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**Gerald Adler**

**ARCHITECTURE IS CONCEALED UNTO ITSELF: HELMUTH PLESSNER AND HIS INFLUENCE ON TWENTIETH-CENTURY ARCHITECTS**

**Introduction**

It is the intention of this paper to examine Helmuth Plessner's (1892-1985) philosophical anthropology and to place its insights within the context of architectural ideas of his time and place, the better to understand this architecture and to gauge its enduring influence on architectural theory and practice today. I argue that in hindsight, and subliminally, the gist of Plessner's thinking has had substantial implications for and reverberations across twentieth-century architectural practice and thinking and it is (and should) still be relevant for architects working today, in the twenty-first century. Philosophical anthropology, as the Introduction to the preceding number of this journal made clear, has been off the boil for decades; its concerns, according to Jürgen Habermas, would be subsumed under sociology.<sup>1</sup> And yet the questions posed by Philosophical Anthropology in the 1920s persist to this day; why else would we be able to talk about the 'humanity' of, say, Alvar Aalto or Hugo Häring as opposed to the more abstract qualities of O. M. Ungers or of Peter Eisenman (to name two pairs of architects with clearly opposed world-views)? Although Philosophical Anthropology as a discipline within philosophy no longer obtains today, its concerns have been taken up by architectural theorists and practitioners, most typically by those tending towards positions of the interrelatedness of architecture with other fields and disciplines: positions generally opposed to the view that architectural theory and practice are largely autonomous pursuits.<sup>2</sup> Plessner, who wrote his key texts in the years of the Weimar Republic, has certainly been sidelined within architectural culture, especially in comparison with the hero's welcome afforded his contemporary, Martin Heidegger, with whom he shares some common interests

(Fig. 1).<sup>3</sup> However, his work on the concept of ‘ex-centricity’ has an obvious architectural connection to human beings’ spatial locations, and yet it is a relationship that has suffered from relative neglect over the course of the twentieth century. Plessner deserves to be seen in the light of the great upsurge in philosophical enquiry and critical thinking emanating from Weimar Germany in the 1920s, alongside the likes of Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Ernst Cassirer, Arnold Gehlen, Martin Heidegger, Siegfried Kracauer and Max Scheler.<sup>4</sup>

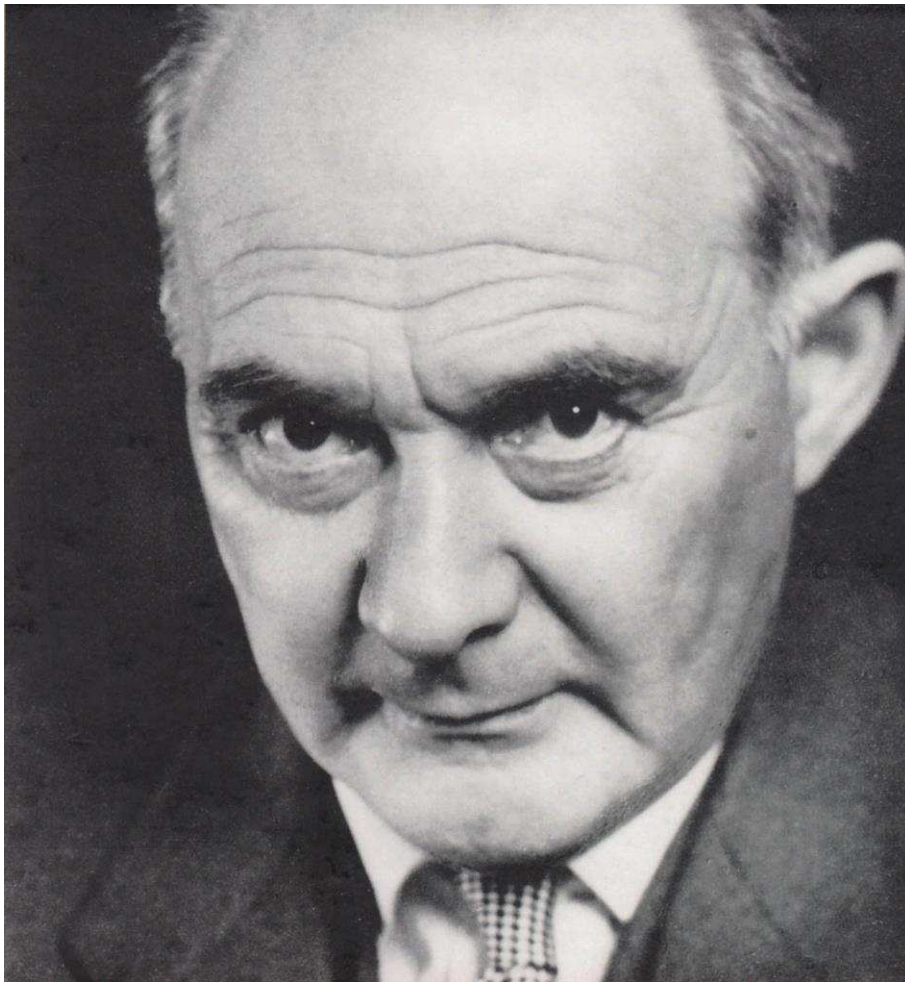


Fig. 1  
Helmuth Plessner, aged ca 64, in Göttingen  
Source: Helmuth-Plessner-Gesellschaft, Dresden. Courtesy of Katharina Günther.

## **Plessner's Philosophical Anthropology**

Philosophical anthropology deals with questions like 'what is man?' and 'what is man's place in the nature of things?' as opposed to the more philosophically fundamental 'what is being?' Joachim Fischer has distinguished Philosophical Anthropology (the capital letters denote its distinctiveness), the special movement within German philosophy of the 1920s, from a more generalised philosophical interest in anthropology.<sup>5</sup> While the individual, subject-discipline claims of anthropology, and of philosophy, have had periodic influences upon architectural thinking, and have waxed and waned in their influence and perceived relevance over the decades, it is surely timely to re-examine philosophical anthropology, at a time when the hand of the living human being seems increasingly distant from architectural conception (the rise of the computer in design), building construction (the increase in digital and mechanised production) and, perhaps most significantly, from the actual perception of material and space, through the social atomisation and physical dematerialisation that are the effects of the new (social, in particular) medias. We seem less and less sure and confident of our place in the world, and a fresh examination of Plessner's thinking may, I hope, act as a spur and challenge to contemporary architects to decrease this distance.

Plessner's claim for philosophical anthropology is that it provides 'a clarification of the position of man in the world'.<sup>6</sup> That is to say, his recourse to the tools of philosophy is aimed at furthering our anthropological and sociological understanding, much as my recourse to Plessner is used to cast light on some aspects of architectural thought and practice.

Plessner's thinking is contemporaneous with Martin Heidegger's. It is certainly easier to read than his compatriot's work, and more readily understandable. Plessner came from a background in the natural sciences, a field of knowledge requiring plain and straightforward language, a language which, moreover, has to act as an adjunct to non-verbal forms of communication, such as drawings, diagrams and photographs, akin to architectural

communication.<sup>7</sup> Immersed in transcendental philosophy, Plessner sought to answer Goethe's wish that Kant's Critique of Pure Reason (Kritik der reinen Vernunft) be completed by a 'Critique of the Senses' (Kritik der Sinne).<sup>8</sup> In a nutshell, this was to be Plessner's contribution to knowledge, initiated with his Unity of the Senses (Die Einheit der Sinne, 1923) and substantiated with his book The Levels of Organic Being and Man (Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch) in 1928.<sup>9</sup> Plessner made one substantial contribution to philosophical vocabulary: the word 'ex-centric' in the sense of "out of the centre".<sup>10</sup>

### **Plessner's key ideas and their relation to architecture**

Plessner's main text is his Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch (The Levels of Organic Being and Man). It failed to sustain the same degree of interest as the key contemporaneous work of phenomenological philosophy, Heidegger's Being and Time, either in the field of philosophy or, as this paper focusses on, that of architecture.<sup>11</sup> The reason, perhaps, is due to its interdisciplinary nature: Plessner was a trained biologist, and indeed of the seven chapters of the Levels, it is only the final one, 'The Sphere of Man', that deals with the anthropological and philosophical implications of his thesis.

### **Man's ex-centric positionality**

Here Plessner posits that, at the (human) observable scale of biological life, each organism's position relative to that of others, and to the environment, is a decisive factor in our understanding its drives and Dasein (roughly, 'being', or 'being-there', to appropriate a word of Heidegger's). Viewed in terms of an ascending hierarchy in the natural world, plants have fixed positions in the world, whereas animals move freely. They have, according to Plessner, different kinds of 'positionality'. Human beings have the additional characteristic, by virtue

of their advanced mental prowess, of being aware of their positionality and of being able to reflect upon it. They have ‘ex-centric positionality’.

If seen in the context of architecture, the concept of man’s ex-centric positionality has interesting implications, both for the way we perceive our position in the world, in reference to our surroundings, and in the way designers conceive, propose and make such environments. First of all architecture provides a way of understanding ex-centricity through the developing means of representing buildings in the early decades of the twentieth century where, in avant-garde circles, the axonometric projection began to supplant the perspective.<sup>12</sup> The axonometric, famously, is a more analytical representation of a building from which we can scale off accurate dimensions, and does not depend upon the single human observer and viewpoint demanded by the perspective. It is emblematic of a disinterested abstraction, ‘ex-centric’, as opposed to the perspective’s centredness on the human eye. The human viewpoint of the perspective, as opposed to other apparently more dispassionate and objective architectural projections, is the main topic of Alberto Pérez-Gómez and Louise Pelletier’s book *Architectural Representation and the Perspective Hinge*.<sup>13</sup> This was published in 1997, in the wake of a renewed and sustained interest in architectural drawing on the part of avant-garde architects and students, and on the brink of the revolution in architectural practice, with the use of the computer fundamentally changing the way buildings are imagined and produced.<sup>14</sup> In recent years, the ubiquity of digital means of representation and architectural production has multiplied the questions regarding man’s position with respect to architecture, in an era where images are invariably projected onto flat screens, and which may be scaled up or down at will.<sup>15</sup> Of course, we cannot claim that buildings and places have any views of their own positions in the world, be they objective or subjective. What may be argued, though, is that people who imagine or make buildings and places, ‘architects’, have, in modern times and places, steadily developed an ex-centric view of their work that has tended

to locate them outside the work itself and, moreover, with heightened abilities to reflect on their work dispassionately. The ‘criticality’ at large in the humanities and social sciences has noticeably extended into architectural design, and has gained increased traction in the last decades. The architect, as artist and agent, is emblematic of a renewed philosophic interest in the question (it is Thomas Nagel’s question) of ‘how to combine the perspective of a particular person inside the world with an objective view of that same world, the person and his viewpoint included. It is a problem that faces every creature with the impulse and the capacity to transcend its particular point of view and to conceive of the world as a whole.’<sup>16</sup>

Plessner’s emphasis on space and position as opposed to time and occasion is probably his most important contribution for architects.

### **The finitude of human beings**

Published in the same year as the now more famous *Being and Time*, Plessner’s *Levels* similarly explores the philosophical implications of man’s finitude. The substantive difference is that whereas Heidegger sees finitude in its temporal sense (‘we will all die’), Plessner regards our spatial limitations and relationships as more compelling (‘we are all located in different places, and in a constantly changing relationship to those places’).<sup>17</sup> He goes on to maintain that ‘human beings live in three worlds: an outer world (*Aussenwelt*), an inner world (*Innenwelt*), and the shared world of culture (*Mitwelt*)’.<sup>18</sup> This heightened sense of the world, derived from a biological understanding of plant, animal and human life-forms, challenges Cartesian dualism, and is furthermore at odds with Descartes in an additional elaboration. Plessner maintains there is a ‘double aspectivity’ to life, at least as it appears to us humans. We experience the world ‘from an inner and outer perspective’ and have a double vocabulary when describing ourselves in the world.<sup>19</sup> There are contrasting outer-world concepts such as ‘body’ (*Körper*) or ‘living body’ (*Leib*) and inner-world ones such as

‘soul’ (‘Seele’) and ‘lived experience’ (‘Erlebnis’); and, as far as the *Mitwelt* (a word translated by Jos De Mul as ‘world of culture’) goes, ‘I’ (‘ich’) and ‘we’ (‘wir’). This is indeed an elaboration, or perhaps a circumvention, of the mind-body problem that has beset (or fascinated, depending on your point of view) Western philosophy for centuries. Plessner was certainly embedded in metaphysics, as attested by his grounding in Kant, yet his ontology derives from a reading of man’s position in the world; it is an ontology of where we are in the world that might confirm Richard Rorty’s view that ‘we [pragmatists] have no use for the reality-appearance distinction, any more than for the distinction between the found and the made. We hope to replace the reality-appearance distinction with the distinction between the more useful and the less useful.’<sup>20</sup> Our principal interests are pragmatic ones, serving our respective areas of cultural and intellectual enquiry and practice.<sup>21</sup>

### **Plessner’s Three Anthropological Laws**

In the final chapter of *The Levels*, ‘The Human Sphere’, Plessner outlines his three anthropological laws that follow from his understanding of man’s ex-centric positionality and his finitude. These are (i) the law of natural artificiality, (ii) the law of mediated immediacy, and (iii) the law of the utopian standpoint .

#### **1. Natural Artificiality**

The first, the law of natural artificiality, states that man uses artificial means (technology) to overcome his ‘constitutive homelessness’.<sup>22</sup>

As an excentric being standing in disequilibrium, out of place and time, constitutively homeless, [man] has to “become something” and form his own equilibrium. [...] Man wishes to escape the unbearable excentricity of his being, he wishes to compensate for



the dichotomy [Hälftenhaftigkeit] of his own life-form and he can only manage to do this with things that are sufficiently heavy to weigh on the scales of his existence.<sup>23</sup>

Plessner goes on to specify what it is that supplies this corrective to man's ex-centricity: culture. To put it simply, as Jos De Mul does in his introduction to his edited book on Plessner, '[t]he world of culture and technology is the expression of the desire of human beings to bridge the distance that separates them from the world, their fellow man and themselves'.<sup>24</sup> For 'culture and technology', read architecture, in a formulation that might have been drafted by any number of reflective practitioners. Plessner understands architecture as 'artificial', certainly, but its artificiality is natural to man as he is currently constituted. Here Plessner makes common ground with his contemporary, the philosopher Arnold Gehlen, for whom man is a deficient being ('Mängelwesen'). The philosophical-anthropological point of Gehlen's is that man is a deficient being (as opposed to other animals) as he has to build his own world, before he can 'be'. 'Man is naturally a cultural being' ('Der Mensch ist von Natur aus ein Kulturwesen').<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, this is also an ontological response, one that answers man's existential need for a secure place in the world. Plessner recognises that

since man is compelled, through his type of existence, to lead the life that he actually lives, that is, to make what he is – since he only is when he accomplishes things – he needs a complement of an unnatural nature to which he is unaccustomed. Because of this he is by his very nature, by dint of his form of existence, artificial. As an ex-centric being that is not in equilibrium, standing in the void, placeless, timeless, constitutively homeless, he has to "become something" and to create his own equilibrium. And he creates this only with the assistance of unnatural things that emerge from his creation when the results of this creative making are granted their own heft.<sup>26</sup>

Plessner makes it absolutely clear that culture, the very essence of natural artificiality, requires both mind and hand; it is, as he puts it, '[...] sucked out of the fingers: intelligence and manual dexterity lie at the root of the origin of the use of tools and of culture.'<sup>27</sup>

Plessner's 'natural artificiality' finds a strong contemporary echo in the writings of the Finnish architect Juhani Pallasmaa and the sociologist Richard Sennett, both of whom relate to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of embodiment.<sup>28</sup> Yet we would be applying mistaken zeal if we allied Plessner's law of artificiality exclusively to what might loosely be termed the organic school of architecture. Instead, as I have argued elsewhere, it is more generally the re-emergent schools of realist and materialist philosophy, building on the work of, inter alios, the twentieth-century French philosophers Gilbert Simondon and François Dagognet, whose architectural implications are still to be realised.<sup>29</sup>

## **2. Mediated Immediacy: immanence and expressivity**

Plessner's second anthropological law, mediated immediacy (subtitled 'immanence and expressivity'), speaks of the centrality of culture and technology in enabling man to express himself and his ex-centric position in the world. 'Man can only invent insofar as he discovers', in other words, man can only mediate things and conditions that are immediately available to him.<sup>30</sup> '[Man's] productivity is only a pretext by which discovery becomes occurrence and gains substance', a sentiment that finds an immediate echo in the writings of his contemporary, the architect Hugo Häring (1882-1958).<sup>31</sup> Häring asks us to '[...] call on things and let them unfold their own forms. It goes against our nature to impose forms on them, to determine them from without, to force upon them laws of any kind, to dictate to them'.<sup>32</sup> Form finding has become the mantra of organic architecture ever since, and shares its vitalism with that of Plessner and others from the first decades of the twentieth century.<sup>33</sup>

However, we would be mistaken in thinking that the architectural implications of Plessner's second law are limited to the organic: let us not forget the adjective 'mediated' that Plessner couples with 'immediacy'. Cultural activities may well begin with the world as experienced, but they soon develop trajectories of their own, 'aesthetics' if you will, in order to express and make intelligible any particular ethos. Certainly, reading his speech that he gave at the Werkbund's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary conference in Berlin, in 1932, it is evident that Plessner alludes to the architecture of the Bauhaus, and of the benefits of the flat roof, while criticising the overtly aesthetic tendencies of the International Style and its followers.<sup>34</sup>

By the end of the section on this second law, Plessner has expanded his thesis out, so that he can claim as a '...law, that in the end people do not know what they do, but only experience it through history'.<sup>35</sup> This second law is one that poses problems for those seeking a single architectural direction from Plessner, for surely the demands of extreme functionalism, exemplified by the organic architecture of Häring, compete directly with those of formalism and historicism. However, for Plessner, culture is always at least one step removed from the body's physiology; his phenomenology never leads to an oversimplistic manifestation of expression, something which for him is always historically embedded. My own reading of the architectural import of his second law leans more towards the claims of history and the memorability of received forms of buildings, and chimes with Plessner's own maturing views by 1932 elaborated in the following section, with an inclusiveness and largeness of character that leads to an 'open' architecture, and one, moreover, that is able to accommodate historical precedent. Plessner is reticent as to what 'open form' might actually mean for architecture. In his Werkbund speech he alluded to Dessau, Rotterdam and Amsterdam, epicentres of avant-garde design, and praised asymmetrical layouts, and especially the flat roof, that emblem of Bauhaus architecture, as an example of openness

precisely because it lacks a conventional termination, and is open to possibilities of buildings being stacked one on top of another.<sup>36</sup>

This second law is, therefore, ambiguous regarding its implications for architecture. On the one hand, and of great relevance to one strand of the Neues Bauen, it has an obvious relationship with the organic functionalism of Häring, on the other, the demands of history, of the importance of a continuing tradition, it represents its antithesis. The Austrian designer Josef Frank's interwar work – about which more later – comprising well-wrought buildings and pithy writings, represents perhaps the ideal balance between the demands of invention and of tradition. One aspect of tradition that links Viennese aesthetics with Plessner's demand for expressivity is the mask. Here one thinks of Plessner's playful and insightful essay 'The Smile' concerning the subtleties of the facial expression that is for him the most human of all our (dis)guises.<sup>37</sup> The mask was certainly something that Adolf Loos railed against in his writings even if his executed buildings, with their spatially rich interiors of Raumplan, their mixed palette of materials, and with their owners' eclectic furnishings, are all 'hidden' by the white-painted render of their exteriors.<sup>38</sup> His buildings, especially the houses, invariably have clear boundaries, even if these boundaries belie complexities within. Such an attitude to public presence is apostrophised by Helmut Lethen as 'public coolness' which Plessner 'seeks to turn [...] into a medium that accepts vitalizing boundaries'.<sup>39</sup> The mask for Plessner acts as an essential distancing mechanism, a human mediation of the immediacy of the Aussenwelt that allows human beings to be in the world. For Lethen

Plessner's sociological discovery of roles as a protective medium is informed by Nietzsche's claim that every profound spirit needs a mask; his anthropology centres on this paradox: 'Only masked is man entirely real'. Oscar Wilde's motto – 'Man is least of all himself when he speaks in his own name. Give him a mask, and he will tell the truth' – echoes through Plessner's code of distance.<sup>40</sup>

Human beings' ex-centric positionality is due to the 'membrane' that separates them from their environment.<sup>41</sup> The German 'Reform' architect Heinrich Tessenow's executed buildings, drawings and writings – an oeuvre that reached its maturity exactly contemporaneous with Plessner's halcyon years of the 1920s – have uncanny echoes of much of the philosopher's work.<sup>42</sup> In an earlier essay, 'Objectivity or Truth in Craftsmanship', Tessenow (1876-1950) wrote:

It would be more beautiful, we would form closer human bonds, if we were able to openly show our sorrows and joys or the pipes of our houses and streets etc, everything that concerns us as humans; but we lack the ability to do so, lest such frankness embarrass or hurt us, and so we have much to hide.<sup>43</sup>

Tessenow recognised the mask-like function of architecture that conceals the facts of human life, and so makes it possible to live. His thinking acknowledges the suppression that enables meaningful expression to emerge, and concurs with Plessner's view that there must be '[...] in every artistic reading [...] a distortion of the work, a partisanship, a choice, an emphasis, in a word a distancing alienation, in order to see the object'.<sup>44</sup>

It is in the city of Vienna, the birthplace of psychoanalysis, that 'mediated immediacy' found its most obvious outlet, though without the directness and polemical purity that are the hallmarks of Weimar Germany's protagonists of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity). Within Viennese critical writings, too, there is frequently a mismatch between texts and buildings. Texts are by their very nature at one step removed from the objects they describe or analyse, and so tend to be more polemical and uncompromising than the buildings designed by the same author. One only has to compare Loos's shrill and hectoring writings, for instance, 'Architecture and Crime' with the architect's nuanced buildings and interiors, embedded in Viennese traditions of Biedermeier as they undoubtedly are.<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, in the era of 'Red Vienna', exactly contemporary with Weimar Germany in the 1920s,

we have the suave cynicism of Frank, who later wrote (in his Swedish exile), in his famous essay ‘Accidentism’:

The formal rules of art have been preserved through tradition, even though their validity cannot be proven; for that reason, there can be no art without recourse to tradition. Since these rules have been consistently observed from the earliest times up to the present day, one can regard them as axioms.<sup>46</sup>

Frank’s pragmatic and non-partisan views will be seen to relate to Plessner’s more nuanced thinking at the dawn of Nazi rule in Germany, a point that will be elaborated in the final part of this paper. The tenor of Frank’s writing is on a par with the wry wit evident in his buildings and other design work: his architectural thinking is always mediated via understandable and stylistically knowing writings and buildings.

### **3. Utopian Standpoint: nothingness and transcendence**

The third and final law, of man’s utopian standpoint, is the one that connects Plessner most profoundly with questions of philosophical ontology. It builds on the mediating role of the second law with the implication for architecture that it is to be located firmly within a historical tradition, historical in a Hegelian understanding of the term. Its subtitle, ‘nothingness and transcendence’, seems most distant from the scientific underpinnings of the previous laws, and yet man’s ex-centric being can only result in a belief in transcendence, as a bulwark against nothingness (i.e. the belief in God), or its profane equivalent, a hope in and striving for a brilliant future (i.e. Utopianism, or a Sartrean existentialism). ‘The ex-centric form [of] human existence drives man to engage in culture, it awakens needs that can only be satisfied through a system of artificial objects’.<sup>47</sup> Buildings are obvious examples of such objects, produced within each society’s architectural culture.

Architecture may be said to be central to the enactment of Plessner's philosophical anthropology as it simultaneously acts in the inner, outer and with-worlds, with the architect as ex-centric agent: ' [human existence's] ex-centric form compels man to engage in culture, it awakens needs that can only be satisfied through a system of artificial objects [...] Its constitutive rootlessness bears witness to the reality of world history'.<sup>48</sup> History, together with its twin, memory, is a central human faculty that affords us utopian transcendence, and with this third law, Plessner's philosophical anthropology broadens out to encompass man's historical nature. It is the law he expresses most succinctly (at some five pages right at the end of *The Levels*, it is significantly shorter than the preceding two laws), but the one to which he returns in his postwar writings in a more expansive mode. He considers the implications man's ex-centric position has for history, and for historiography, in his book *The Belated Nation* where he states that 'only one thing remains of life: memory'.<sup>49</sup> And in a late essay he writes

Thus man never returns. We have to renounce the romanticism of alienation and homecoming inherent in Marxism and admit to ourselves its illusionary character. In its optimistic linkage of progress and homecoming Marxism is based on an outmoded anthropology, which, still under Hegel's spell, ignores the consequences of insight into the impenetrability of man and the essence of his historicity.<sup>50</sup>

This is (late) Plessner, at his most hard-boiled and without any illusions. It is in complete contrast to the romanticism of Heidegger which suggests that appropriate architecture could provide such a refuge from modernity. Such a homecoming, expressed in the late 1960s but harking back to the antagonistic polarities of late Weimar Germany, would be satisfied neither by the nostalgia offered by Ferdinand Tönnies's 'community' nor by the rigidities of Marxist society.<sup>51</sup> Instead, according to Lethen, 'Plessner contrasts the identikit picture of community as a symbiotic companionship with an idea of society that lacks idyllic features. It

is an open system of unencumbered strangers.’<sup>52</sup> An open political and social system, moreover, that finds its architectural equivalence in the open form typified by Walter Gropius’s Bauhaus ensemble (1925-26) at Dessau. This characterises Plessner’s pragmatic turn away from the abstract idealism inherent in Marxism to a transcendence which is just out of our reach, lying in the future of some utopian dream, or as Plessner concluded *The Belated Nation*, ‘[e]ven in the apparent finality of fundamental dogmatism [the philosophy of life] remains linked to historical change and in truth ready to awaken those unknown forces that herald what is coming.’<sup>53</sup>

What might this mean for architecture? In his speech on the occasion of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the German Werkbund Plessner claimed that

we have to underline one more point that is important for the success of this train of thought: the dissolution of the private ties through the technical world, the limitation of the private space of human existence, the eradication of private relationships and in place of these eradicated private relationships the gradual coming into being of a public realm.<sup>54</sup>

He went on to discuss the bankruptcy of aesthetics, since

the aesthetic attitude is no longer valid, it has become in a quite definite sense a private matter. It is the preserve of people of taste, of those who possess time, money and education, who take pleasure in fine things and know what to do with them: however, it is no longer the preserve of the public sphere, no longer the preserve of that unassuming subjectivity of the masses, in which we all participate, like it or not.<sup>55</sup>

So far, so sachlich. However, in what at first sight appears to be a volte-face on the part of Plessner, towards the end of his speech he appears to subvert, or soften, his argument:



But the things with which we are concerned here [...] are greater than the things of politics and of political ideology. Not only do we have the firm belief, but we already know that the new form-making and the search for new form does not rely upon the socialist train of thought. The hope that this new form-world can only be completely brought about by dint of a proletarian revolution [...] we can no longer entertain.<sup>56</sup>

Plessner's decoupling of the Neues Bauen from Marxist ideology is quite startling in the light of his foregoing polemic. The views of the Werkbundists present at the speech are not known, but they – and Plessner – must have seen the writing on the wall: Hitler had become Chancellor by the end of January 1933, and the Werkbund was subsequently disbanded.<sup>57</sup> Yet had the Werkbund audience been familiar with Plessner's writings, and with his carefully plotted development of his anthropological laws stemming from his understanding of man's ex-centricity, then they would have taken his words – prophetic, from our post-Communist perspective – in their stride. Nine years earlier, one year after the publication of his *Unity of the Senses*, in 1924, he had published *Limits of Community*: a critique of social radicalism. It is worth quoting some of its opening remarks, in order to gain the full impact of Plessner's withering assault on dualistic thought, and on the dire consequences such thought would have on political and social life, and, by implication, on architecture:

By radicalism we mean generally the conviction that the truly great and good only come about by conscious recourse to the roots of existence; the belief in the healing power of extremes whose method is to make a stand against all traditional values and compromises. [...] Social radicalism [...] is the native world-view of the impatient, sociologically: of the lower classes, biologically: of youth. [...] Radicalism means dualism. [It is] contemptuous of the conditional, of the limited, of small things and steps, of restraint, or reticence, of unconsciousness, joyful, but only of great things,

devout, but only to the mighty, purist, therefore Pharisaic, principled, therefore inhibited, fanatic, therefore destructive. The enemy of radicalism is nature [...].<sup>58</sup>

Plessner is here announcing a new social construct for man, one that recognises its artificiality while acknowledging its anthropological roots in the biological and the natural.

### **Conclusion: Plessner's Bauhaus**

In conclusion I would like to consider a building project that Plessner took an intense interest in, the house he commissioned for himself and his wife in Göttingen (**Fig. 2**).

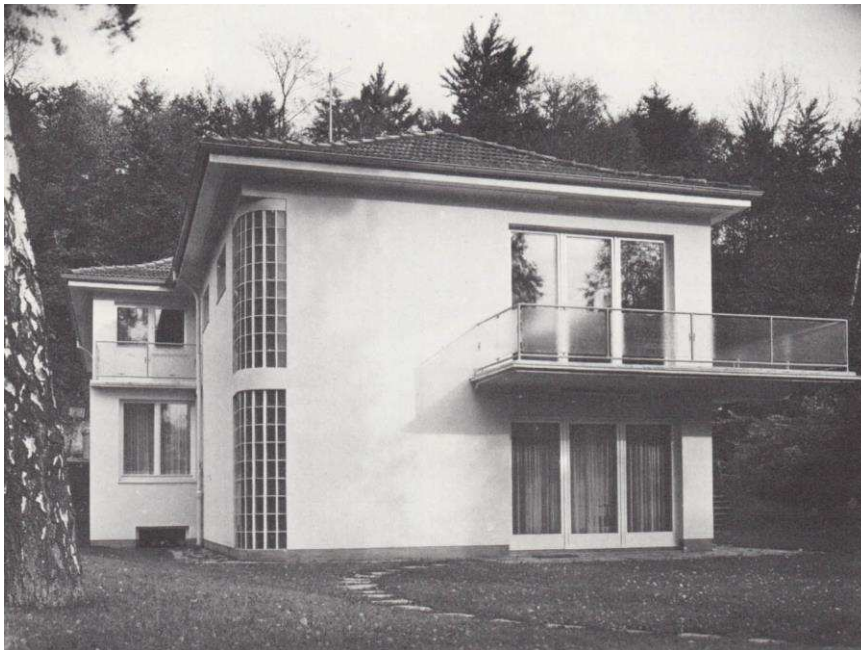


Fig. 2

Lucy Hillebrand, Plessner House, Göttingen (1951-52). View of house from garden.  
Source: Lucy Hillebrand, *Zeit-Räume der Architektin Lucy Hillebrand* (Stuttgart: Krämer, 1983), edited by Dieter Boeminghaus, 156.

Plessner returned to Germany in 1951, following his 15-year exile in Groningen. He took up the newly-founded chair in Sociology at the University of Göttingen, married Monika Tintelnot, and commissioned the architect Lucy Hillebrand (1906-97) to build their house in

the eastern suburbs of the town. Hillebrand was an inspired choice, being both local as well as a convinced and thoughtful Modernist.<sup>59</sup> From the north entrance side the house appears single storey; this belies the fact that it is built into a sloping site. It is rendered white, with a low-pitched hipped roof: sachlich, simple and straightforward, a 1950s rendering of a 1920s Neues Bauen house. The layout of the (upper) ground level is surprising, the orthogonal lines of the exterior softening into an organic essay of a curved staircase leading down to the guest bedrooms beneath. The private quarters of Plessner, hard by the entrance, give onto a free-planned workroom. Beyond, visible through glass doors and panels, is a narrow gallery lined with bookcases, enveloping the top section of a double-height void overlooking the guest and reception areas beneath (**Fig. 3**). These give directly onto the garden. The house is one of a family of villas designed by Hillebrand in postwar West Germany all of which continue the theme of external restraint combined with internal freedom of layout.<sup>60</sup> Evident from the layout, the house has a remarkable ease in which its spaces ‘flow’ into each other;<sup>61</sup> its organic composition resembles that of the houses of Hans Scharoun and Häring, and as Heike Delitz has recounted

Hillebrand designed by virtually dancing through her spaces. Bodily movement in space was her guiding principle; [...] Plessner explained ‘designed’ more precisely, in that she drew for him, and they ‘spurred each other on’ in this creative work, as Monika Plessner has recounted [in Carola Dietze’s intellectual biography *Nachgeholtes Leben. Helmuth Plessner 1892 – 1985*]. A Bauhaus, then, instead of Heidegger’s Hut.<sup>62</sup>

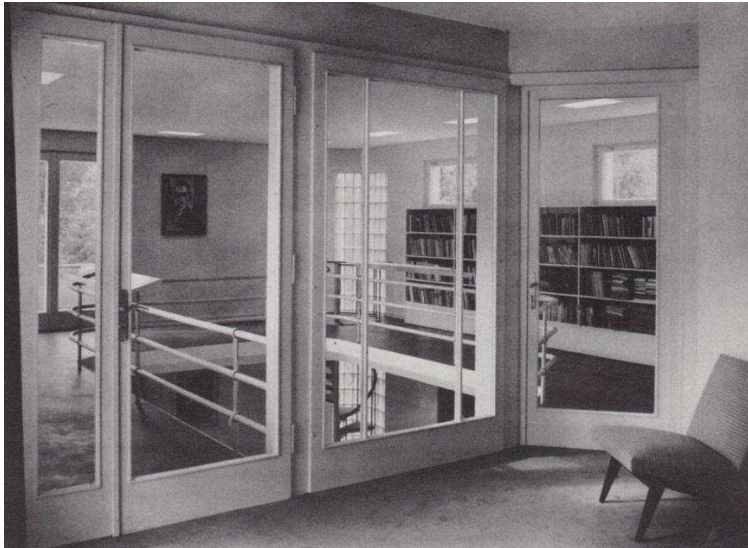


Fig. 3  
Lucy Hillebrand, Plessner House, Göttingen (1951-52). View from Plessner's workroom to the library gallery and the garden beyond.

Source: Lucy Hillebrand, *Zeit-Räume der Architektin Lucy Hillebrand* (Stuttgart: Krämer, 1983), edited by Dieter Boeminghaus, 157.

Delitz's point with this final, acid aphorism is that Plessner's engagement with Modernism and the development of architecture was a positive and creative one, immersive in the practice, theory and politics of contemporary design, as opposed to the Freiberg professor's haughty withdrawal from it in his Todtnauberg retreat.<sup>63</sup> Plessner's Göttingen house in its 'natural artificiality', its 'mediated immediacy' and its 'utopian transcendence' resembles in all its complexities the houses of Josef Frank, with their inner spatial gymnastics contrasted with their external simplicity of form, plane and line (**Fig. 4**).<sup>64</sup> Plessner was straightforward and uncomplicated in his understanding that '[a]rchitecture, on account of rationally understandable functional concepts, presents the object with its meaning, a house, a staircase, a garden.'<sup>65</sup> For Plessner, these 'functional' elements are also clear conveyors of meaning. We see a staircase, and know that it will take us up to the floor above.

ERDGESCHOSS:

- |                        |                     |
|------------------------|---------------------|
| 1 = Windfang und Diele | 6 = Balkon          |
| 2 = Bad                | 7 = Wirtschaftlerin |
| 3 = Schlafzimmer       | 8 = Speisenaufzug   |
| 4 = Arbeitszimmer      | 9 = Küche           |
| 5 = Bibliothek         | 10 = Garderobe      |
|                        | 11 = W. C.          |
|                        | 12 = Garage         |

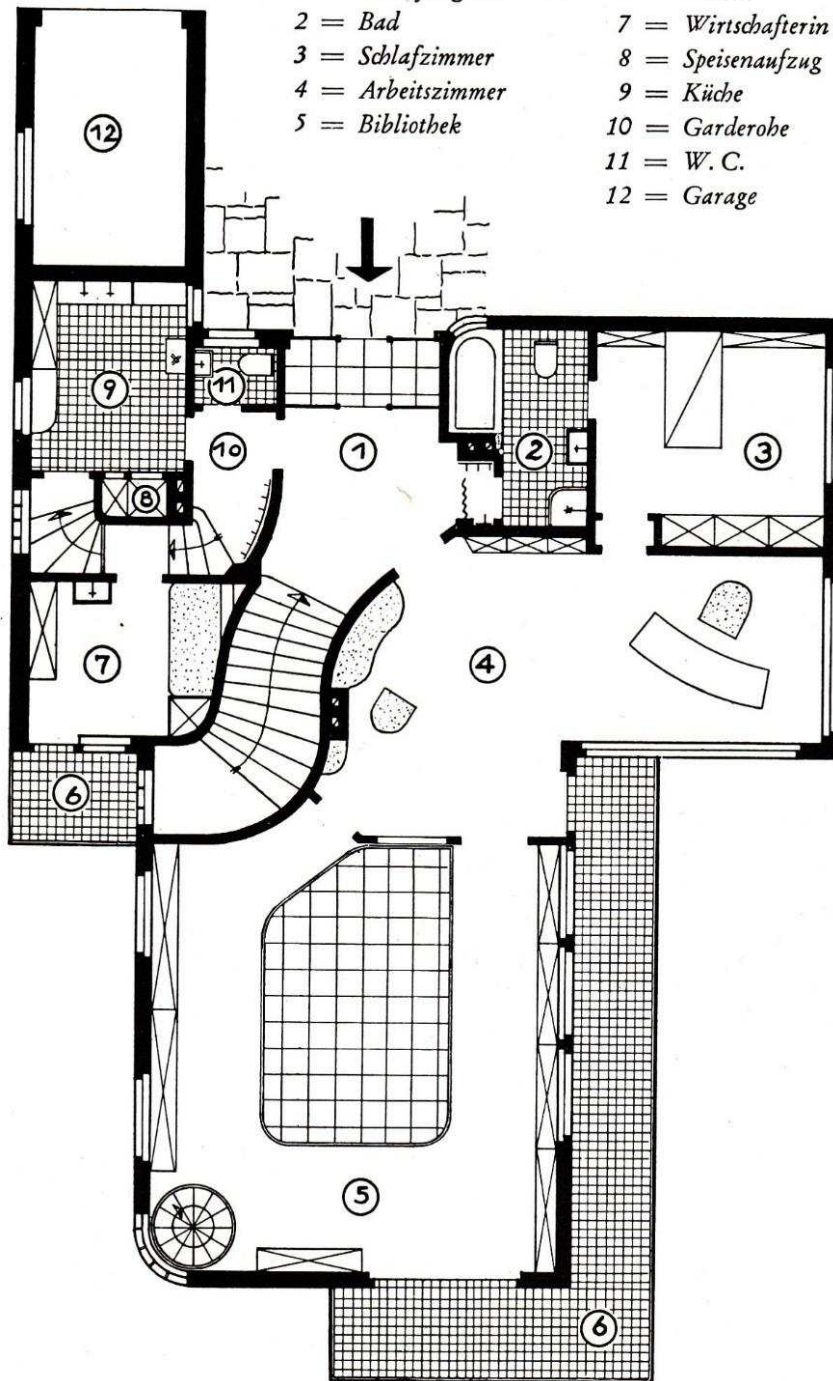


Fig. 4  
 Lucy Hillebrand, Plessner House, Göttingen (1951-52). Upper floor (main entrance level) plan.  
 Source: Lucy Hillebrand, *Zeit-Räume der Architektin Lucy Hillebrand* (Stuttgart: Krämer, 1983), edited by  
 Dieter Boeminghaus, 157.

It is wonderful to imagine Plessner and Hillebrand ‘dancing’ the Göttingen house into being. And yet Plessner had already described such an embodied approach to space, anticipating Merleau-Ponty’s later writings, in this extraordinary passage from his 1923 book *Unity of the Senses*:

Nestling in, moving along, feeling one’s way, occupying space, the thousand ways of living within our postures and giving the silent image of spaces and planes through such postures an immediate connection to me, these are the ways to understand architecture. We always have to feel such an image and its ideal system of expression on our own body in order to taste the sense of a building. The purely ornamental, the effect of light, the qualities of materials form a meaningful structure, if not consciously, then in a more or less immediate reaction to the artificially formed world of space.’<sup>66</sup>

Plessner built an edifice through his work in philosophical anthropology based on human positionality. It is complex and nuanced, and has ramifications for architecture that are similarly complex and nuanced, and ultimately suspicious of radicalism for its own sake.<sup>67</sup>

## NOTES

All translations are by the author unless otherwise stated.

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Düchs and Christian Illies, ‘The Human in Architecture and Philosophy: Steps towards an “Architectural Anthropology”’, *Journal of the International Society for the Philosophy of Architecture*, No. x (2017), n. 10, citing Jürgen Habermas, ‘Philosophische Anthropologie’, in Alwin Diemer and Ivo Frenzel (eds), *Fischer Lexikon Philosophie* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Fischer, 1958), pp. 18–35.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, Sebastian Feldhusen and Ute Poerschke (eds), *Theorie der Architektur: Zeitgenössische Positionen* (Basel and Berlin: Birkhäuser and Bauverlag BV, 2017). This volume is largely inspired by the anti-autonomous writings of Eduard Führ, for whom the ‘theory of architecture’ (and never ‘architectural theory’, which would imply a discipline-specific theory) is one to which all might contribute (op. cit, p. 10).

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<sup>3</sup> Helmuth Plessner was born into an affluent family of Jewish descent in Wiesbaden, in 1892. A bright schoolboy, he went on to study medicine, and then zoology and philosophy in Heidelberg. On the eve of the First World War he moved to Göttingen to study phenomenology under Edmund Husserl. He was appointed professor of philosophy in Cologne in 1926, having already published his first major work, *The Unity of the Senses*, three years earlier. Within two years at Cologne he had published what is generally regarded as his magnum opus, *The Levels of the Organic and Man*. Seven years later he was dismissed from his post, and after a short stay in Istanbul was offered refuge in Holland, with a chair in sociology in Groningen. As the war progressed he went underground in Holland, but returned to Germany in 1951. Numerous writings followed, leading to his collected works being published by Suhrkamp by 1985, the year of his death.

For the biographical sketch of Plessner's life from which this is drawn see Jos De Mul (ed.), *Plessner's Philosophical Anthropology: perspectives and prospects* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014), pp. 12-14.

<sup>4</sup> Frederic Schwartz, *Blind Spots: critical theory and the history of art in twentieth-century Germany* (London: Yale University Press, 2005) and Helmut Lethen, *Cool Conduct: the culture of distance in Weimar Germany* (Berkeley: Calif. and London: University of California Press, 2002), translated by Don Reneau, especially chapter three, 'The Conduct Code of the Cool Persona', pp. 33-100. Originally published as *Verhaltenslehren der Kälte: Lebensversuche zwischen den Kriegen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1994).

<sup>5</sup> A good overview of philosophical anthropology may be found in Joachim Fischer, 'Die "Kölner Konstellation"', in Tilman Allert and Joachim Fischer, eds, *Plessner in Wiesbaden* (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2014), pp. 89-121. Here the three 'stars' alluded to are, in addition to Plessner, Max Scheler and Arnold Gehlen. See also Bernhard Beller, 'Anthropologie und Ethik bei Arnold Gehlen' (Munich: Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, 2010), unpublished doctoral dissertation, especially 'Eine kurze Geschichte der philosophischen Anthropologie', pp. 12-41, [https://edoc.ub.uni-muenchen.de/15913/1/Beller\\_Bernhard.pdf](https://edoc.ub.uni-muenchen.de/15913/1/Beller_Bernhard.pdf) [accessed 13.11.2017].

For the distinction between the specific, 1920s movement and more a generalised anthropological interest for philosophy, see Joachim Fischer, *Philosophische Anthropologie. Eine Denkrichtung des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Alber, 2009), first edition, p. 9. Similarly, the term *Neues Bauen* ('New Building') is a specific reference to architecture in the German-speaking lands in the 1920s, an aesthetic reference that cannot be used in respect of architecture, however 'new', in, say, the 1890s or the 1950s.

<sup>6</sup> Helmuth Plessner, 'Homo absconditus', in Helmuth Plessner, *Conditio humana* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003), pp. 353-66, 353. First published in *Merkur*, 23<sup>rd</sup> year, Vol. 11, Stuttgart 1969, pp. 989-998.

<sup>7</sup> One is reminded of Otto Neurath's work in 'Red' Vienna and his project to develop a clear language of visual communication a generation before the semiotics revolution of the 1960s. See Eve Blau, *The Architecture of Red Vienna, 1919-1934* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT, 1999).

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<sup>8</sup> Helmuth Plessner, *Die Einheit der Sinne: Grundlinien einer Ästhesiologie des Geistes* (Bonn: F. Cohen, 1923) in Helmuth Plessner, *Anthropologie der Sinne: Gesammelte Schriften III* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1980), pp. 7-315, and p. 31.

<sup>9</sup> Helmuth Plessner, *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch: Einleitung in die philosophische Anthropologie* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1928), reprinted 1975 (Berlin: de Gruyter), Sammlung Göschen 2200.

<sup>10</sup> The German term “exzentrisch” does indeed mean both eccentric and “out of the centre”. Plessner uses the term “exzentrische Positionalität” in the sense of “being in a position that is out of the centre”. So I have rendered the spelling in translation in order to differentiate its meaning from the English ‘eccentric’.

<sup>11</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1927).

<sup>12</sup> See Auguste Choisy, *Histoire de l'Architecture* (2 vols) (Paris, 1899).

<sup>13</sup> Alberto Pérez-Gómez and Louise Pelletier, *Architectural Representation and the Perspective Hinge* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1997).

<sup>14</sup> See Rolf Sachsse, *Bild und Bau. Zur Nutzung technischer Medien beim Entwerfen von Architektur* (Braunschweig and Wiesbaden: Vieweg, 1997).

<sup>15</sup> See Gerald Adler, Timothy Brittain-Catlin and Gordana Fontana-Giusti (eds), *Scale: imagination, perception and practice in architecture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), ‘Introduction’, pp. 1-9. The phenomenon of flatness is explored in various scales, media and locations in Barry Higman, *Flatness* (London: Reaktion, 2017).

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 3. For Plessner, the only such creature on earth is the human being.

<sup>17</sup> See De Mul, *Plessner's Philosophical Anthropology*, pp. 14-15.

<sup>18</sup> See De Mul, *Plessner's Philosophical Anthropology*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>19</sup> De Mul, *Plessner's Philosophical Anthropology*, p. 17.

<sup>20</sup> Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1999), p. xxii.

<sup>21</sup> To continue Rorty's line of thought

[...] the vocabulary of Greek metaphysics and Christian ontology – the vocabulary used in what Heidegger has called ‘the onto-theological tradition’ – was a useful one for our ancestors’ purposes, but that we have different purposes, which will be better served by employing a different vocabulary. Our ancestors climbed a ladder which we are now in a position to throw away. We can throw it away not because we have reached a final resting place, but because we have different problems to solve than those which perplexed our ancestors. (Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1999), p. xxii).



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<sup>22</sup> See Helmuth Plessner, *Die Stufen*, p. 310. The reader who is looking for a shortcut to Plessner's three main anthropological laws should refer to Helmuth Plessner, 'Der Mensch als Lebewesen', in Helmuth Plessner, *Mit anderen Augen: Aspekte einer philosophischen Anthropologie* (Stuttgart: Reklam, 1982), pp. 9-62. This essentially reprints the laws as stated in *The Levels* (pp. 309-46), prefaced by a short introduction. There is as yet no English translation of *Die Stufen*.

<sup>23</sup> Plessner, *Die Stufen*, pp. 310-11.

<sup>24</sup> De Mul, *Plessner's Philosophical Anthropology*, p. 19.

<sup>25</sup> Arnold Gehlen, 'Philosophische Anthropologie' (1971), in Arnold Gehlen, *Philosophische Anthropologie und Handlungslehre* (Gesamtausgabe, Vol. 4) (Frankfurt-am-Main: Klostermann, 1983), pp. 236-46, here p. 240. Actual quote: 'So erscheint der Mensch schon von Natur aus als Kulturwesen, seine Sonderstellung hierin begründet.' See also Arnold Gehlen, *Der Mensch: seine Natur und seine Stellung in der Welt* (Berlin: Junker & Dünnhaupt, 1940).

<sup>26</sup> Plessner, *Die Stufen*, p. 310.

<sup>27</sup> Plessner, *Die Stufen*, p. 312. Plessner embraces technology in ways that Heidegger found impossible. For Plessner, as for his contemporary, the philosopher Friedrich Dessauer, '[t]echnology is for Germany what sun is for Spain's wine, for Canada's grain, for Argentina's pastures'. (Friedrich Dessauer, *Philosophie der Technik: das Problem der Realisierung* (Bonn: Friedrich Cohen Verlag, 1927), p. 31.

<sup>28</sup> See Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: architecture and the senses* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2005) and *The Thinking Hand: existential and embodied wisdom in architecture* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2009), Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (London: Allen Lane, 2008), Raymond Tallis, *The Hand: a philosophical inquiry in human being* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 1992). Originally published as *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945).

<sup>29</sup> See Gerald Adler, 'Pragmatics: towards a theory of things', in Teresa Stoppani, Giorgio Ponzio and George Themistokleous (eds), *This Thing Called Theory* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), pp. 179-190. Significant texts referred to here are François Dagognet, *Éloge de l'objet: pour une philosophie de la merchandise* (Paris: Vrin, 1989) and Gilbert Simondon, *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques* (Paris: Aubier, 1958). The fields of enquiry around New Materialism and New Realism are burgeoning today; see the recent compilation Markus Gabriel (ed.), *Der Neue Realismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2014), and Maurizio Ferraris, *Introduction to New Realism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014). (Ferraris is also included in the Gabriel-edited collection.) See also 'Neuer Pragmatismus in der Architektur', *Arch+*, No. 156, May 2001.

<sup>30</sup> Plessner, *Die Stufen*, p. 321.

<sup>31</sup> Plessner, *Die Stufen*, p. 32.

<sup>32</sup> Hugo Häring, *Die Form*, vol. 1, October 1925, p. 5, cited in Peter Blundell Jones, *Hugo Häring* (Stuttgart and London: Axel Menges, 1999), p. 7.

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<sup>33</sup> See Peter Bernhard, ‘Plessners Konzept der offenen Form im Kontext der Avantgarde der 1920er Jahre’ (Plessner’s concept of open form in the context of the avant-garde in the 1920s), in *Arhe*, IV, July 2007 (Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad, Novi Sad, Serbia). There is by now a large bibliography on the relationship between biology and architectural Modernism. The English-speaking reader will be more familiar with D’Arcy Thompson’s book *On Growth and Form* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961). This is an abridged version of the original book published in 1917. Thomson’s ideas about the relationship between biological and structural and architectural form were taken up with alacrity in the years following its re-edition.

<sup>34</sup> Helmuth Plessner, ‘Wiedergeburt der Form im technischen Zeitalter’ (‘Rebirth of Form in the Technical Age’), in *Arch+*, No. 161, June 2002, pp. 52-57, transcript of Plessner’s speech on 14<sup>th</sup> October 1932 in Berlin on the occasion of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the German Werkbund, p. 52. Translations from this speech are my own, although a complete English translation exists: ‘Rebirth of Form in the Technical Age’, translated by Jonathan Blower, *Art in Translation*, vol. 3, issue 1 (2011), pp. 37-51. First published in German in *Politik—Anthropologie—Philosophie: Aufsätze und Vorträge*, edited by Salvatore Giammusso and Hans-Ulrich Lessing (Munich: Fink, 2001), pp. 71-86.

The International Style exhibition opened at MoMA, New York City on 9 February, 1932, some eight months before the Werkbund’s anniversary meeting in Berlin.

<sup>35</sup> Plessner, *Die Stufen*, p. 341.

<sup>36</sup> Plessner, ‘Wiedergeburt der Form’, pp. 52-57, p. 57.

<sup>37</sup> Helmuth Plessner, ‘Das Lächeln’, in Helmuth Plessner, *Mit anderen Augen: Aspekte einer philosophischen Anthropologie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1982), pp. 183-97. Originally published in 1950.

<sup>38</sup> See Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: modern architecture as mass media* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT, 1994). ‘We are divided between what we think and what we say and do’, p. 33. Colomina is referring to the fin-de-siècle disjunctions manifested in ‘civilised’ cultures, especially visible in Vienna, between rich and poor, outside and inside, technology and culture, and so on. She starts the section with an apposite quote of Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s (from his *Buch der Freude*): ‘Depth must be hidden. Where? On the surface.’ See also Janet Stewart, *Fashioning Vienna: Adolf Loos’s cultural criticism* (London: Routledge, 2000), especially chapter four, ‘The display and disguise of difference’, pp. 98-130.

<sup>39</sup> Lethen, *Cool Conduct*, 55, and Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974). Lethen goes on to account for just such ‘coolness’ in western mores and habits of behaviour since the Enlightenment: ‘[Richard] Sennett [in *The Fall of Public Man*, 1976] looks for orientation to public dialogue in the eighteenth century, while Plessner’s theory breathes the air of seventeenth-century French classicism.’

<sup>40</sup> Lethen, *Cool Conduct*, p. 62, citing Friedrich Nietzsche, *Werke in drei Bänden* (Munich: Carl Hanser, 1963), vol. 2, p. 604. Nietzsche’s actual words are ‘[j]eder tiefe Geist braucht eine Maske’, literally, ‘every deep spirit needs a mask’. Lethen further emphasises the point:

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‘Plessner does not tolerate the enactment of “naked honesty” or “eruptive authenticity” either in contemporary design, whether the new objectivity interiors of Bauhaus architecture— “with overhead lighting and tiled walls”- or in expressionist stage sets. Hygiene resides for him at the cold pole, “reckless sincerity” at the warm. He takes aim at all forms of unmediated directness, pleading for moderate temperatures and indirect lighting, for art and literature of whatever type as long as they eschew intimate self-revelation in favor of the regulating practice of distance.’ (Lethen, *Cool Conduct*, p. 54).

<sup>41</sup> Plessner must have been aware – although his writings do not attest to it – of the Dessau visionary designer Siegfried Ebeling, whose tract ‘Space as Membrane’ was published in 1926. Siegfried Ebeling, *Space as Membrane* (London: Architectural Association, 2010), edited and with an afterword by Spyros Papapetros; introduction by Walter Scheiffele; translated by Pamela Johnston based on an earlier translation by Anna Kathryn Schoefert. Originally published in German as *Der Raum als Membran* (Dessau: Dünnhaupt, 1926).

<sup>42</sup> See Gerald Adler, ‘Energising the building edge: Siegfried Ebeling, Bauhaus bioconstructivist’, in Ruth Morrow and Mohamed Abdelmonem (eds), *Peripheries* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), pp. 183-99.

<sup>43</sup> Heinrich Tessenow, ‘Die Sachlichkeit oder die Wahrheit in der gewerblichen Arbeit’ (‘Objectivity or Truth in Craftsmanship’), in Heinrich Tessenow, *Hausbau und dergleichen* (Weimar and Rostock: Edition M, 2011), *Heinrich Tessenow Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 2, edited by Theodor Böll, 38. Originally published in Berlin by Bruno Cassirer, 1916, and subsequently in Braunschweig by Vieweg, 1986.

<sup>44</sup> Helmuth Plessner, ‘Mit anderen Augen’, (‘With other eyes’) in Helmuth Plessner, *Mit anderen Augen: Aspekte einer philosophischen Anthropologie* (Stuttgart: P. Reclam, 1982), p. 171.

<sup>45</sup> Adolf Loos, ‘Ornament und Verbrechen’ (1908) (‘Architecture and Crime’), in Adolf Loos, *Trotzdem* (Vienna: Prachner, 1982), pp. 78-88. Originally published in Adolf Loos, *Trotzdem. 1900- 1930* (Innsbruck: Brenner-Verlag, 1931).

<sup>46</sup> Josef Frank, ‘Accidentism’, in Josef Frank, *Schriften/Writings* (Vienna: Metroverlag, 2012), vol. 2, p. 373, translated by Christopher Long. Originally published (in Swedish) as ‘Accidentism’ in *Form*, 54 (1958), 160-65, and in German in *Baukunst und Werkform*, Year 14, Nuremberg 1961, vol. 4, pp. 216-18. Frank continued:

In our age of scientific thinking, all traditions are gradually being lost; there is no longer any reason to recognize rules that cannot be proven. Thus, concepts such as art and beauty – which cannot even be fully defined – have come under doubt. A person without tradition is forced to invent his own rules of art, which, as a result, must be quite arbitrary. To believe these rules himself and to disseminate the belief in them, he must base them on moral, scientific, utilitarian, or mystical motives.

For a pithy and concise assessment of Frank’s centrality in Vienna’s interwar architecture and debates concerning aesthetics, see Friedrich Achleitner, ‘Josef Frank und die Wiener Architektur der Zwischenkriegszeit’, in Friedrich Achleitner, *Wiener Architektur: zwischen typologischem Fatalismus und semantischem Schlamassel* (Vienna, Cologne and Weimar: Böhlau, 1996), pp. 81-87.

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<sup>47</sup> Plessner, *Die Stufen*, p. 341.

<sup>48</sup> Plessner, *Die Stufen*, p. 341.

<sup>49</sup> Helmuth Plessner, *Die verspätete Nation* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1959), p. 97. This book, originally published in 1935 with the title *Das Schicksal deutschen Geistes im Ausgang seiner bürgerlichen Epoche* (The Fate of the German Spirit at the End of its Bourgeois Epoch) was suppressed the following year. It was only republished in 1959 with its new title.

<sup>50</sup> Helmuth Plessner, 'De Homine Abscondito', in *Social Research*, vol. 36, Winter (1969), no. 4, p. 509. Translated by Claus Mueller.

<sup>51</sup> Ferdinand Tönnies, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (Leipzig: Fues's Verlag, 1912).

<sup>52</sup> Lethen, *Cool Conduct*, p. xi.

<sup>53</sup> Plessner, *Die verspätete Nation*, p. 166.

<sup>54</sup> Plessner, 'Wiedergeburt der Form', p. 52.

<sup>55</sup> Plessner, 'Wiedergeburt der Form', p. 53.

<sup>56</sup> Plessner, 'Wiedergeburt der Form', p. 55.

<sup>57</sup> See Peter Bernhard, 'Plessners Konzept der offenen Form im Kontext der Avantgarde der 1920er Jahre' (Plessner's concept of open form in the context of the avant-garde in the 1920s), in *Arhe*, IV, July 2007 (Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad, Novi Sad, Serbia). This is a version of a lecture given by Bernhard at the Plessner Workshop held at the TU Dresden in April 2005. It is essentially a commentary on the position 'open form' has in Plessner's 'Rebirth of Form' speech on the occasion of the Werkbund's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, in 1932. Bernhard alludes to Plessner's understanding of open form in the context of technology as well as of life itself. For technical artefacts, such as machines, their 'open forms' enable them to change as needs and capabilities change.

<sup>58</sup> Helmuth Plessner, *Grenzen der Gemeinschaft. Eine Kritik des sozialen Radikalismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002), p. 14. Originally published by Friedrich Cohen, Bonn, 1924. It remains untranslated into English.

<sup>59</sup> Hillebrand was, like Plessner, of mixed Jewish descent, and was unable to practise during the Nazi interregnum. See <http://www.fembio.org/biographie.php/frau/biographie/lucy-hillebrand/> [accessed 27.06.2017]. See also:

Lucy Hillebrand, *Zeit-Räume der Architektin Lucy Hillebrand* (Stuttgart: Krämer, 1983), edited by Dieter Boeminghaus, and Sonia Ricon Baldessarini, *Wie Frauen bauen: Architektinnen von Julia Morgan bis Zaha Hadid* (Berlin und Grambin: AvivA, 2001), 'Lucy Hillebrand: Architektur als Schrift der Beweglichkeit', pp. 93-102.

<sup>60</sup> See Hillebrand, *Zeit-Räume*, pp. 156-7. The description of Plessner's house cites Albrecht Bürkle, 'Das Haus des Professors', in *Merian* 6 (1953), vol. 1, p. 41.

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<sup>61</sup> ‘There were hardly any doors [in Plessner’s Wiesbaden house]’. Cited in Heike Delitz, ‘Ein Bau für die modern Philosophie und Soziologie: Plessner in Göttingen’, in Tilman Allert and Joachim Fischer, eds, *Plessner in Wiesbaden* (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2014), pp. 133-143, cited p. 136, from original in Carola Dietze, *Nachgeholtes Leben. Helmuth Plessner 1892-1985* (Göttingen: Wallstein-Verlag, 2006), p. 362. The lack of doors puts one in mind of the domestic architecture of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, of whom it was said that ‘he [Plessner] might have been Mies’s favourite philosopher, therefore the favourite philosopher of one of the three great heroes of modern architecture’. (Delitz, p. 138, citing Hans-Joachim Dahms, ‘Mies van der Rohe und die Philosophie um 1930’, in *arch+* 161 (2002), pp. 52-57, p. 55.

<sup>62</sup> Delitz, ‘Ein Bau’, p. 133. Delitz cites Dietze, *Nachgeholtes Leben*, p. 361. For more on Hillebrand’s relationship to dance, see Klaus Hoffmann, ‘Über Tanz-Schrift zu Raum-Schrift’ (‘On Dance-Script to Space-Script’), in Hillebrand, *Zeit-Räume*, pp. 14-15.

<sup>63</sup> Todtnauberg in the Black Forest is the location of Heidegger’s hut where he retreated in order to write, in his refuge from the world. See Adam Sharr, *Heidegger’s Hut* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2006)

<sup>64</sup> See the Beer House, Vienna (1929) for a prime example of Josef Frank’s domestic output.

<sup>65</sup> Plessner, *Die Einheit der Sinne*, p. 266.

<sup>66</sup> Plessner, *Die Einheit der Sinne*, p. 267.

<sup>67</sup> Frank’s ‘compromised’ architecture is far less well known than the more radical designs of his peers, such as Adolf Loos. His writings, too, especially those of his Viennese years before his exile have a pithy irony that speaks to us directly today, as evinced by the recent translation of his collected writings with the foreword written by Denise Scott Brown. In his ‘Architecture as Symbol: Elements of the German New Building’ (1931) he writes about

[...] imagin[ing] a world in which people live in small houses in meadows, growing tulips and pursuing arts and crafts of that sort, cut off from the world, peaceful and sedate. All they need grows in their garden, and they know nothing of the rocket ship that will soon fly to the moon. Any rush is unnecessary since no one works more than he must, and all find their work fulfilling. Such a way of life will seem strange to most today, even if in its straightforwardness it is not absent of all propagandistic pathos and as an ideal is even preferable in some respects. But how few will even see [any] point in shaping something lacking in any pathos, even the pathos of absolute primitivism; alas, very few people accept that a pleasant life is always a *via media* between all kinds of ideals – no person has the same disposition all the time -; and that shaping a pleasant life as a composite of all these ideals is a matter with goals just as consistent and absolute as the goals of those who strive for a single extreme. The fate of modern architecture hinges on achieving this ambition, for its essential function resides in the formation and symbolization of our lives. [Josef Frank, ‘Architektur als Symbol. Elemente deutschen neuen Bauens’ (‘Architecture as Symbol: Elements of the German New Building’), in Frank, *Schriften/Writings*, Vol. 2, pp. 9-191, here pp. 27-28.]