The Limits of Community—The Possibilities of Society: On Modern Architecture in Weimar Germany

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1. Ferdinand Tönnies, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft. Abhandlung des Communismus und Socialismus als empirischer Kulturformen* (Fues: Leipzig, 1887).

2. Ferdinand Tönnies, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft. Grundbegriffe der reinen Soziologie* (Karl Curtius: Berlin, 1912). The third edition was published in 1920, the combined fourth and fifth edition in 1922, the combined sixth and seventh in 1926, and an eighth edition in 1935.

3. Helmuth Plessner, *Die Grenzen der Gemeinschaft. Eine Kritik des sozialen Radikalismus* (Friedrich Cohen: Bonn, 1924). In the following I use Helmuth Plessner, *The Limits of Community. A Critique of Social Radicalism*, trans. Andrew Wallace (Humanity Books: Amherst, NY, 1999). All German quotes are taken from *Grenzen der Gemeinschaft. Eine Kritik des sozialen Radikalismus* (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt/M., 2001).

In the historiography of early-twentieth-century modern German architecture and urban planning, the idea of community has been a major analytical category. Whether garden city, garden suburb, workers' housing, factory estate, or social housing estate, the often unified architectural forms seem to suggest community. Any enclosing geometric urban form is often understood to strengthen the introverted character that clearly separates such settlements from the big city. In short, these communities are depicted as shining beacons of a new social order in the otherwise harsh urban surroundings of society.

Stylistically, such communities were designed in both traditionalist and modernist architectural languages, or in any other style. Politically, the commissioning bodies, for example municipalities and housing associations, and the tenants and inhabitants – in theory mostly of working class and lower middle-class background – were affiliated with political positions ranging from the far left to the far right. Regardless of such differences, architectural designs for communities are often understood as attempts to overcome the consequences of the transformation of Germany into a capitalist, bourgeois society. Accordingly, the notion of community functions as the smallest common denominator of highly diverse architectural and urban planning responses to the processes that modernised Germany from the nineteenth century onwards.

One of the roots of this pre-occupation is the contemporary argument over Germany's social organisation, exemplified in the book *Community and Society* by the sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies.[1] Although Tönnies acknowledged the inevitability of the shift from community to society that came with capitalism, a longing for the former – which even if no longer accessible in its historical form might perhaps be achievable in some future form – nevertheless characterises the text. Originally published in 1887 and reprinted in revised form in 1912, the book's popularity surged during the Weimar years when it saw five editions between 1920 and 1926.[2] Although Tönnies considered together both forms of social organisation, the architectural historical emphasis on community tends to reduce society to either the mere background or to depict it as a past form of social organisation.

Period contributions to the debate about community or society reveal a more differentiated picture, one in which popular notions of community were contested and the eschatological hopes pinned on them criticised. For example, in his 1924 book *The Limits of Community: A Critique of Social Radicalism*,[3] the philosopher and sociologist Helmuth Plessner (1892–1985) widened Tönnies's juxtaposition into a tripartite matrix of two types of community nurtured by social radicalism with society constituting a third, non-radical possibility. Plessner charged the bourgeoisie and middle classes, respectively, with being responsible for both the defense of society and the increase of its appeal to other citizens. His short book is a reminder that

during the Weimar Republic community was not favoured unanimously over society, but rather that there existed heated arguments, changing and competing positions, shifting alliances, and conflicting anticipations of the future.

Little of a comparable variety can be found in many architectural histories of the period which, instead, tend to focus on the radical positions of architects of *Neues Bauen* who wanted to rebuild the world, or on that of traditionalists who wished to shield it from all changes. Both positions are depicted as locked into a battle that left almost no room for those who did not agree with either the radical renewal or the fundamental rejection of all change. This essay aims to broaden this perspective by approaching the period on two levels. First, the paper will look at the historiography of German modern architecture, in particular at architectural history's almost exclusive focus on modernist architecture with a socialist or otherwise social revolutionary bent. With this focus comes a strong emphasis on types of architecture such as housing, for example, that benefited the working classes and other lower classes. Traditionalist architecture is integrated easily into such accounts of the period, if only as the background against which modernism emerged.

Second, the historical architectural debate of the Weimar Republic will be revisited in the light of some points that Plessner made in the aforementioned book and during a speech on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Deutsche Werkbund in October 1932. The book was published at a time when architects began to abandon the exaltations of Expressionism in favour of both a more rational-functionalist approach to modern architecture and a *sachliche* attitude to modern life. The latter also stood at the centre of a larger societal debate to which Plessner's book was a polemical contribution.

The speech to the Deutsche Werkbund, entitled 'Wiedergeburt der Form im technischen Zeitalter',[4] points towards an argument within modernist architecture that has prompted my interest in the themes in Plessner's thoughts that touch upon architecture and its possible social meaning. Today, Plessner is known as one of the founders of philosophical anthropology, a philosophical approach that contributed to both his interest in architecture as part of the *Umwelt*, the environs of human beings, and to his political arguments. The latter have occasionally generated the charge of a proximity to such philosophers of the right as Carl Schmitt.[5] For reasons of space, these two points lie outside of the scope of this essay. Here I focus on his views on housing and domestic architecture, without wishing to imply that Plessner's ideas are only or primarily relevant to the analysis of these types of buildings.

Wem gehört die Welt?[6]—the Historiography of Weimar Republic Architecture

The Berlin architect Alexander Klein is today perhaps best known for his studies of rationalised floor plans for standardised minimum housing during the 1920s. At the same time, he also built sumptuous town houses in a classical mode.[7] The latter's spatial arrangement of a ground floor with a central open stair hall and flanking dining room and living room was ideally suited for formal dinner parties and is therefore understood to have mirrored 'the functional sequence of Wilhelmine society'.[8] Thus, the houses were not only out of sync with modern Weimar Germany but Klein himself contradicted with their design his otherwise impeccable modernity. As Gert Kähler has observed: 'Even an

4. Helmuth Plessner, 'Wiedergeburt der Form im Technischen Zeitalter' [14 October 1932], in Salvatore Giammusso and Hans-Ulrich Lessing (eds), *Helmuth Plessner, Politik—Anthropologie—Philosophie. Aufsätze und Vorträge* (Wilhelm Fink Verlag: Munich, 2001), pp. 71–86.

5. See, for example, Alex Honneth, 'Plessner und Schmitt. Ein Kommentar zur Entdeckung ihrer Affinität', in Wolfgang Eßbach *et al.* (eds), *Plessners 'Grenzen der Gemeinschaft'. Eine Debatte* (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt/M., 2002), pp. 21–8.

6. *Wem gehört die Welt? Kunst und Gesellschaft in der Weimarer Republik* (Neuer Berliner Kunstverein: Berlin, 1977).

7. Terraced villas in Ballenstedter Straße, Berlin-Wilmersdorf, 1922–1925, *Architekten im Exil*, http://www.ikg.uni-karlsruhe.de/projekte/exilarchitekten/architekten/klein.htm, accessed 14 August 2007.

8. 'Funktionsablauf, wie er der wilhelmischen Gesellschaft entsprach', Gert Kähler, 'Nicht nur Neues Bauen! Stadtbau, Wohnung, Architektur', in Gert Kähler (ed.), *1918–1945 Reform, Reaktion, Zerstörung* (DVA: Stuttgart, 1996), pp. 303–452 (p. 349). Unless noted otherwise, throughout the essay all the translations from German are my own.

9. 'Es zeigt sich, daß ein durchaus den zeitgemäßen Ideen von Typisierung und Rationalisierung aufgeschlossener Architekt dennoch in der Lage ist, ein ganz traditionelles Haus zu bauen – nicht nur äußerlich mit seinem klassizistischen Säulenschmuck, sondern auch im Inneren', Kähler, 'Nicht nur Neues Bauen!', p. 349.

10. 'In der Villa Tugendhat wird eine neue Welt beschworen, in den Kleinschen Häusern an der alten zäh festgehalten', Kähler, 'Nicht nur Neues Bauen!', p. 350.

11. Iain Boyd Whyte (ed.), *The Crystal Chain Letters: Architectural Fantasies by Bruno Taut and His Circle* (MIT Press: Cambridge, MA, 1985).

12. Helga Kliemann, *Die Novembergruppe* (Gebr. Mann Verlag: Berlin, 1969).

13. *Arbeitsrat für Kunst: 1918–1921* (Akademie der Künste: Berlin, 1980).

14. Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani, 'Vom "Block" zur Kochenhofsiedlung', in Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani and Romana Schneider (eds), *Moderne Architektur in Deutschland 1900–1950: Reform and Tradition* (Gerd Hatje: Stuttgart, 1992), pp. 266–81.

architect who was quite open to contemporaneous ideas about typology and standardisation was nevertheless capable of building a very traditional house – not only on the exterior with its classicistic decoration of columns but also in the interior'.[9]

The contradiction extends to the period at large during which architectural journals regularly published buildings like Klein's town houses. While these were thus no isolated examples, it is apparently only through a comparison with, for example, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's Tugendhat villa (Brno, Czechoslovakia, 1928–1930) that they can be integrated into the discourse about modern architecture. To quote Kähler again: 'Inside the Tugendhat villa a new world is conjured up, whereas inside the Kleinian houses the old one is preserved obstinately'.[10] This comparison maintains the primacy of modernist architecture, yet it overlooks the fact that Mies van der Rohe's villa, Klein's town houses and minimum dwellings can be distinguished according to criteria other than aesthetic–stylistic ones. For example, Klein served clients of different social standing with varying types of dwellings and changing architectural styles. The classicising town houses aimed at bourgeois inhabitants, whereas the standardised minimum housing was primarily conceived for the working classes and lower middle classes. In the wider context of period architecture, the Tugendhat villa and Klein's town houses have in common that they were built for clients of broadly comparable social background. They offered, to different degrees, comfortable, even luxurious surroundings for the bourgeoisie. Accordingly, these examples of domestic architecture can be analysed in constellations other than the juxtaposition of modernist designs versus traditional ones.

However, the aesthetic–stylistic approach to the architecture of the Weimar Republic has been a standard approach with regard to at least three points. First, the approach is evolutionary-teleological in that it places modernist architecture at the end of a long progression of styles that eventually culminates in what became known as the International Style. The use of any other – that is earlier – style constitutes an incomprehensible regression within both a single architect's works and the period at large. Second, it firmly weds architectural modernism with radical social reform or even revolutionary change, on the assumption that at a societal level this would benefit the lower social classes, and, at the level of the individual, that it would lead to the rise of a new human (*neue Mensch*). Regardless of whether they were social housing estate or bourgeois villa, all modernist buildings appear as harbingers of the new times that would overcome backward – looking ideas about both forms of social organisation and human beings. Third, it holds an agonistic view of architectural modernism with architects struggling against the aforementioned regression to the past. This battle was at the same time cathartic as it helped to clear any remnants of the past from the path of the avant-garde.

All three characteristics are rooted in the period itself, a time when modern architects deliberately set themselves apart both from their professional colleagues and society at large. For example, the *Gläserne Kette* (1919–1920),[11] the *Novembergruppe* (founded in 1918),[12] the *Arbeitsrat für Kunst* (1918–1921),[13] the architectural pressure groups of the modernist *Der Ring* (founded in 1926), and the more traditionally oriented counterpart of *Der Block* (founded in1928)[14] all perceived themselves as small, exclusive groups whose members were initiated into the true principles of architecture. Most of them envisioned a future social organisation of Germany that harked back to some form of community.

Early written accounts of modernist architecture, for example by Adolf Behne, Sigfried Giedion, Walter Curt Behrendt, Walter Gropius, Ludwig Hilberseimer, and Nikolaus Pevsner, presented a comparable picture.[15] This is not surprising as they were compiled by authors who as architects and critics often had a vested interest in the fate of the modernist movement. Their books evoked a powerful break with the past, used a militaristic language to portray modernist architects as members of an avant-garde that surged heroically ahead of more ordinary architects and mortals, and identified modernist architecture with progressive social causes.

These publications prefigured a standard approach to the architectural historical analysis of the Weimar period that was widely adopted after World War Two. Its gaze focused almost exclusively on the agonistic aspect of modernism, the equation of modernist architecture with socially progressive goals, and its opposition to traditionalist architecture. This approach culminated, for example, in the 1977 exhibition catalogue *Wem gehört die Welt?*,[16] which reduced almost the entire architectural history of the Weimar Republic to the history of modernist social housing and related institutions such as trade union buildings, schools, and hospitals.

Period publications, however, refer to other fault lines than just the one between modernist and traditional architecture. Nor did they take for granted that modernist architecture equalled a socialist conviction. For example, Albert Sigrist in *Das Buch vom Bauen* drew a distinction between bourgeois and proletarian modernist architecture: '[T]he new architecture has two faces. Indeed, it is both bourgeois and proletarian, highly capitalistic and socialist. One can even say it is autocratic and democratic. However, one thing it is not: it is no longer individualistic'.[17] True to his own political beliefs, Sigrist claimed ownership of modernist architecture for socialist politics.

In 1968, architectural historian Barbara Miller Lane already pointed out that modernist architecture 'never made up the bulk of new building in Germany',[18] thus raising the question of whether a narrow focus on *Neues Bauen* would adequately comprehend the period. To this criticism, history of architecture responded gradually from the mid-1980s onwards when revisionist accounts of modern Weimar Republic architecture tentatively re-integrated buildings and architects thus far overlooked. For example, the concept of an 'other modernity' (*andere Moderne*) was introduced, probably for the first time in 1985 with an exhibition dedicated to the Swiss architect Otto Salvisberg who had practiced in Berlin in the 1920s and early 1930s.[19] During the 1990s, the Deutsche Architekturmuseum in Frankfurt-upon-Main embarked on a series of exhibitions on modern architecture in Germany from 1900 to 1950, later extended to 2000, that added a notion of a 'moderate modernity' (*moderate Moderne*) to the debate.[20]

The renaming points towards a conceptual limitation of these revisions in so far as both leave the primacy of modernist architecture unquestioned. Indeed, the latter is used as the measuring gauge for whatever architecture is about to be re-admitted to the canon. For example, 'other modernity' is often defined by degrees of deviation from both the social goals and the formal purity of modernist architecture.

The idea of a 'moderate modernity' is differently argued. It considers all modern architecture, modernist as well as traditionalist, as a response to such conditions of modernity as, for example, industrialisation and mass society and, therefore, concludes that modern architecture is grounded in social ideologies, even though not necessarily socialist ones.[21] Regardless of the foci of the social ideologies that informed modern architecture, the

15. Adolf Behne, *The Modern Functional Building* [1926], trans. Michael Robinson, intro. Rosemarie Haag Bletter (The Getty: Santa Monica, 1996); Sigfried Giedion, *Bauen in Frankreich, Eisen, Eisenbeton* (Klinkhardt & Biermann: Leipzig, 1926); Walter Curt Behrendt, *The Victory of the New Building Style* [1927], trans. Harry Francis Malgrave, intro. Detlef Mertins (The Getty: Los Angeles, 2000); Walter Gropius, *Internationale Architektur* (Albert Langen Verlag: München, 1927); Ludwig Hilberseimer, *Internationale Neue Baukunst* (J. Hoffmann: Stuttgart, 1928); Nikolaus Pevsner, *Pioneers of Modern Design. From William Morris to Walter Gropius* [1936] (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1986).

16. See note 6.

17. 'Das neue Bauen hat ein Doppelgesicht: es ist in der Tat beides, großbürgerlich und proletarisch, hochkapitalistisch und sozialistisch. Man sogar sagen: autokratisch und demokratisch. Allerdings, eines ist es nicht: es ist nicht mehr individualistisch', Albert Sigrist (i.e. Alexander Schwab), *'Das Buch vom Bauen'. Wohnungsnot, neue Technik, neue Baukunst Städtebau aus sozialistischer Sicht* [1930] (Bertelsmann: Düsseldorf, 1973), p. 67.

18. Barbara Miller Lane, *Architecture and Politics in Germany, 1918–1945* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, 1968), p. 35.

19. Claude Lichtentstein (ed.), *Otto R. Salvisberg: Die andere Moderne* (gta: Zurich, 1985).

20. Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani, foreword to Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani and Romana Schneider (eds), *Moderne Architektur in Deutschland 1900–1950: Expressionismus und Neue Sachlichkeit* (Gerd Hatje: Stuttgart, 1994), p. 9.

21. Lampugnani, foreword to *Reform and Tradition*, pp. 10–11.

22. Ulrich Hartung, 'Keine andere Moderne. Elementarismus in der deutschen Architektur des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts', *Kritische Berichte*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2001, pp. 54–70.

23. 'Reaktion auf die Moderne', Hartung, 'Keine andere Moderne', p. 58. German architectural history uses the word *Moderne* (modernity) as both a general term for the modern period and as a synonym for modernism in architecture as in '*klassische Moderne*' (classical modernity). *Modernismus*, the German equivalent to the English modernism, carries negative connotations, such as implying a superficial application of modernist architectural detailing.

24. '[E]inem allgemeinen Lesebuch der sozialwissenschaftlich gebildeten Deutschen'. René König, 'Zur Soziologie der zwanziger Jahre oder ein Epilog zu zwei Revolutionen, die niemals stattgefunden haben, und was daraus für unsere Gegenwart resultiert', in Leonhard Reinsch (ed.), *Die Zeit ohne Eigenschaften. Eine Bilanz der zwanziger Jahre* (Kohlhammer: Stuttgart, 1961), pp. 82–118 (p. 98).

25. I use Andrew Wallace's translation of *Gemeinschaft der Sache* as 'ideal-based community' even though it looses the closeness of the term *Gemeinschaft der Sache* both to *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) and to *die Sache* as in thing, object, or even commodity. See Wallace's note regarding the translation of the word *Sache* as 'ideal' (Plessner, *Limits*, p. 83, endnote 1).

26. See Joachim Fischer, 'Panzer or Maske. "Verhaltenslehre der Kälte" oder Sozialtheorie der "Grenze"', in *Plessners 'Grenzen der Gemeinschaft'*, pp. 80–102 (pp. 92–3).

27. Fischer, 'Panzer or Maske', p. 93.

28. Plessner, *Limits*, p. 81.

29. Volker M. Welter, 'The Metaphysical Imperative in Urban Design around 1900', in *Biopolis—Patrick Geddes and the City of Life* (MIT Press: Cambridge, MA, 2003), pp. 136–72.

different strands all came together in their search for an alternative to capitalism. While the latter may have been the dream of the period, it was nevertheless also a time during which Germany continued to be transformed into a capitalist society. However, the buildings of bourgeois capitalism tend to be ignored or are looked at as purely architectural–artistic events and experiments (as in the open plan of the Tugendhat villa) without asking after the social reality, or even social ideology, of the bourgeois culture that gave rise to many of them.

More recently, the historian Ulrich Hartung proposed to substitute the term *Elementarismus* for that of 'other modernity' in order to highlight a continuity between that Weimar Republic architecture which is filed under the latter category and earlier bourgeois reform movements such as *Jugendstil*.[22] The link is a typical bourgeois appeal to eternal truths, such as those encapsulated in nature that were embodied in *Jugendstil*, or those found in the human condition that became embodied in the bare cubes of elementarist buildings from the Weimar period. Hartung calls the latter a 'reaction to modernity',[23] thus the primacy of architectural modernism is maintained and the bourgeoisie relegated to a rear-guard position. Plessner's ideas, to whom the next two sections will turn, complicate this picture of the historical architectural debate, because the philosopher and sociologist combined a positive consideration of the concept of society, which he identified as a historical achievement of the bourgeoisie, with an appreciation of modernist architecture.

The Limits of Community

Tönnies's book – which during the 1920s was 'a general reader for Germans who were educated in the social sciences'[24] – described community as an organic togetherness of relatives or otherwise closely related human beings, whereas society was a nexus of exchange relations between individuals. Plessner's *The Limits of Community* widened the juxtaposition into a triangular framework that comprised two types of community: a blood-based type and an ideal-based type.[25] Next to both, Plessner placed society as a third possibility.[26] These three modes of social organisation originated in the analogue realms of body, soul, and spirit (*Geist*) which, in turn, were constitutive of human life.[27] Both chains of concepts were rooted in Plessner's larger interest in philosophical anthropology. He did not argue for society as the sole mode of social organisation,[28] but rather stated that the tripartite make-up of individual human life required as its societal equivalent all three realms of social interaction and encounter.

Throughout the nineteenth century, capitalist society was regularly criticised and even condemned by evoking the counter-model of community. The latter was either imagined as a return to the past, supposedly organically structured social order, the feudal or corporate organisation of which was conveniently overlooked; or, it was envisioned as a coming state of communism that would have regained principles similar to those of pre-historic forms of social organisation. At the turn of the twentieth century, many ideas about community blossomed in the shadow of the life reform and youth movements, and both remained crystallisation points for community ideas well into the Weimar period and beyond.

The concept of community was also a rallying point for many architectural schemes and visionary designs from the nineteenth century onwards.[29] For example, in 1896, the German writer and anti-Semite Theodor Fritsch

proposed a scheme for garden city-type new settlements outside of large cities.[30] Others, including the anarcho-socialist and architect Bruno Taut, suggested during World War One that large cities be decentralised into small, confederate (*bündische*) settlements nestled in the country side.[31] Proposals like these strove actively to overcome capitalist society in favour of a communitarian way of organising the modern world.

Whatever salvation community ideas promised, modern society was rejected because of its detrimental effects on human beings, which it alienated from either their origin in nature – the assumed security of traditionally arranged, tightly knit communities, or from the alleged warmth of either socialist class solidarity or nationalistic (*völkische*) unity. Instead, society thrust its citizens into a public domain where life was ruled by artificial social codes and reduced to the pursuit of material and economic gains. Redemption seemed reachable only through the conscious return to the primeval origins of humanity in a community-based life.

Attempts to overcome the alienating powers of society stood at the centre of Plessner's critique of the social radicalism that nourished many communitarian dreams.[32] Plessner identified a belief in the existence of a true inner, and therefore more natural, core of human life as one of the driving forces of the wild eschatological hopes that accompanied many contemporary concepts of community. Historically, this longing for a return to a primeval state of human life could be traced to doctrines that stated a dualism between an uncorrupted and incorruptible, good inner self and a compromised and contaminable, bad outer world.[33] A contemporary version of this dualism was the rejection of modern society in favour of a primordial way of life. Repeated attempts throughout history to make the bad outer world conform to the good inner one continuously fed social radicalism which, following Plessner, was characterised by four basic qualities.[34]

First, social radicalism could only think in terms of fundamental categories or first principles. Second, it envisioned the new world in a radically new form. Third, the socially radical insisted on the destruction of the existing in anticipatory preparation for the new and the perfect. Finally, social radicalism existed in two versions. It was either based on irrational ideas as they became visible, for example, 'in art, roughly [with] impressionism – expressionism and in politics, [with] communism – anarchism'.[35] Or it was based on more rational ideas: 'Radicalism and the despiritualization of reality is intrinsic to the modern world in the isolation of its individual components'[36] was Plessner's diagnosis when he pondered the consequences of the specialisation of professions, the mechanisation of labour, and increasing technological advances.

Even though Plessner did not refer explicitly to architecture, the four principles can be employed to shed light on the contemporary architectural debate in ways that cut across, for instance, merely stylistic differences between modernist and traditionalist architecture. To start with the second principle, comparable with social visionaries, many architects dreamed up architectural schemes for housing and cities that would have cast both into radically new forms. Examples are the schemes by Fritsch and Taut but also Hilberseimer's 1927 *Wohlfahrtsstadt*, to cite a modernist ideal urban plan. Schemes like Hilberseimer's called for the demolition of existing cities in order to gain a *tabula rasa* on which the city of the future could rise uninhibitedly; this recalls Plessner's third principle of social radicalism. In accord with Plessner's first principle, these new cities were typically conceived in such fundamental categories as a return to nature, or the quest

30. Theodor Fritsch, *Stadt der Zukunft* (1896).

31. Bruno Taut, *Die Auflösung der Städte, oder, Die Erde, eine gute Wohnung, oder auch: Der Weg zur alpinen Architektur* (Folkwang-Verlag: Hagen, 1920).

32. See also Helmuth Plessner, 'Das Problem der Öffentlichkeit und die Idee der Entfremdung [1960]', in Helmuth Plessner (ed.), *Diesseits der Utopie. Ausgewählte Beiträge zur Kultursoziologie* (Eugen Diederichs: Düsseldorf, 1966), pp. 9–22.

33. Plessner, *Limits*, p. 54.

34. Plessner, *Limits*, pp. 48–53.

35. Plessner, *Limits*, p. 52; 'in der Kunst etwa Impressionismus – Expressionismus, in der Politik Kommunismus – Anarchismus', Plessner, *Grenzen*, p. 18.

36. Plessner, *Limits*, p. 52; 'Die moderne Welt lebt in der Isolierung ihrer eigenen Komponenten den Radikalismus, die Entgeistung der Wirklichkeit', Plessner, *Grenzen*, p. 18.
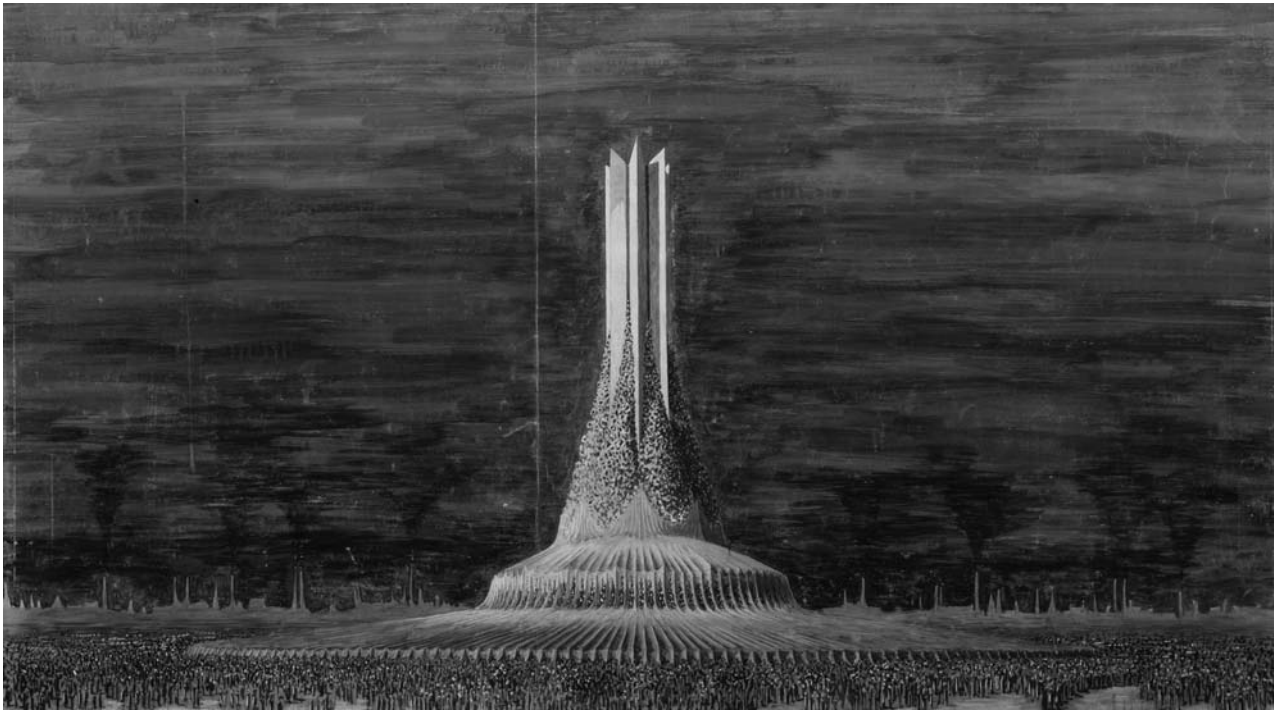
Fig. 1. Wassili Luckhardt, *Monument of Labor (To the 'Ode to Joy')*, before April 1920, gouache and pencil 74.0 × 129.4 cm. Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Hans-und Wassili-Luckhardt-und-Alfons-Anker-Archiv, Sign. 13.46.1. (Photograph: Akademie der Künste, Berlin.).

37. Plessner, *Limits*, p. 94, '...unpersönliche Sachmitte', Plessner, *Grenzen*, p. 51.

38. Plessner, *Limits*, p. 85, '...ein emotional getragenes Führertum', Plessner, *Grenzen*, p. 43.

39. Plessner, *Limits*, p. 86.

for egalitarian minimum spatial requirements that would allow all human beings to lead a useful and healthy life in hygienic and modernist buildings. Lastly, his fourth point, the argument that social radicalism appeared in two basic forms, is relevant to the historical architectural debate, but to explain this we need to delve deeper into Plessner's thought.

According to Plessner, irrational and rational social radicalism resulted in the blood-based (*Gemeinschaft des Blutes*) and the ideal-based (*Gemeinschaft der Sache*) community. Ultimately, both types were rooted in different forms of human encounter. The former originated in love relationships between individuals and within families; the latter emerged from 'the impersonal center of the ideal'[37] such as of, for example, business encounters and labour relationships. Thus on a societal level, the community of blood might gather around 'emotionally supported rulership' in patriarchal estates and religious communities.[38] Characterised by authenticity, lack of restraints, and immediate relations between individuals,[39] this form of social order fostered emotional attachment to a leader or *Führer*.

The spirit of this first type of community idea is captured in a visionary design for a monument dedicated to Beethoven's 'Ode to Joy' by Wassili Luckhardt (Fig. 1). The central, soaring beacon surrounded by masses of people hailing the well-known composer — or perhaps the architect? — speaks blatantly of the emotional power architect-leaders hoped to project. More examples of architectural equivalents of the blood-based community can especially be found among the expressionist, socialist, and anarchist artist and architectural groups that emerged in the immediate aftermath of World War One. Thus, the first Bauhaus manifesto from 1919 famously called upon architects to

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conceive 'the new structure of the future, which will embrace architecture sculpture, and painting in one unity and which will one day rise towards heaven from the hands of a million workers like the crystal symbol of a new faith'.[40] Around 1920, the architect Walter Determann translated this idea into a scheme for a Bauhaus settlement in Weimar that was focused on a crystal shaped centre surrounded by stylised flames (Fig. 2).

Plessner's other ideal-based community type was more rational, because it was built on 'partnership in one and the same value'.[41] The non-emotional bond between its members required constant renewal 'through the work of contemplating the archetypes and guidelines of all humanity'.[42] Operating within 'an abstract universality', the legacy of the eighteenth century, and the Enlightenment,[43] this community constituted itself around an 'impersonal human foundation', 'boundless capacity for expansion', and 'the character of work – for the community exists only for the sake of solving difficulties'.[44] Plessner cited the industrial proletariat but also modern science, as it had developed in Europe, as examples of this type of community.

The Limits of Community was written in 1923, the same year as the currency reform of the Weimar Republic. The subsequent economic stabilisation fostered a gradual increase in building activities and focused architectural thought on solutions to the housing crisis, among other things. Confronted with a rather sudden demand to build many modern architects abandoned Expressionism, which up to that point had captured much of the avant-garde architectural interest, as at the Bauhaus, but now gave way to a more rational– functionalist modernist architecture. Plessner did not refer explicitly to these nascent architectural developments in a way comparable with the references he made to contemporary demands for hygienic buildings and to Expressionism:

> Industrialism is the form of social interaction of tactlessness, expressionism its form of art and social radicalism its form of ethics. The cry for physical cleanliness – satisfied easily with overhead windows and tiled walls – fits well with an art that pounces on what is essential without thinking and with a morality of unrestrained honesty, and of a principled practice of doing harm to oneself and others.[45]

The hints at a bare functionalism – the clerestory window and the easy to clean wall – that were included in this polemic dismissal of the socially radical attitude do of course not amount to a criticism of modernism in architecture or, indeed, of the Bauhaus as historian Hans-Joachim Dahms has pointed out.[46] However, they anticipate the criticism of 'the exaggerated radicalism of the radical-functionalist period'[47] of modernist architecture whose emergence coincided with Plessner's book and which Plessner developed more fully in his 1932 speech to the Deutsche Werkbund to which I will return below. By analogy, Plessner's critique of the radicalism of the more rational, ideal-based type of community offers an insight in understanding some strands of modernist architecture such as social housing, by directing attention to the socially radical attitude as one important root of this kind of architecture and therefore emphasising a similarity with modernism's counterparts of both the Expressionist and traditionalist varieties, rather than making stylistic differences to the decisive criteria.

A 'Design for a Mural Painting' (1928) by Oskar Schlemmer illustrates in a subtle manner this ideal-based type of radical community.[48] The longing for an ideal state of life in harmony with one's own body and the natural environment is represented by the half-naked youths engaged in sports and by the figures to the far left that plant a tree while marvelling at the existing nature. The
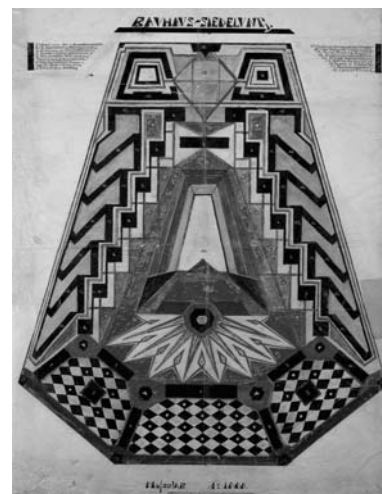

Fig. 2. Walter Determann, Bauhaus settlement near Weimar, 1920, site plan, 1:1000, 660 × 500 mm. Klassik Stiftung Weimar, Weimar. (Photo: Klassik Stiftung Weimar.)

40. Walter Gropius, 'Program of the Staatliches Bauhaus in Weimar [April 1919]', in Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimendberg (eds), *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1994), pp. 435–8; '. . . den neuen Bau der Zukunft, der alles in einer Gestalt sein wird: Architektur und Plastik und Malerei, der aus Millionen Händen der Handwerker einst gen Himmel steigen wird als kristallenes Sinnbild eines neuen kommenden Glaubens' (Walter Gropius, 'Programm des Staatlichen Bauhauses in Weimar' in Peter Pfankuch, 'Von der futuristischen zur funktionellen Stadt—Planen und Bauen in Europa 1913–1933', in Stephan Waetzold and Verena Hass (eds), *Tendenzen der Zwanziger Jahre* (Dietrich Reimer Verlag: Berlin, 1977), p. 2/69).

41. Plessner, *Limits*, p. 92; '. . . Teilhaberschaft an ein und demselben Wert', Plessner, *Grenzen*, p. 50.

42. Plessner, *Limits*, p. 95; '. . . Zuwendung zu den Urbildern und Richtlinien aller Menschlichkeit', Plessner, *Grenzen*, p. 52.

43. Plessner, *Limits*, p. 93; '. . . abstrakten Allgemeinheit', Plessner, *Grenzen*, p. 50.

44. Plessner, *Limits*, p. 95; '. . . Unpersönlichkeit seines [the type of community] menschlichen Fundamentes, . . . unendliche Ausdehnungfähigkeit, . . . Arbeitscharakter, denn die Gemeinschaft ist um der Lösung von Schwierigkeiten willen da', Plessner, *Grenzen*, p. 52.

45. Plessner, *Limits*, p. 167. I substituted 'overhead window' for 'small, high window' as the term for *Oberlicht*; 'Industrialismus ist die Verkehrsform, Expressionismus die Kunst, sozialer Radikalismus die Ethik der Taktlosigkeit. Der Schrei nach körperlicher Hygiene, der schon mit Oberlicht und gekachelten Wänden zufrieden ist, paßt trefflich zu einer Kunst, die ohne Umstände auf das Wesentliche losstürzt, zu einer Moral der rücksichtslosen Aufrichtigkeit und des prinzipiellen sich und anderen Wehetuns'. Plessner, *Grenzen*, p. 110.

46. Hans-Joachim Dahms, 'Mies van der Rohe und die Philosophie um 1930', *Arch+*, no. 161, June 2002, internet edition, no pagination (columns 6–8), www.archplus.net/ archiv_artikel.php?show=1998, accessed 10 July 2007.

47. '[d]er übertriebene Radikalismus der radikal-funktionalistischen Phase', Dahms, 'Mies van der Rohe' (column 10).

48. The original is in the Museum Folkwang, Essen; for an illustration see Lampugnani and Schneider (eds), *Expressionismus und Neue Sachlichkeit*, p. 13.

49. Plessner, *Limits*, p. 96, italics in original; '... unbestimmten *Öffentlichkeit*', Plessner, *Grenzen*, p. 53.

50. Plessner, *Limits*, p. 91; '... abgeschlossene Sphäre der Vertrautheit', Plessner, *Grenzen*, p. 48.

51. Plessner, *Limits*, p. 96.

52. Plessner, *Limits*, p. 93; '... das natürliche Recht der Völker und Individuen, ... die natürliche Pflicht', Plessner, *Grenzen*, p. 50.

53. Plessner, *Limits*, p. 91; '... gegen ein unbestimmtes Milieu abgeschlossene Sphäre der Vertrautheit', Plessner, *Grenzen*, p. 48.

54. See note 51.

55. Plessner, *Limits*, pp. 103–4; '... Gemeinschaft der Sache chont die Intimität der Personen, die ohne Stellenwert, gänzlich vertretbar, in dem bloßen Hingeordnetsein auf die Sache zur funktionellen Einheit der Leistung zusammengeschlossen sind'. Plessner, *Grenzen*, p. 58.

modernist building to the right is another step towards that anticipated state of authentic, blissful innocence. It is reduced to primary geometrical forms of squares, rectangles, vertical, and horizontal lines, pure materials like glass and plain whitish surfaces; all produced and put together with the help, presumably, of the latest technology so that the idyllic scene can be admired from the modernist flat roof lit by a perfectly circular moon. That the image illustrates an anticipated ideal-based community is indicated by a small cohort of humans in the background to the left, who have assembled under a banner at the bottom of a slope from where their gaze is directed towards a single human, who looks to them from higher up like a leader might address his followers.

One of Plessner's main concerns in *The Limits of Community* was to probe the borders of both types of community not because he wanted to restrict either but in order to delineate and thus make visible the domain of non-radical society. The limit of the blood-based community was the decrease of the probability of love in the 'indeterminate *public sphere*'.[49] Because this community type was at its heart 'an enclosed sphere of intimacy',[50] its limits were outwardly directed against the public domain. The ideal-based community was, as Plessner formulated it, limited by the vast realm of manifold individual realities of life.[51] To break through the latter was both the 'natural duty' and 'the natural right of nations and individuals'.[52]

Boundaries were also important for architectural community schemes. Some designers gave their planned community a distinctly enclosing, geometrical form in order to emphasise an introverted character. For example, Dessau's municipal architect Theodor Overhoff selected an octagon as the overall form for a terrace of pitched-roofed houses of the *Hohe Lache* settlement (1919–1926) in Dessau (Fig. 3). The *Rundling* (1929–1930), a social housing estate in Leipzig, designed by Hubert Ritter, adopted a circular form (Fig. 4). In both cases, the plans may be read as illustrating Plessner's definition of the blood-based community as 'an enclosed sphere of intimacy set against an indeterminate milieu'.[53] The borders between the coherently designed settlements and the uncanny urban fabric outside of them were the limits of these communities. Such architectural schemes often clashed irreconcilably with the reality of both society and the city, if their good intentions did not fail entirely as the many ruins of architecturally ideal communities that litter the landscapes of architectural history may suggest.

Other urban schemes relied less on enclosing urban forms. Some used them to some extent as, for example, the central horseshoe-shaped building that provided the name for the *Hufeisensiedlung* in Berlin-Britz, built between 1925 and 1933 to plans by Taut and Martin Wagner (Fig. 5). Some favoured potentially unlimited forms such as the linear *Zeilenbau* of the workers' housing estate (1928–1930) in Bad Dürrenberg near Leipzig, designed by Alexander Klein but based on an earlier master plan by Gropius (Fig. 6). The repetitive, often rhythmic use of identical design elements including window openings, balconies, and stair towers suggests both the identity of the apartments and the sameness of their inhabitants. In analogy to Plessner's earlier-quoted definition of the ideal-based community,[54] schemes like these seem to demonstrate the potential irreconcilability of this type of radical community with the manifold realities of individual lives: 'A community of the ideal looks after the intimacy of persons, who are combined – without status and entirely interchangeable – into a functional unity of achievement through being organized around the ideal',[55] or housed within and around the latter as the examples from Berlin and Leipzig show.

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Fig. 3. Theodor Overhoff, social housing settlement Hohe Lache, Dessau, 1919–1926, aerial view of the octagon. (Photograph: Stadtarchiv Dessau-Rosslau, FLI 17-0002.) Stadtarchiv Dessau-Rosslau granted rights for print and online versions.

The Possibilities of Society

Plessner's probing of the limits of the two forms of community pointed to the realm of society outside of either type. Following on from his parallel analysis of societal life and individual ones, on the level of the latter the community of blood matched the body and the ideal-based community the realm of the spirit (*Geist*). This left society as the equivalent of the realm of the individual soul. Society was 'the unity of interactions among an indeterminate number of persons unknown to each other, who because of limited opportunities, time, and reciprocal interests can at most establish acquaintances'.[56] In this world of chance encounters the 'forced distance between persons becomes ennobled into reserve. The offensive indifference, coldness, and rudeness of living past each other is made ineffective through the forms of politeness, respectfulness, and attentiveness. Reserve counteracts a too great intimacy'.[57] That public social interactions took such forms as, for example, prestige, ceremony, diplomacy, and tactfulness was not accidental but a consequence of the 'ontological ambiguity'[58] of the human soul. With this term Plessner referred to the soul being torn between the two opposing forces of 'the impetus to disclosure – the need for validity; and the impetus to restraint – the need for modesty'.[59] In order to safeguard it, society and its individual members required form and limits, social masks and roles, restraint, and compromise; in short, formalised social interaction.[60]

56. Plessner, *Limits*, p. 131; '... Gesellschaft im Sinne der Einheit des Verkehrs unbestimmt vieler einander unbekannter und durch Mangel an Gelegenheit, Zeit und gegenseitigem Interesse höchstens zur Bekanntschaft gelangender Menschen'. Plessner, *Grenzen*, p. 80.

57. Plessner, *Limits*, p. 131; 'Die erzwungene Ferne von Mensch zu Mensch wird zur Distanz geadelt, die beleidigende Indifferenz, Kälte und Roheit des Aneinandervorbeilebens durch die Formen der Höflichkeit, Ehrerbietung und Aufmerksamkeit unwirksam gemacht und einer zu großen Nähe durch Reservierung entgegengewirkt'. Plessner, *Grenzen*, p. 80.

58. Plessner, *Limits*, p. 109; '... ontologischen Zweideutigkeit', Plessner, *Grenzen*, p. 63.

59. Plessner, *Limits*, p. 109; '... der Drang nach Offenbarung, die Geltungsbedürftigkeit, und der Drang nach Verhaltung, die Schamhaftigkeit'. Plessner, *Grenzen*, p. 63.

60. See also Plessner, 'Soziale Rolle und menschliche Natur [1960]', in *Diesseits der Utopie*, pp. 23–35.

Fig. 4. Hubert Ritter, aerial view of the social housing settlement 'Rundling', also called *Nibelungensiedlung*, Leipzig-Lössig, 1929–1930, photographed on 28 March 1933 by Junkers Luftbild-Zentrale, Leipzig, Flughafen Mockau. (Photograph: Stadtarchiv, Stadt Leipzig, BA 1978/3804.)

61. Plessner, *Limits*, p. 169; my italics; 'Diplomatisches und taktvolles Benehmen . . . bezeichnen die Weisen des Verhaltens des Menschen in der Öffentlichkeit', Plessner, *Grenzen*, p. 112. On the differences between Plessner's public domain or public sphere and that of Habermas see Plessner, *Limits*, p. 101, endnote 3.

62. *Zur Geschichtsphilosophie der bildenden Kunst seit Renaissance und Reformation*, in: *Mitteilungen aus dem Germanischen Nationalmuseum 1918/19. Festschrift für E von Bezold* (Nuremberg, 1918), pp. 157–85; *Die Einheit der Sinne. Grundlinien einer Ästhesiologie des Geistes* (F. Cohen: Bonn, 1923).

63. 'Man and Environment', see also Dahms, 'Mies van der Rohe'.

Plessner argued that formal social encounter created spatial relations, both real and metaphorical ones, between human beings. In order to be effective, prestige and ceremony especially relied on, and also generated, bodily distance, whereas 'diplomatic and tactful conduct . . . describe the way of conduct of persons in the public domain'.[61] Thus spaces of society such as the general public domain and reception rooms in private dwellings were more than places to conduct business encounters and to hold polite conversations. They were spaces to stage and choreograph human encounter so that they could cater to the two sides of the human soul.

To think spatially about human encounter was for Plessner not just a figure of speech. Instead, it expressed his philosophical interest in architecture – as a part of the human environment – and also, more generally, in art, a topic on which several of his early writings had touched.[62] *The Limits of Community* made references to various art movements, and in 1932 Plessner lectured to the Bauhaus in Dessau and to the Deutsche Werkbund in Berlin.

The Dessau lecture 'Mensch und Umwelt' from February 1932 has been lost,[63] but according to the notes of a Bauhaus student Plessner 'clarified the term [sic!] evolution and revolution, spoke about Marx, Freud, and towards the end gave the heated *Bauhäusler* in a very smart way a little cold

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Fig. 5. Bruno Taut and Martin Wagner, view into the horseshoe-shaped central garden court of the social housing settlement, Berlin-Britz, 1925–1933, photographed by Arthur Köster. Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Arthur-Köster-Archiv, Sign. Kös-28-69. (Photograph: Arthur Köster, © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2009.)

Fig. 6. Alexander Klein, aerial view of the rigid Zeilenbau of workers' settlement Bad Dürrenberg near Leipzig based on an earlier master plan by Walter Gropius, 1928–1930. (Photo: Bundesarchiv, Bild 102-09733.)

shower'.[64] Apparently, Mies van der Rohe, who was familiar with the philosopher's work, had invited him.[65] Mies had succeeded Hannes Meyer as Bauhaus director in autumn 1930, the latter having steered the school on a left-wing course that matched his own communist affiliations.[66] Mies's orientation was more pragmatic both for political reasons and because architecture for him was not primarily about fulfilling specific purposes in

64. '[k]lärte den begriff [sic] der evolution und revolution, sprach von Marx, Freud und gab zum schluß in einer sehr geschickten weise den erhitzten bauhäuslern eine kleine, kalte dusche'. 'Die letzten zwei Jahre des Bauhauses. Auszüge aus Briefen des Bauhäuslers Hans Keßler', in Peter Hahn (ed.), *Bauhaus Berlin. Auflösung Dessau 1932, Schließung Berlin 1933, Bauhäusler und Drittes Reich* (Kunstverlag Weingarten: Bonn, 1985), pp. 157–82 (pp. 163–4).

65. Mies van der Rohe owned *Die Einheit der Sinne* (1923) and *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch. Einleitung in die philosophische Anthropologie* (Berlin, 1928), see Fritz Neumeyer, *Mies van der Rohe. The Artless Word. Mies van der Rohe on the Building Art*, trans. by Mark Jarzombek (MIT Press: Cambridge, MA, 1991), p. 358, notes 27 and 39.

66. Klaus-Jürgen Winkler, *Der Architekt Hannes Meyer. Anschauungen und Werk* (VEB Verlag für Bauwesen: MIT Press, 1989), chapter 4.

67. Mies van der Rohe, 'Build Beautifully and Practically! Stop This Cold Functionality' [1932], in Neumeyer, *Mies van der Rohe*, p. 307. Dahms, 'Mies van der Rohe', (columns 3–5).

68. Plessner, 'Wiedergeburt', p. 85.

69. '[m]eisterliche Siedlungen', Plessner, 'Wiedergeburt', p. 85.

70. '[a]narchische Macht', Plessner, 'Wiedergeburt', pp. 71–2.

71. Plessner, 'Wiedergeburt', p. 73.

72. '[g]eschlossenen Form', Plessner, 'Wiedergeburt', p. 76.

73. See Peter Bernhard, 'Plessners Konzept der *offenen Form* im Kontext der Avantgarde der 1920er Jahre', *ARHE. Časopis za filozofiju*, vol. 4, no. 7, 2007, pp. 237–52.

74. '[d]en wesenhaft unabgeschlossenen und offenen Charakter', Plessner, 'Wiedergeburt', p. 77.

75. Plessner, 'Wiedergeburt', p. 76.

76. 'Schönheit einer Maschine', '...
Unterstellung aller raumgestaltenden Rücksichten unter die Zwecke der Technik'. Plessner, 'Wiedergeburt', p. 81.

77. Plessner, 'Wiedergeburt', pp. 77–80.

78. '"Form" heißt Bindung, heißt Maß, heißt Gleichgewicht'. Plessner, 'Wiedergeburt', p. 71.

79. Plessner, 'Wiedergeburt', p. 82.

80. '[w]enigstens nur bei den großen Meistern des "Neuen Stils"', Plessner, 'Wiedergeburt', p. 82.

quasi-scientific manner. Rather, it was an art form that posed questions of beauty, value, and spirit (*Geist*).[67]

In his speech to the Deutsche Werkbund, Plessner identified himself with modernism in architecture, as when he remarked favourably upon recent housing projects in Rotterdam, Amsterdam, and Dessau.[68] In the latter city, the Bauhaus's first director Gropius had designed a new building into which the school moved in 1926, a group of *Meisterhäuser* (1925-26) for Bauhaus professors, and an experimental housing estate in Dessau-Törten (1926-28). So when Plessner spoke about 'masterly settlements',[69] he was probably referring to some of these buildings, which he may have seen when lecturing in Dessau. However, he qualified his alignment with modernist architecture by arguing for a renaissance of form and for a playful engagement with the latter, thereby indicating that thus far modernist architecture may not have achieved either.

For Plessner, the future of architecture rested in the discipline's relationship with modern technology, which had emerged in the early nineteenth century as an 'anarchic power' that had changed, if not destroyed, both the social and economic order, and the ways in which objects were produced.[70] Mid-nineteenth century historicist styles tried to deny these changes, whereas new styles such as the late-nineteenth-century *Jugendstil* wanted to ennoble them.[71] Instead of encapsulating the potentially destructive forces of technology within the corset of 'closed forms',[72] Plessner argued for an 'open form'[73] that would match the technological world's 'essentially non-enclosed and open character'[74] with regard to space, time, and objects or commodities.

To accept the continuous changes enforced by technology resulted in an active attitude towards the latter. Thus architectural designs based primarily on purpose and function allowed architects to work with the technological forces rather than against them,[75] while to discover the functional 'beauty of a machine' meant to reject both historicism and *Jugendstil*. Yet, in continuation of his criticism of rational-functionalist architecture from the 1924 book, Plessner argued that this functionalist approach subordinated 'all space-creating considerations to the purposes of technology'.[76] Moreover, it was a radical programme because it aimed at a new form by shedding all aesthetic concerns and it had aligned itself often with Marxism and socialism.[77]

In *The Limits of Community* the radicalism of the two types of communities was balanced by society; Plessner's Werkbund talk was structured comparably. The two extreme positions of facing modern technology through either the rigidity of styles (historical and new ones alike) or the functionalist approach required as a check 'the renaissance of form' as Plessner had appropriately titled his talk. The characteristics of this reborn form – '"Form" means bond, means moderation, means equilibrium'[78] – echoed the qualities Plessner had ascribed to society. In order for the new, open form to emerge, man had to strive beyond pure functionality as the determining characteristic of designed objects towards a relationship with the latter that was determined by play;[79] a type of social behaviour that was as formalised as those that determined the order of society. Only by regaining such a relationship with his own creations, man could achieve sovereignty; a condition that comparable to the open form had been reached thus far 'only among the great masters of the "new Style"'.[80]

Plessner did not mention a particular architect, but his acquaintance with Mies van der Rohe allows one to tie the philosopher's thoughts with the Tugendhat villa as an exemplary instance. The comparison quoted earlier

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between this building and the town houses by Klein equated differences in formal qualities with ones in social behaviour: 'closed spaces versus a flowing continuum of space divided only by guiding, freely placed walls; the static principle of social ritual versus the principle of movement and openness'.[81] But, contrary to such a reading, Plessner's ideas about a modern open architectural form, a playful relationship between man and his creations, and spatially formalised social rituals as one constituent element of society, raise the question of ritualised social encounter within modernist architectural spaces both in the public realm and the private home. Looking at the latter only, one possible answer was provided by Grete Tugendhat in describing her home as 'large and austerely simple — however, not in a dwarfing but in a liberating sense'. The latter quality was made possible by experiencing the spacious rooms as enforcing a distinct social behaviour: 'This austerity makes it impossible to spend your time just relaxing and letting yourself go, and it is precisely this being forced to do something else which people, exhausted and left empty by their working lives, need and find liberating today'.[82]

Another answer is embedded in the open plan of the villa itself. The lower-level living spaces consist of formal dining area, supper and breakfast zone, sitting area, music area, and a library cum study with a writing desk. The ritualised habits of the bourgeois life were also catered for on the upper level where, for example, behind the entrance a waiting area was arranged complete with chairs and a table on which to leave calling cards.[83]

Seen from this perspective, a modernist villa like the Tugendhat's is much closer to the neo-classical town houses of Klein than, for example, to modernist housing estates. With the latter it shares superficially some architectural detailing, on the strength of which the aforementioned aesthetic-stylistic approach to architectural history can integrate easily both types of buildings into a one-dimensional history of modernism in architecture. With the former it shares the aspirations and ideologies of the bourgeoisie and the middle-classes — that the bourgeois domestic architecture existed also in a modernist version and was not just a remnant of a past time, Sigrist had already pointed this in 1930.

Plessner himself traced the origins of the ritualised social behaviour of society to the rise of the bourgeoisie. Moreover, in some of the most polemical sections of *The Limits of Community*, he identified social radicalism and the popularity of community ideas with 'the impatient, the lower classes (speaking sociologically) and the youth (speaking biologically)'.[84] These groups were contrasted with an equally broad selection of representatives of the middle classes and the bourgeoisie,[85] social layers Plessner held responsible for both defending the concept of society and broadening its appeal.[86] Thus when looking at such domestic architecture as one might be tempted to classify as 'other modern' in relation to Plessner's thinking — for example designs by Salvisberg, Ernst L. Freud,[87] Harry Rosenthal,[88] and even Fritz Breuhaus,[89] — the sociological similarities between these spaces of modern bourgeois living stand out more than their alleged stylistic shortcomings when compared individually with some assumed ideal modernist home.

The concept of society as an adequate domain of modernity was Plessner's contribution to the heated discussion about the future social organisation of Weimar Germany and the fate of its different social classes.[90] This larger debate was also visible in Weimar Republic architectural culture, for example, in many architectural publications, working-class housing schemes, and bourgeois domestic architecture. Two books that frame the period illustrate the vitality of the latter adversary in this argument.

81. '[g]eschlossene Räume gegen ein fließendes Raumkontinuum; das statische Prinzip des gesellschaftlichen Rituals gegen das Prinzip der Bewegung und Offenheit', Kähler, 'Nicht nur Neues Bauen!', p. 350.

82. Grete and Fritz Tugendhat, 'The Inhabitants of the Tugendhat House Give Their Opinion', in Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat and Wolf Tegethoff (eds), *Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. The Tugendhat House* (Springer: Vienna, 2000), pp. 35–7 (p. 35).

83. Wolf Tegethoff, 'A Modern Residence in Turbulent Times', in Hammer-Tugendhat *et al.*, *The Tugendhat House*, pp. 43–97 (p. 78).

84. Plessner, *Limits*, p. 47, also p. 66, for example; '... der Ungeduldigen, soziologisch: der unteren Klassen, biologisch: der Jugend'. Plessner, *Grenzen*, p. 14.

85. Plessner, *Limits*, p. 70–3. For the arguments surrounding definitions of bourgeoisie and middle-classes, and the appropriate translation into English see, for example, David Blackbourne and Richard J. Evans (eds), *The German Bourgeoisie. Essays on the Social History of the German Middle Class from the late Eighteenth to the Early Twentieth Century* (Blackbourne: London, 1991); Geoff Eley (ed.), *Society, Culture, and the State in Germany 1870–1930* (University of Michigan Press: Ann Arbor, 1996); Jonathan Sperber, 'Bürger, Bürgertum, Bürgerlichkeit, Bürgerliche Gesellschaft: Studies of the German (Upper) Middle Class and Its Sociocultural World', *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 69, no. 2, June 1997, pp. 271–97.

86. Plessner, *Limits*, pp. 83–4, and chapters 4–6.

87. Volker M. Welter, 'Ernst L. Freud—Domestic Architect', in Shulamith Behr and Marian Malet (eds), *Arts in Exile in Britain 1933–1945. Politics, and Cultural Identity* [The Yearbook of the Research Center for German and Austrian Exile Studies, vol. 6 (2004)] (Rodopi: Amsterdam, 2005), pp. 201–37.

88. Sylvia Claus, *Harry Rosenthal (1892–1966). Architekt und Designer in Deutschland, Palästina, Grossbritannien* (gta: Amsterdam, 2006).

89. Elisabeth Schmidle, *Fritz August Breuhaus (1883–1960). Kultivierte Sachlichkeit* (Ernst Wasmuth: Tübingen, 2006).

90. On the Weimar Republic, the Third Reich, and Germany as a middle-class society in the making since the 1880s see, for example, René König: 'Soziologie der zwanziger Jahre' (see note 25) and 'Strukturwandel des kapitalistischen Systems', in *Soziologie heute* (Regio-Verlag: Zurich, 1949), pp. 46–87.

91. Hermann Muthesius, *Wie baue ich mein Haus?* (F. Bruckmann: München, 1919).

92. Gustav Adolf Platz, *Wohnräume der Gegenwart* (Propyläen: Berlin, 1933).

93. 'Für die Radikalen ist die Wohnung der Masse einzig würdiges Objekt, für die Gemäßigten besteht nach wie vor das Problem der bürgerlichen Wohnung'. Platz, *Wohnräume*, p. 13.

94. Gustav Platz, *Baukunst der neuesten Zeit* (Propyläen: Berlin, 1927).

95. Grete Dexel and Walter Dexel, *Das Wohnhaus von heute* (Hesse & Becker: Leipzig, 1928).

96. Walter Müller-Wulckow, *Wohnbauten und Siedlungen* (Karl Robert Langewiesche: Königstein i. Taunus, 1928).

97. Leo Adler, *Neuzeitliche Miethäuser und Siedlungen* (Ernst Pollak: Berlin, 1931).

98. Helmut Lethen's book *Cool Conduct: The Culture of Distance in Weimar Germany* [1994], trans. Don Reneau (University of California Press: Berkeley, 2002) barely addresses the fact that Plessner defined two types of community, with society as a third type of social organisation. Instead, Lethen refers to the blood-based community as the opposite of the cool, objective society which he detected in *Neue Sachlichkeit*.

In 1919, in the aftermath of World War One, the third edition of Herman Muthesius's book *Wie baue ich mein Haus?* was published.[91] This was an evocation of a hypothetical bourgeois home including, for example, a gentleman's room, lady's room, reception room, and spaces dedicated to such bourgeois activities as billiard, collecting, and art and music making. The other end of the Weimar Republic was marked by *Wohnräume der Gegenwart*[92] by Gustav Adolf Platz. Platz did not dismiss bourgeois domestic architecture as a historical phenomenon or argue that in modern Weimar Germany the need for it had disappeared together with the social differences that had historically sustained this type of house. Rather, the period was one of confrontation: 'For the radicals, the housing [*Wohnung*] of the masses is the only valid subject. For the moderates, the issue of bourgeois living [*Wohnung*] still exists'.[93]

These discussions of bourgeois domestic architecture were not isolated cases. For example, Platz's earlier *Baukunst der neuesten Zeit*,[94] Grete and Walter Dexel's *Das Wohnhaus von heute*,[95] Walter Müller-Wulckow's *Wohnbauten und Siedlungen*,[96] and Leo Adler's *Neuzeitliche Miethäuser und Siedlungen*[97] included many examples of bourgeois domestic architecture in almost every style. Plessner's discussion of the possibilities of society helps to ground this type of modern architecture in distinct social circumstances, just as his thinking about the limits of community broadens the basis for the analysis of housing estates from the same period.

Conclusion

I have argued in this paper that some of Plessner's thoughts from *The Limits of Community* and his Werkbund talk may be useful in achieving a more comprehensive architectural history of the Weimar Republic. Four possible conclusions seem to be particularly important.

First, Weimar architectural culture was not solely dominated by arguments between architectural modernists and traditionalists. Contemporary participants often presented to each other the terms of the debate in these straightforwardly opposing terms; a fascinating topic for a sociological study of the profession at the time. However, to maintain this juxtaposition as an analytical framework without asking after its size and shape provides too narrow corset into which to fit the 'other modernity'.

Second, Plessner's texts remind us that the Weimar Republic was not a one-way-street towards social, even socialist, political, and architectural communities, and thus the assumption that the community was always preferred over society needs to be questioned critically. In the light of German history, this is, perhaps, hardly contentious with regard to Plessner's blood-based community, of which the *völkische* variant was one example. To consider, however, the ideal-based community as equally open to critical inquiry appears to be more difficult, as it is often conflated with Plessner's concept of society.

When *The Limits of Community* was published, modern art and architecture were about to shift from Expressionism and post-World War One utopian community dreams to *Neue Sachlichkeit* and a more rational–functional approach to building. It is tempting to read this move as indicating Weimar Germany's orientation towards reforming itself into a modern society. This overlooks the fact that already at the time more complex social constellations were being discussed, as Plessner's analysis of community and society exemplifies.[98] In the 1960s, Plessner reiterated his earlier analysis when he

emphasised the identity of radicalism both of the 'angry young men of Expressionism and the Bauhaus' whose art forms had resulted in the equally 'extreme temperature of Expressionism and the *Neue Sachlichkeit*'.[99]

Third, to look at the bourgeois modernist architecture as exemplifying, by analogy, Plessner's concept of society requires that we look at the origin of architecture and architectural history in those social layers that, according to Plessner, had been responsible for building society. Traditionally, both disciplines have mainly focused on bourgeois architecture, which was considered to set the normative task. Throughout the nineteenth century, social causes such as working-class housing were gradually added first to the architects' responsibilities and, later, to the historians' brief. Once architectural histories move into the post-1918 era, the latter causes become often the overriding ones, with mainstream bourgeois architecture relegated to the background, where it is visible but drained of much of its social context.

Finally, parallel to the wider reaction during the 1960s to Germany's National-Socialist past, architectural histories re-evaluated modernist architecture. This allowed not only for a more politicised historical analysis but also for a possible personal identification with those political forces of mainly social-democratic, socialist, and communist conviction that had tried to prevent the coming of the Third Reich. This retrospect identification was part of the broader attempts of the 1960s generation at a posthumous *Wiedergutmachung* (literally 'making good again') of the failures of their parents and grand-parents. Yet, to write well-intended histories that tried to correct retrospectively what can never be righted did not amount to acts of resistance, however belated and symbolic. However, it did, over time, help to establish a rather narrow perspective on a period that like any other phase of history was anything but one-dimensional. Accordingly, a consideration of Plessner's writings helps us to see that its architecture cannot be captured adequately on a single band with modernist and traditionalist architecture at either end and an 'other modernity' somewhere in between.

This paper goes back to my work on domestic architect Ernst L. Freud, on whom I have just completed a book manuscript. A keynote lecture that Prof. Hilde Heynen kindly invited me to deliver at the international colloquium Making a New World— Reforming and Designing Modern Communities in Interwar Europe, *held at the Katholieke Universiteit in Leuven (9–10 June 2006) provided a first opportunity to present the ideas of this paper to colleagues. I also wish to thank for their constructive criticism Prof. Iain Boyd Whyte, University of Edinburgh, my co-chair of the session,* The Limits of Community: Bourgeois and Middle-Class Modernism in German Architecture from c. 1900–1940, *at the 61st annual meeting of the Society of Architectural Historians, Cincinnati, Ohio, in April 2008; as well as the keynote speaker Prof. Alice T Friedman, Wellesley College, and the organiser and participants at the 10th Dorich House annual conference* Staging the Modern Interior, *Kingston University, London, May 2008.*

99. '[d]ie zornigen jungen Männer des Expressionismus und des Bauhauses', '. . . extremen Temperaturen des Expressionismus und der neuen Sachlichkeit', Plessner, 'Die Legende von den zwanziger Jahren [1962]', in Plessner, *Diesseits der Utopie*, pp. 87–102 (p. 88, p. 97).