

Werkbund Ausstellung, Cologne 1914

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Nov. 13, 2013

The Faculty of Architecture's Central Library of Rome University La Sapienza can now boast an important holding, the *Deutsche Werkbund Ausstellung, Cöln 1914. Offizielle Katalog*, (Rudolf Mosse, Cöln 1914), i.e. the Catalogue of the 1914 Werkbund Exhibition, a key event of European culture and production which was to influence a short peaceful but decisive period (until 1933).

The exhibition took place in Cologne along the Rhine next to the Hohenzollern Bridge and the Deutzer train station; both places lend themselves to the development of new road access and hubs, including new river crossings. This was a big political-economic initiative aimed at making the general public aware of the advancements in civil engineering in Germany and Austria seven years after the foundation of the Werkbund, literally "Work Union", that gathered politicians and industrials as well as intellectuals, artists, and architects.

At the same time, a boost of military production was also going on in a Germany seeking hegemony over Europe. Not coincidentally, "War and Production" was a title standing out in German architecture magazines of those years.

According to a superficial gaze, three buildings stood as signs of modernity in Europe, i.e. Bruno Taut's *Glashaus*, Henry Van de Velde's *Werkbund-Theater*, and "*Fabrik und Buro*" realized by Gropius and Martin Meier (made of four parts, offices and factory, volumetrically integrated). In itself, this triad was strongly dialectical, with Taut and Gropius representing the New Times and Van de Velde, director of the Weimar *Kunstgewerbeschule*, as high representative of the Old Times. The dialectics of old and new was clearly felt by the organizers and illustrated accordingly in the commercial ads of the *Katalog*, that documented the moment of transformation of the methods of manufacture, market, and taste.

The *Wiener Werkstätte* were also given considerable room – with 20 Arts and Crafts Schools – even though they were about to give way to industrial processes.

Among the "special buildings" mentioned in the exhibition catalogue (along with those of Bruno Taut and the duo Gropius-Meier) was a Yellow House to whose construction 16 craftsmen and artists had contributed under the direction of Bruno Paul, and a Summer House proposed by Bernhard Stadler.

That summer was to lead to WWI. One month into the Exhibition, the archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated in Sarajevo (June 14th, 1914); and with a dreary domino effect European nations quickly took up arms against each other.

On the other hand, the *Ausstellung* included a large amusements park, with 38 different attractions, commercial pavilions, and sports facilities. The itinerary ended on a '*Heimat* village' that featured traditional elements such as a little church, a restaurant, a few typologies of detached houses and one multi-storey condominium among others. In-between, the actual *Ausstellung* was displayed in a gigantic 18,000-square metre Main Room designed by Theodor Fischer that housed nearly 200 exhibitors.

The Official Catalogue offers the epitome of a fundamental productive, cultural, and political moment. The following years witnessed a radical critical revision of the thinking related to city and architecture, with Walter Gropius replacing Van de Velde as head of the Weimar School, Bruno Taut initiating the "Utopian Correspondence" between artists and architects, and the formation of the short-lived "Artists' Soviet" in Berlin, which called for artists and architects working together for the sake of the *Bauprojekt*.