

## 1914 Paul Scheerbart: Glass architecture (excerpt)

The architect Bruno Taut called Paul Scheerbart (b. 1863 in Danzig, d. 1915 in Berlin) the 'only poet in architecture'. Scheerbart's Utopian phantasmagoria, which he wrote in marvellous abundance from 1893 on, evokes more impressively each time the idea of a 'glass architecture', the architect's dream of light, crystal clear, colourful, mobile, floating and soaring constructions that will transform 'Old Europe's' habits of thought and feeling. In 1914, the same year in which Bruno Taut, inspired by Scheerbart, built his 'Glass House' at the Werkbund Exhibition in Cologne, Herwarth Walden printed Scheerbart's III-chapter 'Glass Architecture' in *Sturm*.

### I. The environment and its influence on the evolution of culture

We live for the most part within enclosed spaces. These form the environment from which our culture grows. Our culture is in a sense a product of our architecture. If we wish to raise our culture to a higher level, we are forced for better or for worse to transform our architecture. And this will be possible only if we remove the enclosed quality from the spaces within which we live. This can be done only through the introduction of glass architecture that lets the sunlight and the light of the moon and stars into our rooms not merely through a few windows, but simultaneously through the greatest possible number of walls that are made entirely of glass – coloured glass. The new environment that we shall thereby create must bring with it a new culture.

### XVIII. The beauty of the Earth if glass architecture is everywhere

The surface of the Earth would change greatly if brick architecture were everywhere displaced by glass architecture.

It would be as though the Earth clad itself in jewellery of brilliants and enamel.

The splendour is absolutely unimaginable. And we should then have on the Earth more exquisite things than the gardens of the Arabian Nights.

Then we should have a paradise on Earth and would not need to gaze longingly at the paradise in the sky.

### XLI. The possibilities which iron construction renders capable of development

Iron construction makes it possible to give walls any form that may be desired. Walls need no longer be vertical.

Hence the possibilities which iron construction enables to be developed are quite unlimited.

The dome effects up above can be displaced to the sides, so that when sitting at a table one need only look sideways and upwards in order to observe the dome effect.

But curved surfaces are also effective in the lower parts of the walls – this effect is particularly easy to achieve in smaller rooms.

Smaller rooms are totally and completely freed from the need for verticality.

The significance of the ground-plan in architecture is thereby greatly reduced; the design of the outline of the building acquires greater importance than hitherto.

### LXII. The terraces

No doubt a terrace formation is necessary in taller glass buildings and with several storeys, since otherwise the glass surfaces could not reach the free light-conducting air, to which they aspire, since in darkness they can fulfil their purpose only at night – not during the day.

This terrace formation of the storeys will of course quickly replace the dreary frontal architecture of brick houses.

### LXXI. Transportable buildings

Transportable glass buildings can also be manufactured. They are particularly well suited for exhibition purposes.

Such transportable buildings are not exactly easy to produce. But let it not be forgotten that when something new is involved it is very often precisely the most difficult problem that is tackled first.

### CII. The transformation of the Earth's surface

Again and again something sounds to us like a fairy tale, when it is not really so fantastic or Utopian at all. Eighty years ago the steam railway came along and actually transformed the whole surface of the Earth, as no one will deny.

According to what has been said so far the surface of the Earth is to be transformed – and by glass architecture. If it comes, it will transform the Earth's surface. Naturally, a part will also be played by other factors outside the present discussion.

It was the steam railway that produced the brick metropolis culture of today from which we all suffer. Glass architecture will come only when the metropolis in our sense of the word has been done away with.

That it must be done away with is perfectly clear to all those who aim at the further evolution of our culture. This is no longer worth talking about.

We all know what colour means; it forms only a small part of the spectrum. But this we want to have. Infra-red and ultra-violet are not perceptible to our eyes – but no doubt ultra-violet is perceptible to the sense organs of ants.

Even if we cannot for the present assume that our sense organs will evolve further from today to tomorrow, we shall nevertheless be justified in supposing that to begin with we may attain that which is accessible to us – to wit, that part of the spectrum which we are able to perceive with our eyes, those miracles of colour which we are capable of taking in.

The only thing that can help us to do this is glass architecture, which must transform our whole life – the environment in which we live.

It is therefore to be hoped that glass architecture really will 'transform' the surface of our Earth.