

## From *Fürstenhaus* to *Bauhaus*: An Architectural Irony

Within a twenty-minute drive of each other, just south of the Elbe in the German state of Saxony-Anhalt, a visitor is able to take in what are practically polar opposites in architecture. This paper will present two architectural monuments as a study in both the reception and rejection of classicism in the 18<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Upon their return from a grand tour of Europe, Leopold III Frederick Franz, Duke of Anhalt-Dessau (known as Prince Franz), and his wife Louise of Brandenburger-Swedt built their palace, the first example of a neoclassical architecture outside Italy and England. The palace, or *Schloss*, was completed in 1773. Friedrich Wilhelm von Erdmannsdorff was the designer, and the house is remarkable for its many technological innovations, such as cast-iron stoves, wall-mounted foldaway beds, and a refrigerator. The decoration of the house is a fantasy of classical detail, including huge, mythological murals, Wedgwood vases imitating Greek red-figure pots, and elaborate columns in various orders. The entrance hall is a small replica of the Pantheon graced by a nearly full sized reproduction of the Apollo Belvedere, an homage perhaps to the owner's friend, Johann Joachim Winkelmann.

Set on the edge of the town of Wörlitz, the palace stands in an elaborate garden park with a lake and an artificial island; upon this island stands an artificial volcano, which could (and still can) be made to erupt. When on his travels, the prince had been so taken by Naples, Mt. Vesuvius and the recently discovered Pompeii, that he sought to reproduce the volcano at home. Then from his visit to Tivoli, outside Rome, came an imitation of the Temple of Vesta, which the prince situated on the eastern side of the garden and which was to serve as a synagogue.

In a deliberate contrast to the aesthetics of the classical world there stands, in nearby Dessau, Walter Gropius' *Bauhaus*. In 1925, Gropius moved his school for architecture from

Weimar and constructed the *Bauhaus*, which seeks to realize his idea that all aspects of the creative work should be housed together, including a place for the *Meisters*, workshops for the *Hardwerker*, and living quarters for the *Studenten*. As a proponent of the idea that ‘form follows function,’ and also committed to providing healthful housing for the working class, Gropius’ design used clean lines and walls entirely of windows, creating a ‘machine for living.’ This presents a complete antithesis to the style and detail of the palace at Wörlitz. Far from the wealth and privilege that allowed Prince Franz to build his palace and park, Gropius sought in his Bauhaus ideal to make good design and high quality available to all.

This presentation will present both of these World Heritage sites as paradigms of the use and rejection of the classical aesthetic. Their close proximity serves not only to heighten the architectural contrast but also to suggest the irony that Walter Gropius, in seeking a more democratic approach to architecture, rejected the architectural forms of the culture that gave us democracy.