

Epilogue

The Werkbund debates, Taut's Glashaus, as well as the accompanying exhibit buildings that so inspired Behne's thinking on the development of modern architecture, all came to an abrupt close in the first week of August 1914, when the German Kaiser declared war on Europe. Soon after, Behne began a brief tour of duty on the western front and then as a hospital attendant in the Berlin suburb of Oranienburg, writing throughout almost without interruption. He swung from bouts of patriotism early in the war, to deep depression about the state of the industrial world order late in the war.¹ His criticism of the Werkbund and the missions it promoted became harsher. He turned more inward to the Idealist position of Expressionist art that he would retain so for his entire career.

In his well-known article "Critique of the Werkbund," published in the former Werkbund publisher Diederichs' journal Die Tat in August 1917, Behne launched a full-scale attack on the institution which had done so much to bring about reform towards more *sachlich* design in Germany.² Behne suggested that the Werkbund's mission of uniting art and industry was farce, doomed to failure because of contradictory goals.

¹ On Behne's nationalism, see Magdalena Bushart, "Adolf Behne 'Kunst-Theoretikus'," in Adolf Behne. Essays zu seiner Kunst- und Architektur-Kritik, ed. Magdalena Bushart (2000); Rose-Carol Washton Long, "National or International? Berlin Critics and the Question of Expressionism," in Künstlerischer Austausch - Artistic Exchange vol. 3, ed. Thomas W. Gaehtgens (1993), pp. 521-534.

² Behne, "Kritik des Werkbundes" Die Tat 9.1, no. 5 (Aug. 1917): 430-438; also published as separate reprint; and republished in Frecot, ed., Werkbund Archiv Jahrbuch 1 (1972):118-128.

Business and industry, he claimed, by their very nature tended towards sentimentality and convention, while pure art was an elementary formal force that could not be harnessed into a "style" or any other goals.³ In an article from the same year published in the more obscure Expressionist magazine Marsyas, he lamented how business and modern technology had come to dominate modern man. In his own field, he felt the technical modes of reproduction were inflicting "violence" on any notion of a true art.⁴ In the Fall of 1918, Behne even began to criticize his mentor Walden for having gone over to the other side, accusing the art dealer of being bourgeois in the way he promoted art as a commodity and luxury, rather than as an idea and "Inner necessity".⁵

By the end of World War I, Behne's advocacy of appropriate new art for the age turned from Expressionism to Cubism and eventually to Constructivism. Through support of these movements, he began to play an even more pivotal role in the development of a modern art and architecture in Germany. In March 1919, Behne became the executive secretary of the Arbeitsrat für Kunst (Working Council for Art), a group modeled after the Soviet worker's councils, intent on promoting utopian artistic

³ Behne, "Kritik des Werkbundes," esp. p. 438.

⁴ Behne, "Das reproduktive Zeitalter," Marsyas, no. 2 (Nov./Dec. 1917): 219-226. Arnd Bohm, in "Artful Reproduction: Benjamin's Appropriation of Adolf Behne's 'Das reproduktive Zeitalter' in the *Kunstwerk* Essay," The Germanic Review 68, no. 4 (1993): 146-155, claims with questionable evidence, that Behne's essay was the unacknowledged source for Walter Benjamin's much more famous essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." See also chapter 2 above.

⁵ Behne, "Kunstwende?," Sozialistische Monatshefte 24.2 = Bd.51 (Oct. 15, 1918): 946-952.

experimentation in the face of the gloom of post-war Berlin.⁶ Acting as secretary general of the group, Behne was responsible for all the exhibits, publications, as well as worker-outreach programs initiated by the group. In part through contacts he developed in the Arbeitsrat, Behne introduced his friend Gropius to Lyonel Feininger, and eventually helped convince the architect to hire him and several other artists as "Form-Masters" at the Bauhaus.

Behne also became ever more Socialist, politically, and artistically. In the midst of Germany's failed revolution in November 1918, he briefly joined the new USPD party that split from the mainstream SPD. He became one of the primary art editors for Die Freiheit (The Freedom), the official mouthpiece of the USPD, and after the party collapsed in 1923, he moved on to become art editor of Die Welt am Abend (The Evening World), a communist newspaper sold mostly on the streets to workers, rather than through subscriptions. Behne also contributed significantly to discussions of art in two of the most important socialist journals of the Weimar era, the Sozialistische Monatshefte (Socialist Monthly), and DieWeltbühne (The World Stage).

In the late summer of 1920 Behne traveled to the "International Socialist Exhibition of Modern Art" in Amsterdam, and in the process became the first important

⁶ Although Behne is often credited with being a founder of the *Arbeitsrat für Kunst*, possibly alongside his friends Bruno Taut and Walter Gropius, there is no evidence that Behne was involved before March 1919; see Bushart, "Kunst-Theoretikus." On the *Arbeitsrat*, see recently Regine Prange, "Architectural Fantasies without Architecture? The *Arbeitsrat für Kunst* and its Exhibitions," in City of Architecture: Architecture of the City. Berlin 1900-2000, ed. Josef P. Kleihues, Thorsten Scheer et al. (2000), pp. 93-103.

member of the German avant-garde to seek out the artists of the De Stijl movement. Through articles and books Behne began to convince Germans to look towards Holland for ideas of renewal and modern architecture. When Theo van Doesburg ventured east to Berlin, he first stayed in Behne's apartment, where he was introduced to Taut, Gropius, Adolf Meyer, Fred Forbat, and Raoul Hausman, among others. Behne and these acquaintances eventually inspired van Doesburg to move to Weimar in 1921, where he was instrumental in helping move Gropius and the Bauhaus away from Expressionism. Behne's 1922 article "Kunst, Handwerk und Industrie," written in the wake of these events, was one of the key theoretical essays that convinced Gropius and many other architects to abandon an Expressionist emphasis on craft in favor of technique, technology, and modern production methods.⁷

Although he cannot be said to have invented the ideas or the terms, Behne became ever more instrumental in identifying and promoting a new type of architecture that emerged after World War I as "Neues Bauen." Always seeking "the new," Behne was determined to reveal through his criticism what he called a "sociological approach" to architecture, one that balanced between the needs of the individual and the masses. Building on ideas that he had first formulated and explored before the war, Behne outlined a strategy that combined an emphasis on rational, *sachlich* design, with attention to the inner spiritual needs of the users and inhabitants of this new

⁷ Behne, "Kunst, Handwerk, Technik," Die Neue Rundschau 33.2, no. 10 (Oct. 1922): 1021-1037; translated as "Art, Handicraft, Technology," Oppositions 22 (Fall 1980): 96-104, with an introduction by Francesco Dal Co.; as well as by Christiane Crasemann Collins in Dal Co, Figures of Architecture and Thought (1990). pp.324-338.

architecture. In his book Der moderne Zweckbau (The Modern Functional Building), written to a large extent in 1923, Behne laid out with remarkable clarity the complete range of approaches to functionalism circulating in Germany at the time. In later books such as Neues Wohnen, Neues Bauen (New Living, New Building, 1927) and Eine Stunde Architektur (One Hour of Architecture, 1928), as well as his often reprinted article "Dammerstock" (1930), Behne continued his attempt simultaneously to shape a modern architecture, and to insure that it retained a humane character in the face of increasingly rational and mechanistic tendencies. Increasingly, he was forced to balance his often harsh critique of modern architecture, with a criticism of older, traditional, and according to Behne, clearly anachronistic approaches.

Although his ideas would continue to evolve and accommodate the changes in the context around him, the origin for most of Adolf Behne's increasingly well-known ideas and arguments had their origins in his pre-World War I criticism. It was during these crucial years that the foundation and much of all the necessary intellectual and critical work was done that would allow for the radical architectural developments after the war that still inform our architectural thoughts today.⁸ The intellectual milieu in which Behne established his ideas about modern architecture distinguish him from his more famous critic colleagues such as Sigfried Giedion, allowing him to be both more perceptive and more influential on contemporary developments.

⁸ Posener, for example, insists that the years before 1918 were the decisive ones, not merely a prehistory to modern architecture, Berlin auf dem Wege 8. See also V.M. Lampugnani and R. Schneider, eds. Moderne Architektur in Deutschland 1900 bis 1950. Reform und Tradition (1992).