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Summaries in English

DAS WERK, 1914: Vol. 1, a manifesto for architectural excellence

1. The origins in the years preceding the First World War

The first issue of DAS WERK in January 1914 appeared in the midst of a situation that can be outlined as follows:

1907 foundation of the Deutscher Werkbund
1908 foundation of the *Bund Schweizer Architekten/Fédération des Architectes suisses* (BSA/FAS)

1909 creation of *Die Schweizerische Baukunst*, official organ of the BSA

1912 creation of *L'architecture suisse*, official organ of the FAS

1913 foundation of the *Schweizerischer Werkbund* (SWB) and its sister organization, *L'Œuvre* (OEV)

1914 creation of *DAS WERK*, official organ of the BSA and the SWB. *Die schweizerische Baukunst* and *L'architecture suisse* cease publication.

1914 creation of *L'Œuvre*, official organ of the FAS and the OEV. An abortive attempt to bring out a French-language equivalent of DAS WERK. Ceased publication in January 1915, after six issues.

This bustling activity was characteristic of the pre-1914 period. The turn of the century was indeed marked by intense architectural enterprise throughout Switzerland and in all the advanced industrial countries.

2. Brief sketch of Swiss developments

In Switzerland the two decades before 1914 were a period of considerable economic growth marked by a sudden increase in urbanization. By 1910 25% of the population was living in communities of more than 10,000 inhabitants.

The building industry was booming, expanding more rapidly than other industries based on transformation of raw materials. The maintenance of an expanding export industry dependent on raw materials and foreign markets is a difficult undertaking. Therefore Swiss economists began to preach the doctrine of "quality", the necessity of a vertical development rather than of continuous horizontal expansion. *Quality* became the great slogan of Swiss business before 1914.

3. Quality, an operating concept in the history of art and in the field of publicity

In 1901 Bernard Berenson, the American historian of Italian painting, confers upon "quality", or more precisely, upon "sense of quality" an operative value of decisive importance in art history. However, when it comes to precise definition of this "sense of quality", he has little to say. It turns out to be an innate gift developed by way of visual experience.

As a philosophical concept, the idea of quality stems essentially from Aristotle and his successors. But Hegel and Engels state the problem

in terms of a dialectical opposition between quantity and quality. Be that as it may, people around 1900 resorted to the antinomy quality – quantity, whereas its actual content remains woolly or trivial. The growth of newspaper publicity and of department stores, from 1880 on, no doubt greatly contribute to the idea of quantity versus quality. And these notions are carried over into the vocabulary of architects. The organizations listed above all claim *quality* as an artistic and professional ideal.

4. Architectural quality as a claim and as a means of corporate identity

Nikolaus Pevsner has shown how the problem of design quality became, in 1907, the major concern of the champions of the Deutscher Werkbund.

As "total work of art" (Gesamtkunstwerk), architecture thus reattains its preeminence in the Classical and Renaissance trivium of architecture, sculpture and painting. The outstanding role of architecture was also promoted by the activity of civil engineers in the 19th century. The SIA, founded ten years before the first constitution of 1848, tended to promote building as a cooperative undertaking of the engineer and the architect. There developed a rather pointless debate about the relationship between the technical and the aesthetic aspects of architecture. The claim was put forward that the architect takes precedence over the engineer and the industrial designer, because he is, owing to his training, a "man of synthesis". The architect embodies, according to this view, the encyclopedist and liberal ideal of Jacob Burckhardt. Architecture was thus conceived as playing a major cultural role.

These ideals suffered a setback between 1914 and 1918, but they reemerged in 1925 when Walter Gropius proclaims the advent of *International Architecture*.

5. Summary

The quality of the work results: a) from the concept of architecture as a totality, taking into account the least details, by way of "totalizing" design that has mastered technical processes and decoration (subordination of painting, sculpture and interior fittings); b) from a minacious supervision of technical execution, guarantee of impeccability; c) from a plastic idiom (style) freely chosen, but in conformity with the new national Swiss tradition.

Karl Moser is the architect that probably comes closest to meeting these requirements.

JACQUES GUBLER

The years 1943–1956 in retrospect

Renewal of WERK

In the midst of World War II, at the end of 1942, WERK underwent a complete reorganization which involved a new printer, the *Buchdruckerei Winterthur AG*, and new editors, *Ernst F. Burckhardt*, architect BSA/SIA, and

Prof. G. Jedlicke, art historian at the University of Zurich, and there were other changes in typography, plus the addition of a "Chronicle". WERK also became the official organ of the *Schweizerische Kunstverein VSK*, and there was founded a special *WERK Commission*, which had the function of supervising the make-up of the individual issues and handling administrative and financial problems.

WERK between 1943 and 1956

On the basis of this reorganization an attempt was made to broaden the horizons of the journal. The number of associates and contributors in Switzerland and abroad was increased greatly. In this connection, it must be remembered that during the war the frontiers were almost completely closed and there was practically no building activity. This led the editors to come to grips with the architecture and design of the 20s and 30s and to make a clear break with the pre-war "Heimatsstil". Further innovations in lay-out and composition were undertaken.

At the end of 1948 Prof. Jedlicke was succeeded by Dr. Heinz Keller. And the architecture section was expanded to keep up with the increase in building activity after the end of the war. Increased attention was devoted to regional planning problems.

The Chronicle furnished information on current developments in the various fields of architecture, exhibitions, special campaigns, etc.

Our criticisms of projects did not always meet with approval from architects, and an attempt was made in 1951 to get the architecture editor replaced by another person.

At the end of 1954 I requested release from my editorial duties so as to be able to devote myself wholly to my profession. My successor was *Benedikt Huber*, architect BSA/SIA, of Zurich, and I definitely resigned at the end of 1956.

Concluding remarks

WERK in the period under review was not only the official organ of three leading associations, but was the true mirror of all vital architectural and artistic activity in Switzerland and in foreign countries. All aspects were covered, theoretical, critical and practical, and there was taken into consideration the needs of a wide range of readers, working architects, students, art experts, public authorities and laymen.

There was another reorganization at the end of 1972, and we wonder whether the patron associations and readers in general can agree to all the changes. This is no reflection on the work done by the new editor, *Henri Stierlin*. The presentations of building projects continue to be interesting and meticulously prepared. On the other hand, the artistic side seems to have been jettisoned. And the Chronicle has been stripped to the minimum. Moreover, the reader is disturbed by the confusing mixture of articles and advertising.

I can only wish that WERK will be able to return to its original mission of providing information on the totality of architecture, planning, art and design. In view of the present-day segmentation of activities and specialization, the

maintenance of a synthetic total viewpoint strikes me as doubly urgent and necessary.

ALFRED ROTH

Werk 1955 to 1961

In the spring of 1955 I was called by the BSA to become the successor of Alfred Roth as an editor of WERK. It was purely a sideline for me. Swiss architecture was at that time dominated by a bitter struggle between the "moderates" and the "moderns". Many of the architects who are now building entire university complexes were then doing modest school-houses. In those days the Modern came from America, and every break-through of a new design, such as the Freudenberg High School or the Parktheater in Grenchen, was celebrated as a rare victory for the modern spirit. At the beginning of my activity as editor I published reports on the first Swiss high-rise buildings on the Letzigraben and the Birsfelden power station. Articles on ecclesiastical architecture were especially popular, since the churches began to show an interest in the avant garde. Moreover, we tried to maintain a balance between the moderates and the moderns, the German-Swiss and the French-Swiss, art and architecture.

When the building boom got under way, competition sharpened among architecture journals. There was a race to come out with the latest architectural sensations. Connections were assiduously cultivated with leading architecture firms. We also had to polish the apple with star architects, some of whom could be quite temperamental. WERK was also involved in the campaign for "good design" in the field of furniture and household appliances. Preference was given to angular forms in the style of Mondrian.

After everyone had gone modern, it became ever more difficult to find material worthy of publication. But I mastered the trick of doctoring photos of mediocre buildings so that they looked "modern". More difficult was the problem of converting the texts supplied into readable German. Above all, no one at that time among all the many architects was trying to come to terms with the problems of regional and town planning. The individual building still took pride of place, every building claiming to be an "accent" in the skyline. While we were fascinated by the new schools, high-rises and office towers, urban sprawl took over and the annihilation of urban centres by new highways. Town-planning meant dreaming up "new cities". Planning was invested with a political meaning, and was treated in very gingerly fashion. The majority still believed in the organic growth of the city, and there was a widespread fear of centralized planning, which was equated with dictatorship.

It is amazing how little time has been required for a complete change in the architectural climate. As recently as 10 or even 5 years ago the belief in growth and progress still prevailed, this optimistic period culminated in the Expo in Lausanne, where criticism was very carefully parcelled out in minimum dosages.

It was this feeling of uneasiness in the society of colleagues all believing in progress that in-

duced me to turn the editorship over to a sociologist, Lucius Burckhardt. BENEDIKT HUBER

Criticism of the 60s

At the beginning of the 60s, Swiss architects could look with confidence into the future. Jacques Schader's Freudenberg school represented the break-through to the new contemporary style. Not everyone was pleased by the new development, however. "Correct" design was still regarded as the central point of architecture.

Architects were overweening in their notions of their areas of competence, this becoming apparent especially in the preparations for the EXPO of 1964, in which architects were regarded as the crucial decision-makers for the nation. In the middle of the decade, however, the architect had to withdraw in favour of the technician, the planner. The architect became a kind of total specialist, responsible for the future, the well-being of society, the environment. But at the end of the 60s it was felt, after all, that an architect has simply to be able to build a house, he is not responsible for the commission given him.

Thus the 60s are difficult to reduce to a formula. The decade ended in disappointment and dismay.

Limits attained

Many of the projects of the 60s, such as the daring new churches, are now felt to be exceptionally clever ways of ruining the environment, attempts to glide over cultural and social problems by means of purely technical achievements.

The end of the 60s gave us the vision of the architectonically designed city. The political and economic difficulties that arose then forced us to realize the interdependent character of all planning and building. Planning and building mean continuing on the basis of what already exists leaving the field open for future developments. This was the end of the old idea of tabula rasa architecture such as is still promulgated in schools of architecture.

It is difficult to sum up a whole decade of architecture because planning projects are all on a long-range basis, for example, university complexes.

So far we have adduced material problems, but we should also mention systems technology and the student revolt as complicating factors. We find ourselves caught up in the polarity between technical planning, which leads to "idiotic" specialization, and the revolt against technocracy in favour of popular co-decision making.

The great masters

At the beginning of the decade stands the engineer Leibbrand, the man who is always ready with a technical solution, the inventor of the traffic system that became the prototype of so many schemes in the 60s. But Leibbrand's planning led in the last analysis to a total impasse in our cities. It turned out that this kind of planning favours the financially strong and works against the interests of the underprivileged. The result is frustration.

This approach was carried over into architec-

ture, as witness the big hospital complexes in Basel, Schaffhausen and Zurich. The same tendency to allow planning projects to eventuate in over-dimensioned projects is apparent in the later construction. The problems came to light only after completion of the projects. They are partly economic in nature, since the promised rationalization turned out, on completion of the project, to be illusory, but the main trouble was artistic in that the more discriminating public was repelled. The planning and decision-making of the past decade have to be judged as unsatisfactory.

The reduction of everything to science, and participation

At this juncture, mention should be made of the competition as a decision-making instrument. This method celebrated outstanding triumphs at the beginning of the decade. It encouraged the rise of the star architect, who designed every church, every school, every hospital from scratch. With the growth of rationalization, attempts to create a unique building became ever more subtle and clever.

The competition crisis, which came to a head at the end of the 60s, did not lead to any solution, but only to insignificant improvements on the already existing situation. The competition should have been converted into a decision-making method incorporating elements of feedback, such as group deliberations, panel discussions, etc., even popular referenda. This would have been a vital impulse for the architecture of the 70s.

The malaise emerging in the middle of the decade has led to the infusion of "science" into the architectural profession and to the institutionalization of research. The backwardness of the building trades was to be overcome by the application of architectural research. This is not the place to assess this development. Not only the construction process as such but rather the whole process of decision-making and design have to become the object of methodical procedure.

Although in the scientific and technical field there is ground for hope, in the realm of architecture per se the academic attitude and mannerism continue to prevail as before. Autonomous perfectionism of design thrives where presumably "town-planning" is being engaged in. The Zurich "Gemüsebrücke" is a case in point; here an overweening artistic concept has a disintegrating effect on the skyline of the city. It is astonishing how blind the Swiss are to ideas from England and the USA.

Christian Hunziker in Geneva has probably done more than anyone else to contribute to putting an end to the stagnation in this field. His buildings, visibly the product of interaction among client, construction workers and architect, exemplify not only the technical but also the human building process. Hunziker breaks through the "imperialism of professionalism", and he shows how all concerned can participate in a building process which is really a learning process. In this way, a new architecture outside the existing established schools at the same time created a new, more understanding public.

LUCIUS BURCKHARDT