

Modernism in German Architecture (SAH, Cincinnati, OH, April 2008)

Volker M.

CALL FOR PAPERS:

"The Limits of Community"?--Bourgeois and Middle-Class Modernism in German Architecture from c.1900 to 1940

Session at the 61st annual meeting of the Society of Architectural Historians (SAH), Cincinnati, Ohio, USA, April 23-27, 2008
(www.sah.org)

As is confirmed in countless declamatory manifestos, the form of social organization favored by the architectural avant-garde in the early twentieth century was the particular and unique community rather than that of the broader, capitalist society.

The historiography of twentieth-century architecture, particularly in the German context, has followed this path by theorizing notions of community, rather than researching the complex interrelations of developer, architect, and city planner. As a result, we know in great detail the workings of the agonist, avant-garde group that built next to nothing, but very little about the mainstream commercial practices that built the banks, offices, shops, factories, and bourgeois housing that composed 95% of the building stock of a city like Berlin.

Already during the 1920s this one-sided fascination with "community" was criticized. For example, the philosopher Helmuth Plessner vigorously affirmed "society" in the book *The Limits of Community: A Critique of Social Radicalism* (1924) as the appropriate realm of human interaction based on formal adherence to social conventions. Moreover, Plessner declared the creation and defense of society to be a specific concern of the middle classes and the bourgeoisie. This argument offers a useful viewpoint from which to analyze anew the contributions of the middle classes to the architectural culture of Germany in the first half of the twentieth century. Both middle-class architects and clients argued for the individual as the acting agent in modern society. Moreover, bourgeois domestic architecture affirmed the modern metropolis as an adequate space of and for modern society.

This session invites papers that deal with commercial and

residential architecture, which reflects an affirmative view of capitalist society, the architects and clients who produced it, and contemporary theoretical discussions that are relevant to the analysis of German modern architecture in the early twentieth century.

Please send abstracts to:

Prof. Volker M. Welter, University
of California at Santa Barbara, Arts 1234, Santa Barbara, CA
93106-7080, telephone: +1-805-893-5875, fax: +1-805-893-7117, e-mail:
welter@arthistory.ucsb.edu;
or to

Prof. Iain Boyd Whyte, Architecture, University of Edinburgh,
School of Arts, Culture and Environment, 20 Chambers Street,
Edinburgh EH1 1JZ, Scotland, United Kingdom, telephone:
+44-131-650-2322, facsimile: +44-131-650 8019, email:
i.b.whyte@ed.ed.ac.uk

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