



Peter Behrens and a New Architecture for the Twentieth Century

By *Stanford Anderson*

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Most histories of twentieth-century architecture cite Peter Behrens' influence on three of his protégés--Walter Gropius, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and Le Corbusier--and mention the turbine factory and arc lamp he designed for the German electrical firm AEG. Now Behrens' full contribution to the history of twentieth-century architecture is finally told, in Stanford Anderson's indispensable guide to one of the great designers of our century. The author was first attracted to Behrens as one of the emblematic figures in the development of architectural modernism. Over the years, he has reflected critically on the growing body of Behrens scholarship that has appeared on both sides of the Atlantic, as well as on the views of such tastemakers as Philip Johnson, who rejected Behrens' AEG Turbine Factory, the signature icon of his early experiments in modernism, in favor of his later conservatively classical work. Anderson now assimilates decades of research into a definitive work that considers Behrens from the most nuanced perspective yet and that clarifies many problematic issues such as Behrens' endorsement of historical determinism and his work on Hitler's proposed monumental axis in Berlin. The book looks at the cultural and architectural context in which Behrens worked, his early career, and the relation of his own house in Darmstadt to his ideal of a society where life is formed as art. It also looks at his directorship of the School of Arts and Crafts in Düsseldorf, where he drew on the work of such brilliant historiographers of art and architecture as Alois Riegl and August Schmarsow. In his conclusion, Anderson considers Behrens' melancholy in the face of modern industrial society and his avoidance of a direct address of life, despite, or rather because of, his professed commitment to express life as art.

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Review

"A first-rate study, unlikely to be surpassed." Choice

"Reveals a profound understanding of the social and cultural context in which Behrens operated and of the crucial issues of artistic theory in early twentieth-century Germany." Gabriele Bryant AA Files

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"This clear and critical book... is a welcome addition to the still rather small literature on Behrens in English." E. Mumford

About the Author

Stanford Anderson is Head of the Department of Architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

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