

Bertolt Brecht and Walter Gropius—Cultural Front Figures in Berlin of the Weimar Republic

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Abstract

Within the Weimar Republic and its new democratic constitution, an intense cultural activity flourished with Berlin as the intellectual centre. Original ideas or currents of thought were created in this environment, not least within theatre and architecture. This article focuses on the most prominent representatives of these fields, Bertolt Brecht and Walter Gropius, and how they created and realized ideas that have become lasting and still relevant. Their way of working had many similarities—both had a unique ability to inspire and coordinate people with exceptional knowledge and qualities to work with and for them so that their visions could be realized. Their working ethics have been criticized, and it is possible, and even likely, that everyone who contributed to their fame did not receive the credit they deserved. Regardless, Brecht's and Gropius's contributions as representatives of innovative theatre and architecture must be respected.

Keywords

Weimar Culture, Creativity, Epic Theatre, Collaboration, Working Ethics, Bauhaus

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

The Weimar Republic, as a historical epoch sandwiched between two world wars, has been noted in various ways. It has been seen as a cautionary tale—a failed democracy that became the breeding ground for Nazism. However, when viewed through the lens of Berlin, the Weimar Republic often presents an entirely different picture. The purely historical aspect recedes into the background, and what is often focused on is the sinful, liberated, and decadent Berlin as depicted in Bob

Fosse's film and various productions of the musical "Cabaret", which are loosely based on a novella in Christopher Isherwood's "Goodbye to Berlin" (Isherwood, 1954). In reality, the book mainly portrays an entirely different side of Berlin—the poor, proletarian one. Another example of what has been called "Weimar culture" is Josef von Sternberg's famous 1930 film "The Blue Angel", which features Marlene Dietrich as the nightclub singer Lola Lola and also focuses on Berlin's glamorous nightlife. However, many comprehensive surveys describe the political Weimar Republic and the enormous cultural activity that generated many intellectually exciting ideas during the period (Williams, 2012; Laqueur, 2017; Weitz, 2012; Rossol & Ziemann, 2022).

1.2. Rationale for the Study

What was the background to the intense cultural activity in Berlin of the Weimar Republic—how could it arise, and what traces did it leave behind? Are there any ideas or currents of thought that have endured and had a lasting influence on people and society today? Describing all the intellectual environments that generated ideas during the Weimar Republic, especially in the intensely creative Berlin, is impossible. Therefore, focus has been given to environments and ideas that formed the basis for the emergence, realization, and dissemination of innovations in two areas: theater and architecture. These areas have been chosen for several reasons: first, they still have relevance in today's society (Englund & Daybelge, 2022; Schönström, 2023); second, through the discussion of two of the most prominent representatives of these fields, Bertolt Brecht and Walter Gropius, and their surroundings, it should be possible to shed light not only on the cultural networks in which they operated but also on the social and political reality of the Weimar Republic and Berlin of that time.

1.3. Specific Questions

- 1) What were the reasons for high cultural activity in the Weimar Republic? How to evaluate different sources of information?
- 2) How did Brecht and Gropius create and realize their ideas? From what sources can information be obtained?
- 3) Have the ideas of Brecht and Gropius survived?

1.4. Method

This article uses several overviews to describe and analyze the Weimar Republic from various perspectives, with Berlin as a central starting point. Comparing the information in these works, I have assessed areas of agreement and disagreement between the different sources. The context in which the information was produced has been considered. I have tried to fill some knowledge gaps and synthesize information for a comprehensive understanding and more nuanced picture of the themes I have investigated. This comparative approach has also been applied to the biographies of Brecht and Gropius, where I have tried to identify any

underlying assumptions or biases in the sources. I have also used selected examples from the key persons' oeuvres (Brecht) and publications in scientific journals (Gropius).

2. The Weimar Republic

The period around the fall of the German Empire, the armistice, and the proclamation of the Republic in November 1918 was marked by chaos, revolution, and enormous social conflicts, including the Spartacist uprising in 1919 and the Kapp Putsch in 1920 (Henig, 2014). Amid this chaos, the Social Democratic government called for elections to the Constituent Assembly and chose Weimar, the city of Goethe and Schiller, over Berlin as the meeting place. Here, on August 11, 1919, a republican, democratic, and parliamentary constitution was created and adopted by the National Assembly. The Weimar Constitution established the most democratic conditions Germans had ever lived under (Weitz, 2012). All political rights established in constitutions since the American, French, and Latin American revolutions were written into the document, such as freedom of speech, assembly, and press, and protection of person and property. Men and women were declared equal under the law. The constitution guaranteed universal suffrage and recognized trade unions. Workers were given the right to participate in the regulation of wages and working conditions (Weitz, 2012). Power was vested in the Reichstag and the Reichsrat, representing the states, and the popularly elected Reich President had limited powers. An exception was the president's right to rule by decree in emergencies. Thus, the Weimar Constitution became one of the most democratic constitutions—perhaps the most democratic—in the world during the 1920s (Weitz, 2012).

The democratic spirit permeated culture and society and contributed to creative environments not only in Berlin, but also in other parts of Germany. However, one cannot overlook that Berlin became the country's cultural centre and window to the world. The Weimar Republic was a fragile democracy, and its primary weakness was the large party fragmentation. The republic was created by the Social Democrats and the bourgeois left and centre. However, the presence of other major parties, such as the Communists and the Liberals, and later the Nazis, made it difficult to form effective parliamentary governments. The Weimar Republic lasted until January 30, 1933, when Hitler became Reich Chancellor.

For most of the population, cultural activity was not central; instead, the Weimar Republic was associated with defeat (the Treaty of Versailles, war reparations), division, and powerlessness. The economy was shaky, with occasional periods of economic prosperity alternating with periods of hyperinflation and depression. The Great Depression in the late 1920s and early 1930s also hit Germany, and the uncertainty that characterized life both politically and economically was likely a contributing factor to the hectic life that developed and culminated in Berlin, creating the outward image of a sinful, liberated city where anything could happen, but where cultural activity also flourished.

2.1. Berlin in the Weimar Republic

Berlin, previously the capital of Prussia, became the capital of the unified Germany in 1871. Until World War I, the population growth was explosive, with the city's population increasing to 3 million. In the early 1920s, many suburbs and villages were incorporated, making Berlin one of Europe's largest cities with a population of 4 million. Thus, Berlin became the world's third-largest city after London and New York (Henig, 2014).

During the 1920s, Berlin was characterized by mass unemployment and increasing political polarization between left and right forces. With a high proportion of industrial workers, Berlin became the centre of the German labour movement. Berlin also became the cultural centre, but this did not exclude other parts of Germany from displaying high cultural activity. This created asymmetry of various types (Nygård & Strang, 2016): spatial (centre-periphery), temporal (modernity vs. conservatism), and ideological (cosmopolitanism vs. nationalism). People outside Berlin generated many ideas but eventually became connected to the city. For example, Brecht started his theatre career long before moving to Berlin in 1922. Gropius (1919) started the Bauhaus school in Weimar, but the school moved (via Dessau) to Berlin only in 1928. However, neither the ideas nor their creators were accepted or "legitimized" until they spent longer or shorter periods in Berlin. It was prestigious to mingle in Berlin's cultural circles, where writers like Alfred Döblin ("Berlin Alexanderplatz"), Kurt Tucholsky, and Erich Kästner, artists like Otto Dix and George Grosz, film directors like Fritz Lang ("Nosferatu," "Metropolis") and Josef von Sternberg ("The Blue Angel"), theatre people like Bertolt Brecht and Erwin Piscator, and architects like Bruno Taut and Erich Mendelsohn gathered. All knew each other and mingled at places like the Romanisches Café on Kurfürstendamm (Kesting, 1967). Berlin also became a transnational centre for "modernity," attracting intellectuals from all over Europe who came to update themselves.

2.2. Ideas and Intellectual Creation

What is required for intellectual activity and for ideas to be produced? In 1928, Virginia Woolf wrote in "A Room of One's Own": "A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" (Woolf, 2004). Freedom and space for artistic activity have always been (and still are) essential for creativity. In the Berlin of the Weimar Republic, the democratic constitution provided freedom for individuals never seen before. Freedom of speech and press, equality between men and women, and the political climate created increased tolerance for minorities. A good economy can never be wrong—even if it is hardly necessary to produce ideas, it possibly creates time for it. In Berlin, the chaotic years of 1919-1923 were followed by a five-year period of relative political and economic stability (the Golden Twenties), which caused cultural life to flourish.

The concept of an idea can have many different meanings (Lovejoy, 1949; Skinner 1969). An idea can be a sudden thought that provides new insights, such as

Descartes' "aha" moment: "I think, therefore I am," which became the starting point for his philosophy. A scientific observation (discovery) can give rise to an idea that, in turn, can lead to knowledge that can be conveyed and have consequences for humanity and society. An idea can be the spark that gives rise to cultural movements. Nevertheless, how many ideas are original and new? To answer that question, one can quote the pathologist Henry Harris (2008):

Regrettably, it can hardly be denied that you can become a competent scientist without giving a thought to the history of your chosen subject. But the history is there all the same, and if you have only the foggiest idea about what was done before you entered the field, you will have no way of assessing the significance of your own work, and you will certainly overestimate its originality and its importance. Worse still, you may occasionally find that your bright idea was someone else's half a century ago, and that arguments in which you are currently engaged were raging long before you were born, and sometimes with greater acuity. That can be an embarrassment when someone else draws the fact to your attention.

To whom or what can an idea be credited? Often, an idea is linked to a specific individual who becomes the representative or central figure for a cultural orientation resulting from discussions between many people. An idea can be modified and, over time, take on different forms that can be linked to different eras and places. Brecht's and Gropius' ways of generating, processing, and spreading the ideas they have become front figures for differ in many respects.

3. Bertolt Brecht and the New Theatre

There is rich literature on Brecht's life and work (Haas, 1958, Kesting, 1967; Schönström, 2023). I have chosen to focus on the activities that Brecht and his collaborators and network engaged in during the Weimar Republic, focusing on what was generated in Berlin.

3.1. The Person Bertolt Brecht

Bertolt (Bert) Brecht (1898-1956) grew up in Augsburg in a wealthy home, and he described himself his upbringing (Kesting, 1967): *I grew up as the son of wealthy people. My parents put a collar on me/and raised me to be constantly served/and taught me the art of command. But/when I grew up and looked around/I did not like people of my own class. I did not want to command and not be served./So I left my class and joined/the common people.*

With this background, it is difficult to explain why Brecht already harboured such a strong aversion to the bourgeoisie and all authorities early on. Already at the age of 16, he began publishing in left-oriented newspapers and caused a scandal when he wrote a school essay (1915) on "Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori" (It is sweet and honorable to die for one's country): "The statement that it is sweet and honorable to die for one's country can only be valued as propaganda for a specific purpose."

After graduating in 1917, Brecht studied medicine at the University of Munich and worked as a medic during the last year of World War I. The encounter with the suffering of returning soldiers made him a lifelong pacifist and social critic (Kesting, 1967). His experiences led him to write the satirical “Legende vom toten Soldaten” (“Legend of the Dead Soldier”). This poem lashed out at militarism and chauvinism and led to Brecht being stripped of his German citizenship by the Nazis in 1935.

Brecht also wrote poetry and theatre criticism in the socialist newspaper “Der Volkswille” (which later became communist) without much success. Around 1920, Brecht made a living as a troubadour in beer halls and cabarets in Munich, experiences that left marks on his lyricism and dramaturgy. Brecht actively participated in the November Revolution, experiences he literarily processed in the play “Trommeln in der Nacht” (1922; “Drums in the Night”). He also published the poetry collection “Die Hauspostille,” and the publication of these works marked Brecht’s breakthrough with critics and the public.

3.2. Brecht and His Circle in Berlin

In 1924, Brecht moved permanently to Berlin. He worked briefly with director Max Reinhardt and the socialist avant-gardist Erwin Piscator, which gave him new insights into contemporary stage art. Brecht had his charismatic profile: short-cropped hair, a cigar in the corner of his mouth, a mechanic’s jacket, a sports shirt, a leather cap, and the strangest—a pair of cheap glasses with wireframes (Kesting, 1967). He soon began experimenting as a director. One of his collaborators described his working method: “Brecht walked around the room, enjoying smoking his cigar, listening to dozens of people’s arguments and counterarguments, joking, winking, and yet sticking to his own line.” This way of working, which he maintained until his last years, was the foundation of his “collective” work, where the collective contributed arguments and counterarguments. In the “collective,” which he more or less used as a “sounding board,” not only actors and other writers were included but also, for example, stagehands and, as a permanent member, his second wife, actress Helene Weigel. Brecht discussed both his own and others’ ideas, which took shape during the discussions. The final form was, however, always marked by Brecht—it became his work. He had no respect for copyright, which led to accusations of plagiarism—something he did not care about.

Brecht began to study Marxism in depth and became a Marxist. He was influenced by the intensifying conflict between communists and Nazis and came to advocate a politically intensely coloured theatre that worked with distancing effects (“Verfremdungseffekte”). Collaboration with Piscator inspired him to abandon his earlier expressionist drama in favour of what he called “epic theatre”. He saw little value in realistic theatre. His epic theatre differed from the naturalistic and realistic theatre introduced by Henrik Ibsen and Anton Chekhov. He wanted his epic theatre to awaken the audience—it was to appeal to their reason, not their emotions. It was to be entertaining but also didactic and socially provocative. The

audience was encouraged to be critical of what happened on stage, and through the use of the “Verfremdungseffekt”, they were reminded that they were in the theatre and that what happened on stage was not real. The stage was always fully lit, and the action could be interrupted with songs or messages on placards.

3.3. Brecht's Works in Berlin

During his time in Berlin, Brecht created and contributed to many works that have left their mark on theatre history (Willett, 1988; Schönström, 2023). I have chosen to discuss a few that I perceive as the most representative to highlight Brecht's working method and how they reflect the spirit of the times.

In Brecht's network of collaborators who stimulated and helped him to create and process his and others' ideas was Kurt Weill, a classically trained musician and good friend (McNeff, 2006). He wrote not only classical music that is still played but also “Gebrauchsmusik,” sometimes with jazz influences. Together with Weill and the close collaborator Elisabeth Hauptmann, Brecht wrote “Die Dreigroschenoper” (“The Threepenny Opera”), which premiered in 1928 and became a success not only in Berlin but soon also internationally. Thematically, the piece was a free adaptation of John Gay's “The Beggar's Opera” from 1728. What appealed to the audience were the songs, the motley cast of characters, the coarse slang with comic formulations, and the satire's focus on the English upper-class society. Many of the songs became immediate classics that have lived on to this day—such as the Moritat of Mackie Messer in the Prologue is still relevant! Although The Threepenny Opera can be perceived as a comic musical, it ultimately deals with the depraved, degenerate, and exploitative nature of capitalism—everyone lies and cheats—crooks and the police can hardly be distinguished—sexuality is a business transaction. The political satire—Brecht had seriously begun studying Marxism—focuses on the class society and bourgeois double standards relevant to contemporary Berlin:

“You gentlemen who think you have a mission/ To purge us from the seven deadly sin./ Should first sort out the basic food position/ Then start your preaching: that's where it begins./ You lot, who preach restraint and watch your waist as well/ Should learn for all time how the world is run./ However much you twist, whatever lies you tell/ Food is the first thing. Morals follow on./ So first make sure that those who now are starving/ Get proper helping when we do the carving./...”

Continued collaboration with Weill and Hauptmann resulted, among other things, in the opera “Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny” (1929; “The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny”). Kurt Weill was commissioned in 1927 to write a short opera for the Festival für deutsche Kammermusik in Baden-Baden and chose five poems from Brecht's “Hauspostille,” and he also asked the author for a sixth poem for the finale. The result was “The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny,” performed in depression-stricken Berlin in 1931. The play is a satire on the temptations and dangers of capitalism and the modern city. A hurricane threatens to destroy the fictional American desert city of Mahagonny, but the

hurricane takes another path, and everything suddenly becomes permissible. The inhabitants lose themselves in consumption and pleasure, with food, gambling, violence, and sex alternating in abundance. Musically, various opera styles from several centuries were mixed with tones related to 1920s popular music and jazz. Literarily and linguistically, everything from advanced poetic expressions to songs in a kind of primitive English is found here. One of these is the well-known “Alabama Song”. The innovative presentation of text and music provoked the expected scandal: the actors opposed the outraged audience with whistles.

Brecht realized his idea of didactic theatre in a series of Marxist “Lehrstücke”. These short pieces were primarily intended for internal party work and, thus, for amateur actors. The theme was not the most important; instead, the innovation lay in the structure, which aimed to dissolve the separation between performance and audience completely.

3.4. Brecht after the Berlin Period

In early 1933, after the Reichstag fire and Hitler’s rise to power, Brecht and his family left Germany. They fled to Prague, continuing through Switzerland and France to finally end up in Denmark, where he stayed for six years—a period that gave him undisturbed opportunities to devote himself to writing poetry and drama. In 1939, Brecht moved from Denmark via Sweden and Finland, and in 1941 continued the flight through Moscow and Vladivostok to Los Angeles. He stayed in the USA for six years. All the time, Brecht created significant and well-known dramatic works that are still performed, such as “Leben des Galilei” (“Life of Galileo”), “Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder” (“Mother Courage and Her Children”), “Der gute Mensch von Sezuan” (“The Good Person of Szechwan”), and “Der kaukasische Kreidekreis” (“The Caucasian Chalk Circle”). Brecht returned to East Berlin in 1949, taking over his theater, Theater am Schiffbauerdamm. Shortly after that, his group, Berliner Ensemble, was started.

Most of Brecht’s significant dramas came after 1933, but it was not until the 1950s that he was entirely accepted as one of the greatest playwrights of the 20th century. Brecht died in 1956, and his widow, Helene Weigel, managed his estate until she died in 1971. Berliner Ensemble still exists and regularly performs his works.

4. Walter Gropius and the Bauhaus Movement

4.1. The Person Walter Gropius

Walter Gropius (1883-1969) was born and raised in Berlin in an upper-middle-class family with architectural heritage (his older relative Martin Gropius had designed the Kunstgewerbemuseum in Berlin). After studying architecture in Munich and Berlin, although he never completed a degree, Gropius secured a three-year position with the well-established architect Peter Behrens. Among his colleagues at Behrens were Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier, who later became renowned architects. In 1910, Gropius opened his own architectural office

in Berlin and, together with colleague Adolf Meyer, designed innovative, modernist buildings over the following years, such as the Fagus shoelast factory in Alfeld an der Leine (1911). In his early industrial buildings, he adopted motifs that would be widely applied in other building types during the 1920s.

During World War I, Gropius served as an officer on the Western Front. He returned as a decorated war hero but to a changed environment. Activity at his architectural office was low, but he tried to maintain contact with his colleagues. He involved himself in several radical artist groups in Berlin (e.g., “Die Novembergruppe”) and, together with fellow architects such as Bruno Taut and Erich Mendelsohn, formed the “Arbeitsrat für Kunst,” which he led. Together with Taut, they issued a manifesto advocating a new architecture—tall buildings—houses for the people. Gropius established an extensive network within various artistic circles and became a well-known name.

Several biographies of Gropius provide varying images of the person and what drove him. They highlight his charismatic leadership qualities, chaotic love life (especially his relationship with Alma Mahler, whom he was married to for a period), inability to draw (he always worked with someone who drew his ideas), and ability to build a cult around himself (McCarthy, 2021; Polster, 2019; Isaacs, 1983; Englund & Daybelge, 2022).

4.2. Gropius and the Bauhaus School

Gropius had already been considered for a position as the head of the Weimar “Kunstgewerbeschule” in 1915, but Weimar also had a “Hochschule für Bildende Kunst.” Gropius proposed merging the two institutions and accepted an offer in 1919 to become the head of the “Staatliches Bauhaus” in Weimar, which resulted from the merger. In connection with this, Gropius issued a manifesto in which he formulated his intentions and program, advocating for cooperation between art and craft (and later technology) to achieve the ultimate goal for all visual art forms – “the complete building” (“Gesamtkunstwerk”) where all art forms could be brought together (Gropius, 1919):

The old schools of art were unable to produce this unity; how could they, since art cannot be taught. They must be merged once more with the workshop. The mere drawing and painting world of the pattern designer and the applied artist must become a world that builds again. When young people who take joy in artistic creation once more begin their life's work by learning a trade, then the unproductive “artist” will no longer be condemned to deficient artistry, for his skill will now be preserved for the crafts, in which he will be able to achieve excellence. Architects, sculptors, painters, we must all return to the crafts! For art is not a “profession”. There is no essential difference between the artist and the craftsman. The artist is an exalted craftsman. In rare moments of inspiration, transcending the consciousness of his will, the grace of heaven may cause his work to blossom into art. But proficiency in a craft is essential to every artist. Therein lies the prime source of creative imagination.

The new school marked a fresh start, and Gropius began to realize his ideas on how it should be organized and function. Inspired by architect Otto Bartning's publication "Teaching Plan for Architecture and the Fine Arts on the Basis of Handicrafts," Gropius's intention for Bauhaus was for it to be a combination of an architecture school, a craft workshop, and an art academy (Droste, 2002). Students would engage in handicrafts and traditional art forms such as sculpture and painting. The curriculum included metalworking, woodworking, drawing, weaving, pottery, typography, photography, and design. Before gaining access to the school's workshops, students underwent a six-month preliminary course ("Vorkursus") led by one of the school's teachers. After three years of workshop instruction, students received a journeyman's diploma.

Instead of traditional professorships, teachers received titles like "Master of Form" and "Master of Craft" in an attempt to erase barriers between artists and craftsmen, and between teachers and students. Within a short time, Gropius had managed to gather several well-known names as teachers for the school, such as painters Paul Klee, Wassily Kandinsky, Lyonel Feininger, and Johannes Itten, sculptors like Gerhard Marcks and Oskar Schlemmer, and many other prominent artists and architects, including László Moholy-Nagy and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, who were recruited later. Gropius himself was one of the teachers. The school became more or less a collective where new forms of living together were experimented with. Creativity at the school was to be promoted through "friendly relations between student and master in their free time," and they organized plays, poetry, music, film, and masquerade balls, creating a cohesive collective feeling for the school. Bauhaus is often associated with an elegant geometric style executed with modest means, but the produced works were very diverse. The Bauhaus style, also known as the International Style, interpreted the famous design phrase "form follows function" as abstaining from any decoration and instead emphasizing the harmony between an object's function and its design. Bauhaus made advances not only in design but also strongly influenced modern graphic art, for example.

Due to a lack of state funding, Bauhaus moved to Dessau in 1925. Gropius designed the new school building, which was considered a triumph of modernist aesthetics, and the school is still used today as a design school. Besides the school's new buildings, he designed various types of buildings and residential houses. Around the same time, he initiated an unrealized project for a "total theatre" in collaboration with director Erwin Piscator and a famous competition proposal (not accepted) for a skyscraper for the Chicago Tribune (1922). Gropius recognized that mechanical production was the future, and he, therefore, shifted the school's design focus to mass manufacture—modern designers were to work for functional and aesthetic solutions for the mass society rather than individual products for the economic elite.

After the mid-1920s, Gropius worked on urban planning issues and developed a plan with parallel slab buildings, whose orientation and spacing were determined

by the sun's exposure. The ideas were realized in the Dammerstock district in Karlsruhe and in Siemensstadt in Berlin, where he collaborated with, among others, Hans Scharoun. Gropius also worked (mainly through his private architectural office) on various design tasks such as interiors and furniture, a railway motor coach, car bodies, and a convertible Adler!

Gropius left the leadership of Bauhaus in 1928. The operation moved to Berlin and was eventually led by Mies van der Rohe. Even though he no longer led Bauhaus, Gropius continued his private architectural practice and served as a consultant for the school until it was shut down by the Nazis in 1933.

4.3. Gropius and the Architectural Scene in the Weimar Republic

In the mid-1920s, when the economy was good (*Goldene Zwanziger Jahre*), construction activity was high throughout Germany. Several leading architects gathered in the early 1920s around Bruno Taut (1880-1938) and Erich Mendelsohn (1887-1953). They formed the Crystal Chain, representing an expressionist view of art that gradually softened and was succeeded by *Die Neue Sachlichkeit*. Taut and Mendelsohn did not have the same strict view of architecture as Gropius and, for example, Le Corbusier, whom they criticized—their rational, airy, and standardized houses without decorative details were considered sterile and cold. Taut and Mendelsohn were nevertheless modernist pioneers but softened the hard line of functionalism. Taut's most famous works were the “Onkel Toms Siedlung” and “Britz” projects in Berlin, where the residents would get “light, air, and sun.” In 1920, Taut published “Alpine Architektur,” which was about his idea of building glass houses throughout the Swiss Alps. This remained a vision, but the use of glass as a building material fascinated Gropius, who increasingly used this material in his works. Mendelsohn openly distanced himself from the strict functionalism with its straight lines and lack of colours. He had a penchant for the curved form, which is reflected in his works, and strove for an “organic” architecture where buildings would both blend in with and stand out from the environment they were placed in. He was a champion of the modern and advocated for new building methods, mass consumption, automobilism, and advertising. Mendelsohn's two most famous buildings are the boldly expressionist “Einstein Tower” in Potsdam and the rounded, modernist “Schocken Department Store” in Chemnitz. By the end of the 1920s, he was perhaps Germany's most successful architect (Weitz, 2012).

4.4. Gropius after the Weimar Republic

Gropius, Taut, and Mendelsohn all fled Germany when the Nazis took over and continued their work in exile in the USA and Turkey, respectively. In exile, however, none of the three achieved anything that could measure up to their best works from the Weimar years. During 1934-37, Gropius worked in Great Britain, where he designed, among other things, the “Impington Village College” (1936), a local educational centre, in collaboration with Maxwell Fry. He then moved to

the USA, where he became a professor at Harvard University. In the USA, Gropius ran a private practice in collaboration with his student Marcel Breuer from 1937-41 and with several younger architects in “The Architects Collaborative (TAC)” from 1945. They designed residences, hospitals, and other buildings, the “Graduate Center at Harvard” (1949-50), the American Embassy in Athens (1956), and from the 1950s several buildings in Berlin, including a residential building for the Interbau exhibition in 1957 and the Gropiusstadt district (started in 1959). Gropius’s approach had a significant impact on early functionalism and 1950s American-influenced architecture, as well as internationally.

5. Discussion

What is required for intellectual activity to thrive and produce ideas? In 1928, Virginia Woolf wrote in *A Room of One’s Own*: “it is necessary to have five hundred pounds a year and a room with a lock on the door if one is to write novels or poems.” (Woolf, 2004) Freedom and space for artistic activity have always been (and still are) essential for creative creation. Undoubtedly, the democratic and parliamentary constitution adopted by the national assembly in 1919—the Weimar Constitution—created democratic conditions that were the most important reason for the intense cultural flourishing during the Weimar Republic. Freedom in all areas—freedom of expression, opinion, and press, as well as tolerance towards minorities and different forms of sexuality—was the basis for cultural activities. Weimar Republic Berlin can be likened to “a room of one’s own”. Berlin was the natural meeting place for cultural activity; every “new” or revived idea or movement had to pass through Berlin to be approved and accepted. In Berlin, ideas were discussed and interacted with combined, criticized, rejected, or accepted. Berlin was the window outward and the magnet that attracted various artists and other intellectuals from the rest of Germany and the world—Berlin was an international cultural centre. There were also economic opportunities, at least periodically. After the chaotic years 1919-1923, which included hyperinflation, there followed a five-year period of relative political and economic stability (Goldene Zwanziger Jahre), which caused cultural life to flourish.

But were the activities that “flared up” during the Weimar period akin to a phoenix—an explosion of phenomena that turned to ashes when the Nazis took over? Could something new and lasting arise from the ashes? The exciting, exotic, sinful Berlin disappeared. However, many ideas and movements survived and have left their mark both in history and the present, including those represented by Bertolt Brecht and Walter Gropius.

One can ask whether Brecht could have realized his ideas and created his “new theatre” in any place other than Berlin. Was his time in Berlin a prerequisite for his successful authorship? When Brecht moved to Berlin in 1924, his political views (leftist) were already formed, his pacifism firmly rooted in his experiences as a medic during World War I, and as a writer, he had already written and published prose, dramas, and poetry. Once in Berlin, Brecht established himself as his

own “profile” and created a rich network of other theatre practitioners like Ernst Piscator, musicians like Kurt Weill, and then-famous actors and writers. Brecht has been described as open to arguments; he gladly listened to others’ opinions and ideas that took shape during discussions. The final form, however, was always marked by Brecht—it became his work. However, was it always so, and was this accurate? Did he always give sufficient “credit” to his collaborators? John Fuegi, a literature professor at the University of Maryland and founder of the International Brecht Society, questioned this and claimed that most of Brecht’s works were created by a female collective where Brecht played a subordinate role (Fuegi, 1994). Fuegi’s views have been questioned, but it is well-documented that, for example, Elisabeth Hauptmann not only came up with the idea to adapt John Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera* from 1728 but also wrote a large part of the text for *The Threepenny Opera*. That Brecht had no respect for copyright is well known. Although the plagiarism accusations did not hinder his continued work, it cannot be denied that his name appeared on material that may not always have been his own—he took what he needed. The artistic quality of his works does not seem to have been affected by whether more than Brecht contributed to writing them. Regardless of whether Brecht’s most famous and significant works did not come about during his Berlin years, it was during these years that his ideas about the theatre’s function and message were shaped. Brecht did not achieve an international breakthrough until just before he died in 1956. However, his classic status is established today, and he is accepted as one of the 20th century’s greatest dramatists. His works are regularly performed worldwide.

Who then was Walter Gropius, how did he work, and how did his involvement in the Weimar Republic’s architectural scene have such lasting influence on the rest of the 20th century and today? Undoubtedly, Gropius’s most significant contribution was his role in establishing Bauhaus and how the school was built, organized, and marketed. Gropius had an extensive network, was apparently charming, rhetorically skilled, and had a social grounding that probably facilitated his efforts to promote the school and its ideas. Gropius’s intention for Bauhaus was to create a combination of an architecture school, craft workshop, and art academy, which he later summarized and emphasized (Gropius, 1948; 1963).

Interest in Bauhaus and Gropius as a person has increased rather than decreased over the years. Over time, he has become an almost mythical cult figure, not least through the idealizing biographies published, often focusing on his complicated private life. Critical voices are not lacking regarding his way of working professionally and “building his own reputation” (Polster, 2019). Regardless of the differing opinions about Gropius’s actual competence as an architect (no formal degree) and his lack of ability to draw, it is hard to overlook that during the Weimar period, he was a visionary and charismatic coordinator of what became the Bauhaus movement.

What significance does Bauhaus have today? During the 100th anniversary of Bauhaus’s “birth”, both the Weimar Republic, the Bauhaus school, and its founder,

Walter Gropius, were highlighted in the press. With headlines like “They Built Houses for Aliens and Changed the World”, the significant influence of the Bauhaus school was discussed. However, it was concluded that today’s functionalism belongs to a bygone era and that the school’s ideology feels “dated” (Clason, 2019).

6. Conclusion

The fact that the democratic constitution of the Weimar Republic created an environment where cultural activity could flourish is well-documented. However, the exciting, sinful Berlin mainly gave the period a special glow, and the serious cultural aspects were often overshadowed. How could Brecht and Gropius create and realize ideas that have become lasting and still relevant? Both based their ideas on their own and others’ thoughts and worked in different ways “collectively”. They both had a unique ability to inspire and coordinate people with exceptional knowledge and qualities to work with and for them so that their visions could be realized. It is possible and even likely that in presenting the innovations that Brecht and Gropius have become representatives of, not everyone who contributed has received the attention they deserved. Regardless of whether Brecht’s and Gropius’s ways of working have contributed to this, their contributions as representatives of innovative theatre and architecture must be respected.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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