A Preliminary Study of the *Architektonischer Garten* as a Post-perspectival Concept

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ABSTRACT: This paper examines the concept of *architektonischer Garten*, an understudied idea that came to define early modern architecture. Presented as a brief examination of its historical transformation from a garden design approach to a spatial configuration model, this paper reinterprets the history of this concept with a focus on the relationship between the man, the house, and its surrounding gardens. Starting from offering a long-overdue definition of the *architektonischer Garten* concept, this paper explains the formation and development of this concept by studying the corresponding contribution of Hermann Muthesius and Mies van der Rohe, arguing that the sense of space evoked by the *architektonischer Garten* is, through offering a self-exceeding mode of experience, "circumstantial" and "holistic." Further, the *architektonischer Garten* can be understood as the key spatial concept that characterized the post-perspectival age, by virtue of our perception of spatial depth, capable of forming an integral whole consists of the perceiving subject and the perceived world, which includes both indoor space and outdoor topography.

KEYWORDS: Architectonic Garden, Space, Hermann Muthesius, Mies van der Rohe, Perspective

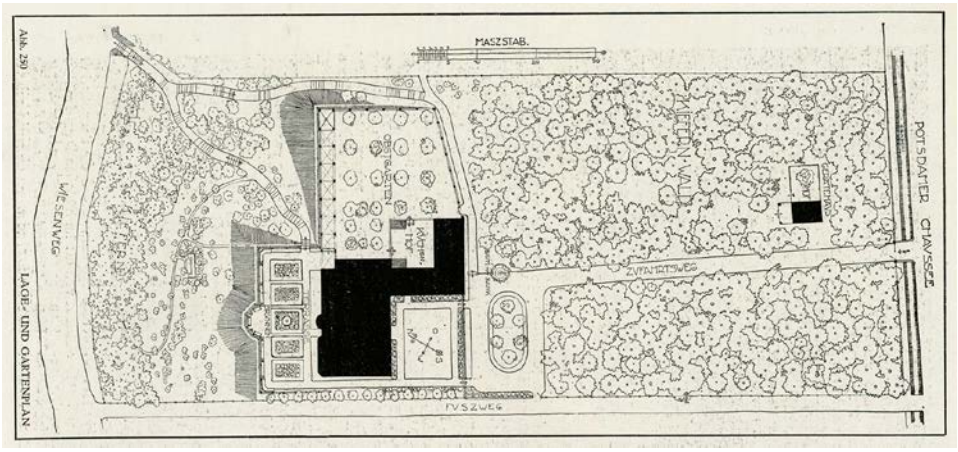
1.0 *Architektonischer Garten* as a Garden Design Approach

The German term "*architektonischer Garten*" (architectonic garden) first appeared in Hermann Muthesius's *Das englische Haus* (1904-5), a three-volume treatise of the *Landhaus* (country house) design in England during the late 19th century (Muthesius 1904-5, Bd. I: 210, 216; Bd. II: 86, 96, 99). While discussing the relationship between the house and its surrounding gardens, Muthesius (1861-1927) asserted:

> The English garden is no longer the landscape garden familiar to us under this name (landscape garden), but in those cases where artistic considerations play a part, it is a formal garden laid out essentially along geometric or — if one prefers it — architectural lines: in short, a garden that does not seek to imitate nature but which stands in a close artistic relationship to the house (Muthesius 1904-5, Bd. I: 210; Muthesius, 2007, vol. 1: 210).

This idea is to some extent self-explanatory by referring to Muthesius's design of his own house (1906): (Fig. 1)

> … In his own house he (Muthesius) realized his ideas of surrounding the building with a series of individual, geometrically designed garden rooms, linked to the house with a pergola … Although this new style was initiated by architects, it was soon



> adopted by a new generation of garden designers … they called themselves *Gartenarchitekten* (garden architects) in order to set themselves apart from the landscape gardening tradition of the previous century (Stiles, 222).

Figure 1: Hermann Muthesius, Site and Garden Plan, Muthesius House, Nikolassee (1906). Source: (Muthesius 1912, 166).

Similar to read Muthesius's writing and design, there are also two ways to formulate the proper definition of the concept of *architektonischer Garten*: descriptive and prescriptive, or, in other words, from a way of viewing it as the outcome of design process and from a way of viewing it as a goal of garden design. From the first perspective, a preliminary definition of the *architektonischer Garten* can be outlined as follows: the *architektonischer Garten* can be seen as the geometric room-like spaces for outdoor activities that programmatically and perceptually connect to their adjacent indoor rooms from within. Meanwhile, we can also arrive at a slightly different definition if we see it as a garden design approach: (1) to see the surrounding garden as the outdoor extension of the indoor space; (2) to design the garden in conformity with the way of organizing indoor rooms; and (3) to designate each outdoor room in accordance with the function of its adjoining indoor one.

Muthesius's related description, his own house design manifestation, a descriptive definition, and prescriptive design principles, I believe, are sufficient to understand the first stage of the development of the *architektonischer Garten* concept. As a garden design approach, this concept reflected Muthesius's conviction that: (1) the *architektonischer Garten* constituted a critique of the practice of setting a villa in a picturesque garden, proffering an escape route from historical culture and a path to restoring authenticity to German life and building; (2) the *architektonischer Garten* is an indispensable component of English country house; in other words, the house is only validated by its associated garden (Muthesius 2007, vol. 2: 82).

2.0 *Architektonischer Garten* as a Spatial Concept

Now, I want to turn to Mies van der Rohe (1886-1969), who, according to Barry Bergdoll, developed the *architektonischer Garten* idea into a specific model of spatial configuration (Bergdoll 2001, 66-105). Bergdoll argued that both Muthesius and Mies sought a sense of fusion of interior and exterior in spatial composition. In particular, Mies's early Berlin projects seemed to transcend the categorical distinction between the building and the landscape; he treated the order of building as if it is part of the landscape (Leatherbarrow 2009, 280). Mies's pre-WWI work — such as the Riehl House (1907), Perls House (1911-2), Wolf House (1926), Esters & Lange House (1927-30), and the Tugendhat House (1928-30) — constantly employed multiple *architektonischer Garten* devices, namely, deliberately framed landscape views, exedra bench tied to certain vantage points, and vine-covered pergola as emblems of the harmonious unity of house and garden. Calling for a tight spatial interweaving relationship between interior space and exterior garden, all of these treatments were exploited by Karl Friedrich Schinkel (1781-1841) and Peter Joseph Lenné (1789-1866), clearly emulated by Mies, and documented by Muthesius (Muthesius 1910, 50-1). (Fig. 2) What is even more evident is that, while teaching at the Bauhaus in the 30s, Mies developed his court-house concept, where rooms and gardens were integrated as if the later became small outdoor "rooms" defined by perimeter walls that mark the boundary between the house and the city. (Fig. 3)

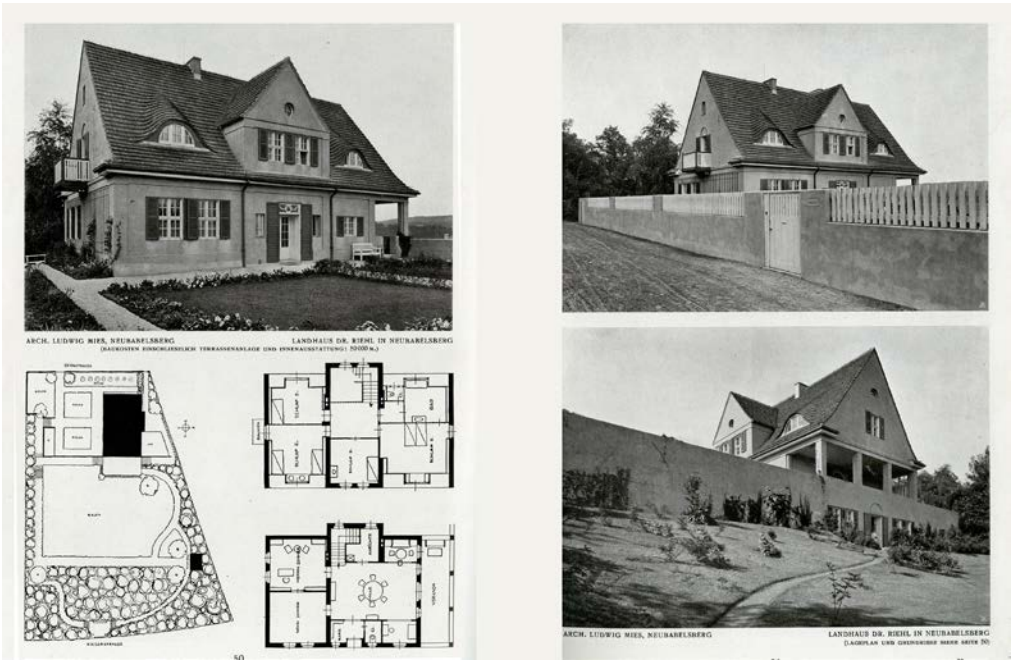


Figure 2: Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Riehl House, Neubabelsberg (1907) Source: (Muthesius 1910, 50-51).

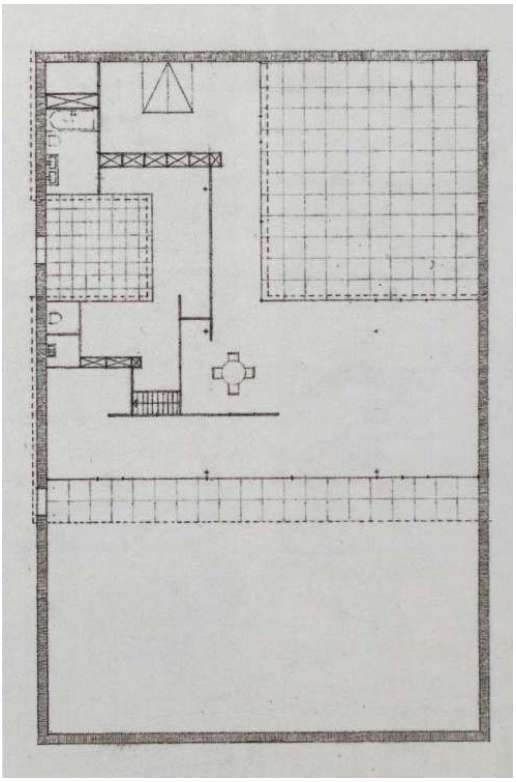


Figure 3: Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Plan with furniture layout, Hubbe Court-House (1934-5) Source: (Riley Bergdoll 2001, 295).

Furthermore, the *architektonischer Garten* idea for both Muthesius and Mies embodied a philosophical consideration. First, Muthesius had seemingly assigned disparate features to two integral elements of the *Landhaus* — the house and the garden. He argued that, on one hand, the "irregularity" and "freedom" were essential characteristics of the house; its garden had to be "formal" or "architectural," on the other. Seemingly contradictory, the "free" interior plan and the "formal" exterior garden should nonetheless be considered as two coherent aspects of the central feature of English "free architecture." Explaining what he understood as the essence of English country house, in *Das englische Haus*, Muthesius wrote:

> All that can be done here is to record the basic features of its development by concentrating on what might be termed its *inner organism*, as expressed above all in the design of its floor plan. Only those aspects will be singled out that are of relevance to the house's present form (Muthesius 2007, vol. 1: 12).

Thus the central feature of English "free" architecture and also the main thesis of Muthesius's book was the *inneren Organismus* (inner organicism) (Posener 1989, ix). Muthesius in his later book *Landhaus and Garten* re-emphasized this idea:

> If the house is combined with the garden as a unity, then this can only be the case with a regular garden. The palace [historicist villa] and grassy lawn are no artistic unity. If the house is architecture, then the garden must also be architecture. And if one takes the word "architecture" in its most general terms, so that it encompasses human creation and design in all its forms, then garden design must belong to architecture by necessity which is appropriate to human design in all forms is the rhythmic, and regular. Regularity and rhythm are found in the most primitive ornament of the wild just as in the art of advanced culture… the same fundamental principles that underlie the house, the same *organic* relation of the parts to one another, the same unity of the single elements into a harmonious whole … must also govern the garden … in order to save the house from the decadence into which it had fallen in the nineteenth century, and to stamp it once again with the mark of artistic unity … garden and house are a unity, they characteristics should be infused with the same spirit. (Muthesius, 1910, xxix-xxv).

According to Muthesius, English country house had developed the "organic" characteristic as "inside to outside," a higher essence that governed both house and garden than that of the banal imitation of nature, which allied his attack on the naturalistic tradition of landscape design with the critique of historical style in architecture. Rather than "display," Muthesius advocated for a middle class focused on family and healthful living. A similar idea can be identified evidently in Mies's terms. While being asked about his idea of the role of nature with respect to the buildings, he answered with reference to his Farnsworth House:

> Nature, too, shall live its own life. We must beware not to disrupt it with the color of our houses and interior fittings. Yet we should attempt to bring nature, houses, and human beings together into a higher unity. If you view nature through the glass walls of the Farnsworth House, it gains a more profound significance than if viewed from outside. This way more is said about nature — it becomes a part of a larger whole (Norberg-Schulz 1958, 339).

This claim can be seen as a response to the contention that garden design was not a major focus for Mies (Beneš 1998, 133; Schulze 1985, 22-3). Mies, indeed, showed no particular interest in garden design per se; rather, he viewed building and landscape as integral parts of "a higher unity." It is therefore safe to say that modern living for both Muthesius and Mies concerned both interior and exterior spaces, and both of which were integrated into an "organic" whole — a new and all-encompassing mode of human situation.

Now, to understand the "inner organicism" or "higher unity" expressed respectively in Mies and Muthesius's terms, it is decisive first to acknowledge the *architektonischer Garten* concept contains an extended connotation of a spatial conception. Because the most notable feature of spatial conception is that it puts the perceiving subject into the center of consideration. And this sense of "higher unity" that Mies was implicitly referring to, I argue, can be understood as a new sense of space that articulates the reciprocal relationship between the subject and the architectural setting.

The notion of space has a double character: physical and nonphysical (Straus 1966, 3-4; Jammer 1969; Merleau-Ponty 1962; Morris 2004). Apart from its physical property, the experience and sense of space from the first-person point of view — known as spatiality — is the central concern of spatial creation in architecture. Based on the up-to-date understanding of human spatial perception, our experience of space depends on people and object in space appearing, perceiving, and moving in depth — the central feature of spatiality (Morris 2004, 2). Due to the limited space of this paper, I have to explicate this philosophical aspect of the understanding of this mode of human situation on another occasion. Nevertheless, to put it in a relatable way, the sense of depth is nothing like the dimension of height and breadth that are seen as equivalent in an abstract, isotropic, and homogeneous space. Nor is it the perception that buildings allow people to "see through things" or to perceive space as "many-sided and dynamic," with an intent to exhibit "the interiors and exteriors of objects simultaneously." (Giedion 1941, 493, 521). Rather, this depth perception is a "trans-substantial" *medium* that mediates the perceiving subject and the outside world (Merleau-Ponty 1945, 159; Straus 1996). In short, it is depth perception — which functions as "first

dimension" of spatiality, as the *medium* that integrates the subject and the outside world, and as the central structure — that makes this new "higher" sense of space possible.

At this point, a further question needs to be raised: were there examples, in early modern architecture, that accommodated a similar spatial experience over static, frontal, or axial spatial experience, say, putting painterly images on display? My answer is "yes." And they are the works that were intended to evoke the "lived," dynamic space by a compression or in-stabilization, rather than amplification or stabilization of the "dead," static depth effect in the perspectival spatial construction. This manipulation of our depth perception resulted from multiple architectural devices and treatments, such as the concealment of ground surface, thwarting any extended view in only one direction, devising a series of non-aligned, transverse walls that limit visual expansion, projecting a transition zone that avoids an abrupt shift to the outside, etc. Above all, it should first and foremost consent the primacy of our temporal experience from the first-person point of view, with the aim to produce a *surplus* of structured views or a *self-exceeding* mode of architectural setting.

Many scholars have observed that Mies intended his buildings, especially his Berlin projects designed between 1923 and 1933, to offer more scenes than they were meant to provide (Constant 1990; Quetglas 1988; Evans 1990; Leatherbarrow 2009, 280-1). Most evidently in his projects such as the Brick Country House (1923), the Esters & Lange Houses, the Barcelona Pavilion (1929), and Tugendhat House, Mies devised a spatial composition that continually offers to experience both unexpected and familiar situations, thus turning the viewer into an "ambulant observer." (Evans 1990, 63). As a result, in contrast to experience an axial construction of space where depth — presented as the "third dimension" — can be grasped instantaneously or to experience individual architectural settings in an orderly sequence, the spaces created in these projects were conceived in a way that one was forced to experience "all" of architectural settings "at once." Put differently, this particular sense of space requires a perceptual apprehension that simultaneously "maximizes" and "minimizes" the built environment as a holistic entity. It seems that what constitutes the margin of perceptual concentration always exceeds the expectations of that momentary focus; there is always "more" as the subject moves in space, despite this "more" of the immediate experience is not the "same" experience, arisen by the given architectural setting, of the temporally extended present either before or after, the perceptual act that is retained in our consciousness. This lived experience of space, according to Merleau-Ponty, "runs from my perceptual field itself, so to speak, which draws along in its wake its own horizon of retentions, and bites into the future with its protentions. (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 371)

3.0 *Architektonischer Garten* as a Post-perspectival Concept

Given the emphasis on the primacy of human perception of space, it would be natural to view building and garden both as, rather than stylistic forms with mere technological and aesthetic values, arts of man-made space that are parts of an all-embracing topography. What's more, depth perception, because of its primordial role in structuring our spatial experience, performs as the *medium* through which a building, its adjoining garden, the surrounding topography, and the perceiving subject are integrated. In light of this, by virtue of depth, everything becomes part of a special wholeness in perception (Casey 1991). The most striking consequence of this understanding is that this reciprocal, holistic entity that comprises both subject and object indicates objects such as architectural and garden elements are no longer "outside me," but rather I am "in things," and everything is "in things." Therefore, the sense of space that people perceive in the *Gartenarchitektur*, such as Mies's Berlin projects and court-house schemes, is essentially "circumstantial" and "holistic."

It seems that there emerged a new "unknown" space in early modern architecture that was exemplified the "circumstantial," "holistic" sense. Then, how shall we understand this "unknown" spatial configuration? My tentative answer to this question is this: rather than challenging the hitherto clear, dualistic relationship between indoor space and its immediate vicinity, the central concern of this "unknown" spatial configuration, ever since Muthesius's *architektonischer Garten* concept, was not about the relationship between inside and outside, but rather, as I would like to call it, "outside of outside." In fact, this matter was less disciplinary (garden design versus architecture) than ontological.

I would like to argue that the organicist motivation that underlay the *architektonischer Garten* idea embodied a paradigm shift in the structure of our consciousness about the world — a shift from a subject-object split to a subject-world fusion. And aiming at a self-world fusion, the *architektonischer Garten* idea initiated by Muthesius and further developed by Mies can therefore be considered as an exemplary spatial concept that characterized the post-perspectival space. And this post-perspectival space in its genuine sense, I argue, does not just defy pictorial representation or signify exclusively material reality; it, rather, transcends the scientific framework upon which classic linear perspective was built. The key to understanding post-perspectival space is this: it embodies an attempt to suspend the subject-object split that underlies the scientific epistemological tradition, a division between the perceiving subject and the perceived world resulted from the presuppositions of the modern Galilean scientific and Cartesian philosophical and epistemological tradition (Johnson 1996). Considering post-perspectival space in a

genuine sense should therefore indicate a liberation, rather than mere negation of scientific perspective. By "liberation," I mean that we have to do away not only from the perspective tradition but also from its central structure that makes perspective possible. That is to say, our focus should be the space as we experience it, before we objectify it through mathematical, geometric, or scientific means. Thus post-perspective space is not the objectified space that would be measured by the surveyor, geometer, or scientist, but the perceived space as we experience it before we objectify it. David Morris, a philosopher who developed Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of spatiality, called this kind of spatial perception "lived space." (Morris 2004)

To repeat myself, the lived experience of space — "lived space" — should become the central concern of the post-perspectival architectural creation. To evoke and enhance "lived space" depends on the perceiving subject and the perceived object in architectural topography appearing, perceiving, and moving in depth, the "primordial dimension" of spatiality, or the central structure that makes spatiality possible.

4.0 Conclusion

To sum up, the development of the *architektonischer Garten* concept has been through two stages, both contributing to modern architecture. First, as a design approach for the country house garden, the *architektonischer Garten* concept physically and perceptually created a close correlation between the indoor room and the adjoining outdoor garden, foreshadowing the fusion of domestic life and natural living as a goal for German *Hausgartenreform*. Second, as a model of spatial configuration, the *architektonischer Garten* idea was intended to provoke a new kind of spatiality, in which the depth perception, by virtue of its role as the central structure of the spatial experience, functions as *medium* that integrates a building, its adjoining garden, the surrounding topography, and of course the perceiving subject. Considering this new spatial characteristic in association with the paradigm shift of the structure of our consciousness about the world, it is evident that the emergence and development of *architektonischer Garten* concept embodied the transition of human consciousness of the world from perspectival (static, dualistic) to post-perspectival (circumstantial, holistic). Thus far the still-persistent understanding of modern spatial conception that characterized modern architecture is nevertheless in need of timely revision. The study of the *architektonischer Garten* concept presented in this paper can be seen as a start point for this task.

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