

Bruno Taut and the Architecture of Activism

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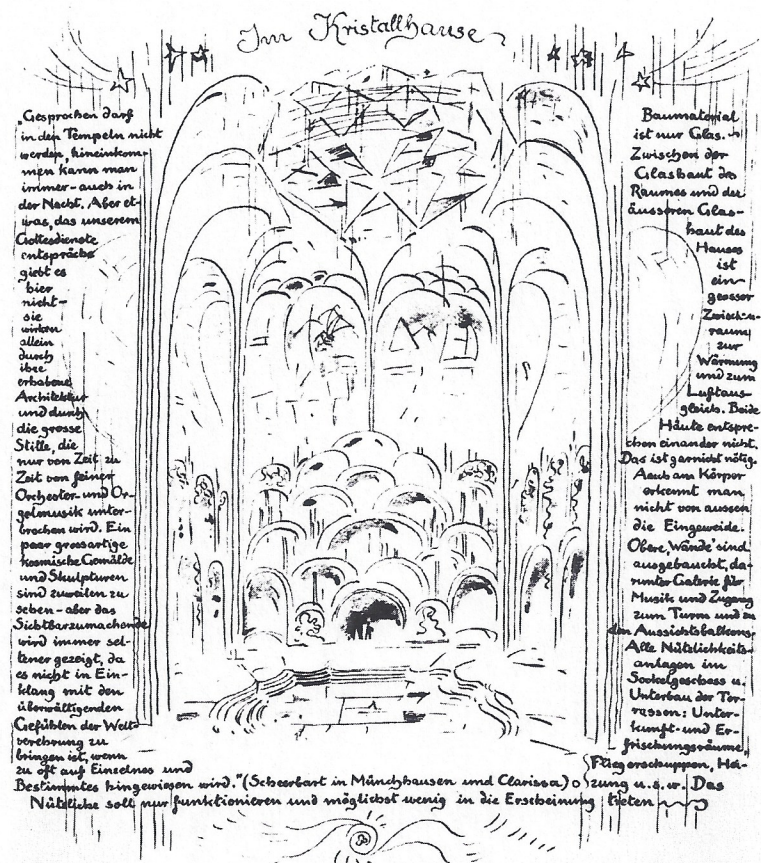
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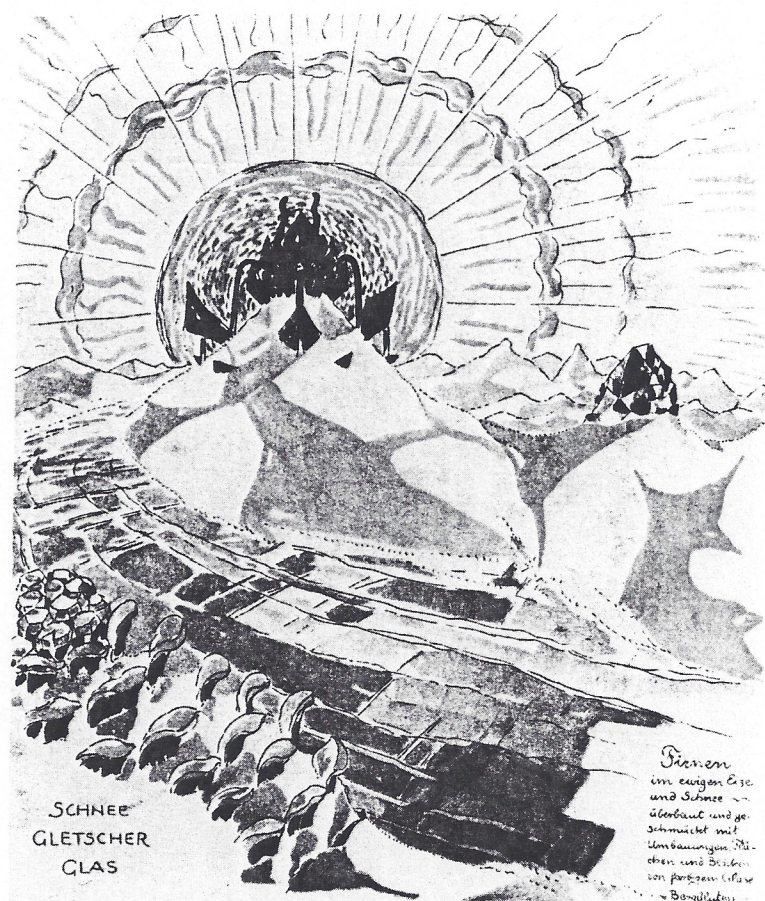
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we have seen, a particularly fresh idea at that time. What is interesting, however, are the means suggested by Taut to break away from the tyranny of nineteenth-century rationalism.

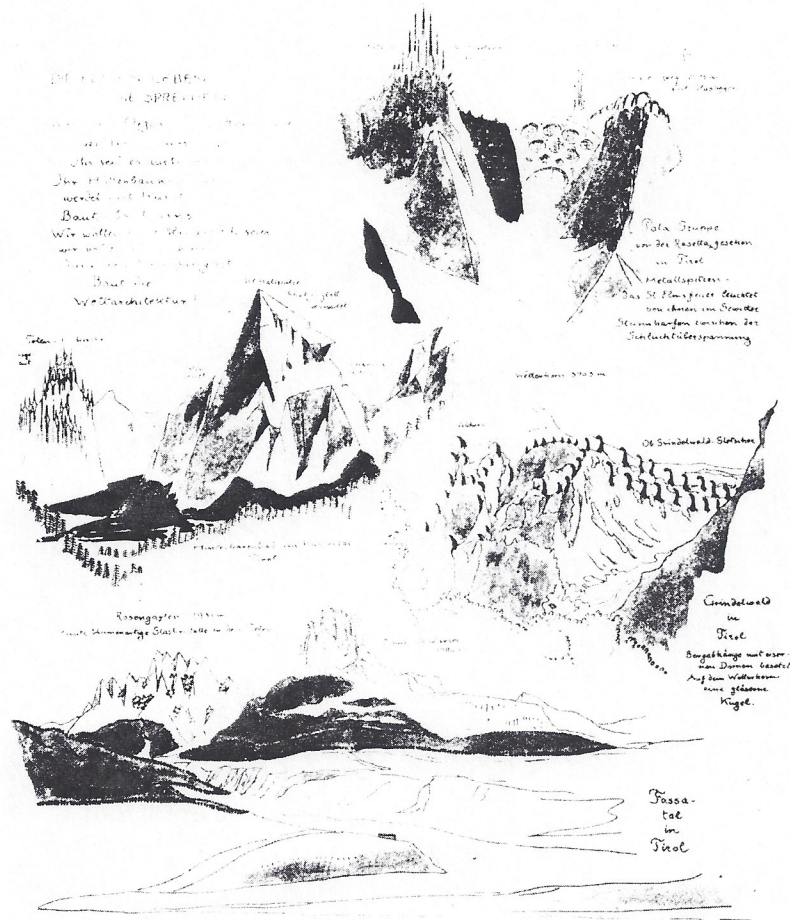
Instead of proposing a retrospective utopia, as the *Bodenreform* and *Heimatkunst* movements had done, Taut summonsed up a futurist utopia. Instead of damning technology as incompatible with *Geist*, Taut invoked a super-technology, which was to be the discreet servant of *Geist*. This super-technology, when allied to *Geist*, would transcend and thus make obsolete the discredited rationalism and materialism which had led, said Taut, to the war. The glass and steel architecture, the searchlights, airships and aeroplanes which were depicted in *Alpine Architektur* were seen by him as the means to break away from



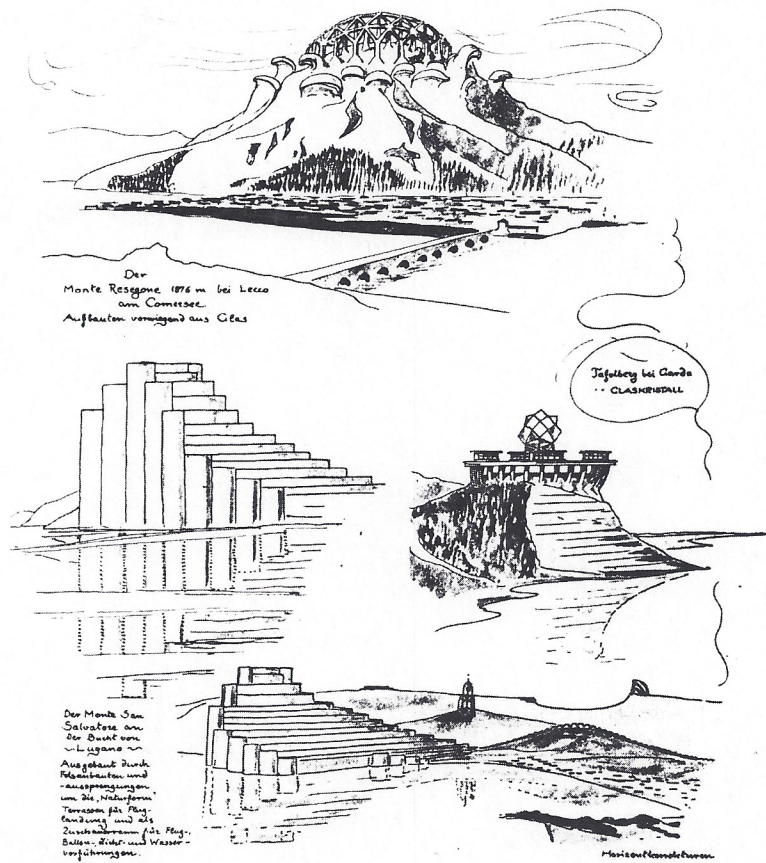
Die Ausführung ist gewiss ungeheuer schwer und opfervoll, aber nicht unmöglich. „Man verlangt so sehr von den Menschen das Unmögliche“ (Goethe)

materialism, not as materialist artefacts in themselves. Taut's irrational faith in the ability of super-technology to transcend the limitations of materialism was one aspect of the Activist challenge to rationalism.

Taut was not alone, in 1916–17, in his rejection of materialist or positivist rationalism. It was a widespread reaction to the war. The birth of Dada was the most conspicuous symptom of this anti-positivist tendency. As Allan Greenberg has commented: 'The Dadaists, along with many other artist-intellectuals, considered the irrationalism of war as the culmination of the rationalism of the nineteenth century: adherence to logic and morality exclusively in the sphere of the ideal led to illogic and immorality in the sphere of the real.'⁷ However, the Activists, in contrast to the Dadaists, did not reject the concept of rationalism. Rather, they sought to transcend its limitations. Their ambition was to found a new rationalism based on creative rather than analytical thought. The *Literat* and the creative *Geist* would take over from the politician, the economist or the technologist. The Activist variant of rationalism had a distinctly messianic and mystical flavour.



In his essay 'Aktivismus und Rationalismus', Max Brod defined Activist rationalism as a search for the Godhead. 'True rationalism is nothing more than the clearest indication possible of the mystery of the world. Considered practically, in rationalist Activism, it seeks to promote the fullest possible concentration on the eternal, divine, and *geistig* among the greatest possible number of people.'⁸ The super-rationalism of the Activists was conceived as the vehicle for the immanent God in man.⁹ The way to the 'eternal, divine, and *geistig*' was not to be found via the calculating rationalism of the positivists, but, rather, via irrationalism. And, as Max Brod indicated, 'This true rationalism can not only tolerate a synthesis with genuine irrationalism, it virtually demands it.'¹⁰ Also in contrast to their Dadaist contemporaries, the Activists did not regard irrationalism nihilistically, as an end in itself. Instead, they saw it as a necessary step on the way to a higher, transcendental rationalism. 'True rationalism strives, with a rational selection of rational and super-rational means, to achieve super-rationality.'¹¹ This higher rationalism can be seen as a striving for ultimate truths: to the Activists it was a search for objective truths – truths grounded not on the subjective emotions



of the individual, but on a higher *geistig* authority. Paulsen noted this tendency: 'The will of Activism means nothing except the desire to be both realistic and pure. Realistic, that means rational, and pure – true.'¹² This is very important both to the understanding of Activism and to the understanding of the movements which followed it. The reaction against the excessive subjectivity of Expressionism, which is generally associated with the *Neue Sachlichkeit* movement, can actually be traced back to Activism. Certainly, the Activists themselves thought that they were constructing a true alternative to indulgent Expressionist subjectivity. Thus the divide between Activism and *Neue Sachlichkeit* was much narrower than that between Expressionism and *Neue Sachlichkeit*. Both Activism and *Neue Sachlichkeit* were founded on the search for an anonymous, absolute, and 'pure' rationalism.¹³

How was this to be achieved in practice? Through mystical intuition, said Hiller.

The source of all rationality lies not in knowledge but in experience. Its deepest essence, therefore, is not to be comprehended quasi-mathematically, but mystically... The impulse towards the benevolent, messianic reform of the world remains dark and inaccessible to all justification. An intellectualism which lusts

for proof – both pure and poor philosophy – fails here. For here rule the ardour and the assurance of more sacred, more profound powers.¹⁴

This description of a quasi-mystical power to comprehend a given phenomenon without 'understanding' it in the positivist sense clearly derived from current intuitionist philosophies. In the visual arts, the most potent variant of intuitionism was empathy theory, which would have reached Taut via Worringer and Kandinsky.¹⁵

The core of empathy theory was the experience of a mutual resonance which exists between the intellect, as a medium of perception, and a physical object – for example, a painting, sculpture or building. Kandinsky offered the following explanation:

So long as the mind remains united with the body it can, as a rule, only perceive vibrations through the medium of sensation. Hence sensation is the bridge from the non-material to the material (the artist), and from the material to the non-material (the onlooker). Emotion – sensation – work – sensation – emotion ... The inward element created by the vibrations of the mind forms the content of a work.¹⁶

Kandinsky's sequence was proto-typically Expressionist, in that it placed the emotions at the beginning and end of the cycle. Empathy, to Kandinsky, was a means of uncovering subjective truths. The Activists, however, gave empathy a more vigorous reforming role, a role with a social purpose.

Taut's goal, and that of the literary Activists, was, as we have seen, an ideal *Gemeinschaft*. Taut's models, representing respectively the first and third ages of the revolutionary eschatology, were the Gothic and the Orient. The historicist belief in a new age represents the idolization of both the past and the future. The vehicle for Taut's idolatry was intuition, or empathy.

As an Activist, Taut assumed two roles simultaneously: the first as historian and philosopher, the second as man of action. In his first role, Taut's understanding of his Gothic and oriental models was based on intuitive understanding – *Verstehen*. This historical method, developed by Johann Droysen, Wilhelm Dilthey and Max Weber, was credited with the ability of transporting the historical observer into the very core of values and standards which allegedly gave meaning and pattern to bygone societies. Thus the external historical records – in Taut's case the cathedrals and temples – were projected into the observer's inner experience, where they released intellectual and emotional processes analogous to those experienced by historical characters.¹⁷

Thus via empathy, or *Verstehen*, Taut claimed he could see beyond the merely technical or functional aspects of a medieval city like Speyer, or an oriental temple group, and perceive through the architecture the resonant tones of a united, organic society, of a *Gemeinschaft*. Not only did Taut study these models intuitively rather than factually, but he also perceived in them internal resonances and harmonies. As already noted, Taut saw a unity between *Geist* and *Volk*, between sacred and profane

in Gothic and oriental societies. This unity, however, was not a fusion of similar elements, but a resonance between different, but complementary elements. Thus the architectural expressions of *Geist* and *Volk* provided mutual inspiration and a mutually beneficial context and scale, the one for the other.

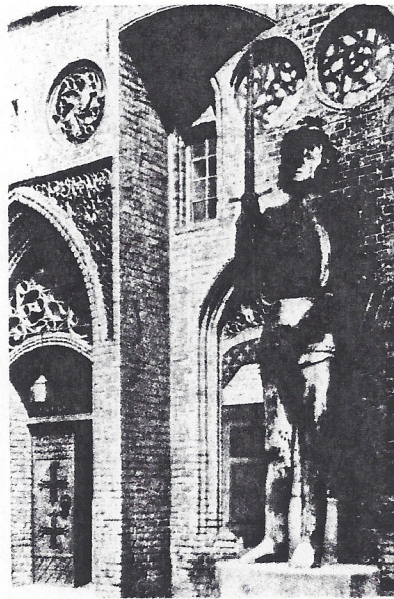
The cathedral over the old city, the pagoda over the huts of the Indians, the incredible temple quarter in the rectangle of the Chinese city and the Acropolis rising above the simple housing of the antique city – they all show that the pinnacle, the highest point, the crystallized religious intuition, is both the ultimate goal and the starting point for all architecture. This central focus radiates its light over every building, right down to the simplest hut, and graces the solution of the simplest practical necessities with the shimmer of its brilliance.¹⁸

In this sequence, *Geist*, or the 'crystallized religious intuition', is taken as the beginning and end of the empathy chain. The profane architecture of the *Volk*, said Taut, is illuminated by the glory of *Geist*, and the society is thus harmoniously united. The sequence, however, can also flow in the other direction, due to the mutual nature of the *Geist-Volk* resonance. Then the great architecture of *Geist* draws its strength and context from the *Volkswille*. 'Not only great edifices are dependent on a profound and powerful philosophy of life. This passionate comprehension first produces beauty in small buildings.'¹⁹ From these humble, profane beginnings, the *Gemeinschaft* takes its inspiration and also its scale from the great sacred enterprises. 'Only this philosophy of life achieves the correct evaluation of scale, which is part of the architects's task, and prevents the blurring of the borders between great and small, sacred and profane, from which our age suffers.'²⁰ Empathy and *Verstehen*, as historical resonance, were used by Taut to transcend the merely external evidence of earlier cultures, and to construct a highly idealized account of their harmonious inner workings. This was Taut in his first Activist role, as idolizer of the past.

In his second Activist role, as a man of practical action, Taut was also dependent on intuition and empathy. The first ambition of architectural Activism was to revive the intuitive, as against the scientific understanding of architecture. In an article on the Roland at Brandenburg, written while Taut was working there in 1916, he complained that the Roland was 'the victim of so-called art history... He was catalogued on account of his scale, but his quite unique beauty was never appreciated.'²¹ Later in the same article, Taut made the general point: 'A living feeling for architecture is rare, very rare today. All feelings are stifled by principles and theories.'²² The application of a positivistic *Kunstwissenschaft* to the study of architecture had led to an overriding concern for technical and functional details at the expense of an intuitive understanding of the true purpose of architecture.

This true purpose, said Taut, was to link man with nature. 'In all the arts, the notion of "nature" has never had any other meaning, except that the artist and his work are themselves part of nature.'²³ In this

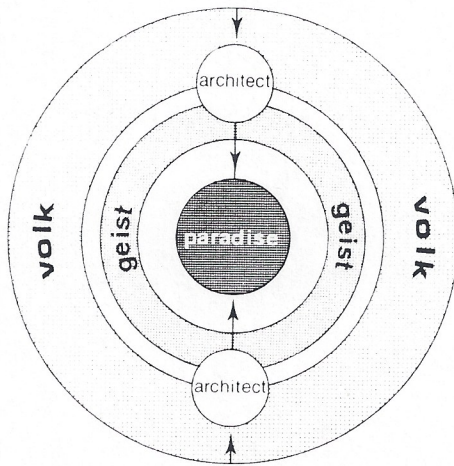
40 Brandenburg, Roland.
1474.



empathetic chain, the architect and his work acted as intermediaries between the *Volk* and nature. Nature, in this sense, meant the higher ideals of life, an organic, harmonious society, a *Gemeinschaft*.

In 'Architektur', Taut returned to this image of the architect as the resonant medium through which the *Volk* could make contact with higher nature, with *Geist*. 'Our concern here is not with mere necessity, but to create a resonance between the building and a higher function.'²⁴ And just as Theodor Lipps, the most influential early advocate of empathy, had defined aesthetic enjoyment as objectified self-enjoyment: 'The perception of aesthetic worth is always the perception of a profound value which exists both in the object and in myself. In appreciating the abstract value I also enjoy its presence in myself.'²⁵ – so Taut defined architecture as being simultaneously the means of expression and also as the physical statement of the deepest longings of man: 'Architecture is an art and should be the highest of all arts. It derives only from strong emotions and speaks only to the senses. The head can, at best, work as a regulating influence. For the true essence of architecture can only spring from the heart: the heart alone must be allowed to speak.'²⁶ Such an architectural process, which 'entsteht nur aus einem starken Gefühl und spricht auch nur zum Gefühl', is clearly related to Kandinsky's empathetic chain: 'Emotion – Gefühl – Werk – Gefühl – Emotion.' Yet as we have already noted, Kandinsky's chain was typically Expressionist in that it limited itself to a deeper understanding of the emotions. Taut, as an Activist, saw his chain as a tool for social action.

Taut's ideal, as we have seen, derived principally from Landauer's version of a socialist *Gemeinschaft*, which could be derived through an intensification of *Geist*. The tendency of this scheme is centripetal. As society or the *Volk*, through the leadership of the architect/Activist,



becomes more and more *geistig*, so the society as a whole moves closer and closer towards paradise. At its final resolution, society will become paradise and *Geist* will become superfluous – a means to an end, but not an end in itself. To quote Hiller's definition of paradise once again, 'Paradise... is that state of existence at which humanity has no further need for *Geist*.'²⁷ Until this ultimate stage of development is reached, however, the job of the Activist, said Hiller, was to articulate the resonances between *Geist* and *Volk* and to direct them, via the Activist's own work and leadership, towards the final goal – paradise. To Taut, paradise could be reached through architecture, and would be reached when the architect was able, once again, to bring into harmony the resonances which once existed between *Geist* and *Volk*, but which had become dissonant after the decline of the Gothic and the upsurge of individualism and materialism.

The new city and the resonance of *Geist* and *Volk*

Taut's city plan in *Die Stadtkrone* was an attempt to re-tune *Geist* and *Volk*, according to the models of the Gothic and the Orient. As in most humanist utopias, from Thomas More on, Taut's layout was concentric. The circle was conceived as *axis mundi*, as a microcosm of the earth itself. The plan consisted of a central public core – the *Stadtkrone*, surrounded by a zoned town, broken down into housing, business, industrial and recreational zones according to the precepts of Taut's former teacher, Theodor Goecke. The distinction between the *Stadtkrone* and the surrounding zones corresponded to *Geist* and *Volk*, to sacred and profane.

The model for the housing – corresponding to the huts in the Orient and the humble housing of medieval Europe, was the row-housing which Taut had developed for the Deutsche Gartenstadtgesellschaft. Taut included illustrations of the Falkenberg estate as examples on which the housing in the new city could be based. He described the residential areas as follows: 'The housing is conceived on the garden city model, with low terrace-housing, and a long garden for every house...the residential area itself will function as a green zone and make allotment gardens unnecessary.'¹ The housing, low in profile, squatted around the physical and *geistig* focus of the city, the *Stadtkrone*.

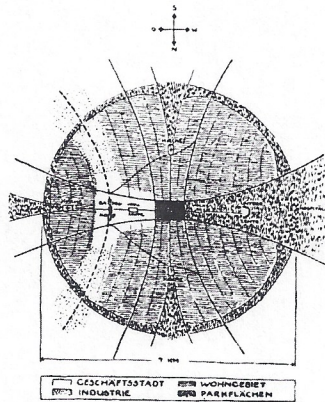
Taut's sacred centre was built upon communal buildings. On these buildings depended the city's intellectual and cultural life. 'A grouping of all those buildings, which are the focus for the already mentioned social tendencies, and which a city of this size needs for its cultural and entertainment needs.'² These included an opera house, theatre, library, museum, aquarium, plant-house and assembly rooms. Elevated above these buildings on a reinforced concrete frame was to be a *Kristallhaus* – the ultimate glory of the *Stadtkrone* and a physical representation of *Geist*.

As we have already seen, Worringer, in *Formprobleme der Gotik*, identified the Gothic urge for dematerialization as an urge for *Vergeistigung*.³ The distinction between the Gothic and classical spirit, between *Vergeistigung* and *Versinnlichung*, was adopted by Taut and applied to his own period as the contrast between the rationalism and materialism of the nineteenth century (*Versinnlichung*) and the contemporary desire for a new age of the spirit (*Vergeistigung*). Just as Worringer set the Gothic vault against the Greek column und lintel, so Taut set his new architecture of glass and iron against the stone and

41 Bruno Taut, *Die Stadtkrone*, silhouette and plan.

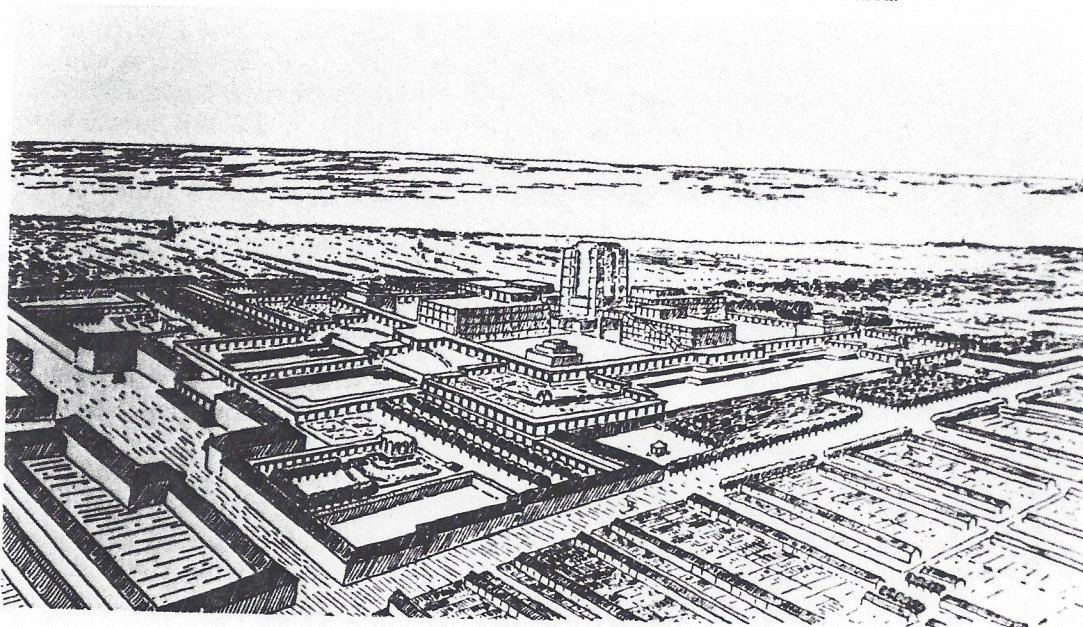


45. Stadtsilhouette



46. Stadtschema

42 *Die Stadtkrone*, central area.



bricks of the nineteenth century. Through its power to dematerialize, glass lifted architecture above materialism to a higher, *geistig* level.

The *Kristallhaus* had no practical function, beyond simply being. 'The *Kristallhaus* contains nothing apart from an incredibly beautiful room, reached by steps and walkways to the right and left of the theatre and the small *Volkshaus*. But how can one hope to describe something that can only be built?'⁴ And just as the Gothic cathedral, according to Taut's *Verstehen*, had radiated its beneficial glow over the entire town, so the *Kristallhaus*, with its shimmering and reflecting planes of coloured glass, would shine, as Taut said, 'over everything, like a sparkling diamond'.⁵

The silhouette of the city, rising from squat, profane housing to the sacred central crown, echoes the drawings of medieval cities which illustrated Taut's essay. A more immediate source was also Constantinople. In an article written in 1916, describing his visit to Turkey in connection with the 'Haus der Freundschaft' contest, Taut noted the harmonious union of sacred and profane architecture in Constantinople. 'Certainly, the great buildings are distinct from profane life, but they do not reject it: on the contrary, they attract it, with the result that everything – the mosques and the multi-coloured turmoil – form a total unity.'⁶ There is a clear source for the silhouette of Taut's new city in his description of the skyline of Constantinople. He wrote: 'The great mosques crown the hills and the multifarious jumble of houses which, however chaotic and thrown together as one might describe them, still work harmoniously together.'⁷ As in his description of the Roland, Taut once again leant heavily on intuition, on perceived resonances and harmonies in his account of Constantinople.

In spite of the manifesto-like nature of *Die Stadtkrone*, there was very little in the individual architectural elements which was new. Indeed, Taut urged that: 'Naturally, the architectural forms in this project are to be taken only as summaries.'⁸ No suggestions were given as to the form the industrial buildings should take, and the housing, as we have seen, was based on Taut's pre-war work for the Gartenstadtgesellschaft. The very simple nature, however, of these pre-war designs was even more appropriate to the conditions of 1917 than to those of 1913–14, when they were first drawn up. For the crippling effects of the war and the 'turnip winter' of 1916–17⁹ lead to a reassessment of the luxury and profligacy of the *Gründerzeit*. In an article on 'Bauluxus', written in 1917, the critic Paul Westheim attacked the architectural extravagance of the pre-war decades – singling out the enormous and lavishly appointed town halls for his particular scorn. In contrast, said Westheim, the post-war prospects for architecture were bleak. 'Everything will be lacking: cheap money, cheap labour, cheap materials, and, above all, the purchasing power and taxability of the population.'¹⁰ Forecasting a slump in construction immediately after the war, Westheim added that the criteria for any new building would be the maximum of efficiency coupled with the minimum of the simplest materials – a formula on which Taut's housing could not be faulted. Westheim's thesis was shared by Cürlis and Stephany in their book *Die Künstlerischen und*

Wirtschaftlichen Irrwege unserer Baukunst, which Taut cited approvingly in *Die Stadtkrone*.¹¹

Two other appeals for simplicity were also written in 1917 – one by Behne, one by Heinrich Tessenow. In his attack on the Werkbund, published in *Die Tat*, Behne dismissed the Werkbund premise that art and industry could be brought together. It was an abuse of art, he said, to attempt to package biscuits in artistic or tasteful wrappers or to 'create' artistic spoons. The only criteria for such things should be function and practicality – not 'taste'.

A spoon is good when it is made from suitable materials, is practical and honest – with the proviso that the best guarantee for the design of such a spoon would be to entrust it to a sensitive modern artist. Of course it would be better! The spoon would be even better still if one no longer bothered about the art in the life of the spoon. The same holds true for art and biscuit wrappers, matchboxes...and garden furniture.¹²

This proposition refuted the whole conception of the Werkbund as a meeting ground where artists, designers and industrialists could come together and, by their joint efforts, elevate the standards of industrial and commercial design. The much vaunted partnership between Behrens and the AEG was, according to Behne, a sham: for art had nothing to do with biscuit packets or garden furniture, or, for that matter, with light fittings or electric kettles.

To emphasize his scorn for 'good taste', Behne went even further, and claimed that the trashy furniture and kitschy knick-knacks which were anathema to the Werkbund were, in fact, preferable to the ghastly good taste of the *Kunstpuritaner*. At least, he said, they were interesting and amusing. 'If I were given the choice between a room designed "artistically" by Bruno Paul and the average, kitsch-filled room, then I would choose the latter: at least it is amusing and holds its surprises. I would choose it not out of contrariness, but by following my true feelings.'¹³ As alternatives to the precious artiness of Bruno Paul, Behne advocated ultra-functionalism in the case of the spoon, and an indulgence in kitsch in the case of interior design. Both positions were vigorously anti-intellectual, the former replacing any value judgements by simple criteria of performance, the latter wallowing delightedly in whatever came along.

Behne felt that true art could only appear when all the would-be art and pseudo-artiness had been stamped out. The way forward to the new art was to be found, he said, via the primitive. 'Simply develop a feeling for the primitive in life, and art will appear over the horizon.'¹⁴ Taking up Taut's opposition of the sacred and profane, Behne placed these opposing, yet complementary poles in a reciprocal relationship: the more simple, straightforward and honest the daily life, the more splendid and dazzling the art. 'Isn't that a splendid ambition: to enjoy a plain, simple and practical life, untroubled and without pretensions, finding pleasure in self-sufficiency – and in a magnificently proud, passionate, and illuminating art.'¹⁵ The polemical style of this article and Behne's description of a 'splendid ambition', to be achieved through simplicity

and practicality, suggest that, like Taut, he had been influenced by Hiller's writings. Certainly, Behne's appeal to primitivism and creativity echoed a passage in Hiller's proto-Activist tract *Die Weisheit der Langenweile*, in which he suggested that modern man should strive for 'a new naivety, like nature's children in the sphere of culture'.¹⁶

Behne's call for a return to the simple and the primitive was endorsed in Tessenow's *Handwerk und Kleinstadt*, begun in 1917, completed by Whitsun 1918, and published in 1919. Tessenow's plea for small-towns, *Handwerk*, mutualism and economic autonomy was based on the theories of Kropotkin and Landauer and was, as we shall see, to influence Taut's own work in 1919.

It is clear that Taut's housing scheme for the new town conformed exactly to current thinking on primitivism and austerity. Similarly, his plans for a symbolic city crown or temple can be related to contemporary projects. Obvious antecedents are the Festspielhaus in Bayreuth – opened in 1875, the Mathildenhöhe at Darmstadt (1900–14), Jaques-Dalcroze's music school at Hellerau (designed 1911 by Tessenow), and Steiner's first Goetheanum (1913–20). On a theoretical, unrealized or unrealizable level, Taut's principal source must have been Paul Scheerbart. He would also have known of Theodor Fritsch's scheme for *Die Stadt der Zukunft* (1896), which was also based on a circular, zoned plan,¹⁷ centred around a monumental group comprising public buildings, museums, an opera house, library and 'the cathedral of German Christianity'.¹⁸ Taut was also acquainted with Fidus's plans for theosophical temples, with their vivid use of water, glass and coloured light,¹⁹ and of the fantastic architectural fantasies published by Otto Kohtz in 1909 as *Gedanken über Architektur*.²⁰ Kohtz probably shared in Scheerbart a mutual source with Taut. A less obvious, but very interesting source may have been the scheme suggested by the brothers Horneffer for 'Das heilige Haus'. In an article of this name, published in 1912, August Horneffer advocated a return to practical Christianity. One way of achieving this, he said, would be to build new centres and focuses for Christian faith – 'heilige Häuser'. 'Only religion can bring together the divergent cultural components into a unity and create sacred houses with a compelling power of attraction.'²¹ As a prototype for the sacred houses, Horneffer suggested the lodges of the medieval masons, which he saw as: 'a model for this close union of devotion, instruction, sociability, festivity, and pleasure in art.'²² Ernst Horneffer returned to this theme in a long article on freemasonry which appeared in *Die Tat* in two parts in October and November 1912.²³ As a precursor to the subsequent views of Taut and Behne, Horneffer's vision of a new religiosity gained through architecture is extremely striking. 'To comprehend the world through the image of building, to summarize the entire idealism of man in the image of symbolic construction – this idea is so simple and therefore so convincing, that I credit it with an inexhaustible vitality.'²⁴ As Taut was later to do, he asked: 'Doesn't the symbol of building offer the most profound interpretation of nature which can be imagined? It is a form of worship which reveals the most

intimate essence of nature.'²⁵ Taut himself had contributed to *Die Tat*, and it is likely that he knew of these articles by the journal's former editor.

If similar schemes were suggested by a radical conservative like Fritsch, a mystic and theosophist like Fidus and by Christian freemasons like the Horneffers, then why is Taut's *Stadtkrone* scheme particularly interesting, and in what way is it an Activist plan?

To return to Poggioli's definition of Activism, it was an attempt to redirect the individualistic impulses of Expressionism towards a more practical or tangible goal of social reform. In Taut's case, we have defined his Activism as an attempt to bring together his pre-war, Sturm- and Scheerbart-inspired Expressionist inclinations with his reformist spirit. The plan for the new city clearly did this. The reformist tendencies of the Gartenstadtgesellschaft were represented by the housing; the subjective, Expressionist tendencies by the *Kristallhaus*. The new city, however, was more than an enforced marriage between these two disparate elements.

At a superficial glance, the ideology of primitivism, as expressed in the row-housing, was the very antithesis of the ideology of fantasy – the exotic and doubtlessly very expensive *Kristallhaus*. Taut, however, conceived the two as being intimately related, the former as an expression of *Volk* and of the virtues of the *Volk*, the latter as a physical approximation of *Geist*. This relationship, as already noted, was to be perceived empathetically, as a mutual resonance. Although the resonance was mutual, however, the direction of Taut's social engineering ran from *Volk* to *Geist*, and from there to paradise. As society improved itself through an intensification of *Geist*, so the *Volkswille* would move through *Geist* to paradise.

The two mutually resonant components, *Volk* and *Geist* were, according to Taut, linked through the personality of the architect and through his work. Taut also suggested that this resonance could be given a physical and plastic form through the harmony of colour: 'The glowing light of purity and transcendence shimmers over the carnival of unrefracted, radiant colours. The city spreads out like a sea of colour, as proof of the happiness in the new life.'²⁶ He offered no details of his proposed colour harmonies, and, as the text was accompanied only by line drawings, there is no way of knowing what he intended. At Falkenberg he had used earth colours – browns, greens, yellows – but it was probably his intention to use stronger tones in the new city, in order to match the intensity of the coloured glass in the *Kristallhaus*. At this time Taut was particularly attracted to the painting of Chagall, and one might guess that Taut would have adopted Chagall's colour range, with dark resonant reds and blues, for his city harmonies. Another possible source was Wilhelm Ostwald's *Farbatlas*, a quasi-scientific theory of colour harmony, which Ostwald described at the 1916 Werkbund conference at Bamberg.²⁷

That Taut should have seen no discrepancy between his primitivist and fantastic architecture, between the secular and the sacred, was quite

in accord with contemporary Activist thinking. In his collection of aphorisms, written between 1913 and 1922, Kurt Hiller insisted that ecstasy was a precondition for rationalism. 'Rationalism does not exclude ecstasy: no, it needs it. Ecstasy is the motor which sets the machinery of practical reason in motion and keeps it going – its heart.'²⁸ As Hiller described ecstasy as the motor which sets rationalism in motion, so Taut's *geistig* focus, the *Kristallhaus*, was intended to inspire the *Volk* and the *Volkswille*, and thus move the *Volk* nearer to paradise.

The Activist paradise, furthermore, was not the rural idyll of the *Bodenreformer* or of Tessenow, but was conceived as a well-functioning city. It was an eminently reachable paradise. Hiller made this quite clear in the first of his self-consciously Activistic essays, 'Philosophie des Ziels'. 'Paradise is no Garden of Eden: rather, it looks like a beautiful, broad city... Paradise is not arcadian (although the lover will find the arcadian in it): much more, it displays the most fabulous civilization, with industry, technology, finance, schools, communications – everything.'²⁹ Hiller's 'attainable paradise' could almost be a description of Taut's new city, and typified the Activists' intention to contain the Expressionist ecstasy and to relate it to practical ends.

The politics of Activism

In his plan for the new city, Taut saw the resonant relationship between *Volk* and *Geist* as an egalitarian relationship. He wrote: 'The architecture becomes a crystalline expression of human stratification. Everything is accessible to everybody. Each person will find a niche according to his desires. There will be no conflict, for people of similar opinions will find each other.'¹ The architecture of the *Stadtkrone* itself reflected, said Taut, the mutualist ideals of the new society, the ideals of the *Gemeinschaft*. Thus the theatre, the opera house and the two *Volkshäuser* were intended to express the social freedom and the natural social intercourse of the *Gemeinschaft*. 'The crowning climax is formed by the massive complex made up of the four large buildings which, in their cruciform plan, can be seen as a symbolic expression of fulfilment. On this plane, the socially orientated aspirations of the *Volk* find their realization.'² All four buildings are in harmony both with each other, and with the ideals of the *Volk*. 'The *Volkshäuser* strike a similar note – the full, harmonious tone of human brotherhood.'³ The *Kristallhaus* – as the architectural embodiment of pure *Geist* was supported, both physically and symbolically by the *Volkshäuser*.

The dream of an harmonious *Menschengemeinschaft* was, as we have seen, the basis of Landauer's romantic socialism. Socialism to Landauer, was synonymous with *Gemeinschaft*, which, itself, was synonymous with the fruitful symbiosis of *Geist* and *Volk*. The gospel of romantic socialism was given expression in *Die Stadtkrone* in the essay 'Aufbau', by Erich Baron, who was Taut's political mentor during the war years.⁴ Just as Landauer had claimed that 'The socialist comprehends the whole of society',⁵ so Baron, in 'Aufbau', wrote: 'He who loves all forms of existence has become the conscious creator of communal life – he is a socialist. The idealistic aim of romantic, visionary socialism is to succeed in translating the abundance of the heart into an all-penetrating *Geist*.'⁶ Taut was very enthusiastic about Baron's contribution, which clearly echoed Taut's own faith in lyrical, romantic socialism – in 'socialism in the non-political, supra-political sense', which he appealed to in his own essay.⁷ The degree of Taut's enthusiasm for Baron's visionary essay can be judged from a letter which he wrote to his brother Max in October 1917: 'I've just had a great delight: Baron has given me his manuscript for *Die Stadtkrone*, so everything is now ready. Perhaps I'll send you a copy. The manuscript is very good and heartening, for it shows us our

43 Erich Baron.



world.'⁸ For both Taut and Baron, romantic, chiliastic socialism was the contemporary equivalent to and replacement for religion. Taut called it 'Christianity in a new form',⁹ and Baron compared it to the transcendental faith of the middle ages: 'Just as medieval man proceeded from religious confession to a higher consciousness, so the social sphere swells and climbs towards the divine – cosmic – artistic universe.'¹⁰

Obviously, the socialism of Landauer, Taut and Baron in 1916–17 was quite different from the socialism of the political parties. However, if one does compare 'romantic' and 'practical' socialism it becomes clear that they were not only dissimilar, but actually in direct opposition to each other.

Throughout the First World War and the German revolution, the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD) and its offshoot, the Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (USPD), adhered to the Erfurt Programme of 1891. The Erfurt Programme was firmly grounded on Marxist doctrine, and insisted that socialism would be the achievement of the working classes alone: all other classes were bound to property, and thus bound to support the existing social order. This first tenet of the SPD was totally rejected by Landauer, who spurned the orthodoxies of Marxism and the organized politics of the proletarian parties. Landauer damned Marxism as a blind faith in science: 'the man who produced this drug in his laboratory was called Karl Marx. Karl Marx, Professor, has given us a credulous faith in science instead of spiritual knowledge, politics and parties instead of the desire for civilization and culture.'¹¹ Marx, according to Landauer, was a philistine, and his political theory was nothing more than the philistine worship of technology and technological progress.¹² Landauer also dismissed the Marxist belief in a revolutionary proletariat. Far from being the revolutionary vanguard of society, Landauer identified the urban proletariat as the stronghold of philistinism and parochialism. 'If it came to revolution today, no part of the population would understand less about what was to be done than the industrial proletariat.'¹³ In Landauer's analysis, not only did Marxism fail to offer a workable alternative to capitalism, it actually supported capitalism by accepting, as presuppositions, the centralized state and a centralized bureaucracy. This was apparently confirmed in August 1914, when the SPD voted unanimously in favour of war credits and acquiesced in the Kaiser's

Burgfrieden pact – a freezing of the political status quo for the duration of the war.

Landauer was in no doubt as to who should lead the 'romantic' socialists into battle against the philistines – the poets. 'We are poets, and we want to clear away the science-swindlers, the Marxists, the unfeeling, the hollow – those without *Geist*.'¹⁴ This was not only highly antagonistic, it was also supremely élitistic. Only the especially gifted individual, the artist, said Landauer, could give birth to the *Geist* in the *Volk*. 'They were individuals, men of inner might, representatives of the *Volk*, who gave birth to *Geist* in the *Volk*.'¹⁵ The unique role of the artist as a guide and leader of the spiritual development of society at large was also a theme with which Taut had concerned himself. His *Sturm* article of 1914, 'Eine Notwendigkeit', insisted that: 'Great art always exists first in the artist alone. The *Volk* may learn from it themselves, or wait until their teacher arrives.'¹⁶ At the Werkbund conference, later in the same year, Taut attacked Muthesius's position as 'philistine' and 'unfelt' – an echo, perhaps, of Landauer's critique of Marx – and suggested that the future of the Werkbund should be entrusted to a creative élite. He said that instead of elevating the typical and the average to an undeserved pre-eminence, the Werkbund should foster and nurture the skills of the talented few at the top of the pile.

Art represents a pyramid, which widens towards its base. Above, at the apex, stand the most able – the artists with ideas. The broadening base means nothing more than a levelling down of these ideas. On no account can I understand the typical in any other way, and I find it exceedingly depressing that we cannot bring ourselves always to trust simply in the artists at the top.¹⁷

The sources for Taut's egoist view of the artist's role were Stirner and Nietzsche. Taut's son Heinrich recalls that his father was greatly influenced by Stirner's major work, *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*, which he re-read on numerous occasions. Taut clearly identified strongly with the Stirnerian egoist, with the isolated leader whose life is sustained by the force of his own imagination and by an inviolable confidence in his own capacity for revolutionary human consciousness.¹⁸

He was also a convinced Nietzschean. As early as 1904 he wrote to his brother Max: 'I've read Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* over the last three months – a book of enormous and serious vitality. I've learnt a lot from it.'¹⁹ Taut's existing inclination towards Stirner and Nietzsche would have been reinforced at Cologne in 1914 by his contact with Obrist and van de Velde.²⁰ A few years earlier, J. A. Lux had dubbed Obrist the Max Stirner of the applied arts. Van de Velde had made an intensive study of Nietzsche's writings in the 1880s, and after 1900 became a member of the group of Nietzsche devotees which had assembled around Count Kessler in Berlin. He remodelled the Nietzsche Archive in Weimar in 1903 and between 1910 and 1914 was involved with plans for a Nietzsche monument, also for Weimar. It is illuminating to compare the already quoted extract from Taut's Werkbund conference speech to Nietzsche's description of the artist in 'Wir Künstler'.

It is enough to love, to hate, to desire, simply to experience... we are immediately gripped by the spirit and the power of the dream, and we ascend the most hazardous paths with open eyes and indifferent to all dangers, high onto the roofs and towers of fantasy, without any dizziness, as if born to climb – we sleep walkers of the day! We artists! We concealers of naturalness! We moonstruck and God-struck ones! We deadly silent, indefatigable wanderers on heights that we do not perceive as heights, but as our plains, our places of safety.²¹

Nietzsche's vision of the artist as superman, as a man elevated above normal humanity, found an echo in Taut's pyramid image. It was later to provide the leitmotiv for *Alpine Architektur*.

A further source for the pyramid image was, as Franciscono has shown, Kandinsky's *Über das Geistige in der Kunst*.²² At the head of the pyramid, said Taut, there should be a dictator. 'I therefore suggest that for all artistic questions, we should arrange to elect a recognized artist as a dictator, whose decision would be absolute... A dictatorship in artistic matters – I am quite certain, ... that therein lies the only possible way in which good, artistic values might be promoted.'²³ Taut repeated this call for an artistic dictator in his open letter to the Werkbund conference at Bamberg in 1916. No text survives, but Gropius mentioned Taut's demand in a letter to Osthaus, written in June 1916. Gropius wrote that he found Taut's ideas excellent, but added: 'Only the suggestion of an artistic dictator is, in this form, unwise. I've begged him to moderate this passage in his paper.'²⁴ In the context of the liberal Werkbund, Taut's call for a dictator struck a jarring and discordant note. In Activist circles, however, it would hardly have raised an eyebrow.

The Activist programme, as formulated principally by Hiller, was vigorously élitist and anti-democratic. Like Taut, Hiller saw in a dictatorship the means of achieving concrete intellectual or social reforms. In an article published in the 1919 *Ziel* yearbook, Hiller praised the direct power of dictatorship and contrasted this strength to the weakness of liberalism. 'Dictatorship also belongs to the permitted means, indeed, it is the means par excellence. Do not tremble at the wrath of this word!... Dictatorship simply means reaching the goal by the most powerful methods – in contrast to flabby "anything-goes", to laissez-faire, to empty, tired liberalism.'²⁵ This paean to dictatorship was an extreme statement of the Activists' belief in the aristocratic role and status of the artist. The leading Activist theorist, Rudolf Leonhard, wrote in 1919–20: 'The majority of rebels were aristocrats: only aristocrats understand how to rebel; our ideal will be near, when all aristocrats become rebels.'²⁶ The belief in an aristocracy of *Geist* tied together several strands of the Activist ideology. It stood for the rejection of democracy, which was seen by the Activists as the opponent of *Geist* and of messianic idealism.²⁷ By its nature, the aristocratic spirit rejected the politics and the culture of the masses, thus endorsing Landauer's attack on the materialism and philistinism of Marxism and proletarian socialism.

In terms of the internal dynamics of Activism, the concept of an aristocracy endorsed the romantic picture of the artist or intellectual as

the lone enlightened voice in the philistine crowd. At the same time as Hiller was writing in praise of dictatorship, Landauer was penning this hymn of praise to the poet. 'The poet is the leader in the choir. At the same time, however, he is the splendidly isolated figure who stands his ground against the multitude, like the solo tenor in the Ninth Symphony, who sings his own melody with inexorable momentum above the massed choir. He is the eternal rebel.'²⁸ This portrayal of the poet as both aristocratic and isolated corresponds exactly to Massimo Bontempelli's general observation that 'the avant-garde is by nature solitary and aristocratic; it loves the initiated and the ivory tower'.²⁹

During the war years, Taut clearly cast himself in this role, as isolated, misunderstood, and undervalued. His frame of mind early in 1918 can be judged from a letter which he wrote to Max Taut from Bergisch-Gladbach.

The work at the Stellawerk has now become unbearable and I suspect that they want to get rid of me. But under no circumstances will I co-operate. Everything really looks so totally hopeless for us true architects that the way out appears ever nearer and easier. How loathsome politics now is! Stinking filth. But I *shan't* run away, my *Glanzwelt* lives inside me – even if I take it with me to the grave. Farewell, dear brother, keep your courage. You fit better in the world.³⁰

This brief extract is typically avant-gardistic. Taut portrayed himself as a 'pure' artist, oppressed by the mundane world and by the dirty and unpalatable realities of politics. His response was also typically avant-gardistic: to take refuge in a private world, in a private utopia. The last sentence – 'You fit better in this world' – is pure agonism.

As Poggioli has shown, the tendency of the avant-garde towards aristocratic isolation was the response to the alienation – social, economic and political, which society at large imposes upon the avant-garde artist.³¹ In his study of Expressionist literature, Walter Sokel has devoted an entire chapter to the theme of alienation. The chapter, entitled 'Poeta Dolorosus', traces the potent mix of Hegelianism and the Judeo-Christian belief in the persecuted prophet-saviour, which went into the Expressionist vision of the artist as isolated genius.³²

The messianic appeals of the Activists were clearly derived from this Expressionist tradition. Hiller's description of the *Literat* as 'the prophet, the leader' and Taut's description of architecture as a 'priestly...divine calling' are indications that the Activists were casting themselves in the Expressionist role of prophet and saviour, and, by implication, offering themselves for persecution. There were differences, however, for the Activists lacked the fatalism of their Expressionist counterparts, and were thus unable to accept their isolation with the same resigned equanimity. Both Expressionism and Activism had chiliastic roots. As Sokel has written, in the context of Expressionism: 'The crucified is also the saviour. Persecuted at present, he will inherit the kingdom of the elect.'³³ But whereas the Expressionists saw no foreseeable end to their martyrdom, the Activists wanted paradise tomorrow, or, failing that, the next day. Thus the Activists identified themselves with the cult of prophetic genius, yet could not accept the isolation and impotence

which went with it. Their solution to this problem was the *Bund* – the formalized group or council.

Shortly after the outbreak of war, Hiller suggested, in an article in *Zeit-Echo*,³⁴ that the intellectuals should abandon their fondly nurtured individuality and should work together to resolve the crisis brought about by the war. The natural leaders of intellect and *Geist* should form together into a *Bund*. He reiterated his plea in 'Philosophie des Ziels', his first Activist manifesto, in which he questioned the power of the individual against the folly of millions. 'The strong man is strongest when alone? Stupid, most dubious maxim! What is one strong man against millions of weak ones? But only twenty strong men, united in their ardour, would certainly be something against a billion weaklings who simply incorporate a common impotence.'³⁵ The sole hope for the *geistig* élite in combating the mass genocide was to speak as one united voice, as a *Bund*: 'Geistig men, let us form a *Bund*! This flare (the war is still blustering)...I will shoot this flare into your firmament. Let us form a *Bund*, so that those things over which we have been in agreement for millennia and of which nothing has yet been accomplished, will at last stream into life.'³⁶ The *Bund*, said Hiller, was the vehicle which would link *Geist* and *Macht*: 'What do we want? Paradise. What achieves it? *Geist*. What is needed in addition? Power. How is power to be won? By working together.'³⁷ Hiller's desire to order the forces of individualism into some form of coherent group reflects the complex relationship between the alienated, anarchically inclined artist, and the wider society. As Poggioli has noted:

Avant-garde individualism is not strictly libertarian, as its cult of the 'happy few' demonstrates. On one hand, the anarchistic state of mind presupposes the individualistic revolt of the 'unique' against society in the largest sense. On the other, it presupposes solidarity within a society in the restricted sense of that word – that is to say, solidarity within the community of rebels and libertarians.³⁸

The idea of the *Bund*, however, was not only a typically avant-gardistic response to alienation, it was also a current concern of the German intelligentsia.

Hiller's immediate sources for the *Bund* would have included Simmel and Tönnies, as proponents of the antithesis of *Gesellschaft* and *Gemeinschaft*, and, more directly, Hans Blüher and Landauer. Blüher was the historian of the *Wandervogel* movement and subsequently a contributor to *Das Ziel*. This mixture of radical conservatism and romantic socialism is only one example of the appeal which the *Bund* held for both the radical right and the anarchist left. In the pre-war decade the *Bund* was promoted with equal enthusiasm by Avenarius, *Kunstwart* and the *Dürerbund*, by Diederichs and the *Tat* circle, and by Wyneken, Kropotkin and Landauer.

Hiller's most direct source was Landauer's Sozialistische Bund, which was founded in June 1908. But there were profound differences between the role assigned to the *Bund* by Landauer and that assigned by Hiller. To Landauer, the *Bund* represented the most innocent and

natural form of social grouping, freed from any hierarchy or domination. *Bund* and *Gemeinschaft* were indistinguishable to Landauer. In *Aufruf zum Sozialismus* he defined the ideal society as: 'A federation of unions of *Bünden*; a commonwealth of communities of rural communes; a republic made up of republics of republics. Only there is freedom and order, only there is *Geist* – a *Geist* which means autonomy and community, association and independence.'³⁹ By forming together into groups with mutual interests, society could become self-regulating, said Landauer, without the need for any higher controls, without the state or the police. It was this anarchist view of the *Bund* which Taut adopted for his new city, in which, he said: 'There will be no conflict, for people of similar opinions will find each other.'⁴⁰ Although he was also opposed to the state, Hiller could not accept Landauer's idealist, anarchist solution as appropriate to the contemporary political crisis in Germany. Hiller's solution, which mediated between the formlessness of anarchy and the mediocrity and impotence of democracy, was an oligarchy of *geistig* leaders.

In an essay first written in 1917, Hiller offered his plans for the transformation of his belief in a *geistig* élite into a political programme. The essay was entitled 'Ein deutsches Herrenhaus'.⁴¹ Hiller had taken both the idea and the title from the Berlin historian Kurt Breysig, who had suggested in 1912 that a *Herrenhaus* should be established, encompassing the religious, political and creative leaders of the nation.⁴² Alfred Wolfenstein, a co-founder, with Hiller, of the Activist movement, wrote enthusiastically about this suggestion in *Die Aktion*.⁴³ Breysig's plan involved the established churches, political parties and cultural leaders. Hiller was more selective. He insisted that the *geistig* élite alone were the natural rulers of society: 'The more *geistig* the man, the more he is destined for power.'⁴⁴ The core of Hiller's argument was a long harangue against democracy, and on the impossibility of achieving a representative government via constituencies and democratic elections. Instead of the ponderous and inefficient system of parliamentary elections, Hiller suggested that the *geistig* élite should unite and proclaim themselves as the new leaders. 'This is history, albeit the history of the future. An upper chamber!...No one had appointed it, no one had elected it: one day the competent people met and said: we are it.'⁴⁵ Hiller thus translated the Expressionist idea of creative leadership into the programme for a new political élite.

The relationship of this élite to the mass of the population depended on the mutual resonance of *Geist* and *Volk*. As Hiller had already explained in 'Philosophie des Ziels':

The *geistig* man is a function of the *Volk*: in him the *Volk* is made aware of its needs, it thinks through him. For this reason, *Geist* can never be a tyrannical ruler. From the outset, his power is tacitly conferred on the *geistig* man by the *Volk*. It cannot do otherwise than appoint him as its leader, for his is the vitality of the *Volk*, its base and crown.⁴⁶

Just as in Taut's city plan the *Kristallhaus* acted as the crown of the city,

so Hiller's *geistig* man was to be the crown of the *Volk*. The *Volk*, however, was not synonymous with the masses – dismissed by Hiller with suitably aristocratic disdain as 'feeble-minded and immoral',⁴⁷ but, rather, represented the higher aspirations, the *Gemeinschaftswille*, of the people.

But the *Volk* had no powers of leadership. Adopting the pyramid analogy also favoured by Kandinsky and Taut, Hiller insisted that society could only be improved by example from above, not by grass-roots reform. 'It remains a mistake to try to cultivate the pyramid of human society from the base up. The more effective way is to work from the top.'⁴⁸ However, in order to articulate the mystical rapport between *Geist* and *Volk*, Hiller advocated a two-tier system. The lower one was to be the *Volkshaus*, which was to be a microcosm of the *Volk*, and responsible for the day-to-day administration of commerce, industry, and economic planning. It was also conceived as a 'source of information for the *Herrenhaus*'.⁴⁹ The function of the *Herrenhaus* was far more esoteric. Composed of the spontaneously self-chosen élite,⁵⁰ its mission was spiritual and philosophical, to ennoble society, to elevate the *Volk* to an ever-higher level of *Geistigkeit*.

The symbiosis of *Volk* and *Geist* through the *Volkshaus* and the *Herrenhaus* was given physical form by Taut with his plan for the *Stadtkrone*. The *Kristallhaus*, representing the spiritual strata of *Geist*, was supported by two *Volkshäuser*. Thus the realm of *Geist* was grounded on the firm base of the *Volk*, whilst the practical deliberations which would be conducted in the *Volkshaus* would take place in the reflected glow and inspiration streaming out of the spiritual focus – the *Kristallhaus* or *Herrenhaus*. As Taut explained: 'The *Volkshäuser* possess the full, harmonic tone of the human community. In them, *Geist* and soul should be elevated and matured, in order to transmit their wondrousness to all men.'⁵¹

Hiller's *bündisch* aspirations took a first step towards reality in the summer of 1917, with the foundation of the Bund zum Ziel. The group of Activists which had centred around Hiller and *Das Ziel* met between 10 and 12 August 1917, in a villa in Berlin-Westend, and formed themselves into a *Bund*. The *Leitsätze* (guiding principles) which were drawn up at the time stated the intentions of the Bund: 'The Bund zum Ziel is the active community of *geistig* orientated men, to whom *Geist* is not a game of perception or of pretty forms, but means ethical activity: a force which is not introspective, but rather concentrates on the transformation of reality, on changing the world.'⁵² Hiller subsequently described these guiding principles as 'the outcome of a preliminary discussion of the (expanded) Ziel-Circle', but gave no indication as to who was actually there. All that is known is that the *Leitsätze* carried twenty-eight signatures. Hiller's subsequent reluctance to give names probably derived from the split in the Activist camp which occurred in the winter of 1917 as a direct result of the revolution in Russia.

The success of the Russian Revolution led a number of Activists away from their previously held, aristocratic positions and turned them into

fervent advocates of proletarian revolution. A list of converts would include Becher, Frank, Rubiner and Taut's collaborator, Erich Baron, who abandoned the romantic socialism of the war years and, in 1925, became the General Secretary of the Gesellschaft der Freunde des neuen Rußland.⁵³

Even before the war, the Expressionists had hailed the life on the Russian soil as a model of Christian *Gemeinschaft*. Sokel has noted the influence on Trakl, Kafka and Kornfeld of the 'mythical-demonic' Russia of Dostoyevsky, and saw in the works of Rubiner, Goll, Becher and Frank an echo of the Russia of Tolstoy and the village *mir*. Sokel commented: 'But within and beyond the Russian experience in either form lay that which both Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy proclaimed and the village community represented – the image of the fraternal way of life of apostolic Christianity.' He concluded: 'For the German Expressionists, Russia pointed the way back to Christ.'⁵⁴ This Expressionist infatuation with Russia, when combined with a successful revolution, gave a massive stimulus to the chiliastic expectations of the *Literaten* and intellectuals in Germany.

In the period between October 1917 and November 1918, however, there was little exact information to be had in Germany as to the true nature of structure of the new Russian society. As a result, an idealized picture of revolutionary Russia was created, a picture which was based more on wish-projection than on facts.

For example, Adolf Behne, ever susceptible to the fashion of the moment, leapt in during the winter of 1917 with an enthusiastic greeting to the new Russian *Volk*. In an article in the *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, he wrote: 'The conscience has awoken in Russia. The *Volk* has awoken in Russia. Both are the same... The fact that it was the *Volk* which first did the new, courageous and honest deed is profoundly gratifying. It points to the way which we have to go: from society to *Volk*, from classes and status to unity.'⁵⁵ As if to unite the revolutionary Russian *Volk* with the idealized view of the Orient nurtured by contemporary German intellectuals, Behne cited Ku Hung Ming's approval of the Russian people: 'the Russians, whom the Chinaman Ku Hung Ming named in his extraordinarily valuable book, as the best, healthiest, most amiable and most generous nation in Europe'.⁵⁶ Behne concluded his article: 'The awakening of the conscience in a great nation is an act of the deepest inner strength, which we may witness only with emotion.'⁵⁷ Behne followed this first piece up with a series of articles on Russian art and architecture which were published in the *Sozialistische Monatshefte* in 1918. The articles were little more than a series of potted essays on the history of Russian painting and design. At that stage, Behne had no knowledge of or information about recent Russian activity in the arts.⁵⁸

More interesting than Behne's speculative articles, but still in a similarly idolatrous vein, was an account written by Taut of a visit to Kowno.⁵⁹ It was published in the *Sozialistische Monatshefte* in September 1918. In his earlier account of his visit to Constantinople, Taut had

described the Orient as the 'true mother of Europe'.⁶⁰ By 1918, this maternal role was given over to Russia. Taut's first sentence began: 'At the threshold of Mother Russia'.⁶¹ In Kowno, Taut was enraptured by the simplicity and naivety of the wooden buildings, and by the brightly coloured decorations on them. Although he admitted that Kowno was only on the fringes of Russia, he took the example of Kowno as representative of Russian culture as a whole.

Certainly, all this is only at the periphery of the great Russian culture. But look at the brilliant ultramarine blue, red, brown, green and yellow painted shutters on the doors and windows. Everything is brightly and prettily painted in a naive, childlike manner – the marvellous architecture of the town hall also has this childlike charm. It is folk art: some shop signs have such artistic directness and are so full of expression, that they could have been painted by Henri Rousseau.⁶²

Following on from his analysis of the *Roland* at Brandenburg and his account of Constantinople, Taut explained the roots of this folk art vitalistically. It was part of, and the direct result of true 'life': 'Only where there is life is there art: real life – not life hemmed in by abstractions.'⁶³ The moral was clearly drawn: 'The *Volksgeist* speaks clearly enough in everything: Live! Live for the moment! This living is everything, and itself remains art.'⁶⁴ This idealized picture of post-revolutionary Russia was one of an innocent and harmonious *Volk* striving via their simple, natural form of life towards *Geist*. Thus socialism in Russia was equated, at least at this stage, with the socialism of the Activists. The Russian Revolution was seen to have vindicated the Activist philosophy of a progression, through *Geist*, from *Volk* to paradise. In addition, the Russian culture was seen by German observers to combine both the 'fraternal way of life of apostolic Christianity' with the transcendental wisdom of the Orient, thus reinforcing both these models as paradigms for the eagerly awaited new age.

The chiliastic expectations stimulated by the revolution in Russia found apparent justification with the outbreak of revolution in Germany in November 1918, and the Activists moved quickly to exploit the new situation.