MODERN ARCHITECTURE OF HANS SCHAROUN AND A NOTE ON THE PROBLEM OF GESTALT HISTORIOGRAPHY
ハンス・シャロウンの近代建築とゲシュタルト建築史編纂に関する問題

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Hans Scharoun (1893-1972) is a German architect best known for Berlin Philharmonic Concert Hall (1956-1963). Despite the fact that Scharoun is an accomplished modern organic architect, he has often been cited as an Expressionist architect, partly due to his involvement in the Glass Chain (Glasere Kette). Scharoun's works are thus presented as products of fantasy and irrationality epitomized in the Philharmonie. A careful examination of his design however reveals an advanced functional quality of modern organic architecture. Scharoun's design requires more merit than one might think as his designs are not in violation of form in favor of expressiveness, but an elaborate expression of functional form. Expressionist quality in his design is a permanent feature of his work, not the Expressionist hangover. This paper also claims that Expressionism was conceived of as having no objectivity when German Gestalt theory was fused with the arrival of Neue Sachlichkeit. Works of Scharoun in this regard deserve a careful attention for a better understanding of the modern organic architecture.

Keywords: Hans Scharoun, organic architecture, Expressionism, Gestalt, Neue Sachlichkeit

1. Introduction
Hans Scharoun (1893-1972) is often understood as an Expressionist architect due to influential remarks by historians such as Sir Nikolaus Pevsner (1902-83) and Sigfried Giedion (1888-1968). In the fifth edition of “Space, Time and Architecture” (1967), Giedion wrote that “Scharoun did not fully succeed in creating both a plastic volume and a fine interior space” (upon the design of Berlin Philharmonic) without providing good reasons for this accusation.1 Pevsner did not help matters. In his influential book “Pioneers of Modern Design” (1960), he accused Expressionist architects of ‘... satisfying the craving of architecture for individual expression, the craving of the public for the surprising and fantastic, and for an escape out of reality into a fairy world’.2 For Pevsner, Functionalism and Expressionism were binary polemics of modern architecture. Scharoun’s designs in fact show Expressionist qualities. It is nonetheless a permanent feature of his design, not withstanding his firm conviction on the modern functionalism. He indeed grew out of Expressionism, but further developed and nurtured expression of form to function.3

2. The Theory of Modern Functional Building
Scharoun’s functionalism was greatly influenced by his peer Hugo Häring (1882-1958) who developed the theory of “organisches Bauen” (organic building). For Häring, a building’s characters or forms came out of the inner nature of the function and program, and they were not to be imposed by universal laws or preconceived ideas. He attempted to achieve a unity in life in which responsive interaction between inside and outside, man and nature could be embedded and manifested in architecture. In his famous essay “Wege zur Form” (Approaches to Form), Häring (1925) wrote that

“We must call on things and let them unfold their own forms. It goes against our nature to impose forms on them, to determine them from without, to force upon them laws of any kind, to dictate to them ...”4

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He further wrote that "... The unity which we achieve in many things on grounds of geometric figures is only a unity of form, not in terms of life." For Häring, expression was not derived from intuition or emotion from an individual architect either. Expression was a functional manifestation of the building. Häring and Scharoun therefore rejected formalism, and paid careful attention to function and spatial qualities of the building. Scharoun's Glass Chain experiment in this context performed a good service for envisioning his functional architecture. A couple of examples will suffice to exemplify his modern functional design. As we shall see, Weissenhofhaus and Wohnheim Breslau are way beyond mere Expressionism, and they can best represent his early designs.

3. Scharoun's Modern Functional Design

3.1. Weissenhof House

Weissenhof house was built at the Deutscher Werkbund Exhibition held in Stuttgart in 1927 (Fig. 1). This house is a provocative yet sound solution for the site at the corner of the Weissenhof Siedlung. It deserves a good deal of careful analysis, especially in comparison to other architects on the scene. Designed in four phases, Scharoun's house displays a plastic conformity in tune with the aesthetics of Mies, Gropius and other participants. A careful study of this house however reveals a stark opposition to the universal architecture of Mies and Gropius in the sense that it was site-specific, and the form was discovered through interrelationship between inside and outside. He tirelessly sought more organic space out of a given site, and out of the functional needs of a family of four: two adults and two children. The visual cohesiveness with other houses at the scene is therefore a premature interpretation.

Room to have a great vista over the city of Stuttgart, and the cellar was placed a half story above the ground, allowing natural light and ventilation. With two major axes of East-West and North-South, the first plans show detailed arrangements of pieces of furniture. Almost all pieces of furniture are built-in, and hence determine the specific use of the rooms. In the second phase, Scharoun cut down room sizes while achieving a dynamic spatial relationship in the complex. (Fig. 3) Reduced in size, the large staircase in the north had been removed and the one in the south rearranged. The living room changed its position while terraces leveled even. Strong axes of East-West and North-South became no longer effective. All the parts, both plans and vertical links, became more interwoven into the whole.

(Fig. 2) Weissenhof House (Stage 1)
Left: Site Plan / Right: Ground Plan (No Scale)

(Fig. 3)
Weissenhof House
Stage 2: Ground Plan

(Fig. 4)
Weissenhof House
Stage 3: Ground Plan

(Fig. 5)
Weissenhof House
Stage 4: Ground Plan

(Fig. 1) Weissenhof House: Overview & Site Plan, 1927

In the first phase, Scharoun attempted to occupy almost the entire site providing two paved terraces and an adjacent garden visually protected from the outside through leveling a half story up the complex. (Fig. 2) This level change, primarily offered by the site itself, enabled the main living
The third phase shows a more reduced ground floor plan. (Fig. 4) The dining room and the living are now separated on different levels whilst still visually connected. Staircases are rearranged and the small unit at the corner is eliminated resulting in a more horizontal image. The final scheme presents curved corners at both north and south, pulling out the first floor's roof right up to the wall line and making the garden more protective and private. (Fig. 5)

The curved staircase at the corner evokes Expressionism, but it also undoubtedly came out of the functional need of the building (the main staircase). Seen in toto, Scharoun's Weissenhof house must stand as an important achievement in the Modern Movement for its harmonic synthesis of function and its organic expression. There was no preordained form to be imposed (as Le Corbusier did), but the form was discovered from the inner functional needs and the external constraints.8

3.2. Wohnheim Breslau

Wohnheim Breslau was a housing block designed for the Breslau Werkbundausstellung in 1929, mainly intended to address different functions of dwelling.9 (Figs. 6 and 7) Strongly motivated by socialist utopian scheme, it had the concise title of "Wohnung und Werkraum". Scharoun's experimental housing was designed to provide a quality accommodation to busy city workers with no children.

Wohnheim Breslau was Scharoun's first large scale building, and it was often eulogized for its aesthetics rather than its functionality. In fact, the design was rebuked for its lack of functionality.10 However, the inner space was most economically used. The elongated building has a protuberant entrance hall in the center with a restaurant and a terrace. There are two types of accommodations (one bedroom block and two bedrooms block) separated by the main hall. (Fig. 8) The two story residential floors are served by a single corridor from the main hall, and the each living unit was equipped with in-built furniture and kitchen cupboard. Unlike many other hostels built at the time, Scharoun did not separate male and female, but married and single. Both types are arranged in a row in a repeatable manner, but parts of the end of the two bedrooms block is skewed which is perhaps Expressionist element in this design. However, an exterior view of the building and the fenestration even appear to be in conformity with machine aesthetics, which on the other hand insinuates its inner spatial organization. (Fig. 9) The main entrance, shaped like a stern of a ship, is a reminiscence of his boyhood memory at the ports of Bremen and Bremenhaven where he was born and raised.11 Scharoun was initially working on another site for this housing scheme, and it was provided a porte-cochère linking to the existing pitched roofed building while making one of the wings meet the tram stop.12 This is undoubtedly reflected in the later design where curved entrance has a columned arcade, and the complex is straddled by the two wings. This asymmetrical
arrangement and the level changes were primarily offered by the site, but Scharoun’s articulation produced a dynamic design in accordance with relevant functions in the various parts. Seen through the Weissenhof house and the Wohnheim Breslau, it is evident that Scharoun was oriented towards modern functional building. There also exists Expressionist element in them (i.e., staircase at the Weissenhof house and the entrance hall at the Wohnheim Breslau), but it is not Expressionist hangover. Rather it is a permanent feature of his design. Expressionist quality can be further detectable in his later designs such as Rosen Gallery of 1948 which is in fact a precursor of Berlin Philharmonie. In this regard, Scharoun was never trapped in his own belief on functionalism, thus interpreting his works fully in terms of functional logic is not only meaningless, but may even lead to an undervaluing judgement.

4. Expressionism and Beyond

It was not only Hans Scharoun who showed Expressionist quality in the Modern Movement. After the First World War (1914-1918), with the collapse of the German Second Empire (1871-1918), there were almost no architectural commissions in Weimar Republic, and visionary architects were naturally led to explore and speculate unknown possibilities of a new architecture. To some architects, this socio-economic condition was even taken to be beneficial to future German architecture, perhaps to a certain measure in its entirety. Scharoun was an active member in the Glass Chain (Glasere Kette), founded by Bruno Taut (1880-1938) in December 1919. Scharoun had then barely finished his architectural studies in Technische Hochschule Berlin-Charlottenberg, and was hardly known to the public. It was in this period Scharoun could experiment and develop his notion of modern organic architecture. Scharoun’s preoccupation with intuition as a primary shaping force in architecture led him to explore pure fantasy which could herald spiritual and intellectual revival (Fig. 10).

(Fig. 10)
H. Scharoun (1920)
Ich-du-ich

Scharoun’s sketches were not for the real construction, but a pure fantasy for future architecture.

Scharoun was not in favor of the bony callosity of Jugendstil as it appeared to him as a slavish imitation of natural forms without intuitive foundation which was for him a necessary condition for a new architecture. Nonetheless, his notion of organic as functionally rooted in reality is already explained in his letters sent to the Glass Chain. In one of them, he wrote that:

"A thousand possibilities flow out of our fantasy. The one that remains will come into being overnight. Our ardent will rage feverishly toward this night of unification with the primeval urge of the "Volk." Then once again will building have its function in the sensuality of mankind and its crown in the purity of the beyond. And once again we shall be rooted in reality".

Scharoun’s stance was intended as polemic against Wenzel Hablik (1881-1934), Wassili Luckhardt (1889-1972) and Hans Luckhardt (1890-1954) within the Glass Chain for whom form was of primary importance. Glass Chain also included Walter Gropius (1883-1969), but he never corresponded any in the Chain although he did follow it with interest. It was perhaps Gropius’ passive attitude in the Chain which was recognized by Giedion as an evidence for his attempt to differentiate Gropius from the rest of the participants in his famous “Space, Time and Architecture”. Another important figure in the Chain was Adolf Behne (1895-1948). Behne was an art historian, and was not completely sure about the purpose of Taut’s call for the Glass Chain. He nonetheless joined the Glass Chain and remained as a close friend of Taut and others. Although he did not present any images in the correspondence, his importance is that he was the one who could most closely and objectively read and value Glass Chain.

Taut and Behne in fact launched Arbeitsrat für Kunst (Worker’s Council for Art) in 1919 with utopian socialist theme. In his book “Ruf zum Bauen (1920)”, issued at the second exhibition of Arbeitsrat für Kunst, Behne advocated a visionary architecture in preference to practical architecture with immediate concerns. It was however apparent that he was in favor of functional architecture, (i.e. visionary not imaginary), and his piece ‘Der Moderne Zweckbau’ (1926) is an important work in this regard. Behne proffered more didactic exposition of the modern architecture in that he took Scharoun as a key figure and regarded his design as “functional”, while acknowledging Mies and others as “rational”. In a letter to Scharoun, Behne (1923) wrote that:
"A building should be organic, but never an organism in the sense of living nature—because it cannot be so! ... ... Do not put any suns, moons or stars on your drawings... ... Dynamic architecture must be unconditionally rational, as cold as the nose of a dog—otherwise it declines into a drama."

It is precisely this notion of rationalism, the program and function of the building, that Behne adopted to separate the goats from the sheep. Behne therefore subscribed to both rationalism and functionalism as fundamentals of healthy modern architecture. In the Chain prevailed the Nietzschean perspective on modern society, and artists’ moral reciprocal responsibilities. As evidenced in the first Deutscher Werkbund congress in 1907, the notion of Kantian ‘Gestalt’ occupied the German mind so deeply and it was a precursor of the arrival of Neue Sachlichkeit in the post-war era. Under the neo-Kantian intellectual tradition of Germany, knowledge having it’s a priori form, the idea and content of art lie exclusively in the realm of visual formal organization. The underlying implication of this tradition inevitably generated a contentious debate about the integration of new technical advancement in shaping the new architecture of the twentieth century. For Peter Behrens (1868-1940) and other German neo-classicists, visual forms always held a priori significance over building technique or new material, while Theodor Fischer (1862-1938) and his circle favored an idea that forms can give rise only when building’s function and program became fulfilled.

5. Advent of Gestalt Theory and Its Misconception

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, vast proliferation of aesthetic theories and their anti-historic tendencies inevitably led to an increasing feeling of disorientation in German art and architecture. Although it is open to a question whether or not the advancement of intellectual queries result in the victimization of practice as a corollary, it is evident that the consequence of the advent of Neo-Kantian aesthetics was immense in both theory and practice. The aesthetic transformation occurred in the late nineteenth century maybe seen through the binary propositions of Robert Vischer (1847-1933) and Conrad Fiedler (1841-1895). Vischer employed the notion of ‘empathy’ (Einfühlung) along with symbolism in an attempt to theorize the role of subjectivity in the perception of form. For Vischer, pure forms evoke beauty in one’s mind, and they can not be reduced into numerical properties. The notion of empathy therefore pertains to transcendental existence that inevitably links to a phenomenological apprehension.

The other trend in neo-Kantian psychological speculation, eventually becoming known as Gestalt theory, was epitomized by C. Fiedler. This formalist theory claims that visual cognition has its innate forms, and the works of art can be the manifestation of inherent optical volition. For Fiedler, the primary importance of art works lay in its formation as content. Fiedler wrote that “artistic activity is neither a slavish imitation nor arbitrary feeling; rather, it was free creative Gestalt-formation”. In “Über Wesen und geschichte der Baukunst”, Fiedler presented Roman building tradition as a process of constructing and combining rather than of creating, which resulted in the decline of the forms. His advocacy for the pure formal presentation in architecture can be clearly detected in that:

“Only when the structure has become a pure expression of form is the intellectual activity of formation completed and, in the highest sense/product and possession of the human intellect—only then is it a work of art of the highest intellectual substance.”

This formalist tradition continued with historians such as Heinrich Wölfflin (1864-1945) and Sigfried Giedeon well into the end of the twentieth century. The Fiedlerian aesthetic theory, however, had been fused with the notion of 'sachlich' in the post-war period in order that the incorporation may proffer an apropos aesthetic judgement of the modern form. Seen from the functional point of view, the arrival of ‘Neue Sachlichkeit’ was completely misunderstood by artist societies. The term was directed to have a new objectivity, rather than renewed objectivity or a newly found objectivity. Expressionism was mistakenly conceived of as having no objectivity. When this terminological confusion is applied to architecture, if Expressionism refers to ‘a violation of form in favor of expressiveness’ at any measure, the notion of ‘organisches Bauen’, which Häring and Scharoun sought in theory and practice to articulate has nothing to do with it. The formalist perspective was nonetheless so deeply inherited by Pevsner and Giedion, and their influential remarks left abstruse vestiges in modern architectural historiography.

6. Conclusion

Hans Scharoun occupies an important place in the Modern Movement. A careful analysis of his design shows an advanced quality in modern organic tradition. Traditional gestalt theory did not do justice when it was applied to the works of Hans Scharoun, especially when fused with the arrival of “Neue Sachlichkeit”. Scharoun’s design may possess Expressionist qualities, but it is inappropriate to
reduce it into mere Expressionism. His conviction in modern organic building was much more profound and substantial than one might think. Scharoun's organic modernism deserves careful attention from the apparent morbidity of the old.

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Photo Credits: (Fig. 1) J. F. Geist, *et al.* (1993:53) & J. Joedicke (1989)
(Figs.2.5-10: A. Wendrichs (1993:50))

**Note:** The Chinese text mentions "平成14年度科学研究費補助金（特別研究員奨励費）交付番号012251" which translates to "Grants for Specified Research Projects (1992)". It is noted that the text has been translated into English and that the original context may have been changed or simplified. The text is primarily in German, with references to architectural works and historical events.

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5. H. Häring, *ibid.*


7. Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886-1969) had been asked to be an art director of the Deutsche Werkbund Exhibition to be held in Stuttgart in 1927, and with his alliance with Le Corbusier stole the architectural scene at the Weissenhof from the organic architects. Hugo Häring and Erich Mendelsohn withdrew their participation at the last minute, but Scharoun was able to build his first important work at an international level. For further discussions on Weissenhof asiedung, see R. Pomer & C. Otto, *Weissenhof 1927 and the Modern Movement in Architecture* (University of Chicago Press, 1991); K. Kirsch, *Weissenhof Siedlung* (NY: Rizzoli, 1989); J. Joedicke, *Weissenhof Siedlung Stuttgart* (Stuttgart: Karl Krämer Verlag, 1989).

8. This is an interesting parallel compared to the design of Le Corbusier. As a theorist, Le Corbusier declares the plan proceeds from within to without. (see Le Corbusier, *Vers une Architecture. Paris, 1927*) As a practicing architect, however, his design presents that a priori form always precedes function.

9. Unlike Weissenhof, only the local architects participated Breslau anlzung. Scharoun was then a professor of architecture at the Breslau Arts Academy.

10. Ernst May, for example, made a comment about Scharoun's design that "...talented artists ... forgot the clear, sober economic efficiency and succumbed to the temptations of the exhibition devil." See Wohnung und Werkraum Ausstellung in Breslau. In *Das Neue Frankfurt 3*, 1929, pp. 205.

11. A critic Blundell-Jones however argues that its marine image is distinguishable from Corbusier's "Ueine d'Habitation that appears to be an ocean liner stranded in a park, for it is specifically designed to the site and is free from pre-ordained geometry. See P. Blundell-Jones (1995:61).

12. Scharoun was initially working on another plot at the other corner of the site, which A. Rading took it on. It is unknown why he changed the site, but his earlier design was primarily redrafted for the new site. See Blundell-Jones (1995:61).

13. Taut (1919) wrote that "...it is good thing that nothing is being built today. Things will have time to ripen, we shall gather our strength, and when building begins again we shall know our objectives and be strong enough to protect our movement against botching and degeneration." Glass Chain letter dated 24 November 1919. Translation from J. B. Whyte, *The Crystal Chain Letters: Architectural Fantasies by Bruno Taut and His Circle* (London: The MIT Press, 1985:19).


15. Adolf Behne (1895-1948) studied architecture at the Technische Hochschule Berlin-Charlottenberg for four semesters, and then art history at Berlin University under Heinrich Wolfflin and Karl Frey having his doctorate in 1912. In 1918, Behne founded *Arbeiter für Kunst* with Bruno Taut and Walter Gropius.

16. A. Behne, *Der Moderne Zweckbau* (Berlin: Drei Masken-Verlag, 1926): This piece was originally written in 1923, but published only in 1926: another art historian Walter Curt Behrendt (1884-1945) was also sympathetic to organic architects. Behrendt (1927) identified Häring's design logically well carried out according to building's functional values. He (1937:145-146) further pointed out that Bruno Taut's sketches in the *Alpine Architektur* (1919) are not real projects to be carried out, but utopian concepts: Taut's dream of a better form of human settlement. He also mentioned that Erich Mendelsohn was able to strengthen himself with the discipline of architecture, after the completion of Einstein Tower, and he moved out of the blind alley of Expressionism. See W. C. Behrendt, *Der Sieg Des Neuen Bauwill* (Stuttgart: Fritz Wedekind & Co., 1927); W. C. Behrendt, *Modern Building: Its Nature, Problems and Forms* (NY: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1937).


19. *Deutscher Werkbund* was established in Munich on 5 October 1907. Herman Muthesius (1861-1927) was *his eminence* of the Werkbund. He was a cultural *attaché* in German Embassy in London between 1897 and 1904. Greatly influenced by English domestic architecture, his notion of Sachlichkeit was taken from the English attitude against the imitation of styles in search of true modernity (i.e., rationalization and standardization). For him, engineers and industrialists were the true creators of the new era. In 1914, the famous Cologne debate occurred between
Mathiesius and Henry van de Velde (1863-1957). Against universal language of form, suggested by Mathiesius, van de Velde was fundamentally an individualist and idealist. Ironically, Gropius supported van de Velde at this event, and later replaced him for the Kunstgewerbeschule which became Staatliches Bauhaus in 1919. See H. Mathiesius, Das englische Haus (Berlin: Wasmuth, 1904-05); F. J. Schwartz, The Werkbund (London: Yale University Press, 1996).

Theodor Fischer (1862-1938) was perhaps the best known architecture professor in Germany at the time. Bruno Taut, Erich Mendelsohn, J.J.P. Oud and Hugo Häring were all once apprentices at his office. Taut was not only a student under Fischer but practiced as an assistant at his office between 1906-08 in Stuttgart. Fischer studied architecture at Technisch Hochschule München under August Thiersch, but left the school without a degree to practice in the office of Paul Wallot. From 1892, he directed the town planning office of the city of München when its urban expansion was immensely speedy. He abandoned the rigid geometric system of the city, but corresponded to its local topography and historical settings. His responsive aesthetics influenced by Camillo Sitte (1843-1903) who published an influential book on artistic city planning principles five years earlier. See C. Sitte, Städte-Bau nach seinen künstlerischen Grundsätzen (Vienna, 1889); For more discussions on T. Fischer, see W. Niedinger, Theodor Fischer: Architekt und Stadtplaner (Berlin: Ernst & Sohn, 1988).

R. Vischer's aesthetics of content and C. Fiedler's formalism are by no means exhaustive representations of the fundamental aesthetic transformation in the late nineteenth century, but they would suffice to delineate German intellectual milieu. For further discussions on the German aesthetics in the late nineteenth century, see H. F. Mallgrave and E. Ikonomou (eds.) Empathy, Form and Space: Problems in German Aesthetics, 1873-1893 (Santa Monica, CA: The Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1994).

Vischer's take of form as perceptive phenomenon is intended polemical against formalism. Inherited from the aesthetics of his father, F. T. Vischer (1807-1887), he could further develop the thesis of symbolic nature of form and its resonance in the visual arts. The aesthetics of F. T. Vischer is best represented in "Aesthetik: oder, Wissenschaft des Schönen", published in 1846-1847. In his doctoral thesis "Über das optische Formgefühl" (1873) at Tübingen Universität, R. Vischer defended the aesthetics of content against formalism. Through the concept of empathy (Einfühlung), he theorized an empirical break between sensation and feeling. For more discussions on R. Vischer, see H. F. Mallgrave and E. Ikonomou, ibid.


Translation from C. Reading, Essay on Architecture (Lexington, KY, 1954:12); originally published as Über Wissen und Geschicht der Baukunst (1878). For further discussions on C. Fiedler, see H. F. Mallgrave and E. Ikonomou, ibid.

The term 'Neue Sachlichkeit' was coined by C. G. F. Harlaut, then a director of the Mannheim Art Gallery. Harlaut intended to open an exhibition of the prevailing tendencies in paintings, and he circulated a letter to artists with this view in May 18, 1923 bearing a provisional title of "Die Neue Sachlichkeit". The exhibition "Neue Sachlichkeit: Nachkriegszonistische Malerei" was held in summer 1925. See F. Schmalenbach, The Term Neue Sachlichkeit. In Art Bulletin. 22 (1940:161-5).


Select Bibliography