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Form Follows Fetish: Adolf Behne and the Problem of *Sachlichkeit*

Frederic J. Schwartz

Nothing is more exotic than the world around us, nothing more fantastical than *Sachlichkeit*.

– Egon Erwin Kisch, *Der rasende Reporter* (1924)

I

‘Zurück zu den Sachen – Back to the things themselves!’ was the way Husserl put it. He meant it in a quite specific philosophical context, but as a return to sense, a new beginning from which progress was promised, a return from the dead ends of idealism or indulgence, the phrase, in its various cognate forms, served as a creed for many radical projects of the early twentieth century. For architects of the Neues Bauen in Weimar Germany too, the object, the *Sache*, stood at the centre of attention in a way that seemed both new and necessary. In his *Neues Wohnen – Neues Bauen* of 1927, Adolf Behne, who has come to be considered the most ambitious and perceptive of the Weimar architectural critics and whose work I shall be looking at here, summed up the slogan *Sachlichkeit*, or ‘objectivity’, as the need ‘to get as close as possible to the object . . . to apprehend [it] creatively’.¹

Yet the encounter with the object in modernity – the meeting must be ‘brave and without prejudice’, said Behne² – turned out to be anything but simple and enlightening. Instead we find that it created confusions, called forth strange visions, even aroused intense anxiety. Depending on the field of inquiry, the steady gaze at the object could call the transparency of vision into question; the search for hard facts might reveal the dependence of the outside world on the consciousness positing it; the analysis of the object would provoke fears of the disintegration of the subject. So if a return to *Sachlichkeit* in German architectural practice and theory of the 1920s was a gambit to steer clear of large issues and to concentrate on what could be easily grasped, it was a questionable one. The issues that architects needed to address were precisely those of the relation between humans and the objects of their world, and there the philosophical stakes were high.

Behne was one critic who did not lose his taste for philosophy in the era of ‘*Neue Sachlichkeit*’, one who took the return to the object as a practical, historical and theoretical problem and not as an excuse to abandon ambitious critical thought in the name of the object. Anticipating others at the time, he sought to return the concerns of architects from obsessive plans for a world that did not exist to the recrafting of a world that, for all its faults and resistances, could accommodate their work. And while he posited this down-to-earth *Sachlichkeit* of practicality as the goal of architectural practice, he never reduced it to matters of simple function or technique, never denied the importance of reflection and fantasy, and never stopped trying to define what the object, in the end, was or what a design practice that would attend to it would be.

If I ultimately assert that he failed in this attempt, I hope my discussion will be taken in the spirit in which Behne wrote his own commentary. For while

1. Adolf Behne, *Neues Wohnen—Neues Bauen* (Hesse & Becker: Leipzig, 1927), p. 105. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. The attention devoted to Behne in recent years has been considerable. *Der moderne Zweckbau* (1923, pub. 1926) has appeared in an English edition (*The Modern Functional Building*, trans. Michael Robinson [Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities: Santa Monica, 1996]) with an extended introduction by Rosemarie Haag Bletter that amounts to the most serious study of Behne in English. An anthology of Behne’s architectural criticism has been published under the title *Architekturkritik in der Zeit und über die Zeit hinaus: Texte 1913–1946*, ed. Haila Ochs (Birkhäuser: Basel, 1994). A symposium, organized by Bernd Nicolai and Magdalena Bushart, was held in Berlin in 1995. See also Alan Colquhoun, ‘Criticism and Self-Criticism in German Modernism’, *AA Files*, no. 28 (Autumn 1994), pp. 26–33, published also as ‘Kritik und Selbstkritik in der deutschen Moderne’, in *Moderne Architektur in Deutschland, 1900–1950: Expressionismus und Neue Sachlichkeit*, exh. cat. (Deutsches Architektur-Museum: Frankfurt a.M., 1994), pp. 251–72; Francesco Dal Co, ‘The Remoteness of *die Moderne*’, *Oppositions*, no. 22 (Fall 1980), pp. 75–95; and the section devoted to Behne in *Werkbund-Archiv* 1 (1971). Aspects of Behne’s earlier criticism are discussed in Detlef Mertins, ‘Anything But Literal: Sigfried Giedion and the Reception of Cubism in Germany’, in Eve Blau and Nancy J. Troy (eds.), *Architecture and Cubism* (MIT Press: Cambridge, 1997), esp. pp. 222–27.

2. Adolf Behne, ‘Einige Bemerkungen zum Thema: Moderne Baukunst,’ foreword to *Max Taut: Bauten und Pläne* (F.E. Hübsch: Berlin, 1927), p. 16.

Behne was one of the most indefatigable propagandizers of the Neues Bauen, he was also one of the most persistent critics of what he saw as its shortcomings. His articles are often prefaced with a statement that his arguments must be seen in support of the very projects he finds faults in, and his words were occasionally taken out of context and used by opponents of radical architecture; more than once he had to clarify whose side he was really on. Behne's texts, I will argue, are fraught with contradictions and blindspots, but it is important to identify them, for my point is that the problems he addresses remain our own, and his attempt to solve them was among the most ambitious of the time.

II

We need a provisional definition. *Sachlichkeit* – a key word in architectural discussions since the 1890s – can be translated in a number of ways: it means 'practicality', 'straightforwardness', 'suitability'. It can also mean 'objective', in the sense of not being distracted by irrelevant emotion or matters beyond the object in question and staying close to obvious material facts. It contains within it the word *Sache*, which can mean 'object', 'thing', but also 'cause' (object as the commitment to a particular goal) or 'matter at hand'. It has implications of 'function', but most often seems to avoid a narrow identification with a limited, technical sense of the term. In a recent study of Behne, Rosemarie Haag Bletter proposes the necessarily expanded translation of 'the simple, practical, straightforward solution to a problem' and suggests bearing in mind 'matter-of-factness', 'objectivity', and also a philosophical sense of 'thingness'.³

However one translates the word, it is worth pointing out that the concept was used in a quite particular way in architectural discourse, at least before the First World War: it had a limiting sense and was understood in terms of what it excluded. In *Style-Architecture and Building-Art* of 1902, which in many ways consolidated the terms of pre-war discussions, Hermann Muthesius wrote of technical constructions as prototypical of the new direction of advanced architecture. He suggested looking for models

in our railway terminals and exhibition buildings, in very large meeting halls, and further, in the general tectonic realm, in our giant bridges, steamships, railway cars, bicycles, and the like. It is precisely here that we see embodied truly modern ideas and new principles of design. . . . Here we notice a rigorous, one might say scientific objectivity [*Sachlichkeit*], an abstention from all superficial forms of decoration, a design strictly following the purpose that the work should serve. All things considered, who would deny the pleasing impression of the broad sweep of an iron bridge? Who is not pleased by today's elegant landau, trim warship, or light bicycle? . . .

In such new creations we find the signs indicating our aesthetic progress. This can henceforth be sought only in the tendency toward the strict matter-of-fact [*Sachlichen*], in the elimination of every merely applied decorative form, and in shaping each form according to the demands set by purpose.⁴

Muthesius defines *Sachlichkeit* twice in this passage, and each time he does so in the same way. The first moment of the definition is a negative one: the 'abstention from all superficial . . . decoration', the 'elimination of . . . merely applied decorative form'. The positive moment comes second, and is secondary: 'design strictly following the purpose' or the 'demands set by purpose'. The 'agreeable impression' this creates is hardly explored, and certainly no positive principle; it is a by-product of the mere elimination of ornament, of visual and semantic excess, of what Behne called the 'chattering' aspect of everyday objects.⁵

3. Bletter, introduction to *The Modern Functional Building*, pp. 47–48. For nuanced analyses of the use of the term before World War I, see Stanford Anderson, introduction to Hermann Muthesius, *Style-Architecture and Building-Art: Transformations of Architecture in the Nineteenth Century and its Present Condition*, trans. S. Anderson (The Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities: Santa Monica, 1994), pp. 14–19; Anderson, 'Sachlichkeit and Modernity, or Realist Architecture' and Harry Francis Mallgrave, 'From Realism to *Sachlichkeit*: The Polemics of Architectural Modernity in the 1890s', both in *Otto Wagner: Reflections on the Raiment of Modernity*, ed. H.F. Mallgrave (The Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities: Santa Monica, 1993), pp. 323–60; see also Frederic J. Schwartz, *The Werkbund: Design Theory and Mass Culture before the First World War* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 1996), pp. 41–43. Martin Gaughan considers the notions of *Sachlichkeit* and *Sachkultur* in both their pre- and post-1914 incarnations in 'The Cultural Politics of the German Modernist Interior', in *Modernism and Design*, ed. P. Greenhalgh (Reaktion Books: London, 1990).

4. Hermann Muthesius, *Style-Architecture and Building-Art*, p. 79.

5. 'Geschwätzig': *Max Taut: Bauten und Pläne*, p. 11.

6. Adolf Behne, 'Holländische Baukunst in der Gegenwart', *Wasmuths Monatshefte für Baukunst*, vol. 6, no. 1/2 (1921-22), p. 4.

7. 'Holländische Baukunst in der Gegenwart', p. 4.

8. Adolf Behne, *Der moderne Zweckbau* (1923; pub. Drei Masken Verlag: Munich, 1926), p. 22; *The Modern Functional Building*, p. 100.

9. *Der moderne Zweckbau*, p. 22; *The Modern Functional Building*, p. 100.

10. *Neues Wohnen – Neues Bauen*, pp. 43–51.

In his writings of the early 1920s, Behne's discussions of *Sachlichkeit* make clear the negative function of the concept. We can look at an important article of 1921 which was pivotal in pointing to developments in Holland as a way out of the impasse of architectural Expressionism. In line with pre-war discussions, he points to 'style' as a transcendent principle of architectural form, but, paraphrasing Berlage, states that style 'in its highest sense is no longer possible; its prerequisite is life in a community [*Gemeinschaft*]'.⁶ Modernity is different, and (here he breaks with pre-war goals, if not terminology) dictates different goals: 'Our world is *sachlich* . . . *Sachlichkeit* is the most we are capable of. *Sachlichkeit* is reality.'⁷ In a disenchanted world devoid of the organic bonds of communal spirit, *Sachlichkeit* is the closest principle to the transcendent: it accepts the modern world but steers the architect clear of the excesses of individuality. And in *Der moderne Zweckbau* (written in 1923 but published three years later), Behne closes his discussion of Berlage, Otto Wagner and Alfred Messel, precursors to the new architecture, with the statement that 'their *Sachlichkeit* was restricted primarily to resisting and avoiding *Unsachlichkeit*'.⁸ He then raises the possibility of a 'positive *Sachlichkeit*'⁹ as a goal of later architects, the subject of the rest of the book (and indeed, the rest of his architectural criticism). Behne recognizes that the resonance of the 'object' served as an alibi for the lack of a positive principle and haunted the use of the term 'objectivity'. He accepted the burden of proof inherent in the term *Sachlichkeit*: the obligation to define the *Sache*.

III

Behne's clearest definition of the true nature of the object, and thus what 'objectivity' would be, is made in a series of three texts published in the years 1927 and 1928: the foreword to the book *Max Taut: Bauten und Pläne*, *Neues Wohnen – Neues Bauen*, and *Eine Stunde Architektur*. In the latter two, he begins by defining the relation to the object that must be overcome.

In *Neues Wohnen – Neues Bauen*, Behne explores a colloquial German expression commonly used to signify the exclusivity of, or pride in, a piece of furniture, an *objet d'art*, a knick-knack: it would be described as '*apart*'.¹⁰ The term meant 'separate' in the sense of standing out in excellence or artistry, and primarily in the richness of ornamentation. What is significant for Behne is that the affected adoption of the French term makes clear the nineteenth-century German bourgeois's relation to his prized possessions: they would be separated or isolated as objects of attention and would be arranged so as to highlight their putative uniqueness, denying any role in a room or home as a totality. Behne also makes much of the term's origin in the vocabulary of medieval combat: '*à parte*' was a knight's battle position; like objects of admiration, a combatant would stand separately, in a position commanding a corner and the surrounding space. The *apart* represents, for Behne, the primitive and military aspect of objects' social role as prestige; their rich ornament is vestige of the visual and architectural language of military defense. The objects that aspire to be *apart* are seen to isolate themselves from human traffic; they create a distance from those who might use them, controlling that space and commanding veneration. A relation is set up between human subject and household object, one in which the object is granted considerable power over its owner or viewer.

In *Eine Stunde Architektur*, Behne continues to allude to his military metaphor of the *apart* object, but he develops another notion to describe it. Here he calls it a 'fetish'.



Objects, writes Behne, should be made as instruments for human use; buildings should be built for their inhabitants. Yet some things have had the tendency to reverse this relationship. Instead of serving life, they serve precisely death: 'The goal of building is the most complete adaptation to life. The power against which it must fight is the non-vital, the rigid, the dead.'¹¹ Form in the historical past was the means by which objects were granted self-sufficiency, their *Apartheit*, their distance from users and their lives. Recalling Wilhelm Worringer's discussions of 'primitive' man's use of abstract form as an artistic will to negate the chaos and contingency of an ill-understood nature, Behne writes that 'the sign of Death's domination was form – self-isolating, geometric, autonomous form. . . . Art emerges out of Death and strives toward Life. And if we posit the perfected instrument helping man as the goal, then we must see as its opposite self-sufficient form that knows nothing of man. It is a fetish that claims its victims to the present day.'¹²

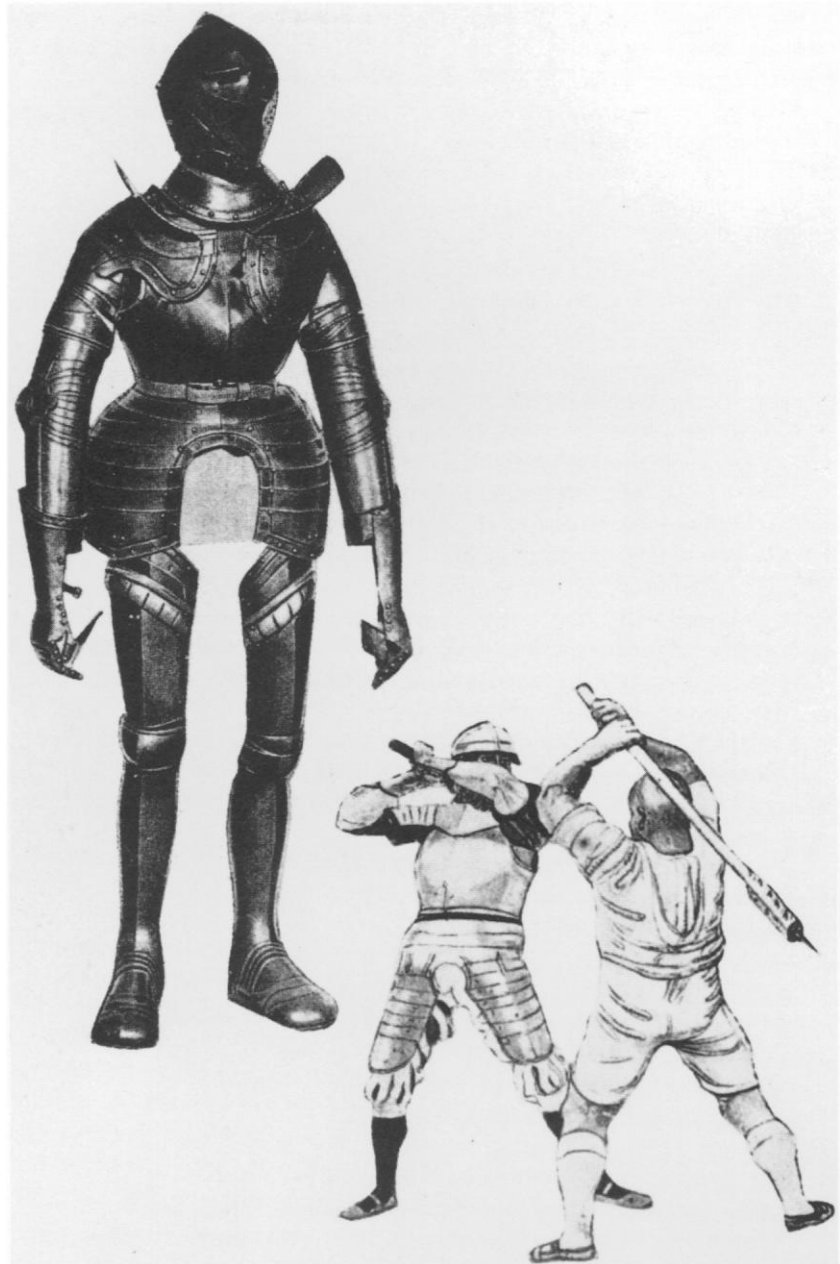
One could describe Behne's project as a demystifying critique of a hegemonic notion of 'culture'. Rather than resting his case on an atavistic, Worringerian sense of abstraction, the argument turns on a polemical equation of the nineteenth-century bourgeois habitus with that of the barbarian (and here he rehearses the strategy of Adolf Loos in 'Ornament and Crime'). Behne seeks, in other words, to defamiliarize the traditional traffic with objects: 'How it was, and still is, possible that men subjugate themselves to these fetishes that are hostile to life is another question. Answering it is what we call cultural history.'¹³ And thus the point here is apparently less mystical than the terms used to make it. Translated into architectural terms, the opposition between fetish and instrument is that between facade and plan. The facade, in

11. Adolf Behne, *Eine Stunde Architektur* (F. Wedekind: Stuttgart, 1928), p. 7.

12. Behne, *Eine Stunde Architektur*, p. 7.

13. Behne, *Eine Stunde Architektur*, p. 9. Here, as elsewhere in Behne's work, we find formulations that are remarkably reminiscent of those by Walter Benjamin. If one substitutes the notion of disaster for that of the fetish, and progress for cultural history, one begins to approach the ninth of Benjamin's 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' (1940). See Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (Schocken: New York, 1969), pp. 257–58. Benjamin read *Eine Stunde Architektur* in early 1929; it is no. 1094 in his 'Verzeichnis der gelesenen Schriften'. See Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 7, *Nachträge* (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt a.M., 1989), p. 461. For an adventurous argument that sees an early work of Behne's as an important source of some of the ideas Benjamin expressed in his essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', see Arnd Bohm: 'Artful Reproduction: Benjamin's Appropriation of Adolf Behne's "Das reproduktive Zeitalter" in the *Kunstwerk-Essay*', *Germanic Review*, vol. 68, no. 4 (Fall 1993), pp. 146–55.

14. Behne, *Eine Stunde Architektur*, p. 11. Unfortunately, 'man' is the only way to render fluidly Behne's use of the less gender-specific German word *Mensch*.



Figs. 1 and 2. The military metaphor: 'Apart' objects and medieval combat. From *Neues Wohnen - Neues Bauen*.

times of war characterized by resistance to human attack and in classicizing ages by rigid rules of symmetry, negates clues to the patterns and processes of inhabitants' use; it makes no reference to man and no concession to his needs:

The old buildings stand more under the sign of rigid formalism than helping function. Mighty is their fetishism of form, paltry their orientation toward man. In their indifference to elemental demands of life they are still like the pyramids . . . They are not determined by man, but rather by the idol of form, whose sacraments include regularity and symmetry.¹⁴

The principle of the plan over the facade, of patterns of use over formal principles, defines the proper function of the architectural object – a plan,

writes Behne, whose 'feeling for and consideration of the necessities of function' give it 'a unified current of life,' plans 'which no longer attach regular, rigid rooms to axes but follow living movement'.¹⁵

A thing, a *Sache*, is precisely an instrument, an object of use; and thus *Sachlichkeit* represents its adaptation to the material needs of the *Mensch*. This is the base of reality to which Behne referred already in his article on Dutch architecture in 1921, and which he repeats in 1927: 'Works are *sachlich* when they give form to a *Sache*, that is a necessity, a reality.'¹⁶ Behne understands this reality as social: 'If a work is to serve a proper function in human society, it must be *sachlich*. Only through its *Sachlichkeit* can it incorporate man. *Sachlichkeit* is . . . the most effective bond between men. It is the productive connection of man to man.'¹⁷ Thus it serves as a material alternative to the lost (or, better, mythical) bonds of spirit. This allows Behne to distinguish *Sachlichkeit* from *Zweck* or 'purpose': the latter represents the mere fulfilling of a mechanical function and requires 'no more than a bit of common sense';¹⁸ the former is a function in a social totality. Since *Sachen* serve their purposes in social life, the goal of *Sachlichkeit* is not the mere fulfilling of a narrowly defined task but rather 'the connection of man to man by means of the *Sache*'.¹⁹ And this definition of the object in a social totality is dialectical: *Sachlichkeit* demands not the mere serving of a limited purpose; rather it requires one 'to see the end anew, to marshal all means to the end while at the same time taking the end as a means to enrich man, to refine him and lead him in a new direction'.²⁰

In line with contemporary theories of religion, Behne sees the fetish as an object to which man has ceded power, an object that requires veneration and devotion. Now representation is, of course, a kind of use, a manipulation of signs, but Behne describes a situation in which representation seems to take over – qualities which are represented are seen as qualities of the objects themselves; they are granted life at the expense of their users, immobilizing, paralysing, and blinding their users to their real nature. Behne's account of an alternative *Neues Bauen* is built upon what he calls a 'process of self-reflection',²¹ an Enlightenment philosophy of history that posits man's ability to reflect upon his relation to objects and move out of a state of myth, in which powers that are not understood are projected onto things, towards a consciousness of the subordination of objects to man's use of them.

'What then is the "object"?' Behne asks in *Neues Wohnen – Neues Bauen*. His answer is his programme:

Every object is a nodal point, an intersection in the relation of man to man. Whoever really grasps and forms the object grasps and forms not only the single human and his desires but rather grasps and forms the most important thing of all: the relationships between men.

Thus in every discipline, to work objectively means to work socially.

To build objectively thus means to build socially.

In the following sections, we will always attempt to grasp the *object*.²²

In the works of 1927 and 1928, Behne builds a self-consciously and impressively dialectical base on which to build this project.

IV

But Behne never succeeds in capturing the object. His analyses try to fix it as a nodal point of human activity, but the texts resist his own argument; time and again, they set the object free. The object remains invested with power that is

15. Behne, *Eine Stunde Architektur*, p. 49.
16. 'Von der Sachlichkeit', *Max Taut: Bauten und Pläne*, p. 21.
17. *Max Taut: Bauten und Pläne*, p. 21.
18. Behne, *Eine Stunde Architektur*, p. 57.
19. *Max Taut: Bauten und Pläne*, p. 22.
20. Behne, *Eine Stunde Architektur*, p. 57.
21. *Max Taut: Bauten und Pläne*, p. 7.
22. *Neues Wohnen – Neues Bauen*, p. 34 (emphasis in original).

23. *Max Taut: Bauten und Pläne*, p. 8.
24. *Max Taut: Bauten und Pläne*, p. 8.
25. *Max Taut: Bauten und Pläne*, p. 8.
26. The conventions of such photographs were also adopted by the photographic Neue Sachlichkeit and were famously critiqued by Brecht: 'The situation has become so complicated that a simple "description of reality" tells us less than ever about this reality. A photograph of the Krupp works or of the AEG reveals almost nothing about these institutions.' Bertolt Brecht, *Der Dreigroschenprozeß* (1931), in *Brecht's Dreigroschenbuch*, ed. S. Unseld (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt a.M., 1960), p. 93. On the technical document, see Molly Nesbit, *Atget's Seven Albums* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 1992), pp. 14–19; on architectural photography, see Rolf Sachsse, *Photographie als Medium der Architekturinterpretation. Studien zur Geschichte der deutschen Architekturphotographie im 20. Jahrhundert* (Saur: Munich, 1984).
27. *Max Taut: Bauten und Pläne*, p. 7.
28. Wilhelm Worringer, *Abstraktion und Einfühlung: Ein Beitrag zur Stilpsychologie* (Piper: Munich, 1948; orig. pub. 1908), pp. 28–29.

not exercised by those who make or use it; it retains its hold over the people it is supposed to serve.

Let us consider first the opening section of the foreword to *Max Taut: Bauten und Pläne*, entitled 'Observations on the Subject of Modern Architecture.' The text does not itself refer to Max Taut, but it serves as the introduction to a volume which served chiefly to publish Taut's latest work, the *Haus der Buchdrucker* of 1924–26. What is interesting here is that neither Taut's work nor Behne's description of the architectural object sit comfortably with the dialectical theory of the object Behne develops elsewhere in the text and in others of the period. The new object, he writes, the non-fetish, will no longer have the arbitrary, individual form equated in the past with beauty, but rather a 'spirit of constructive rigour'²³ that represents a new sort of beauty. It is not a beauty of surfaces, but – and here he begins to veer off from his critique of the *apart* – out of a rationality 'that emerges out of very mysterious sources. The irrational element does not, of course, lie on a decorative surface, but in the object itself, in its core.' 'The secret,' he continues, 'is no longer a matter of expression, interpretation, sermon, explanation, entertainment, but immediate, mute power of form [*Formkraft*].'²⁴ Objects, then, have their own mysterious powers. The metaphors here might seem to be governed by Behne's opposition of the *sachlich* with the 'chattering' object, but they carry the weight of conviction on their own terms: 'From speech the secret is distilled to emotion – and from emotion it is distilled to the naked existence of silent forms.'²⁵

Placed next to photographs from the book, Behne's words can be seen as a sympathetic reading of Taut's building. He might seem to respond, to the rigorous symmetry of the street facade, a symmetry that, however, places deep, shadowed voids where one might expect a richness of semanticized ornament. The voids, deeply cut in the yellow brick front, puncture the mass of the building and turn the evacuated central entrance, the row of shopwindows, and the balconies into enigmatic black holes in the center and far corners of the building. Or the description might respond to the towering blankness of the transomless top-storey windows of the meeting room, visible in the court view, windows emphasized by the raised piers surrounding them revealing the reinforced concrete frame; the result is a powerful, top-heavy facade framed by the darker descending windows of the stair-towers symmetrically placed on either side. The illustrations present a powerful image of a self-sufficient, *apart* object. Here they conform to the tradition of architectural photography that presents images as technical documents by removing traces of human presence; what is noteworthy is that Behne's own description does so as well.²⁶

The terms of this description are also worthy of note. The 'power of form', its nakedness and muteness, is also described as 'concentration' and contrasted, in a discussion of the development of types, to the 'chaotic, innumerable mass of arbitrary, utterly *unsachlich* variations' of architectural hardware.²⁷ Self-sufficient, concentrated, isolated form as a way of overcoming arbitrariness and chaos is precisely the way Worringer described the 'primitive' drive to abstraction in his *Abstraktion and Empathy* of 1908. The 'possibility of happiness' that the 'primitive' sought in art, writes Worringer,

did not entail immersing oneself in the things of the external world . . . but rather in removing single things of this world from their arbitrariness and seeming randomness, eternalizing them through an approach to abstract forms and in this way to find a point of peace in the flood of appearances. Their strongest urge was, so to speak, to tear the object of the world out of its natural context, out of the endless to and fro of being, to cleanse it of all dependence on life, of all arbitrariness, to make it necessary and immobile, to bring it closer to its *absolute* value.²⁸

This is another kind of primitive fetish, one in which form is granted the power to render the incomprehensible world of nature dead, absolute, and under the control of an opposing magic.

Apart, fetish, life-denying: the descriptions of the formal properties of the new, *sachlich* object in Behne's programmatic text blur the distinction between the empowered fetish of primitive myth and the objective implement whose existence is contingent upon its user and which gains its meaning precisely in the processes of social life. In other passages, Behne similarly withdraws the object from its progressive dialectic, the compelling shift that let the object be understood as part of a larger totality. At times he implies a certain reciprocity in the relation of man to object: 'The dwelling is man and the man is the dwelling.'²⁹ Whether this is a matter of reciprocity or the imposition of identity is not made clear here, but other passages imply a certain crude identification of the two poles. Arguing his case for the necessity of housing reform in the Max Taut foreword, Behne in fact denies the social construction of the meaning of the object that is the great contribution of his discussion: 'Living spaces are becoming, with an inescapable force, the fate of their inhabitants.'³⁰ Objects are granted the mythic power of fate. The turns of

29. *Eine Stunde Architektur*, p. 5.

30. *Max Taut: Bauten und Pläne*, p. 10.



Fig. 3. Max Taut and Franz Hoffmann, Verbandshaus der deutschen Buchdrucker (German Printers' Union building), Berlin, 1924–26. From *Max Taut: Bauten und Pläne*.

- 31. *Neues Wohnen – Neues Bauen*, pp. 27–28.
- 32. *Max Taut: Bauten und Pläne*, p. 7.
- 33. *Max Taut: Bauten und Pläne*, p. 9.
- 34. *Max Taut: Bauten und Pläne*, p. 22.
- 35. *Neues Wohnen – Neues Bauen*, p. 10.



Fig. 4. Max Taut and Franz Hoffmann, Verbandshaus der deutschen Buchdrucker (German Printers' Union building), administration building, seen from the court, Berlin, 1924–26. From *Max Taut: Bauten und Pläne*.

phrase are undialectical in their positing of an object that forms consciousness and determines action. Without 'paintbrush and saw'³¹ objects cannot be turned, by social action, to positive ends; objects are given power that the user can not overcome. The frontispiece to *Neues Wohnen – Neues Bauen* shows two scenes from Berlin's impoverished and notorious tenements and reproduces Heinrich Zille's words to this very effect: 'One can kill a man as easily with a dwelling as with an ax.' The point itself is indisputable, but Behne's texts, despite their call to put the relation between man and object in a social context, end up replacing the power of social action with the power of objects. And by implication, it is the mere presence of *sachlich* objects and environments that will unleash and lead the human subject in an enlightened path.

Indeed, in the philosophy of art history Behne presents, it is not man but rather objects themselves, their own spirit, that achieves self-reflection and release from the power of myth: 'The path that our art follows in all its disciplines can be characterized as a process of self-reflection. Everywhere evolution is moving away from a descriptive, narrative, referential form of breadth and singularity to a form of precise, naked and determinate revelation of the object itself.'³² *Sachlichkeit* is described as a social matter, but Behne's texts are littered with talk of the object itself, the object *an sich*: 'A thing comes to its own power and fullness only when it is true to itself.'³³ The project wavers between the attempt to subordinate objects to social processes and the attempt to 'bring material to life'.³⁴

Behne calls the move from *unsachlich* to *sachlich* a 'Copernican revolution',³⁵ but a certain undercurrent in his texts raises the suspicion that the world has not been turned rightside-up at all. For though a benign object has been posited, objects still wield the same tremendous power over man. The gods will still determine man's fate by the nature of the objects they bear; man is still dependent on a spiritual evolution that is not his own.

I do not mean to imply that Behne's texts simply contradict themselves:

they do no such thing. What I have tried to do, however, is to extrapolate a scenario not from their *logic* but from their *rhetoric*, and my goal will be to see whether the tension between the two impinges on his argument or his ability to make it. What I would suggest so far is that the important texts of 1927 and 1928 offer a certain amount of internal resistance to their own otherwise compelling arguments. This resistance, a sort of rhetorical friction, raises two questions that I would like to explore. First, whether the tendency to invest inanimate objects with a life of their own was peculiar to Behne at the time. And second, whether it is merely a surface effect, a phantom inevitably produced by language in the attempt to describe things, or instead indicative of a more fundamental problem Behne faced in trying to make the object of use into an object of thought.

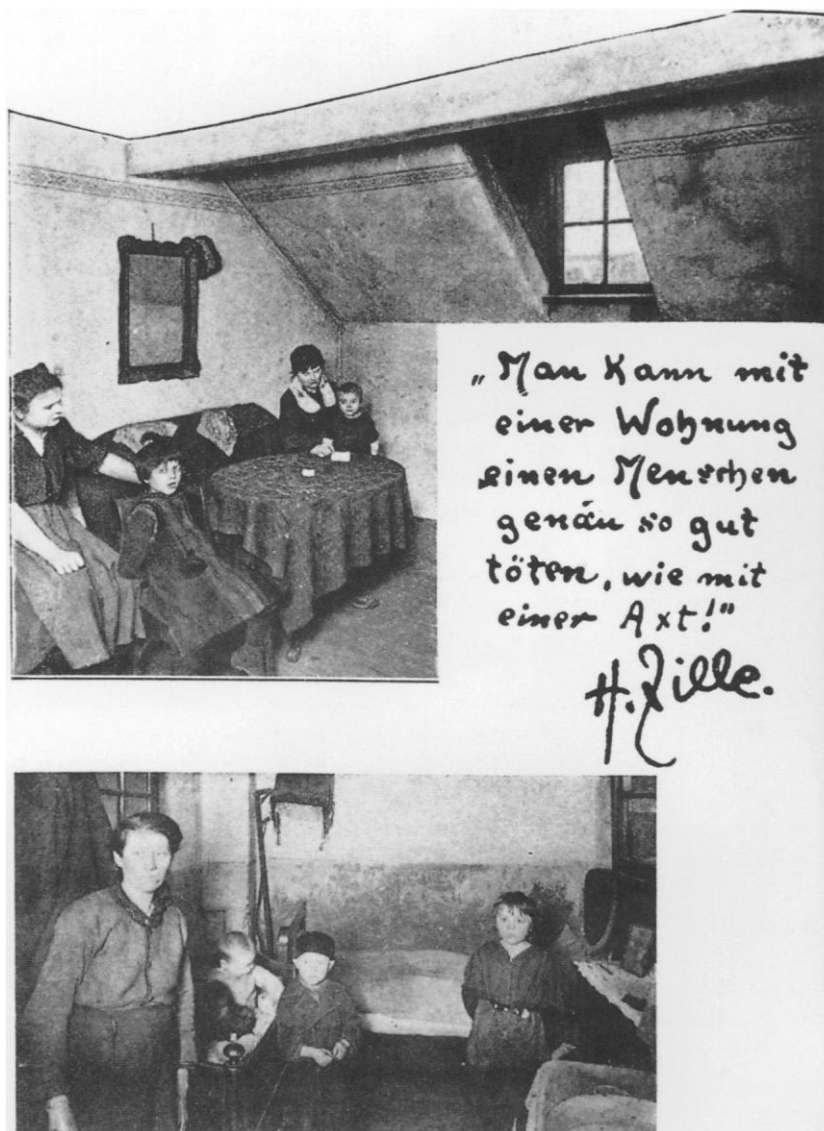


Fig. 5. 'One can kill a man as easily with a dwelling as with an ax.' Frontispiece to *Neues Wohnen - Neues Bauen*.

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36. Needless to say, objects become animate in many other discursive (and visual) contexts. Some are discussed in Christoph Asendorf, *Batteries of Life: On the History of Things and their Perception in Modernity*, trans. D. Reneau (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1993). My concern here, however, is the specific implications of this figural language in discussions of architecture and design in 1920s Germany.

37. On Kracauer's studies and early career, see I. Belke and I. Renz, eds., *Siegfried Kracauer, 1889–1966 (Marbacher Magazin 47 [1988])*, pp. 7–28; and Gerwin Zohlen, 'Schmugglerpfad: Siegfried Kracauer, Architekt und Schriftsteller', in Michael Kessler and Thomas Y. Levin, eds., *Siegfried Kracauer: Neue Interpretationen* (Stauffenburg: Tübingen, 1990), pp. 324–31 (the dates in Zohlen's otherwise important article are slightly inaccurate).

38. Both were also in contact with Heinrich Wölfflin at the Berlin University: Behne studied with Wölfflin, and Kracauer was perhaps interested in doing so. In any case, both went on to write dissertations – Behne's on 'Der Inkrustationsstil in Toskana' under Karl Frey at the University, Kracauer's on 'Die Entwicklung der Schmiedekunst in Berlin, Potsdam und einigen Städten der Mark' at the TH. The very close proximity of the two figures at this time is certainly intriguing.

39. Theodor W. Adorno, 'The Curious Realist: On Siegfried Kracauer', in *Notes to Literature*, vol. 2, trans. S. Weber Nicholsen (Columbia University Press: New York, 1992), p. 70. See also Inka Mülder's more precise description of Kracauer's shifts between simile and metaphor in Mülder, *Siegfried Kracauer – Grenzgänge zwischen Theorie und Literatur: Seine frühe Schriften, 1913–1933* (Metzler: Stuttgart, 1985), p. 131–32.

40. Siegfried Kracauer, *Ginster* (1928; repr. Suhrkamp: Frankfurt a.M., 1990), p. 7. On *Ginster*, see Mülder, *Siegfried Kracauer*, pp. 125–45; and Zohlen, 'Schmugglerpfad,' pp. 334–38.

40a. Kracauer, *Ginster*, pp. 10–11.

The strange and occasionally threatening vitality of the objects in Behne's descriptions was not a unique phenomenon in the writing of Weimar Germany. The animate thing and its concomitant, the immobilized user, appear in fact regularly in discussions that take up the relation of the human subject to the built environment and objects of everyday use. Central to a surprising number of texts are the figures of *personification* and *reification* – descriptions in which objects become active agents and those in which humans are reduced to the passive role of inanimate objects respectively – and/or various moments when this rhetorical transference of roles is taken literally and the human subject is left to ponder his or her response to the emergence of a world of active objects. Here simple tropes are extended so that they do not merely structure the language of the text but generate, to varying degrees, the narrative itself. Revealingly, these discussions do not appear so much in architectural theory or criticism per se, but rather at the margins of architectural discourse.³⁶ I shall look here at four works written between 1926 and 1929, the same time as Behne's texts: Siegfried Kracauer's semi-autobiographical novel *Ginster*, a short story by Bertolt Brecht, and two *feuilleton* essays by Joseph Roth. The works might be chosen somewhat arbitrarily, but the different positions from which the strange events encountered here are staged offer points of reference for considering their unexpected appearance in Behne's texts.

Kracauer, best known today as a film theorist, as perhaps the most ambitious sociological critic of culture in the Weimar period, and as an associate of the Frankfurt School, was educated and trained as an architect.³⁷ This, I think, significantly informed his thinking about modernity; it also gave him a set of concerns which were the same as Behne's. Indeed, both Behne and Kracauer studied architecture at the Technische Hochschule in Berlin (Charlottenburg) – Behne between 1905 and 1907, Kracauer between 1907 and 1909 – and both attended lectures by the philosopher and sociologist Georg Simmel.³⁸ Behne and Kracauer thus had very similar backgrounds in terms of understanding how objects were designed and discussed, and they were also exposed to other, non-professional, ways of exploring these relations.

In *Ginster* of 1928, Theodor W. Adorno has remarked, Kracauer displays an 'unquenchable delight in taking metaphors literally, giving them autonomy à la *Eulenspiegel*.'³⁹ This gives Kracauer's writing an extraordinary and hallucinatory quality. Playing on the German word for cobblestone (*Kopfstein*, literally 'head-stone'), for example, Kracauer describes his protagonist's experience of the declaration of the First World War in Munich: 'The mass stood immobile in the square. The bright afternoon sun invited one to stroll on their heads, which glowed like asphalt.' People are frozen into objects, and their movements are then described as natural phenomena: 'Ginster was terrified by the thought that the pavement [*Kopfsteinpflaster*] could break apart. . . . A roar arose; the pavement melted.'⁴⁰ *Ginster* is filled with descriptions of uniforms that move of their own accord and hold together their wearers, of marks that march across paper, of strange encounters with a world that has its own plans. Ginster's own relation to things is deeply insecure: he is, for example, threatened by the furniture of a rented room: 'The reflection of the desk, which had sides like balustrades, was . . . thrown back by the window on the wardrobe, which also showed the washbasin. The objects, usually invisible, jumped out of their hiding places and trapped him.'^{40a} He 'never felt himself

to be the owner of real objects'.⁴¹ Those he did own were unloved and demanding: 'The things had the habit of changing their positions by themselves, and moreover demanded constant attention.'⁴² Following the logic of the personified thing, Ginster himself tends to turn into an object: he often finds himself treated as an 'article'.⁴³

Behne sought to characterize particular types of relationships between object and human subject (the fetish subordinating man, the instrument or *Sache* serving him) but ended up discussing them in terms of an uncomfortable reciprocity ('the dwelling is the man, and the man the dwelling'). In Kracauer's descriptions of the everyday environment, this reciprocity figures from the very beginning as confusion. Ginster never knows what is alive and what is not: 'Alien to the room, Ginster stumbled over an object, to which he apologized.'⁴⁴ The boundaries between architectural space and its inhabitants, and between inhabitants and their material accessories, are never clear: thus it was difficult to find a doctor in his clinic 'because his white coat didn't move in the large room. It merged with the surroundings like fish in the aquaria'.⁴⁵

In the descriptions of Ginster's experiences in architectural studios, the uncertain reciprocal relation of objects and people recalls, but also occasionally reverses, Behne's descriptions of the design and architectural fetish and the inversions they precipitate. In his Munich employer's studio, a host does not serve a guest with the cups and saucers; one is instead *their* guest.⁴⁶ And Kracauer's discussion of a factory commission is striking. The Frankfurt architect Valentin proceeds here in full accordance with *Sachlichkeit* – designing from the inside out, from plan and use to facade, from implement to form – but this seems just as perverse as the *unsachlich* subordination of these matters to external representation:

The machines were even more spoiled than Pedro [the architect's dog]; the factory building had to conform completely to their needs. The engineer responsible for them acted like a famous animal tamer telling the circus director the rules about the lodging of his beasts. . . . He despised facades; if he had his way, the facades would have been arranged toward the inside, the impressive exterior placed up against the boilers and pipes. Sometimes the masonry would not twist to the machines' demands. Then Herr Valentin himself, followed by Ginster, would travel to the site in the woods.⁴⁷

Here the functional objects do not simply serve their users but have instead their own agendas; they are simply a different class of things from the environments built for them; they are fetishes too. Functional architecture, for Behne and others paradigmatic for requiring one to sidestep the bourgeois's inverted relation to objects of prestige, provided no easy way out of the increasingly tense relation between man and thing.

We find similar tropes and similar tensions in the newspaper sketches of Joseph Roth. Roth, the most celebrated and highly-paid Weimar feuilletonist, wrote regularly about the changes to Berlin in the 1920s and about the spread of the Neues Bauen and Neue Sachlichkeit in design (that his examples were not always the finest of their kind, indeed were often derivative and merely decorative variants of the advanced work supported by Behne, need not concern us in this context). In 1929 he wrote an article on the 'Very Large Department Store' – the occasion was the opening of Europe's largest store, Karstadt, on Berlin's Hermannplatz – and concentrated on a seemingly innocent labor-saving device, indispensable to this day in such structures, the escalator.⁴⁸ The escalator, writes Roth,

carries a man up; it does so by climbing itself in his place. Indeed, it doesn't climb, it runs. Each step races up with a customer as if it were afraid he would turn back. It carries him to

41. Kracauer, *Ginster*, p. 33.

42. Kracauer, *Ginster*, p. 153.

43. Kracauer, *Ginster*, pp. 17, 130.

44. Kracauer, *Ginster*, p. 156.

45. Kracauer, *Ginster*, p. 80.

46. 'In these rooms one was a guest of the china': Kracauer, *Ginster*, p. 11.

47. Kracauer, *Ginster*, p. 96.

48. The specific site is not in fact mentioned in Roth's text. It has been identified by Michael Bienert in Bienert, ed., *Joseph Roth in Berlin* (Kiepenheuer & Witsch: Cologne, 1996), p. 266.

49. Joseph Roth, 'Das ganz große Warenhaus', *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten*, 8 September 1929; repr. in Roth, *Berliner Saisonbericht: Reportagen und journalistische Arbeiten, 1920–1939* (Kiepenheuer & Witsch: Cologne, 1984), p. 321. Hillel Schwartz discusses other aspects of the novelty of the escalator in 'Torque: The New Kinaesthetic', in Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter (eds.), *Incorporations, Zone*, no. 6, 1992, pp. 88–89.
50. Roth, 'Das ganz große Warenhaus', p. 322.
51. Roth, 'Das ganz große Warenhaus', p. 322.

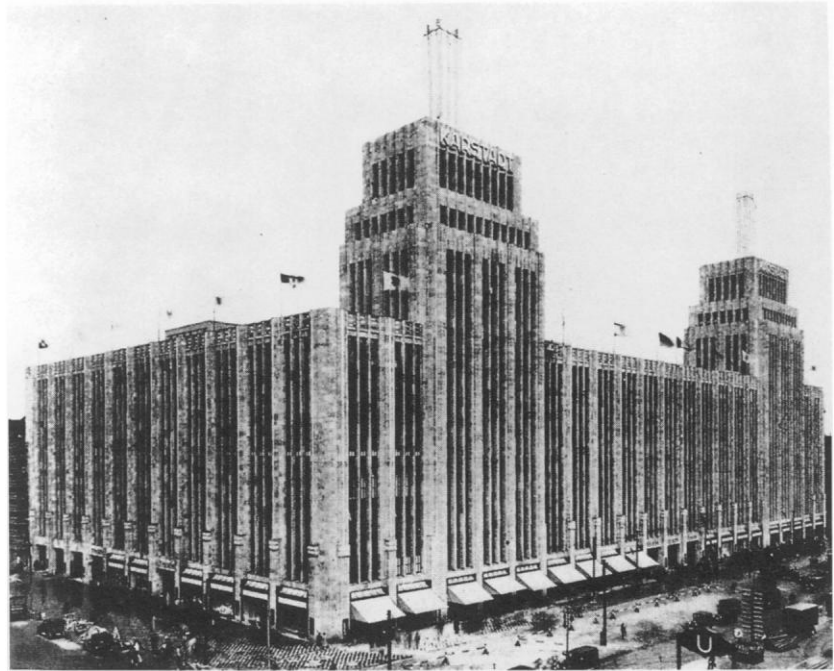


Fig. 6. Philipp Schaefer, Karstadt department store, Hermannplatz, Berlin, 1927–29. From *Neue Warenhaus-Bauten der Rudolf Karstadt von Architekt Philipp Schaefer* (Berlin, 1929).

merchandise to which he might otherwise not have gone. In the end it doesn't matter if the merchandise is brought down to a waiting customer on a descending stair or if he is brought up to the waiting merchandise.⁴⁹

The escalator is described as having a positive power over those it serves and as subordinating them to its own activity, and Roth stresses the way it renders the user thinglike. This turning of humans into objects is as central to Roth as it is to Kracauer (both use the word *Ware*, which also means 'commodity'). We see this when Roth quibbles with the fashion for roof terraces, something we recognize as a modernist gesture (with a distinguished history from Peter Behrens's work for the AEG to Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye) but described by Roth as built more for the glory of the building than for the customers, who probably feel no deep-seated need to 'drink coffee, eat cake and listen to music after the purchase of linen, crockery and sports articles'⁵⁰ seven stories above street level. Roth describes this function as an alibi to which the customer must adapt:

Day in, day out people sit there, eating and drinking . . . it is as if they eat and drink merely to demonstrate the necessity of the terrace. Indeed, even their appetite is perhaps only demonstrative. Carried up by the escalators, the people, despite their reduced mobility, were still recognizable as customers; on the roof they are rendered so passive that they resemble the merchandise.⁵¹

In the works of Behne, Kracauer and Roth, the relation between man and object (whatever its provenance) does not remain in an uneasy stasis but inevitably descends into some sort of confrontation. Here is Behne's account, from *Eine Stunde Architektur*, of the relation between user and a Baroque palace:

The old palaces are costly and luxurious . . . But . . . in their indifference to the basic demands of life they are still pyramids in which rooms have been carved out. They are not determined by man but by an idolatrous form, whose holy sacraments include regularity and symmetry. . . .

The Baroque palace, rigidly regular, does not distinguish between the different directions of the compass; it behaves in the same way whether looking to the east, west, north or south. It is there to be lived in, but it forces all dwelling, all life into a rigid, dead form . . . Adapting [to it] is very difficult, for life does not proceed in an axial, symmetrical and geometric way. Only as a corpse is man symmetrical, only when he does not move.⁵²

52. *Eine Stunde Architektur*, p. 11.

53. Kracauer, *Ginster*, pp. 37–38.

Behne has stacked the deck here – his example, the Schloß Stern near Prague, is built in the shape of a star – but his point holds. And it is echoed in Ginster's encounter with a comparable structure. As if not to be noticed, Ginster sneaks up on it at night:

W[ürzburg] had a renowned Baroque palace that Ginster had not seen. At three in the morning a large square opened before him. . . . He leaned against a wall, not a soul nearby, only the mute mass. . . . He could feel the park on either side, trees and flowers. . . . The park was presumably laid out in the Italian style, with steps and statues of putti on the balustrades. It would have been easy to enter, but Ginster did not move a step from the wall. Gradually an area paved with stone emerged, with paths that followed strict laws. Rows of windows, balconies and columns: he saw them emerge out of the darkness, wanted to get closer and stayed at the wall. . . . The apparition was firmly rooted; it would remain, with or without witnesses, it needed no witnesses. Ginster would have liked to tear it to pieces, to destroy its columns, its lines of windows behind which the ornate rooms slept unmoved. Anxiety gripped him, just don't cross the square, what does the beautiful facade know of the war? . . . He turned around exhausted, chased by the palace through the narrow alleys.⁵³

Ginster marks the battle line, one which he dared not cross and from which he fled. The tyranny of the representative architecture, however, does not only immobilize him and instill fear; it also arouses resentment, and a desire for retribution as well.

The confrontation with the *apart* object that Behne describes, however, is a different one. Here, in the end, it is the objects themselves that react. Tired of the weight of their own fetishism, the burden they have to bear, heaped in



Fig. 7. Johann Balthasar Neumann and J.L. von Hildebrandt, Würzburg Residenz, south facade and inner courtyard garden, 1720–44.

rooms with no connection to the whole, each having to assert itself, to mark its space and defend it – tired of all this, they revolt. The problem resulted

54. Max Taut: *Bauten und Pläne*, p. 9. 'The Revolt of the Objects' was, interestingly, the original title of Vladimir Mayakovsky's first dramatic work; it was written in 1913 and later retitled 'Vladimir Mayakovsky: Tragedy in Two Acts'. This Russian revolt would have to be looked at in the specific historical context in which it arose. See Wladimir Majakowski, *Vers und Hammer: Schriften, Gedichte* (Luchterhand: Frankfurt a.M., 1989), pp. 22–41; and Manfredo Tafuri, *The Sphere and the Labyrinth: Avant-Gardes and Architecture from Piranesi to the 1970s* (MIT Press: Cambridge, 1987), p. 100. The text was first translated into German in 1959.

55. Joseph Roth, 'Architektur,' *Münchener Illustrierte Presse*, 27 October 1929, repr. in *Berliner Saisonbericht*, p. 341.

56. Roth, 'Architektur', p. 341.

57. Roth, 'Architektur', p. 341.

58. Roth, 'Architektur', p. 341.

from a certain relaxed attitude, a certain good-naturedness. We tried to please everyone. We overlooked the tensions between the objects benignly, just as we overlook the tensions in the best of families. With a smile, we brought together the most incompatible things. Everything got along, as long as we talked pleasantly. So we thought. Until one day the things rebelled. They showed their hardness and irreconcilability towards the benevolent laziness of man, which was in fact less benevolence than blindness. This kind of humanity that overlooked all inhumanity collapsed in the War.⁵⁴

Interestingly, both Behne and Kracauer relate the animate object to the war; what seems to connect the accounts is their teacher Simmel's idea of 'objective culture' – a man-made world that had become alien to humans, that no longer responded to its makers, that led its own material existence and led man to do its bidding. For many others at the time too, capitalism's creation of such a world of objects and objective laws had led to the apocalypse that began in 1914.

If the objects in Behne's account took their own revenge for the burden put upon them, Roth does not see the *Neue Wohnung* – self-effacing, adapted to the use of its inhabitants, setting a stage for life and sociation – to be any better. For it increasingly and alarmingly left man to his own inadequate devices: instead of absorbing tensions (and only occasionally, in the psychological economy of anthropomorphism, breaking down or blowing up), the tensions become our own.

'The facade of the new age makes me nervous,' wrote Roth in an essay of 1929 called 'Architecture'.⁵⁵ His reasons recall Behne's terms, but the critical valences are, as in Kracauer's writings, reversed. The lack of representational pomp, the lack of 'chatter', renders the new buildings precisely *mute*: what Roth means is that one can no longer tell a café from a railroad station. Indeed, as things are reduced to performing their tasks, they become so self-effacing that the vocabulary of the environment needs to be revised. In accordance with Behne's critique of the autonomy of objects and his insistence on their contingency, objects are stripped of nouns that might be construed as names and relabelled with predicate forms referring to their use: 'Certain objects are deep, made out of wide, white-lacquered, durable wood; they have no feet, resemble crates and are hollow. One sits on these objects. Not that they are chairs – rather 'Sitzgelegenheiten' [opportunities for sitting].'⁵⁶ Lamps become, by the same logic, 'Leuchtkörper' [light bodies].⁵⁷ The very inconspicuousness of some objects raises doubts as to their function: 'A tabletop out of glass is not meant to allow guests conveniently to inspect their own shoes while eating, but rather to generate bone-shattering scratching noises when the metal ashtray is drawn across the transparent material.'⁵⁸ Now Roth shows no particularly profound understanding of the goals of advanced architecture, and he is no sympathetic critic of the *Neue Wohnung*; but he does suggest that objects bearing the prefix 'new' are not necessarily any better at serving human needs, and that a changed relationship to human activities can produce another sort of fetishism.

These scenarios, so similar to those Behne describes, ask us to reconsider the idea that some objects simply master their users while others serve them. Perhaps the problem was that human emotions could no longer be projected onto objects, no longer provided the vent of empty chatter and the tactful oversight of glaring problems. More likely, progressive architects (and their



Fig. 8. 'The new cantilevered steel furniture is beautiful in form, functional, and offers the most comfortable *Sitzgelegenheit*.' Advertisement for the Deutsche Stahlmöbel G.m.b.H. showing tubular steel chairs by Marcel Breuer (ST 12) and Breuer or Anton Lorenz (KS 41). From *Die Form*, vol. 5, no. 1, 1930.

vulgarizers) were, at times, just a bit clumsy in leading their clients into the path of rational activity. In any case, with the advent of the Neues Wohnen we find descriptions reversing Behne's family squabble of man and object, descriptions of inhabitants taking revenge on their own dwellings. One such account is Brecht's 'Nordseekrabben oder Die moderne Bauhauswohnung [North Sea Prawns, or The Modern Bauhaus Flat],' published in 1927.

Brecht certainly knew such flats: the target of his satire was the new apartment of Friedrich Kroner, editor of the journal *Uhu*, of approximately 1926; and the theatre director Erwin Piscator, with whom Brecht was associated at the time, commissioned in 1927 a renovation of his Berlin home from the Bauhaus master Marcel Breuer (and the Piscator flat was one of the most published interiors of the time).⁵⁹ But Brecht places his dwelling, as so many others did, in the shadow of the war. Three former 'trench swine', friends in the extremes of combat, comrades in mud and misery, can no longer be so at their later reunion; the Bauhaus interior gets in their way. Its occupant is Kampert, presented as a modernist cliché: an engineer (for the AEG, no less). Kampert is 'a man who was forced [during the war] to eat filthy grass and for weeks on end to carry buckets with unspeakable contents through field hospitals'; he had the right to demand 'to sleep for the rest of his life under a down duvet and to dine in a harmonious environment'.⁶⁰ He is host to the narrator and their friend Müller, one of 'a great horde of men' returning from war 'whose morals had suffered somewhat and whose habits got on the nerves of those for whom they had fought'.⁶¹

From the beginning, Müller experiences the flat as hostile and animate: 'Say,' he mutters nervously on entering, 'is there a whole crowd of people in there?' 'Nonsense,' says Kampert. 'Not a soul. Only the three of us.'⁶² They sit in two 'original American easy-chairs' – fashionable furnishing at the time among the avant-garde – which Kampert calls 'a few simple *Sitzgelegenheiten*'.⁶³ The setting is picture-perfect. The centre of the apartment is a great

59. On the inspiration for this short story, written with Elisabeth Hauptmann, see Bertolt Brecht, *Prosa 4*, Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe, vol. 19 (Aufbau: Berlin and Suhrkamp: Frankfurt a.M., 1997), pp. 637–38. The Piscator home was first published in 'Das Heim Piscators', *Die Dame*, no. 14 (1928); photographs also appeared in works such as Walter Müller-Wulckow's popular *Blaue Bücher* volume *Die Deutsche Wohnung der Gegenwart* (Langewiesche: Königstein, 1930). The perceived preciousness of the interior and left-wing condemnations of its apparent radical chic seem to have caused Piscator, a major figure of the cultural left, considerable grief. See Piscator, *The Political Theatre* (1929), trans. H. Rorrison (Methuen: London, 1980), p. 327; and Eckhardt Köhn, *Sasha Stone: Fotografien 1925–1939*, exh. cat. (Museum Folkwang: Essen, 1990), p. 14.

60. Bertolt Brecht, 'Nordseekrabben oder Die moderne Bauhauswohnung', *Münchner Neueste Nachrichten*, January 1927, repr. in Brecht, *Über die bildenden Künste*, ed. J. Hermand (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main, 1983), pp. 50–58, here pp. 50–51. (This volume reprints the last version of the text to be published in Brecht's lifetime; the Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe reprints the original text of 1927.) On 'Nordseekrabben', see Helmut Lethen, *Verhaltenslehren der Kälte: Lebensversuche zwischen dem Kriegern* (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt a.M., 1994), pp. 164–70; and Klaus-Detlef Müller, *Brecht-Kommentar zur erzählenden Prosa* (Winkler: Munich, 1980), pp. 79–81.

61. Brecht, 'Nordseekrabben', p. 50.

62. Brecht, 'Nordseekrabben', p. 51.

63. Brecht, 'Nordseekrabben', pp. 51, 52.



Fig. 9. Marcel Breuer, Piscator apartment, living room, Berlin, 1927, showing Hildegard Piscator. From M. Droste and M. Ludewig, *Marcel Breuer: Design* (Berlin, 1992). Photograph: Lotte Jacobi.

64. Brecht, 'Nordseekrabben', p. 56.

65. Brecht, 'Nordseekrabben', p. 57.

66. *Eine Stunde Architektur*, p. 37.

67. Brecht, 'Nordseekrabben', p. 54. Behne also describes what that separate room would be like: 'In 1926 Lissitzky designed a picture room for the International Art Exhibition in Dresden with the intention of showing pictures as independent optical instruments, not as colourful patches on the wall. Here the wall is not treated as planar; the picture is planar, so logically the wall is made unplanar.' *Eine Stunde Architektur*, p. 25. The walls behind the pictures in Lisitzky's Dresden room and the 1927 'Abstract Cabinet' in Hanover are covered with vertical slats painted black on one side and white on the other; this gives a plastic and changing scale of black/gray/white as one moves through the room. Lissitzky himself described his earlier 'Proun Space' as follows: 'The organization of the wall cannot be conceived as anything like a representative picture-painting. Whether one "paints" on a wall or whether one hangs pictures on it, both actions are equally wrong. New space neither needs nor demands pictures – it is not a picture transposed on a surface.' *G: Zeitschrift für elementare Gestaltung*, no. 1 (July 1923); repr. in Lissitzky, *Russia: An Architecture for World Revolution*, trans. E. Dluhosch (MIT Press: Cambridge, 1984), p. 140.

68. Brecht, 'Nordseekrabben', p. 54.

69. Brecht, 'Nordseekrabben', p. 55.

70. Compare Lissitzky, 'Proun Space', 140: 'Space exists for man – man does not exist for space'.

71. Brecht, 'Nordseekrabben', p. 56.

72. Brecht, 'Nordseekrabben', p. 58.

73. *Neues Wohnen – Neues Bauen*, p. 51.

empty hall with bare white walls and a large studio window; walls are replaced with moveable Japanese screens; spiral stairs lead up to a first floor whose skylit bedroom contains only an iron bed frame with simple blanket, chairs and a porcelain wash basin; a workroom is equally spartan; the kitchen is 'hygienically impeccable'⁶⁴; even the human touch is planned in: touches or accents that clash slightly. 'Everything can't match in a home or it becomes unlivable.'⁶⁵

Kampert and his wife supplement the visual clichés of the Neues Wohnen with the discursive commonplaces familiar to the readers of, among others, Behne. 'As soon as a room is experienced spatially, pictures begin to be a disturbance,' we read in *Eine Stunde Architektur*.⁶⁶ Kampert:

'Do you notice anything, about the walls, I mean?'

'They're very high,' said Müller.

Kampert's wife laughed again. But Kampert said, quite *sachlich*: 'I meant that there aren't any pictures there. Most people hang their walls as full as poster hoardings. My position is that if a man doesn't have a separate room for pictures, then he should simply skip them.'⁶⁷

The interior is 'not made out of money. . . . just with a bit of thought and, if you will, some skill'.⁶⁸ The spare work room is furnished according to the motto 'nothing *unsachlich*'.⁶⁹ And Kampert explains, in the spirit of Behne, 'We aren't here for the home, the home is here for us.'⁷⁰

Through the tour, Müller becomes increasingly agitated – 'it was the flat that made Müller so nervous'⁷¹ – and calms his nerves with tumblers of liqueur and whisky (from a small red mahogany cabinet). He begins to plot his revenge. When Kampert's wife retires for the evening and Kampert himself is sent out to fetch a tin of prawns, Müller outlines a 'battle plan' to revert the home back into the knight's fortress, the overstuffed salon, the trench he was used to. With the narrator's help, he throws his jacket into a corner, breaks open bottles over a bamboo chair, tears down the interior awning over the window and rehanges it across the room as a hammock, throws together the sparse furniture into a 'cozy corner', defaces the walls by sticking up newspapers with the sugary remains from their coffee cups, and wreaks havoc with a 'victory march' through the upstairs rooms. Müller is methodical and precise, as is the description of him; it is Brecht near his diabolical best. As an ironic sort of housewarming, Müller holds a drunken 'Speech on Modest Demands':

Man is born . . . to fight. By his nature, he shirks labour. But thanks to God there are forces of nature that will still stir him to action. Man is a miserable worm who wants to have everything in perfect harmony. . . . But on the other hand, especially after the consumption of North Sea prawns, he is like a frightful whirlwind who will restore the grandiose manifold of nature and the awe-inspiring disharmony of creation through the violent accumulation of American patent easy-chairs, simple washbasins and fine old newspapers. . . . A home is where a man has thrown an old collar in the corner. God has decreed this, not me, Müller. *Basta*. And now this is a home.⁷²

Brecht takes man to be empowered by the reversal of Behne's ideas. The *apart* is as much a part of man as it is an attribute of his objects. People like the chatter of furniture. Whoever does not accept the tensions of life and living will have them revisited upon him with the force of fate. Battle is the logical result of the fetish object, but for Brecht, the *sachlich* object is still a false god. If for Behne 'every decoration stands with one foot in war',⁷³ *Sachlichkeit* would provide no peace.

VI

The figures of the fetish (personification and reification) and the scenarios of the fetish object (confrontation and escape, battle and revenge) have their own perverse logic, permutations, and disastrous trajectory. By themselves, however, they tell us little. We need, very briefly, to look at some other ideas informing notions of the fetish, to draw some distinctions, and to reformulate the question raised by Behne's texts.

The object as social, people as objects: this spectre which emerges so unexpectedly in Behne's works of 1927 and 1928 sounds so much like the fetishism of commodities described by Marx in the first volume of *Capital* (and extended in discussions of the fetishism of money, capital and land in volume three) that one might be tempted to look directly to those famous passages about the commodity's 'metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties'.⁷⁴ Yet I think it is safe to say that Behne probably did not have this text in mind (though as a committed and informed socialist he might well have known *Capital*). For Marx considers the relation of a person to a thing within the problematic of an economic theory of value. He provides not a critique of *dwelling* but a critique of political economy. The case is similar with Georg Lukács's theory of reification outlined in *History and Class Consciousness* of 1923. In a rhetorical sense, of course, we see reification (*Verdinglichung* or 'thingification') in Behne's accounts, but Lukács's understanding of this is very different. His project is to extend Marx's idea of economic fetishism and to turn it into a theory both of general alienation and of knowledge under capitalism. It is a theory of *consciousness* under capitalism and is thus a critique of *philosophy*. Walter Benjamin too sets the commodity in motion and grants it a life that enthralls the urban dweller, the consumer, and the poet. He calls this world of the commodity, along with Adorno, the 'phantasmagoria.' But his point is that the experience of the city, of capitalism, of modernity is mediated by the commodity; his goal was a theory of *experience* and a critique of *culture*.

This important tradition of Western Marxism (alongside the work of Freud) has provided reference points for discussions of the nature of the fetish. But Behne's awareness of these ideas was, at best, loose, and I think it would be misguided to try to reconcile his ideas with the investigations of the social and cultural effects of the commodity form. Instead, Behne talks about the fetish in the context of the description of the everyday object as designed and lived with. And though he derives his concept from the tradition of studies of 'primitive' religions,⁷⁵ it is to the discourse around design objects that we should look for sources, for resonances, for the field within which Behne thought. In fact, in the discussions around the pre-Weimer German applied arts movement, one encounters living objects not infrequently. Here the concern was to address the problem of alienation by means of the built environment, to turn the object from something whose mass production as a commodity was inherently inimical to 'Culture' into something that would recreate some sort of subjective bond between estranged subjects and their environment. The concern was, to put it another way, to explore the way objects mediated human subjectivity, and the goal was the production of objects that would in fact live along with, and as much as, their users. Thus Friedrich Naumann, the political voice of the Werkbund, wrote in 1906: 'Either a household object has a soul, or it does not. If it is without a soul it is dead forever, neither loved nor mourned. . . . Only one thing is missing [today]: spirit in household furnishings.'⁷⁶ Much of Georg Simmel's work is

74. 'The mysterious character of the commodity form consists therefore simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men's own labour as the objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves . . . It is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things . . . I call this the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities, and is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities . . . To the producers, therefore, the social relations between their private labours appear as what they are, i.e. they do not appear as direct social relations between persons in their work, but rather as material [*dinglich*] relations between persons and social relations between things.' Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, trans. B. Fowkes (Vintage Books: New York, 1977), pp. 164–66.

75. The most widely read book on the subject in German was Fritz Schultze, *Der Fetischismus: Ein Beitrag zur Anthropologie und Religionsgeschichte* (Wilferodt: Leipzig, 1871).

76. Friedrich Naumann, *Der Geist im Hausgestühl: Ausstattungsbriefe*, quoted in Julius Posener, *Berlin auf dem Wege zu einer neuen Architektur: Das Zeitalter Wilhelms II.* (Prestel: Munich, 1979), p. 78.

77. Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, trans. T. Bottomore and D. Frisby (Routledge & Kegan Paul: London, 1978), chap. 6.

78. Quoted in Hellmuth Wolff, 'Aesthetik und Wirtschaftslehre', *Volkswirtschaftliche Blätter*, vol. 9, no. 15/16, 1910, p. 274.

79. Mülder, *Siegfried Kracauer*, passim; with regard to *Ginster*, pp. 134–35.

80. Until about 1927, Kracauer showed sympathy for the negative or ascetic aspects of the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, but he consistently stressed that the positive aspect of the development had yet to be fulfilled. By 1930, however, he wrote of the 'excesses of the *Neue Sachlichkeit*' and most of his mentions of the tendency were quite critical. See Siegfried Kracauer, *Schriften*, vol. 5 (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt a.M., 1990), 3:332.

81. His sketch 'Tote Welt [Dead World]' (1922) is exemplary of the genre. Roth, *Berliner Saisonbericht*, pp. 173–5.

82. Adolf Loos, 'The Poor Little Rich Man' (1900), in Loos, *Spoken into the Void: Collected Essays, 1897–1900*, trans. J.O. Newman and J.H. Smith (MIT Press: Cambridge, 1982), pp. 125–27.

concerned with precisely these issues. The last chapter of his *Philosophy of Money* (1900/1908), entitled 'The Style of Life', looks at subjective experience in a society based on a money economy, and he devotes much attention to a social phenomenology of the object.⁷⁷ Interestingly, in his *Sociology* of 1908 Simmel writes about the levelling effect of money on the objects of everyday life – its reduction of qualities into quantitative sums – as follows: 'The production of cheap goods is, so to speak, the revenge of the objects for the fact that they were forced out of the center of attention by a merely indifferent means.'⁷⁸ It is this passage, I would suggest, that is Behne's source for the idea of the revolt of the objects – if, of course, it needs a source at all.

Now all this was as familiar to Kracauer as it was to Behne; but Kracauer clearly knew Lukács's work very well too, and Inka Mülder has traced his close continuing concerns with *History and Class Consciousness*.⁷⁹ And indeed, Ginster's adventures in the world of animate objects can be read in terms of Lukács's description of objective culture as an alienated and alienating 'second nature'. *Ginster's* estranged descriptions of the military and Germany at war, its metaphorizing and concretizing of the experience of anomie fit very well with the extrapolation of Simmel's and Marx's theories undertaken by Lukács. It is also worth pointing out that as aware as Kracauer was of developments in architecture, he saw no major advance in the work of the *Neues Bauen* and was no firm friend of this part of the *avant-garde*.⁸⁰ His use of the extended tropes of the fetishized object thus served a very different purpose from Behne's. The same can be said of Roth, though his exploration of the living object and paralysed human subject is certainly more mannered and less thought through. In fact, the figures fit in quite well with a regular theme of the Weimar feuilleton: the search for the soul in the modern city.⁸¹ He too was no defender of the architectural vanguard, and the rhetoric he explored here similarly served the purposes of critique. And Brecht's Bauhaus satire as well comes from different quarters. It fits comfortably in tradition of the critique of the excesses of aestheticism in the applied arts, the pretension to make an environment a total work of art in the fashion of the *Jugendstil* or *Art Nouveau*, and can be compared, for example, with Adolf Loos's 'Poor Little Rich Man'.⁸² Kampert is precisely such a figure, his incarnation as he emerged from the muds of Arras and Ypres. Though Behne regularly criticized what he perceived as aestheticizing tendencies at the Bauhaus, he was sympathetic to its goals and considered himself an ally in the larger movement of the *Neues Bauen*. Whatever details they might have agreed upon, Brecht wrote from an oppositional stance, Behne from a supportive one.

Behne's activation of the object does not seem to fit in to the pattern of use the figures of personification and reification saw in Weimar German discussions of the built environment. There is also something careless about Behne's texts: they are governed by the same extended tropes, but Behne seems less in control of them than the other authors; he seems to have no consistent rhetorical strategy. Why, having invoked one kind of object-fetish, does he unintentionally evoke another kind? Why do things constantly spring to life, not only the *apart* object but the *sachlich* one, so insistently at the service of its user, as well? Why are we not convinced, having read Behne's works, that Kracauer, Roth and Brecht have simply missed the point, that the problem is not in Behne's categories but in the precious Constructivist aesthetic of Breuer's Piscator flat or the degradation of the *Neues Bauen* on the Kurfürstendamm? And why, finally, does Behne fall into the figures and narratives of an older discourse that seemed to be turning into the common currency of the *critique* of modern architecture?

VII

Behne's arguments about *Sachlichkeit* are built on the foundation of two seemingly simple categories: *Sache* and *Mensch*, object and man. *Sachlichkeit* is simply the subordination of the object to man in his social life. In the case of fetishism, this relation is reversed. If Behne's task was to define the object, he might seem to have told us all we need to know: the object will be defined by the needs of man. This shifts the burden of the definition to the other category. But we still know very little. For despite the scores of pages we read about the object, there is strangely little about the matter on which it all rests: about the *Mensch*, in fact, Behne tells us next to nothing.

Let us look again at the important passage of *The Modern Functional Building* in which Behne raises the possibility of a 'positive *Sachlichkeit*'; it is about Frank Lloyd Wright:

Wright provided the first real breakthrough. Through a positive *Sachlichkeit*, he made the country-house plan something new and developed directly out of life, by returning to the most elementary functions of the inhabitants. This was the decisive turn from formal restraint to an abandonment [*Hingabe*] to life itself – in the confidence that a form appropriate to a healthy and orderly life will of necessity be beautiful – space newly conquered by purpose and function.⁸³

Mensch is not the term Behne uses here, but rather *Leben* or 'life', and it is used no less than three times. Purpose and function are not measured in terms of specific needs that Behne describes; the house is asked to respond to life itself. *Leben* as the criterion of *Sachlichkeit* is, by 1927, replaced by a notion of *Mensch*, but consider Behne's description of Bruno Taut's own house from *Eine Stunde Architektur*, which I have also quoted above; it is thoroughly typical of descriptions of the later period.

The only thing one could criticize here is the arrangement of the levels. They are a last vestige of geometry in this otherwise so lively [*lebendig*] plan. . . . Through the identification and consideration of the functional necessities, a unified current of life [*Lebensstrom*] runs through this plan which no longer attaches regular, rigid rooms to axes but follows instead living movement.⁸⁴

The idea of an 'abandonment to life itself', the sense of a 'life stream', the desire to work 'directly out of life', the constant appearance of the term: this is the vocabulary of *Lebensphilosophie*.

Lebensphilosophie or the 'philosophy of life' is an ill-defined but nonetheless pervasive tendency on the German intellectual scene in the early part of the twentieth century.⁸⁵ Emerging out of the work of Dilthey and Nietzsche, finding confirmation in Bergson, the later Simmel and to a certain extent Husserl, it posited the relativity of truth and sought to identify the reality of things exclusively as they are experienced or lived. With the perceived failure of abstract concepts to represent the nature of the world, Life became a basic, if shaky, criterion of truth and morals and indeed an end in itself. To those who responded to it, *Lebensphilosophie* represented a rebellion against the aridity of academic philosophy's abstract speculation and the stranglehold of Neo-Kantianism; it posited the existence of unmediated experience, one not suppressed by institutions, concepts, and the moral codes of a seemingly bankrupt bourgeois order. It raised the possibility of a 'wholeness' of life in an age widely experienced as characterized by alienation. It was the philosophical underpinning of Behne's generation in its youth.

'Life' was typically placed in opposition to abstract rationality; Ludwig Klage's famous formulation from the late twenties was that the 'Spirit' or intellect was the enemy of the 'Soul' or life.⁸⁶ Behne offers a very similar

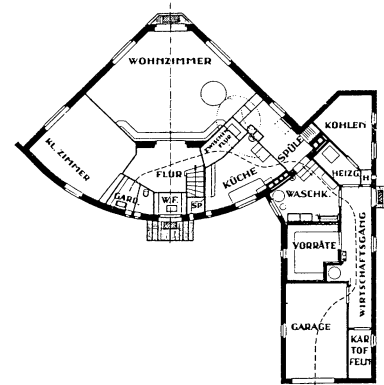
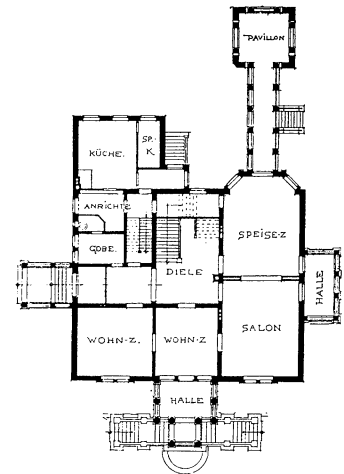


Fig. 10. Bruno Taut, own house, Dahlewitz, 1926/27, plan of ground floor (below) compared to the plan of a villa from Grunewald, Berlin, 1880s (above). From *Eine Stunde Architektur*.

83. *Der moderne Zweckbau*, p. 22; *The Modern Functional Building*, p. 100 (trans. modified)

84. *Eine Stunde Architektur*, p. 49.

85. On *Lebensphilosophie*, see Hans-Joachim Lieber, *Kulturkritik und Lebensphilosophie: Studien zur deutschen Philosophie der Jahrhundertwende* (Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft: Darmstadt, 1974); and Herbert Schnädelbach, *Philosophie in Deutschland, 1831–1933* (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt a.M., 1983), chap. 5. On the relation between *Lebensphilosophie* and what Behne discusses as 'functionalism' in *The Modern Functional Building*, see Colquhoun, 'Criticism and Self-Criticism', p. 30.

86. Ludwig Klages, *Der Geist als Widersacher der Seele* (Leipzig, 1929/32).

87. Walter Gropius, 'Bauhaus Dessau – Principles of Bauhaus Production' (1926), in H.M. Wingler, *The Bauhaus*, trans. W. Jabs and B. Gilbert (MIT Press: Cambridge, 1978), p. 109 (trans. modified).

88. Max Horkheimer, 'Die neue Sachlichkeit', in *Notizen 1950 bis 1969 und Dämmerung: Notizen in Deutschland* (Fischer: Frankfurt a.M., 1974), p. 327–28. This text was first published in *Dämmerung* under the pseudonym Heinrich Regius in 1934, but it certainly dates to the previous decade.

89. 'Mistaken . . . are those who seek to establish a connection between the *Sachlichkeit* of the new architects with the painters' "'*Neue Sachlichkeit*'": Max Taut: *Bauten und Pläne*, p. 21.

90. *Neues Wohnen – Neues Bauen*, p. 6–7. On the problems and politics of housing in Weimar Germany, see Manfredo Tafuri, 'Sozialpolitik and the City in Weimar Germany', in *The Sphere and the Labyrinth: Avant-Gardes and Architecture from Piranesi to the 1970s*, trans. P. d'Acerno and R. Connolly (MIT Press: Cambridge, 1987), pp. 197–263; Barbara Miller Lane, *Architecture and Politics in Germany, 1918–1945*, rev. edn. (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1985), chap. 4; and the special issue of *Architectural Association Quarterly*, vol. 11, no. 1 (1979).

opposition using the language of architecture. *Sachlichkeit*, which we now see is beholden to a sense of life, is put in opposition to symmetry, axial arrangements, and the impassive presence of the facade, its Medusa-gaze fixed on the individual. The words he uses to describe their effect, again and again, are 'rigid' and 'life-denying'; the fetish, we recall, served 'Death'.

The equation of 'object' with 'life' gives a new coordinate by which to understand Behne's sense of the *Sache*. The object, adapting to life, partaking of its energies and pushing them along, becomes a sort of supplement to an irrationalist sense of the wholeness of life at the level of individual experience. Similarly, the fetish is not a force blinding one to social realities, but rather an item, or relation, that impedes life. These concepts stand in direct contradiction to the social sense of architecture that he was trying to develop and which remains, despite these problems, a major force in his work. But the ever-present jargon of *Lebensphilosophie* is, I will suggest, closely linked with difficulties Behne had in developing the social notion of 'man' to which he was so committed.

One cannot say that Behne simply ignored the social side of architecture in the works under discussion here. Compared to other theorists of the time, his sense of the social is precisely his strength. Consider Gropius's 'Principles of Bauhaus Production' of 1926, a classic statement of functionalist – or better, *neusachlich* – design thinking: 'An object is defined by its essence [*Wesen*]. In order, then, to design it to function correctly – a container, a chair, or a house – one must first of all study its nature; for it must serve its purpose perfectly, that is, it must fulfill its function usefully, be durable, economical, and "beautiful".'⁸⁷ 'Essence' was a slogan to those who stood behind a '*Neue Sachlichkeit*' in the arts, philosophy, or social theory, who found the 'concrete' immediacy of objects and the tangibility of problems as the only measure of them. But there were also many who couldn't stomach the word. For instance, Max Horkheimer, in an early text titled 'The *Neue Sachlichkeit*':

The 'concrete' is in fashion. But what is understood by this 'concreteness'? Certainly not what the sciences have investigated for the last few centuries. Quite the opposite. . . . It is not the causal relationships between things that is at issue, not their relations. What stands in question is precisely the objects in isolation from the relations – the things themselves, their existence, their essence.⁸⁸

It is revealing and typical that Behne struggled to distinguish his own position, his own use of the term *Sachlichkeit*, from the modishness of the false concrete.⁸⁹

Nonetheless, Behne's attempts to widen his view of man are halting. The introduction to *Neues Wohnen – Neues Bauen* is a case in point. He begins by writing that 'the discussion of the housing problem is a highly political task'. He mentions the relevance of legislative issues, the financing of building, and building technology, only to arrive at what he calls the 'cultural-artistic' issue. 'As absurd as it would be to overemphasize it, to discuss it at the expense of the financial and political or the technical matters, it would be equally absurd to underestimate the importance of a cultural-artistic view. . . . Ultimately, it is the cultural, spiritual demands of man that determine the work made possible by politics, finance and technique.'⁹⁰ These paragraphs are among the most succinct introductions to the true issues of architecture and the problem of housing in the Weimar Republic – and yet they are Behne's identification of the matters he will *not* be discussing. In full awareness of the breadth of political issues faced by architects, Behne narrows the frame back to the

encounter of man and object and falls into the trap of *Lebensphilosophie's* tendency toward a simple and unreflective phenomenology.

One must look beyond Behne to find solid discussions of the social demands of the human subjects of architecture, the precise way *Sachen* mediate between them, joining and inflecting the relation of *Mensch* to *Mensch*. Such discussions exist: the most important is, perhaps, *Das Buch vom Bauen* by Alexander Schwab.⁹¹ Man has to be described not only in terms of the life-stream his activities produce, but his financial ability to secure housing; his various culturally determined demands (house versus flat); the social unit to be housed (extended family, nuclear family, single people, pairs); the organization, spatial placement, and social determinants of certain functions (cooking, dining, laundry, etc. – communal or private? at home or at work?); the social implication of different architecturally determined groupings (and the older model ‘intermediate stages’ of barracks, cloister, and boarding school); the economic determinants of ‘privacy’ and ‘social life’ – the list is long and impressive. These matters are bracketed out by Behne, but they cannot be in the light of the concept of *Sachlichkeit* that he seeks to develop: that of the social mediation of objects. Behne wanted to avoid the false ‘concrete’ of the *neusachlich* essence, but his tendency to reduce the concerns of architecture to the immediate experience of the objects of the world plays havoc with his notion of man – and therefore with his notion of *Sachlichkeit*.

We need a test case; we need to study Behne’s use of the concept of *Sachlichkeit* in action. Let us take Behne’s most often anthologized essay, his most heroic and human work of architectural criticism, his 1930 essay ‘Dammerstock’. ‘Dammerstock’ represents Behne’s critique of an experimental estate of that name. Built between 1928 and 1929 in Karlsruhe under the supervision of Walter Gropius, the Dammerstock *Siedlung* was an attempt to maximize housing hygiene and efficiency; it represents the ‘hardline’ approach to solving the problem of housing by the establishment of the minimal requirements of modern dwelling (the famous *Existenzminimum*).⁹² The estate’s characteristic feature was the strict use of the *Zeilenbau*, the placement of all buildings oriented north to south, regardless of terrain, each flat extending across the building and thus having both an eastern and western exposure and adequate ventilation.

It was the rigorous application of the *Zeilenbau* principle which attracted most criticism, and which Behne also called into question. He criticizes the ‘dogmatic’ use of the idea, the ‘rigid’ adherence to the theory.⁹³ True to his principles, he stresses the need to judge not according to isolated criteria but from the view of totality: ‘If, in Dammerstock, all rooms must face east or west, the guarantee for this truth will be found not in the invocation of this or that hygienic capacity, but in the examination of the total result.’⁹⁴ And it is ‘man’ who will provide the measure of its success:

And we must say: Dammerstock would be right if our compass had only east and west, if the sun commuted along the shortest path between east and west without touching north and south. But since the sun, from man’s point of view, follows a circle around the earth and marks four directions that are deeply engrained in our consciousness, Dammerstock has the effect of a torso.⁹⁵

He continues, mocking the experts: the architect

need not orient apartments toward the north. But must he boycott the south? If in the small apartments . . . the living rooms face south, the kitchen, bathroom and toilet can certainly be oriented toward the north. The sunlight from the south is strong enough – far more intense than

91. Alexander Schwab, *Das Buch vom Bauen* (Bertelsmann: Düsseldorf, 1973), originally published under the pseudonym ‘Alfred Sigrist’ in 1930.

92. Richard Pommer and Christian F. Otto, *Weissenhof 1927 and the Modern Movement in Architecture* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1991), p. 149. On Dammerstock, see Winfried Nerdinger, *Walter Gropius* (Gebr. Mann: Berlin, 1985), pp. 112–14; and Hartmut Probst and Christian Schädlich, *Walter Gropius*, vol. 1: *Der Architekt und Theoretiker, Verzeichnis Teil 1* (Verlag für Bauwesen: Berlin, 1985), pp. 108–11.

93. Adolf Behne, ‘Dammerstock’, *Die Form*, vol. 5 (1930), repr. in *Die Form: Stimme des Deutschen Werkbundes, 1925–1934*, ed. Felix Schwarz and Frank Gloor (Bertelsmann: Gütersloh, 1969), p. 168.

94. ‘Dammerstock’, p. 169.

95. ‘Dammerstock’, p. 169.

from east or west – to keep the service rooms in these small apartments disinfected and healthy.

96. 'Dammerstock', pp. 169–70.

In Dammerstock, too many factors have been forgotten over the morning sun. It is certainly valuable to let the sun into the bedrooms . . . but is the early morning the only opportunity to come into contact with the sun? On good days, it shines another few hours on the way to work, to school and from school, and even working in the garden family members encounter the sun. For after all, man is mobile and does not live twenty-four hours a day in the house.

The *Zeilenbau* seeks to solve and cure all problems from the point of view of the dwelling, certainly out of a deep concern for man. But in fact, precisely here man becomes a concept, a figure. Man has to dwell and will become healthy through it; and this dwelling diet is prescribed in detail. He must . . . go to bed facing east, eat and answer Mother's letter facing west, and the apartments are in fact organized so that he can not do it any other way.⁹⁶

Behne resists a narrow definition of function. He calls the *Zeilenbau* 'dictatorial' in that it forces the user into specific patterns, determining his actions instead of adapting to them. It would seem that he has caught Gropius red-handed, as if putting the finishing touches on Kampert's flat; it would seem that desks would continue to corner their unfortunate users.

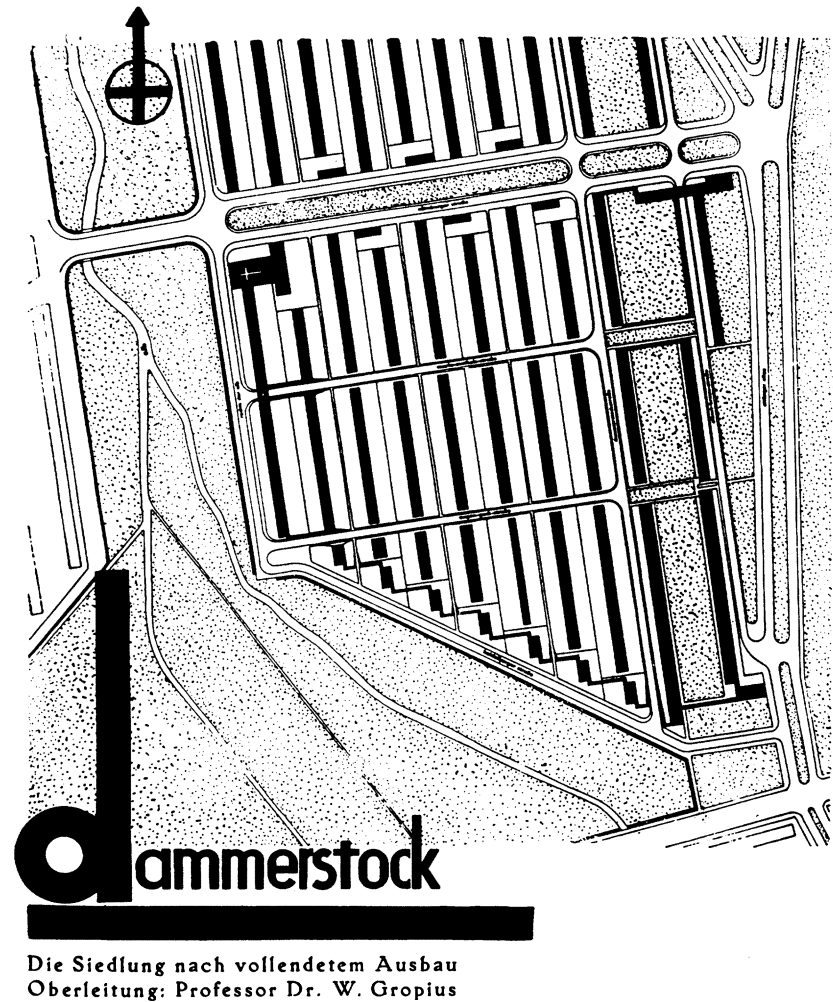


Fig. 11. Walter Gropius, plan for the Dammerstock Siedlung, 1928, from a brochure of 1929 designed by Kurt Schwitters. From Norbert Huse, *'Neues Bauen' 1918 bis 1933* (Berlin, 1985).

Behne's point is undeniable, and his critique is powerful and necessary. In the end, however, it does not fulfill the promise of the positions laid out in the works of 1927–28. We can, so to speak, take an impression or an imprint and try to coax out his view of man from clues about the notion of *Sachlichkeit* that informs the critique. Again, we find that the concerns are narrow. As elsewhere, Behne provides no discussion of labour, of class, or the units to be housed, of how they would meet; he does begin to talk about the apartment in terms of the time spent outside of it but resists drawing any positive conclusions about the effect of the dwelling. Patterns of social life are present in his picture of domestic life only as weak shadows; changes are not discussed at all. There is no sense here of how objects could mediate a truly social life, how they would connect man to man and respond to the society they create.

97. 'Dammerstock', p. 170.

It is strange: for all its power as a statement of resistance to a narrow, laboratory view of 'function,' Behne's notion of the whole man is oddly empty. Man is still discussed only in his role as a user of objects; he does not transcend them and therefore cannot subordinate them. His fate is still in their hands, his life still rigidly determined by the orientation of windows and untouched by larger issues of housing in a rapidly changing society. And thus Behne's sensitive account is not as different from Brecht's Bauhaus burlesque as one could reasonably hope it would be. Instead of clarifying and defining the object by tying it to man, Behne's conceptually incestuous coupling of *Mensch* and *Sache* ultimately reduces man to being simply the user of the objects around him.

The object is to be defined by man. And at first sight, Behne's notion of man seems full: social, vital, empowered. But the social life of man quickly falls outside of the frame of Behne's discussions: social man is an alibi and an ideal, but not a protagonist. What is left is a concept of man inherited from *Lebensphilosophie*, a concept that does not accept the rule of 'abstract' concepts of morals or truths, a concept deeply in contradiction with a notion of man as socially defined, a concept that ultimately destabilizes the encounter Behne seeks to describe. In his Dammerstock critique, Behne calls the inhabitant of the *Zeilenbau* an '*abstraktes Wohnwesen*' or 'abstract living being',⁹⁷ but his own view is not qualitatively different; it is only slightly more refined. The emptiness and abstraction of his own view of *Mensch* ultimately puts the burden back on the *Sache*, which is asked, quietly, to define man after all and to do his social bidding. Behne's unstable concepts must in the end reinvest the object with the power to determine man; it becomes, again, a fetish. And thus, inevitably and in unpredictable ways, it springs to life.

VIII

One might be tempted, following Derrida, to put Behne's term *Mensch* '*sous rature*' to show its shaky foundations and its tendency to evaporate on close inspection. But the inhabitant of a tenement or a *Zeilenbau* is not an irruption of discourse; he is not governed by the logic of *différance* (though some writing about him occasionally is). Though the rhetorical structures that animate Behne's texts also undermine them, I do not think that the problem of *Sachlichkeit* is inevitable, built-in, or the result of any inherent inadequacy of architectural theory to master its own conceptual apparatus. The problem, instead, emerges from a very specific context.

Several writers – most recently and persuasively Alan Colquhoun – have called attention to some surprising continuities between the architectural discourse of Expressionism and the Neues Bauen, and even between the 1920s

98. See Dal Co, 'The Remoteness of *die Moderne*' and Colquhoun, 'Criticism and Self-Criticism', as in n. 1, above.

99. Adolf Behne, 'Kunst, Handwerk, Technik', *Die neue Rundschau*, vol. 33, no. 10 (1922), pp. 1021–37, trans. by Christiane Crasemann Collins in Francesco Dal Co, *Figures of Architecture and Thought: German Architecture Culture, 1880–1920* (Rizzoli: New York, 1990), pp. 324–38.

100. Colquhoun, 'Criticism and Self-Criticism', pp. 29–30. 'The metamorphosis that took place in Behne's thinking when he espoused the Neues Bauen a year or so later,' he writes, 'was not so complete as it seems, and . . . the change of allegiance from expressionism to the Neues Bauen primarily marked a change of form, and was only partly a change of substance.' Colquhoun calls the simultaneous presence of romantic anti-capitalist ideas and a commitment to the Neues Bauen an 'inner conflict' in Behne's work (p. 30). Needless to say, the inner conflict I delineate here is a different one.

101. Walter Gropius, *Idee und Aufbau des Staatlichen Bauhauses Weimar* (Bauhausverlag: Munich, 1923), trans. in *Bauhaus 1919–1928*, ed. H. Bayer, W. Gropius, I. Gropius, exh. cat. (Museum of Modern Art: New York, 1938), pp. 20–29.

102. 'Neue Kräfte in unserer Architektur', *Feuer*, vol. 3, no. 8 (1921/22), pp. 268–76; repr. in Behne, *Architekturkritik in der Zeit und über die Zeit hinaus*, pp. 61–67

103. Tilmann Buddensieg has traced the elements of these texts in 'Adolf Behne – Max Taut: Die Gewerkschaften als Bauherren', his afterword to the recent reprint of the *Max Taut: Bauten und Pläne* (Gebr. Mann: Berlin, 1996), appendix, p. x, n.12.

and the pre-First World War period.⁹⁸ They have pointed specifically to Behne's essay 'Art, Craft, Technology' of 1922, an essay showing Behne's rejection of Expressionism and his turn to the Neues Bauen, his rejection of craft and antimodernism and his acceptance of the machine.⁹⁹ Colquhoun points out that this acceptance is still couched in terms of a romantic anti-capitalist rationale: machine labour's suppression of the individual, in Behne's argument, leads him more easily into a supra-personal unity. Modern society's alienating forms have the potential to unite its subjects in a larger collective than the 'organic' relations of traditional society.¹⁰⁰

This sort of analysis is indeed widespread at the time of the move from organicist dreams to an adherence to the machine aesthetic: we find it in Gropius's fundamental text *Idee und Aufbau des Staatlichen Bauhauses*,¹⁰¹ and most pronounced in the writings of the De Stijl group, especially Theo van Doesburg (and indeed, it was De Stijl theory that eased the transition to a technologized *Sachlichkeit*, allowing new forms to be justified within the parameters of an old ideology). And Colquhoun's analysis is masterful. Yet there is still a problem with it; and in the end, I think, it leads to some incorrect conclusions. The problem is that it reduces the new to the traces of the old that we find in it; from clues drawn out of a complex situation it constructs a simple, continuous narrative. It implies that the change from Expressionism to Neue *Sachlichkeit* is, in its essence, a purely formal matter; and because of the continuous formal trajectory of the Neues Bauen from the mid- to the late-1920s, it implies that the rationales and ideologies of, say, 1928 are the same as those of 1922 and 1923.

Looked at in terms of their ruptures and discontinuities, Behne's texts of 1927–28 show a very different situation. They show not only that form and ideology can be out of synch, but also that texts can be out of synch with themselves. Let us consider the foreword to the Max Taut book. There we found all the elements of Behne's ideas at the time, elements that do not always mix. There Behne wrote about the 'self-realization' of the *Sache*, its emergence out of 'mysterious sources' and its 'mute' formal power, that strange Worringerian sense of form. It is in this text too that the objects rebelled, fed up with the tensions that were so politely tolerated by the bourgeoisie, and here that the dwelling becomes the inescapable fate of its passive inhabitant. But in the same text we find Behne's outline of an Enlightenment philosophy of history of the *Sache*, its equation with the plan, and his most dialectical sense of the relation of *Sache* to man. In light of this, it is no surprise to find out that the first of the four parts of the essay, titled 'New Goals,' is in fact considerably older than it might appear to be: it is largely identical to an article published in 1921/22 under the title 'New Forces in our Architecture.'¹⁰² There are, in fact, only a few changes of particulars and grammatical alterations to remove some of the more self-conscious drama and Expressionist affect. The second and third parts, 'On Ornament' and 'On the Plan,' also have precedents from roughly the same time.¹⁰³ The Max Taut foreword was thus written over the unusually long period of 1921–1927, and only the final section, 'On *Sachlichkeit*,' seems to have been drafted for the publication itself.

It is not as though the 'older' or 'Expressionist' ideas are all located in the 'older' parts of the text, the ideas of *Sachlichkeit* in the 'newer': other writings at the same time show a sort of discursive non-simultaneity that corresponds to the literal non-simultaneity of the Max Taut foreword. It is not that Behne is, in 1927, 'still' an Expressionist, 'still' a romantic anti-capitalist, 'still' an adherent of *Lebensphilosophie*. For these elements are conceptually incompatible

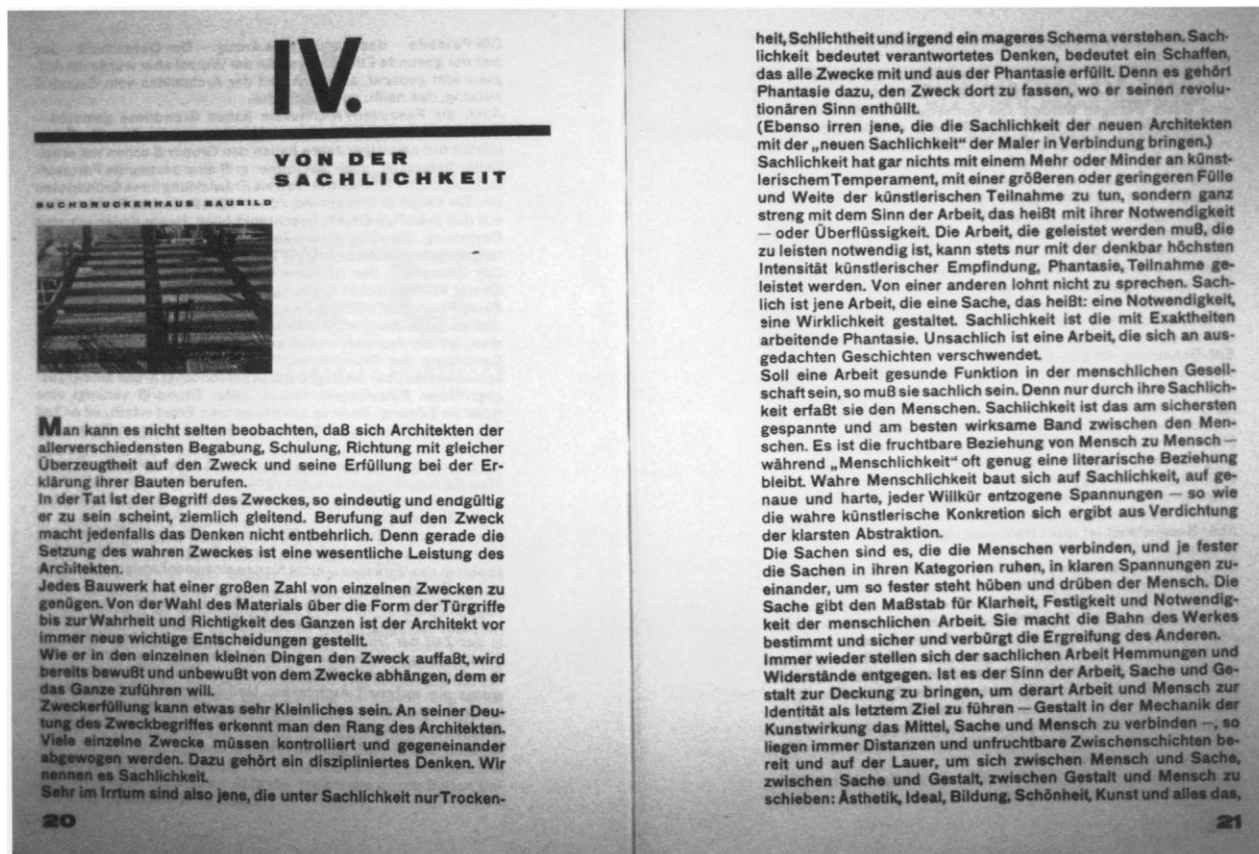


Fig. 12. 'On *Sachlichkeit*,' from the foreword to Max Taut: *Bauten und Pläne*.

with the direction in which Behne takes his notion of *Sachlichkeit*, and we cannot reduce the latter notion to the vestiges of former habits of thought with which they clash. Why, we must ask, did Behne choose to republish older formulations that sit so uneasily with his developing views? Why weren't these parts simply replaced? And why does Behne rehearse rhetoric that forms an unintentionally ironic backdrop to his arguments?

These non-simultaneous elements remain, I will argue, because Behne could not have written in any other way. Certainly, by 1927, Behne had dispensed with his romantic anti-capitalist rationale for *Sachlichkeit*, but he is still left with a somewhat Expressionist sense of form and a notion of man indebted to *Lebensphilosophie*. I think that these latter elements which clash so clearly with Behne's sense of the social are signs of a difficulty Behne faced in his own thought, that they reveal how Behne's texts are held together by a certain contradiction, and that they are there to cover over a basic gap.

IX

When it came to defining the *Sache*, we have seen, Behne had to define the *Mensch*; and if he retained an abstract and inadequate notion of man, it was simply because there was nothing to put there in his place. Man was a black hole because the discursive structures by which he could have been an object of knowledge in discussions of architecture in the 1920s were deeply unstable.

Pre-war ideas were firmly rooted in a set of institutions and discourses that

104. On architectural discourse before the First World War, see Schwartz, *The Werkbund*, esp. chaps. 1 and 2.

formed the common currency of thought about architecture and constituted a coherent set of objects and ways of talking about it.¹⁰⁴ Discussions of architecture took place at the intersection of two related bodies of knowledge. The first was that represented by *Kulturkritik* and a very particular kind of sociology that formed in its wake: both pursued an analysis of culture that sought to define the differences between modern and pre-modern social forms as a way of understanding what was interpreted as a state of alienation. In the work of the sociologists Georg Simmel and Werner Sombart (the latter a member of the *Werkbund*), but also architects such as Behrens and Muthesius and critics such as Karl Scheffler, objects were investigated in terms of their ability to mediate subjectivity: pre-industrial 'style' was seen to represent a spiritual unity; the debased 'fashion' object reflected a state of alienation produced by a destabilized capitalist culture. The second body of knowledge was economics: objects, their modes of production, distribution and consumption, were all studied in great depth. What made this extraordinary depth and detail possible was the fact that economics was construed as an historical and human study, a *Geisteswissenschaft*; the economy was considered a realm of human subjectivity. In this context, man could be defined with some precision: he was bourgeois, related to objects as consumer and not producer, and was seen to be fulfilled in the idealist terms of belonging to a transcendent cultural totality to which he had access by economic activity (and it is this notion that still reverberates in Behne's 'Art, Craft, Technology'). It is this discursive foundation – reflecting an institutional base involving a bourgeois press concerned with issues of culture, an academic community concerned with the social and cultural effects of capitalism, and a bourgeois strain of politics that found political capital in culture – that served to construct man and the design object in a solid sociological, political and cultural framework that defined, in quite precise ways, how the relation of man to object could be thought.

By contrast, both the institutional and discursive bases of architectural discussions in the 1920s had been radically fragmented and were in the process of reforming. The object, for example, was bandied about, defined differently depending on which of a bewilderingly heterogeneous set of different audiences was being addressed. Alexander Schwab, for example, defines the object in terms of the problem of housing; his issues are precisely those of finance and the political possibility of building; his audience is a working class seeking to understand its own predicament. His terms are provided by economics (in which he had a university degree) and the political discourses of social democracy and communism. Gropius defines the object in a variety of different ways: as a pedagogue he defined it on a small scale and in terms of the process of its design; as a civil servant in terms of its economic potential and its ability to fund a learning institution; as a private architect he described it as a home in terms of comfort and culture; as a builder for local governments he defined it as a *Siedlung* or estate and in terms of efficiency of housing. Behne's coordinates are again different. He was deeply involved in the divided cultural discourse of socialism (and not the political one, as Schwab); and in general his object was a modest one, one to be, or to be found in, a modest home. Its relation to its own production was not always clear; nor was its relation to its own form. Radically but unsuccessfully, Behne tried to define the object on his own, using common sense, and going from the object out. As we have seen, this gave him little ground from which to make the thing an object of knowledge.

All this reflects the fact that as an object of knowledge, the human subject

too was fragmented, incomplete and pulled in various discursive and institutional directions over the course of the decade. At first, in the phase called Expressionist, he was an alienated subject who was to be redeemed by cultural means that were confused with political means. His discursive roots come from a wide variety of utopian texts, and his home was the manifesto and leaflet. When he came into contact with the very real institutions of the new Social Democratic state, there were problems.¹⁰⁵ Overlapping with this phase and extending through the mid-1920s, man was a cosmic being, exceeding in spirituality the pre-war inhabitant of 'culture' by his ability to float freely above any material mediations. His home, however, was more mundane: it might be seen as typified by the 'little magazine', the low-circulation cultural journal read by a narrow circle of artists, architects and other interested parties.¹⁰⁶ What is interesting here is that this transcendent sense of man served as the alibi for a formal shift to Constructivism, an artistic tendency that long outlived its discursive roots. With the stabilization phase of the Weimar Republic man entered a deeply unstable discursive space that needed to take account of some more material social reality. At the same time, however, as architects became increasingly successful in practices and entrenched in bureaucratic positions, their institutional bases became firmer; this is a period of rapid renegotiation of the terms of architecture.

Yet there was often, at the beginning, little agreement about who the human subject of architecture and design was. For some – Erich Mendelsohn, perhaps – he was the urban shopper. For others – Gropius, at times – he was the student. For many, he was the minimum dweller of the *Existenzminimum*, the man or woman mapped out in a Frederick J. Taylor-type diagram, a figure who was not completely without political importance, as Ernst May and Martin Wagner knew. In any case, some architects' enthusiasm for new forms

105. See Joan Weinstein's exemplary account in *The End of Expressionism: Art and the November Revolution in Germany, 1918–19* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1990), chap. 1.

106. On the relation between architecture and journals in the twentieth century, see Annette Ciré and Haila Ochs, eds., *Die Zeitschrift als Manifest: Aufsätze zu architektonischen Strömungen im 20. Jahrhundert* (Birkhäuser: Basel, 1991), and Manfredo Tafuri's very brief remarks in his essay "Operative Criticism," in *Theories and History of Architecture*, trans. G. Verrecchia (Granada: London: 1980), p. 153.

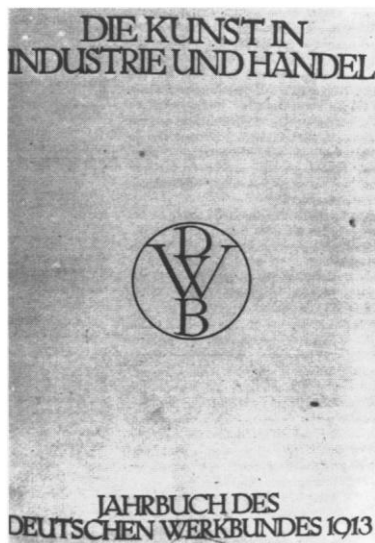


Fig. 13. Deutscher Werkbund yearbook, 1913.



Fig. 14. *De Stijl*, vol. 1, 1917.



Fig. 15. *Frühlicht*, no. 7, 1920.

107. K. Michael Hays, *Modernism and the Posthumanist Subject: The Architecture of Hannes Meyer and Ludwig Hilberseimer* (MIT Press: Cambridge, 1992).

108. 'Dammerstock', p. 170.

of scientific knowledge might best be interpreted as a search for a new discursive and institutional home. Ludwig Hilberseimer and Hannes Meyer worked on understanding minimum man as a cultural being, one recently discussed as the 'posthumanist subject'.¹⁰⁷ And in very clear terms, Alexander Schwab saw him, in a nuanced way, as increasingly proletarian. In this context, Behne's benevolent but phantom Everyman seems strangely closest to home, yet at the same time utterly homeless.

By 1930 – the year of Behne's Dammerstock critique, the year of Schwab's *Buch vom Bauen* – the contours of a new architectural discourse can be discerned, one with which the personnel and venues of older forms of thinking about architecture were no longer in harmony. Instead of journals of the educated bourgeoisie or radical artists, the important discussions of architecture were happening in forums that defined themselves as professional: *Die Form*, *Das neue Frankfurt* and (as ever) journals of the building trade. The field in which architects worked was no longer called 'culture'; it was no longer the cosmos; it was called society. The architect was seen to have a crucial and immediate role here (something about which Behne has, in many of his writings, much to say). And the notion of man constructed was increasingly sociological. Yet the coordinates of sociological man were very different from those of the pre-war bourgeois sociology of Weber, Sombart and Simmel, and it was not yet clear whether they were to be set by the experimental sciences, by political parties, or by more flexible means.

Behne's problems defining man were not so much a failure as a faithful mirror of the confusion about the subject of architecture at the time. And it is in the attempt to determine the nature of this subject that Behne sought to intervene. He did so by responding to the built work of those he considered his allies; he sought to suggest corrections and encourage clarity about sociological man. This is the context in which we must read the question he posed in the Dammerstock critique: 'Can one be sociological by dictatorship?'¹⁰⁸ For his part, Behne tried to make the notion of man a critical one, one that would exceed material minima, one whose dwelling was not inconsistent with thought, action, and change. Yet such an intervention could not on its

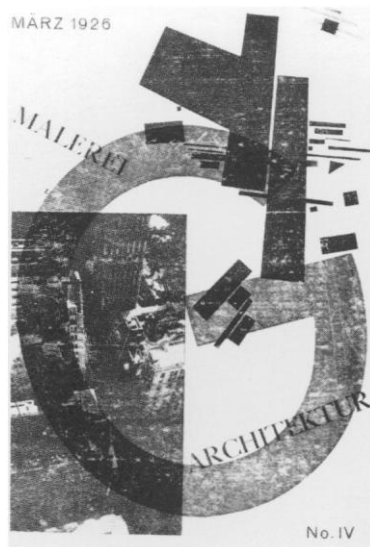


Fig. 16. G. Material zur elementaren Gestaltung, no. 4, 1926.



Fig. 17. Das neue Frankfurt, vol. 2, no. 1, 1928.



Fig. 18. Die Form, vol. 5, no. 14, 1930.

own change architectural theory and practice; simple *sense* does not provide coordinates for a field of thought. We cannot, however, fault Behne for not providing, ready-made, an alternative body or bodies of knowledge by which to think, or rethink, the relation of man to object.

I am aware that this section has been, at best, sketchy; what I have tried to do is simply to suggest some of the issues that Behne's work seems to raise in the study of the Neues Bauen. Two tentative conclusions, however, can perhaps be drawn.

The first is that the relation of architectural theory to knowledge of any consistent kind in the 1920s was problematic and shifting. Architectural discourse reveals profound ruptures that are covered over by the seeming uniformity of certain strains of building (and in recent years it has become quite clear just how much this uniform development is itself an historiographical fiction). Certainly the connections to the tradition of architectural theory, though they do exist, seem tenuous. Connections to the immediate history of the pre-First World War period evaporated as quickly as the institutional structures provided by the Wilhelmine bourgeoisie. The period demands as close attention to historical discontinuities as to longer, seemingly continuous developments.

The second is that the architecture represented by the Neues Bauen was beset by tensions and transitions. Indeed, it was a truism of the time that the Neues Bauen was a transitional phenomenon; the only question was where it would lead. It was, one could say, heading somewhere fast, towards a destination at which it never arrived. This situation, which we have yet to grasp in its full complexity, required thinking on one's feet and a tolerance for inconsistency; it involved a flexible relation of empirical criticism and theory; it involved constant corrections, even at the expense of conflicts among allies. It is for all these qualities that we most value Behne.

X

Zurück zur Sache: Back to the object, back to the matter at hand.

It has become customary to end discussions of continuity and discontinuity in Weimar Germany with some sort of equation of the avant-garde with the pre- and post-Weimar right, with ideologies of the *Volk* and with techniques of Fascism. Many of these perceived continuities have emerged out of new accounts of the complexities of modernity itself, and these insights are extremely important.¹⁰⁹ Yet others have emerged from the nature of the enterprise of intellectual history. For that reason I have tried to reassert the case for discontinuity, for attention to ruptures and contradictions. Yet the rupture explored here was incomplete, one in which theorists were still struggling to define their objects of study and a basis for knowledge about them.

But in the end, there is another point we can take from the problem of *Sachlichkeit*. That point, from Behne and other writers of the 1920s, is that objects have a politics. One might argue that objects have no politics, only people do. This is, of course, the bottom line; but the matter is certainly more complex. As Behne and others knew, objects would put up a fight, would resist any specious epistemological clarity that would seek to render them transparent to processes that are called social and then defined so as to exclude them. Behne knew that design was a matter of fundamental social importance because objects mediate human action; their production and use were social activities as well as the determinants of social activity. Kracauer and Brecht

109. See, for example, Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1984); and, in the realm of design, Francesco Dal Co, *Figures of Architecture and Thought: German Architectural Culture, 1880–1920*, trans. S. Sartarelli (Rizzoli: New York, 1990) and the essays in *Bauhaus-Moderne im Nationalsozialismus: Zwischen Anbiederung und Verfolgung*, ed. Winfried Nerdinger (Prestel: Munich, 1993).

also saw a sort of object politics, but one they did not like. Behne's work intersected with theirs when he tried to define a good politics with the name *Sachlichkeit*.

It is another commonplace to justify an historical study with claims of its contemporary relevance – a topos that is often as disingenuous as it is superfluous. But Behne shows that though the Neues Bauen could fall into the trap of formalism and occasionally rendered its subjects abstract, these were not problems inherent in the endeavour. The project developed then – the search for a proper politics of the object – is one that has yet to be redefined or superseded. Until this happens, Behne will remain topical, and we will share much common ground.

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