

BAUHAUS Goes West

ALAN POWERS

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MODERN ART AND DESIGN IN BRITAIN AND AMERICA



Pages 2–3: Marcel Breuer (with F. R. S. Yorke),
pavilion for P. E. Gane Ltd at the Royal West of
England Showground, 1936

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Contents

	Introduction	6
1	Elective Affinities: England and Germany	14
2	'A simpler and more cordial accent': Walter Gropius	52
3	'The habitability of the whole': Marcel Breuer	82
4	'That lovely madman': László Moholy-Nagy	102
5	The People with No Taste: English Modernism in the 1930s	130
6	Beneath the Radar: Other <i>Bauhäusler</i> in Britain	166
7	For Better, for Worse: America's Bauhaus Affair	188
8	Dead or Alive? The Bauhaus Legacy	228
	Notes	256
	Further Reading	273
	Sources of Illustrations	274
	Acknowledgments	275
	Index	276

Elective Affinities: England and Germany

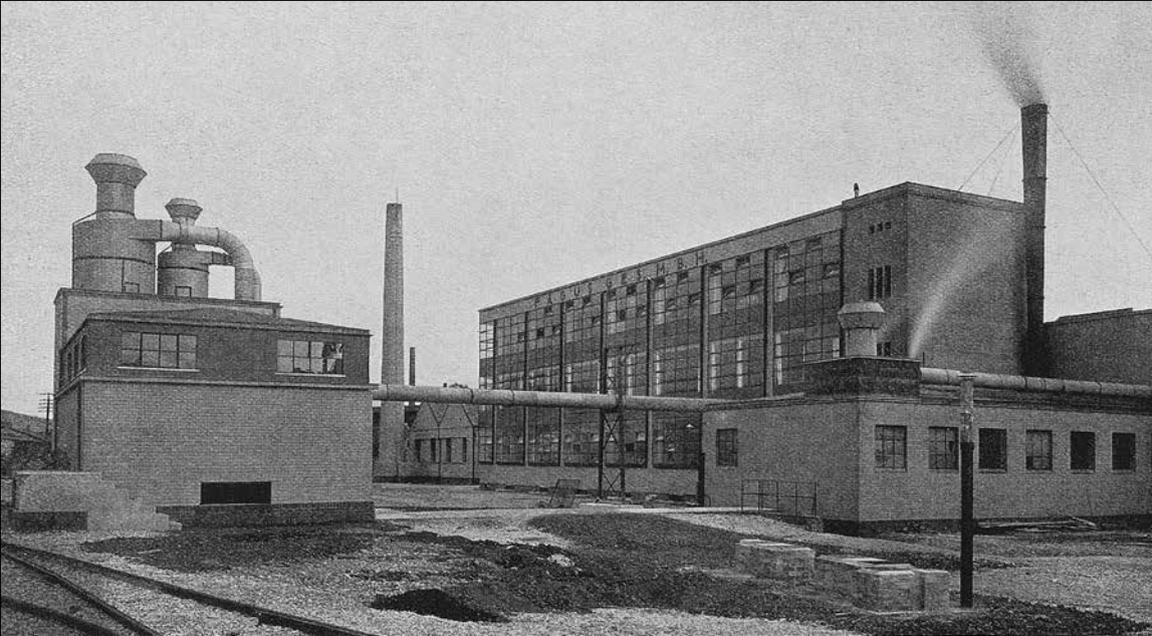
When Walter Gropius arrived in London on 18 October 1934, he was treated like a creature from another planet. Under the Nazis, the founder of the Bauhaus was no longer welcome in his home country, Germany, and remained in Britain for two and a half years before moving on to America. How different were these planets, however? While the two cultures were divided by war, language and the rival attractions of France, the background story to the reception of the Bauhaus in Britain needs to be traced in the underlying history of shared ideas.

In 1936 Nikolaus Pevsner's book *Pioneers of the Modern Movement from William Morris to Walter Gropius* popularized the narrative that ideas travelled from Britain to Germany before coming back in the form of Modernism, as represented by Gropius, who personally acknowledged the influence of Morris. The work of C. F. A. Voysey and Charles Rennie Mackintosh had influenced the art nouveau movement in Europe and thence led to Modernism proper; but at home, these 'pioneers' failed to spark Modernism of a recognizable kind, while Britain apparently took a wrong turning towards classicism. Such historical interpretations by Pevsner and others were intended to support the development of the new movements of their time and to achieve specific outcomes in the future, when scientific progress would no longer be impeded by individual ego or inappropriate memories of the past. That future was perhaps briefly credible, but the historical pathway described by Pevsner was oversimplified, and when the Platonic world of pure forms that he favoured became reality, it provoked a reaction against its emotional coldness.

The Bauhaus has often been taken as the exemplar for this imagined future, with British art and design judged adversely for its delay in arriving at similar results. Art nouveau was short-lived, and condemned in Germany as well as in Britain. True originality, as influential German thinkers now thought, lay not in instant novelty but in more appropriate past models, such as the Biedermeier style from the period after the Napoleonic wars, when classicism was tempered by sobriety and local vernacular building wisdom. After 1900, this was adopted as a touchstone of sanity and quality, in much the same way that Georgian was adopted in Britain, suggesting that a reluctance to accept superficial solutions was the main cause of British 'backwardness'. The majority of British architects chose classicism because the sobriety and informality of Arts and Crafts architecture seemed inappropriate to the rhetorical needs of the modern world. Furthermore, Britain was not alone in this apparent regression, since classicism in some guise became a universal trend in Western architecture in the first three decades of the new century; even two of the future leaders of the Bauhaus – Gropius and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe – began their careers before the First World War on lines similar to those of some of their English counterparts. First with Gropius and later with Mies, however, this classical seed developed in unexpected ways, although only later was it hailed the long-awaited new style.

When, in 1911, Gropius and his architectural partner, Adolf Meyer, completed their design for the administrative offices of the Fagus shoe-last factory near Hannover, their building showed how a new clarity of expression could be achieved with glass and steel. But this famous, glass-fronted office block with transparent corners featured in a rather dull photograph in the 1912 yearbook of the Deutsche Werkbund, and, if seen in Britain, left no recorded impact.¹ When the *Architectural Review* eventually reported on the *Faguswerke* in 1924, the article's author, Herman George Scheffauer (see below), failed to recognize its significance, describing its glass corner as 'an unnecessary, even disturbing tour de force'.² Even Gropius himself needed time to understand what he had done.³

From the British side, there is no evidence that Gropius was recognized until Scheffauer's article appeared. Even this was well ahead



Walter Gropius and Adolf Meyer, Fagus shoe-last factory, Alfeld-an-der-Leine, Lower Saxony, 1911–12, as illustrated in the 1912 yearbook of the Deutsche Werkbund, but failing to show off the features that have made it a landmark of Modernism.

of any other written tributes, but there was nonetheless a continuing interest in progressive German art and design, even during the years of the war. This took the form not only of seeking to emulate specific design features, but also of channelling the spirit that had previously animated the Arts and Crafts Movement in a new direction, where Germany had recently shown the way. Individuals in both countries believed in a deeper possibility, that design could lift up the whole of society through a process beyond rational explanation.

Elective affinities

In *Howards End* (1910), E. M. Forster reminded English readers how far the liberal Germanic upbringing of the Schlegel sisters could temper the insensitive and materialist values of the Wilcox family. In fact, the intellectual and spiritual pathways of the two cultures had been intertwined for centuries, despite a growing sense that France and Germany represented mutually exclusive choices. German music, philosophy and science made a stronger impression than art or literature, but there was common ground in the Romantic period, including the belief that

science, art and technology were fundamentally unified.⁴ In Germany, thinking about the role of design was a way of investigating ‘the deep structures of reality, a path overlooked by Enlightenment thinkers’.⁵ Nikolaus Pevsner traced William Morris’s theories, as transmitted from Goethe through Thomas Carlyle, ‘back to the Classic-Romantic school of Germany’, suggesting that his parallel between Morris and Gropius was not accidental, since they had common intellectual roots.⁶

An essential aspect of German thinking was that people and their surroundings have a fluid interaction. This aspiration to a higher form of existence belonged to the long tradition of mental and spiritual improvement known as *Bildung*, an education that also constitutes an individual’s process of inner growth. Lacking a direct English translation, its equivalent in Britain could be found among a section of the middle class who followed the urging of the poet and critic Matthew Arnold in *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) to bring ‘sweetness and light’ (a phrase borrowed from Jonathan Swift) to those less fortunate than themselves, and who, while sensitive to the arts, steered away from the excesses of *fin de siècle* decadence. Women as well as men thus found a purpose amid inequality and materialism. These were the patrons of Arts and Crafts and, in the next generation, of Modernism, and their desire for social change marched alongside their preference for simplicity and freedom. Disdained by the Wilcoxes of Edwardian England, who took their cue from higher levels of society, such English *Bildung* became the sphere of progressive educators, social entrepreneurs and artistic activists whose activities ran in parallel to related German movements.

The Bauhaus was first and foremost a school of art and design, but the process of art education is often overlooked when its products are studied. Thus the educational ideas seen in the school founded by Gropius in 1919 and stemming from Friedrich Froebel – such as bringing together fine art and craft and learning by actual physical contact with materials – had been universal in Britain since the 1890s and continued until the 1960s.⁷ Craft learning offered the potential for training industrial designers of a type that scarcely existed, but the British problem was that industry seldom expressed a demand for original work and offered little encouragement to the crafts community to make connections with it. However, it is wrong to assume, as

many did at the time and since, that all the design talent deliberately shunned the very idea of machine production. The need to compete internationally against Germany and America grew more urgent, and in 1911 twenty-seven artists and architects told the then prime minister, Henry Herbert Asquith, that 'British manufacturers no longer enjoy that superiority in machinery alone, which almost amounted to a monopoly during the middle part of the last century.'⁸ Ideas must now be the leading feature of products. Three years later, in his introduction to a translation of a German book on children's creative education as a preparation for a productive life, Viscount Haldane warned: 'It is a movement with which we will have to reckon. If we do not keep up with it our workmen will in the course of a few years compete with their fellow-workmen abroad at a serious disadvantage.'⁹

On the German side, the sense of rivalry with England in the export of goods increasingly became a conscious one, carried on in tandem with colonial and naval competition. In addition to the support given by scientific research, German industry after the Franco-Prussian War (1870–71) enjoyed an influx of capital from French reparation payments. At first, German goods were identified as 'cheap and nasty', but there were enough industrialists in Germany determined to do better. If Britain had the edge over Germany in creative invention owing to its liberal-minded art schools, Germany was catching up with its well-funded and systematic training and, through such massive enterprises as the Allgemeine Electricitäts-Gesellschaft (AEG), bringing new design principles to the mass market.

Cologne and London

In 1906, against a background of deteriorating diplomatic relationships, a group of German cultural leaders sent a letter to *The Times* in an effort to cool down the mounting opposition on both sides; it was seconded by a reciprocal letter heavy with the signatures of English artists and others associated with the Arts and Crafts Movement. The instigator was Harry Kessler, an Anglo-German count and patron of the arts who would have known all the signatories. Kessler was an unintentional contributor to the founding of the Bauhaus, which grew

out of the Kunstgewerbeschule (School of Applied Art) in the small Thuringian city of Weimar that he had encouraged his protégé, the Belgian architect-designer Henry van de Velde, to lead in rivalry to the more traditional academy; it was in this school that the Gropius-led successor institution opened under his brilliantly conceived name 'Bauhaus', whose uniqueness, brevity and relative ease of pronunciation has probably assisted the durability of the Bauhaus's reputation as much as what it actually achieved. Introducing Van de Velde was part of Kessler's attempt to help the young Grand Duke of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach emulate the glorious age of Goethe and Schiller in Weimar a hundred years earlier. In 1909 Van de Velde created new buildings for the school in a simplified art nouveau style, as well as many villas in the neighbourhood. With Kessler's patronage, he also remodelled the house on the edge of Weimar to which the incapacitated Friedrich Nietzsche had been brought by his sister. After Nietzsche's death in 1900, the house became an archive and a shrine, at a time when the philosopher's work was also popular in England.

Kessler promoted the avant-garde theatre designer Edward Gordon Craig and brought him to Weimar, without any direct outcome apart from the edition of *Hamlet* with Craig's illustrations that finally emerged from his Cranach Press in 1929. More consequential was Kessler's introduction of the new approach to lettering design devised by the British calligrapher Edward Johnston, whom he had first met in 1904. When Johnston was unable to accept Kessler's invitation to run a lettering course for art teachers in Dusseldorf in 1905, he sent in his place Anna Simons (1871–1951), a German student of his. Simons would later translate into German Johnston's manual, *Writing & Illuminating & Lettering* (1906), creating a new tradition of lettering in Germany almost single-handedly. Indeed, writing in the 1930s, an English printer recalled that, at the annual printing exhibition at Leipzig in 1914, 'I seemed to see in the German pavilions the hand of Johnston on every stall and every wall.'¹⁰

There was not only hubris in Wilhelmine Germany, but also Arnoldian self-criticism against the militaristic values in court circles, where the Kaiser set the tone in condemning all Modernist tendencies in art. The Deutsche Werkbund was an association of manufacturers

founded in 1907 in response to ‘a widespread feeling that the rapid industrialization and modernization of Germany posed a threat to the national culture’.¹¹ The Werkbund differed from the Arts and Crafts Movement in Britain in seeking to reform the design of machine products, rather than avoid the problem of ‘cheap and nasty’ goods by reverting to crafts. It affirmed that such a transition was possible, and so became a point of reference for the founders of an English equivalent, the Design and Industries Association (see below).

The Werkbund, and its extension into the Bauhaus, is commonly differentiated from the actions and beliefs of William Morris and his followers in terms of their attitudes to machinery and mass production. ‘There is a very widespread opinion that ... Morris was an uncompromising enemy of all machinery as such’, wrote E. P. Thompson in 1955, a misunderstanding caused by ‘reading *News from Nowhere* [Morris’s vision of a post-industrial future] unrelated to the conditions of its creation and to the specific statements on this issue in Morris’s other writings’.¹² Morris wanted to emphasize that it was the *way* machines had developed in Britain that was a disaster for people, for the environment and for the quality of the goods that came out of them, rather than the machines themselves, writing, ‘it is not this or that tangible steel and brass machine which we want to get rid of, but the great intangible machine of commercial tyranny which oppresses the lives of all of us’.¹³ It is hard to exaggerate the significance of reversing the still endlessly repeated view that Morris would never tolerate machinery, which, over the decades, has become engrained as a form of self-castigation by British commentators. It is too late to reverse it now, perhaps, but its revision could give us a different perspective on the Anglo-German relationship in applied arts.

Morris’s widow, Jane, was a signatory to the 1906 *Times* letter, and her daughter May showed her awareness of contemporary events by relating in a letter to the paper at the beginning of 1914 how ‘the city of Cologne has guaranteed £25,000 and given the ground for the purposes of a great exhibition by the Werkbund (an association of German arts and crafts people)’.¹⁴ In April that year, the Oberbürgermeister of Cologne spoke to the British-German Friendship Society at the Carlton Hotel in London in order to promote the event, drawing

attention to historic ties of friendship between the two cities and appropriately paying tribute to William Morris.¹⁵

In July 1914, the month before war broke out, a group of Englishmen went as official delegates to the Werkbund Exhibition. They were Ambrose Heal (1872–1959), the fourth-generation heir to the famous furniture factory and shop on Tottenham Court Road, London; a cousin of Heal’s, the architect Cecil Brewer (1871–1918), ‘electric, urbane, interested in ideas’;¹⁶ Harry Peach (1874–1936), a businessman and campaigner for social reform; E. T. Strange of the Victoria and Albert Museum; and Henry Wilson (1864–1934), president of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society.¹⁷ They were a mixed group – a retailer, a visionary industrialist, a scholar and two architects – all imbued with a desire to shake up the status quo.

Soon after the group’s return to England, Brewer wrote to Peach: ‘I am all agog with German things afloat in my head – + already I am making myself a nuisance in the profession by preaching Germany. Friends shudder + spit at my photos but I am now an apostle – of much German work.’¹⁸ Brewer’s photos might have shown the model factory by Walter Gropius and Adolf Meyer and the Glass Pavilion by Bruno Taut – as frequently reproduced in histories of modern architecture – prompting the adverse response that Brewer described, but this was not the only style on offer. A more moderate progressive traditionalism, familiar in Germany, can still be seen in Brewer’s own design for the reconstruction of the Heals shop in London, begun in 1914 – a building whose façade is classically structured without explicit classical or ‘period’ ornament, and whose steel frame was clad in Portland stone that showed the underlying construction.

Ambrose Heal and his long-time colleague, Hamilton Temple Smith (1883–1961), were designers as well as manufacturers and retailers, bringing the simplicity of Cotswold craftsmen to a wider market. Heal ‘managed to blend Ruskin’s philosophy of the ethical businessman (putting social purpose before profit) with Morris’s ideals on beauty and utility, whilst at the same time introducing an element of discreet “intellectual” showmanship’.¹⁹ Brewer, Heal and Smith, together with Peach and the potter Harold Stabler, were ringleaders in a scheme to reconstruct the ailing twenty-five-year-old Arts and Crafts Exhibition

Society by rejecting what Stabler called its 'irritating self-satisfaction + conservatism'.²⁰

The outbreak of war with Germany in August 1914 did not prevent a growing admiration for what the enemy had achieved. In early 1915 some of those who had visited Cologne, with like-minded supporters, asked the British government's Board of Trade to stage an exhibition on German design at home. Entitled 'German and Austrian Articles Typifying Successful Design', the exhibition was held over just three days at the end of March 1915 in London's Goldsmiths' Hall. Although apparently not photographed, it was nonetheless widely reported. The permanent secretary at the Board of Trade, Hubert Llewellyn Smith (1864–1945), who gave the exhibition official status, was already a supporter of its cause. Smith was the archetype of a new kind of campaigning civil servant, a disciple of Ruskin and a member of the 'new Oxford Movement' committed to 'investigating and improving the condition of the working classes'. Earlier, he had been a keen member of the Settlement Movement, collaborating with Charles Booth in his survey of social deprivation in London.²¹

The contents of the exhibition were hastily assembled, with Harry Peach's own collection of German design objects providing much of the material.²² A lengthy review in *The Times* by the critic Arthur Clutton-Brock pointed out the confusion in Britain about what German design actually was, as well as ignorance of the fact that art nouveau had long been replaced in Germany by a much more English sense of taste and decorum.²³ According to the *Manchester Guardian*, 'a large section of the public [was] sympathetic towards original efforts'.²⁴ The Royal Society of Arts journal was more defensive, acknowledging that Germany was superior in some areas, while in ceramics, for example, '[although] it is true that we are producing quantities of dull and inartistic designs and objects ... we are also doing some good and original work'.²⁵

In retrospect, this exhibition seems an astonishing event to have received official backing amid rabid anti-German campaigning. Nevertheless, it led directly to the foundation of the Design and Industries Association, whose bridge-building would make it possible, nearly twenty years later, for Gropius to both receive and accept an invitation to settle in London.

Design and Industries Association

The Design and Industries Association (DIA) would probably have been formed with or without the Cologne or London exhibitions, but the timing of its foundation, in May 1915, came logically in sequence. Among its early publications was a pamphlet containing reprints of texts about the Goldsmiths' Hall exhibition, soon to be republished by the Werkbund in German, with slightly condescending approval.²⁶

The DIA attracted talented and active people, the best remembered of whom, Frank Pick (1878–1941), the design supremo of London Underground, was unusual in being a patron rather than a producer. Harry Peach, by contrast, was a manufacturer; he was also a Fabian socialist who, in the words of Pat Kirkham, 'aimed at improving the world for all classes of society, particularly the working class, within a framework of the gradual reform of capitalism'.²⁷ Peach was the key figure in the first two decades of the DIA. A fluent German speaker, having spent a winter in Freiberg as a boy, he followed the development of product design more closely than anyone else in Britain, setting up a new enterprise in Leicester in 1907 called Dryad, initially to manufacture lightweight cane furniture in competition with similar products from Austria and Germany. Dryad's early designs were created by Benjamin Fletcher, headmaster of Leicester School of Art, which was already known as a notable centre of Arts and Crafts-based training.²⁸

The DIA reached out to a working-class public through imaginative exhibitions of affordable furnishings displayed in well-chosen places, representing good quality and durability, as well as the avoidance of bad taste. Aspiring to a lack of self-consciousness, they were 'modern' as much by default as intention. The DIA exhibition 'Household Things', held at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in 1920, included 'bad' objects, such as 'biscuit boxes made to look like gold bags or rows of books', as well as 'good' objects.²⁹ More than 26,000 people visited the exhibition, and many bought a catalogue that told them, among other things, how in crockery 'flutings and raised ornament and unnecessary twists and curls have been avoided'.³⁰ The exclusion of excess visual 'noise' was the overt message, while Germanic *Bildung* was the subtext: 'It is for the public to see that a demand is created for



Dryad Ltd was founded by Harry Peach in 1907 near Leicester to make cane and willow seating. It was through this company, which later diversified, that Peach became a leading figure in the DIA.

articles of everyday use that are simple, fitted for use, and delightful in their conception. In this way there will be some addition made to the joy of living.³¹ No colour images of this exhibition exist, but its character probably resembled illustrations in the 1919 *Studio Yearbook of Decorative Art* by the artist Hall Thorpe (pl. 1), who designed the exhibition rooms. Colour was a leading theme for the DIA, with painted deal furniture on display. Percy Wells, head of the Cabinet Department at the Shoreditch Technical Institute in London, had devised a new method for painting furniture that involved a combed surface (pl. 2), with one colour laid over another. ‘The cheap bedroom “suites” of satin walnut,’ Wells wrote, ‘though ugly in design, would look more pleasant painted in good colours than polished in the ghastly yellow which has always been the recognized finish for them.’³²

Adopting an approach originated by William Morris and continued by the self-effacing but widely respected architect-educator William Richard Lethaby (1858–1931), the DIA liked to discover timeless forms already in production that had no reason to change

and develop. Lethaby looked forward to ‘our coming days of poverty’ after the war, when we might have more of what he considered riches: the Epicurean pleasures of ‘learning and beauty, and music and art, coffee and omelettes’ – so much better understood on the Continent, especially the last two simple sensual pleasures.³³ Disdain for omelettes, art and suchlike as worldly snares had long been part of a tradition of piety that, in turn, sat well with the socialist movement, many of whose leaders had a ‘chapel’ background. Restrained good taste could thus differentiate itself from the more art nouveau tendencies within the Arts and Crafts Movement, and lead to the dominant style of the Garden City Movement in late Edwardian England that was greatly admired in Germany.

Finding modern vernacular products with unselfconscious quality was like discovering rare wildflowers. Writing to Harry Peach, Cecil Brewer expressed particular excitement about the catalogues of pre-fabricated timber farm buildings produced by the firm of English Brothers in Wisbech, Cambridgeshire: not only were the buildings ‘simple straight forward things with fine roofs’, but also they came from the generally taste-free area of “catalogue architecture”.³⁴ Peach responded enthusiastically: ‘so nice and clean and straightforward after



English Brothers Ltd, farm-buildings brochure, 1910. Cecil Brewer, the first secretary of the DIA, enthused over the naturalness of the buildings’ designs.

the Pottery Catalogues. What a curse the word “Art” is!’³⁵ Peach had recently visited the T. G. Green works at Church Gresley in Derbyshire, where the blue-and-white-striped, slip-decorated kitchenware now known as Cornishware was made, as illustrated in the DIA’s yearbook of 1922 with the caption ‘simple pottery made for use and beautiful in its unaffected simplicity’.³⁶

Modernism and eugenics

Phrases such as Peach’s ‘nice and clean and straightforward’ and the ‘beautiful in its unaffected simplicity’ caption are English equivalents of the German term *Sachlichkeit*, translated in 1898 by the word ‘realist’, to mean ‘the most scrupulous fulfilment of the demands of function, convenience and health’.³⁷ *Sachlichkeit* and ‘realist’ were ways of expressing the English values of sobriety, ‘cleanness’ and decorum, quasi-aristocratic in their intuitive reserve, classless and acceptable to those of all classes who had no special interest in art or design. Peach’s phrase also described some of the pieces of standardized English furniture, such as ‘country Chippendale’ chairs, that were admired by the architect and theorist Adolf Loos, and which were used by him to berate his fellow Viennese and Germans for wanting over-ornamented things by named designers – the preciousness that the English also disdained. Indeed, it has been said that, with his proposition that ‘the aesthetic man is the man who feels nothing at all’, Loos was turning on its head the received understanding of how art should be approached.³⁸

The turn against such decadent aestheticism was part of the background to the classical revival of the early twentieth century and also to Modernism. Theories of degeneration, popularized by the writing of Max Nordau, were widely circulated, and in England there were many enthusiasts for eugenics, often based on misinterpretations of the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche.³⁹ The DIA’s preferred slogan, ‘Fitness for Purpose’, had a eugenic ring to it, and the idea that good design in some way resembled a good breeding process found expression in Hamilton Temple Smith’s casual use of the phrase ‘mongrel litter’ in an early DIA publication to describe ‘shams, shabbiness and

disorder ... got by Covetousness out of Modern Commerce’.⁴⁰ In the same publication, an unattributed piece described misplaced decoration as a disease. Later, in the 1930s, it became something of a cliché to show the evolutionary development of everyday objects, from shoes and dresses to cars and planes, all becoming sleeker through time.⁴¹

In 1919 the editorship of the world’s leading scientific journal, *Nature*, was passed to Richard Gregory, a long-time friend of H. G. Wells and an advocate of eugenics. During recruitment for the Boer War in 1899, it was found that large numbers of the British male working population were below the standard of physical fitness required, and this stimulated a wide-ranging ‘Campaign for National Efficiency’, similar to movements in Germany and America, in which national morale and military and commercial competitiveness were seen in the context of individual physical health. The last of these was commonly seen as the result of genetic inheritance, with eugenics as a programme to eliminate the ‘unfit’, although progressive politicians took steps to ensure that poor living conditions were gradually improved as well. There was little to temper the elitism of influential eugenicists, whom Gary Werskey has called the ‘High Scientists’ based at the University of Cambridge.⁴² So pervasive were the views of this group among

In the 1922 DIA yearbook, in which this picture of an exhibition display appeared, H. Collins Baker of the National Gallery defined the principle of efficient problem-solving, by which ‘nothing may we despise or neglect; that everything is worth doing well’.



progressive thinkers and activists, exemplified by the arch-Bauhaus enthusiast Jack Pritchard (see below), that they gain significance in retrospect on the few occasions for which there is evidence of contact.

Kandinsky in Leeds and Calcutta

Decadence was an accusation commonly levelled against unfamiliar modern art, most notably in the two famous Post-Impressionist exhibitions featuring French artists organized in London by Roger Fry.⁴³ Among modern German artists, only Wassily Kandinsky – who, together with Paul Klee, joined the Bauhaus staff soon after the launch of the school – was known in Britain in the pre-1914 period. This was largely thanks to his promotion by the critic and curator Frank Rutter and the response of Michael Sadler, the newly appointed vice chancellor of Leeds University, and his son, also Michael Sadler (who later used the name Sadleir to avoid confusion). Both visited the artist in 1912 at Murnau in Upper Bavaria, where they bought paintings and drawings, hoping to stage an exhibition in London of Kandinsky and his associates in the group *Der Blaue Reiter*, an idea abandoned on grounds of cost. The younger Sadler translated Kandinsky's book *Über das Geistige* as *The Art of Spiritual Harmony*, published in 1914.⁴⁴

At a time when modern paintings were generally unavailable, Sadler's collection was something that students and other interested people could see. On his appointment to Leeds, Sadler discovered the existence of Leeds Art Club, founded in 1903 by Alfred Orage, later a famous magazine editor, and Holbrook Jackson, author of *The Eighteen-Nineties* (1913), and originally sparked by their shared enthusiasm for Nietzsche. Orage moved to London in 1908 to edit the *New Age*, the magazine that has been credited with contributing to the perception of Germany of a whole generation of writers, and with Sadler's encouragement the Art Club continued.⁴⁵ In different ways, Orage and Sadler each exercised a wide liberalizing but challenging influence. This is clearest in its effect on Herbert Read, a young Yorkshireman studying at Leeds who would go on to become one of the greatest advocates of modern art and design in Britain, and of the Bauhaus in particular. The art historian Matthew Potter suggests that

there was a perverse incentive for British people to study German art in these pre-1914 years, since 'a close relationship was often seen as a prerequisite for seeing off a rival, providing understanding of the competitor's mindset, which could be converted into profit via the emulation of their strengths and avoiding their weaknesses', but most perceptions of German art remained negative until after the Second World War.⁴⁶

While London, the 'Hub of the Empire', was largely off the map of modern art in the 1920s, a network of far-reaching cultural links meant that a Bauhaus exhibition was held in one of its outposts, Calcutta, in 1922. Stella Kramrisch (1896–1993), the distinguished Austrian scholar of Indian art, had been a student in Vienna of Josef Strzygowski, an early supporter of the Bauhaus. When Kramrisch was studying in London in 1919, her lecturing impressed both the English artist and teacher William Rothenstein and his friend Rabindranath Tagore, the Bengali poet and Nobel Prize winner; as a result, Kramrisch was invited to teach for Tagore at his rural university at Santiniketan, thereby becoming a link between the group of Viennese teachers and students at the Bauhaus and the advanced artistic circles of Bengal. The exhibition featured paintings and drawings only, representative of Johannes Itten's teaching and including pieces by Klee and Kandinsky. If it had been held in London, we would now consider it a major event; but apart from Kramrisch's own contacts, it is unlikely that anyone 'back home' was ever aware of it.⁴⁷

When an exhibition of Modern German art was finally held in London in 1938, in protest at the Nazis' *Entartete Kunst* (Degenerate Art) show of the year before, Read, who had been the most consistent supporter of the artists featured in the exhibition, wrote in the catalogue: 'It would not be untrue to say that to the general public in Great Britain, modern German art is totally unknown.'⁴⁸ Also in 1938, the sister of Peggy Guggenheim, Hazel McKinley, offered the nation – in the form of the Tate Gallery – the gift of four major paintings by Kandinsky (admittedly Russian by birth, but seen as part of German art). However, as if to provide further evidence for Read's claim, only one, *Cossacks* (1911), was accepted.

The reception of German architecture

In comparison with German painting, modern German architecture attracted some positive interest. In 1921 Erich Mendelsohn became its best-known representative, thanks largely to his Einstein Tower at Potsdam, compared, not inaccurately, with 'the gun turret of some nightmare battleship' by the architect Sir Reginald Blomfield (1856–1942).⁴⁹ Even progressive commentators were happy to condemn it, along with the whole Expressionist tendency.⁵⁰ In 1923 Mendelsohn's champion in Berlin, the German-American writer and architect Herman George Scheffauer (1876–1927), followed an earlier article on the Expressionist work of Bruno Taut in the *Architectural Review* with one on Mendelsohn.⁵¹

Later, when Mendelsohn first visited Britain in May 1930, both the mood of the architectural community and his own work had converged. He attracted eager audiences to lectures he gave at the Architectural Association and produced a short article in favour of Modernism for *The Listener*. *The Observer* praised his Universum Cinema and WOGA residential complex in the centre of West Berlin (both 1927–28) for their 'grace of line and sweet reasonableness of conception that even the most firmly entrenched conservative in architecture cannot resist'; the paper also commended him for his stand against Nazism.⁵²

Mendelsohn's buildings, wrote a commentator, displayed a vitalist quality of becoming like 'living beings', with an organic unity.⁵³ By this date, the previously sceptical architect and teacher Howard Robertson had compared Mendelsohn to Winston Churchill, suggesting that English people would admire 'the man of action who blunders but does things'.⁵⁴ Mendelsohn's exaggeration of horizontals through projecting bands of brick and masonry, and through windows passing round curves, became clichés for many English architects, although he had modified these considerably in his own designs by the time he came to live and work in London in 1933.

Published in 1929, Bruno Taut's book *Modern Architecture* showed his own abrupt change of position, to the sobriety of *Die Neue Sachlichkeit* (see below), since Scheffauer had written about him seven years earlier. Taut had spent June and July of 1929 staying mostly at Lulworth in Dorset, to familiarize himself with Britain, and wrote

encouragingly that 'English culture constitutes so exceptional a foundation for the further development of Modern Architecture.'⁵⁵ 'Aware as he is of the absurdities of revivalism,' wrote Charles Marriott in the *Times Literary Supplement*, 'he is equally on his guard against a false modernity in architecture, that which juggles with the outward forms evolved by traffic and transport. This latter ineptitude he distinguishes very happily as a "transport-cum-machinery Romanticism".'⁵⁶ Even Blomfield, reputedly an arch-conservative, found Taut's book a 'fair and on the whole temperate account' of a range of Modernist designs of the past decade.⁵⁷ These comments suggest that there was a greater endorsement of a broad range of Modernism among an older generation than has been supposed, but that they stuck to their underlying Arts and Crafts principles about reasonableness and decorum, objecting chiefly when they felt these had been breached.

Taut's epilogue, addressed to English readers, was intended to reinforce these values of 'honesty and simplicity, one might even say, of an essential frugality'.⁵⁸ He appeared to be urging the English back on their road to moderation after their excesses of period styles, lavishing praise on the 'calm beauty' and 'simple lines' of apparently flat-roofed Georgian terraced houses, which seem to have had a universal appeal for visiting European Modernists, adding, 'There is no trace here of the sentimental, pretty effect with which so many English architects of the present day send their clients into transports.'⁵⁹

The works of Mendelsohn and Taut were not the only possibilities offered, although much subsequent historical writing has obscured the alternatives. Hans Scharoun, Hugo Häring and Otto Haesler, for example, were members, alongside Gropius and Mendelsohn, of the Berlin group Der Ring, the radical architectural collective founded in 1926 that soon split into different factions. The group's work was included in Taut's *Modern Architecture*, and some of it was recognized in English publications, including perhaps the most famous example: Häring's farm buildings at Gut Garkau near Lübeck (1923–26), which earned two photographs in Taut's book, but lay as 'sleepers' until this obscure site achieved cult status in the 1960s.⁶⁰

The beginning of the sequence leading to the adoption in Britain of 'proper' modernism is usually traced to a house designed by Peter

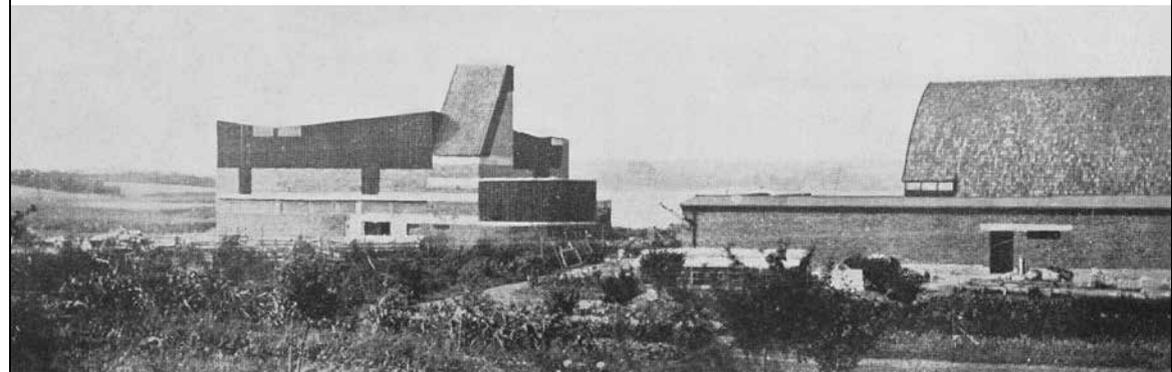
Behrens in Northampton in 1925. In every way, this house was an anomaly, with its slightly Expressionist decorative details over the entrance and a plan that did nothing special to develop a sense of space. In German terms it was old-fashioned, although outlandish enough in England to provoke comment. Had it not such a distinguished author, it could be taken to represent the work of an amateur enthusiast, which was an apt description for the client, W. J. Bassett-Lowke (1877–1953), a local manufacturer specializing in accurate models of ships, together with high-quality model railways. Bassett-Lowke, previously a patron of Charles Rennie Mackintosh, became a DIA activist, which was probably how he came to hear about Behrens.⁶¹

If Behrens's house in Northampton was untypical of German work at the time, the fact that Behrens had been Gropius's master made it appear subsequently as a first step on the road ahead. Yet during the 1920s, Britain showed more interest in other routes within German architecture, such as the brick buildings in Hamburg by Fritz Höger and Fritz Schumacher, reflected in the choice of Elisabeth Scott's massive, uncompromising brick design for a national monument, the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre at Stratford-upon-Avon (1929–32). Whether in these patterned and decorative surfaces, or in the influence of the sublime German churches of Dominikus Böhm on such architects as N. F. Cachemaille-Day and F. X. Velarde after 1930, German sources of inspiration apart from the Bauhaus found a grateful reception but were long considered irrational and therefore not truly Modern. The rediscovery of Gut Garkau was part of a wider rehabilitation of Expressionism as an alternative to the Bauhaus, but it is still the more extreme examples such as this that have attracted the most attention.

When Frank Pick and the architect Charles Holden undertook a research trip to Europe in the summer of 1930, their official report

Opposite, top and centre: Bruno Taut's book *Modern Architecture* (1929) showed alternatives among current German designs – the Bauhaus building at Dessau (in an unconventionally frontal view) and the farm by Hugo Häring at Gut Garkau.

Opposite, bottom: *New Ways*, Northampton, by Peter Behrens, 1925–26. Modernism descends on the English suburb, complete with a rock garden.



found Germany's 'revolt' against its 'massive and grandiose' pre-1914 style 'more extreme and iconoclastic than otherwise would have been necessary', and praiseworthy chiefly on account of its provision of outdoor exercise facilities. Pick and Holden preferred the moderation of the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden, a judgment seemingly made with prejudiced eyes.⁶²

Discussion of Modernism at this time has insisted on knowing the 'correct' direction of travel, often in despite of the historical evidence. Apart from his uncharacteristic design for an electricity pylon, adopted as standard from 1928, Reginald Blomfield, the author of *Modernismus* (1934), continued to design as a classicist to the end of his long career, contributing to his reputation as an arch-conservative and nationalist. His views were broader and more tolerant than is usually recognized, however, for in *Modernismus* he accepted that historical styles could be abandoned provided they were not replaced by unfunctional 'stunts' – a view shared with Pevsner's reluctant 'pioneers', William Richard Lethaby and C. F. A. Voysey.⁶³ When Modernism took a romantic and regional turn in the second half of the 1930s, in which Gropius himself played a part, there were younger critics on the Modernist side, such as J. M. Richards and John Summerson, who saw this as a desirable and necessary move towards maturity and public approval, in which we might now see a fulfilment of Blomfield's hopes.

Sachlichkeit and Neue Sachlichkeit

The single term 'Modernism' is inadequate to encompass the succession of reactions in Germany during the 1920s – first the Expressionist reaction to the despair occasioned by the end of the First World War, and second a sudden reaction around 1922 against the first, known as *Die Neue Sachlichkeit* and described by Franz Schulze as an attempt 'to cope with the world rather than reject it outright'.⁶⁴ These positions cannot easily be mapped on to what was happening in Britain, where, as we have seen, Expressionism merely confirmed a long-standing prejudice about the ugliness of German design. From this viewpoint, the austerity of *Neue Sachlichkeit* was a vast improvement, and, as Taut indicated, it came to serve as an effective stick with which to beat the

'period' styles that remained popular. Gropius's adoption of 'Art and Technology: A New Unity' as the slogan of the Bauhaus at its crucial moment of transition in 1923 corresponded to the DIA's continuing campaigns for more lively design at affordable prices, but progress was impeded by the slowness of the majority of manufacturers to respond to this call, or their tendency to pick the 'wrong' aspects of Modernism, usually referred to as 'jazz patterns'.⁶⁵ During the 1920s, however, the objects in shops that most conformed to Modernist criteria were likely to be either the anonymous, almost vernacular products such as Cornishware, or items made in small workshops, largely using handcraft methods.

'Stunts' and 'jazz' were seen as a repetition of the errors of taste committed by art nouveau, as well as impediments in the path to the elusive goal of unselfconscious rightness. Late in life, Lethaby wrote to Harry Peach to complain that even the DIA was taking a 'jazzerly jump ... to illustrate as "the thing"', dismissing this as 'only another kind of design humbug to pass with a shrug', and adding with astute recognition of the inescapable tendency to label styles and treat them as finite, 'Ye olde modernist "style". We must have a style to copy. What funny stuff this art is!!'⁶⁶

The word 'jazz', from which Lethaby made his own adjectival form, had negative connotations of confidence trickery and immorality, denoting for many the 'wrong' type of Modernism. In a broadcast in 1945, the textile-pattern designer Enid Marx (see below) distinguished between good and bad jazz in the visual arts, describing the latter as 'mostly a lot of multi-coloured patches thrown together haphazard ... Unlike jazz music, jazz patterns have no clear rhythm and you find your eyes are never brought back to a theme as they are in a good pattern and so they get tired and irritated as a result of continually hopping about.'⁶⁷ To the inexperienced eye, the two might look much the same, hence the effort that went into trying to educate the public to know the difference.

Could reaction be carried too far, however? The textile designer Minnie McLeish (1876–1957) wrote to Harry Peach, teasing him for his adverse reaction to the 'squares or zig-zags + wiggle-waggle of foreign "fads"' that he had condemned in the press. 'It might look as

though even the most intelligent Englishman yet appearing on the continent, the renowned Herr Peach himself – had missed seeing what they were driving at!’ McLeish argued for a more detached viewpoint: ‘I don’t really feel that we should be always calling our sort of mind sane + everybody else’s crazy. It may seem so to us, but that does not “go for to say” that it is.’⁶⁸

Our preconception of Modernism, however, almost requires a degree of jazz to qualify. William Foxton Ltd’s bright, machine-printed textiles from 1917 onwards were exceptional among British products, since they offered quite jazzy designs of striking modernity produced by mechanical methods. The designers included Charles Rennie Mackintosh and Claud Lovat Fraser, both still remembered, and such new stars as Minnie McLeish herself (pl. 3), Constance Irving and F. Gregory Brown, all now largely forgotten. Featuring vibrant colours and a controlled use of form, the work of these designers rivalled that produced in Germany and Austria before 1914. Although perhaps dangerously avant-garde from the DIA’s perspective, Foxton’s range was nevertheless promoted by the association, where, as noted earlier, colour was an important consideration.

In Chapter 5, some of the industrial designers active later in this period will be considered, but the 1920s were characterized by designers working in the crafts with a new, avant-garde approach to design, similar in many respects to the craftworkers of the Bauhaus during its Weimar period between 1919 and 1925. The potter Bernard Leach (1887–1979) was never reconciled to industrial methods, since the effects he wanted to create could not be achieved by such means. Leach made more expensive, one-off pieces, but, in a manner comparable to the vernacular-inspired contemporary Bauhaus pottery at Dornburg near Weimar, was helped by a workshop team to produce lower-cost ‘standard ware’ by hand on the wheel – simple pieces intended for everyday use, adding dignity to the houses of all but the poorest – an industrial type of production but not by industrial means.

In weaving, unlike in pottery, no substantial alteration was needed – in either the materials or the process – in the transition from handloom to machine. It was simply a case of the same product coming out faster, with little inherent artistic value attached either to hand-making

or to mechanized production. Ethel Mairet (1872–1952) was a handweaver all her life, specializing in the rediscovery of vegetable dyes and the production of strong but harmonious patterned cloths. She wrote articles and books and trained successors in her workshop at Ditchling in East Sussex. Although she never aimed to design for machine production, some of her pupils, such as Marianne Straub, did, and Mairet herself became an advocate of the Bauhaus teaching method when she learnt about it in the 1930s.⁶⁹

Enid Marx (1902–1998), a friend of both Leach and Mairet, was one of several women hand-printing textiles in the traditional manner with vegetable dyes and wooden printing blocks.⁷⁰ In 1937, after ten years of running her studio largely single-handed, Marx was commissioned by London Underground to produce seating fabric for its trains, accelerating her knowledge of industrial weaving for this very specialized task. In doing so, she fulfilled the Bauhaus prediction that a training in craft could lead into industrial design, but made the transition almost overnight, rather than via a structured learning process. She later formed the view that ‘The strength of the Bauhaus was not in the profundity of its technical training, but in the atmosphere of enterprise and experiment in all the arts which it managed to create.’⁷¹

Gordon Russell (1892–1980) is a paradigm of the shift from craft to industry. After serving in the First World War, he returned to his family in Broadway, Worcestershire, where they ran the Lygon Arms hotel, and expanded an existing cabinet-making and repair workshop to produce hand-made furniture in an Arts and Crafts manner. His younger brother, Richard Drew Russell (1903–1981), who trained as an architect, introduced the business to machine production and a more modern aesthetic when, in the 1930s, the economics of hand-working were destabilized by the Depression. An appeal from a radio manufacturer, Frank Murphy, for modern cases for his products brought the younger Russell into the role of chief designer. ‘Quiet English good taste’ remained the company’s keynote, and Gordon Russell Ltd, now with a factory in the suburbs of west London and a West End showroom (later managed by Nikolaus Pevsner), became the epitome of what a subdued English-style equivalent to Bauhaus production might be.

Very different in character was a group of artists working in photography and film in London, all émigrés from English-speaking countries who took their inspiration from the mobile European avant-garde, whether in Berlin or Paris. Curtis Moffat (1887–1949) and Francis Bruguière (1879–1945) were both bohemian escapees from rich American families who experimented with abstract and surreal effects.⁷² Bruguière, who had some influence on Moholy-Nagy, made an abstract animated film, *Light Rhythms*, in 1930 (with Oswell Blakeston) and, using the same medium of dramatically lit cut paper, produced illustrations for a psychological novel, *Beyond this Point* (1930) by the writer and experimental broadcaster Lance Sieveking. Len Lye (1901–1980), who came to London from New Zealand with neither money nor connections, has remained more famous than either Moffat or Bruguière, especially for his animated films, such as *A Colour Box* (1935), which he made by painting directly on to strips of film to avoid the cost of colour processing. These leisured aesthetes experimented with forms and media quite unlike the DIA, but in terms of the map of British Modernism as it existed before contact with the Bauhaus, they made up a small but significant tribe.



Beyond this Point (1929) by Lance Sieveking, with illustrations by Francis Bruguière. According to the blurb, the book 'deals with three fundamental crises in human experience – Death, Jealousy and Ruin. The reader is led by the text into an abstract photographic design, through which his eye passes till it reaches the text again.'

Harry Peach goes to Dessau

Some time in the early 1930s, the word 'Bauhaus' came to describe the literal school and its products, while also serving as a generic designation of German or European Modernism. British readers and travellers moved on from their interest in brick when the Weissenhof Estate in Stuttgart was created in 1927. This Deutsche Werkbund project, demonstrating the *Neue Sachlichkeit* as a living environment, was its most ambitious public manifestation since 1914, bringing Mies van der Rohe to wider attention as the coordinating architect. It included two houses by the already-famous Le Corbusier, as well as a small house by Gropius and others by a range of talents. Ernst May's much more extensive housing programmes in Frankfurt, mostly built on garden-city principles but with long rows of connected houses, were similarly on the circuit for architectural tourists and helped at least one British student, David Green (1912–1998), to understand afresh the potential of terraced houses and apply it with his partner, Herbert Tayler, in the Norfolk countryside in the 1950s.⁷³

Herman George Scheffauer's article 'The Work of Walter Gropius', published in the *Architectural Review* in 1924, mentions the Bauhaus only in passing. Likewise, there is no record of British visitors going either to Weimar or to Dessau until 1925, when Harry Peach, on one of his regular German excursions, visited Weimar, but after the school had moved to Dessau. It was two years later, in 1927, that Peach travelled to Dessau as the first British visitor to report back on the Bauhaus.

The context of Peach's visit is itself an important episode in the story of design development. The offerings in the British Pavilion at the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Moderne, held in Paris in 1925, had attracted much criticism, and, under the banner of the DIA, Peach personally financed and organized a more carefully selected display of British textiles, pots, sculpture and other objects at an important International Crafts Exhibition in Leipzig in 1927, official representation having failed to take place owing to British manufacturers being put off by high tariffs and fear of plagiarism.⁷⁴ After many tribulations, the one-room display of British work was mounted with help from Minnie McLeish and Harry Trethowan of Heals. Lawrence

Weaver, reporting in *The Times*, noted the remarks of two visiting Englishwomen, who, having ‘gone with fear and trembling after the British show at Paris ... had come away delighted’.⁷⁵ Yet in a post-mortem meeting of the DIA, McLeish and Peach were the harshest critics of the overcrowding and dated feel of the display, evidenced by an older German female visitor who said she loved ‘the old-fashioned things’.⁷⁶

This unknown visitor may have been right about the carved wooden ducks and carthorses by W. G. Simmonds, or even the two carved reliefs by Eric Gill. But among the most ‘modern’ items on show were the block-printed textiles – probably in a range of subtle blues and browns – by Phyllis Barron and Dorothy Larcher, partners in a workshop since the early 1920s, with others by Enid Marx and Paul Nash. These proved to Peach ‘that we had a modern movement’.⁷⁷ A contributor to *The Spectator* wrote that, ‘For the first time I felt the transition from the old to the new had been accomplished without violence, and the things, being beautiful, restrained and sincere, would look at home with other beautiful things.’⁷⁸ Building up a solid groundwork of technique and form at every stage, rather than attempting a vertical take-off, was a typically cautious DIA response; but such work, condemned by many later writers for its tameness, was arguably the right approach.

The Berlin correspondent of *The Times* declared that the English exhibits were ‘modern and fresh, not merely slight exercises in varying well-known traditions; [the work is] not snobbish in the sense of being too costly for ordinary folk to buy (as is the French work), and it is visibly English’;⁷⁹ or, as Peach put it, ‘it is decent, dignified, homely ... something of which we need not be ashamed.’⁸⁰ Writing in the *Manchester Guardian*, Weaver – a major figure in the slowly transitioning design world of the 1920s – felt, like Peach, that the moral qualities of German design were paramount because they showed the effect of ‘sane practical and thrifty people aware of the facts of manufacture’.⁸¹ French designs at the 1925 exhibition in Paris had little to offer ordinary householders; in Germany, however, understanding of the marketplace was fed in at the design stage of production and trickled down effectively to the marketplace, the flow that the DIA



The English section at the 1927 International Crafts Exhibition at Leipzig. Left: Minnie McLeish and Harry Trethowan installing glass. Right: William Simmonds carvings in the foreground, ceramics by Poole Potteries and other hand-painted wares, and a printed textile by Enid Marx on the wall behind.

found from experience was usually blocked somewhere down the line, between the producer and the customer, because of the unwillingness of retailers and their buyers to take what they perceived to be risks.⁸²

After the Leipzig exhibition had opened, Peach, apparently lured by Herbert Bayer’s ‘Bauhaus style’ poster, ‘fixed up an appointment and went off to visit the famous new research school at Dessau’.⁸³ He was struck by the barrenness of the town, where ‘what looked like two great blocks of factories, all glass and concrete, joined by a bridge’, loomed ahead on the route from the station.⁸⁴ His tour was conducted by the Bauhaus master Georg Muche (whose name he spelt ‘Mucha’). Peach’s account of the visit, written for the *Times Educational Supplement*, stresses the otherness of the whole experience, the hospital-like entrance hall, the showroom containing ‘examples of experimental and often strange furniture, a variety of chairs made

of plated steel tubes and canvas, curious to look at but comfortable to use, and a range of curious-looking wooden chair experiments'. Peach's English yearning for the homely and familiar make him sound like Beatrix Potter's country mouse accidentally transported to the modern world, longing for 'a friendly teapot ... even if its art was bad, one even with a label "A Present to Mrs Jones" such as they still make at Woodville', rather than tea and coffee services that 'tried one's nerves'.⁸⁵ The weaving he found 'very cold and unpleasant in colour and freakish in pattern', although the pottery was 'pleasant and useful', reminding him of his earlier visit to the Weimar Bauhaus outstation at Dornberg, where the pottery workshops were located at a distance from the main establishment.

There was a consistency to Peach's judgments. The seating in the lecture theatre, designed with tubular steel and canvas by Marcel Breuer, won his approval as space-saving, neat and comfortable, while the colours on the walls and ceilings relieved the bleakness. Visiting Walter Gropius in the master's house he had designed, Peach thought it American in its use of concrete in blocky forms, but 'not unpleasant'. The oddest feature of his article are the illustrations, showing two buildings in the Netherlands with only remote connections to the Bauhaus – Gerrit Rietveld's Schröder House at Utrecht and Hilversum Town Hall by Willem Marinus Dudok – and a Bauhaus chess set. This is even stranger given Peach's immediate access to the *Bauhausbücher* (see below).

Slightly apologetically, Peach described the Bauhaus, 'with all its vagaries and crudities', as 'a definite research department ... an attempt to do for industrial design what science does for industry'.⁸⁶ This misperception, that the Bauhaus training was primarily about technology, was widespread, and Gropius, who in 1927 was coming close to handing over the directorship to Hannes Meyer, was presented as the leader of efficiency. 'Though many may jeer at the Bauhaus,' Peach challenged his audience, 'everyone is interested' – the 'everyone' in this instance being chiefly Germans and Austrians.⁸⁷ The lack of interest in Britain he attributed to the narrowness of secondary and tertiary education.

DIA Modernism emergent

During the second half of the 1920s, the DIA was challenged from within. Perhaps the origin of Gordon Russell's tank analogy, cited in the introduction, was a humorous but critical piece in the DIA's journal by the textile and poster artist Gregory Brown, who suggested that the association was fated to push its burden uphill for eternity, 'unaware of the indifference of the world and on the evidence of the overpriced products of some of its members, disengaged from the reality of the market'.⁸⁸ The intention of cultivating public taste seemed ever less plausible in the face of commercial pressures to lower it. This last problem was soon to be addressed by the BBC and a number of writers and campaigners both inside formal education, such as J. E. Barton (headmaster of Bristol Grammar School, who lectured whole year groups on design), and outside it, such as Margaret H. Bulley. Bulley selected photographs in pairs to suggest by comparison the differences between good and bad design, and her short book, *Have You Good Taste?* (1933; pl. 15), showed the results of a survey of listeners' opinions. Going beyond simple binaries of with/without ornament or with/without historical reference, Bulley showed that there were no easy answers, while her evidence revealed that good taste was more likely to be spoiled by education and higher class status than created by either.

A new cohort of activists emerged, including John Gloag (1896–1981), a partner in the advertising firm of Pritchard, Wood & Partners and a prolific writer on design, and John Craven Pritchard (known as Jack, 1899–1992), the younger brother of Gloag's colleague Fleetwood Pritchard. After serving in the Royal Navy during the First World War, Pritchard went to Cambridge, where he formed part of a circle around Philip Sargant Florence (1890–1982), one of the first specialists in the study of industrial relations; he also met the educational reformer Henry Morris (1889–1961; see Chapter 2, page 66). Both men were recruited by Pritchard as potential patrons for Walter Gropius in the mid-1930s.

Pritchard was a born organizer, whose role in the 1930s will be explored in Chapters 2 and 5. His job as a plywood salesman for Venesta, a subsidiary of the Estonian firm A. M. Luther, gave him access to architects and the furniture trade. He held a competition to

design the Venesta stand at the Building Trades Exhibition in 1930, for which he chose a proposal by Le Corbusier and Charlotte Perriand, resulting in the only structure by Corbusier, albeit a temporary one, to be built in Britain. At the same time, Pritchard was drawn into the emerging Modernist networks that existed outside the DIA, especially the Cambridge circle of the English don Mansfield Forbes (1889–1935). Elfin in body and spirit, and given to un-donnish levity and a carnivalesque concept of Modernism in the arts, Forbes aimed to reverse the pleasure-denying attitudes prevalent in education and society.⁸⁹ Another of Pritchard's interests was the think-tank Political and Economic Planning (PEP), formed in 1931 in response to an article by the young journalist-ecologist Max Nicholson, with Julian Huxley and Leonard Elmhirst, co-founder of the Dartington Hall Trust (see Chapter 2, page 54), among its members. It proposed the physical and economic reconstruction of Britain in response to the financial crisis, avoiding both Fascism and Communism by working with capitalism in a democratic manner. Although PEP left no physical monument, it was an important network of progressive thinkers and activists, working alongside Modernism in design.

In 1927 Forbes rented a Victorian villa on Queen's Road in the Backs area of Cambridge, and had it imaginatively and playfully converted by a young Australian architect, Raymond McGrath (1903–1977). The interiors, while not 'period', had little to do with function, introducing what, from a German perspective, would have seemed by this point an outdated note of symbolism (relating to Scottish mythology and Lady Finella, after whom the villa was renamed) and decoration, largely with glass and mirrors (pl. 4). Folding doors made from Venesta's copper-faced 'Plymax' testified to Pritchard's involvement.

In Forbes's little utopia, freethinking moved across academic and political boundaries, with similarities to the Bloomsbury group but more connected internationally and to a younger generation. Two other architects, neither of them born in Britain, met McGrath in the context of Finella: the Japanese-born Canadian Wells Coates (1895–1958), and the Russian-born Serge Chermayeff (1900–1996), both of whom would play an important role in the 1930s as designers and publicists, and, in Chermayeff's case, in carrying a version of

Bauhaus teaching into courses in America. Together with Pritchard, the three architects were among the members of the Twentieth Century Group, a short-lived and not very effective coalition of professionals and enthusiasts whose initial project was to stage a design exhibition that would, presumably, have gone in a much more Modernist direction than anything organized by the DIA. Nonetheless, Coates and P. Morton Shand (see below) became the prime movers behind the establishment in 1933 of the MARS Group, which, as a national chapter of the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM), was more ambitious in its scope, if at times similarly dysfunctional.

Forbes's contacts and colleagues in Cambridge included I. A. Richards, a brilliant and influential critic in the university's English faculty whose 'practical criticism' blew away the Romantic cobwebs with a kind of logical positivism. C. K. Ogden (initials were preferred to names) had translated Georg Kerchensteiner's *The Schools and the Nation* in 1914, bringing the British public news about German reforms. In 1920 Ogden translated Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, and challenged everyone he met with surprising ideas. Other frequent visitors to Finella were academics, including Frank Attenborough, later one of the founders of the University of Leicester and father of Richard and David; the novelist T. H. White; and the psychological guru John Layard, whose ideas influenced W. H. Auden. Public education, by any available means, was a common thread among them. Forbes's ludic approach to Modernism was widely shared in England, a way of being 'for but not with' the movement, especially in the transitional period between 1928 and 1934.

A critic of architecture and design, P. Morton Shand (1888–1960) was fluent in German and French, writing articles on French art deco in the *Architectural Review* and an anonymous piece on Peter Behrens's house New Ways in the 1920s. He was a cousin of the architect Howard Robertson (1888–1963), whose articles on modern buildings, already quoted, appeared with excellent photographs by F. R. Yerbury in the weekly *Architect and Building News*. Although interested as a non-architect in technical issues, Shand took a hedonistic view of Modernism, rather than a moral or intellectual one, writing in 1930: 'We want to be amused and not instructed, intrigued but not edified.'

The pedagogue was never more unpopular ... Uplift quickly gets the uplifting posterior kick it invites.⁹⁰

Shand was an early historian of the development of Modernism, covering much of the same ground, if in a more dilettante manner, as Nikolaus Pevsner's *Pioneers of the Modern Movement* of 1936.⁹¹ He was only dimly aware of the Bauhaus and its building in 1929, but by 1934 had been roused to act as Gropius's chief enabler in making his move to London. He also translated his book *The New Architecture and the Bauhaus* (1933; see Chapter 2, page 73), which contributed greatly to spreading knowledge of the school and guiding its interpretation.

Why the Bauhaus?

We should ask why, having had so little impact in the 1920s, the Bauhaus was singled out for such attention in Britain so suddenly and fervently in the 1930s. While other German architects attracted attention, even a superficial knowledge of the rival schools of art and design would have allowed the Bauhaus to be seen in context, but they have never been described, at least to English-language readers. The Vereinigte Staatsschulen in Berlin from 1907, for example, headed by the German architect, illustrator and designer Bruno Paul, had its own version of *Vorschule* (introductory course), based, as was the Bauhaus version, on establishing design principles appropriate to all the arts. A continuation under a new name of an existing school in a museum, it was described as being 'analogous to ... South Kensington ... or to the Art Institute of Chicago'.⁹² In terms of the look of the student work, however, the approach was more open-ended. There was no attempt to develop a unified modern style, and Paul declared that 'much of what is brought to fruition today will be dead tomorrow. Only that which is becoming appears to be eternally vital.'⁹³

Other important but still little-known schools were the Kunst- und Gewerbeschule under Hans Poelzig in Breslau (1903–16), where the workshops were 'the central teaching medium' and certainly inspired Gropius; the Bauhochschule in Weimar under Otto Bartning (1924–30); and the Burg Giebichenstein Kunsthochschule in Halle under the former *Bauhäusler* Gerhard Marcks (1925–33).⁹⁴ The reason why

the Bauhaus obscured all these other institutions in the retrospective view of German art education can be attributed to the combined image of the institution and its building, together with Gropius's skill as a publicist, required simply to combat opposition from his local paymasters. To aid international circulation, the substantial catalogue of the 1923 Bauhaus exhibition was issued in 300 English-language copies as well as 2,000 in German and a further 300 in Russian.⁹⁵ This and other titles in the *Bauhausbücher*, the series of highly illustrated publications edited by Gropius, could be found in London shops in the later 1920s, while the other schools failed to broadcast their message.

'The best thing Gropius has done', said Mies van der Rohe, 'was to invent the name Bauhaus.'⁹⁶ Even Gropius might not have understood in 1919 how accessible this unique, brief neologism would be to non-German speakers, compared to the long-winded compound nouns that denoted the rival schools.

The tipping point

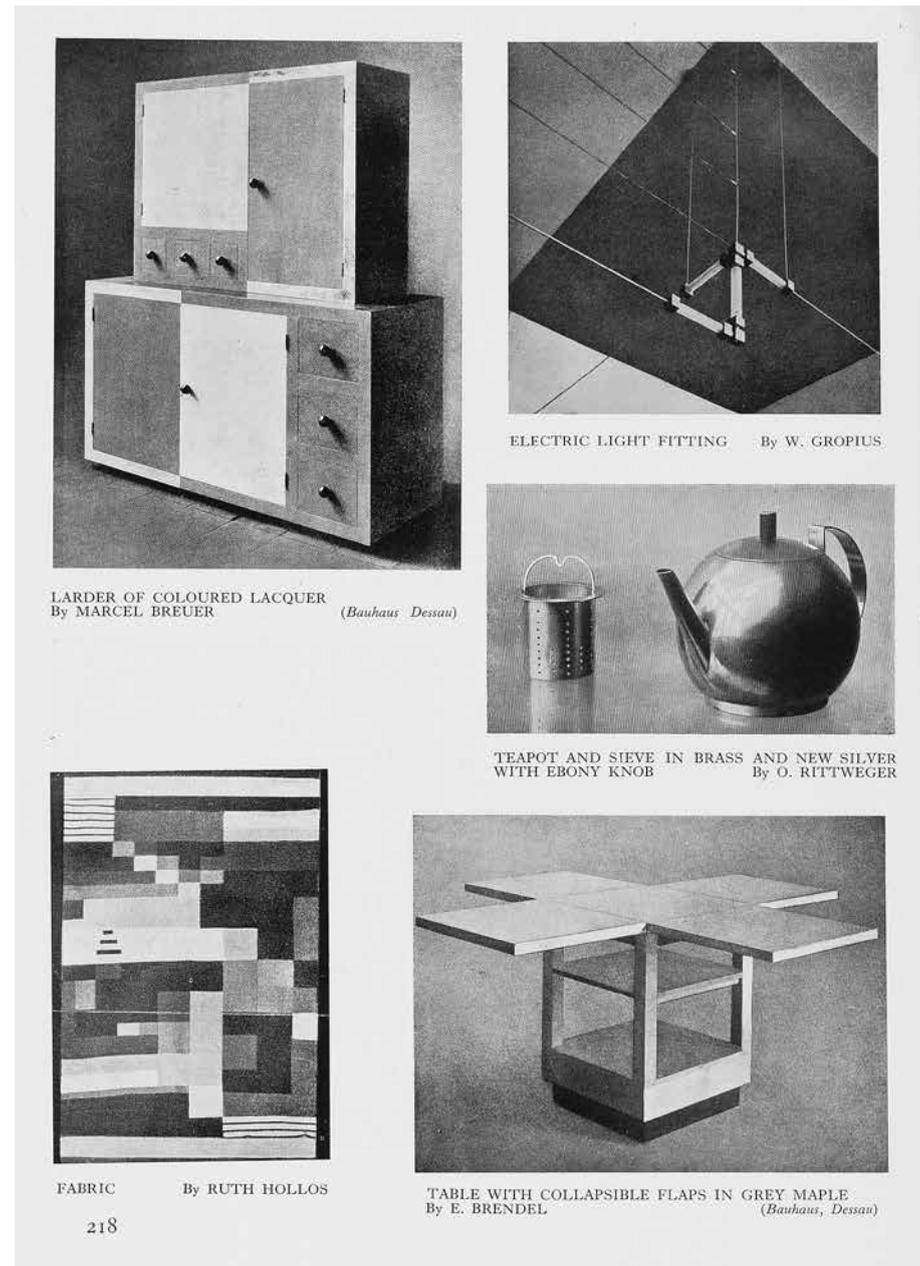
Evidence for the effectiveness of Gropius's publishing programme comes from Ashley Havinden (1903–1973), the art director for Crawfords Advertising Agency, who found examples of the *Bauhausbücher* at Zwemmer's bookshop on Charing Cross Road in London 'quite by chance'. This discovery presumably predated Havinden's journey to Germany with his employer, William Crawford, in 1926, during which he became 'converted to a new outlook in design which [I] then put into practice in England'.⁹⁷ Crawford, no doubt with Havinden's encouragement and guidance, went on to commission an urbane but, for the time, still unusually unornamented office building for the company on a conspicuous site on High Holborn, London. Completed in 1930, it was seen as the first fully modern office building in Britain.⁹⁸ A copy of the 1923 Bauhaus exhibition catalogue can be seen in a photograph of Havinden's studio at his Hampstead home in north London, designed by Rodney Thomas, apparently displayed with careful intent (pl. 5).

Harry Peach's articles on the Bauhaus from 1927, published anonymously in the *Times Educational Supplement* and the *Manchester*

Guardian, were followed in 1928 by a small item in *Artwork* by the art critic Horace Shipp.⁹⁹ Even at this date, the school was still treated as a new topic. 'In innocence I went to Munich', Shipp wrote, where he discovered 'aesthetic excitement centred round the form of craft creation which in its many phases might be categorically termed "Bauhaus-kunst", the Bauhaus at Dessau providing the dynamic for the new movement'. He went on to give a standard account of the combination of 'function-form' and truth to materials, claiming (inaccurately and unjustly when one considers the campaigning of the DIA) that 'To us when the machine enters the artist leaves; to the Central European mind the artist is best serving and best served if he creates the forms of whole or of parts which can be produced by machines and then again exercises his function in the assembling of the component parts.'¹⁰⁰ The English aversion to the machine was, he felt, 'a curious piece of almost superstitious atavism which disregards the reality of the times in which we live'.¹⁰¹ He improved on Peach's *TES* article, however, by illustrating interiors and objects of genuine Bauhaus provenance.

The first article on the Bauhaus published in Britain to carry any authority appeared in the monthly *Commercial Art*, in February 1931. The author, photographer Edith Suschitzky, had trained at the school before moving to London in 1933 as the wife of the English doctor Alex Tudor-Hart.¹⁰² In the opening paragraph of her article, she refers to the 'so-called "glassbox", the much abused much talked of Bauhaus (school of architecture and crafts)', abused mostly by now by the local Nazi party, although this goes unsaid. In recent years, she adds, 'industry produced a Bauhaus-style, even ladies' underwear was embroidered à la Bauhaus' – a part of design history still awaiting investigation. Providing a short résumé of the curriculum during the Hannes Meyer period, Suschitzky, who in London recruited spies for Soviet Russia, notes that 'the only similar institution is in Moscow, and it is an astonishing fact that this experiment found no imitation in other countries'.¹⁰³

In the summer of 1931, Wells Coates, Serge Chermayeff and Jack Pritchard embarked on an expedition to Germany that included a visit to Dessau, apparently seeing the Bauhaus school itself, by then under



LARDER OF COLOURED LACQUER
By MARCEL BREUER (Bauhaus, Dessau)

ELECTRIC LIGHT FITTING By W. GROPIUS

TEAPOT AND SIEVE IN BRASS AND NEW SILVER WITH EBONY KNOB By O. RITTWEGER

FABRIC By RUTH HOLLOS

TABLE WITH COLLAPSIBLE FLAPS IN GREY MAPLE
By E. BRENDEL (Bauhaus, Dessau)

218

Illustrations from *Artwork*, January–March 1928, the first in a British magazine to show a range of Bauhaus designs, none of them of the most 'advanced' kind, accompanying an article by Horace Shipp.

A University of Commercial Art



A Description of the Bauhaus at Dessau by Edith Suschitzky

THE small German provincial town of Dessau has become famous for two reasons: one is the great Junkers Airplane Works, the other, the so-called "glassbox," the much abused, much talked of Bauhaus (school of architecture and crafts). One of the most outstanding German architects, Walter Gropius, was the original founder of this epoch-making group, which in the course of ten years has been extending its revolutionary influence throughout artistic circles and throughout Europe. The slogan was then "constructivism," "away with sentimental naturalism (whether impressionist or expressionist) for 'purity' of form, for rectangle, circle and triangle, for geometry as the basis of all form." This original Bauhaus was situated in reactionary Weimar, where,

however, this small group of foreign and German artists was not tolerated for long. In 1924 the group was taken up by a broadminded mayor of Dessau. There the actual Bauhaus was built. Some former pupils became teachers, the others were the famous surrealists painters, Klee and Kandinsky, the well-known photographer, Moholy-Nagy, and the founder of the "mechanic ballet" and the Bauhaustheatre, Oskar Schlemmer.

In time the Bauhaus became the fashion, the violent opposition to these destroyers of tradition weakened, in other countries, too, they started to build with flat roofs, in other parts of Germany, too, writing without capitals was preached, industry produced a Bauhaus-style in arts and crafts, even ladies' underwear was embroidered à la Bauhaus. The

113

Edith Suschitzky's article from 1931 in *Commercial Art* gave a first-hand account of the Bauhaus by a former student.

Mies as its final director. Chermayeff published a pictorial account of the journey, although oddly it omits the Bauhaus.¹⁰⁴ He later became close to Gropius, but at this time was more impressed, it seems, by the work of his future partner, Erich Mendelsohn. For two hours, he explained, he observed the effect that the staircase of Mendelsohn's Metal Workers' Union building in Berlin had 'upon ordinary people using it', and 'saw that everybody threw his chest out and danced up it'.¹⁰⁵ Mendelsohn and Chermayeff got to know each other better during 1932 when both were engaged by the Dutch architect H. T. Wijdeveld in his project, with Amédée Ozenfant, for a European Academy of the Mediterranean. It is probable that Chermayeff was brought in, together with Eric Gill, in the hope they could attract funding from Lord Howard de Walden. In fact, the academy, which would have been similar to the Bauhaus in some respects although more craft-based, never opened, but Chermayeff was happy to join Mendelsohn in partnership in 1933.¹⁰⁶

The less accurate information there was about the Bauhaus, the more it was able to provide an imaginary cure for every kind of aesthetic malady. Herbert Read, during his brief tenure at Edinburgh University as a professor of art (1931–33), composed some unpublished 'Proposals for a Scottish Philanthropist'. 'The country perishes, in this aesthetic sense, because the people has no vision', he complained, suggesting that the unidentified benefactor should support 'the kind of unit I have in mind', such as existed in the Bauhaus at Dessau. 'This is in fact a state school of art, but a school of art with a difference: it does not merely teach architecture – it builds houses; in every branch of its teaching it makes things and does so under the direction of artists whose qualifications are, not an established reputation and a complacent outlook but a new spirit of experiment and trial ... It is a laboratory of art [whose experiments] have vitalized the whole artistic life of Germany.' Read expanded on his theme, imagining a "functional" building, incorporating lecture-rooms, a music room, an exhibition gallery, a small theatre,' as 'a centre for the performance of modern music and modern plays, free from dependence on popular taste.' His vision was for a hybrid institution, part Bauhaus but linked to Edinburgh University, part DIA, part Scottish philanthropist Patrick Geddes. 'Surely such a man exists!' he finished in his appeal for a backer, but it was not to be.¹⁰⁷ The time was wrong, although in some respects the proposal anticipated two post-war schemes with which Read was closely involved: the multidisciplinary Design Research Unit, and the Institute of Contemporary Art, concerned with inspiring, provoking and educating the public.