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Hannes Meyer at the Bauhaus (1927-1930)

The main purpose of this research project is to investigate the role that Hannes Meyer (1889 – 1954) had in shaping the Bauhaus school, both during the years it was active and thereafter in gaining the reputation it did. I propose to explore the different initiatives that Meyer introduced and to examine the ideologies that stood behind them. Meyer was one of the leading figures among the creators of the modern movement in architecture, but he was underestimated due to the fact that his focus was abstract and because he worked on few buildings only. Meyer's abstractionism is linked with the ethics of architecture and its role a servant of society.

Meyer's professional career extended over a few countries, from early on in Switzerland and Germany, and later in the Soviet Union and Mexico. In 1927, he proposed a drawing for the Union of Nation's palace in Geneva, a drawing that appears frequently in books on the story of the Modern Movement in architecture. His stay at the Bauhaus, however, both as head of the architecture department and later as director of the institution, was his most important contribution to the history of Modern Architecture. Each one of its three directors – Walter Gropius (1919-1927), Meyer (1927-1930), and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1930-1933) – made his own contribution to the Bauhaus and its ideology, but the years under Meyer's directorship were the most prosperous and successful years of the Bauhaus.

The idea of cooperation between art and industry, for example, was fulfilled under Meyer's directorship, and the different departments at the institution were very productive under him. Broad collections of house furniture prototypes (tens of prototypes of electric lamps, chairs, and wallpapers) were sold to furniture factories, and the annual income of the Bauhaus was doubled as a result of that initiative. Meyer also commissioned the two most significant buildings while at the Bauhaus, both of

which still standing today: (1) five apartment buildings in the city of Dessau, and (2) the headquarters of the Federal School of the German Trade Unions (ADGB) in Bernau. The school turned its first profit under his leadership in 1929.

Meyer was seldom mentioned in the history of architecture books, and his contribution to the Bauhaus and Modernism was investigated properly only in the 1980s. Some researchers explain his lack of appearance in these books based on his leftist political positions and other political activity. Meyer was a communist and he believed in the ideological socialism of Karl Marx and Lenin. This stand was obviously in disharmony with the common German atmosphere at the time, and it led finally to his dismissal. Other researchers mention his immigration to Russia and later to Mexico as the main reasons for his disappearance from the architectural world, decisions that put him far from the main stage of the architectural activity. Still, there are others who believe that Gropius' hostility against him was a factor in not paying enough attention to his contributions. Gropius talked in an interview about Meyer's political activities, for example, ones that caused an immense damage to the Bauhaus, he suggested.

My proposal concerns the genuine contribution that Meyer made, regardless of his political views and activities. I hope to restore his architectural stature to its rightful place.