike, but every visually and sensually talented person naturally prefers the catholic church with the pomp and circumstance of its ceremonies to protestantism's arid austerity, i can well understand why you have crossed over.
what is up with your language exam? do you think you'll do well? also please write me about this susi.³⁴
tomorrow i am 50 years old. all my friends will be with me, just not you, my darling, my sweet! a hug and a kiss.
your papa

Isaacs places Gropius in Vienna in mid-June 1933. Gropius, however, made no mention of this visit in his next letter or gave any indication that he saw his daughter.³⁵ It discusses a trip to England, where Gropius had been invited by Leonard and Dorothy Elmhirst to visit their experimental community and school, Dartington Hall. That hopeful prospect was contrasted with the gloom of the tightening net of Nazi restrictions:

17 june 1933. berlin.
my dearest mutzi dear,
. . . . on tuesday or wednesday ise and i go to dartington hall, totnes, s. devon, england. a wealthy englishman, who wants to partition and eventually build on his estates, seeks my advice and has invited ise and me to stay for three weeks at his countryseat. Possibly here there is even a new job opportunity looming for me. will you write me here. presently at the "triennale" in milan³⁶ there is a special exhibition about me and italy has invited me to it, but i will hardly be able to travel there in person because in august the international congress for modern architecture,³⁷ for which i am vice president, holds another meeting on a ship from marseille to athens and back, so i will continually be on the move, provided that i have enough money in july to be able to make the journey because the outlook is bad here, there's no work anywhere, and for several months now i've been taking so many long walks like no other time in my life.
. . . i think so often of you given the external events that are coming down.³⁸ people are so stupid and live such narrow lives instead of making it wider and richer. the [German–Austrian] border is closed,³⁹ but you could be a german for me one time to come visit. anyway we hope the stupid blockade does not last long. . . .
your papa

Knowing his daughter would be insatiable for more news about his trip to England, Gropius wrote again after his return to describe the Elmhirsts' wealth; but his account of his English prospects makes for a wistful preamble to the wrapping up of his work in Berlin. He also speaks with sympathy about the plight of German Jews. The photograph of Manon by Schawinsky that he refers to was displayed by Alban Berg when he composed his Violin Concerto, which he dedicated to Manon in 1935.

berlin 11 september 1933
my dear little girl,
you look at me so matter-of-factly because, since the last time you left here, xanti schawinsky,—now he too is

mountains away—made me a life-size [photographic] enlargement of your head, which is exquisite and is always sitting on my desk. visitors always ask me who is this girl with the interesting face! . . .

here much has changed for me. because i have had no commissions for so long, i must sell my car, will probably have to move, and i must, by october 1, close my office after laying everyone off. i still don't know what i will do. going to another country, where i would have better odds, is very hard for me because i am not only too attached to germany, i also have this feeling that the emigrant quickly loses his roots that nourish him from within; and only a young tree can survive being transplanted. . . . my chief occupation for the time being is to reestablish this european balance of power⁴⁰ between me and the immediate environment. i should not be so plainspoken—but tell franz that i feel a special kinship with him right now and have half a mind to get myself circumcised out of sympathy! honi soit qui mal y pense.⁴¹

england was a pleasant episode.⁴² . . . an ancient gothic palace erected by the bastard brother of the english king in the 14th cent.⁴³ a vast park with trees as i have never seen. fantastic wealth, 60 motorcars albeit rather plain, one saw no servants apart from the classic butler, the lord served himself at the table! the wife is an american and has an enormous fortune, thus they are determined to spend 600,000 pounds annually, earmarked primarily for educational purposes. two research institutes, a dance school, model farms, sawmills, laundry, weaving mill, etc., all of it planned to solve modern production problems. a large section of the fiord's coast⁴⁴ has been purchased to establish a bathing resort. although it already has an american architect,⁴⁵ i nevertheless hope to be involved in some way at some point. the country is very beautiful and green like no other what little i saw, but the humidity is just like breathing in a hothouse. i gave my "views on architecture"⁴⁶ and for the most part lay on the beach in the sun with ise.
. . . still on semmering?⁴⁷ let's hear from you soon, my dear, and many greetings to your mommy and w. from me. all my friends are gone, it is very lonely.
hugs and kisses.
your papa

Manon learned that for her sixteenth birthday she would receive a clear glass tea service by the Bauhaus's Wilhelm Wagenfeld, a gift her father hoped would facilitate her parties. Such a gift, with its modern and functional lines, would contrast with the lingering late Victorian mores of Manon's Vienna, where young men danced the Shimmy with her and her girlfriends while wearing white gloves.⁴⁸

Gropius also told Manon about the time of her birth and how Alma, from the beginning, had put herself between father and daughter:

3.10.33

my dearest mutzerli,
yesterday i just found among my mother's correspondence the first letter i wrote her following your birth and everything came back to me. i had traveled to vienna to be there when you first drew near to us with your presence, but you would not be separated from your mommy, so i had to go back to the front and i sat in the vosges again bemoaning my fate and waited with beating heart until you could finally bring yourself to begin your autonomous existence. and after many weeks, when i was at last allowed to catch a glimpse of my sweet product on mommy's changing table, mommy was like a lioness defending her cub from someone who wanted to wrest it from her. then came a couple of beautiful holiday weeks during which you accepted me as your father and let me swaddle you daily as your features and character began to peep from the blanket,—i have not seen you for so terribly long! the sporadic encounters of the war have chronically remained between us. . . . a few days ago i sent a glass tea service⁴⁹ so that you can serve your own guests. it is unbreakable jena glass and hopefully it gives you a little joy and arrives okay. . . . dearly your papa

As Christmas approached, Gropius wrote Manon once more. He needed to replace a broken teacup, and he told her how proud he was that she would take the interpreter's exam at such an early age. As he asked for more news about her and a new photograph, he had to admit to further professional setbacks—having to “give up half of my apartment” and “manage with just two rooms.”⁵⁰ Implicit was the collapse of Gropius's architectural practice. Creating the “equilibrium,” mentioned as though Manon would understand the cruel joke, had not worked. It became increasingly untenable for him to keep his employees busy by entering Nazi competitions such as the new Berlin Reichsbank,⁵¹ while dismissing a new office manager for wearing a Nazi party pin. Gropius's political behavior resembled that of much of the German intelligentsia, who entertained the naive hope that Hitler, once in power, would become another typical, tame politician and would be voted out by the German people when he too failed them.

Gropius began to look abroad for work seriously in early 1934. In March, A. Lawrence Kocher, editor of the *Architectural Record*, suggested that he establish a practice in the United States, and Gropius's chief American exponent,

Robert L. Davison of Columbia University, continued to seek support among fellow architects and academics to invite Gropius to teach in America, where he would enhance the country's position as a center of new architecture, especially important now with the coming of the New Deal and its building projects. Gropius, although receptive to these American contacts, looked more to England for work and as a temporary haven from Nazi Germany. In May he exhibited his designs for planned communities and lectured at the invitation of the Royal Institute of British Architects.⁵²

Deeply involved with improving his professional and economic situation, Gropius lapsed in his writing to Manon. Her life had been disrupted as well, by the Austrian Civil War of February 1934, an uprising between the armed bands of Social Democrats and the forces of the Austro-Fascist government of Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss. To leave her house after government cannon pounded the nearby Karl-Marx-Hof—that monument of Red Vienna's public housing movement—Manon required a safe conduct pass. Its photograph revealed a young woman whose resemblance to Gropius had increased during the long years of their separation.

Although Werfel had just returned from Italy in March and wanted to spend Easter in Vienna, after having endured weeks of civil unrest, martial law—and cold, Manon and Alma refused to put off the family tradition of celebrating the spring holiday in Venice. There Manon fell ill during the second week of April, and by the third she was diagnosed with acute poliomyelitis of the spine. The resulting paralysis nearly asphyxiated her and left her virtually incapable of movement from the neck down. After the immediate crisis had passed, the Austrian government provided the imperial railway ambulance once reserved for Emperor Franz Josef to transport Manon back to Vienna like a royal.

Gropius received scant information about his daughter's condition, and his next letter betrays an optimism that kept him from postponing his trip to England. (The “Hitler series” he mentions refers to postage stamps or *Sammelbilder*, trading cards issued by manufacturers of cigarettes and chocolates, which Manon, like other German and Austrian young people, collected and put into albums, innocent of their political meaning.)

berlin 6 may 1934

dearest mutzili, finally you are close enough and i could telephone at last and get details about how you are and how wonderfully you have come through this ordeal. . . . for all that you have endured, my sweet mutzi, our human nature is admirably adapted, especially if one is young, such that i see you rising from this insidious illness like a

beautiful phoenix. . . . i strove in vain for that hitler series you wanted, it doesn't exist. so i can only send you the wagner series. . . . on thursday i go to england and come back on pentecost sunday,⁵³ then i hope to hear there is significant progress in your condition. all the best, my darling, and from ise the fondest wish for your recovery. i love, kiss you,
your papa

When Gropius departed for England on May 10, more news of Manon's condition had been received: she could not speak, could barely swallow, and her breathing was labored. Ise then wrote the sick young woman, realizing that her husband's trip needed justification. The audience for this letter was not just Manon, but Alma too, who could use Gropius's English trip as proof that his work took precedence over his child.

dear mutzi,
walter has just left for england utterly despondent. he is deeply grieved that it's not going well with you. . . . the thousand-marks penalty [for travel to Austria] that one still has to pay has always prevented him since we've become rather poor people due to the local conditions. . . . walter accepted this english invitation with a heavy heart, but he could not really reject it because little by little he has had to rely on whatever foreign work there is. for us here every path is blocked to him and we stand before a vast field of rubble. now he has suffered the added blow of news that you have to still struggle with this illness. . . .
your ise

Gropius, upon his return from England, managed to secure the travel fee (intended to punish Austria by making it costly for Germans to attend the summer Salzburg Festival) and saw his daughter during the second week of June and for the first time since December 1931. Alma reacted as though the old Kaiser were coming to inspect a field hospital. She had Manon and her two nurses moved to Werfel's rarely used study on the top floor of Villa Mahler. She had the room decorated with flowers, paintings by her father Emil Schindler, and Manon was ensconced in a wing back chair used by Talleyrand at the Congress of Vienna.⁵⁴ Her legs, which would have already shown the degenerative effects of paralysis, were probably hidden by the Oriental throw rug that others saw when Manon was similarly presented. Gropius was to be overawed by the level of care given to his daughter and dissuaded from insisting on a private clinic. (There is no evidence that he saw his daughter's bedroom,

which he had so painstakingly tried to furnish from afar, or whether it met with his satisfaction.)

Not only did Alma put a good face on the situation, her doctors, among them the neurologist Otto Pötzl, gave Gropius reason to hope that his daughter would recover and even walk again. (The same doctor had told Werfel that this was impossible.) While Isaacs writes that Gropius took little comfort in what the doctors told him, Alma's mother, Anna Moll, reported that he was upbeat, despite the fact that his daughter was an "incurable cripple."⁵⁵ This mystified her, but what she witnessed may have been Gropius's performance, which, like Alma's Potemkin village of a sickroom, was intended to inspire mother and patient. This carried over into his letters to Manon, which expressed a strange futurist vision of high rises, green spaces, and faith that her illness was like a demonic possession, which Manon and her "angels" could defeat (see Figure 1):

20. june 34.
my sweet mutzi,
at least i have a concrete idea now about you and the aura around you and . . . feel reassured again. . . . the angels will not let you fall as much as put your and our endurance to the test. i am so happy that your calm in the face of illness is cheerful and truly marvel at your confidence against this trial by fire, my beautiful one! please, please sharpen your own adversarial opposition as well against this beelzebub inside you. you will see the powers you give off are much more brilliant than any shortwave, faradic, and magnetic radiation.⁵⁶ mommy, with her matchless verve and drive and her love for you, will dissect you properly so as to rouse the inner mutzi into action. please, please dictate a letter to me, i want to know every detail, my precious, from the magnetic foot massages to the electrical stimulation!
i am sending you at the same time two little geography textbooks. . . . i am now doing my city planning primer,⁵⁷ which i mentioned to you, in a similar fashion . . . one should bring such visual representation to everything we learn at school.
best wishes . . . to your faithful nurses, whom i would like to reinforce with an army of elves⁵⁸ to do the scratching and push back the folds in your sheets⁵⁹
to give you some relief.
a dear kiss!
your papa.

In early July Gropius received a letter from Manon that revealed what Alma could not disguise with flowers. "It's a shame that you saw me so miserable and not happy," Manon

wrote in handwriting that was not hers, and she reported that she was working “frantically on getting healthy” and was “in treatment all day long.”⁶⁰ Her hope of attempting to walk in the coming weeks was both unrealistic and probably an echo of her mother’s. So was the claim that she could already stand up halfway—a miracle worked by her crank-up bed. This, nevertheless, arrived as good news in Berlin where otherwise there was none. The latest Nazi political violence, although an internecine attack on its “brown-shirts” and their leader Ernst Röhm, revealed the danger faced by anyone whom the regime considered expendable. A similar lesson was taught by the Nazi involvement in Austria’s “July Putsch,” which saw the assassination of Engelbert Dollfuss.⁶¹ This and the continuing drought of commissions compelled Walter and Ise Gropius to take a long July–August vacation on the Croatian Riviera. With such a backdrop of tranquility, while “mending their lives, gaining strength—and planning,” Gropius decided to go to England for an extended period to work and lecture before the German government closed that route. This was not only to make a living—but also, he may have sensed, to stay alive.⁶² He did not forget to write Manon during his last days in Berlin:

1. oct. 34
 my sweet,
 before i disappear in a cloud of steam, i must file past you again.⁶³ we sit in a dreadful disarray of packing, everything must be cleared out because the apartment has been rented to the daughter of lieberman.⁶⁴ wednesday we go to rome, i.e., i’ll be making a side trip to assisi, which i still haven’t seen. i am in rome on 14 october at the hotel palazzo e ambasciatori via vittorio veneto 70. please write me there! hopefully i’ll see mommy or werfel or both then? that is if you can give them a vacation! on 16 oct. i will stop off in zurich for a lecture: “the new building in the balance”⁶⁵ and then through france directly to london where at last, after all this dilly-dallying . . . my work awaits!
 my temporary address in london:
 c/o maxwell fry
 58 victoria street
 westminster
 london w1.
 i am curious about how to survive in this inartistic country with unsalted vegetables, bony women and an eternally freezing draft!?! certainly not very stimulating, but after all it is the one european country in which to find something like a “boom,” especially in new housing.
 before i leave on wednesday afternoon, i’ll telephone to ask you. . . . until then my little sweetheart, say hello to

mommy and werfel and draw nearer to the mental and physical state of this philosophical newborn whom i befriended on the island of *korcula*.⁶⁶
 i hug and kiss you!
 your
 papa

In Rome, Gropius attended the theater conference that was the fourth such event organized by the Alessandro Volta Foundation and a showpiece by Fascist Italy’s culture ministry, which, unlike its German counterpart, esteemed the work of Gropius. And, while he remembered to write his sick daughter, Gropius forgot what would be Manon’s last birthday. Horrified by his faux pas, he quickly digressed, in an undated letter, from an apology to an account of the Roman conference at which he presented the Total Theater concept:

my sweet mutzi,
 i am utterly shattered having forgotten your birthday now of all times while closing down my office in berlin and find it unforgivable! i was so sorry not to see mommy and werfel here in rome because that told me your cold is still not getting better. . . .
 i wish for you, my angel, *steadfastly* that you recover *soon* from this horridness once and for all! . . . we lead a busy life here at the congress. the proceedings get quite stormy and it would amuse you how they climb into the ring to “*boxe spirituel*”⁶⁷ as it was called today. this evening a big gala performance of the *figlia di jorio*⁶⁸ in the presence of the duce!
 sunday on to zurich . . . and then to london. . . . tomorrow i will try to find something pretty to send you and make up for my appalling absentmindedness.
 say hello to mommy and werfel and forgive
 your
 papa

In the days that followed Gropius scoured shops in Rome and Milan as he and Ise traveled by train north to the Swiss border. At last he found the perfect gift to make up for missing Manon’s birthday, an antique jade pendant that possessed “4 hundred years of best wishes” and would endow her with “radiant health.”⁶⁹ The charm had another, unintended purpose: it would buy Gropius some time as he acclimated himself to England and once more relied on his daughter’s devotion and patience. The inner being that Gropius counted on did exist, ever serene. As her stepfather observed, she did not exhibit the “psychology of the cripple,” in which the sick person oppresses “those around them.” Werfel saw

“nothing of this in Manon. . . . Indeed her face showed an entirely new kind of transcendence, sometimes almost a quality of relentless acuity. . . . Did she know the truth? . . . Everything that was said in her presence expressed the most smiling hope that she would make an early recovery.”⁷⁰

Some of Manon’s acuity was also spent in studying with Franz Horch, Max Reinhardt’s play editor, and such celebrity visitors as the actor Werner Krauss, who found the bedridden girl a demanding partner for practicing a soliloquy. Alma and Werfel ironically encouraged such contacts, but they also saw them as therapy, not real.

Across the Channel, Gropius’s English supporter Jack Pritchard, the founder of the Isokon design group, provided the unofficial exile with work. Gropius was learning English with the help of the fluent Ise. To supplement their meager income, Gropius gave lectures, such as “Modern Buildings: Defense of Mass Production,” which he presented in Edinburgh in early December. Manon learned of this from a postcard illustrated by a Scottish engineering marvel, the Firth of Forth Bridge. For Christmas, Gropius promised her an animal book like the ones he had been sending since seeing her in June. He also discussed his work and the news that Werfel and Alma would take Manon to the United States. Werfel had a play opening in New York, which might allow Manon to take advantage of alternative polio treatments, such as those available at Warm Springs, Georgia, made famous by its most famous patient, the new president Franklin D. Roosevelt.

london 22.12.34.

my mutzili,

. . .

for a while now i have had rewarding work again, a big project for a perfect, historical site near windsor castle.⁷¹ although i still must get by for the time being, such that i can’t even afford to buy us shoes, i recently received interesting offers not only from here in england but from america as well and—from turkey for establishing a bauhaus in constantinople.⁷² in england i have even been recommended to roosevelt for the new roosevelt plan.⁷³ probably i will stay in england for now, where most of the possibilities seem to be developing. i will wait for as long as i can hold out to make the best choice.—how far along are your plans for america?

In early 1935 Manon’s treatment was changed by Dr. Pötzl to a more aggressive form of X-ray therapy. One observer saw her, as she was carried inside the ambulance that took her to a nearby clinic, covered with heavy white makeup, “like a clown.” Manon had agreed to become engaged to an

Austrian bureaucrat, Erich Cyhlar, apparently because it was expected to advance the young man’s career. Alma placed a therapeutic value on this arrangement for Manon, who might now have “reason to hope that she would marry.”⁷⁴

Gropius’s letters suggest he knew nothing about Cyhlar and only vague details of Manon’s current condition. She sat up “like a grownup” at the family table for their Christmas dinner, but her handwriting had degraded. A lung infection—treated by the same doctor who had administered a fatal dose of morphine to Franz Kafka—led to a low-grade fever. On 3 February 1935 Gropius wrote his first letter of the new year to Manon and his first on a typewriter. The letter, with a Bauhaus-like page layout, was also his last to her. It contained a long account of his activities and impressions, dating back to November, and was illustrated with a sketch floor plan of his apartment at Isokon No. 1, built by and named for the design firm of his host Jack Pritchard, for whom Gropius would become Controller of Design in 1936 (Figure 5). The apartment building was a streamlined, sculptural block-long edifice with unbroken surfaces of white-tinted concrete, which critics likened to a beached ocean liner. The Gropius drawing is rare; he famously depended on others to draw for him. Perhaps more unexpectedly, Gropius expressed an interest in the lessons that the eighteenth-century Anglo-Irish writer Jonathan Swift could teach architects about scale; admiration for the new RIBA headquarters, a lavish but conservative edifice in a classical variant of Art Deco; and his respect for the progressivism of the Prince of Wales:

3.2.35

my dearest mutzi,

the first public television phone was set up here yesterday. perhaps soon it will be possible to call you up and see you at the same time!?. . .

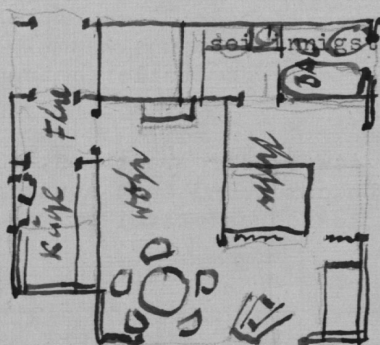
i am slowly struggling to find a position for myself here and it is starting to go fairly well, but the language gives me a lot of trouble . . . how far along are you in english? can you read easily? can i send you something one of these days? i am totally engrossed here in jonathan swift. . . . as you know my interest has been focused over the past ten years on the phenomenon of changing scales in relation to our fixed human size. this is what i see as the central issue of architectural efficacy, which increases when the scale of a building or a room seems greater than it really is. this is also the thing that works in swiftian prose. he not only shrinks things in the material sense one moment, then makes them gigantic compared to us in the next, . . . in the intellectual sense, he achieves a similar displacement with point of view to finally deliver

ich bin ehrenmitglied in einem englischen club, wo ich immer frühstücke, auf zwei grossen empfangen der englischen ingenieure und der 'art und industry association' wurde auch ein toast auf mich gehalten und das board of education der englischen regierung hat mich aufgefordert ihnen meine erfahrungen und ratschläge zu geben.

auch mit amerika stehe ich noch in verbindung und neulich erfuhr ich auch, dass man mich von england aus für den rooseveltplan vorgeschlagen hatte, freilich mit dem zusatz, dass wohl vorläufig sprachschwierigkeiten bestehen würden.

ich habe eine ganze reihe projekte gemacht, einen theaterumbau für dartingtonhall, ein wohnhaus und ein ganz grosses projekt für ein riesiges wohnhotel auf einem unvergleichlich schönen grundstück bei london mit uraltem historischem park. ich hoffe, dass wenigstens die eine oder andere sache bald zur entscheidung kommt, damit ich endlich wieder ein wirtschaftliches fundament unter die füsse bekomme. vorläufig sind wir noch zu gast bei dem mann, der mich herübergerufen hat, um baupläne für seine absichten aufzustellen. wir wohnen in einem ganz modernen flatgebäude, zimmer wie nebenstehend: einschliessl. service, d.h. wir bekommen das essen - üblicher englischer einheitsfrass - aus der zentralküche.

so nun ist es wohl für heute genug. ich hoffe sehr sehr bald von dir einen ebenso langen brief zu kriegen, mit guten nachrichten über dein befinden. -hat sich mammi ein wenig erholt? ich wünschte es so, nach all den schweren monaten der aufregung und pflege für dich. grüsse sie herzlich, ebenso werfel.



geküsst und umarmt von deinem

Johannes

Figure 5 Gropius's drawing of his London apartment in a letter to Manon Gropius, 3 February 1935 (© Austrian National Library Vienna, Picture Archiv+Signature)

human vanity a deadly blow. a priceless book that you must read one day.

...

at the inauguration of this magnificent new building for the 'royal institute of british architects'⁷⁵ i stood directly before the king and the queen. he a somewhat stooped

and ill-looking papa, she quite regal in bearing.⁷⁶ the entire royal family plays the role of an impresario for the entire country, . . . the prince of wales⁷⁷ is remarkable. he delivered a lecture at a dinner of the royal institute and functions like a true revolutionary in this circle of english architects and i could subscribe to his every word. as a

solution to london's slum problem, he called for high-rise housing with open green spaces and for the assistance of industry in the manufacture of such housing. exactly my program for years now. . . .

i have an entire list of projects to do, a theater renovation for dartington hall, a residential building⁷⁸ and an enormous project for a giant apartment complex on an incomparably beautiful plot of land near london with an ages-old historic park.⁷⁹ the least i can hope for is that one or the other comes to a decision soon so that i can at last have some financial footing again. for the present we are still the guests of this man⁸⁰ who brought me over in order to draw up a building plan for his own intentions. we live in an entirely modern apartment building,⁸¹ rooms shown in the margin: incl. [dining] service, i.e. we get to eat—usually standard english fare—from the central kitchen. well that is enough for today. i hope very very soon to get an equally long letter from you with good news about your health. . . . with a dearest kiss and hug from your papa

Gropius learned that his daughter was mortally ill on Easter Monday morning, 22 April, when a telegram arrived as he was writing to the Dutch architect C. H. van der Leeuw about the forthcoming CIAM meeting in Amsterdam. The telegram said nothing about the intestinal paresis that she had suffered—only that he should come right away. Then came a second telegram, informing him that Manon had died in the afternoon.

By the time Gropius arrived at his sister's home in Germany, Manon had been buried in Vienna, despite his request for a delay. Alma's priest friend, who had baptized Manon as a Catholic and who conducted her funeral, wrote to him about her last days, the cause of death, the interment laws, and he made a veiled accusation of neglect for not coming to Vienna after the theater congress in Rome.⁸²

Upon his return to London, Gropius compartmentalized his grief; pictures of Manon, which he once had to beg for, were put away. He did not request or ever see her death certificate, with the nature of their relationship ironically and bureaucratically unsuppressed. The city morgue had entered her vocation as "Student/Architect's daughter," words Alma could not have supplied. In June, she wrote to Gropius to assuage bad feelings and—incredibly—to thank him for their "perfectly beautiful creation."⁸³ She invited him to Vienna to see Manon's untouched room, photographs, and the death mask that her sister, the sculptor Anna Mahler, had made.



Figure 6 The grave of Manon Gropius by Walter Gropius (1955), Grinzing Friedhof, Vienna (by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University)

Though amicable, Alma later recorded mixed feelings about Gropius in her diary, including an afterthought that she did not publish: "Walter Gropius, the father of this angelic child, a brilliant artist," had "bored his own child to tears."⁸⁴

That Alma did not invite Gropius to visit her daughter's grave is no accident. She felt that her child was still all around her. This was a tenet of Theosophy, a belief that she, Gropius, and even his first partner, Adolf Meyer, had once entertained; for them graves and other *memento mori* were superfluous.⁸⁵ Hence, Alma never erected a monument to mark Manon's grave and the death mask—compared to the *l'Inconnue de la Seine*—ended up in a cardboard box in her garden shed. Eventually, a plain cross was erected in Vienna's Grinzing Friedhof in 1942 at the expense of Manon's childhood nurse. But it disappeared at the end of World War II.

It was not until May 1955, after he had retired from teaching in the Department of Architecture at Harvard, that Gropius learned of the missing cross. In the office of his American practice, TAC (The Architects Cooperative), located in Cambridge, Massachusetts, he received a letter from Alma's nephew, a younger architect named Wilhelm Legler.⁸⁶ "Dear Uncle Walter!" he began, describing how difficult it was to find Gropius's address and then getting to the matter of Manon's grave. "[It] should now be put back into an orderly, durable condition," Legler wrote, "[and] there is no one more called upon than you to design the grave for Mutzi. . . . I enclose the general plan of its current state."⁸⁷

Gropius's catalogue raisonné documents three grave markers, but not his daughter's.⁸⁸ They are, like his other work for the masses, simple shapes that identify the resting places of the dead. Yet all are individuated and none more than the pyramidal granite stone for Manon Gropius, which spans a grass plot enclosed by a plain concrete border. Here, too, Alma would be interred, when she chose to be buried with her daughter. Photographs of the marker and the contract for its fabrication are misfiled among Gropius's papers (Figure 6).⁸⁹

Notes

1. The letters in the Sammlung Ida Gebauer of the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek (ÖNB). All translations are my own. For assistance in transcribing Gropius's letters, I thank Heinz Wohlers, Violet Lutz, Rosemary Moravec-Hilmar, and Brigitte Mersich. I also thank Ati Gropius Johansen and Marina Mahler for permission to reprint the correspondence.
2. Alma Mahler is the subject of three biographies: Karen Monson, *Alma Mahler: Muse to Genius* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983); Suzanne Keegan, *The Bride of the Wind: The Life and Times of Alma Mahler-Werfel* (New York: Viking, 1991); and Oliver Hilmes, *Witwe im Wahn: Das Leben der Alma Mahler-Werfel* (Munich: Siedler, 2004). Walter Gropius's authorized biography is Reginald Isaacs, *Gropius: Der Mensch und sein Werk*, 2 vols. (Berlin: Mann, 1983, 1984); his catalogue raisonné is Winfried Nerdinger, *Walter Gropius: Der Architekt Walter Gropius, Zeichnungen, Pläne und Fotos* (Berlin: Mann, 1985).
3. Alma Mahler-Werfel, undated entry, "Tagebuch der Alma Maria [Diary of Alma Maria] 1902–1944." Mahler-Werfel Collection, University of Pennsylvania Library. This page, numbered 301 and dated 1944, is interpolated into the 1919 section of the diary suite.
4. Quoted in Hilmes, *Witwe im Wahn*, 257–58.
5. See Gropius to Alma Mahler-Werfel, November 1926, Bauhaus-Archiv.
6. The notable "revenants" are the Jewish-Egyptian girl Zenua from *Hearken unto the Voice (Hören die Stimme)*, Bernadette and the Virgin Mary from *The Song of Bernadette (Das Lied von Bernadette)*, and the Bride from *Star of the Unborn (Stern der Ungeborenen)*.
7. Gropius's interest in Native Americans and Karl May were revealed to me through my talks with his daughter Ati Gropius Johansen. That he encouraged her to read *Winnetou*, which she found too violent, suggested that Gropius may have done so with Manon at Dessau.
8. For a detailed and illustrated discussion of Gropius's first visit to the United States, see Gerda Breuer and Annemarie Jaeggi, eds., *Walter Gropius Amerika Reise 1928 / American Journey 1928* (Berlin: Bauhaus-Archiv, 2008), a catalogue that accompanied the Berlin Bauhaus-Archiv exhibition of Nov. 2008–Jan. 2009.
9. Gropius had come to Arizona to see the contemporary Native American pueblo and ancient cliff dwellings.
10. Alma Mahler-Werfel, *And the Bridge Is Love* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1958), 197.
11. See Erich Rietenauer, *Alma, meine Liebe* [Alma, my Dear] (Vienna: Amalthea, 2008), 144ff. Because this is a selection, some letters have been omitted that do, in fact, exist.
12. See Isaacs, *Gropius*, 2:537ff and Nerdinger, *Walter Gropius*, 304ff. for Gropius's six car body designs. Gropius's personal car was a *Schlaf-Kabriolet* (sleep cabriolet). For the Feder "standard furniture," see Isaacs, *Gropius*: 2:533, 535 and Nerdinger, *Walter Gropius*, 43.
13. Walter Gropius to Manon Gropius, 5 March 1931.
14. Villa Ast/Mahler is described in Markus Kristan, *Die Villenkolonie Hobe Warte von Josef Hoffmann* (Vienna: Album, 2004). Because no photographs exist of Manon's quarters, it is impossible to verify that Gropius's furniture was installed. In a telephone conversation with Erich Rietenauer (29 January 2009), he recalled seeing, as a young boy, a bed set of "Bauhaus" design in Manon's bedroom.
15. The Pyrenees and Côte d'Argent Limited, a luxury train that connected Paris to the Basque seacoast.
16. A deluxe *wagon-lit* (sleeper). In German folklore, *Schlaraffenland* is the mythical medieval land of plenty.
17. Manon's headmistress.
18. The Ukrainian State Theatre at Kharkov.
19. Walter Gropius to Manon Gropius, undated [early April 1931].
20. Walter Gropius to Manon Gropius, 5 March 1931.
21. See Isaacs, *Gropius*, 1:160.
22. The *Deutschen Bauausstellung* [German Building Exhibition] Berlin 1931 ran from May to August.
23. The firm of Anton Schroll, in a letter dated 19 June 1931, extended Gropius's deadline for an untitled "Buch über Wohn-Hochhäuser" (book about high-rise apartment houses) to 15 August, the final date to guarantee publication in 1931. The manuscript in question is "Wohnhochhäuser im Grünen: Eine grossstädtische Wohnform der Zukunft" (Highrise apartment houses in green spaces: a future form of urban residency). Both letter and manuscript are in the Gropius papers at Harvard's Houghton Library.
24. Franz Möller, one of Gropius's former employees.
25. Pierre Jay (1892–1949), an American banker-philanthropist who befriended Gropius during his U.S. tour.
26. Walter Gropius to Manon Gropius, 18 April 1932.
27. *Ibid.*
28. Nerdinger, *Walter Gropius*, 124; and Isaacs, *Gropius*, 2:558–59.
29. *En camarade*, i.e., as a coequal.
30. See Rietenauer, *Alma, meine Liebe*, 144ff.
31. Dorothy Thompson (1893–1961) was the Berlin correspondent for the *New York Evening Post*. She befriended Walter Gropius after writing a favorable article about the Dessau Bauhaus in 1926.
32. Manon Gropius, "Meinem verehrten Schauspieler Raoul Aslan" (To my favorite actor Raoul Aslan), in Rietenauer, *Alma, meine Liebe*, 111.
33. For emphasis, Gropius uses French.
34. A new friend, Susi Kertesz (1916–1947), a graduate of the Reinhardt-Seminar who later became a theater actress in Switzerland.
35. *Ibid.*, 2:633.
36. The Milan Triennial.
37. CIAM.
38. The worsening relations between Nazi Germany and Fascist Austria.
39. The German government had recently closed the border to Austria in retaliation for Chancellor Engelbert Dolfuss outlawing the Austrian National Socialist Party.
40. Gropius uses, ironically, the common World War I German propaganda phrase *europäische Gleichgewicht*.
41. "Evil be to him who evil thinks," the motto of the Order of the Garter.
42. Walter and Ise Gropius had arrived in Harwich on 26 June 1933. In a postcard stamped Devon, 8 July, with a Torquay scene, Gropius reported to Manon: "my dear mutzi, i am gadding about on an english beach here at the invitation of a rich Lord. how are you and mommy? write me at the english address i gave you. am here until 14 july, your papa."
43. In 1384, Richard II granted the estate to his half-brother John Holland (1352–1400), first Duke of Exeter; beheaded by Henry IV.
44. The River Dart's estuary.

45. William Lescaze (1896–1969), the Swiss-American architect.
46. English in original.
47. Manon and her friend Susi Kertesz had spent part of the summer in Breitenstein possibly to avoid the polio outbreak in Vienna that killed another girlfriend, Agathe Lothar, the daughter of Ernst Lothar, the writer and director of Vienna's Josefstadt theater.
48. One of Manon's beaux during this time was Walter Jaksch (1912–1998), the son of the Austrian architect Hans Jaksch (1879–1970). The younger Jaksch designed Vienna's Hotel Intercontinental (1964) and wrote a history of the second Reichsbrücke (1937), the bridge designed by his father that collapsed in 1976.
49. A photo of the tea service can be found at: http://www.artsmia.org/modernism/object_frame.cfm?targid=296&movement=Bauhaus (accessed 20 Nov. 2009).
50. Walter Gropius to Manon Gropius, 12 December 1933.
51. See Nerdinger, *Walter Gropius*, 180.
52. Isaacs, *Gropius*, 2:652ff.
53. Whitsuntide, 20 May 1934, the third Sunday in May.
54. See Rietenauer, *Alma, meine Liebe*, 175ff.
55. See Isaacs, *Gropius*, 2:656–57; and Rietenauer, *Alma, meine Liebe*, 178.
56. Forms of vibrational medicine were once used to treat paralytic polio.
57. An unpublished precursor to later Gropius texts on urban design arising from the 4th CIAM conference of 1933, "The Functional City."
58. *Heinzelmänchen* in the German, from German folklore.
59. To prevent bedsores.
60. Manon Gropius to Walter Gropius, undated (ca. early July 1934).
61. The politician selected by Austrian Nazis to succeed Dollfuss was Anton Rintelen, whom Alma befriended using Manon as a lure. Rintelen indulged in a personal fantasy, calling Manon "Sissy," the pet name of the Empress Elizabeth of Austria-Hungary, a famous Victorian beauty.
62. Isaacs, *Gropius*, 2:658.
63. An ironical allusion to the sickroom that Alma had readied for Gropius's June 1934 visit. In the German, he uses *vorbeidefilieren*, i.e., the action of passing a reviewing stand, going through an art museum, viewing a funeral bier, and the like.
64. Kathe Liebermann (1885–1952), the daughter of the painter Max Liebermann (1847–1935).
65. Published as "Bilanz des neuen Bauens," in *Walter Gropius, Bd. 3: Ausgewählte Schriften*, edited by H. Probst and C. Schädlich (Berlin: Ernst & Sohn, 1988), 152–65.
66. Korčula, a walled medieval Croatian town, is considered an early example of a planned city, which would explain its interest to Gropius in the summer of 1934. The "friend" is probably Gropius himself.
67. *Boxe spirituelle*, shadow boxing.
68. The pastoral tragic opera by Alberto Franchetti.
69. Walter Gropius to Manon Gropius, undated letter (about 14 October 1934).
70. Werfel, "Manon," 397.
71. The unrealized St. Leonard's Hill development, with Maxwell Fry.
72. Some of Gropius's Bauhaus colleagues—such as Martin Wagner—were teaching in exile in Turkey.
73. The New Deal.
74. Elias Canetti, "The Funeral of an Angel," in *The Play of the Eyes*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1986), 198–99.
75. At 66 Portland Place, London, designed by *George Grey Wornum*. Gropius refers to the ceremony on 8 November 1934.
76. George V and Queen Mary.
77. The future Edward VIII and Duke of Windsor.
78. The house of Benjamin Levy and Constance Cummings.
79. St. Leonards Hill (unbuilt). The site overlooks Windsor Castle and Forest and Royal Park.
80. Jack Pritchard.
81. Pritchard's Lawn Road Flats—also called Isokon No. 1—in the progressive Hampstead section of London, where many German exiles came to live during the prewar years.
82. Fr. Johannes Hollnsteiner to Walter Gropius, 25 April 1935. Quoted in Isaacs, *Gropius*, 2:736ff.
83. Alma Mahler-Werfel to Walter Gropius, 19 June 1935. Quoted in *ibid.*, 2:740.
84. This revelation is not in Alma's memoir *And the Bridge Is Love* (1958), whose sanitized content Gropius protested nevertheless (see note 11).
85. According to Ati Gropius Johansen, her mother held such viewpoints, too, and she misplaced and disposed of Gropius's ashes after his death in 1969.
86. Legler was Manon's cousin.
87. Wilhelm Legler to Walter Gropius, 30 May 1955. Walter Gropius Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard College Library.
88. See Nerdinger, *Walter Gropius*, 302–3.
89. The reason for this is that the detailed contract between Gropius and the firm that created the marker, as well as new landscaping for the gravesite, was apparently filed in Harvard's Houghton Library under "Material relating to the death and memorial concerts of Alma Manon Gropius; 1935–1936."