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## **To See Daydreams: The Glass Utopia of Paul Scheerbart and Bruno Taut**

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Ufuk Ersoy

**To See Daydreams:  
The Glass Utopia of Paul Scheerbart and Bruno Taut**

**Building Narrative**

If architecture can be defined as simply the art of building (*Baukunst*), then, should the task of the architect be conceptualized as limited to the act of building alone, which, in the present day, is usually read as limited to only encompassing the technique of putting together solid components of structures? Although the original meaning of the term ‘architect’ refers to a chief craftsman (*archi-tekton*), the true nature of architectural operations has been under nearly constant debate since publication of Renaissance architect Leon Batista Alberti’s (1404-1472) treatise, *On the Art of Building in Ten Books* (*De re aedificatoria*, 1452). More recently, the French philosopher Paul Ricœur (1913-2005) contributed to this persistent debate by demonstrating a link between the “configurative” act of “narrating” with that of “building” (Ricœur, “Architecture et narrativité” 9). In particular, Ricœur read the act of “building” as a spatial reflection of “narrating,” and drew a parallel between inventions of authors and architects. According to Ricœur, the author who writes a novel dreams a series of events which no one has yet experienced. In a similar way, the architect who imagines and designs a project dreams a place into existence yet to be experienced. In these dreams distant from present reality, both the architect and author activate the same human faculty – “anticipation” and occupy the same human dimension of time – “present of the future” (Ricœur, *Time and Narrative* 65). According to this line of thought, architecture represents a kind of fiction, and buildings stand as a possible reality so long as their imaginary potential persists, even once they are inhabited. Following Ricœur’s analogy between narrating and building, it might be possible to claim that utopian thinking, which combines the dream of a better place with the dream of a good life (as a secularized form of human longing for paradise or an age of gold), establishes an intersection between literature and architecture. (Coleman, 46-63).

In 1914, the passionate young German architect Bruno Taut (1880-1938) and the bohemian German poet Paul Scheerbart (1863-1915) were already aware of the parallel between the two imaginative disciplines of building and narrative and thus decisively committed themselves to a shared vision of Utopia. Both sought

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to represent an archetype of “glass architecture”; one by narrating, the other by building. Highly critical of existing architecture and social conditions, they were in search of an inspiring alternative, as were many of their more progressive contemporaries. Yet, what made Taut and Scheerbart’s shared approach more sophisticated than that of their contemporaries also left it open to criticism. In particular, their choice of glass as the idiosyncratic constituent of their imaginary world, because of its utopian character, far exceeded its more limited role as the rising icon of industrialization and bourgeois culture.

For them however, glass was much more than an emergent modern building material; rather, it was the concrete substance of transcendence; permitting the consciousness access to another, better, world. And where the consciousness goes, the body will follow, until it too is transcended.

In a short autobiography, Scheerbart described himself as the spirit of the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) who watched contemporary human life from the future-anterior through a satirical lens. For Scheerbart, akin to the future-anterior, architecture is a gifted art, able to transform the environment. He was convinced that through its contemplative beauty, architecture could create some significant spiritual changes in human beings, and even bring them to a condition of universal brotherhood with each other and their surroundings. Scheerbart saw the architect as a community organizer in macro scale; in other words, as a contemporary Demiurge. Intriguingly, the majority of Scheerbart’s fiction involved the adventure of an architect (or a creator) building in fantastic cosmic settings. However, in 1913, after publishing *Lesabéndio: Ein Asteroïden-Roman (Lesabéndio: An Asteroid Novel)*, Scheerbart made the decision to come down to Earth. Thus, while searching for the glass architect who could implement his ideas, he began to write his last two works: *Glasarchitektur (Glass Architecture, 1914)* and *Das graue Tuch und zehn Prozent Weiß: Ein Damenroman (The Grey Cloth and Ten Percent White: A Ladies’ Novel, 1914)*.

Quite the reverse of Scheerbart’s macro vision, Taut’s utopian view of glass architecture stemmed from an experience at the micro scale: building the *Glashaus (Glass House) Pavilion* for the *Werkbund (Work Federation) Exhibition* at Cologne (1914), which was his first and only work in collaboration with Scheerbart.<sup>1</sup> It is likely that while Taut was drafting the sketches of this pavilion in July 1913, Gottfried Heinersdorff, a famous glass painter from Berlin, introduced him to Scheerbart who was already celebrated

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<sup>1</sup>The *Werkbund* exhibition of 1914 in Cologne was organized by the *Deutscher Werkbund (German Work Federation)*, which was an important early 20<sup>th</sup> century association of artists, architects, and industrialists. Its objective was to improve the quality of German products by establishing partnerships between manufacturers and design professionals.

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for his visionary tales of glass architecture (Rausch, *70 Trillionen Weltgruesse* 455–7; Ikelaar 87–144). As Taut acknowledged, he already knew of Scheerbart before this meeting and was an “admirer” of the poet. Moreover, Scheerbart’s glass architecture fantasies inspired Taut’s idea for a glass house (Taut, “Glaserzeugung und Glasbau” 9). Similarly, after learning about Taut’s engagement in a glass house project, Scheerbart became excited to meet “the glass architect” (Rausch, *70 Trillionen Weltgruesse* 457). The close friendship that instantly developed between the two turned into an intellectual mission of encouraging architects to make use of glass as a transcendent material. In 1914, right after Taut built the *Glashaus*, Scheerbart published his *Glasmarchitektur*, which Taut accepted as a programmatic account of his building, they even went so far as to dedicate their respective works to each other. For both Scheerbart, who called his involvement in this project “the greatest event” of his life, and Taut, who called Scheerbart his “*Glaspapa*,” the *Glashaus* was a remarkable survey of imaginative possibilities that glass offered to architecture by means specific to it (Rausch, *70 Trillionen Weltgruesse* 460–4; Scheerbart, “Das Glashaus: ein Vorbericht” 3).

Like a rehearsal on stage, in the *Glashaus*, Taut had a chance to implement the glass architecture Scheerbart envisioned and to test its immediate bodily effect on visitors. In brief, the *Glashaus* resulted from a utopian practice that attempted to give physical manifestation to Scheerbart’s fiction and thus expose it to the uncertainties of daily life. Nevertheless, in architectural literature, (primarily in the English speaking world), the *Glashaus* is overshadowed, on the one hand, by the technological utopianism of the *Werkbund*, based on near-blind faith in industrial progress, and on the other, by the shortcomings of Taut’s later macro-scale speculations on a new society and world (Banham, “The Glass Paradise”; Whyte, *Bruno Taut and the Architecture of Activism*). Indeed, Taut’s over-exaggerated expectation of achieving a faultless world simply by adorning the Alps with crystalline glass buildings, such as he proposed in *Alpine Architecture* (1919), demonstrated an escapist attitude that ultimately served conservatives more than reformists by confirming, unintentionally perhaps, just how difficult it was to offer concrete alternatives to existing conditions. Briefly, as an unachievable abstraction, it is fair to describe Taut’s *Alpine* vision as a pathological utopia, in the sense developed by Ricœur, who asserted that Utopia can have both pathological and constitutive dimensions (Ricœur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*). Despite this, in what follows, I will endeavor to draw out the constitutive dimension of Taut and Scheerbart’s utopian enterprise, and thus reveal its potential continuing relevance to the invention of architecture even in the present day. Thus, my objective here is to comprehend

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the constitutive utopic value of their creative efforts, rather than merely reading their fantastic visions as a fruitless satisfaction of naïve desire. The main way in which I will attempt to accomplish this is by concentrating on Scheerbart and Taut's critical engagement with existing conditions, primarily by focusing on the *Glashaus* as a configurative act, in particular illuminating how glass nourished their utopian imagination.

**Something Missing**

Although at first glance Taut and Scheerbart's utopian approach to glass might seem to fetishize a new industrial material of their period, they were actually rather critical of the industrialization of glass and even of the prevailing use of transparent glass. In their view, by the end of the nineteenth century, the misuse of industrial materials "mechanized" the interior of buildings and individuals alike (Scheerbart, "Licht und Luft" 13). During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the use of glass was generally identified with heightening or widening window openings. Taut maintained that the attractive gleam of recent industrial buildings, such as train stations, factories, exhibition halls, and film studios, could be appreciated only from a distance. In most instances, a "terrible scenery of junk" lay in wait behind the transparent surface, ready to assault the senses of those who came closer (Taut, "Das Bauen mit Glas" 36).<sup>2</sup> It was clear that the iron structure of such buildings had already been perfected, but the main problem for Taut was "the smooth glass surfaces in between iron frameworks" (Taut, "Das Bauen mit Glas" 37). According to him, the architect's employ of the stuff should not have been limited to attaching sheet or plate glass panes to structure. Instead, they ought to have considered the glass covering of structure in view of the material's "outstanding conditionality", in the sense of the changeable character of glass, dependent on ambient conditions external to it (Taut, "Das Bauen mit Glas" 37). According to Taut, architects needed re-invent the architectonic quality of glass by working with it in harmony with light and air, which would require intense sensitivity to the surrounding world.

Taut's presentation of the *Glashaus* in the pamphlet he prepared for its visitors hints at his and Scheerbart's critical attitude. In this building, one should look for nothing other than beauty; that was its only

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<sup>2</sup> All translations in this chapter from German to English are by the author, unless otherwise noted.

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purpose (Taut, *Glashaus: Werkbundaustellung Cöln*, reprinted in Herzogenrath, *Frühe Kölner Kunstausstellungen* 287–93). In articulating beauty as the exclusive goal, Taut manifested his and Scheerbart's endeavor to exempt this building from the overriding pragmatic and material concerns of the modern industrial world. As a result, while their exploratory approach to glass stimulated the interest of some contemporaries, such as the young German art critic Adolf Behne (1885–1948), it seemed unorthodox to both technocrats and conservatives. The conviction that technology was the formative agent of the current culture, and that the artist's task was to enunciate it, governed the 1914 Cologne exhibition. Sharing this basic conviction, Taut asserted the influence of production processes and methods on the configurative capacity of the architect. Having witnessed the increased manufacture and use of glass, he concluded that its increasing pervasiveness was “the determined will – *entschlossen Wille*” of the architecture profession (Taut, “Das Bauen mit Glas” 37). Yet, Taut was not a fatalist with no hopes for the future; far from yielding to technology, he invited his colleagues to join him in his commitment to creatively attune industrialized glass and architecture to a higher purpose than a banal imaging of the industrial progress of modernity.

The *Glashaus* stood directly behind the entrance to the Cologne exhibition as the first building welcoming visitors. However, its location did not allude to any privilege given to it as a result of its prestige or patronage. In contrast, it was a sign of the polemic which took place during the approval process of it as an exhibition building. The *Glashaus* was listed among “radical” projects that were rejected at the outset for contradicting the guiding principles and integrity of the *Werkbund* (which had something to do with ideas of ‘good form’ and standardization). In fact, it was not shown on the first two master plans of the exhibition.

In an essay Taut wrote almost six years after the exhibition, he admitted his frustration at its planning process. In a cynical tone, he underlined the consistency in the placement of the *Glashaus*. In the Cologne Exhibition, which he saw as an arena of artistic will and industrial norms, the *Glashaus* opposed these standards upheld by the *Werkbund* and, therefore, deserved to be separated from more “serious” buildings representing industry, so that it could be closer to the amusement area near the entrance (Taut, “Glaserzeugung und Glasbau” 9). Paradoxically, exclusion of his project from the main core of the exhibition highlighted the distinctive character of his design and obliquely confirmed its achievement. Taut's intent for the *Glashaus* was that simply by visiting it, serious visitors would be released from their entrapment within a banal and profane world of commerce. As alluded to above, he explicitly stated the

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transcendental aims of his work in the opening sentence of the pamphlet that he prepared for the exhibition, proclaiming that his building “ha[d] no other purpose than to be beautiful” (Herzogenrath, *Frühe Kölner Kunstausstellungen* 287). These words echoed the thoughts of Taut’s advocate, art critic Adolf Behne. The main reason for Behne’s appreciation of Taut’s building was its having only an “inner-artistic” purpose, which freed technology from its pragmatic concerns (Behne, “Bruno Taut” 183). Taut’s building was a purpose-free – *zweckfrei* – art work. In practice, Taut provided concrete models which helped Behne to reinterpret the principle of *Sachlichkeit* (objectivity) as a synthesis of artistic creativity and matter-of-factness, and thus define a new kind of architecture closer to crystalline, abstract, non-historical forms, distinct from the pseudo-symbolic buildings of technology, such as the industrial designer Peter Behrens’ (1868-1940) well known AEG Turbine Factory (1908-1909) in Berlin.

At the turn of the twentieth century, *Sachlichkeit* referred to a norm used to measure the appropriateness of architecture to contemporary life conditions and was in general used to invoke “a straightforward attention to needs” missing in the world of daily life (Anderson 340).<sup>3</sup> Yet, practical reality and the range of needs that architecture addressed were phenomena open to diverse interpretations and so could be extended to extreme points. For instance, read from a *technocentric* standpoint, *Sachlichkeit* would mean matter-of-factness and privilege some aspects of buildings that largely passed into the control of industrial agents, such as construction materials and engineering techniques. This would not only justify the exigency of technology, but also legislate that buildings should be treated as industrial works so that they would manifest *pure Sachlichkeit*. On the other hand, *Sachlichkeit* could be directed to a more introverted artistic understanding that encompassed the inner needs of human beings. Then, instead of limiting a building to being a unique object with a specific technical function it must fulfill, the focus could turn to the expressive capacity of architecture, and how it was experienced in terms of *sachliche Kunst* (literally matter-of-fact art, but suggestive of the intersection of reason and fantasy).

Together with the *Glashauss*, Taut’s previous building, the Monument of Iron, *Das Monument des Eisens* (1913), which was in the shape of an octagonal ziggurat crowned by a sphere nine meters in diameter, could help to illustrate his artistic approach (cf. Figure 1). Behne observed that Taut’s work was

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<sup>3</sup> As a noun that derives from the adjective *sachlich* and the noun *Sache*, *Sachlichkeit* has been translated in numerous ways: “objectivity,” “thingness,” “practicality,” “straightforwardness,” “functionalism,” “realism” and “matter-of-factness.”

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expressionist architecture that emancipated buildings from all non-artistic considerations by exposing them to “the reality of arts,” defined as the regulation of surface by means of color, line and light. To achieve this, Taut “left aside all conventions and derivative elements,” especially conventional ornament. Instead, he “returned to the primal elements of building,” which were “the wall and the opening” (Behne, “Bruno Taut” 183). Even so, Taut animated the primal elements of his buildings with a third element, which was “the joy of adornment,” accomplished with pure “ornamental forms” such as color, light and line. In other words, he freely invented his own modern ornament which was stripped of all excess and was purely expressive. Taut supplemented “the primal elements” of his buildings with color schemes that functioned aesthetically and attained the “*architectureplastic*,” or the “architectonic” quality that transformed building into art (Behne, “Bruno Taut” 183). Taut well understood that the main preoccupation of contemporary architects was form-making, and exemplified this by subduing construction techniques to artistic expression.

In both the *Glashaus* and the Monument of Iron, the regular frame structure revealed the overall geometrical form of the building, whereas colored glass covering the openings softened the rigidity of the structural frame. Behne thought that, while the steel or reinforced concrete frame manifested the rational side of the design, it would be difficult if not impossible to discuss the colorful elements in a matter-of-fact tone. For him, they were “built out of fantasy” (Behne, “Bruno Taut” 183). Cohabitation of the objective and the subjective in the same work confirmed the viability of Behne’s apparent oxymoron, *sachliche Kunst*; which was a synthesis of *Sachlichkeit* and fantasy.

***Glashaus* and Reinvention of the Gothic Dome**

In the essay “Eine Notwendigkeit” (“A Necessity”), which Taut wrote in February 1914, before the construction of the *Glashaus* began, he clearly stated that the current need was for an architecture whose purpose was to reveal artistic spirit to people by integrating all of the arts. Taut may have been introduced to this idea by his mentor at the Technical University of Munich, Theodor Fischer (1862-1938). Fischer developed these ideas in his concept of a *Volkhaus* as a new type of communal building. What Fischer had in mind were what he called “houses for all” that would include multiple “colored and multiform” halls, suited to accommodating various artistic activities open to the public (Fischer, 5). Although Fischer’s vision was of a modern progressive structure, Taut’s dream of a future shelter for community derived from a retrospective



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image: “the Gothic Cathedral.” Since the early days of romanticism, the Gothic cathedral had been idealized as the supreme cultural product because it was believed to have been perhaps the last great example of authentic communal work encompassing art and architectural expression. More specifically, what Taut identified in Gothic cathedrals was an act of “construction heightened to the point of passion.” The Gothic master builders constructed very simply and economically, but they “transcended practicality” and converted “the most primitive form to a symbol” (Taut, “Eine Notwendigkeit” 174).

The art historian Wilhelm Worringer (1881-1965), who wrote the key manifesto of expressionist art, provided a historical justification for the Gothic Taut imagined. In Worringer’s view, artwork represented the “world feeling – *Weltgefühl*” of artists and their periods. This was a feeling that he generalized into two categories: “empathy” and “abstraction.” Empathy, which he borrowed from the psychologist Theodor Lipps (1851-1914), resulted from a feeling of security, from being at home in the cosmos. This was evident in the works of the Italian Renaissance and French Impressionism, for example, which liberally depicted the natural world. On the other hand, abstraction referred to a spiritual agoraphobia that he saw in archaic and Byzantine arts. This feeling evoked an urge to transcend perilous surroundings. The Gothic cathedral, which Worringer advocated as a paradigm for a new northern art, combined these two urges by dematerializing the stone. According to Worringer, “all expression to which Greek architecture attained was attained through the stone, by means of the stone,” whereas, “all expression to which Gothic architecture attained, was attained [...] in spite of the stone” (Worringer, 106). While the essence of stone is weight and its suitable use is “based on the law of gravity,” the great achievement of Gothic cathedrals was to have overcome the laws of gravity. Stone, released from its weight, became spiritualized. In Worringer’s words, in the Gothic cathedrals, stone was turned into a vehicle of “an immaterial expression,” a bearer of “an uncontrolled upward movement” (Worringer, 106). The act of building such structures was a struggle to awaken the dormant energies in the massiveness of the stone, and in the Gothic cathedral, “there [were] no walls, no mass [...] only a thousand separate energies speak to us” (Worringer, 107).

Although Worringer may not have described his preoccupation with the Gothic as utopian, it is worth noting that the idea of spiritualized, reformed and disalienated community that Gothic life and culture came to stand for, most profoundly in the achievement of the cathedrals, was drawn upon again and again by

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utopian socialists such as Pugin, Ruskin and Morris, before Taut, and in the founding ideals of the Bauhaus, more or less contemporaneously with him (Donahue, 1-12).<sup>4</sup>

A pastel sketch made by Taut in 1904, at the Collegiate Church of Stuttgart, provides a clue as to his understanding of Gothic architecture (cf. Figure 2). For the sketch, Taut chose a light brown drafting paper and articulated the structure with nothing more than the different tones of background color. This technique gave the impression that the colored background light that bathes the nave in the sketch softens the solidity of the structure making stone, the symbol of gravity, dematerialize. As a result, although the supporting piers are not easily discernable, the converging vault ribs soar even higher above the nave-like latticework. The diaphanous nave denies the material limits of construction but still succeeds in setting spatial limits. In the composition, the dominant reddish-brown hue loses its strength against the brightness that grows after the transept, which reaches an end at the upper windows of the apse. Among luminous terrestrial elements (*lumen* reflected from surfaces), the stained glass stands out as the most vividly articulated image, allowing one to visualize light – *lux*. If the *Glashaus* is read in light of this painting, the aim of the colored prismatic glass wall, which wraps its prominent dome, was to remove any feeling of heaviness, of earthliness, by transforming the solid surfaces of the structure into a weightless layer of colored light, like a foil. However, the physical quality of the result is more than a thin, transparent diaphragm, rather, even in his pursuit of dematerialization, Taut favored thick, colored diaphanous walls that absorbed and stored light. In Scheerbart's words, he and Taut were interested in the “diaphanous (not transparent) – *lichtdurchlässigen (nicht durchsichtigen)*” – qualities of glass (Scheerbart, “Glashäuser” 105).

For Taut, industry, the Luxfer Prism Glass Syndicate in particular, already provided him with a handy means to develop an alternative to conventional glass applications. Prismatic glass, which was produced in Chicago in 1897, was destined to fill “monotonous openings of the unpromising and garish sheet of plate glass,” with an “opaque appearance” that would extend the substantial surface of the facade with “a fine textile-like effect,” capable of turning the “scientific prose” of glass “into the language of poetry and art” (Crew and Basquin 6, cited in Neumann). The prismatic glass treatment could be compared with the ornamental stone carvings that adorn Gothic cathedrals. In a similar way, in the *Glashaus*, Taut handled glass

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<sup>4</sup> Unsurprisingly, Taut was a reader of Ruskin, whose *Stones of Venice* (1851-53) was translated into German by 1904. In turn, Taut's ideas, specifically the manifesto he wrote for the Working Council for Art (*Arbeitsrat für Kunst*) paved the way for the foundation of the Bauhaus.

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like a lapidary working with precious stones. He wanted to craft a complicated “network” that interweaved colored prismatic glass tiles with ferro-concrete ribs, with the ultimate aim of making the *Glashaus* jewel-like.

Taut saw the dome that covered the whole building as a most complex and refined arrangement, because it let glass speak like a diamond. The reinforced-concrete ribs of the dome carried two separated layers of rhomboid-shaped glass panels. While the outer layer was thin, transparent plate glass, the inner layer consisted of blended prismatic tiles of different colors. In Taut’s words, after “the reflective panes” scattered the light rays, while the colored prismatic glazing captured and projected them: “the inner face of the dome was composed of small thick glass plates with an uneven surface. These plates effectively kept out external views and turned the daylight coming in into a soft powdery luminosity without shadows” (Taut, “Farbenwirkungen aus meiner Praxis” 266). The *Luxfer* prism became active during the day and created a chromatic pattern in the interior as a hidden source of light. Consequently, the domed room was forever flooded with colored light: “there was always a diffused glow, in colors that began with a deep blue at the bottom and progressed upwards through moss-green and golden yellow to the peak, where they culminated in brilliant creamy white” (Taut, “Beobachtungen über Farbenwirkungen aus meiner Praxis” 13). Just as the word *Luxfer* connoted, Taut believed that “color and light! Both are in glass” (Taut, “Beobachtungen über Farbenwirkungen aus meiner Praxis” 13). Colored glass embodied light and promised to reenact the effects of the diaphanous Gothic nave and the luminous walls enclosing it.

As Scheerbart observed, the Gothic cathedral, in which the wall was dissolved by light to become a “light filter,” was Taut’s “prelude” (Taut, *Glashaus*) (cf. Figure 3). The nineteenth century’s “ferrous and concrete constructions” challenged the definition of rooms based upon the law of gravity – as an enclosure surrounded by solid walls – and gave momentum to the idea of using glass once again as the actual space-cladding element that could achieve a nearly Gothic manner of enclosing space (Taut, “Das Bauen mit Glas” 35). For Taut, who called glass “melted earth,” what distinguished this substance from others was its paradoxical nature: its simultaneous chthonic and phantasmal performance. Glass, specifically colored glass, emanated from the earth. It recorded epochal transformations of the earth’s surface:

human beings recover gradually their earth, and from this earth they make the carrier of their subtle feelings, the glass. Depending on the excess of their work on the soil, they can carve

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out the opulence of color in glass by adding metals whose preciousness is ranked according to the luminosity of the color; gold for red, silver for yellow, copper for blue and green, nickel for violet and iron for brown (Taut, “Glaserzeugung und Glasbau” 12).

Glass was made of earth; nevertheless, it could act as if it were intangible like “air, water, fire” and could overcome the heaviness of the earth. To depict this quality, Taut called upon the image of the crystal, as a metaphor of creativity. Like a delicate piece of crystal, which incorporates play between revealing and hiding, a glass wall could engage in countless mutual interactions with the surrounding world while displaying these to the eyes.

It is important to keep in mind that the dematerialization promised by way of reference to the achievement of the Gothic cathedral builders was, for Taut, concrete expression of the utopian moment of his endeavor: Utopia nearly always requires distancing, that is, the attainment of some remove from present conditions so as to be able to reflect on them critically and to begin rethinking them, with an eye toward overcoming or transcending them. As Karl Mannheim (1893-1947) explains “orientations transcending reality” characterize the utopian “state of mind” even though they are incongruent with actual conditions. (Mannheim 173, quoted in Coleman 34). In this respect, as noted earlier, key to an understanding of Scheerbart and Taut’s utopian project is grasping how for them overcoming gravity in building was analogous to overcoming one’s body (or given conditions) in the world. The hazy conditions Taut strove for in his *Glashaus* illuminated the first steps in the direction of individual and societal transformation.

### Colored Glass, Scheerbart’s Rhetorical Tool

Scheerbart and Taut were in agreement that colored glass could alter the face of the earth for the better, even – perhaps especially – the depressingly gray atmosphere of industrial cities. As soon as architects could grasp the “true” architectonic quality of glass, Scheerbart was certain that “the whole of nature in all cultural regions [would] appear to us in quite a different light. The wealth of colored glass is bound to give nature another hue” (Scheerbart, *Glasarchitektur* 58). Thus, he took it as his mission to persuade architects to this view, which is why he wrote *Glasarchitektur*. Surprisingly, amongst all of Scheerbart’s works, the best-known *Glasarchitektur* was also the most atypical. It is composed of 111 independent aphoristic chapters. And just like the architecture of which he dreamed, the text did not have an easily readable structure or

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style. However, in terms of its content, rather than sitting comfortably as a fiction, it reads more like an advisory, descriptive *Sachbuch* (non-fiction book) on glass, which likely explains why it was rejected by Scheerbart's regular publisher, George Müller.

Written in an authoritative and sophisticated tone, throughout the book, Scheerbart's book gives detailed instructions for the correct use of glass throughout. The last paragraph effectively summarizes his objective in this work as aiming to conquer the field of architecture so as to have "fewer opponents" (Scheerbart, *Glasmarchitektur* 119).<sup>5</sup> Scheerbart was very well aware that contemporary architects had to compromise with technology by taking on its beneficial attributes while mitigating its more negative ones. Yet, in advocating glass he was not so much promoting a new industrial building component as extolling the precious stone-like qualities of the material – more akin to crystal – that architects could use to color the dull urban landscape of nineteenth-century cities. Therefore, he felt it necessary to explain to his new publisher Herwarth Walden (1879-1941) – owner of the famous expressionist art gallery and publisher of its journal *Der Sturm* – that this work did not originate the idea of glass architecture but had amended it in order to affirm its appropriateness to material comfort and technical needs at the time.

In fact, Scheerbart was not interested in writing realist *Sachbücher* (non-fiction books). Likewise, he did not hold pure *Sachstil* (objective) buildings in high esteem, which, in his view, looked like stripped down structures. When he was writing *Glasmarchitektur*, Scheerbart lived in Lichterfeld, a southwestern suburb of Berlin, not far from the botanical gardens at Dahlem (Ikelaar 25). For him, the frame structures of glasshouses in botanical gardens, like the Palmenhaus or Kalthaus, showed some possibilities of glass architecture, but did not yet fulfill his fantasy, precisely because they lacked "color" (Scheerbart, *Glasmarchitektur* 13). Admittedly, he admired their magnificent look at sunset, yet, without intrinsic, rather than reflected, color they appeared "cold." Had the designers of these buildings used color, he was certain they could have overcome the cold look, and then, no words would have been adequate to praise the wonder of glass. Strictly speaking, Scheerbart did not like these inartistic *Sachstil* buildings "without ornament," but they could be accepted temporarily since, "any how [they did] away with copying older styles" (Scheerbart, *Glasmarchitektur* 26). With this statement, Scheerbart expressed his support for *Sachlichkeit* on one hand, and

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<sup>5</sup> The famous motto reprinted in the preface of the book: "Hony soit qui mal y pense (Shame to one who thinks evil of it)," gives an early clue to Scheerbart's objectives.

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his worries about the prevailing blind trust of engineering on the other. His key objective was to advance neither an entirely utilitarian use of technology nor a nostalgic or reactionary renouncement of it. Evidently, Scheerbart walked in the same direction as Behne and Taut, in pursuit of *sachliche Kunst* and sought the reconciliation of “scientific curiosity” and “artistic creativity” (Scheerbart, *Lesabéndio* 137). He did not credit technology as being the formative agent of human life which could generate a culture. On the other hand, in his eyes, architecture corresponded to a cosmic worldview and constituted the primordial spiritual source that he considered to be prior to technology.

Nevertheless, technology and science continually nourished Scheerbart’s writings. Many of his plots involved the latest machinery, such as airships, automobiles, and elevators which had transformed daily life remarkably. A first glance at his texts might seem to reveal him as simply dreaming enthusiastically about a modern world in a “prognostic” rather than “anticipatory” way, or to have been a fetishist of modern tools and techniques. In fact, Scheerbart observed the widening gap between science—and society from a critical distance. He uneasily detected the process by which technological innovations that had become increasingly incomprehensible moved quickly from practical utility to take on the status of myth in the eyes of laymen. In reaction to this situation, he attempted to exploit this knowledge gap as an opportunity to redefine technology in a completely different, that is to say, imaginary context. The enigmatic structure of his tales, which ambiguously slipped in and out of fantasy, aimed to convey to the reader a dilemma between what is “possible” and what is “appropriate.” Sometimes, the absurdity of the plots he wove cast doubt on the seductive power of technology, mostly by way of an epigrammatic tone.<sup>6</sup> Briefly, Scheerbart’s most significant and unchanging literary tactic was “fictional estrangement.” He made the reader move back and forth between the given “scientific-technological context” and an unknown and relatively unpredictable “alternate reality” (Partsch 204).

Ultimately, Scheerbart’s effort was to liberate a range of cultural values from the pragmatic rationality and hegemony of technology. The “freedom of discretion” in writing fiction enabled him to easily transcend the given reality of present conditions in a mood of “reality as if” (Schutz vol.1, 234). In particular,

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<sup>6</sup> For instance, in his pamphlet "Die Entwicklung des Luftmilitarismus und die Auflösung der Europäischen Land-Heere, Festungen und Seeflotten (The Development of Aerial Militarism and the Dissolution of the European Land-army, Fortresses and Navies); Scheerbart tried to warn his readers against the detrimental power of advancing technology and increasing militarization, by depicting some catastrophic scenarios of mass destruction (Parcsch 205). In this way, he openly attacked technocentrism and the idea of "progress."

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through a metaphorical language free from the logical constraints of an ordinary worldview, he released the things and events of daily life from their empirical and pragmatic meanings. In his literature, Scheerbart freely played with the referential link between words and the world. Through a series of metaphorical utterances, he created semantic ambiguities which destabilized common postulations that had been mostly taken for granted by the general population and thus stimulated his readers' imaginations. Perhaps the most effective way by which Scheerbart attempted to loosen the link between words and world was with color.

For example, Scheerbart's novel *Lesabéndio. Ein Asteroiden-Roman*, which chronicles the adventures of a genius astronomer (and visionary technician) who also turns out to be a master builder, begins with a description that overwhelms ordinary vision. In the very first line of the novel, Scheerbart depicts Lesabéndio's world: "violet was the sky. And green were the stars. And the sun was also green" (Scheerbart, *Lesabéndio* 17). It is conceivable that, by means of his "violet sky" and "green sun" metaphors, Scheerbart successfully eliminates any attempt to read his text literally from the outset. Instead, he creates a puzzle of "semantic dissonance" open to interpretation and imagination (Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory* 52). By virtue of its capacity to change the literal meaning of things, color had an exceptional utopian value for Scheerbart. Particularly, in his fantasies, the "semantic dissonance" suggested by unexpected colors helped him to describe mysterious imaginative variations of landscapes that could not be mapped out or analyzed in terms of objective knowledge. Color verbally enriched his poetic language and increased its semantic ambiguity.

Attracted to the late nineteenth-century experimental psychology and artistic movement of Symbolism, which rejected realist arts, Scheerbart advocated color and light as capable of substantially augmenting artistic creativity in the visual arts and architecture by increasing the perceptual ambiguity of both. Simply put, he described color as a tool of fantasy for painters. Critical of impressionism, he argued that the lack of imaginative enthusiasm in naturalist arts kept artists from painting "a blue field and reddish trees whose branches reach up into a yellow sky" (Scheerbart, "Die Phantastik in der Malerei" 289, translated in Bletter, "Bruno Taut and Paul Scheerbart's Vision" 138–9). According to Scheerbart, artists saw the world in different hues from other people. By means of color, artists could deny the material attributes of things and transform the plain everyday world into a work of art. Color was the tool to abstract and

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spiritualize objects conventionally neutralized in terms of utility. Creative artists who furnished themselves with a language of color knew how to say something spiritual by circulating color's inherent energy.

Essentially, prior to developing his general interest in color, Scheerbart had already been fascinated with colored glass; specifically its dramatic effects. By the end of the nineteenth century, Richard Wagner's idea of *Gesamtkunstwerk* (or 'total work of art'), which had greatly influenced opera and performing arts in Europe, had reached its climax. Consequently, Symbolist artists aspired to design a stage for a multi-sensory performances which would take one back to "the indoor religious rituals of the Middle Ages" (Gage 178). Scheerbart conceptualized colored glass as being uniquely suited to achieving such a transcendent milieu. He believed that as an artistic medium with powers far beyond those of any other material, it could give "a new direction to theater art." In his essay, "Das Glas-Theater," Scheerbart describes the scene in a director's dream: a theater in which colored glass plays the dominant role spreads its radiance around by projecting the hues of various colors into the environment (913). He was convinced that such a splendid bath of color would overwhelm the senses and thus could transport not only the performers on the stage into a dramatic atmosphere but anyone in the theater as well. Nineteenth-century psychological studies on people's responses to colored light sustained Scheerbart's belief that colored glass had not lost its traditional therapeutic virtues.

In medieval cathedrals, the light penetrating through stained glass windows contributed to indoor rituals which engaged all the senses by its direct affect on the human state of mind. Depending on weather conditions, the fluctuation of principal red and violet light-could stimulate as well as calm the congregation during liturgical activities (Gage 166). But, beyond its therapeutic power, what made colored glass unique for Scheerbart were its super-sensuous effects which might offer a chance to transcend the corporeal self. In his view, one who was successfully exposed to a harmony of colored lights could turn into an astral body whose wild desires and emotions would then come under the full control of the mind. Accordingly, through colored glass, Scheerbart sought a milieu, or stage of transfiguration, where the Christian religious drama could be reenacted, and a metaphysic of light reconstructed, even in a secular context.

In fact, it was just this that Lesabéndio, Scheerbart's genius astronomer and visionary technician discovered as having been achieved in the double-cone shaped star called Pallas, which figures prominently in the asteroid novel. After the shocking introduction familiarizes the reader with the imaginary cosmic



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setting, which serves also to de-familiarize the world as it is, Scheerbart explains the details of the architectural drama that takes place in the violet atmosphere. Pallasians, unisex and mutable inhabitants of the star, live peacefully in their very lively beautiful space free from any political authority and administration. Like every Pallasian, the young astronomer Lesabéndio is perpetually intoxicated by the rich play of light and color (Scheerbart, *Lesabéndio* 34). However, having learned about the disgraceful planet Earth inhabited by semi-evolved aliens called human-beings, Lesabéndio becomes terrified. Considering Earth to be blighted by human ignorance of spiritual values and the “human propensity for destruction,” he realizes that to maintain the virtues of his own planet, Pallas needs a building that could refine its star by giving the population access to a “more spiritual, and complex sphere” (Scheerbart, *Lesabéndio* 95). Lesabéndio thus undertakes the construction of a tower tall enough to reach the luminescent cloud which hovers over Pallas and hides the “secret” of life. Through his impressive powers of rhetoric, the master builder succeeds in persuading many Pallasians to participate in this sacred mission and to work in harmony.

When the frame structure designed by Lesabéndio (made of the recently discovered unbreakable metal called Kaddimohn) is erected, an experienced builder, Peka, who is dedicated to peppering the topography of Pallas with crystalline shapes, warns Lesabéndio: “the form of your tower [...] is crystalline [...] but the crystalline substance is missing” (Scheerbart, *Lesabéndio* 47). On the other hand, Labu, an expert builder of irregular organic forms, shows more sympathy for the tower project. Finally, following passionate argument about the artistic merits of the tower, Peka (who believes it is necessary to combine engineering with artistic creativity) decides to “dissolve in Lesabéndio” as an act of devotion. Following Peka’s act of sacrifice all Pallasians commit to the project, because they can now see the “new forces” growing in Lesabéndio (Scheerbart, *Lesabéndio* 156). Scheerbart’s story ends with the opening ceremony of the tower. As part of the novel’s dénouement, the master builder is the first to climb the tower, and does so with great passion. Upon surmounting the final step, Lesabéndio begins a painful transformation into a de-individualized astral body and utters a last prophetic message: “knowledge does not bring [one] to an end. The world [...] is so complexly constructed that everything leads to the eternal” (Scheerbart, *Lesabéndio* 180). Pallasians who watch their leader’s fascinating metamorphosis, comprehend that this tower, which brought them together, has led them to reconsider their world. It unified them while broadening their imaginative capacity, which had become progressively more restricted as a result of the monotony that came

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with the comfort that characterized their routine life. After Lesabéndio's process of transformation and transcendence is completed, the citizens of Pallas return to their newly colorful world more harmoniously. In his story's conclusion, Scheerbart portrays the art of building at the apex of its capacity for catalyzing, sheltering and analogizing genuine communal purpose; in this instance by contributing to "a higher truth," manifested in the overcoming of architecture's technological and artistic limitations as analogous to individuals transcending themselves.

### Taut and the Apex of Architecture

In Taut's treatise on city planning, *Die Stadtkrone* (*The City Crown*, 1919), published six years after Scheerbart's asteroid novel, it is possible to detect a rhetorical intent comparable with that of the fictional character of Lesabéndio. Explicating his idea of *Kristallhaus*, Taut called attention to towers as the type of building "new cities" needed. In his view, despite healthier conditions and increasing standards of comfort, the new city was still like a "torso without head – *Rumpf ohne Kopf*" (Taut, *Die Stadtkrone* 56). "The comfort and elegance" of modern cities could not satisfy everything. For example, in observing antique cities, Taut identified modern urban society's lack of "a foundation to lean on." In ancient times, the Athenian Acropolis was the site of worship and of the *areopagus* (or the central governing body of Athens, later the criminal court), which gathered the community together by way of its gods and laws. Only "romantics" such as the German Painter and Architect, Karl F. Schinkel (1781-1841) had been sensitive to this essential civil provision of ancient cities, so much so that he attempted to create an architecture "which would unite the wishes and hopes of men"; where in the present they could find no "echo" of their desires. According to Schinkel, community longed for "something superior, something that would rise above [...] mundane existence [...] with pure celebratory intentions" (Taut, *Die Stadtkrone* 57). In a number of important ways, Taut's own convictions were quite close to Schinkel's. In Taut's view, "the church" is missing from "the idea of the new city." More explicitly, he argued that "in all epochs, we have gravitated to the house of God; as the only building capable of representing our deepest feelings about mankind and the world" (Taut, *Die Stadtkrone* 58).

Although "the liturgical ceremony" no longer possesses its "cohesive strength" in the way it did during the medieval period, for Taut, this did not mean that "the religious life [had] lost its ardor" (Taut, *Die*

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*Stadtkrone* 59). He had no doubt that “faith” persisted; even if it had been lost or obscured by modern materialist values. In modern times, human spirit was “awaiting its resurrection, its radiant transfiguration and crystallization in [...] glorious edifices,” and architects had to recover their “priestly and divine profession and try to dig out the treasure which [lay] in the depths of the human spirit” (Taut, *Die Stadtkrone* 59–60). Taut accepted that, “without religion there [was] no true culture, there [was] no art” (*Die Stadtkrone* 59). For his contemporaries, religion could be translated as socialism in an “apolitical” or “suprapolitical” sense and understood simply as a brotherhood. Now, instead of abusing creative talent by “aestheticizing” industrial things, it was time to convert ideas of a new brotherhood of men into material. In Taut’s eyes, architects’ “final objective” should be to create an architecture that would awaken “the faculties of the soul [now] hidden behind the veil of faith” and to “crown the city” with “the act of construction in a more elevated sense,” which would make all people “conscious of being members of a great architecture” (Taut, *Die Stadtkrone* 60).

Although Taut imagined that the religious traditions of the church could be returned to by way of architecture, he did not propose monuments of stone as the means to achieving this end, as had been the case in the past. Rather, what he imagined was an architecture that would free the city from its “pale gray” urban texture by awakening the love for brightness. Correspondingly, he recommended that architects should build a colorful, lustrous tower away from old prejudices, and spread their creative energies outward from there. Furthermore, he explained that when he wrote his treatise, “some small beginnings” of this architecture “[had] already existed,” but for it to become a tradition would take some time (*Die Stadtkrone* 61). In Taut’s mind, the most significant prototype for the new form of expression leading to a new great cathedral was the *Glashaus*. Thus, following in the footsteps of Scheerbart, Taut developed his dream of “the house of art” as analogous to a towering city crown.

As early as 1915, Behne had already asserted that the *Glashaus* had an “ethical function” and deserved to be called a “sparkling skull” (Behne, “Gedanken über Kunst und Zweck dem Glashause Gewidmet” 4).<sup>7</sup> In his eyes, the colored glass dome was the roof which sheltered and represented the creative spirit of humanity and thus should crown the new city that Taut identified negatively as a disembodied torso,

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<sup>7</sup> In the neo-romanticist discourse, the creative spirit was symbolically associated with the brain. For instance, the symbolist writer Alfred Jarry described Vincent van Gogh’s brain as a philosopher stone (Bletter, “The Interpretation of the Glass Dream” 30).

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as a way of both completing and reforming it. According to Behne, the *Glashaus* proved that “building as an elemental activity has the power to transform the individual. And now, indeed, building with glass! This would be the surest method of transforming the European into a human being” (Behne, *Schriften zur Kunst* 34, quoted in Bletter, “Paul Scheerbart’s Architectural Fantasies” 97).

Simply put, for Taut, Scheerbart and Behne, the *Glashaus* was the stage upon which the religious drama they imagined could be rehearsed. In their view, the *Glashaus* could draw one to an aesthetic experience which would reactivate the *homo religiosus*’s vision of the world inevitably obscured in the daily activities of ordinary modern life. Ultimately, they believed that a creative microcosmic reproduction could remind people of the correspondence between architecture and universe, a renewed awareness that would result in a self-crystallization of the individual as well as the community. As Scheerbart made clear, to achieve such a transformative aesthetic experience, the architect had to neutralize all extraverted sensations and thoughts of the world. Accordingly, in the *Glashaus*, Taut’s primary concern was to distance the body from the outside realm in order to provide a moment away from the hustle and bustle of daily life. In utopian terms, this was an attempt to translate the semantic dissonance Scheerbart used in his fantasies into architecture as an aesthetic experience with symbolic as much as social potential. As Scheerbart used color to de-familiarize daily life objects by challenging their literary meaning, Taut used colored glass to generate a spatio-temporal experience that would challenge the limits of visual perception and add an aesthetic and symbolic meaning to the homogenous, banal space of the industrial city.

Obliquely, the importance given to aesthetic experience reflected the basic premise of Scheerbart and Taut’s Utopia: the substance of a collective change depended upon individual change which would enable one to see the world through different eyes. Unsurprisingly, movement through the *Glashaus* was meant to evoke a rite of passage that would end in individual transformation. From a distance, the *Glashaus* looked like a gemstone which grew up from the ground. Coming closer, one would notice a substantial transformation from the bottom upwards. The building emerged from a sculpted organically shaped concrete base. Translucent glass brick walls rested on this solid base, infilling the voids between the columns, which supported the fourteen sided diaphanous colored glass dome above. To emphasize the crystalline geometry of the polyhedral cupola, which was composed of rhomboids, Taut struggled to make the frame disappear, so that it would appear as though it were floating. The reinforced concrete ribs carrying the glass panes of the

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dome were hidden in between transparent and prismatic layers. The transformation from soil to crystal, from base to dome, hinted at the relationship between the two basic parts of the building, which aimed to mirror the structure of the universe, while also analogizing Taut's imagined transformation of the mundane human body into a transcendent spirit (by way of architecture). Taut's overarching program for the structure was to integrate the dome, which characterized the celestial order, with the hidden cave-like interior housed within the concrete base, which symbolized the fecundity of the earth.

In a romanticist way, Taut attributed the talent for establishing continuity between the two symbolic parts of his *Glashauss* to the artistic eye. According to him, not every eye was gifted enough to distinguish the intrinsic properties of things: only a transcendent "great eye" of insight could know these properties and comprehend the creative force behind them. In Taut's view, the artistic genius had a capacity to share in the knowledge of the transcendental eye, enabling him or her to train the mundane eye of sight by revealing the intrinsic properties of its surroundings to it, primarily through works of art. Taut's related architectural formula was to bring into visibility the cosmic connections of his building with the indistinct complex structure of the landscape. Consequently, while the *Glashauss* removed its visitors from their immediate environment, it simultaneously reintroduced them to the same landscape as if it were seen through the great eye. For visitors, a spatial as well as a corporeal transition began once they had climbed one of the glass brick stairs on either side of the building's terrace. Even though the thicker faces of the ribs carrying the glass bricks and other infill materials were exposed, when seen from inside, the crystalline polyhedral lost its geometrical rigidity. In turn, the prismatic colored walls, which refracted the daylight in various hues, created a dynamic surface that came into prominence by apparently absorbing the frame (cf. Figure 4). And the cupola continually changed its appearance in harmony with the movements of sunlight, which was intended to analogize the sky. Apparently, this dazzling play of light on translucent surfaces created an illusion that challenged not only climatic conditions but also the earthly burden of gravity. Just as the thick diaphanous glass walls did not allow for any visual contact with the outside world, neither was there any horizontal nor any vertical reference in the hall that would direct the eyes to the cupola's connection with the ground. Through colorful luminous surfaces in constant flux, Taut created perceptual ambiguity, which encouraged the impression of an architecture without earthly limitations that must have disrupted visitors'

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sense of horizon. Consequently, after visitors entered the glass hall, their contact with mundane reality was hypothetically suspended.

In this unearthly, weightless hall animated by light and color, Taut sought to bring the cosmic spirit into view. Under the sunlight, the glass wall opalesced and the cupola seemed to dissolve into a spectrum of colors, which developed from a deep blue, to a moss-green and then to a golden yellow. Their culmination at the peak was a dazzling creamy white. In short, in the glass hall, Taut aspired to reproduce the experience of different stages of daylight, and, at the apex of the dome, to convert it to an apparition of pure light. On the other hand, in the relatively darker, earthly level of the *Glashaus*, his interest lay more with the reflections on the surface. Here, descending the curving stairs wrapped by silvered glass bricks, visitors transmigrated from the celestial to the earthly order. Upon descending the stairs, visitors would have entered into a circular space roofed by a conical ceiling. The ceiling was patterned with a mosaic made of stained and gilded glass tiles centered on the oculus opening upward to the brighter glass hall. The light coming from this oculus was reflected directly on the first step of the water cascade located at the center of the room. According to Taut, the running water of the cascade sparkled like gold, with glinting colored lights in it. Although the gold-like shining water was the most prominent element of this grotto-like descending room, the most dominant color, and perhaps the most prominent feature, was red. The walls surrounding the cascade were all covered with red and polychrome glazed or enamel tiles. The last episode along the walk downward was the dark niche at the lowest level. Lined in purple velvet, this niche directed visitors' eyes toward an opaque glass screen displaying the colorful projections of a hidden kaleidoscope. While at the entrance to the grotto, the lightest stained glass paintings, free of any shadow, made the light visible, and thus in the deepest corner of the space, the colors hidden in darkness were revealed. Overall, there can be no question that Taut's building program was based on a hierarchy of light. For Taut, the *Glashaus* demonstrated that colored glass (and analogously crystal) was the expressive medium through which the spirit of the world could be seamlessly illuminated.

In Taut's own words, the *Glashaus* reminded him that "color is a phenomenon that is produced by light," which encouraged him to use it as the artistic means for giving form to his buildings throughout his career (Taut, "Farbe am Hause," translated in Düttmann, 24). But, under the influence of Scheerbart's fictions and Behne's theory, a more significant aspect of the *Glashaus* that encouraged Taut's utopian

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projects (*Alpine Architektur*, 1917; *Die Stadtkrone*, 1918; and *Der Weltbaumeister*, 1920) during the years of World War I and immediately after it, was the power of colored glass. Its most profound effects were, according to Taut, that it could affect and change human psyche. He summarized what he experienced in and learned from his own building as follows:

in the domed room [of the *Glashaus*] where the light was scattered by reflecting panes, rain or shine, the mood was never depressing. There was always a diffused glow, in colors that began with a deep blue at the bottom and progressed upwards through moss-green and golden yellow to the peak, where they culminated in dazzling creamy white. Their vivifying effect on the nerves was generally felt, as was a more concentrating, calming effect in the lower cascade room, where the ceilings and walls led through all the hues of the spectrum from red, gold and silver-painted surfaces to polychrome tiles to the ever changing kaleidoscope of the deep violet niche, all of the colors collected and focused by the bright yellow glow of the cascade, trickling like golden water (“Beobachtungen über Farbenwirkungen aus meiner Praxis” 13, translated in Düttmann, 24).

In conclusion, the end imagined for the *Glashaus* by Taut, Behne and Scheerbart was a dreamlike experience that would remove one from material concerns and utilitarian ends of mundane reality, which otherwise would obscure a deeper understanding of art and beauty. According to Scheerbart, the opacity of their imagined glass buildings – in other words, the perceptual ambiguity within them – could conquer the sensual bodies of inhabitants. Once the physical had been overcome, the emanation of the spirit from the body could begin. As beings liberated from all earthliness, the inhabitants could attain spiritual purity and act as astral beings. In this respect, especially for Scheerbart, besides its therapeutic power, colored glass promised to open the doors of perception for the spirit which when closed inhibited access to the metaphysical world. However, whether detachment from daily life promised freedom for one to redefine him or herself, or assured a complete self-exemption which could free one from all gravity and memories of the past and present, remains an open question.

According to the German Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch (1885-1977), this was the chief weakness of Taut and Scheerbart’s glass Utopia. In Taut, Behne and Scheerbart’s optimistic view, architecture in the shape of a beautiful form purified of all materialist conditions and practical reality could stimulate an exalted aesthetic experience, equivalent to the contemplative acts they associated with religious experience. In this

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view, the architect was ideally the free-creator who could give form to the house of God. Bloch was not convinced by this presumption. He observed that in the wake of neo-romanticist expressionist discourse, Taut, like many of his friends and colleagues, naively believed that architecture could be a universe unto itself and alone assure Utopia. For Bloch, the alleged autonomy of architecture seemed to promote a kind of dissociative self-justification which blinded many architects to the full complexity of their art, and its near total capture within the existing system. In this respect, the search for pure form and the use of glass, in Bloch's view, purified space of content and context, and thus also of meaning. His conviction was that so long as architecture was bound within the "empty space" assured by the logic of the capitalist system, it would have all but nothing to communicate (Bloch, *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature* 189).

Bloch sharply diagnosed architecture as a discipline in crisis desperately looking for self-justification; debates on *Sachlichkeit* at the time could be seen as a symptom of this. The Vitruvian triad of *firmitas*, *utilitas* and *venustas* (firmness, commodity and delight) that served for centuries as the primary law of architecture had been fragmenting since at least the eighteenth century (Pérez-Gómez; Rykwert). The notion of built form developed out of Vitruvius had for some time faced a double challenge to its authority from engineering sciences on the one hand and aesthetics on the other. Construction and art came to be seen as two distinct and autonomous areas of knowledge, with the special synthesizing capacity of the architect increasingly squeezed out between them. Accordingly, in his pessimistic evaluation of early modern architecture, Bloch imagined that there was no choice but to read the principles of pure *Sachlichkeit*, with its search for pure functional form, and *sachliche Kunst*, with its search for pure artistic expression, in the same folder of purity that he associated with the unimaginative "art of engineering (*Ingenieurkunst*)" (Bloch, *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature* 190). Consequently, Bloch regarded Taut and Scheerbart's critique of the present as "fruitless."

However, in defense of Scheerbart and Taut's utopian vision, it is worth noting that their aim was to create a *Traumkunst* (art of dream) in glass architecture but not a *Raumkunst* (art of space). The ambiguous substance of glass appealed to them, especially by virtue of its fictive attributes. The potential of glass to act in the subjunctive mode of "as if" and to suspend material reality invited both men to explore a different way of engaging with the environment. Intrigued by the paradoxical character of glass – a most incorporeal material (solid liquid, in fact) that urges sensual limits – Scheerbart and Taut attempted to replace traditional



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stone with it to pursue alternate connections between people and the world. Arguably, theirs was an admirable aim, considering that in the relationship between human beings and the world in which they live, buildings ought to signify more than a simple technical phenomenon (to which they have now been mostly reduced). As a substance on the threshold between materiality and immateriality, glass seemed to signify for Taut (as well as Scheerbart and Behne) a repository of some profound expressive attributes more than simply being a convenient construction material. In Taut's own words, it was a complement to the surplus meaning of architecture. The act of making was not determined merely by finding a solution to what is pragmatically "necessary." What is not "surplus" was compelled to perish in time (as existing technology are superseded or original uses change). Taut stressed the impotence of defining architecture merely as a material fixation of practical demands ("Glaserzeugung und Glasbau" 11).

Taut resorted to the term "surplus" to articulate the metaphoric, representational task of architecture. However, this did not mean that glass was an external factor that lacked any cognitive significance in the perception of the building or that it was simply an ornamental figure that aimed to make the ordinary more attractive. Rather, it was a variation in signification, a deviation from the literary or materialist meaning of the building. By virtue of its mysterious and enigmatic nature, which was open to ongoing interpretation, glass could serve architects as a matrix to furnish architecture with an excess of signification. Briefly, Taut anticipated that, like a "garment of hidden inscriptions," colored glass could reestablish the narrative capacity of architecture (Taut, "Glaserzeugung und Glasbau" 9). Because of its sensuousness, colored glass, which could modulate space and time on sensory, emotional, and aesthetic levels of experience, could open a door to the opaque, symbolic depth of the world; it could reactivate a vision of the world similar to the one seen by the eyes of *homo religiosus*. Furthermore, despite the fact that Taut naïvely wished for the self-sufficiency of art work, the *Glashaus* was not a pure product of Taut's free creative-self. Although unacknowledged by Taut himself, his building drew upon cultural memory and tradition. Specifically, he attempted to reactivate 'tower' and 'cave,' two archetypes that Bloch saw as "figures of hope," where existing reality can be surpassed, questioned and remade (Moylan, 159). In light of this, Scheerbart and Taut's project can be understood as an attempt to 'excavate' the "fairy-like quality of architecture" by converting a building material into a rhetorical tool (Bloch, *The Principle of Hope* 699-745). Consequently, their utopia remains worthy of reconsideration even in the present, perhaps especially now, when, as David

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Harvey maintains, architects have yet to embrace their basic responsibility for envisioning and constructing a different – superior – environment capable of associating “the micro-scale of the body” with the “macro-scale” of a global world view (Harvey, 51).

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**Image Captions**

Figure 1: Taut's Monument of Iron at Leipzig, 1913 (From *Der Industriebau* 4, no. 11(November 15, 1913): 149).

Figure 2: Taut's sketch at the Collegiate Church of Stuttgart, 1904

Figure 3: On the cover of Taut's pamphlet for the Glashaus, Scheerbart's motto "Der Gothische Dom ist das Präludium der Glasarchitektur" was placed below Taut's drawing. (From *Glashaus: Werkbundaustellung Cöln* (Cologne: [n. pub.], 1914))

Figure 4: Interior view of the glass cupola (From *Deutsche Form im Kriegsjahr. Die Ausstellung Köln 1914. Jahrbuch des Deutschen Werkbundes* (Munich: F. Bruckmann, 1915), plate 79).