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Samuel Roy

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Samuel Roy

“I, Samuel Roy, proudly affirm that this is my honest and original academic work, that I have cited outside sources appropriately, and that I have received no undue help from others.”

In my honors thesis project, I will be analyzing architectural developments in Berlin from the late nineteenth century and up until the end of the Weimar Republic. I will analyze why such developments occurred and will explain the historical background of German society to better explain to uninformed readers. Some of the new architectural styles and forms I will be discussing include expressionism and naturalism, and the prominent architects whose works will be most thoroughly analyzed include Erich Mendelsohn, Bruno Taut, and Walter Gropius, all who helped to lead the search in finding new architectural styles. I've chosen these three individuals in particular as I view their works in Berlin to best capture new architectural developments in the city and how they clearly reflect social upheaval taking place in German society.

One of the main tasks of these three men was to rethink architecture so that it may better account for the needs and desires of modern man.¹ These architects within the wanted to break away from architecture of the past. One of the ways in which this was accomplished was the emphasis placed on expressionism and functionalism. Expressionism was a distorted style that sought to create within spectators an emotional reaction to building. Functionalism simply focused on the function of the building, which would be the primary focus of the building's construction. This meant no unnecessary design would be added, and the building would obtain its beauty simply by the material from which it was built. Thus, the building would be seen as an art piece itself. What these artists also strove to achieve was the uniting of art and industrial technology so as to make architecture appear as an art in the contemporary world.² However,

¹ Eric Weitz, "Building a New Germany" in *Weimar Germany promise and tragedy*. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2018), 170.

² Wenwen Chen. "The Analysis of the Influence and Inspiration of the Bauhaus on Contemporary Design and Education." *Scientific Research*, (2013): 324.

before jumping straight into an analysis of these architects' works, it will be necessary to provide a little background information on architecture before the onset of the social upheaval in the early twentieth century.

Berlin is one of the most peculiar cities in all of Europe. Unlike most of the continent, the territory of northern Germany was never conquered by the Romans, and thus the area possesses no background in Roman customs that characterized the early western world. Founded sometime during the twelfth century, the city of Berlin started out as a small Medieval town which prospered from trade. For years it remained an undeveloped town, lacking the medieval architecture found in already developed cities like Paris and London. Thus, it was no secret Berlin fell way behind her neighboring



Figure 1, Berlin Palace (1443-1845)

capitals both in cultural and architectural development. The first magnificent piece of imperial architecture constructed in Berlin that would display the pomp and growth of the city and the lands of Brandenburg-Prussia was the palace of Frederick von Hohenzollern, built in 1443 (Fig. 1).³

During the Thirty Year's War, the northern German lands were completely devastated from fighting, causing famine and high rates of mortality for civilians impacted. The city of Berlin was destroyed and burned during the war, returning the growing capital to dust. Fortunately, the lands of Brandenburg-Prussia would experience a miraculous recovery under the rule of four

³ Alexander Richie, "History, Myth, and the Birth of Berlin" in *Faust's Metropolis: A History of Berlin* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 1998) 32.

successive and competent rulers of the Hohenzollerns. The first among these was the Great Elector of Brandenburg, Frederick William, who helped to restore Berlin to her former glory immediately following the war. He did this by taking control over the large power vacuum left behind in Central Europe after the war. His efforts to conquer and unite neighboring lands resulted in the formation of the Prussian state, with Berlin as its capital. With the newly achieved status as a major power, Berlin was on course to match her European counterparts. The success of Frederick William won him the support of many Berliners who were grateful a single powerful figure helped to restore stability and prosperity. Berliners, from this point forward, would owe their loyalty towards powerful imperial figures, a point which becomes evidently important when witnessing future events in the city. Lastly, besides helping Berlin recover,



Figure 2, New Palace in Potsdam

Frederick William would help to establish a prominent military culture in Brandenburg-Prussia and would celebrate the authority of the state and those responsible for its protection.⁴

Following the rule of the Great Elector was King Frederick I. King Frederick was responsible for lifting Berlin from its cultural

backwardness and propping it up as a fully developed and modern European city. Frederick began this process by adopting contemporary European architectural styles for his capital city. Baroque was the style of the day and new palaces and courts were built in this ornate style to embellish the authority of the monarch and nobility, as seen in the New Palace in Potsdam (Fig.

⁴ Alexander Richie, "The Capital of Absolutism" in *Faust's Metropolis: A History of Berlin* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 1998) 47-58.

2). However, most Berliners during this time period lived without sufficient shelter, and homelessness was pervasive.⁵ The priorities of the Hohenzollern leaders laid in creating a beautiful façade of Berlin's prosperity while most of the population's needs were rarely tended to, especially in terms of housing.

King Frederick I was succeeded by his son, Frederick William I, the Soldier King, who would continue improving the city of Berlin and brought minor improvements to the housing crisis as well. Under his rule, he passed a Housing Law in 1747 which allowed property speculators to build three-story apartment buildings around the Leipziger Platz.⁶ However, many of these homes were cramped together and made for nearly unsuitable living conditions. They were else very unclean brick buildings. Nevertheless, they did provide little relief for the population during this time. But when the nineteenth century came around, the housing crisis would reach a level never seen in the city before.

In addition to his developments in housing, Frederick William I also adopted French architectural styles. French architectural styles at this point in time were associated with absolutism and aimed to prop up the king as the sole ruler of his kingdom. This style was utilized to invoke a similar acceptance of absolutist rule from the king in the kingdom of Prussia. New palaces modeled off of the Palace of Versailles were constructed. This adoption of French cultural practices by German leaders would prove particularly striking considering the future between these two powers. Opera houses, libraries, and town houses for government bureaucrats

⁵ Richie, *Faust's Metropolis: A History of Berlin*, 59-60.

⁶ Alexander Richie, "The Rise of Red Berlin" in *Faust's Metropolis: A History of Berlin* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 1998) 161-162.

were also built in the neo-classical and rococo.⁷ These buildings at large represented the power of the monarch and nobility at large, while most of the population still remained impoverished.

By implementing the use of baroque and rococo styles, the Prussian leaders of the day sought to glorify the power and strength of the Prussian monarchy. Similar to King Louis XIV's palace at Versailles, the Prussian monarch too sought to display his power through rich ornamentation of his own personal housing, as can be seen from the New Palace in Potsdam. But besides the monarch's own personal residence, many buildings throughout Germany and Berlin, in particular, acquired more beauty and ornamentation as a means to embellish the power of the Prussian kingdom. As more buildings were being constructed, other architectural styles, including neo-classical and renaissance, were being implemented so that the building's style would be suited towards the building's function.

During the years of the Napoleonic Wars, with Napoleon's conquest of central Europe and Prussia, he brought along with his army the ideals and values of the Enlightenment which had begun and had caused the French Revolution. While Napoleon occupied Berlin, he eliminated long established institutions such as serfdom in attempt to rid Prussia of its feudal system. The Enlightenment would successfully take hold in Prussian society, up until Napoleon's subsequent defeat and exile, when Prussian Enlightenment ideals would take on an extraordinarily new form.

Nineteenth century Enlightenment ideals in Prussia turned dramatically away from reason and increasingly towards emotion. Prussia's utter humiliation during the Napoleonic Wars would spark insane hatred towards France. Emphasis was steered away from principles such as reason

⁷ Alexander Richie, "The Capital of Absolutism" in *Faust's Metropolis: A History of Berlin* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 1998) 76.

and equality, as Enlightenment thought became increasingly anti-French in central Europe.⁸ Germanic peoples began embracing an Enlightenment that was more Romantic and filled with emotion. Stirred into this emotional hatred for everything French was a desire to connect the German people together to stand against French imperialism. Early concepts of the “volk” were used to connect German peoples to a common land, something which was never attempted or thought of before. The desire to unite the volk and stand against France came to characterize early German nationalism, and it would shape German nationalism for most of the countries following history.

When Romanticism became influential in the development of German nationalism, Romanticism also began to shape how this nationalist sentiment would be evoked in contemporary society. A prominent architect named Karl Frederick Schinkel would bring a voice to the earliest forms of German nationalism. Schinkel believed that the Gothic style best represented the Romanticism and nationalism that connected all German peoples.⁹ However, in the case of Berlin, not much gothic architecture is to be found. The reason for this is because the Prussian state, and Prussian culture in general, was less focused on a unified German state and were more focused on empowering the Prussian kingdom. Although Prussia would lead the effort in creating a unified Germany, Prussian leaders ultimately used German unification to strengthen their own power and authority. Romantic sentiment over a unified Germany did not have a strong presence in the city of Berlin, which is why not much gothic is found there.

Although Schinkel did not design any gothic buildings in Berlin, he did design the Alter Museum (Fig. 3). Being a museum depicting works of ancient antiquity, the façade of the

⁸ Alexander Richie, “The Emerging Giant” in *Faust's Metropolis: A History of Berlin* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 1998) 99.

⁹ Richie, *Faust's Metropolis: A History of Berlin*, 118.

building depicts ionic columns which were customary of ancient Greek architecture. This use of neo-classical and renaissance styles create a deep appreciation and inspiring perspective on the study of the classical era. Thus, the choice of design is a clear representation of the building's function.



Figure 3, Altes Museum in Berlin

Architecture in the city of Berlin during the nineteenth century wasn't quite as distinct from architecture in other major European cities. This was a consequence of the industrial revolution taking place across Europe during this time. A new industrial elite emerged within newly formed capitalist systems, and like the monarch and nobility of earlier times, they wanted architecture to reflect their influence and wealth. Most of the important buildings in Berlin were built in the customary traditional style that was employed for most major buildings in Europe ever since the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.¹⁰ These styles included Baroque, Neo-Baroque, Neo-Classicism, Renaissance, Romanesque, and Gothic. These architectural forms served the function of beautifying the city, depicting the wealth of the kingdom, and the showing off the strength of the state. These styles were also very much based in Europe's past, and represented the power of classes and institutions at the apex of European society, including the Church, the aristocracy, the nobility, and rulers.¹¹ One building that serves as a prime example of traditional architecture

¹⁰ Barbara Lane, "The Revolution in Style" in *Architecture and Politics in Germany: 1918-1945* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985), 11–40.

¹¹ Pegioudis, Nikos. "The 'Bare Wall': Interior Design, Painting, and Professional Politics in Late Weimar Germany." *Oxford Art Journal* 39, no. 1 (2016): 67.

that still survives in Berlin is the “Reichstag.”

The Reichstag was designed by Paul Wallot and construction was completed 1884 (see Fig. 4).¹² The Reichstag was meant to serve as the center of the German parliament. The building itself is a mix of Neo-Renaissance and Neo-Baroque styles. Its Neo-Renaissance characteristics include the columns that stand before the main entrance and that resemble classical Greek values of democracy. The building’s pediments and its near-perfect symmetry echoes the earliest forms of Renaissance architecture as well. The building’s Neo-Baroque characteristics include the jumbled ornamentation, consisting of reliefs that cover nearly the entire façade in a



Figure 4, *The Reichstag*

somewhat chaotic fashion. The Neo-Baroque, unlike the Neo-Classicism, resembles the power and authority of the emperor and the German bureaucracy. The Neo-Baroque dominates the significantly smaller Neo-Classical aspects of the building. It appears, then, that Wallot designed a building that glorifies the

emperor and shows the predominance of the bureaucracy’s role in state affairs. Wallot only hints ever so slightly at the democratic principles that supposedly existed in German politics and yet had very little influence in German society early in the nation’s history. Although the architectural styles of late Europe predominated in nineteenth century Berlin, newer projects started appearing that sought to re-think traditional architectural designs.

¹² Barbara Lane, “The Revolution in Style” in *Architecture and Politics in Germany: 1918-1945* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985), 13.

Compared with her European counterparts, Prussia was relatively late in terms of industrialization. The urgent need to catch up with other major powers led to rapid modernization in many industries. This industrialization also attracted many foreign peoples in search of work. Hundreds of thousands migrated to the city of Berlin, desperate for work. Having not predicted this mass migration, Berlin officials had no plans on how to provide sufficient shelter for these workers. This massive housing shortage led to the rapid construction of rental barracks, which were very unclean and exceedingly small. Rooms contained an average of 5 people, and in some instances even up to 20. Compared with the public housing built under Frederick the Great, these new rental barracks were far from an improvement.¹³

Mid-nineteenth century housing in Berlin was abysmal. Located at the very heart of the industrial center, apartments were in the midst of heavily polluted and extremely unclean areas.

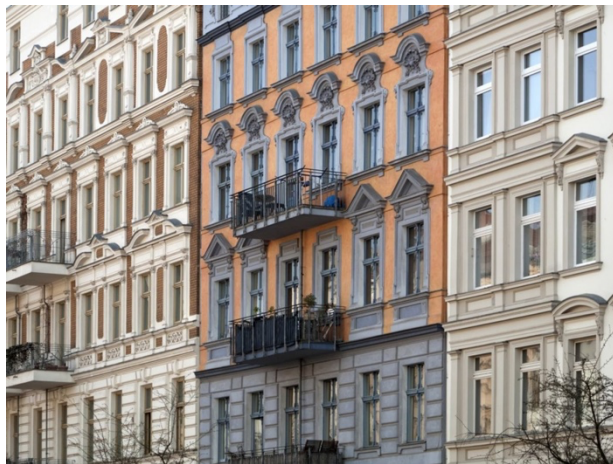


Figure 5, Berlin Public Housing in Nineteenth Century

Not only were they very unclean, but also tightly compressed into one small complex, as can be seen in Figure 5. Besides being tightly packed together, these buildings offer very little access to nature that future architects would believe to be vital to humanity's mental and spiritual health. Rather these buildings were in the thickets of the industrial machine,

leaving one's entire life to be consumed by man's artificial and commercially driven world. However, despite the poor location and living environment which these buildings have been

¹³ Anton Kaes, "Housing for the Masses" in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook* (California: University of California Press, 1994), 454.

constructed in, the facades of each building try painting a different picture. The clear use of neo-classical and renaissance styles evoke a false image of prosperity and high living within the buildings' walls. Architects used these styles to signal to the German people themselves and other nations that Germany's working class was strong and well-off. This false sense of success was thought to help bolster the reputation of the government and those in power who were responsible for creating contemporary society. The reality inside on the other hand was quite the opposite.

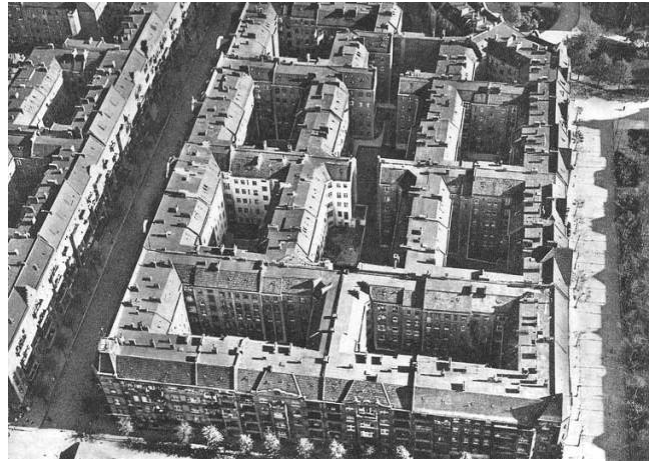


Figure 6, Berlin Public Housing in Nineteenth Century

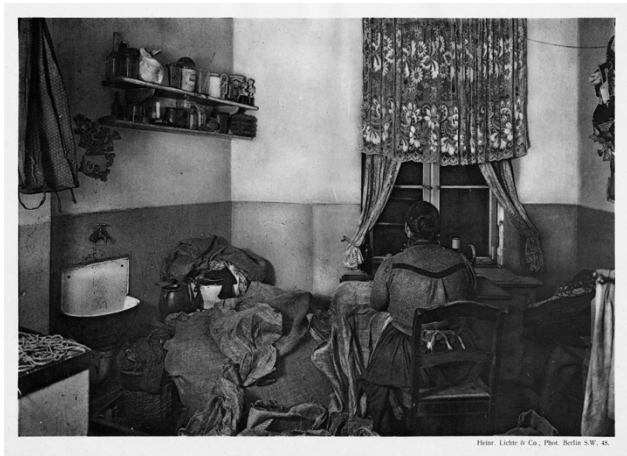


Figure 7, interior of Berlin Public Housing in Nineteenth Century

Despite the fanciful exteriors of these public houses, the interiors presented unsightly living conditions. As mentioned before, apartments in nineteenth century Berlin were over-crowded, as each room contained an average of 5 people. A family of seven can be seen in Figure 8 can be seen sharing a single room and four children having to sleep on a single couch. Many families were forced to adjust to the over-crowding being resorting to unnatural and irrational interior planning. As can be seen in Figure 7, a woman's bed is located right next to a sink and directly underneath a shelf full of pots and pans. These images speak volumes about the average working-class member's living conditions in nineteenth

century Germany, despite what the view from the outside shows.

Architecture in Berlin underwent early stages of transformation by the end of the nineteenth century. Although most buildings in Berlin were still characterized by traditional European styles, some architects took on a new initiative of re-thinking traditional styles to make them more orderly and coherent. This reconsideration of architectural design reflects further economic and political developments taking



Figure 8, interior of Berlin Public Housing in Nineteenth Century

place across Germany at this time. By the late nineteenth century, steel production along with a number of other industrial materials were becoming ever more widespread, and architects considered implementing these new materials into their projects. Since this new material could not be as easily manipulated to produce the ornate design found in old buildings, newer buildings appeared more orderly, rational, and simple.

As a result, numerous buildings began to have combinations of traditional architectural forms along with more modern design.¹⁴ Unlike the Reichstag, which was clustered with ornamentation in a heavily irrational manner, newer buildings in Berlin sought to bring reason and rationality into the spectrum of traditional architecture. However, it should be noted that these new buildings were simply experimental, and architects at this point in time did not seek new functions for their buildings. A particular building that exemplifies this early transformation in Berlin architecture is the “Wertheim Department Store.”

¹⁴ Barbara Lane, “The Revolution in Style” in *Architecture and Politics in Germany: 1918-1945* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985), 14.

The Wertheim Department Store was designed by Alfred Messel and construction was completed in 1904 (see Fig. 9).¹⁵ The building employs the Gothic style, which is evident by the building's pointed arches on the roof and the vertical mullions. Messel manipulates the Gothic style of the building into a more orderly and rational design. Rather than putting too much ornate design into the mullion windows, as was customary of Gothic architecture, the mullions were set in a



Figure 9, Wertheim Department Store, 1904

pattern of simple vertical windows which surrounded the entire department store. This effect gave the traditional gothic style a more rational and comprehensive design. This traditional gothic design, however, is not meant to celebrate German Romanticism, but is meant to embellish the power of the German bureaucracy at this point in time. Having replaced the nobility as the new upper class of German society, this gothic style celebrates the wealth and power of the new industrial class and emits a general false sense of economic stability in Berlin as well.

Just as equally important is the interior design of the Wertheim Department store (Fig. 10). The stone interior displays additional gothic detail along its walls. At the center of the building is a renaissance style courtyard covered with a glass ceiling. Glass ceiling shows early signs of industrial material being implement in the design of buildings. The search for new architectural

¹⁵ Lane, *Architecture and Politics in Germany: 1918-1945*, 15.

styles and new functions began in the early twentieth century, with Walter Gropius being one of the central figures in this search for new architectural design and meaning.

The period between the late nineteenth century and World War One was a time of great stress



Figure 10, Wertheim Department Store

and uneasiness for many German citizens of different classes.

The tension stemmed firstly from the German Industrial

Revolution, which fundamentally altered many Germans

previous ways of living and undercut the authority of a long-

established aristocratic ruling-class. Secondly, the tension

emanated from the deceptive political system of the German

Empire, whose parliamentary system that represented the

people wielded little power. Years of constant change and

political dissatisfaction undermined the power of the old ruling

elite, and the onset of World War One would mark the class's impending doom.¹⁶

In the wake of World War One, fervent nationalism spread not only throughout Berlin, but across Germany. Millions of Germans were eager to enlist and fight for their nation. Even during the early years of the war, Berlin would lose its cosmopolitan character it maintained for centuries, as streets, businesses, and buildings took on purely German names.¹⁷ By the war's end, most German citizens believed they were winning, as the imperial government lied about the stalemate, disease, and massive casualties being inflicted on both fronts. The news of Germany's

¹⁶ Peter Gay, "The Trauma of Birth" in *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* (New York, New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), 3.

¹⁷ Peter Fritzsche, "July 1914" in *Germans into Nazis* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998), 17.

defeat, thus, left many Germans devastated. Many quickly turned their backs against the emperor and bureaucracy as a result, resulting in Emperor Wilhelm's abdication on November 8, 1918.

The city of Berlin would fall into complete disarray in the years to follow.¹⁸

In the months following the end of the war, Germany was left at the mercy of the allied powers who were in the process of completing the Treaty of Versailles. The conditions of the treaty would turn out to be immensely harsh towards Germany, as she was forced to accept a war guilt clause and pay billions of marks in war damages. The extreme demands of the treaty caused many Germans to grow even more resentful towards the allied powers. With the formation of a new republic in Weimar, the acting president, Friedrich Ebert, signed the treaty on the day of its deadline. This first move done on behalf of the Weimar Republic would make the new government very unpopular, and would lead to the rise of other extremist political groups across the country.

Soon after the fall of the German Empire, extremist political groups began to garner more power by appealing to the immediate emotional and material needs of the German people. Right wing nationalist groups appealed to portions of the population who felt angry with the new republic's mismanagement and scapegoated minority groups, especially Jews, as being responsible for the current state of the nation. Adolf Hitler would launch his political career within these right-wing groups. On the other hand, left wing groups took advantage of the chaos and plight of the German people to push their own agendas as well. On the same day Emperor Wilhelm II abdicated, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, leaders of the socialist group named "The Spartacus League," called for Germany to be made into a Soviet Republic.¹⁹ The

¹⁸ Peter Fritzsche, "November 1918" in *Germans into Nazis* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998), 86.

¹⁹ Peter Gay, "The Trauma of Birth" in *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* (New York, New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), 12.

following Spartacus Uprising which took place in January 1919 in Berlin would turn out to be a very bloody conflict that led to the arrest and unlawful execution of both socialist leaders, whose bodies would be dumped into the Landwehr Canal. The mistreatment of these significant political figures would lead to even more political conflict in Germany and her capital city for years to come. But not only would Germany be troubled with political chaos in the years following the war, it would also face severe economic hardship due to the Treaty of Versailles.

Due to Germany's insufficient supply of gold it needed to pay back to the allies for reparations, the French government decided to occupy and take control of German factories in the Ruhr Valley and extract their profits in order to compensate for Germany's lack of payment. In an act of rebellion, the German government paid German workers in the Ruhr Valley not to work in the factories that the French took control of. This led to the printing of large sums of money, which consequently led to levels of inflation never before experienced in Germany. Immediately following the war, the exchange rate of \$1 USD was roughly 33 marks. By 1923, the exchange rate was \$1 USD to 1 trillion marks. This hyper-inflation led to severe impoverishment among Germany's lower and middle classes, which created the necessity for new forms of affordable housing to be constructed.²⁰ The economic instability in Germany unleashed ever more social and cultural instability which had been building up immediately following the war.

In the wake of the political and economic uproar after World War One came social and cultural instability. Traditional authority and the status quo of 19th Century European social norms were questioned and challenged. The traditional family units, with the father figure having

²⁰ George J.W, Goodman, "The German Hyperinflation" in *Paper Money* (Massachusetts: G.K. Hall, 1983) 57-62.

complete authority, began to break down as more females gained more freedoms by way of working jobs and utilizing new forms of transportation. Changes also appeared in art and literature, as unappealing topics like sex and death came to the forefront. The world of the nineteenth century appeared to be falling apart before everyone's eyes. In an attempt to return stability to Berlin and to make sense of the moral decay facing society, a new artistic movement named Expressionism sought new artistic outlets to accomplish this very purpose.²¹

Expressionists would have their chance at reshaping German society after the hyper-inflation of 1922 and the subsequent economic recovery to follow. Since Berlin's infrastructure and housing remained very poor, as it had been for nearly the cities entire existence, the government funded the construction of public housing. This caused many immigrants to move to Berlin, which necessitated even more housing.²² Artists and architects also moved to Berlin to contribute new ideas to the designs of buildings so that they may be built in the most functional and cheapest way possible to save on resources. But with these limited resources, architects sought not only to build cheap structures, but they also sought to change the way would experience and live everyday life, which helped to change German culture.

As a result of the economic, political, social, and cultural changes taking place in Germany during the post-war years, the idea of what it meant to be German changed dramatically. Instead of the creation of old folk tales, as used by the Romantics, to create a fake history of the German people on which to build identity, German artists turned towards celebrating real world realities as means of reshaping culture. This included the implementation of industrial machinery into

²¹ Peter Gay, "Trauma of Birth" in *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* (New York, New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), 4.

²² Anton Kaes, "Housing for the Masses" in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook* (California: University of California Press, 1994), 455.

everyday life, as a way of celebrating the world as it is, rather than pondering how it should be. German artists truly believed that they could reshape a person and a society based on everyday living conditions and one's surroundings.²³ They used this idea to help reshape German identity that's oriented towards fact, rather than fiction.

In the past, whereas German identity seemed to be highly connected with Gothic style, the new German identity which many architects sought to establish was connected to modernity. Since modernity was not simply just a German phenomenon, but rather a defining characteristic of the west in general, modern architects sought to create a new identity that transcended ethnic and national lines. This new kind of society would eliminate issues connected to nationalism and would bring social cohesion for all kinds of groups of people. What is also different about modern architecture is its attempt to reconnect people who have lived in an individually centered society for years. Repetitive designs within public housing projects sought to instill a sense of commonality between people and their everyday living conditions, and thus help people form closer bonds with their neighbors. Transcending of ethnic lines and the reestablishing a sense of community were believed to be at the root of fixing modern day hardships, and were seen as the most feasible methods whereby people may come to terms and accept the modern world for what it was, rather than how it should be.

One German architect who used architecture to change and benefit the lives of Germans in Berlin was Bruno Taut (1880-1938). Taut utilized the expressionist style in his designing of residential houses. Taut has made available many details about his personal life. As a young man, Taut attended the Baugewerkeschule trade school. After graduating from there, Taut

²³ Alexander Richie, "The Golden Twenties" in *Faust's Metropolis: A History of Berlin* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 1998), 333.

worked closely with a man named Theodore Fischer, who would later help Taut find his passion in constructing and designing public housing.

Much like other architects throughout Europe, Taut was heavily influenced by the First World War, and Germany's reaction to its subsequent defeat from the bloody conflict. The war shaped Taut's belief in achieving a utopian world that could bring an end to world and establish a lasting peace in European society. He viewed communal housing as the basis for establishing an ultimate sense of community, where the individualism, isolationism, and materialism of the modern world would be eradicated.²⁴ Although Taut built cheap and affordable housing for lower and middle-class Berliners, his ultimate vision for the future was to gather together different social groups and have them live in a common area. This, he believed, would achieve the goal of uniting the man from all backgrounds, something which was deeply important in his revisionist-socialist ideology.

Bruno Taut also firmly believed that architecture could help restore the unity between man and nature. Taut envisioned many architectural designs that would help bring mankind into harmony with the forces of nature. Left to his own modern devices and ways of living, man would only continue to engage in warfare and self-destruction. But in bringing man closer to a more coherent and stable form of living, he may emulate the system of natural forces in his own life and create a better world to live in.²⁵ Many of Taut's designs and sketches of buildings seeking to accomplish this new vision of the world were completely unfeasible in realistic terms. His few buildings in Berlin, which we will analyze, are his closest realization of such a vision he

²⁴ Iain Boyd Whyte, *Bruno Taut & the Architecture of Activism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 61.

²⁵ Foster, Ewan, and Christopher Heighes. "The Earth, a Good Apartment," *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 33, no. 2 (2011): 19.

held.

Taut argued in his essay, “The Earth as a Good Dwelling,” that man was the least suited of all living creatures to be herded and crowded into tight living conditions.²⁶ Bearing witness to the public housing crisis of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, he knew the congested and compacted apartments in the center of the city were not suited to human needs. They were especially not suited towards man’s physical and spiritual needs, which Taut placed great focus on when designing his own public housing projects. Taut planned on fulfilling man’s physical and emotional needs by surrounding him with modern industrial material and the natural world. He would give each of his projects a piece of nature, with grass, trees, water, and other things to bring man closer to nature once again.²⁷ Nature, thus, would appeal to man’s spiritual needs and create balance in an ordinary person’s life.

Lastly, Taut believed that architecture not only had an obligation to fulfill man’s physical needs, but it also had to fulfill his emotional needs as well. Taut tried appealing to these needs with his use of color. This brings out the expressionist side of Taut in his artistic work. By using color, Taut wanted buildings to blend in with its natural surroundings to better fulfill the goal of uniting man and nature. Taut’s mission to help others envision a new utopian society, devoid of war and hatred, and to bring man and nature together began with the construction of the Hufeisensiedlung, finished in 1924.

The “Hufeisensiedlung” (“Horseshoe Estate”),²⁸ a large housing complex in the shape of a

²⁶ Bruno Taut. “Die Erde eine gute Wohnung,” *Die Volkswohnung. Zeitschrift für Wohnungsbau und Siedlungswesen* I, no. 4 (February 24, 1919), 45.

²⁷ Taut, *Die Volkswohnung. Zeitschrift für Wohnungsbau und Siedlungswesen* I, 46.

²⁸ Barbara Lane, “The Revolution in Style” in *Architecture and Politics in Germany: 1918-1945* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985), 109.

horseshoe, was finished in 1927 (Fig. 11). The many different apartment buildings of the estate are built out of different material, but still each building is constructed with one primary material of its own. Many of the buildings also share similar characteristics, such as flat roofs and protruding balconies and stairways. But the most important part is the crescent shaped apartment complex. This reflects the architect's vision of a utopian society in which architecture serves as the primary source of social harmony. It also shows his desire to use architecture as a means of transcending conflict both at the class and



Figure 11, the Hufeisensiedlung

national levels. The implementation of portions of the natural world, including the grass, trees, and small pond show Taut's desire to bring physical and spiritual equilibrium to the ordinary German worker's life. Thus, Bruno Taut's Hufeisensiedlung is a great example of how architecture allows for the smooth function of Society.

The interior of the Hufeisensiedlung captures another element of the modern home, the use of mass-produced pieces of furniture (Fig. 12). Unlike the furniture and interior design of traditional styled buildings, modern buildings were filled and decorated with mass-produced material. The dining room chairs and their steel frame reflect this increased use of industrial material in the home. This is a clear display of Taut's conviction that rather than having industrialization control man's life, man ought to control his own life by means of industrial material. From this interior design, architects sought to have future tenants embrace the modern industrial world inside the home, and not just outside. The walls also



Figure 12, apartment inside of the Hufeisensiedlung

display no ornate engravings, and each room looks identical to the other. This fact establishes a sense of equality among the residents and a sense of belonging among a small community who shares similar lifestyles. It also shows Taut's attempt to cut across class differences by making everyone's living conditions identical.

Another work of Bruno Taut's was the Onkel Toms Hütte, a public housing project built in 1929 (Fig. 13). Much like the Hufeisensiedlung, Onkel Toms Hütte is built from one material and shares many characteristics as the previous housing project, including balconies, a flat roof, and curved shapes. The exterior displays no extra ornamentation. Unlike the



Figure 13, Onkel Toms Hütte

Hufeisensiedlung, however, this housing project displays many contrasting colors on its exterior. Taut's goal here, as mentioned, is to blend the buildings in with their natural surroundings to unite man with nature to bring spiritual balance into his life. Each building in this complex, along with their interiors, have the same consistent style, bringing a sense of equality to each tenant.

Another architect who helped to reshape German identity through his work was Eric Mendelsohn (1887-1953). Mendelsohn was a German expressionist artist who was most known

for designing department stores and cinemas. He first began studying architecture at the



Figure 14, *Onkel Toms Hütte*

Technical University of Munich in 1908

and, much like Bruno Taut, was heavily

influenced and inspired by the work of

Theodore Fischer. Mendelsohn would

begin working as an architect

independently in Munich from 1912 to

1914, until he was conscripted and forced

to serve in the German army during

World War One. Upon his return home, he settled in Berlin and continued his career as an independent architect.

Mendelsohn emphasized function as the primary element for all of his architectural projects. However, he did understand the necessity of architecture to combine both beauty and utility into one coherent work of art. He says that beauty and utility must “find each other” and work together in order to combine the two contrasting elements of reason and unreason into one giant building.²⁹ In all of his works, Mendelsohn aspires to reach this self-made standard, and one of his projects in Berlin that we see this most clearly in is the “Columbushaus.”

The Columbushaus, designed by Eric Mendelsohn, was constructed in the Potsdamer Platz and was finished in 1932 (Fig. 15).³⁰ The Columbushaus served both as a department store on its lowest floors and held offices on the building’s upper levels. In the simplest terms, the building

²⁹ Peter Gay, “The Hunger of Wholeness” in *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* (New York, New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), 97.

³⁰ Eric Weitz, “Building a New Germany” in *Weimar Germany promise and tragedy*. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2018), 53.

sticks out like a sore thumb. It contrasts sharply with the old dark buildings that line the street. It is completely made up of industrial material, such as glass and steel, and resembles something close to a modern-day skyscraper.³¹ The building screams of expressionism, as Mendelsohn's goal was to create a space that removed people from the stresses and chaos of the contemporary world. Mendelsohn wished for spectators to undergo an emotional experience in reaction to the building's appearance and uniqueness, and through this reaction they may for a second feel



Figure 15, the Columbushaus

disconnected from the world they live in and find serenity in the sight of something new.

Counterpoint also plays into Mendelsohn's style, as the lowest parts of the building's exterior contrast with the rest of the building's upper glass exterior. This

counterpoint creates the effect of one

constant melody, the bottom, being accompanied by a separate melody from above, as in musical notation. The design, building material, and function of the project, although appearing to be very simplistic in detail, combine and work off of one another to create a beautiful modern work of art that embraces the modern world for how it is.

The interior of the Columbushaus shows how modern industrial building material was capable of creating much more interior space at a lower cost. The long and wide hallways offer much more room for space for business related activity, unlike the seemingly jam-packed interior of the Wertheim department store. The glass windows also offer more natural light and heating for the building, further diminishing the cost of construction and utilities. The

³¹ James, Kathleen. "Expressionism, Relativity, and the Einstein Tower." *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 53, no. 4 (1994): 393.

colorless and plain interior is similar to Taut's interior design. Much like with Taut, the function of the building take precedent over all other considerations. However, Mendehlsohn's excessive use of windows would be simultaneously used by another prominent architect in Germany named Walter Gropius.

One final architect, and the most influential in the city of Berlin, was a man named Walter Gropius (1883-1969). From a very early age he shared a strong fascination for architecture with his father and uncle. In his early twenties, he enrolled at the Technical School in Munich and later attended the Konigliche Technische Hochschule in Berlin. He dropped out of schooling prematurely and began working for Peter Behrens in 1908. At his new place of employment, Gropius would form life-long connections with other future prominent architects and, more importantly, would creatively think of new ways to build things with modern material and purely original techniques. By 1910, Gropius left Behren's office to pursue his own practice and open his own architecture office in the city of Berlin. However, his career would come to a brief halt after he was called to serve in the first world war. Upon his return home from the war, Gropius, among other architects, became an even



Figure 16, the interior of Columbushaus



Figure 17, the interior of Columbushaus

stronger advocate for new architectural styles. His efforts in calling for new architectural design resulted in his founding of the Bauhaus school in 1919.

Walter Gropius would establish perhaps the most popular school of design in modern



Figure 18, the Bauhaus School in Dessau

European history is Dessau in 1919.

Translating into the “house of architecture” the Bauhaus school sought to bring together all kinds of craftspeople and artists with the intent of creating a new style of architecture that would implement all forms of art, and

which could reimagine the material world in

which modern man lived.³² The ultimate goal and vision, in Gropius’s words, was the creation of “the new building of the future, which will be everything together, architecture and sculpture and painting, in a single shape, rising to heaven from the hands of millions of craftsmen as a crystal symbol of a new emerging faith.”³³ The desire to create entirely new perspectives of how modern people see and understand the world are quite clear in Gropius’s words here. Gropius wanted future students and architects to unite both utility and beauty in their future works as a way to celebrate and embrace the modernity.

Students at this school were encouraged to innovate and create new styles architecture as well as domestic products and amenities with the use of modern industrial material. Gropius believed that in order for man to become more appreciative and accepting of modernity, modern materials

³² Peter Gay, “The Hunger of Wholeness” in *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* (New York, New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), 99.

³³ Walter Gropius, *Programm des Staatlichen Bauhauses* (April 1919).

and devices must be used to fulfill man's every day needs and wants.³⁴ But while these materials served man's needs, they also possessed designs that were aimed at fulfilling man's need for art in everyday life. Gropius's founding of the



Figure 19, the Bauhaus School in Dessau

Bauhaus began a new period of architectural innovation that would permeate not just across German, but also around the world.

After the school's initial focus on the creation of hand-made designs for modern materials, the production of houses and housing amenities became increasingly mass produced to reach a wider population. Mass production of building material and parts of housing also shows ways in which modern architects took advantage of industrialization to reimagine architecture. Residential buildings were "to be constructed not at the building site, but for the most part in assembly-ready units by special factories."³⁵ This strategy made public housing construction much more efficient and far cheaper. More housing designs and amenities would share far more similar characteristics, establishing an even greater sense of commonality among tenants.

The Bauhaus School building, designed by Walter Gropius, shares many similar aspects between Bruno Taut and Erich Mendelsohn's work. On the one hand, like Mendelsohn's designs, the school building makes great use of industrial material to create more interior space at a cheaper price and utilizes windows to bring in natural light and heating. On the other hand, like

³⁴ Walter Gropius, *Wer hat Recht? Traditionelle Baukunst oder Bauen in neuen Formen*, no. 7 (April 1926) 31.

³⁵ Gropius, *Wer hat Recht? Traditionelle Baukunst oder Bauen in neuen Formen*, 32.

Taut's designs, the school is surrounded by nature and the windows help in bringing individuals closer with nature. These designs will be seen in much of Gropius's later projects in Berlin.

Upon returning home, Walter Gropius intensified his calls for rethinking architectural design, and many of his early projects in Berlin echo this sentiment. One of Gropius's earliest projects in Berlin was the construction of the "Sommerfeld House," completed in 1921 (Fig. 10).³⁶ Some

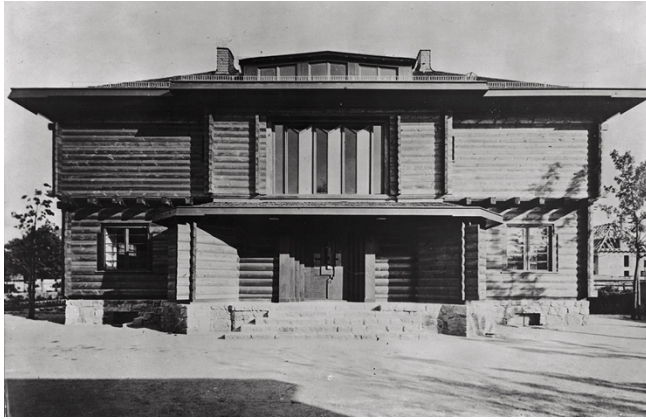


Figure 20, Sommerfeld House in Berlin, 1921

Bauhaus architects, including Adolf Meyer, worked alongside Gropius to co-design the Sommerfeld House. This house was built for a man named Adolf Sommerfeld, a building entrepreneur. This building would also be the Bauhaus's undertaking of a major project in the city of Berlin. Unlike

Gropius's future works, this house is primarily built with timber, with a stone foundation underneath. Although the building was built out of material associated with traditional architecture, the design of the building was quite unique to Gropius and the Bauhaus. The structure was built in a simple block shape. Adolf Sommerfeld asked for this shape and design, despite being a part of the entrepreneurial class, in which many members probably resided in grandiose houses with ornate designs as depictions of their wealth. The shape of the Sommerfeld House was Gropius and the Bauhaus's first manifestation of the principle of function over ornamentation in Berlin. The design of the building came from the building's material alone.

The interior of the Sommerfeld House presents a unique use of geometric design to

³⁶ Hans Wingler, *The Bauhaus: Weimar, Dessau, Berlin, Chicago*. (Massachusetts: MIT Press. 1969), 239.

decorate the walls, stair, floor, and ceiling (Fig. 11). The shapes are all embedded within the wood from which the building is constructed, further showing how the design of the building emanates from its material alone. The Sommerfeld is great representation of how Gropius and the Bauhaus's earliest architecture tended to the simple needs of modern man, with an extra display of unnecessary extravagance.

The best depiction of the Bauhaus's architectural principles and the culmination of modern architectural values is Walter Gropius's Siemensstadt (Fig. 12).³⁷ The Siemensstadt was



Figure 21, Sommerfeld House

a residential estate completed in 1934. The estate shares many similar characteristics as the Hufeisensiedlung in the sense that it has flat roofs and protruding balconies and stairways. The



Figure 22, the Siemensstadt

complex's buildings are also built of a single material. As can be seen, little ornamentation can building. The building receives its beauty purely from the material from which it's built.

However, the Siemensstadt also consists of rounded edges and curvatures that give the building a sense of movement. The design of the buildings left much space between apartment complexes for there to be spaces of recreation and gathering, where a sense of community may be established. The principles of architectural design for the Bauhaus throughout the years is quite evident in this final project of Walter

³⁷ Barbara Lane, "The Revolution in Style" in *Architecture and Politics in Germany: 1918-1945* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985), 111.

Gropius. The Siemensstadt truly represents all aspects of what Gropius, the Bauhaus, and the whole “Neues Bauen” stood for.

The interior of the Siemensstadt reflects similar Bauhaus characteristics, including simplicity and functionality (Fig. 13). As can be observed, very little decoration can be seen within the apartments themselves, and the monotone color of the walls



Figure 23, inside the Siemensstadt

reflects the building’s exterior. Also, within the building are mass-produced furniture and other home commodities. Much like inside Taut’s Hufeisensiedlung, Gropius attempts to unite man’s personal life and industrialization, to make him master over it in the home, so that in the outside world, man no longer feels alienated or belittled by the industrial world outside. Now that I’ve finished analyzing some of the works of the architects I’ve chosen to focus on, let me now reiterate why studying architecture in this time is important.

Studying architecture during the Weimar era can tell us much about how Germans felt about themselves and about their changing culture and desires in the post-World War One years. A society dominated by emperor, aristocracy, and church was dwindling away by the forces of industrialization and modernization and came to an abrupt end after the end of the Great War. From then on, Germans took power and control over politics and culture and sought new ways of expressing German identity, an identity separated from its past. The new identity, seemingly identified through architecture, seemed to contradict the pretentious attitudes of the German ruling elite, as simplicity conquered over ornamentation. Thus, by studying architecture in the years of the Weimar Republic, we may better realize the cultural developments occurring in

Germany and the social upheaval that completely turned German society upside down.

I have chosen to analyze the works of Bruno Taut, Erich Mendelsohn, and Walter Gropius because each architect demonstrates, under both distinct and common methods, how architecture was used to change the way people experienced the world in everyday life. For Bruno Taut, this included public housing and the underlying focus on creating a sense of commonality among residence's everyday living conditions. For Mendelsohn, this involved department stores whose appearances contrasted so sharply with other buildings that it provoked an emotional experience in spectators that made them feel, at a single moment, disconnected from the modern world as they knew it. Finally, for Walter Gropius, this included the founding of the Bauhaus School of Design and his own works, all of which sought to subject modernity to the needs of man while also creating complete works within the buildings. Each architect has significantly influenced the other in numerous ways and all share a common goal in helping man to accept the modern world and the realities of modern life.

The study of architecture is incredibly important in studying and understanding a society's cultural and social priorities. Through the study of architecture in Berlin from the late fifteenth century to the Weimar Republic era, the considerable changes in architectural designs offer material manifestation to the shifts in culture and political power happening within the city's confines. The post war world from 1919-1933 depicts the fall of traditional authority that remained powerful for a millennium and the rise of new world that sought to reflect and fulfill the needs of ordinary Germans. The architecture that resulted from this period reflects the very fact that the Weimar Republic was the most volatile era in German history. These changes, however, offer us just as many questions about German history during this time as they do answers. Such questions may ask, "what explains the rise of authoritarianism in 1933, with Hitler

and the Nazis, if German culture seemingly changed for the better after World War One?” The brief window between authoritarian regimes make the Weimar Republic all the more interesting to study and understand. Many brilliant thinkers, including these three architects, seemed to be guiding society into a more harmonious and sustainable direction until it all came to an end just years later.

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