

EXPRESSIONIST ARCHITECTURE IN DRAWINGS



WOLFGANG PEHNT

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VAN NOSTRAND REINHOLD COMPANY

New York

Translated from the German
ARCHITEKTURZEICHNUNGEN DES EXPRESSIONISMUS
by John Gabriel

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Preface

In our days an architecture that neglects materials and purpose, function and engineering and insists on the primacy of individual expression would fly in the face of modern architectural dogma. And just such an approach, whose protagonists dreamed of reshaping heaven and earth, stood at the beginning of the modern movement – or, more precisely, at one of its many beginnings, during the era of Expressionism. Architectural drawing played just as important a role during that period as it does now, though today's Post-Modernism, with its historical references, cautious precision, and intellectualism, may seem worlds apart from the stormy vitality and humanitarian zeal of the Expressionist generation.

This comparison, which reveals a few similarities and many differences, was one of the more immediate reasons for compiling a volume of this kind. Another and better reason was the sheer quality of these documents of a renewal illustrated here. Since Göran Lindahl's 1959 essay "From Cathedral of the Future to Machine for Living", since Ulrich Conrads and Hans G. Sperlich's *Fantastic Architecture* of 1960 and the overviews of Expressionist architecture written by Dennis Sharp, Borsi and König, and myself, several more specialized studies have been published on the structures and architects of Expressionism. The bequests and archives still contain undiscovered material, however, and this was yet another motive for compiling this book.

Even a slim volume like this depends on the assistance of many people. If besides the indispensable and better-known drawings I have been able to include many previously unpublished works, this would not have been possible without the cooperation of heirs and bequest administrators, collectors and museum people. My special thanks go to Mrs. Lisbet Balslev Jørgensen, Copenhagen; Mrs. Susanne Klingenberg, Itzehoe; Mrs. Marlene Charlotte Krüger, Hamburg; Mrs. Claudia Lang-Pack, Aachen; Mrs. Loretto Molzahn, Munich; Mrs. Marlene Poelzig, Hamburg; Mrs. Maria Schwarz, Cologne; Mrs. Gemma Wolters-Thiersch, Überlingen; and to Professor Gottfried Böhm, Cologne; Mr. Kasper König, Cologne; Dr. Helmut Lerch, Darmstadt; Mr. Peter Magdowski, Berlin; Dr. Winfried Nerdinger, Munich; Mr. Dieter Radicke, Berlin; Dr. Wolf Tegethoff, Kiel; Professor Oswald Mathias Ungers, Cologne; Mr. Achim Wendschuh, Berlin; Mr. Dirk van Woerkom, Amsterdam; as well as to those lenders who wished to remain anonymous, to the management and staff of the collections named in the list of plates, and to the VEB Verlag der Kunst, Dresden. It was Gerd Hatje, my publisher, who had the idea for the present book. I am particularly indebted to him and his staff, and especially to Mrs. Ruth Wurster, who shepherded the volume through all stages of production, and to Mrs. Karin Janthur for her untiring assistance in obtaining visual material.

Wolfgang Pehnt

I.

Building is not a profession for the lone individualist. Writers, artists, and to a certain extent composers and sculptors, can do most of their work alone in the studio, but architects depend on the cooperation of many other people – clients, contractors, builders, engineers, officials, financing experts and real estate agents. And if they want to communicate some special message with their work, they have to explain it to all concerned. Nor is the fact that they are tremendously moved by their own vision any guarantee that the other people involved will be. Architects who create, as Bruno Taut put it, “out of a strong emotion” and whose buildings are meant to speak “to the emotions only”¹ thus face much greater difficulties than artists in other fields when it comes to finding acceptance for unfamiliar ideas. The Expressionist architects never felt completely at home in three-dimensional reality. They were able to execute their projects only under the most favourable circumstances – where architects’ dreams met with such high public receptiveness as they did in Amsterdam, where a community of philosophic interest existed as in Dornach, or where an experimentally-minded patron commissioned a private residence, as happened here and there during the 1910s and early 1920s. But seated at the drawing board, these architects with a message were absolutely free. They could envisage crystal domes, bridges between Alpine peaks, skyscraping cities and human-oriented settlements regardless of the division of labour and its strictures. Only when they were content to rule over a sheet of paper were architects truly kings, those “leaders and masters of the visual artists”² and farsighted shapers of human destiny that they imagined themselves to be during the Expressionist years. Pencil and charcoal, pen and brush enabled them to capture, far from the compulsions of the building site, every passing fancy and heartfelt wish. If Expressionist architecture existed more on paper than in three-dimensional reality, it was because drawing is the medium that offers least resistance to imaginative vision. It was no disadvantage in the eyes of their contemporaries that architects should depend so strongly on the tools of fine art. Though the architects may have claimed priority, declaring that their art was the mother of all, even some of their sharpest critics recommended that they limit themselves to drawing and sketching as a beneficial means of self-reflection. This was the only way in which the art of building could repair the link with the other arts which all too much utilitarian thinking had shattered. “If present-day architecture is almost completely cut off from the extremely vital efforts being made in sculpture and painting,” wrote Paul Westheim in 1919, “if it can fructify just as little in that direction as it can receive new impetus in return, the reason may well be that intense building activity has caused it to lose touch with its true basis”.³ A temporary return to the means of two-dimensional art (or, in the case of architectural models, to the means of sculpture) was recommended as a rite of initiation to the insights that painters and sculptors had already achieved.

During the 1920s such insights were labelled Expressionist, and architecture began to be measured against the works of Expressionist painters and sculptors. Was architecture indeed an “emanation of indomitable personality”, a “radiation of the spirit” involving “creative audacity”, “imagina-

tive experience”, and a “boiling over of sensibility”⁴? “The creative art of building”, enthused Westheim, “is just as much an imaginative projection into materials of humanity, intelligence, power and grandeur as is creation in paint or clay, the translation of a higher idea of the universe into artistic reality, the infusion of an inner musical rhythm into space and stone; it means dreaming and dream-shaping, that same ineffable, titanic, insatiable passion which attempted to rage itself out in both Rembrandt and Michelangelo.”⁵ Westheim’s no less enthusiastic colleague Walter Müller-Wulckow drew the uncontroversial conclusion that this passion was “bound to lead to an Expressionism that will seem unusual in architecture for some time to come”⁶.

Where the creative urge was so highly valued, the architectural sketch became doubly significant. Sketches promised insight into the creative process, and with their aid artists could tap sources that would otherwise remain buried. Expressionism banked on spontaneity and intuition, not on results achieved through involvement and compromises with reality. “The recording of a vision is so infinitely more important than the trimming down and pruning out required to meet actual conditions . . . Because these sudden pyrotechnic bursts of genius illuminate in a flash the depths where the Inconceivable lies.”⁷ Drawings were also expected to point to the tasks of the future. Not only were they conceived as opening channels to the primal source of all creative power, they were a challenge to the imagination: “An architectural sketch continually restimulates the imagination, making it help work, help build, help *will*”, declared Adolf Behne in the brochure for an exhibition of drawings.⁸ The unfinished character of architectural sketches was considered a guarantee of their openness to the future – a utopian quality that existed independently of the utopian subject represented. It is not surprising that exhibitions of architects’ drawings burgeoned during the first months and years after World War I. In April 1919, the Berlin Arbeitsrat für Kunst (Working Council for Art) organized an “Exhibition for Unknown Architects”, followed in May 1920 by “New Building”. The artists’ society Novembergruppe, also of Berlin and closely allied with the Arbeitsrat, included architects’ designs, drawings, models and photographs in their shows as a matter of course. The Paul Cassirer gallery, at Henry van de Velde’s suggestion, exhibited in 1919 the sketches that Erich Mendelsohn had made during the war and recasted the year after. Sections were devoted to architecture at other regularly scheduled events such as the Dresden Secession and Grosse Berliner Kunstausstellung. In Amsterdam, the group Architectura et Amicitia held many exhibitions, of which their 1915 show, with Michel de Klerk, Johan Melchior van der Mey, and Piet Kramer, must have looked like a demonstration of Dutch Expressionists. The organizers of events like these appealed to a different and more committed audience than that of normal art shows. “To a much higher degree than non-applied art,” wrote Adolf Behne, “architectural designs appeal to the *will* and thus fulfil a mission.”⁹ People who appreciated these drawings of a future architecture were considered allies, who were willing to accept more responsibility than the normal buyer and collector of art and who participated in the development of the new work of the building art from the beginning.

Designs produced by Expressionist architects during this period seldom disappointed these high expectations. In



Max Pechstein(?). Flysheet for the *Arbeitsrat für Kunst* (Working Council for Art). 1919

Hans Poelzig's drawings, surfaces roughed in with charcoal or wash evoke a primordial layer out of which identifiable shapes and spaces begin to emerge. Ornamental sequences, striving upward in pointed gothic spires or outward in forceful baroque arabesques, mark off a dancing rhythm in which the separate beats are linked into space-defining chains. The violence of these images suggests the rapidity with which they must have appeared to Poelzig's mind's eye. Speaking of his studies for a Festival Hall in Salzburg, Poelzig once recalled that a "more or less mild frenzy" had seized him when he saw the natural theatre at Mirabell and Hellbrunn, driving every thought from his mind except "how to supplement, or even surpass, this world of form with something essentially related".¹⁰ In the case of Hans Scharoun, such conjurings-up of spirits took on an explosive character. His sheaves of form lick like flames, shoot like crystals, or break like exotic fruits out of the earth; the streamlined shapes of the somewhat later drawings, like strange creatures made of some unknown kind of protoplasm, rush as if from afar into the rectangle of the paper. In Rudolf Schwarz's drawings a knotted and tangled network of energy-charged lines shape themselves into the facades of sacred buildings. An indefinite spatial depth is evoked simultaneously with volume, as though the structures brought the atmosphere out of which they have materialized along with them.

In works such as those of Poelzig and Schwarz (his former master-student), those of Jefim Golyscheff, and certain of Hermann Finsterlin's drawings, definition of space and volume appears to have been achieved by letting the hand move of its own accord. This spontaneous gestural automatism prefigures Surrealist techniques of visual evocation. Moreover, these are the drawings that evince most clearly two further traits of the Expressionist approach to architecture: an extremely close, reciprocal relationship between interior and exterior space, and the independence of Expressionist designs from their material realization. The first aspect, an interdependence of interior and exterior that dissolves the solid walls of traditional architecture, has since become a prime criterion of all modern architecture. The early, Expressionist version of this integration, however, employed means different from those of the later, classical modern. Instead of articulating space in terms of clearly defined structural elements – point-like sections, precise planes, and platonic volumes – the Expressionists conceived both spaces and solid bodies as a plastically modelled continuum. In Poelzig's sketches, the earth bulges into configurations that

may appear either organic or man-made, function as enclosing shell or enclosed sculpture, cavern or tower. Many of Finsterlin's drawings show eroded, jagged formations projecting and impinging – glacial landscapes which the eyes traverses without being able to tell us whether we are on ice or solid ground. Of course, besides these geomorphic approaches other compositional techniques offered themselves, techniques derived from Cubism in which the synthesis of interior and exterior space could be expressed in groupings of overlapping and superimposed fragments of form.

As with exterior and interior space, it is impossible in many of these drawings to distinguish between organic nature and the results of human intervention. In Wenzel August Hablik's early drawings, man seems to have burrowed into the crystallizations of a primordial world, continuing to shape them as if the human imagination were an anonymous force of nature. Bruno Taut interpreted the intervention of man the building animal among the Alpine peaks as the work of some demiurgic jeweller who, carefully facetting and polishing, lent ores and minerals a beauty characterized by strange mergers of the as-yet-unformed with the already formed. In a sketch for his album *Alpine Architecture*, the main nave of a "Cliff Cathedral" overtops a narrow chasm while its aisles merge with caves and grottoes chipped out of the mountainside, reversing positive and negative form. The ambiguity of this technique of representation is paralleled by the ambiguity of its content.

These suggestions and borderline ambiguities are complicated by the fact that the means of material realization, beyond the drawing, have seldom been taken into consideration. Materials are indeed sometimes specified in *Alpine Architecture* and Finsterlin's "Wohnlinge", but the bridges and piers of emerald green or ruby red glass, the crystal needles of the mountaintops, the frosted glass domes and arbitrarily tinted concrete shells, the porphyry boulders, ebony structures, gilded copper roofs, and silver-plated columns were evidently meant to evoke costliness, brilliancy and colour rather than as practical construction specifications. Interestingly, it was a man untrained in architecture who devoted most thought to the realization of his utopian schemes. Wenzel August Hablik, in his designs for self-supporting cupolas and exhibition towers erected on staggered, polygonal plans, took account of such practical problems as scaffolding, wind forces and snow loads. But in many other drawings of this period, the architects appear to have relied on some infinitely malleable substance to help them in the play of metamorphoses. No such material was available on the market, of course, nor has it been invented since.

Another technique of representation that answered well to the quid pro quo of space and sculpture was a development and ramification of basic forms in seemingly endless series. Erich Mendelsohn used to sketch out morphological sequences with great rapidity (and with stimulating gramophone music in the background). Finsterlin's work includes drawings that almost systematically investigate the potentialities of an embryonal shape, frequently crossing the borderline into figurative, even sometimes physiognomic interpretations. Yet such first, shorthand notes, attempts to record an idea that has not developed into complex figuration, have less of the specific tone of the period than other, more finished drawings. There is an Expressionism of the moment that is found not only in the works of the Expres-

sionists. Gradually working up to and pinning down an idea in sketch after sketch is something architects have practised whenever a notebook, the back of an envelope, or a paper napkin fell into their hands – an occupational habit and also a bit of prestidigitation that is good for one's status consciousness and part of the architectural game.

There was too much diversity of temperament among Expressionist architects to allow them to be subsumed under a unified aesthetic. If some of them seemed to develop their ideas in the process of sketching, letting the pencil glide across the paper of its own accord, other artists obviously had the finished structure in mind before they began to draw. And they worked out such conceptions to various degrees of finish. Erich Mendelsohn set his ideas down in pregnant contours and enlarged his original, tiny sketches "like poster roughs", as Walter Curt Behrendt rather deprecatingly put it.¹¹ Many of Finsterlin's ideas congealed in a calligraphic shorthand, while Otto Bartning recorded his hesitatingly, and with an almost anxious precision.

The differing states of these aggregates of form were not only a function of the artists' personal idiosyncrasies. They were also determined by opportunities for realization of the designs and thus by the purpose for which the drawings were made. Where it was a matter of dimensioning and structural reconsideration as in many of Michel de Klerk's sketches, or where the client had to be provided with a lucid view of his future real estate, the spontaneous gesture was out of place. The rendering as a means of communicating an idea to others demanded a different approach from the monologue of the rapid sketch. Still different means were required by the educational and moral aims that members of Bruno Taut's circle pursued. Taut himself, not an extraordinarily gifted draughtsman, frequently resorted to multiple views in his depictions, combinations of elevation and ground plan, overall view and detail, a juxtaposition of characteristic parts of the building accompanied by exhaustive commentary. This combination of lettering and image was among the typical visual means of the period. Concerned foremost with dramatic effects, the Expressionists placed little weight on purity of genre. Making one's message understood was the prime thing, and hence Taut's or Hablik's drawings explain their authors' intentions in words and pictures that recall popular illustrated sheets or even the comic strips that had just begun to appear at the time.

The closer architects were to an actual commission, the less subjective their methods became. The archives of the Amsterdam architects, for instance, contain relatively few drawings in which the furies of the subconscious have been allowed free rein. These men adapted their fantasies to realisable buildings, while many of their German counterparts considered drawing an end in itself. With the Dutch architects a sketch was often a descriptive prediction of some imaginative reality; with the Germans, it was that reality itself.

II.

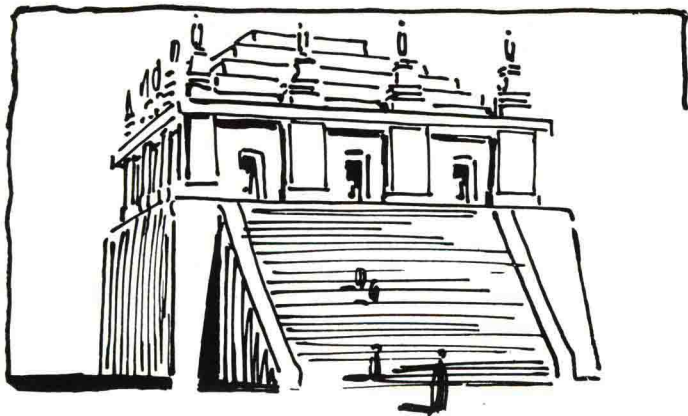
The period immediately following World War I was a time of great deprivation for everyone in defeated Germany, but for the architects it meant facing special professional problems. Practising architecture during the first postwar years amounted to managing shortages and dealing with need. The construction business profited least of all branches of trade from the inflationary tendencies of the market. When

the government saw itself compelled to administrate housing, private investors lost interest in the housing field. A scarcity of raw materials – particularly losses in coal production capacity – runaway building prices, and high interest rates on capital prevented investment in other areas of building as well. As the letters of Bruno Taut and Walter Gropius testify, even established architects often faced acute problems in making a living.

In these conditions, the sketchbook offered a substitute for non-existent commissions, and publication or exhibition were the only ways to disseminate ideas in the absence of built architecture. Bruno Taut's 1919 and 1920 initiatives as spokesman of the younger generation were all on paper – that exchange of graphic and written ideas he encouraged among his friends and that later came to be known as *Gläserne Kette*; his project for a musical drama, *Der Weltbaumeister*; and his planned film, whose scenes were to be designed and drawn by his *Gläserne Kette* correspondents. These drawings, done without any hope of practical realization, informed by utopian idealism, and, as in Taut's portfolios, predicated on the emergence of a new audience, a populace reconciled with art, were a product of unemployed years. Taut's great hope was that his and his friends' architectural visions would strike "aspiring workingmen" with the imaginative force of art. "When you say they have, brothers," he wrote, "we will be gratified beyond words. It will show us that you are prepared to help us build, and convince us that the early dawn of a new culture is already emerging on the horizon."¹²

During the years – or was it only months? – when a spiritual and cultural revolution still seemed possible, many latent developments appeared to be coming to a head. Even the term "Expressionism" harked back to a pre-1914 movement. In painting, this stylistic label had found currency in the course of 1911; it was first applied to architecture about a year later by Adolf Behne, who was always quick to spot new trends. Writing about the work of Bruno Taut in the journal *Pan* for 1912-13, Behne obviously still felt that much justification was required for calling an activity so strongly dependent on real conditions "Expressionist". Expressionist in the deepest sense, he stated, was whatever "emerged solely from inside". A waiver of preconceived notions of order, an intense involvement with every new challenge, and forms that were "truly inspired, truly organic" were for him unfailing signs of the new attitude.¹³

But had not such "truly inspired, truly organic" forms only recently been achieved, in Art Nouveau and Jugendstil, only to be rejected as ostentatious, arbitrary and artsy-craftsy? The first decade of the century had seen a neo-classical revival in Germany, a return to late-eighteenth century art that practised a Goethean serenity in domestic architecture and translated the requirements of the machine age into a new brand of industrial classicism. Part of its adherents' strategy was to represent the ideas and products of Art Nouveau as belonging to the past, a *fin de siècle* rather than a new beginning, the swan-song of a doomed era. Certain historians, who simplified their task by assuming that history was a linear process, lent support to this view by hindsight. But the impulse of the Nineties was much too strong and the modern movement much too full of promise for it to succumb so easily. In many regions of Europe – Finland, Scotland, and Catalonia especially – Art Nouveau had been more than a passing style; it had contributed to the forma-



Otto Kohtz. From *Gedanken über Architektur* (Thoughts on Architecture). Berlin, 1909

tion of a national or regional identity. Achievements of this scope are not discarded lightly. Catalan Modernisme, for instance, could not have been less concerned with art-historical boundaries. Long after Art Nouveau had been buried by general agreement, Puig i Cadafalch, Josep M. Jujol, and above all Antoni Gaudí went on contributing to their region's modernist architecture with its characteristic amalgam of traditional brick construction, Gothic and northern Arabian ornament, and international modern influence. This "Neo-Catalonian" style was known to the Expressionist generation of architects in Central Europe thanks to a few, scattered publications. Hermann Finsterlin even corresponded with Gaudí, and Walter Gropius visited him during a trip to Spain in 1908.¹⁴

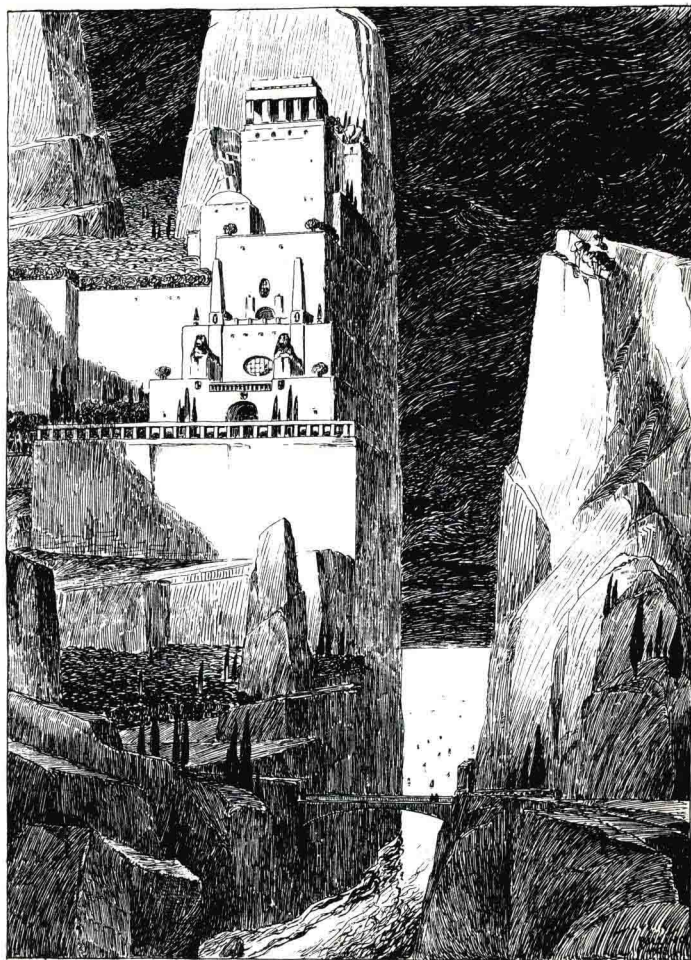
Though Art Nouveau prepared the ground for Expressionism in its use of architectural forms to convey significance and emotion, the biomorphic tendencies of early Art Nouveau found only partial acceptance among the younger generation. Wherever organically inspired shapes occur in the work, say, of Finsterlin, Mendelsohn, or Rudolf Steiner, the Expressionist penchant for the hard and crystalline has generally led them to choose the skeletons of living things as models – branches of coral, snail or mussel shells, and bone structures. But more importantly, the "expressive ornament" of Art Nouveau had already well-nigh explored the capacity of architectural configurations for conveying "the whole range of human feeling and states of mind – joy and pain, waking and dreaming, weakness and power", as Walter Curt Behrendt has written.¹⁵

These similarities being what they were, it is no wonder that contacts across the generations came about. The organizers of the Exhibition for Unknown Architects invited Hermann Obrist, the visionary but almost completely forgotten sculptor and Art Nouveau ornament designer, to participate in their 1919 show. Erich Mendelsohn quite frankly admired both Obrist and Henry van de Velde, who for his part called Mendelsohn his only true pupil. *Wendingen*, the organ of the Amsterdam Expressionists, devoted long articles and even entire special issues to such pioneers as Jan Toorop, Kolo-man Moser, Gustav Klimt, and Josef Hoffmann. Michel de Klerk, the boy genius of the Amsterdam school, which began earlier than its German counterpart and was thus closer in time to Art Nouveau, took many of his motifs from the English and Scottish or Austro-German branches of the

movement. That incunabulum of the Expressionist art of building, Bruno Taut's glass pavilion at the 1914 Cologne Werkbund Exhibition, contained a showcase full of the fragile, shimmering creations of Louis Comfort Tiffany – a younger man's homage to a forerunner who, like him, was out to create a *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Taut's critics argued accordingly, accusing him of regressing into a past that had long been overcome.

The idea of a total work of art, which Art Nouveau attempted to realize in terms of an aesthetic ensemble and the Expressionists in terms of a social unity, included the reshaping of the natural environment. No less than a perfection of the entire visible world was what it implied. Neither Paul Scheerbart's literary fantasies – one of the Expressionist architects' sacred texts – nor the graphic utopias of Hablik and Bruno Taut stopped short of visions of terrestrial, even cosmic redesign. Now, it is one of the paradoxes of expansive thinking that the larger its plans, the smaller the scale of their visualization tends to be – a sheet of drawing paper is the utopian's true medium. This tradition of visionary drawing, too, stretched back unbroken into the days of Art Nouveau. The students of Otto Wagner or Hermann Billing (who had trained Hans Luckhardt and Max Taut) dreamed of mysterious mergings of nature with the works of man. They envisioned lonely temples accessible to only a few adepts, the

Hermann Billing. Architectural Sketch. 1903. From *Architektur-Skizzen* (Architectural Sketches). Stuttgart, n. d. (1904)



elect who bore Zarathustra's message in their hearts, high above precipitous chasms, and set the enigmatic eyes of human habitations in forbidding mountain peaks. The work of Hablik, who was fascinated from the beginning by mountain architecture and crystalline forms, provides the clearest evidence of a link across the generations from Art Nouveau to Arbeitsrat and the group around Bruno Taut. Hablik's creative experience reached back to the turn of the century, when he studied at the Vienna School of Arts and Crafts, and these memories remained a catalyst in his work right down through the postwar period.

"An idea moved mountains – one thundering word blasted stars out of their orbits and, as if with arms of godlike power, gripped deep, deep into infinite space – creating, shaping, with intractable eternal force."¹⁶ The words are Hablik's, but all the utopian architects experienced their individual creative power in such demigod-like terms. Artists, they believed, were active creators and vessels of inspiration in one, both weak and strong, both servants and masters of art. In this notion of the lone genius called to renew the world, they were of a mind with Nietzsche. The philosopher was one of their prophets; another was Paul Scheerbart, the teller of tales. From Nietzsche they drew their pathos, their trust in the sacredness of the visible and tangible world, their belief that a Dionysian age was imminent, their horror of middle-class complacency and state paternalism, and their faith in the creative act as a transporting experience. Scheerbart represented the down-to-earth, witty antipode to Nietzsche, predicting that once his architecture of glass and crystal became a reality, a new ethic would arise. His eccentric novels also contained such practical tips for architects as this: "If you intend to build in comparatively large dimensions, it is to be recommended that the natural environment be used such that the final result looks as if you had created the existing environment along with the rest. It is generally agreed that stylizing expanses of cliff is of higher value to an architect than erecting the usual four-walled buildings", Paul Scheerbart assures us already in a novel of 1900.¹⁷

What distinguished the utopian Expressionists from their Art Nouveau predecessors was their social commitment. Most of the architects among them professed a universal socialism beyond all party squabbles, a "spiritual community" without which, according to Wijdeveld, no general principle of style could emerge.¹⁸ The reform movements of the pre-war period and the vanguard artists' groups of the war and postwar years, with their pacifist, anarchist and activist politics, lent new meaning to the repertoire of Art Nouveau form they had inherited. Instead of addressing themselves to a select congregation gathered to celebrate an aesthetic cult, they were out to win over the entire population. In 1903, Obrist had said that with all due respect for folk art, fine art was a different thing, and that this luxury was a mental and material cultural necessity. On the contrary, Adolf Behne, reflecting on the relation of art to society a decade and a half later, reserved his praise for artists who found the source of all creative power in the people. "There can be no question", Behne wrote, "that the masses, and only the masses, still lead an uncorrupted, fruitful, independent life. This stratum alone is conceivable as the vehicle of a coming culture, because it alone is virgin land, unadulterated soil."¹⁹ The Expressionist groups waxed euphoric both about the people as an audience and also about its artistic products. Thus the Berlin Arbeitsrat für Kunst advertised in newspa-

pers in the hope of discovering anonymous talents and encouraging popular participation in their programmes. Such exalted aims were not, however, backed up by practical political involvement, either among the German Expressionists or their Dutch counterparts, though Amsterdam Expressionism would hardly have been conceivable without the Social Democratic climate of that city and the housing programmes of the SDAP. As far as Expressionists were concerned, all political parties were moribund and the State was a relic of nationalist prestige thinking.

With social idealism and pacifism two types of building projects took on special importance, the *Volkshaus* or community centre and the religious building in the widest sense. Community centres had been planned and in a few cases even erected before the war, particularly in government housing developments. In 1911, for example, the German Werdandi Society held a competition for an estate with community centre, stipulating that this building was to occupy the middle of the site and was to include an auditorium, a swimming pool, and various shops. At the height of the war, in 1917, a *Volkshaus* Society was founded to put up community centres that would double as war memorials. Among the high-minded Expressionists, projects of this kind took on a truly cultic aspect, being exalted to crystal domes and palaces designed not only to cater to the inhabitants' mundane needs but to serve as places of meditation in a worldly religion. They called their shrines of shining crystal "cathedrals of humanity" where the transformed human beings of the future could purge their souls. "A Meeting Place of Nations" was the theme of a competition organized in 1919 by *Shivsculptarch*, the Soviet commission for a synthesis of painting, sculpture and architecture, and its results were shown in Moscow the following year. Bruno Taut's temple projects, by contrast, were meant for the individual, as places of self-communion and solitary meditation.

Nor was the older generation immune to the prevailing mood. During the war years in neutral Holland, Berlage designed a "Pantheon of Humanity", sited on a hill with eight avenues leading up to it. The inner sanctum, watched over by towers of Love and Courage, Inspiration and Prudence, Science and Power, Liberty and Peace, and surrounded by courtyards of quiet contemplation, was intended as a monument to the unity of mankind. Berlage flanked this central hall with galleries of Memory and Reconciliation, and spanned it with a dome of International Community. Younger architects scoffed at the rather heavy-handed allegory of this pantheon, though really its pathos was only a more rational variant of their own cult of crystal. This pathos continued to inform Berlage's work as late as his 1926 project for a Lenin Mausoleum.

When those who built churches for the established faiths expressed their longing for sacred spaces, they did so in terms not much different from those employed by architects who conceived crystal cathedrals for some unknown religion. A pious person, said Otto Bartning, "finds his way to church out of a conscious or unconscious need to immerse his ego in the great melting pot of the community – in the hope not only to unite his voice with a thousand other voices in the same words but to lend his outcry from the depths of despair a thousand tongues and a thousand mouths."²⁰ Ecclesiastical architecture seemed to provide the great communal task that many had longed for, bringing the idea of a total work of art closer to realization and, moreover, promising contact

with the masses. Thus Adolf Behne could see the church building as “the form assumed by a tremendous emotion that unites the multitude”.²¹ The church designs of both Protestant and Catholic architects favoured a unified space in which private acts of devotion were secondary to services that included the entire congregation. Within the Catholic Church, this idea was championed by the Liturgical Movement, while such Protestant architects as Otto Bartning advocated what they termed “unanimous space”. In both cases, the exalted emotions and ideals typical of the period were bound up with actual projects, which is why visionary thinking remained vital for a longer time in this field of architecture than in any other. Bartning, Dominikus Böhm, Rudolf Schwarz and many other ecclesiastical architects were still translating visions into reality long after the ecstatic reawakening elsewhere had succumbed to disillusion. For both kinds of task, religious building and community centre, Gothic was an obvious model. This needs no explanation in the case of church architecture – besides Romanesque, Gothic had been the prime stylistic ideal of the nineteenth century. Gothic forms would still answer to modern needs, architects felt, if only they were divested of archaeological pedantry and infused with high emotion. And the community spirit, integrating force, and religious strength associated with the Gothic style could also be extended to those buildings which were to provide a new focus for the temporal community. “The architect’s ideal building, the community centre,” wrote Paul Wolf, “will set the dominant accent, a cathedral of the future, in the residential

Sigismund Vladislavovich Dombrovski. Meeting-place of the Peoples. 1919



cities to come.”²² Indeed the notion of a “cathedral of socialism”, which got the Weimar Bauhaus into great political trouble, crops up just as often in the writings of the period as the idea of a revived *Bauhütte*, a guild of pious and devoted artisans who, “longing for community, make one last attempt to reach out for heaven”.²³ Among art critics and historians, those who paved the way for a contemporary reception of the Gothic style were particularly Wilhelm Worringer in *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* (1908) and Karl Scheffler in *Geist der Gotik* (1917).

Gothic was seen as an embodiment of creative labour in which an isolation of architectural elements was just as unknown as an isolation of artists and craftsmen from one another or from their community. Its forms were so moving, Behne wrote, because we are always aware that “besides this one gem, many other, equally beautiful and equally inexhaustible ones gleam, and that they are all solidly set in the strong, supple and grand body of space”, and his words applied not only to forms but to convictions and feelings as well.²⁴ In terms of a synthesis of all the arts, the Baroque might have provided as good a model as the Gothic. A Baroque formal exuberance indeed echoes in many of the designs of the day, particularly in those of Hans Poelzig, who as City Architect in Dresden and planner of the Salzburg Festival buildings worked in two strongholds of the Baroque style. But the Expressionist generation as a whole found the Baroque imagination lacking in the “sublime aims of the Gothic will; tranquillity, contemplation, and nearness to God were foreign to it. Ruled by the same blind and everlasting drive, its flame shot outwards, while the flame of Gothic had burned inwardly.”²⁵

A still brighter light, however, shone beyond the confines of the Western world – *ex oriente lux*. Behind the Gothic cathedral shimmered an apparition of the Indian temple. “Is not India much *more* than Gothic?” asked Adolf Behne. Authors of the day, though most of them had seen the wonders of the East only in photographs, found no superlative too strong when it came to describing them. “One can hardly say where art begins in the monuments of India, with such abundance, such breadth, such ease do they grow out of the whole, out of the ponds, rivers and mountains, out of the sunlight, the land, the countless hands and hearts. They can be separated from the life of the populace as little as a living brain can be cut off from the blood circulating in all the body’s arteries.”²⁶ The Asiatic themes of Expressionist poetry and such movements of philosophical renewal as theosophy are records of the fascination exerted, in the words of Theodor Däubler, by the “sensual presence of far lands across the sea”.²⁷ Stupa and pagoda, opulent domes and swarming detail left their mark on Western architects’ drawings and on some of the few structures that were actually built during those years. Dutch architects, at least, could fall back on the first-hand knowledge of the East provided by their country’s colonies. Their graphic and decorative work in particular often echoes the fantastic planar patterning of Indonesian art.

III.

An architecture that shifted the relationship of function to form strongly in favor of form, subordinating every other consideration to expressive shapes and emotional appeals, emerged almost simultaneously in many parts of Europe. And as in Central Europe, these movements’ plans to

change the face of the earth, a missionary zeal inherited from turn-of-the-century reform movements, Art Nouveau, and Secessionism, seldom got off the drawing board. The Italian Futurists would have liked to transform the world into a dynamic totality, a gigantic urban machine. The Czech Cubists, who were at least able to bring a number of their projects to fruition, combined memories of Bohemian Gothic with the latest pictorial formulas imported from Paris, developing an expressive approach opposed to the dogma of Vienna, the headquarters of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. During its first project phase, Russian revolutionary architecture achieved ecstatic configurations that came very close to those of the Central European Expressionists, though they soon gave way to the technological pathos of Soviet modernism.

Many biographical and organizational crosslinks existed between these movements and Expressionism in the stricter sense. Despite a recognizable common impulse, however, their formal repertoires deserve to be defined independently. The existing stylistic categories are simply not flexible enough to clearly distinguish the various streams and do justice to their significance. The hypothetical term "Expressionist Architecture", in other words, can be construed more or less liberally depending on whether one's aim is to cover as many relevant phenomena as possible or achieve the greatest possible focus. In this book the selection of drawings has been limited to German and Dutch artists. Contemporaries applied the term "Expressionist" to both.

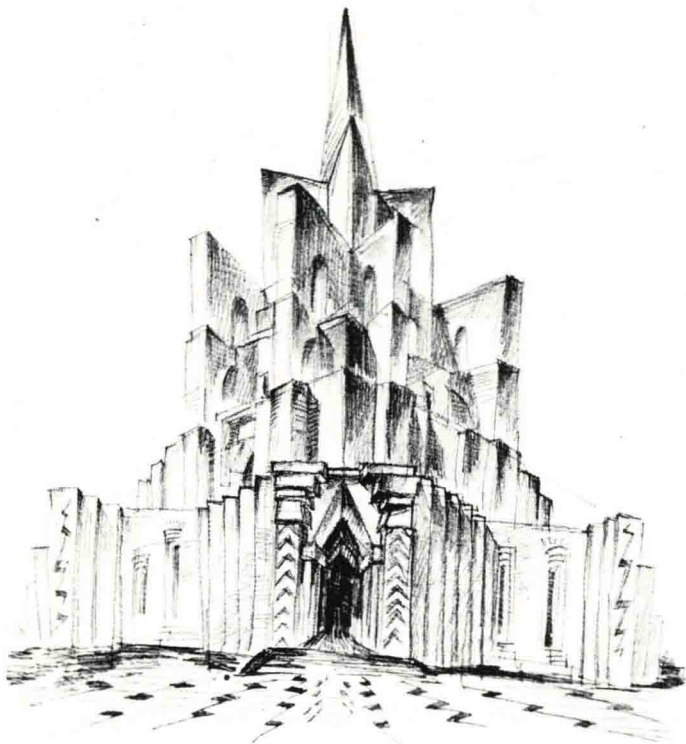
Vladislav Hofman. Study for a Tombstone. 1913



As might have been expected from their related language, relations were very close between groups of architects and artists in Holland and Germany. Hendrik Petrus Berlage figured not only as the doyen of Dutch architecture (at least until he unmistakably distanced himself from the 1920s vanguard), but of the modern movement itself – that “solid cliff in a restless sea”, as Bruno Taut characterized him.²⁸ The journal *Wendingen*, around which the Dutch Expressionists congregated, maintained close contacts with Germany. The “worthy inn of Wendingen”, as Hermann Finsterlin affectionately named it,²⁹ devoted special issues to both Finsterlin and Erich Mendelsohn. Bruno Taut’s *Architekturprogramm* of 1918, his book *Die Stadtkrone*, and his magazine *Frühlicht* were read and discussed in Holland, if not without critical reservations. In the eyes of Jan Frederik Staal, Taut’s book offered not too much but too little utopia: “We in this tame country of flat, rectangular fields between straight, shallow ditches hope, hope for anything that might relieve this monotony and foment a revolt against this parcelled-out, flat world (a bit of land for me, a bit of land for you) – we hope in our tranquil but oh so confined bay for at least a breeze from the storm that heaves the limitless ocean beyond our borders.” Hoping this much, Staal concluded: “A light, a torch, Taut’s book is not.”³⁰ In 1923, Taut gave a lecture before *Architectura et Amicitia*, as did Erich Mendelsohn.

It was particularly Hendrikus Theodorus Wijdeveld, the chief editor of *Wendingen* and hence a spokesman for Dutch Expressionism, who maintained ties with Germany, ties that had been prepared not lastly by the architect J. L. Mathieu Lauweriks, who lived and taught in western Germany for many years.³¹ Sketches by Wijdeveld have survived which he made of Hans Poelzig’s *Grosses Schauspielhaus* in Berlin. He himself was working at the time on a project for a popular theatre, part of an extensive complex in the Vondelpark in Amsterdam. Adolf Behne, who travelled in Holland in 1920 and intended to put on an exhibition of Dutch architects at the Berlin *Arbeitsrat für Kunst*, quoted Wijdeveld’s description of the young Amsterdam artist-architects verbatim – those “rogues and incendiaries of the architectural profession” who “dance like satyrs around the hot smoking coals of the masses, singing a song of liberation”.³²

German architects kept a close eye on developments in the Amsterdam School. Otto Bartning, who had also been to Holland, praised their “structures growing from earth to rooftop, soaring from one end to the other, radiating from interior to exterior; space emerging effortlessly from space, volume generating, impelling, ascending on volume”.³³ The fact that the architecture of *De Stijl* was emerging as an antipode to this, as Bartning put it, “expression of a spontaneous will, a passionate growth” seemed to the German architect to promise a future synthesis. Simplicity stood opposed to complexity, Cubist clarity to dynamic force, cool-headed rationality to the spark of intuition; and the two poles would exert a mutual attraction that could only lead to a great reconciliation. This respect for the achievements of the Amsterdam School remained strong even after developments in Holland, as in Germany, had been diverted into different channels. As late as 1929, Bruno Taut could still call it a miracle that collective architecture had emerged there “in which the individual house was no longer important but long rows of houses concentrated into streets, which



Nikolai Ivanovich Iszelenov. Meeting place of the Peoples. 1919

in turn were concentrated into a larger unity, even though many architects had worked on them".³⁴

While in Germany the Expressionists' formal daring was manifested without compromise only in certain, scattered structures – churches, a handful of apartment blocks, Poelzig's *Grosses Schauspielhaus*, Erich Mendelsohn's early work, Rudolf Steiner's fortress of anthroposophy at Dornach near Basel, and in Bernhard Hoetger's completed projects – the buildings of the Amsterdam School were almost too numerous to count. It is true that these "graceful architectonic sculptures that follow the cadences of developing space in full swing" (Wijdeveld)³⁵ were concentrated on certain quarters of Amsterdam such as Spaarndammer Buurt and the southern and western parts of the city. But many were located in other sections as well, and their influence was felt throughout the country. After beginning with Willem Kromhout's pioneering work, after the designs produced by the emerging Amsterdam School during the first decade of the century, after Michel de Klerk's *Hillehuis* in Amsterdam and Piet Kramer's *Sailors' Union* in Den Helder, both of which were erected in 1911–12, Amsterdam Expressionism first culminated in the *Scheepvaarthuis* designed by the architect trio of Johan Melchior van der Mey, de Klerk, and Kramer (1912–16). The full-blown Expressionist style lasted almost two decades in Holland. Not only did it begin earlier and unfold more freely in Holland than in Germany, but it was destined to be longer-lived.

This relative constancy, something the style did not enjoy in other countries, had organizational reasons. In 1916 the progressives took over the helm of *Architectura et Amicitia*, the Dutch association of architects. Not only the crucial municipal building boards but the government department

of works, the *Rijksgebouwendienst*, came to be headed by affiliates of the Amsterdam School who obtained commissions for its members, or sometimes even built in its style themselves. Thus Piet Kramer was entrusted with the design of no less than 400 bridges in the course of the city's adaptation to increasing automobile traffic. The committees to beautify Amsterdam, responsible for approving the facade of every building erected on municipal property, were also staffed by *Wendingen* affiliates after the war, and they proved to be powerful instruments of that group's interests. Any contractor who wanted to be sure of obtaining a committee's approval was well advised to employ an architect who worked in the *Wendingen* style.

The exotic brickwork of the Amsterdam School had its critics nonetheless. Its expense was a main point of contention from an early date, and the postwar housing shortage, more serious than ever, fueled the debate. Yet as long as fine craftsmanship and artistic inventiveness continued to be the pride of the workmen who lived there, the style was able to hold its ground. De Klerk was indeed an expensive architect, admitted F. M. Wibaut, the Social Democratic deputy for Amsterdam public housing. But de Klerk did not build too expensively, he added, because that was something an extraordinary artist could never do.

This epoch in Amsterdam came to an end about the middle of the 1920s. Expressionist housing projects now began to be valued aesthetically as what in many cases they had always been structurally – a masquerade, with imaginative facades grafted like false fronts onto the run-of-the-mill plans of private contractors and building companies. In 1923, when private housing got a stronger support, a profit-conscious clientele came into being who were no longer willing to finance the exuberance of High Expressionist ar-

J. L. Mathieu Lauweriks. Design for the title-page of *Wendingen*, issue of January 1918



chitecture. The death of Michel de Klerk, the great magician of the Amsterdam group – he died in late 1923 – marked the end of an era in many people's eyes. Both *Architectura* and *Wendingen* devoted special memorial issues to him.

In Germany, too, where important commissions had had to wait until the inflation was over, the vanguard set out to explore new shores. Expressionist building had never been as firmly anchored there as in Holland. The pressing need to economize, experiments in industrialized construction, and particularly the attempt to create an anonymous architecture for mass society and a technological aesthetic for the machine age, made a reconciliation between the two extremes of individual creativity and the general spirit of the people seem secondary. With their built architecture, the former Expressionists left to their imitators a repertoire of easily adaptable elements: pointed arches and triangular windows, parabolic portals, diamond-shaped or wicker-like ornament on facades, stepped or triangular gables, battered pillars and crenellated cornices. Much the same can be said of their drawing styles. Long after Expressionism's demise, competition entries and presentations continued to exhibit its overdrawn pathos and tempestuous rhetoric, though these were no longer justified by any comparable aesthetic or social vision.