

Ulrich Müller: Raum, Bewegung und Zeit im Werk von Walter Gropius und Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Berlin: Akademie Verlag 2004, XII + 240 S., ISBN 3-05-004059-9, EUR 49,80

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What is the relationship between modernism in architecture and modernity? How do particular built or projected forms emerge out of and come to stand for specifically modern ideas and conditions? Ulrich Müller's study "Raum, Bewegung und Zeit im Werk von Walter Gropius und Ludwig Mies van der Rohe" offers a detailed study of a single facet of this complex question. Müller identifies the intellectual sources for the newly spatialized approach to architecture adopted by the two most prominent directors of the Bauhaus. He also persuasively demonstrates how we can impose scholarly rigor upon the exploration of an issue that has been largely the province of a historical criticism. He shows, in other words, how to restate modernism's myths as historical facts.

At first glance, Müller has written a meticulously researched but quite tightly defined study. Although new conceptions of the relationship between space and time lie at the center of his consideration of the way that architectural space changed during the 1920s, the Einstein Tower, the most obvious built response to relativity, lies well beyond its boundaries. Müller instead focuses upon the very core of the modernist canon. Similarly, the new construction techniques that enabled architects to shift their focus from load-bearing masonry walls to skeletal system receive little attention here in what remains a work of intellectual and artistic rather than technological history. Nor is this the place to learn about the political charge that relativity carried, especially in the early years of the Weimar Republic, when it was frequently denounced as ungerman. Finally, the format is entirely conventional, with the usual literature survey followed in the expected order by an exposition of the theoretical approach taken by Gropius, Theo van Doesburg (who, although he is not included in the title, is an important figure in the book), and Mies, and its implementation in a handful of buildings and projects.

In fact Müller has accomplished much more. He begins with a precise analysis of Alfred Arndt's color plan of 1926 for one of Gropius's Meisterhäuser in Dessau. This cleverly drawn set piece reminds us how central radically decontextualized space is to classic modernism. Müller quickly makes clear, however, that he is not simply following in Sigfried Giedion's mammoth footsteps. Instead he takes a refreshingly critical stance towards his predecessor's overly simplistic attempt to tie together

new mathematical and physical conceptions of space and the artistic explorations that at times only appeared to be influenced by them. Müller seems to have read everything on his subject but is only persuaded when he has convincing primary evidence, whether written, drawn, painted, or built.

In place of Giedion's over reliance on a vaguely defined *Zeitgeist*, Müller presents us with specifics. His most original contribution comes in his discussion of the physicist Felix Auerbach and the house Gropius and Adolf Meyer built for him in Jena. Auerbach had long been interested in the arts. Müller reproduces the portrait Munch painted of him in 1906. He was also one of Einstein's leading defenders. He was thus perfectly positioned to explain modern science to the Bauhäusler in nearby Weimar. Nor was his influence confined to the architects there. Müller pairs plates from Auerbach's scientific writings with diagrams by Klee and Kandinsky to show the influence, his conception of space time had as well upon the school's painters.

Never before has the Auerbach House of 1924 been accorded the serious scholarly attention it amply deserves. Auerbach, although no longer a young man, was an ideal client for one of Gropius's first essays in cubistic architecture. As he already equated beauty with functionality, he was prepared for the extreme simplicity of the exterior Gropius and Meyer designed for him. Müller demonstrates the degree to which Gropius applied here lessons learned from Frank Lloyd Wright and van Doesburg in order to develop a composition which anticipated the Bauhaus's destabilized composition, which has to be seen from a variety of viewpoints to be appreciated fully. Müller's analysis encompasses Alfred Arndt's even more radical proposed color scheme for the interior and Heinz Wichmann's garden design, which was implemented. These demonstrate the degree to which Gropius's lifelong reliance upon talented collaborators in this case propelled Bauhaus principles, almost at the moment of their formation, out into fields, such as landscape architecture, with which they remain only rarely associated.

Having demonstrated the relationship between contemporary physics and one of Gropius's earliest essays in the New Building or International Style, Müller then proceeds to differentiate it carefully from the work of van Doesburg and Mies, whose contributions to the establishment of modernist space are certainly equally critical. Müller leads readers through four private houses by Mies, beginning with the unbuilt Dixel House in Jena of 1925, to show how Mies progressed in just a few years from entirely conventional, and not always thoroughly worked out interior plans, to the brilliance of the Tugendhat House in Brno. Müller's fine discussions of the Esters and Lange Houses in Krefeld firmly establishes the centrality of these works to the transformation of Mies's conceptualization of interior spaces, which he bounded here with brick walls conceived as membranes (loads were supported by an internal steel frame).

Müller does not offer a comprehensive history of modernist space, or even of modernist space in the architecture of the Weimar Republic, a subject that would certainly encompass Mendelsohn's functional dynamism and May's Existenzminimum. Rather he establishes with systematic scholarly rigor the character of new artistic and architectural conceptions of space specific to the Bauhaus and ties them with substantive proof rather than mere intuition to equally revolutionary ideas in modern physics. This elegant study establishes the exact means through which relativity influenced Bauhaus concepts of space and should prompt, at a time when modernism increasingly appears to many to have been less radical than its proponents often claimed, stunning proof once again of its experimental vitality.

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