sight of those faux-gilt figures in the performance; Jones was the more triumphally minded of the two collaborators.¹

CHRISTINE STEVENSON
Courtald Institute of Art,
University of London

Notes

RALF MENNEKES
Die Renaissance der deutschen Renaissance
Petersberg, Germany: Michael Imhof Verlag, 2005, 622 pp., 432 bw illus. €69.95, ISBN 3-937251-67-7

The user of this book oscillates between a fascination with the subject as presented through the author’s breadth of knowledge and fruitful insights, and the pain of wading through roughly a quarter of a million words of text and perhaps another hundred thousand words of information in the notes, along with hundreds of small black-and-white illustrations. On the whole, it is curious to note that decades of German scholarship has not until now dealt systematically with the country’s most important design movement of the later nineteenth century. Earlier investigations judged the neo-Renaissance, of which the German neo-Renaissance forms a subsection, as ephemeral and incoherent.¹ To this day German historiography generally characterizes architecture of this period in terms of “historicism,” reflecting a modernist point of view that nineteenth-century designers passively adopted past styles. Old forms are assumed to be just there, an idea that completely ignores the fact that these forms first had to be discovered, “seen,” learned, and valorized, and only then given contemporary significance, which has varied over time.

Ostensibly the Deutschrenaissance was one among many nineteenth-century architectural styles, but Ralf Mennekes’s work establishes that it should rather be seen as a movement, in the fullest nineteenth-century sense of that word—a movement that carried immense strength of conviction and had an enormous breadth of application. In this Mennekes goes a step beyond the limitations of usual German historiography. He shows that it was only this movement that, quite suddenly, loaded a small number of buildings of the sixteenth century with nineteenth-century kinds of meaning.² The Deutschrenaissance movement emerged in the Second German Empire around 1873–76, proclaiming a solution for Germany’s problems of style, from which the country had suffered for some time, certainly from the 1850s onwards. It seems that no major region in Europe, except perhaps Holland, took the “style problem” as seriously as the Germans. They asked, which was the “best” style overall? Which was most suitable for Germany? The new movement very quickly gained popularity for many kinds of buildings, excepting the highest kinds of government offices and churches, which still adhered to Roman classical or Italian Renaissance and Gothic or Romanesque, respectively. At this time, Germans were reminiscing about the golden age of their bourgeois sixteenth century, and the town hall appeared to be an especially suitable bearer of the style. The giant examples at Hamburg and Leipzig of the 1880s and 1890s have been surprisingly well preserved. For the typical suburban German villa, the new Renaissance seemed to apply most naturally, a topic that has been already explored in much greater detail in several books by Wolfgang Brönnm.³ But the most enduring use of the style was with the German, or more precisely the Bavarian, Bierkeller. Here good cheer and a limited degree of roughness were the essence of both the style and lifestyles of this venue—a result that was altogether a successfully devised corporate image.

On the whole, Mennekes is less interested in buildings or building types than in the wider manifestations of the neo-Renaissance style. He touches on the applied arts and their “reform” but is most fascinated by artistic pageants and their costumes. Richard Wagner’s Gesamtkunstwerk, Die Meisteringer von Nürnberg of 1868, was one of the major manifestations. The immense degree of design control that artists such as Lorenz Gedon or Franz Seitz of Munich exercised over seemingly ephemeral objects formed a crucial and novel element of the movement. In some of his most interesting contributions, Mennekes discusses the domestic interior of the 1870s and 1880s, which he characterizes as picturesque in the extreme, combining firm enclosure and often darkness with complex vistas, like a “lichte Höhle” (well-lit cave; 330). Interestingly, at this point he also provides a link with Camillo Sitte’s new articulation of the value of tightly enclosed town squares. Rather doubtful, however, is Mennekes’s suggestion that the desire for vivid color can be seen as the overall formal concept or design intention of the period. Surely, the period of the strongest desire for architectural color internally and externally was around the mid-century, whereas the new preference for darkness and stress on genuine materials from the 1870s, especially wood, took away much of this multicolorism. Central Europe experienced some “brown decades” too.

There are ways in which one may well compare Germany, or at least Munich, with London if one rolls “Old English,” the Queen Anne Revival, and the aesthetic movement into one stylistic direction, even though their end products looked very different. The Germans now perceived their “Old German” times in the same way that the British, in the 1830s to 1850s, had interpreted their sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as happy “Olden Times.” By the 1870s and 1880s, London designers were leaning first toward a new “art” and then toward a serious Arts and Crafts and vernacular
revival. The Germans turned toward a similar kind of seriousness and quietness in the 1890s, with the beginnings of the Heimatschutz movement. Yet, by the late 1880s these new trends had signaled the end of Deutscher renaissance boisterousness. Many of the younger German critics of renown, such as Alfred Lichtwark, Julius Lessing, and Ferdinand Luthner, bitterly attacked the movement only a dozen years after the style had gone into full swing. This sudden turn was also probably part of the special German sensitivity towards styles and their meaning. All this may also be taken forward to the “German Sonderweg,” referring to the way in which some post–World War II historians have traced the causes of the German catastrophes of the twentieth century back into the nineteenth. At the same time, Mennekes rightly points out that it was precisely some of the critics of the new German Renaissance in the 1890s and 1900s, such as Paul Schultz Naumburg, who later turned to Nazism.

On the whole, Mennekes’s book is frustrating. Side and major issues are not balanced in a fruitful way. Thus, in spite of its length, one is not sure whether the book can really be taken as comprehensive. There is no real beginning, as the book starts with a miscellany of places, exhibitions, books, persons, and events. The chapter dealing with building types often degenerates into a list, there is not nearly enough on the beer hall and its interior, and virtually nothing appears on the applied arts. There is no real beginning, as the book shows at the Museum of Modern Architecture shown at the Museum of Modern Art in 1932. Yet once at Harvard, Gropius’s ideas flourished and dovetailed with the cost-cutting and new construction methodologies then being introduced into the United States. In his propagandistic Harvard activities, Gropius broadcast that he was realizing mainstream Bauhaus goals, yet he did not acknowledge the important early contributions of Johannes Itten and Hannes Meyer. James-Chakraborty fills out the picture of European Bauhaus émigrés by describing the contributions of Josef and Ammi Albers, Marcel Breuer, and Ludwig Hilberseimer in America. Mies’s first large contribution to the American scene came in his Lake Shore Drive Apartments in Chicago (1948), where his attention to carefully proportioned windows and cost-cutting technology soon set a pattern for corporate architecture firms. Accompanied by much publicity, many American embassies and consular offices also then began to bear the stamp of the Bauhaus émigrés, directly in the work of Gropius and Breuer.


This collection of essays about the Bauhaus by eight serious scholars clarifies many aspects of the Bauhaus’s importance to visual education, both during the years of its formation and operation and during their long aftermath. The editor and publishers are to be commended for producing a book of such pertinence at a reasonable cost. In her introduction to the essays, editor Kathleen James-Chakraborty describes how the Bauhaus embraced the linking of art and industry during the Weimar Republic. Although only one chapter deals with Bauhaus architecture and architects per se from 1919 to 1933, progenitors, notably Herman Muthesius and Henry van der Velde, are discussed at the beginning of the book, and chilling Nazi and Cold War forces bring it to its conclusion. James-Chakraborty claims that the book’s authors “are self-conscious about their relationship to the historiography of their subjects” and wish for an understanding of “the school’s position in the history of Weimar Germany and, more broadly, twentieth-century culture” (xii–xiii). The fact that half of the book’s authors are women indicates how times have changed since the heyday of the school, when many of the students were female but only a few of the faculty were.

James-Chakraborty suggests that the shift in the United States from classicism to modernism in the 1930s was due more to financial circumstances stemming from the Great Depression and World War II than from the arrival of émigrés like Gropius and Mies van der Rohe or the exposure to the modern European architecture shown at the Museum of Modern Art in 1932. Yet once at Harvard, Gropius’s ideas flourished and dovetailed with the cost-cutting and new construction methodologies then being introduced into the United States. In his propagandistic Harvard activities, Gropius broadcast that he was realizing mainstream Bauhaus goals, yet he did not acknowledge the important early contributions of Johannes Itten and Hannes Meyer. James-Chakraborty fills out the picture of European Bauhaus émigrés by describing the contributions of Josef and Ammi Albers, Marcel Breuer, and Ludwig Hilberseimer in America. Mies’s first large contribution to the American scene came in his Lake Shore Drive Apartments in Chicago (1948), where his attention to carefully proportioned windows and cost-cutting technology soon set a pattern for corporate architecture firms. Accompanied by much publicity, many American embassies and consular offices also then began to bear the stamp of the Bauhaus émigrés, directly in the work of Gropius and Breuer.

Notes
3. Wolfgang Brönnner, Die bürgerliche Villa in Deutschland 1830–1890, 2nd ed. (Worms, Germany, 1994).
4. On the movement in Munich, see Sabine Wieber, “Designing the Nation: Neo-Northern Renaissance Interiors and the Politics of Identity in Late Nineteenth Century Germany 1876–1888” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2004).
5. See Pasinger Fabrik, Wirtshäuser in München um 1900 (Munich, 1997).