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THE AMERICAN ARCHITECTURE OF JOSEPH URBAN

by

MARY BETH BETTS

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Art History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

1999

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Art History in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

9-21-99 — Date
Rosemarie Bletter — Chair of Examining Committee

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Rosemarie Bletter — Executive Officer

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Professor Sally Webster

Professor William Clark
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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
Abstract

The American Architecture of Joseph Urban

by

Mary Beth Betts

Adviser: Professor Rosemarie Haag Bletter

The Austrian-American architect and designer, Joseph Urban (1872-1933) helped to introduce and popularize European modern design in the United States during the early part of the twentieth century. Urban emigrated to the United States in 1911, after establishing a reputation as a designer in Europe. Imported European designers and theatrical troupes as well as exhibitions and periodicals displaying the latest European avant-garde set designs formed an early source of information for American designers during the 1910s and 1920s. Theater also provides a critical model for assessing Urban's visual forms and professional role. During the 1910s-1920s many European theatrical designers and directors made a radical visual shift from Expressionist to epic theater. While visually discontinuous, the shift evolved out of concerns with the audience, and the use of visual effects to engage or detach the viewer. This provides a better model for assessing

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the aims and impact of architects like Urban who shifted from Art Deco forms to an International Style vocabulary than the formalist and functionalist approach that has dismissed the work of such architects as inconsistent.

Recent scholarship has suggested that modernism not only consisted of the machine aesthetic of cubism but the exotic decorations of painter Henri Matisse, the Russian ballet, and fashion designer Paul Poiret. Modern artists often began with the materials from their contemporary life and popular activities. The forms of urban vernacular culture provided inspiration for the content and the visual language of modern art. Modern designers during the 1910s and 1920s took this a step further by creating works for broad commercial cultures rather than elite markets.

Urban's involvement and promotion of European design in the 1900s and the United States during the 1910s, his use of the forms and subjects of urban commercial culture and work for commercial art industries identifies him as a key figure in the development and spread of modernism in the United States. Urban's transfer of his celebrity status from the theatrical to the architectural worlds profoundly influenced his own practice and the professional role and public perception of American architects.

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PREFACE

It has been a privilege to have the financial and moral support that allowed me to write this dissertation. In the course of my studies I have met many people who have been helpful and I hope I have not neglected to thank them.

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established the program and was a valued member of my orals committee, the late Professor Eguene A. Santomasso, who for many years was my advisor, and Professor Linda Nochlin whose classes and comments have always been valued. A special thanks goes to Professor Rosalind Krauss and my colleagues in the dissertation workshop she led, that initiated this entire project.

My research was aided by the helpfulness of numerous institutions and individuals. Joseph Urban's archives are housed in the Rare Books and Manuscripts Division of Butler Library at Columbia University. The staff of this division under the direction of Dr. Kenneth Lofh and now Dr. Jean Ashton have provided accesss to this collection with efficiency and good humor. Jane R. Siegel and Bernard Crystal, Head of Manuscripts have been unfailingly helpful and courteous during my many hours pouring over the Urban papers. Gwynnedd Cannan, Curator of the Joseph Urban Collection, has labored with great success to make the collection more accessible and has helped me on many occasions. It has been a pleasure to work with her and to share her great interest in this collection.

I also owe a great deal to the staff of the Billy Rose Theater Collection at the Lincoln Center Library for the Performing Arts. The numerous archives contained within this research collection have enriched my work on Urban in many ways. The staff of the Newspaper Division of the New York

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Public Library also has provided access and support. Janet Parks, Curator of Drawings and Archives, at Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University, has contributed immensely to this work by sharing both her knowledge and collections. Angela Giral, Director of Avery, also deserves many thanks. The Oral History Research Office at Columbia University provided access to the invaluble interview with Urban office employee William Muschenheim.

Other institutions which have provided significant materials include the staff at Firestone Library, Princeton University who provided access to the Otto Kahn Archives and the staff of the Manuscripts and Archives at Yale University Library who provided access to the Alvin Saunders Johnson Collection.

Many of my colleagues have encouraged and inspired my work. Barry Bergdoll, Michele Bogart, Kevin Bone, Martha Buskirk, Barbara Christen, Michele Cohen, Maria Connelli, Elizabeth Cromley, Andrew S. Dolkart, Holly Hotchner, Dale Neighbors, Marjorie Pearson, Richard Stapleford, Ann Reynolds, Monica Shapiro, David Van Zanten, Vicki Weiner, Carol Willis, Mary Woods and Gwendolyn Wright, have all contributed in countless ways.

This work could not have been completed without the support of family and friends. My parents, the Jane Buck Betts and late Julian E. Betts made graduate school possible both financially and through their love and support. My

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husband, Charles Ayes has supported and nagged me through what at times must have seemed to be an endless process. I am grateful for his love and criticisms and indebted to his interest in Urban and architecture in general. Every lengthy work contains joy and sorrow. While this has mostly been a stimulating process I am saddened that my first advisor, Professor Eugene A. Santomasso, who read early drafts of this work and was the first person to share and encourage my interest in Joseph Urban, did not live to see this project completed. The memory of his lectures and our enthusiastic discussions about architecture and Urban permeates these pages.

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INTRODUCTION

The famous 1920s architect and set designer, Joseph Urban, was born in Vienna, Austria on May 26, 1872. When he came to the United States in 1911 he had already achieved renown in Europe as an architect, graphic artist, and set designer. He first settled in Boston and worked as a set designer noted for his knowledge of the latest European trends in theater. Urban moved to New York City in 1915 and achieved even wider recognition for his work as a set designer with Florenz Ziegfeld, the Metropolitan Opera and William Randolph Hearst's motion picture company. Urban gradually diversified his practice and opened an architectural office in New York in 1926. His professional career defied easy categorization, since it encompassed architecture, set design, industrial design and interior decoration. As the critic Arthur Strawn noted in 1930, it was possible in a single day for someone to walk out of a house designed by Urban, use a car and luggage that he created and attend a play with sets by his scenic studio.[1] Urban further confounded attempts to classify his work by employing a flexible stylistic vocabulary ranging from the exuberant Art Deco forms of the Ziegfeld Theater to the refined International Style modernism of the New School for Social Research. What united this varied practice was a sophisticated use of color and light, commitment to a self-

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[1]Arthur Strawn, "Joseph Urban," *Outlook*, 155 (18 June 1930): 275.

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consciously modern style, and creation of total interior environments which expressed their social and functional purpose.

Biography

Urban trained as an architect at Vienna's Royal Academy and Polytechnicum.[2] He was a protege of Karl von Hasenauer, who with the noted German architect Gottfried Semper, designed many of the monumental and stylistically eclectic buildings along the Ringstrasse, including the 1872-1891 Kunsthistorisches and Naturhistorisches Museum complex as well as the 1874-1888 Hofburgtheater.[3] Urban's education gave him a thorough grounding in the aesthetics and theories of 19th

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[2]For Urban's Viennese career see "Joseph Urban biography," "Joseph Urban chronology," and untitled typescript with the heading "19 years," n.d., TMs, in "Biographical Materials," Production Files Box 41, Joseph Urban Collection, Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, Columbia University; the memorial issue devoted to Urban of *Architecture* 69 (May 1934); and the monograph by Randolph Carter and Robert Reed Cole, *Joseph Urban: Architecture, Theatre, Opera, Film* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1992), 9-43. The Carter and Cole publication along with other recent works on Urban's career will be analyzed in the second part of the introduction.

[3]Renate Wagner-Rieger, *Wiens Architektur im 19.Jahrhundert* (Vienna: Österreichischer Bundesverlag Für Unterricht, Wissenschaft und Kunst, 1970), 191-192; Felix Czecke, "Carl Freiherr von Hasenauer, Der persönliche Nachlass im Archiv der Stadt Wien," *Jahrbuch des Vereins für Geschichte der Stadt Wien* 19/20: (1963/1964), 251; Ludwig Hevesi, *Oesterreichische [sic] Kunst 1848-1900 von Ludwig Hevesi* (Leipzig: E. A. Seeman, 1903), 149-155.

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century German architecture.[4] He made continued reference to the works and ideas of both Semper and Karl Friedrich Schinkel throughout his career.[5] With Hasenauer's recommendation Urban obtained an early and important commission to design the Abdine Palace in Cairo, c.1891-1892. This combined with his 1896 prize-winning competition entry for the Czar Bridge over the River Neva in St. Petersburg, Russia, enabled Urban to travel extensively and gain an international reputation.[6]

As a young practicing designer in turn-of-the-century Vienna, Urban was heavily influenced by the aesthetics of Otto Wagner and his colleagues Joseph Maria Olbrich and Josef Hoffmann. Olbrich, Wagner, and Hoffmann together with the painter Gustav Klimt encouraged a close collaboration between architects, craftsmen and artists in order to create a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or a total work of art. This ideal was most visibly promoted in the periodical and exhibitions of the artists' association, the Vereinigung bildender Künstler Österreichs or Secession.[7] Urban, who was not a member of the

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[4]Walter Wagner, *Die Geschichte der Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Wien* (Vienna: Verlag Bruder Rosenbaum, 1967).

[5]Joseph Urban, "Theatre, Modern Exteriors and Interiors," in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 14th ed.; Joseph Urban, *Theatres* (New York: Theatre Arts, 1929).

[6]"Joseph Urban biography," n.d., TMs in "Biographical Materials," Production Files Box 41, Joseph Urban Collection, Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, Columbia University, 1-2.

[7]The best descriptions of the Secession and its aims are Carl Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna* (New York: Vintage Books 1980); William J. McGrath, *Dionysian Art and Populist Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974); James Shedel, *Art and*

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Secession, took up this ideal and the visual forms associated with it.[8] His design for the 1898-1899 Rathhauskeller, a large bar and dining complex in Vienna's city hall, adhered to these concerns (fig. 1).[9] Together with his friend, the painter Heinrich Lefler, he designed the space of the complex, its furniture, lamps, and murals. This *Gesamtkunstwerk* ideal is also present in some of his other significant projects from this period including the 1899 additions to the Esterhazy Castle in St. Abraham, Hungary, a number of house designs and

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Society: The New Art Movement in Vienna, 1897-1914 (Palo Alto California: Sposs, Inc., 1981); Peter Vergo, *Art in Vienna, 1898-1918* (London: Phaidon, 1974); Marian Bisanz-Prakken, *Gustav Klimt Der Beethovenfries: Geschichte, Funktion und Bedeutung* (Salzburg: Residenz Verlag, 1977); and the three catalogues for the Vienna, Paris and New York city venues of the important show *Traum und Wirklichkeit, Wien 1870-1930* (Wien: Kunstlerhaus, 1985); *Vienna 1880-1938: l'apocalypse joyeuse* (Paris: Editions du Centre Pompidou, 1986); Kirk Varnedoe, *Vienna 1900: art, architecture and design* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1986).

[8]Urban was a sometime member of a small debating group of artists called the Siebener Club along with the painter Koloman Moser and the architects Olbrich, Hoffmann, Jan Kotera and Max Fabiani. Eduard Sekler, *Josef Hoffmann: The Architectural Work*, trans. by author, catalogue trans. John Maass (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985), 15, 17. Urban and Olbrich, however, did not get along. Letter of Joseph Maria Olbrich, December 22, 1895, Manuscript Collection of the City Library, Vienna, I.Nr. 172.581, quoted by Eduard Sekler, 17. Urban continued to acknowledge the *Gesamtkunstwerk* as a significant concept for his practice even after his immigration, see Joseph Urban, "Opera as a Republic," *Boston Evening Transcript*, 3 August 1912, sec. 3, p. 4.

[9]*Der Wiener Rathhauskeller* (Wien: Verlag der Gemeinde Wien, 1899); "Decorative Ausstattung des neuen Wiener Rathhauskellers," *Wiener Bauindustrie-Zeitung* 16 (6 October 1898): 14; and "Rathhauskeller," Vienna Files Box 2, and Portfolio #5, Joseph Urban Collection.

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interiors, including the 1903 house for the painter Alexander Goltz in the Höhe Warte neighborhood of Vienna, as well as restaurant and cabaret interiors including the Restaurant Paul Hofner and the Cabaret Hölle, both of 1906.[10]

Urban was a founding member of the Hagenbund, an organization of Viennese artists, designers and architects that rivalled the Secession. Unlike the western European orientation of the Secession, however, the Hagenbund included the work of eastern European artists and designers, particularly those who fell within the confines of the Austrian-Hungarian empire.[11] Urban frequently designed the Hagenbund's exhibition installations and in 1901-02 renovated an old market building into their headquarters and

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[10]For drawings and photographs of these projects see "Esterhazy Castle, 1899," "Goltz, Alexander D. House 1903," "Hofner Restaurant 1906," and "Hölle Cabaret 1906," in Vienna Period Box 1, Joseph Urban Collection; for publications of these designs see: "Schloss Esterhazy," *Der Architekt* 6 (1900): 3, 35, plate 7; "Buffet und Stuhl für das Speisezimmer im Schloss Esterhazy," *Das Interieur* 1 (August 1900): plate 47; "Damensalon für das Schloss Grafen Karl Eszterhazy [sic] in St. Abraham bei Dioszegh (Ungarn)," *Das Interieur* 1 (August 1900): 30-32; "Villa Goltz in Wien - Höhe Warte," *Der Architekt* 8 (1902): plate 43; "Restaurant Paul Hofner in Wien I," *Das Interieur* 7 (February 1906): 21; "Das Cabaret 'Hölle' in den Souterrain räumen des 'Theater an der Wien'," *Der Bautechniker* 27 (22 November 1907): 937; "Theater und Cabaret 'Die Hölle' in Wien, VI," *Wiener Bauindustrie Zeitung* 25 (1906/07): plates 97-99.

[11]Robert Waissenberger, *Hagenbund 1900-1938: Geschichte der Wiener Künstlervereinigung* (Vienna: Historische Museum der Stadt Wien, 1975).

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galleries.[12] Similar to the Secession building, the Hagenbund had a flexible interior space capable of being totally transformed for each new exhibition. The art critic Ludwig Hevesi noted that Urban was:

> truly unlimited in his artistic creation of ever different room-formation, each one of them novel and each adapted to the nature of the work shown.[13]

In several of the installations, particularly those of 1902 and 1903, Urban used octagonal and diamond room shapes similar to the geometric plans of the Dutch architect J. L. M Lauweriks (fig. 2).[14] Urban began to use a more neoclassical

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[12]"Hagenbund Exhibition 1901 Exhibition Building," in Vienna Period Box 3, and "Hagenbund Catalogs," in Vienna Period Box 5, Joseph Urban Collection. "Das Ausstellunghaus des Künstlerbundes 'Hagen'," *Der Architekt* 8 (1902): 13, 15; "Austellungsgebäude des Hagen Bundes in Wien I. Zedlitzgasse," *Wiener Bauindustrie Zeitung* 19 (22 May 1902): 258-259; "Das Ausstellungsgebäude des Wiener Künstlerbundes 'Hagen'," *Das Interieur* 3 (1902): 73-80, plate 40.

[13]Ludwig Hevesi, "Aus dem Wiener Kunstleben," *Kunst und Kunsthandwerk* 7 (1904): 241: "Nische zu betonen, die Urban in seinen Hauptsaal hineingebaut hat. Er ist unerschöpflich in räumlichen Kombinationen, immer nach der Natur des jeweiligen Ausstellungsstoffes". Translated and compiled with several other descriptions of Urban's Viennese interiors in "Interiors by Joseph Urban," n.d., TMs, Production File Box 42, Joseph Urban Collection, 3.

[14]See floor plans in "Hagenbund Catalogs," Vienna Period Box 5, Joseph Urban Collection; Hevesi described the 1903 exhibition as "two polygons with radially adjoining niches thus opening up the entire vista at a glance." "Interiors by Joseph Urban", 3, from Ludwig Hevesi, "Aus dem Wiener Kunstleben," *Kunst und Kunsthandwerk* 6 (1903): 168. There is no definite connection with Lauweriks at this early date, he did start to work with Behrens in Dusseldorf in 1903, and Urban had already travelled extensively throughout Europe by this period. For Lauweriks see Richard Padovan, "Holland, Building an Ideal: Progressive Architecture in Holland," in *Art Nouveau Architecture*, ed. Frank Russell (London: Academy Editions, 1979), 152-154; Sanford Anderson, "Peter Behren's

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vocabulary for his architecture and furniture after 1900, linking him with the German and Austrian attempts to revive classicism as a modern style (fig. 2).[15] While reminiscent of the 18th and 19th century Biedermeier style, Urban's designs are more attenuated in their proportions and more flat and minimal in the ornament. Urban's installations were so successful that the government commissioned him to design the Austrian installation at the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition in the United States.[16]

Urban in collaboration with his close friend Lefler explored numerous fields of design. They started to illustrate books in 1896, concentrating on epics and fairy tales.[17] In 1906, they began to design sets for the Vienna

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Changing Concept of Life as Art," *AD* 39 (February 1969): 72-78.

[15]Sekler, *Josef Hoffmann*, 101-120; Fritz Neumeyer, *Artless Word: Mies van der Rohe on the Building Art*, trans. Mark Jarzombek (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1991); Anderson, "Peter Behrens'," 72-78; Stanford Anderson, "The Legacy of German Neoclassicism and Beidermeier: Behrens, Tessenow, Loos, and Mies," *Assemblage* 15 (August 1991): 63-87.

[16]"Joseph Urban biography," 1, and "Interiors by Joseph Urban," 1-2, also lists arrangements for a horticultural exposition in Dresden in 1902 and an International Art Exposition in Munich also in 1902. He designed a Hagenbund installation at the Dusseldorf Exposition in 1902, Ludwig Hevesi, "Aus dem Wiener Kunstleben," *Kunst und Kunsthandwerk* 5 (1902): 621-22. For the St. Louis fair see: "St. Louis Fair 1904," in Vienna Period Box 3, Joseph Urban Collection.

[17]The illustrations include: *Rollands Knappen*, 1896; *Die Geschichte der Chronika der Drei Schwestern*, 1900; *Kling Klang Gloria*, *Das Märchen vom Zwergenkönig Weissbart und der Prinzessin Goldhaar*, 1906; *Marienkind*, 1908; as well as numerous calendars for the years 1895; 1897; 1898; 1904; 1910. "Illustrations," n.d., TMs, in "Biographical Manuscripts,"

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Burgtheater.[18] Urban largely abandoned his architecture practice and began to focus on set design in 1908, due to the scandal which erupted concerning the expense of his decorations for the Kaiser-Huldigungs-Festzug.[19] Urban received a growing number of set design projects throughout Europe between 1909 and 1911, and gained an international reputation as a set designer.

In 1911 Urban emigrated to the United States to become artistic director for the Boston Opera Company.[20] He was known in Boston as a proponent of the new stage craft, using simplified three-dimensional sets with expressive colors and lights (fig. 3). With the financial collapse of the Boston Opera in 1914, however, Urban confounded his "high-art" colleagues by accepting a position designing sets for the commercial theater impresario Florenz Ziegfeld.[21] Urban

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Production Files Box 41, Joseph Urban Collection.

[18]"Joseph Urban biography," 1.

[19]"Professor Karl Stemolak," n.d., TMs, in "Biographical Materials," Production Files Box 41, Joseph Urban Collection, vividly captures the scandal; see also Carter and Cole, 39-43.

[20]Biographical information for the rest of this section is largely drawn from the following sources: "Mary Urban, notes for a biography of Joseph Urban," n.d., TMs, in "Urban, Mary notes," Production Files Box 34, Joseph Urban Collection; Otto Teegen, "Joseph Urban," *Architecture*, 69 (May 1934): 251-256; and Carter and Cole.

[21]Oliver Sayler, "Urban, of the Opera, "The Follies" and the Films," *Shadowland* 5 (November 1921): 72, quoted Urban from an earlier 1915 interview as saying: "Most of my friends in Boston think I should remain with the serious and poetic drama and opera. But I do not see why it isn't worth while to do anything well. I believe you can make your fun and your

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oscillated between commercial and high art for the rest of his career. He worked as the set designer for New York City's Metropolitan Opera from 1917-1933, and from 1920-1925 as the artistic director for William Randolph Hearst's film studio, Cosmopolitan Productions. Urban was one of the first artistic directors to be hired by a film studio, and his designs attracted widespread attention in art journals and mass media periodicals.[22] Although capable of creating elaborate period sets, such as the 15th century Tudor sets for the 1922 movie *When Knighthood Was in Flower*, or the Imperial Roman sets for the Metropolitan Opera's 1925 production of *La Vestale*, Urban frequently depicted modern interiors and furniture. The 1923 Metropolitan Opera production of *The Tales of Hoffmann* used furniture, wall coverings and hangings that were startlingly similar to Urban's own designs for interiors, furniture and fabrics (fig. 3).[23] This not only stimulated public interest

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pleasure and your diversion artistic as well as your more serious plays. In America you have seemed to feel that you must do serious things seriously, but that you can do things meant for a pastime carelessly."

[22]Kevin Brownlow, *The Parade's Gone By...* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1968), 238-239, credits Urban as being the advance guard of artistic directors in the movies along with Hugo Ballin, Wilfred Buckland and Robert Brunton; Kenneth MacGowan, "Urban Spends Six Months in the Movies Pointing Way for Screen Artists," *New York Globe and Commercial Advertiser*, 3 July 1920, also mentions Penrhyn Stanlaws, an illustrator, cover designer and occasional playwright, and Paul Calfin as other recent recruits to the movies along with Urban.

[23]Such as the 1922 Wiener Werkstätte Showroom, and the 1922 Rialto Movie Theater.

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in modern design, but subtly advertised Urban's own architectural and design work. His interest in German Expressionist sets, most clearly demonstrated in the influence of the German architect Hans Poelzig on Urban's sets for the 1921 movie *Enchantment*, helped popularize European modernism in the United States (fig. 4).[24]

Urban frequently credited the popularity of his sets with prompting his return to architecture in 1926.[25] The theater and film worlds provided Urban with connections to important patrons such as Ziegfeld, Hearst and financier and arts benefactor Otto Kahn and a public which already admired Urban-designed spaces. He opened his architectural office with a full slate of projects including the design of the 1925-1927 Ziegfeld Theater and the 1926-1927 Metropolitan Opera Company Building in New York City as well as the 1925-1927 Marjorie Merriweather Hutton House, 1926-1927 Bath and Tennis Club, 1926-1927 Oasis Club and 1926 Sunrise Building in Palm Beach Florida.

The 1927 Ziegfeld Theater epitomizes Urban's architectural work of this period (fig. 5). Allegorical

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[24]Urban mentioned his fascination with the German Expressionist movie *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, in his interview with Oliver Sayler, see Sayler, "Urban of the Opera," 72; "Golem" in Production Files Box 13, Joseph Urban Collection contains stills of Poelzig's sets for the movie.

[25]Kenneth MacGowan, "Profiles: Caprice Viennois," *New Yorker* 3 (25 June 1927): 22-23; Arthur Strawn, "Joseph Urban," 275; Frank Cadie, "Joseph Urban Excels Because He Does Not Specialize," *Brooklyn Eagle Magazine*, 30 March 1930, 9; Otto Teegen, "Joseph Urban," 254.

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figures and theater masks were combined on the exterior with a carved proscenium, to advertise the theater within. The oval-shaped auditorium was dominated by a mural of foliate and floral patterning interspersed with medieval figures and castles (fig. 6). Urban arranged the vestibule, lounges and auditorium into a carefully thought-out procession of varying spaces, colors and lighting effects which would stimulate excitement in the auditorium and relaxation in the lounges, creating moods that were appropriate to the theater-going experience of Ziegfeld's musical comedies. He believed that each theater should be designed for the specific type of entertainment housed within. This concept was most fully presented in his 1929 book *Theatres*.

Urban's creation of total environments, similar to John Eberson's atmospheric movie theaters of the 1920s in the evocation of certain responses from users, was most successfully exploited in the number of shops, restaurants and night clubs that he designed. He received commissions for hotel night clubs in Pittsburgh, Detroit, Cincinnati, Chicago and New York (fig. 7). He used highly reflective surfaces to capture images of clients as they ate, drank, and danced. Custom-designed light fixtures and furnishings contributed to the perceived uniqueness of the space. Every detail contributed to the club's illusion of a luxurious, otherworldly environment which attracted and flattered jazz-age patrons.

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Urban's attention to every detail and furnishing of these spaces led to commissions to design fabrics, automobile interiors, and even sets of furniture for the Mallin Furniture Company.[26] In 1929 he participated in the Metropolitan Museum of Art's exhibition, The Architect and the Industrial Arts. Urban, who designed a conservatory and a man's den for the exhibition worked closely with manufacturers to create rugs, furniture, lights and even plant stands for his installations.[27] Urban and the other architects who participated in the show wanted to design modern rooms for specific uses and genders, for instance linking the bedroom and boudoir to women, and the den to men. The custom-designed furniture, and luxurious materials of the installation tended to only be feasible for well-to-do clients. While Urban only received a few domestic commissions in the United States, his 1932 apartment for the writer Katherine Brush, allowed him the opportunity to provide a complete domestic environment for a wealthy client.

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[26]Portfolio 39, Joseph Urban Collection, contains designs for Hartman Trunks; Portfolio 55, Joseph Urban Collection, has the furniture designs for Mallin Furniture Company; for the color design for the Ruxton automobile see "Front-Wheel Drive Ruxton Makes Bow," *New York World*, 26 May 1929; and fabrics see "Displays of New Rayon Fabric Interest Convention Delegates," *New York Journal of Commerce*, 25 May 1929.

[27]See the exhibition catalogue, *The Architect and the Industrial Arts* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1929); Robert A. M. Stern, Gregory Gilmartin, Thomas Mellins, *New York 1930: Architecture and Urbanism Between the Two World Wars* (New York: Rizzoli, 1987), 338-340; Karen Davies, *At Home in Manhattan: Modern Decorative Arts, 1925 to the Depression* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 88-89.

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His interest in industrial design, however, also extended to more cooperative ventures between architects and designers. He was a founding member of the American Designer's Gallery and the American Union of Decorative Artists and Craftsmen, which united architects, theater and industrial designers.[28] These groups criticized the revival style interiors and furnishings which dominated American houses. Instead, they proposed designs and materials which were commensurate with modern life. The organizations united Urban with colleagues from the disparate parts of his career including theater designers Lee Simonson and Frederick Kiesler, architects Ely Jacques Kahn, Ralph Walker and Raymond Hood and designers Ruth Reeves and Paul Frankl.

After the Ziegfeld Theater, Urban's architectural designs gradually moved away from the art deco exuberance of the 1927 building. The 1928 storefront for the Bedell Store in New York City (fig. 8) as well as projects for the Reinhardt Theater in New York City, and Kaufmann store in Pittsburgh began to use modern materials and streamlined forms.

The influence of the European International Style, caused Urban to radically refine his formal vocabulary in 1930. Instead of the patterned decorations and custom light-fixtures, Urban began to use a single color per surface and standardized furniture and fixtures. The 1931 New School for

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[28]Stern, Gilmartin, Mellins, *New York 1930*, 338, 344; Davies, 90-91.

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Social Research in New York City, exemplifies this shift (fig. 9). Lighting in the building was recessed behind coves so that the quality of light rather than the fixture shaped the environment. A complex color scheme was established for each room and every surface within that room received a different tone. Urban's mastery of color combinations resulted in his being placed in charge of color at the 1933 Chicago Century of Progress Exhibition.

Joseph Urban died on July 10, 1933, in the midst of several on-going projects. His main concern was the welfare of his architecture office at a time when many architects were unemployed.[29] His two associates, Irvin Scott and Otto Teegen took over the office and successfully administered the firm, which specialized in restaurant and night club interiors, until 1941.[30]

Review of Literature

If Urban was one of the leaders of modern American design during his lifetime, he all but disappeared from view after

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[29]Carter and Cole, 255; Gretl Urban Tape 3, (magnetic tape), Productions Files Box 46, Joseph Urban Collection.

[30]"Scott 'Inherits' Urban Fame," *New York Telegraph*, 1 September 1933; Stern, Gilmartin, Mellins, *New York 1930*, 281-283, lists some of their commissions as the Bar at the Empire Hotel, the 1936 Cafe Larue; the 1933 Persian Room at the Plaza Hotel and the 1936 House of Morgan; "Irvin L. Scott Dies; Architect was 68," *New York Times*, 2 November 1952; "Otto J. Teegen, 83, Architect of Major New York Projects," *New York Times*, 11 April 1983.

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his death.[31] During the 1930s the practice and theory of modern design in the United States radically shifted, making

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[31]Sheldon Cheney, *The New World Architecture* (New York: Longmans Green, 1930); Paul Frankl, *New Dimensions* (New York: Payson and Clarke, 1928); Edwin Avery Park, *New Backgrounds for a New Age* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1927); all included Urban as a key figure in their evaluations of modern architecture. After 1933 he was almost never mentioned. Key texts such as writings by Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc. 1934)--Mumford's history of American architecture *Sticks and Stones*, 1924 was published before Urban had opened his architecture office--Talbot F. Hamlin, *Forms and Functions of Twentieth Century Architecture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952); Nicholas Pevsner, *Pioneers of the Modern Movement* (London: Penguin Books 1936); and Henry Russell Hitchcock, *Architecture: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1958) do not mention Urban. Interestingly, one significant pre-1933 text, Henry Russell Hitchcock, *Modern Architecture: Romanticism and Reintegration* (New York: Payson & Clarke Ltd., 1929) also omits Urban. Hitchcock's treatment of both American and Austrian architecture, however, is uneven, perhaps a sign of his discomfort with work produced in these countries. He represents American architecture with illustrations of Frank Lloyd Wright, Richard Neutra, Howe and Lescaze, and James Gamble Roger's work; for Austria he uses projects by Josef Hoffmann and Josef Frank. Urban's omission as an important modern American designer was probably reinforced by his absence, admittedly together with other major designers, in a key series of exhibitions by the Museum of Modern Art which established a canon of modern architecture in the United States, starting with the 1932 exhibition *Modern Architecture: International Exhibition* and continuing with the 1944 *Built in U.S.A. 1932-1944*. In the fields of theater and industrial design, Urban was included in most major exhibitions and publications prior to his death, but after either omitted or received cursory treatment. While he was included in Frederick Kiesler's 1926 International Theatre Exposition in New York, see *International Theatre Exposition* (New York: Steinway Hall, 1926), a 1934 comprehensive exhibition on theater art at the Museum of Modern Art did not include a single piece of Urban's, *International Exhibition of Theatre Art, January 16-February 26, 1934* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1934), and in his book *The Art of Scenic Design*, Lee Simonson only briefly mentions Urban. The only reference to Urban in the industrial design field can be found in Rudolph Rosenthal and Helena L. Ratzka, *The Story of Modern Applied Art* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1948).

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Urban and his work virtually inaccessible from either a visual or theoretical viewpoint. Modernist critics, influenced by nineteenth century materialism, stated that artists and designers should recognize and stress the essential conventions of each art form. They believed that this would reinforce the autonomous nature of modern art.[32] This ultimately discouraged designers from working in a variety of formats.[33] Theater, which mixed various media and created illusions of other places and times, became increasingly

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[32]Clement Greenberg wrote: "Under the testing of modernism more and more of the conventions of the art of painting have shown themselves to be dispensable, unessential. But now it has been established, it would seem, that the irreducible essence of pictorial art consists in but two constitutive conventions or norms: flatness and the delimitation of flatness;..." Clement Greenberg, "After Abstract Expressionism," *Art International* 6 (25 October 1962): 30. Siegfried Giedion stated: "Constitutent facts are those tendencies which, when they are suppressed, inevitably reappear. Their recurrence makes us aware that these are elements which, all together, are producing a new tradition. Constituent facts in architecture, for example, are the undulating of the wall, the juxtaposition of nature and the human dwelling, the open ground plan." Siegfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture*, 4th ed., (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 18.

[33]This is best formulated in art criticism see: Alfred H. Barr, Jr., *Cubism and Abstract Art* (New York, The Museum of Modern Art, 1936); Clement Greenberg, "Abstract, Representational, and so forth," in *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 133-138; in architecture see: Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson, *The International Style: Architecture Since 1922* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1932); for a critique of this formalism and the separation of the arts in terms of an analysis of its architecture see Klaus Herdeg, *The Decorated Diagram: Harvard Architecture and the Failure of the Bauhaus Legacy* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983); for an historical assessment see Richard Pommer and Christian F. Otto, *Weissenhof 1927 and the Modern Movement in Architecture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 163-166.

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disapproved of by modernist critics.[34] The critical theorists of the International Style, furthermore, frowned upon any stylistic fluidity.[35] Finally, an increasing gap between commercial and elite culture made it difficult for designers to market their works to a diverse audience.[36] Due to these reasons, but also due to the ephemeral nature of set designs as well as Urban's small oeuvre in architecture, curators, critics, and scholars rarely mentioned Urban's work from the 1930s through the 1960s.

Around 1946-1947 Urban's widow, Mary Porter Beegle Urban, and daughter, Gretl Urban, donated his papers to Columbia University's Brander Matthews Dramatic Museum, which is now a part of the Rare Books and Manuscripts Library.[37] The over 27,000 papers are divided into eight categories. The "Production Files," are organized by project and can consist of manuscript material, photographs, sketches, blueprints and schematic stage set plans. The "Portfolios" house many of the

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[34]"Art degenerates as it approaches the condition of theatre. Theatre is the common denominator that binds a large and seemingly disparate variety of activities to one another, and that distinguishes those activities from the radically different enterprises of the modernist arts." Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battock (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1968), 141.

[35]Hitchcock and Johnson, 17-34; Pommer and Otto, 163-166; Rosemarie Haag Bletter, "Expressionism and the New Objectivity," *Art Journal* 43 (Summer 1983): 108-111.

[36]Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," in *Art and Culture*, 3-21.

[37]Kenneth A. Lohf, "Preface," in Carter and Cole, 7.

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architectural drawings, but also include photographs, some manuscript material, bound photographic albums documenting stage sets, film sets and furniture designs, and an extensive set of newspaper clippings in scrapbooks. The "Drawings" are primarily composed of his stage sets but also contain some architectural drawings. The group of "Models" are exclusively of Urban's stage and opera sets. The "Vienna Period" material contains drawings and photographs of his various architectural projects, book illustrations, a set of Hagenbund catalogues, some memorabilia and a small group of largely unidentified theatrical material. The "Boston Opera" files contain drawings and photographs of Urban's stage set designs for that company. The "Glass Plates" document his drawings, built projects and also contain some reference material. The collection forms the basis of any research done on Urban and his career.

Doctoral dissertations by Samuel M. Marks in 1955, and Donald Wilson Ilko in 1969, which focused on the theater designs, presented the earliest scholarly examinations of Urban's career. Marks' dissertation proposed to evaluate Urban in reference to American stagecraft.[38] The study is a conventional although highly detailed monograph of Urban's life and work. Ilko's dissertation sought to place Urban in a historical context, relating the visual motifs of his designs to Art Nouveau and demonstrating the impact of

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[38]Samuel M. Marks, "Settings by Joseph Urban: an Evaluation of his Stagecraft," (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1955), 20.

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important theater designers' writings, particularly Adolph Appia, upon Urban's approach to and conception of design.[39]

During the 1970s, a renewed interest in designers such as Urban grew out of both scholarly work in the previously ignored field of Art Deco architecture and the rise of post-modern design in the United States with its celebration of eclecticism and diversity. Rosemarie Haag Bletter and Cervin Robinson featured Urban in their pioneering book on New York 1920s architecture: *Skyscraper Style: Art Deco New York*.[40] The 1987-1988 exhibition *Vienna/New York: The Work of Joseph Urban 1872-1933* curated by Timothy Rub at the Cooper-Hewitt Museum provided the public with the first opportunity to examine Urban's work in depth. Robert A. M. Stern, Gregory Gilmartin, Thomas Mellins furthered Urban's posthumous reputation by identifying him as a key figure in their exhaustive survey *New York 1930*.[41] Stern, Gilmartin, and Mellins scoured both the Urban collection, period architectural magazines and literary magazines to present a detailed summary of Urban's New York City buildings. In

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[39]Donald Wilson Ilko, "Joseph Urban: The Relation of Stage Design and Architecture in his Work," (Ph.D. diss., Case Western Reserve University, 1969), 4, 12, for the impact of art nouveau and where he quotes Mary Urban as stating that Urban revered Appia and knew his books the 1895 *The Staging of Wagner's Music Dramas*, the 1898 *Music and the Art of the Theatre*, and the 1921 *The Work of Living Art*.

[40]Cervin Robinson and Rosemarie Haag Bletter, *Skyscraper Style: Art Deco New York* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 19, 52, 69.

[41]Stern, Gilmartin, Mellins, *New York 1930*, 235-240, 624-628.

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particular, their discussion of the controversial 1926-1927 Metropolitan Opera House elucidates a complex and convoluted project and will undoubtedly remain the standard explanation of that design.[42] More focused studies of Urban's work have also been written such as Marshall Marian Brown's thesis on Urban's Palm Beach, Florida architecture.[43] Brown makes extensive use of Palm Beach newspapers and periodicals to supplement the information in the Urban collection, providing a detailed history of each of Urban's Palm Beach projects. She attempts, less successfully, to define Urban's architectural vocabulary by identifying the various recurring motifs in his work.[44] This, unfortunately, dissolves his work into a series of fragments and does not clarify the impact or significance of these projects.

Most of the existing studies of Urban, however, have been descriptive rather than analytical. The facts of Urban's life, descriptions of his projects, identification of sources for his designs, and the influence on subsequent projects, have been the primary concerns of the exhibition and essays. Randolph Carter and Robert Cole's recent book, *Joseph Urban: Architecture, Theater, Opera, Film*, is the first published monograph on Urban's life and work. The Carter and Cole book

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[42]Ibid., 618-628.

[43]Marshall Marian Brown, "Joseph Urban's Work in Palm Beach" (Master's Thesis, Graduate School of Architecture and Planning, Columbia University, 1986).

[44]Ibid., 64-88.

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quite clearly falls into the descriptive category. The monograph presents Urban's life in a roughly chronological fashion with separate chapters devoted to his work in theater, opera, film and architecture. The authors emphasize Urban the man, his biography, how he worked, whom he knew and what he produced. At its best, the book achieves an immediacy, and gives a sense of Urban's presence and work. Sections describing Urban's methods of working, the problems of finishing the Ziegfeld Theater as well as Florenz Ziegfeld's response to the building are vivid and convincing.[45] Chapters on opera and theater are among the best in the book. Carter and Cole accurately and succinctly summarize the history of the Boston Opera Company, and the goals and visual properties of the new stage craft.[46]

The authors' heavy reliance upon the Urban archives and personal reminiscences has its drawbacks. Both Ziegfeld and Hearst realized Urban's name could attract audiences for their productions and began to promote him in a manner similar to theatrical and film stars. Urban's biography, particularly

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[45]Carter and Cole, 53-59, 90, 234-239.

[46]Ibid., 45-50. While information in the text is generally accurate, that in the captions, unfortunately, is not. At times, projects are incorrectly identified. For instance, the Bossert Hotel nightclub in Brooklyn, is labelled as the Hotel Gibson, Cincinnati, and the New School of Social Research facade design is identified as c. 1928-29 when, in fact, the drawing definitely dates from 1929. Even more regrettable is the fact that Urban's main associate in his architectural office, Irvin Scott, is misidentified every time he is mentioned, appearing variously as Schott, and Alvin Scott. Ibid., 169, 196, 211, 260.

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his Viennese career with commissions for European aristocrats, was styled into a careful formula of exoticism and nobility and published in literary journals, newspapers and theater and movie fan magazines. Most of Urban's personal correspondence no longer exists. What remains in the archives are images of his work, extensive press clippings, typescripts of his articles, and biographical notes strongly colored by the "Urban myth." Carter and Cole, however, unquestioningly accept this stylized biography. This results in a rather one-dimensional portrayal of Urban. The chapters on Vienna, Urban's film career and his architecture are particularly schematic because the authors do not take into account recent scholarly work done in these fields. Their rendition of Urban's Viennese career, for instance, is largely drawn from the biographical typescripts in the archives and seemingly does not acknowledge the research of Carl Schorske, William McGrath, James Shedel and others.[47] In this chapter, Urban appears to be working in a void with only passing references to important cultural organizations and figures such as the Secession and Gustav Mahler. Even a general examination of Urban's archives, however, suggests the significance of the Secession, and particularly the 1902 Beethoven exhibition. Urban saved the program for the exhibition and repeatedly quoted a figure from Alfred Roller's Beethoven mural in his

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[47]Schorske, *Fin-de Siècle*; McGrath, *Dionysian Art*; Shedel, *Art and Society*.

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later set designs and illustrations.[48] The *Gesamtkunstwerk* ideal influenced several of his later projects including the 1916 masque *Caliban* and his 1933 installation of the Architectural League annual exhibition.

The authors also neglect to mention important projects and colleagues. In 1896, Urban won the international competition to design the Czar Bridge in St. Petersburg. This is generally viewed as one of his most significant works from the Viennese period, yet is only alluded to in a quotation.[49] His 1906 interiors for the Cabaret Hölle and Restaurant Paul Hofner, important sources for his later American restaurants and night clubs, are omitted altogether. In discussing Urban's film sets, Carter and Cole concentrate on the elaborate costume dramas such as *When Knighthood Was in Flower*, and *Little Old New York*. Yet Urban's modern and fantastic sets for *Enchantment*, *Young Diana*, and *Enemies of Women*, introduced European modernism to a broad American public (fig. 4). While Carter and Cole correctly discuss the significance of late designs such as the New School for Social Research building and Century of Progress color scheme, they omit one of Urban's most important late architectural

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[48]The quotation of the Roller figure occurs in the travelling curtain for the 1920 Metropolitan Opera production of *Parsifal*. *Max Klinger, Beethoven, XIV. Kunstausstellung der Vereinigung Bildender Künstler Österreichs "Secession"* (Vienna: Vereiningung Bildender Künstler Österreichs, 1902) in "Hagenbund Catalogs," Vienna Period Box 5, Joseph Urban Collection.

[49]Carter and Cole, 10.

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projects, the Palace of the Soviets Competition (fig. 10).[50]

Some of Urban's closest colleagues and friends are also given equally short shrift. His connections with the Viennese architect Josef Hoffmann and friendship with the American architect Raymond Hood are only briefly mentioned. Clippings in the Urban archives as well as correspondence in the Frank Lloyd Wright archives provide tantalizing suggestions of a long-standing and close friendship between the two designers. Yet Wright, surely the most famous of American architects, is not mentioned in the book. Instead the authors focus on Urban's relationships with the glamorous Florenz Ziegfeld, William Randolph Hearst, and Tony Biddle. This despite their acknowledgement that Urban had a professional and not social relationship with Ziegfeld, and that he lacked respect for Hearst.[51]

Only Gregory Gilmartin, in an essay on Urban in the recent book *Inventing Times Square,* and William Leach in the volume *Consuming Visions* and his book *Land of Desire,* have attempted to analyze Urban's work and career by examining his relationship with the design world and the interaction between the diverse components of his practice. In his examination of early 20th century store displays, William Leach includes Urban as an important figure in the trend to dramatize store

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[50]Ibid., 210-210; 254-256.

[51]Ibid., 76, 148, 182.

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presentations through the use of color, glass and light.[52] Designers used these materials in order to create a fantasy world which would invest a commodity with desire and therefore entice a potential consumer into buying it. Leach primarily discusses Urban's store commissions although he touches upon the restaurant, night club and Ziegfeld Theater designs as related projects. Leach's essay situates many of Urban's designs within a context of theater and store designs, and explicates their impact upon consumers. Additionally, he emphasizes the lack of boundaries between commercial and high culture as well as the diverse practice of many designers, which, during this period, could range from theater to show rooms to book illustrations. This places Urban within an overall context, which scholars who approach Urban's designs from the particular perspective of architecture or theater have been generally unable to identify or discuss.

Gregory Gilmartin in his essay on Urban also attempts to place Urban within a broader cultural context.[53] He acknowledges the significance of three issues for understanding and interpreting Urban's work: the relationship

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[52]William Leach "Strategists of Display and the Production of Desire," in *Consuming Visions: Accumulation and Display of Goods in America 1880-1920*, ed. Simon J. Bronner (Winterthur, Delaware: The Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, 1989), 99-132, and *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), 143-145.

[53]Gregory Gilmartin, "Joseph Urban," in *Inventing Times Square*, ed. William R. Taylor (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1991), 271-283.

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between theater and architecture, the dialogue between commercial and high culture and Urban's role as a conduit between the European and American design worlds. Rather than exploring the interaction between theater and architecture in Urban's work and how it might illuminate the American architecture during the 1920s, however, Gilmartin reduces it to a motif that he uses to summarize Urban's practice. He compares Urban's career with his favorite opera, Richard Wagner's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. While Urban's interest in the *Gesamtkunstwerk* was undoubtedly inspired by Wagner's theories and the later sets that his compatriot Alfred Roller designed for the opera, Gilmartin proposes that it can be additionally used to provide an aesthetic and social model for understanding Urban's work and practice. He links the music of the opera, which waters down the avant-garde through the use of folk materials, with its plot of a rebellious individual conforming to the existing social order. This is emblematic of Urban's "middle-brow" aesthetics and role of popularizing modernism in American design.[54] Gilmartin's analysis, however, is undermined by his modernist, formalist bias. Implicit in his critique is that Urban is somehow a lesser architect because of his stylistic fluidity and involvement with commercial culture. Gilmartin views the stylistic fluidity within Urban's overall oeuvre with mistrust:

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[54]Ibid., 273.

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> This...came to mean a devotion to modernity rather than modernism. In the 1890s, Urban assimilated the art nouveau; in the 1900s, both Hoffmann's Secessionstil and the monumental Junge Klassizität of Berlin; in the 1920s, he incorporated German Expressionism into his repertoire; and by 1930, the machined vocabulary of the International Style. His aim was always to "express our modern life" or to create "an expression of modern trends," to celebrate the present moment rather than reform it. He was brilliantly facile with each permutation of style and buoyantly optimistic: what Schoenberg saw as a "death dance of principles," Urban saw as the march of fashion.[55]

Such criticism is heavily influenced by a belief in the primacy of high art and the importance of clearly defining high art as separate from all other works of design, or of art which might have a commercial appeal. By dismissing stylistic fluidity as fashionable, Gilmartin ignores the historical context in which Urban worked. Almost every major designer working during this period, including Ludwig Mies van der Rohe as well as Hoffmann and Peter Behrens, could stand similarly accused.[56] Presenting Urban's work as a parade of styles, furthermore, fails to interpret how his work was produced, used and interpreted.

Gilmartin's interpretation of the interaction between commercial and high culture is deeply cynical. He understands any interaction as a one-way street with commercial culture cannibalizing the achievements of the avant-garde.

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[55]Ibid.

[56]Terence Riley, *The International Style: Exhibition 15 and The Museum of Modern Art* (New York: Columbia University, 1992), 15-16, 25.

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> Urban's role in America was that of a bridge linking the forms and techniques of European modernism with American commercial art, which, whether theatrical or architectural, is so dominated by concerns of marketability that it has difficulty innovating from within. Commercial art can be cannibalistic, falling back on successful formulas that are eventually designated "conventions," and thus it tends towards standardization. But since this provokes its own crisis of marketing, commercial art looks to high, or at least higher, culture; it seeks a new generation of aesthetic themes that it can adapt to its own ends. Urban proved an especially valuable property in this regard, for his entire career was devoted to digesting the reigning modernism of the given moment.[57]

This fails to acknowledge the possibility of either the avant-garde cannibalizing the commercial, or the mutually enriching interaction between the two forms. Yet historians are increasingly acknowledging the vital connection between the two spheres for this period.[58]

Aims of Dissertation

A more detailed image of Urban and his work can only result from primary research that extends beyond the Urban archive,

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[57]Gilmartin, 272-273. Equally disturbing is his dismissal of Urban in relation to his colleagues Raymond Hood, Ely Jacques Kahn and Ralph Walker, as being less progressive because he lacked their business clients. One suspects Gilmartin is partly demonstrating the traditional bias in favor of the built over the unbuilt and the conventional understanding of the skyscraper as the pre-eminent 1920 building type, and therefore its designers as the most important architects, Gilmartin. 280.

[58]Peter Wollen, *Raiding The Icebox: Reflections on Twentieth-Century Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 1-16, 35-62, 104-114; Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1994), 141-199.

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a familiarity with recent scholarship in American cultural history, and a critical assessment of his work which interprets the visual themes and social uses of his designs.

The main key to interpreting Urban's designs can be found in the documents and criticism of the European and American theater during this period. Theater as a resource and a critical discourse is central to Urban's work and, I believe, to American design in general during the 1920s.

Imported European designers and theatrical troupes as well as exhibitions and periodicals displaying the latest European avant-garde set designs formed an important and early source of information for American designers during the 1910s and 1920s. The frequent combination of popular topics, music and dance forms with avant-garde set designs and methods of staging provided a model for designers working in other fields who wished to create forms which were viable in both the commercial and elite cultural worlds.

Theater also provides a critical model for assessing Urban's visual forms and professional role. During the 1910s-1920s many European theatrical designers and directors made a radical visual shift from Expressionist to epic theater. While visually discontinuous, the shift evolved out of concerns with the positioning and involvement of the audience, and the use of visual effects to engage or detach the viewer. This provides a better model for assessing the aims and impact of architects like Urban who shifted from Art Deco forms to an

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International Style vocabulary than the formalist and functionalist approach which has dismissed the work of such architects as fashionable and inconsistent. Some of the most astute criticism of this shift and of the aims and forms of popular entertainments come from German cultural critics Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer who wrote during the 1930s and 1940s. Their comments have additional relevance for Urban's work in that they both came from a similar educational background, including German literature, philosophy and theater. It should also be acknowledged that many German architectural writers in the 1920s and early 1930s expressed more diverse theories and aesthetics than their American compatriots. Books by Adolf Behne, Heinrich De Fries and Gustav Platz reveal the variety of modern architecture by including the turn-of-the-century work of Henry Van de Velde and Otto Wagner as well as that of contemporary architects such as Hugo Häring, Adolf Rading and Oskar Kaufmann, who were frequently omitted from American publications.[59] Bruno Taut, in *Modern Architecture*, called for a simplified functional approach to architecture, but one which also acknowledged that

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[59]Adolf Behne, *The Modern Functional Building*, intro. Rosemarie Haag Bletter, transl. Michael Robinson (München: Drei Masken Verlag A.G., 1926; reprint, Santa Monica: Getty Research Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1996); Heinrich De Fries, *Junge Baukunst in Deutschland* (Berlin: Otto Stollberg Verlag für Politik un Wirtschaft, 1926); Gustav Adolf Platz, *Die Baukunst der neuesten Zeit* (Berlin: Im Propyläen Verlag, 1930).

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architecture could never be reduced solely to function and stressed architecture's cultural significance.[60]

Finally, Urban's transfer of his celebrity status from the theatrical to the architectural worlds profoundly influenced his own practice and the professional role and public perception of American architects. When he opened his architectural office in 1926, Urban began to exploit his celebrity status as a set designer in order to advertise himself as an architect. This prompted other architects to begin to promote and advertise themselves in a similar manner.

Is the purpose of examining a figure like Urban to see how well he fits, or does not fit into the traditional canon of architecture? And then to either exclude him from its territory or increase the canon's boundaries to incorporate his work? The purpose, I believe, of studying Urban is to question the assumptions which structure the canon. The goal should be to see if the definitions of style, practice and culture that inform our understanding of architects and architecture have been historically determined. If this is the case these definitions should not be universally applicable to every period and form of architecture.[61] The cultural critic

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[60]Bruno Taut, *Modern Architecture* (London and New York: The Studio Ltd./ Albert & Charles Boni Inc., 1929), 8-9.

[61]Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," *October* 8 (Spring 1979): 31-44; Claude Levi-Strauss, *Totemism*, trans. Rodney Needham (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963); Griselda Pollock, *Vision & Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art* (London: Routledge, 1988).

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Peter Wollen has suggested a more complex interpretation of modernism. Modernism, according to Wollen retrospectively wrote its own history and theory. The ending, particularly the definition and interpretation of modernism as it existed in the 1950s rewrote the origins of modernism in the early twentieth century. Instead, Wollen proposes that the history of modernism consists not only of the machine aesthetic of cubism but of the exotic decorations of painter Henri Matisse, the Russian ballet, and fashion designer Paul Poiret. The decorative impulse from the commercial world of fashion as well as the elite world of painting provided the first modernism in that it subverted and eventually destroyed the visual language and theoretical assumptions of the academy. Wollen also emphasizes the significance of urban vernacular culture for modernist design, art and architecture. Modern artists often began with the materials from their contemporary life and popular activities, such as jazz, skyscrapers, movies, and signage. The forms of urban vernacular culture provided inspiration for the content and the visual language of modern art. Modern designers during the 1910s and 1920s took this a step further by creating works for broad commercial rather than elite markets. This collapsed with the depression of the 1930s.[62]

Urban's involvement and promotion of the new stage craft in Europe in the 1900s and the United States during the 1910s,

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[62]Wollen, 16-18, 104-109.

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his use of the forms and subjects of urban commercial culture and work for commercial art industries identifies him as a key figure in the development and spread of modernism, according to Wollen's interpretation. To study Urban's work is ultimately to question rather than confirm the assumptions which inform our definition of the style, practice and culture of modern design.

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CHAPTER 1

BEFORE ARCHITECTURE:

JOSEPH URBAN'S AMERICAN CAREER PRIOR TO 1926

On July 1, 1925, the *New York Evening Post* printed an announcement in the column "Gossip of the Stage and Screen," which stated that the successful set designer Joseph Urban was abandoning his lucrative practice in order to return to architecture.

> Joseph Urban is going into architecture in the future and will design no more productions except for the Metropolitan Opera House and the new Ziegfeld Theatre. He has gone abroad on a mission connected with the latter house, which he is designing and when he comes back he will take the title of artistic director of the Ziegfeld and Cosmopolitan Theatres.[1]

The *Boston Evening Transcript* also reported on Urban's return to the architectural field with an article headlined: "Joseph Urban, Once Architect, Becomes Architect Again."[2] These articles suggested that Urban, who had practiced architecture in Austria prior to his 1911 immigration, had not designed a single building or space during the entire fourteen years that he had been in the United States. If these accounts were correct then the Ziegfeld Theater, Urban's first completed building, was an amazingly large-scale, stylistically sophisticated and spatially coherent project for an architect

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[1]"Gossip of the Stage and Screen," *New York Evening Post*, 1 July 1925, p. 12.

[2]H. I. Brock, "Joseph Urban, Once Architect, Becomes Architect Again," *Boston Evening Transcript*, 9 November 1926.

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who had not practiced for over a decade. In fact, Urban's opening of an architecture office was not a dramatic return to an abandoned profession. While Urban had not designed a new building between 1912 and 1925 he had engaged in several interior renovation and decoration projects.[3] These projects help us to situate the visual and programmatic themes of Urban's later 1920s-30s buildings within the overall context of his work. More importantly, Urban's designs prior to his opening of an architecture office occurred during a period, 1915-1923, often overlooked in terms of its importance for American architecture.[4] Finally the projects demonstrate that theater was an important conduit for the exchange of design ideas between Europe and the United States and suggest the significance of theater to any analysis and interpretation of American modern architecture during the 1920s.

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[3]Urban designed over fifteen separate interior spaces between 1915 and 1925. Documentation for some of these projects is minimal, consisting of newspaper descriptions and maybe a single photograph or drawing. World War I and the post-war depression made most architects turn to interiors for commissions.

[4]Historians tend to only show a limited number of buildings from this decade and treat the period as an extension of earlier, c. 1900, avant-garde or academic concerns. Leland Roth, *A Concise History of American Architecture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 228-237; William Jordy, *American Buildings and Their Architects: Progressive and Academic Ideals at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1972), 246-274; David Handlin, *American Architecture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985), 144-146; 163; 167-169. Even Frank Lloyd Wright's work during this period has received little detailed study until the recent book, Anthony Alofsin, *Frank Lloyd Wright: The Lost Years, 1910-1922* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993).

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The New Amsterdam Roof Garden

The Themes and Forms of Urban's Early Spaces

Urban's Viennese architecture and interiors from 1896 to 1912, evolved out of an exotic and picturesque stylistic vocabulary. His designs from that period were frequently embellished with symbolic, allegorical and folktale-derived murals and sculptures (fig. 1).[5] By the turn of the century he had adopted the forms and concerns of the Secessionstil, using archaic, geometric forms with ornament based upon abstracted natural motifs (fig. 11).[6] Beginning around 1905, Urban also practiced a classically-based style influenced by the work of both German and Austrian architects (fig. 2).[7] These designs consisted of strong geometrical plans with restrained panelled elevations of attenuated classical elements. From that time until his departure for the United States both Secession and classical motifs were prevalent in his architectural work. These motifs provided a significant underpinning for Urban's

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[5]"Elizabeth, Empress of Austria: Memorial Chapel," "Esterhazy Castle," "Competition 1898," for the bridge linking the Musikverein and Künstlerhaus buildings for the Emperor's fiftieth anniversary festival, Vienna Period Box 1, "Rathauskeller," Vienna Period Box 2, Joseph Urban Collection.

[6]"Goltz, Alexander D. House," "Kaiser Jubilee 1908," Vienna Period Box 1; "Kaiser Jubilaeumsfestzug," "Landau House," Vienna Period Box 2, "Hagenbund Exhibition Building," Vienna Period Box 3, Joseph Urban Collection.

[7]Sekler, 101-120; Neumeyer; Anderson, "Peter Behrens'," 72-78. "Eisenstein, Victor House," "Redlich, Joseph House," Vienna Period Box 1, "Restaurant 1905 Hotel Spiesejaal," Vienna Period Box 2, Joseph Urban Collection.

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later, American, designs. His early work in the United States, 1911-1925, grows out of these styles. Designs dating from 1925-1933 are less obviously related to these forms but synthesized, and ultimately transcended their visual and spatial effects.

The New Amsterdam Roof Garden: Description and History

In December 1914, the theatrical impresario Florenz Ziegfeld commissioned Urban to design a new set for the Midnight Frolic, a cabaret-style revue, and redesign the space in which it occurred, the New Amsterdam Theater Roof Garden.[8] Roof-top performing spaces were among the most significant examples of Urban's early United States designs. While these spaces were initially used as night clubs for dancing, Ziegfeld expanded these activities by introducing informal cabaret-style revues with audience interaction. When the dance-craze started to wane in 1917-19, the revues became more elaborate and the stage became more formal.[9]

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[8]"'Nothing But Girls' Premier by Rennold Wolf," *Morning Telegraph,* 31 December 1914, p. 4; "'Midnight Frolic' in Dance Hall," *New York Herald,* 3 January 1915, sec. 3, p. 8; "Ziegfeld Presents 'Nothing But Girls' by Rennold Wolf," *Morning Telegraph,* 3 January 1915; Rennold Wolf, "'Midnight Frolic' Proves a Splurge, A Splash, A Riot," *Morning Telegraph,* 7 January 1915, p. 14.

[9]Stephen Burge Johnson, *The Roof Gardens of Broadway Theatres, 1883-1942* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1985), 146-157.

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Urban, whose primary work in the United States through 1914 was for the Boston Opera, was not well-known in the commercial theater. Ziegfeld, however, had seen and admired Urban's sets in the short-lived 1914 production of the *Garden of Paradise*, an adaption of Hans Christian Anderson's the "Little Mermaid".[10] The settings of the *Garden of Paradise* employed rich colors, unusual lighting effects and glittering reflective surfaces to create the aura of an exotic, fairy-tale land (fig. 12).[11] Ziegfeld was looking for a new image for the Follies and Frolics, musical revues which had relied heavily on the presentation of scantily clad females. He wanted to broaden the appeal of the shows to attract a mixed-gender audience. Urban's sets created an appropriately artistic aura that would permit both the continued male

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[10]"Mr. Ziegfeld and his Follies," *New York Times*, 18 June 1916, also cited in Carter and Cole, 73.

[11]Walter Prichard Eaton, "The Theater: The Lessons of a Failure," *American Magazine* 79 (April 1915): 42, 44-45, 76-80; "Sheldon and Urban Blend Romance, Fantasy, Picture and Poetry in One Stage Spectacle," *Boston Evening Transcript*, 31 October 1914, sec. 3, p. 6; for drawings of sets "Garden of Paradise," Drawings Box 2, Joseph Urban Collection. The effects of the *Garden of Paradise*, with their suggestion of fantasy and escape formed the basis of Urban's early designs for the Follies and Frolics sets as well as for the space of the Midnight Frolic. Urban's opening scene depicting the palace of the Merman Emperor at the bottom of the sea was strongly indebted to the opening "At the Bottom of the Rhine," scene in productions of Richard Wagner's *Das Rheingold*, "'The Garden of Paradise' An Artistic Achievement," *New York Herald*, 30 November 1914.

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appreciation of female forms as well as female enjoyment of dance, sets and costumes.[12]

The New Amsterdam Roof Garden consisted of a shallow stage, abbreviated proscenium and a large flat area used jointly for audience dancing and theatrical performances (fig. 13). Surrounding the dance floor was a seating area with table and chairs and a balcony above. Ziegfeld had a glass runway, used for performances, placed ten feet above the outer edge of the dance floor (fig. 14).[13] Ziegfeld's production for the roof, the Frolic, was a fast-paced revue consisting of a female chorus as well as individual singers, dancers and comedians. Before, during and after the performance, the audience, who sat at tables on the same level as the performance space, would dance. Audience and performers not only shared the space of the dance floor but were encouraged to interact, hitting the tables with mallets, blowing whistles, getting tangled up in the chorus's fishing lines.[14]

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[12]Rosaline Stone, "The Ziegfeld Follies: A Study of Theatrical Opulence from 1907 to 1931" (Ph.D. diss., University of Denver, 1985), 42; Gilbert Seldes, "A Tribute to Florenz Ziegfeld," *The 7 Lively Arts* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1923), 130; Robert C. Toll, *On With the Show* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 302-313.

[13]Photographs of space in "New Amsterdam Roof," Production File Box 22, Joseph Urban Collection; and photographs of sets, performers and space in White Studio Key Books, no. 16,540, pp. 83, 84, 109; no. 16,542, p. 73, Billy Rose Theater Collection, Lincoln Center Library for the Performing Arts; Wolf, "Midnight Frolic Proves a Splurge," p. 14.

[14]Stephen Burge Johnson, 152, 157; Lewis A. Erenberg, *Steppin' Out* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 128, 207, 209-210, 217.

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For the 1915 Frolic, Urban used a glittering glass bead curtain as a backdrop and framed this on the top and sides with layered painted drops depicting abstracted flowering trees (fig. 15).[15] A semicircular series of platforms provided a small shallow stage and were embellished by a painted curvilinear band of Mycenean style ornament as well as Gothic-inspired carved statues. Two sets of narrow stairs provided a transition from the top of the platform to the dance floor. The glass runway, ten feet above the floor, began at the stage and encircled the dance area and audience tables in a U shape (fig. 14). Besides allowing the audience glimpses up female performers' dresses, the runway was also used to create startling spatial effects. In one popular number, the runway was lit with colored electric lights, the room was darkened and performers covered with phosphorescent paint created floating, anti-gravitational effects.[16] The reflective but transparent surface of the runway, when the audience or performers were dancing below, also created disorienting spatial effects.[17]

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[15]Wolf, "Midnight Frolic Proves a Splurge," p. 14. My description of the space is based on "'Midnight Frolic' Is Lavish," *New York Times*, 4 October 1916, p. 9, and images in the following collections: "New Amsterdam Roof", Production Files Box 22, Joseph Urban Collection; White Studio Key Books, no. 16,540, pp. 83, 84, 109; no.16,542, p. 73, Billy Rose Theater Collection.

[16]"'The Spooky Girl' in 'Midnight Frolic,'" *Morning Telegraph*, 20 January 1915, 12; "New F. Ziegfeld Show Best Yet," *Morning Telegraph*, 26 January 1915, 12.

[17]Wolf, "'Midnight Frolic' Proves a Splurge," p. 14.

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Photographs and newspaper descriptions indicate that Urban's designs for the Midnight Frolic literally extended the sets into the space of the audience (fig. 13). The notions of spatially merging audience and actors, together with the colors, light effects and style of decoration of the roof were important sources for Urban's later 1920s buildings. The small scale, flat but pervasive floral patterning combined with the crude geometric patterning loosely based on ancient archaic art reveal Urban's reliance on a Secessionstil-inspired vocabulary.[18] But the roof, as will be analyzed in a later section, also reveals Urban's knowledge of current European design, ultimately forming an important link between European and American architecture.

While the Midnight Frolic was continually altered and redecorated during its seven to eight year existence, the first two years of Urban's tenure as artistic director, 1915-17, are particularly notable as a model for Urban's 1920s designs.[19]

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[18]This can be compared with Urban's own Viennese work, such as his Hagenbund installations, "Hagenbund 1908," "Hagenbund Exhibition 1908 Dresden," "Hagenbund Exhibition 1907 Venice," "Hagenbund Exhibition 1905," Vienna Period Box 3, and his cabaret interiors "Hofner Restaurant 1906," "Hölle Cabaret 1906," Vienna Period Box 1; as well as with the work of his contemporaries, including Otto Wagner's 1899 Majolika Haus, Joseph Maria Olbrich's 1898-1899 Secession Building, Josef Hoffmann et alia design for the installation of the 1902 Beethoven austellung at the Secession Building and Max Fabiani's 1900 Artaria Building.

[19]The space was most likely altered in an effort to attract customers to the performance by the lure of a new and extravagant space. Renovations occurred in October 1916 which

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Urban's renovation of the space in the fall of 1916 elaborated these spatial effects (fig. 16).[20] The stage consisted of a series of steps stretching across the front and leading up to a backdrop of gold. A large circular cutout in the backdrop would open to reveal an idealized view of lower Manhattan. The stage was framed by two crystal glass bead columns and a top border of hanging golden flowers from which was suspended two orange, silk lanterns. Urban extended the stage sets into the audience space by using draperies of gold to form a canopy over the main floor. The *New York Times* reported:

> Josef Urban, it would seem, despaired ever of crowding enough color into one stage setting, so he let his copious art overflow the stage of the New Amsterdam until

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will be discussed at length, December 1918, March 1920, February 1921, and July - November 1921. Rennold Wolf, "Two New Roof Reviews This Week," *Morning Telegraph*, 9 December 1918 sec. 4, p. 1; Rennold Wolf, "'The Girls of 1920' To-Morrow Night," *Morning Telegraph*, 7 March 1920, sec. 4, p. 1; "Latest 'Frolic' Full of Novelty," *Morning Telegraph*, 9 February 1921, p. 12; Leo Marsh, "Tardy Decorators Put Off 'Midnight Frolic' to Nov. 17", *Morning Telegraph*, 10 November 1921, p. 4. Evidently the show only ran briefly, by December 1922 plans were made to renovate the space into a small theater run by Erlanger, Leo Marsh, "New Amsterdam Roof Will Be Done Over Into Theatre," *Morning Telegraph*, 2 December 1922, p. 4. Ziegfeld and Urban revived the Frolic on the New Amsterdam Roof in 1928, "Ziegfeld Revives Frolic Midnight Rendezvous Opens Tonight," *Morning Telegraph*, 29 December 1928, p. 5; but permanently closed the show in April 1929, "Ziegfeld to Close 'Midnight Frolic'" *New York Times*, 21 April 1929, p. 28. The early years of the Frolic, however, received the most substantial written and photographic documentation.

[20]For photographs see White Studio Key Books, no. 16,542 pp. 73, 77; no. 16,543 pp. 68, 81; no. 16,544, pp. 51, 60, 67, Billy Rose Theater Collection. Rennold Wolf, "'Midnight Frolic' In New Setting," *Morning Telegraph*, 4 October 1916, p. 5; "'Midnight Frolic' Is Lavish," p. 9.

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> it embraced the whole auditorium. This is as it should be since all the floors [sic] a stage in this home of the fox-trot.[21]

This erasure of a definite boundary between audience and performers would become a central theme in Urban's theater designs during the 1920s.

When the dance craze began to wane in 1917 Ziegfeld, Urban and stage director Ned Wayburn, turned to other devices to foster audience and performer interaction. Wayburn developed the telescope stage, a platform which could slowly extend out or retreat from the audience during a performance, projecting the stage scenery and actors into the audience space.[22]

The New Amsterdam Roof space made multiple references to nature (fig. 15). Urban's nature however, was not the wilderness of primeval landscapes untouched by man, but rather nature as mediated and shaped by people. The backdrop depicted flowers and trees cultivated in urns and shaped into bowers. Urban's setting represents a garden into which he inserted fragments of primitive, archaic historical forms. This

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[21]"'Midnight Frolic' Is Lavish," p. 9.

[22]See clippings in Ned Wayburn scrapbook, no. 21,066 including: "The Newest Ziegfeldian Revel Shows a Rubber-Tired Stage," *New York Evening Mail*, 31 December 1917; "Midnight Frolic Forces Rout General Depression," *New York Herald*, 31 December 1917, Billy Rose Theater Collection; Lewis Erenberg dates the "dance craze" to 1912-1916, Erenberg, 146-171; for waning of the "dance craze" and its effect on staging see Stephen Burge Johnson, 147. A search of the patent indexes, however, does not reveal any patent for a telescope stage under Wayburn's name.

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created a safe exoticism, at once familiar enough to be reassuring and yet different enough to indicate a realm outside everyday life. Urban's combination of nature and history at the New Amsterdam formed an important precedent for his later work of the 1920s as well as for John Eberson's atmospheric movie theaters, the first of which was completed in 1923. All of this, in turn, framed images of modernity which could range from reflections of the up-to-date and sophisticated audience in the glass runway or distorted in the crystal curtain, idealized views of the lower Manhattan skyline, or the desirable and modern chorus and actors as they performed on the dance floor, runway above the audience's heads or were transported out into the audience on the telescope stage.

The New Amsterdam Roof Garden: Sources

Urban's designs for the Frolic were rooted in his own earlier European architectural experience as well as his knowledge of modern European art and architecture. During his practice in Vienna he had designed three spaces which can be considered as forerunners of the Frolic space. The 1898 Rathauskeller, a huge restaurant in the basement of Vienna's City Hall was decorated by Urban together with the painters Heinrich Lefler and Alexander Goltz in a Secessionstil manner

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with Gothic and natural inspired motifs (fig. 1).[23] In 1906 Urban designed the Cabaret "Hölle" (Hell) space, and the Restaurant Paul Hofner (fig. 17).[24] Both the Höllensaal at the Cabaret Hölle and the main room of the Restaurant Paul Hofner had fairly bright color schemes, exotic stylistic references and floral and foliate inspired decorative patternings.

These interiors provide sources for Urban's use of historical fragments, strong color and geometric or floral patterning at the New Amsterdam Roof space. The Midnight Frolic space and backdrop, however, differ from the earlier Viennese designs in several important aspects (fig. 15). Similar to Urban's slightly later "Cocoanut Grove," the Viennese spaces included allegorical mural paintings, most likely by Urban's close friend, Heinrich Lefler. The earlier spaces, however, provided a smooth balance between the almost academic figurative murals and abstract patterning, whereas the Roof was dominated by abstract patterned motifs that only gradually drew together into a recognizable form. The Viennese interiors, furthermore, relied on fairly conventional materials, while the Frolic exploited the translucent and

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[23]"Rathauskeller," Portfolio 5; "Viennese Interior Colored Drawings," Vienna Period Box 2, Joseph Urban Collection; Carter and Cole, 24-30; *Der Wiener Rathhauskeller*; "Interiors by Joseph Urban," 1-2.

[24]"Hölle Cabaret 1906," "Hofner Restaurant 1906;" "Interiors by Urban," 3-4. "Restaurant Paul Hofner in Wien I," 21; "Das Cabaret 'Hölle'," 937; "Theater und Cabaret 'Die Hölle'," plates 97-99.

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reflective qualities of glass. Floral and foliate ornaments in the two Viennese spaces were geometricized and compartmentalized into panels or bands. This is in contrast with the exuberant and almost primitive quality of the allover patterning at the New Amsterdam Roof. The dominant stylistic reference in the earlier spaces is that of Archaic Greece. Urban largely achieves a sense of the exotic in these Viennese spaces through the use of unusual proportions and the subdued presence of other historical and natural motifs. In contrast, medieval, classical and Byzantine motifs are emphasized at the New Amsterdam roof and function as highlighted fragments which add a layer of fantasy to the space but are ultimately woven into the tissue of natural motifs (fig. 15). The Viennese spaces drew upon Gothic or Roman details, while the Midnight Frolic emphasized primitive motifs, ranging from Mycenean, Gothic and the Near East and an almost crude sense of craftsmanship evident in both the natural textures of materials and presence of painters' and sculptors' hands. The emphasis upon the abstract, glass, and the primitive, in both material and technique indicates Urban's knowledge of European Expressionism.

In Vienna, Urban had fully ascribed to Secessionstil aesthetics. The conceptual links between the Jugendstil/ Secessionstil and Expressionism are significant.[25] Of

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[25]Jill Lloyd, *German Expressionism: Primitivism and Modernity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 3-5, 13-18, 31.

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particular importance were the Jugendstil's renunciation of historicist styles and emphasis upon ahistoricism, the concern with a work of art's authenticity, art's potential for spiritual renewal, and the breakdown of hierarchies between high art and everyday objects.

Urban was, furthermore, undoubtedly aware of Viennese Expressionism prior to his departure for the United States in 1911.[26] In Boston, Urban enjoyed a reputation as an expert on the latest European theories of set design and on modern art. He wrote an article for the September 6, 1913 *Boston Evening Transcript* discussing the work of Russian painters Leon Bakst, best known for his set designs for Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes which toured Europe prior to World War I, Nicholas Roerich, who immigrated to the United States in 1920, and Sergei Sudeikin, who designed sets for Meyerhold. Urban's description of Sudeikin, whom he called a "cubist", echoed descriptions of his own work and reinforced the connection with Expressionism:

> Soudeikine [sic] has theories of color symbolism--of making the...decorative tone of each scene, both

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[26]One of his most prized possessions was a painting by Egon Schiele. His archives contain a program for the 1908 Kunstschau, "Kunstschau 1908," Vienna Period Box 5, Joseph Urban Collection. From 1908 until his immigration to the United States, he primarily worked as a set designer creating productions throughout Eastern Europe and Germany and could have seen Expressionist paintings exhibited in Berlin or other cities. Urban had a strong interest in art, demonstrated in his design of modern Austrian art installations for the Exposition Universelle 1900 in Paris and the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis as well as his long-time involvement with the Viennese art organization the Hagenbund.

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> physically and symbolically harmonious with the sentiment of the action which it supports. His chromatic scales he believes to be organically related to the musical gamuts of the piece in question.[27]

The Boston papers, and artistic circles, furthermore, reveal a lively interest, prior to World War I, in German and European art. The *Boston Evening Transcript* featured articles on the theater at Hellerau, where at that time the Swiss set designer Adolph Appia was creating his simplified three-dimensional sets with an expressive use of lighting, recent Berlin buildings as well as a photo of Bruno Taut's Steel Pavilion in the 1913 Leipzig Werkbund exhibition.[28] Urban

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[27]Josef [sic] Urban, "A Slav Art Invasion: Russian Decorative Painters and Their Influence on the Drama of Today," *Boston Evening Transcript*, 6 September 1913, sec. 3, p. 2. The article was written because of a possible forthcoming exhibition of Leon Bakst paintings, as well as the forthcoming production of Anna Pavlowa ballets featuring the stage designs of Boris Ainsfeld. Urban describes the art of Bakst as well as other Russian painters. Of Bakst Urban writes: "Russia faces eastward as well as westward, and Bostonians who first become acquainted with Bakst's art through his decorations at the Opera House and his designs and pictures at the proposed exhibition, will not be surprised to find in them a certain almost Oriental splendor. Critics call him primarily a colorist, though it is his capacity for disposition of effective masses--in other words for line--which makes him the power he is in the theatrical world. He is, in fact, as Greek as he is Oriental...Bakst employs a full rich palette of colors. He is a master of concentrated chromatic effects--of pure tones so interplayed that the sheen of pure gold seems to be only a proper part of the combination." His discussion emphasizes the color, symbolism and orientalism of these artists, characteristics which Peter Wollen also identifies as the key "modernist" ideas of Bakst, Matisse and Poiret, Wollen, 1-30.

[28]H. K. Moderwell, "Litmann: Master Theatre-Builder: The Architect Who Has Revolutionized German Playhouses," *Boston Evening Transcript*, 19 April 1913, sec. 3, p. 4; H. K. Moderwell, "Berlin's Modernist Architecture: A Sane New Development as Characteristic as Our Skyscrapers," *Boston Evening Transcript*, 10 May 1913, sec. 3, p. 2; "Building Arts

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continued to maintain strong European contacts during his first two years in the United States, exhibiting his theater designs in Paris at an International Exhibition of Stage Setting in the Palais Royale during the summer of 1913, and returning to Paris with the Boston Opera during the spring and summer of 1914.[29]

By 1915, Urban's designs began to reflect more Expressionist concerns. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Urban's use of glass throughout the New Amsterdam Roof space. Glass formed a predominant motif in the roof, crystal beads constituted the curtain and were shaped into trees as a part of the setting, the glass runway 10 feet above the dance floor, encircled the audience and was used as a major

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Old and New Contrasts in Architecture as Shown by the Leipzig Exposition," *Boston Evening Transcript*, 16 August 1913, sec. 3, p. 3; "New Stylized Scenery at Hellerau," *Boston Evening Transcript*, 6 November 1913, p. 17.

[29]R. L. Roeder, "Boston's Showing in Stagecraft: High Place for Urban, of the Opera, at Paris Show," *Boston Evening Transcript*, 4 June 1913, p. 21; H. T. Parker, "Boston's Opera Success in Paris," *Boston Evening Transcript*, 10 June 1914, sec. 3, p. 1. Urban's exact itinerary that summer is not known; he ended his travels in Italy, where he was stranded for a while due to the outbreak of World War I, "Lieblers Worried About Urban," *Morning Telegraph*, 4 August 1914, p. 4; also Carter and Cole, 67-69. His daughter, Gretl Urban recollected that Urban, still smarting from criticism regarding his role in the 1908 Kaiser Festzug, refused to visit Vienna and suggested that Urban went directly from Paris to Italy prior to his return to the United States, Gretl Urban tape 4, c. 1988, Production File Box 46, Joseph Urban Collection. Urban's visit, however, coincided with the 1914 Werkbund exhibition in Cologne, which opened in June of that year. It is impossible to know whether or not Urban visited Cologne, an easy trip from Paris, but he undoubtedly knew of the exhibition and its buildings.

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performance space (fig. 14, fig. 16). Every important performance space used a significant amount of glass, and suggested that glass was as an agent of transformation, turning trees into crystalline trunks, walkways into transparent floating spaces.

The significance given to glass and its use as an agent of transformation evokes German Expressionist art and architecture. This is particularly evident in the writings of Paul Scheerbart and the utopian projects and buildings of Bruno Taut, Wenzel Hablik and Hermann Finsterlin.[30] Glass, according to these writers and designers, could generate spiritual responses from people and could engender the desire for a utopian paradise. Glass was an agent of social and political metamorphosis and transformation that would ultimately result in a new utopian society.[31]

Urban's manipulation of glass in the Midnight Frolic, reveals at least a rudimentary knowledge of the literature and meanings associated with glass in German Expressionist art

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[30]Rosemarie Haag Bletter, "The Interpretation of the Glass Dream--Expressionist Architecture and the History of the Crystal Metaphor," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 40 (March 1981): 20-43; Lloyd, 51-61; Eugene Santomasso, "Wenzel Hablik the Schaffende Kräfte Folio," *Architectural Association Quarterly* 12, no. 3 (1980): 25-38.

[31]Paul Scheerbart, "Glassarchitektur", in *Glass Architecture by Paul Scheerbart and Alpine Architecture by Bruno Taut*, ed. D. Sharp, trans. J. Palmes, S. Palmer (New York: Praeger, 1972). Bletter demonstrates that German architects' use of glass draws upon a long tradition of associations, evoking the Temple of Solomon, the Alhambra, the Holy Grail, Bletter, "The Interpretation of the Glass Dream" 20-43.

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circles. It is highly probable that he knew of Taut's glass pavilion at the 1914 Werkbund exhibition and possible that he may have visited and seen the structure. While Urban probably regarded the use of glass as an appropriate material for a transformed space, there is no indication that he attached specific utopian or socialist meanings to it.

Urban's designs for the Frolic also suggested a sense of the primitive. Paint, wood, plaster and glass were treated to reveal their intrinsic textures and visual properties (fig. 15). This "truth to materials" suggested a craft rather than academic approach to design. The vibrant, abstracted patterning which covered almost every surface of the space, often revealed through the crudeness of brushwork or carving the painter's and sculptor's hand. This gave the space a vibrancy and immediacy that not only suggested an individual artistic presence but also an emotional immediacy. The Mycenean, Byzantine and Near Eastern motifs symbolized cultures where art was a direct and organic expression of life, and created a sense of exoticism, which removed the Frolic from the alienated modern world. Urban's use of primitive-inspired forms at the Midnight Frolic spaces were important for representing his own continued interest in the total environment, where every aspect of a space is significant and therefore designed. More importantly, it suggested an immediate and more emotionally direct

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environment, suitable to the activities of the Frolic.[32] Urban's formal and symbolic use of primitivism has strong roots in German Expressionism.

For German and Austrian Expressionist artists, primitivism was a broad category which generally referred to all nonclassical art. The concept of primitivism as used by both artists and theorists, such as Wilhelm Worringer, could incorporate African, Archaic Greek, Byzantine and Gothic cultures.[33] Art in such cultures, they felt, was not confined to pictures hanging on walls, but was experienced in objects of both everyday and ritual significance. Primitive societies, many believed, had more intuitive or "natural" responses to the world. Primitivist art-objects and environments not only broke down artistic hierarchies but provided a setting for a more emotionally expressive experience.[34]

At the Frolic space, primitivism existed side-by-side with modern materials, sets depicting modern events and sites, and a fast-paced script which implicitly celebrated the rush of modern life. For most Expressionists primitivism was not just a utopian or nostalgic yearning for a better life, but existed in a dialogue with urban modernity. They celebrated

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[32]Erenberg, 113-142.

[33]Wilhelm Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy*, transl. Michael Bullock (New York: International Universities Press, 1953), 14-15; Lloyd, 50-82.

[34]Lloyd, 67-82.

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the fast-paced mechanistic rush of the city but were wary of the alienation and anxiety of the modern individual as he/she confronts the crowd. While Expressionist art was often abstract, the human figure or the urban and natural environment always remained recognizable.[35] This abstraction, with its roots in primitive art, became an allegory of the modern condition. The theorist Wilhelm Worringer expressed this relation by demonstrating how the fear and alienation of primitive man in the face of what he/she perceived as a hostile and unknowable environment was best signified through abstract geometric pictorial forms which could freeze and control the unknown.[36] This found modern parallels in Georg Simmel's descriptions of modern urban crowds as potentially wild and dangerous if not controlled and disciplined by the rationale of urban life with its punctuality, exactitude and emphasis upon time.[37]

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[35]Expressionists not only took modern urban life as one of their primary subject matters but tried to use the experience of modernity to inform the techniques and forms used in their creations. In doing this, Expressionist painters, such as Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, distinguished themselves from other, modernist artists. Content and particularly spiritual or emotional content always remained primary, as opposed to the formalism and increasing nonfigurative abstraction of modernism. Lloyd, 81-82, 130-160. Donald Gordon, *Expressionism: Art and Idea* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 134-136; also discusses Expressionists' interest and ambivalence toward the modern city.

[36]Worringer, 23-25; 35-37.

[37]Georg Simmel, "Die Grosstadt und das Geistesleben," in *Jahrbuch der Gehe-Stiftung zu Dresden* (Dresden: von Zahn & Jaensch 1903), 187.

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The New Amsterdam Roof Garden: Cabaret

Urban's use of Expressionism was reinforced by the form and content of Ziegfeld's Midnight Frolic. European cabarets were a significant precedent for the Frolic both in terms of the type of entertainment, songs, topical skits and dances with a heavy emphasis upon the sometimes prurient display of the female and male body, as well as the format of rapid, fast moving numbers. French cabarets have long been acknowledged as a source for Ziegfeld.[38] Urban's designs for the Frolics, however, largely grew out of his own previous architectural and theatrical designs as well as his knowledge of cabarets in turn-of-the century Vienna, and probably those of Germany, and Hungary.[39]

Exoticism, with a strong underpinning of eroticism was a primary feature in the Frolic. The 1915 Frolic, the first which Urban designed sets for, was entitled "Nothing But

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[38]Stephen Burge Johnson, 121, 138; Oliver Sayler, *Our American Theatre* (New York: Brentano's, c. 1923), 248; "Revue: The Most Hopeful Sign on the Dramatic Horizon," *Current Opinion* 65 (November 1918): 303-04.

[39]As the designer of the 1906 Cabaret Hölle, Urban was undoubtedly familiar with other Viennese cabarets. His set design commissions took him all over "middle Europe" where he could have attended cabarets. "Joseph Urban: The New Force at the Opera," *Boston Evening Transcript* 6 April 1912 sec. 3, p. 3, quotes Urban as stating that he had worked for the Cologne Stadttheater, the Imperial theatres in Mannheim, Brunswick and Stuttgart, the Lessing Theater in Berlin, and that he had painted sets for *Bluebird* and *Sumurun* for the Königstheater in Budapest; he also claimed that he designed installations for international art exhibitions in Munich, Dresden, Dusseldorf, Berlin, Venice and Paris.

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Girls", and featured numbers including "My Tango Girl", a "Jungle Ball" and an "Apache Violinist" a reference not to Native Americans but a slang term for the rough urban underclass seen as being outside the constraints of middle class laws and morals.[40] Even Urban was perceived as being somewhat exotic due to his European origins. Newspaper articles stressed his Viennese training with his trips to Egypt and Russia, while early programs for the Follies and Frolic emphasized his foreign origins by stating "Scenery painted by Joseph Urban of Vienna."[41] The childlike was also emphasized in the events of the Frolic, balloon girls were a favorite and recurring motif during the first two years of the Frolic. Chorus members often used children's toys and

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[40]*Nothing But Girls* (Ziegfeld Midnight Frolic program) 29 March 1915, Billy Rose Theater Collection, Lincoln Center Library for the Performing Arts. The Apache originated as a dance form in Paris, and then became a term for the urban lower class. Maurice Mouvet introduced the Apache dance at Louis Marin's in New York City in 1910 and described it as "an intensely brutal dance of realism, of primitive passion; as a picture of life in the raw it has beauty and strength." Maurice Mouvet, *Art of Dancing* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1915), 38; also see Erenberg, 165. Ziegfeld used the "Apache" motif more than once, in 1921 he set Fanny Brice's solo "My Man" under a bridge on the Seine to illustrate, "the sordid realism of this Apache scene", "At the Ziegfeld Follies," *Theatre Magazine* 34 (October 1921): 211.

[41]For instance: "Joseph Urban of Vienna, who, associated with Leon Bakst, the famous Russian colorist, has emblazoned his fame on every opera house in Europe as the inventor and projector of a real innovation in everything that pertains to the garniture of the stage where great dance numbers and ornate characteristic scenery are required." "St. Louis Critics Lavish in Praise of Ziegfeld's 'Follies'," *The Morning Telegraph* 7 February 1916, p. 5. See also *Ziegfeld Follies 1915* program, Billy Rose Theater Collection, Lincoln Center Library for the Performing Arts.

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encouraged the audience, particularly male audience members, to participate in the events.[42] Yet the modern was not only evoked in the rapid pacing and staccato dialogue of the Frolic but also in the settings. Modern techniques and inventions were frequently highlighted. One number in the 1915 edition included radium girls, who glowed in the dark, the 1917 telescope stage was also seen as a modern innovation, while the 1917-18 Frolic, in honor of World War I, included chorus members performing in tanks.[43]

These features not only formed parallels with European cabarets but were seen by contemporary commentators as having a distinctly European slant. In commenting on the 1915 Follies, which had similar sets and features to the Frolic, the critic for the *Springfield Union* emphasized the similarity to European, particularly German, cabarets and art:

> The bizarre in scenery and the latest ideas in stage lighting arrangement can find no better partner than this type of entertainment, for the appeal of "The Follies" just like the appeal of the new stagecraft is to the elemental emotions.
>
> Mr. Ziegfeld may, in time, become one of the leaders in making over for American use the vast field of the new stagecraft which Europe is opening up to us. Max Reinhardt, it must be remembered, found his start and his inspiration in the Brille and then the Schall und Rauch of Berlin, midnight entertainments arranged by artists and actors and their friends, just for themselves, and later opened to an insistent public. Social satire, grotesque song and dance, opportunities for unknown

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[42]Erenberg, 217.

[43]"'The Spooky Girl'," p. 12; "Midnight Frolic Forces Rout General Depression,"; White Studio Key Books, v. 16,545, p. 185 for photograph of tank.

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> players who won their way by sheer ability, and all of it staged and presented from a unique angle of life..."[44]

Not only the direct reference to German cabarets, and the work of Max Reinhardt, but the use of the terms, bizarre and elemental emotions, signify a reference to German Expressionist art.

Expressionist artists used cabaret scenes as subject matter for their paintings and frequently participated in designing sets or even performing in cabarets. The cabaret, for many, mediated between the modern and primitive. A supremely urban entertainment, cabarets often starred "exotic" performers and encouraged childlike responses and interaction with the events being staged. The primitive in cabarets was a vehicle for a more direct audience interaction and for an erotic display of partially clothed female bodies. Yet, at the same time, cabarets were also modern, often containing topical commentaries on current events and politics and fast-paced, staccato dialogue in a sequence of non-related, short, rapidly staged skits, dances and songs. The pacing, subject matter and style of dialogue was felt by many critics to echo the rush and excitement of modern urban life.[45]

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[44]"Partners in "The Follies" for Next Season," *Springfield Union*, 13 February 1915, in Robinson Locke Scrapbooks #91, Billy Rose Theater Collection, Lincoln Center Library for the Performing Arts.

[45]Lloyd, 90-99.

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Cabaret for both the German Expressionists and for Ziegfeld's audiences negotiated the disjunction between the celebration of modern life and the desire for a utopian fantasy of a more expressive, emotional and sexual world which primitivism represented. The quick routines, together with topical humor and ironic wit which informed the writing of the Frolic and Follies often proffered an ironic critique of both modernism and the primitive. The rapid displacement of a jungle ball with World War I tanks can also be seen as a form of commentary in which neither vision is allowed to remain on stage for very long or predominate. Urban's sets and space for the New Amsterdam Roof incorporating modern materials and innovations into a space filled with primitive and natural motifs can be similarly understood. Yet the celebratory mood of the Frolic, indicates that the cabaret form ultimately was seen as transcending these differences and uniting them into a synthesis that included both the emotional directness and expressiveness of primitivism with the excitement and rush of modern life.[46]

The New Amsterdam Roof Garden: Social Context and Meaning

As historian Lewis Erenberg has indicated, roofs, such as the Midnight Frolic, were important social spaces. They offered escapist yet safe environments which allowed a release of

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[46]Erenberg, 114-142, 208-212.

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certain cultural tensions while still maintaining the status quo of social and sexual roles. Most typically the audience was encouraged to play, to act like children, as if the momentary escape back to childhood would mitigate the pressures of daily life.

Roofs were some of the earliest recreational spaces, outside the home, where men and women could mingle. Unchaperoned roofs let women engage in such formerly disapproved activities as drinking and dancing. The roofs allowed a mingling of the sexes and through the presentation of women in the chorus encouraged a new sexuality.[47]

Unlike earlier recreation spaces, roofs attracted a mixture of economic and social classes. Anybody, with the exception of African-Americans, could go to the roof regardless of class or ethnic background, as long as they could pay the rather expensive admission and drink charges. Roofs provided a place where strangers of different genders and classes could interact.[48] Yet at the same time, evidence indicates that this interaction was not an agent of major social change. Audience members usually stayed with their own parties.[49] Expensive admissions and drink charges limited

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[47]Ibid., 131-142, 212-227.

[48]Ibid., 81-87, 187.

[49]Ibid., 135-136.

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the actual economic diversity of audience members.[50] And if women were allowed new social roles they still were encouraged to act out these liberties within traditional roles of girlfriend or ultimately wife.[51]

In designing the Midnight Frolic Urban had to create an environment that was sufficiently unusual to convince patrons that they were outside the constraints of work and home. He also needed to create a space that was safe--slightly disorienting but not threatening. He needed to evoke a sense of the exotic yet have it be recognizable (fig. 15). Unusual color combinations, lights, overtly modern design and reflective surfaces signalled the roof's exoticism. Natural motifs and historical fragments made it recognizable.

The pairing of nature and history, primitivism and modernity created an uneasy synthesis that both described current conditions and tried to transform them into a better, more ideal vision of modern life. Modern forms were constantly mediated through references to a natural paradise or an idealized "primitive" world. In his discussion of late 19th and early 20th century designs, Walter Benjamin described the tendency of designers to mask new forms with archaic motifs and natural references in order to make them palatable to the consuming public. He called this masking

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[50]Ibid., 119. Erenberg reports that the Midnight Frolic and Cocoanut Grove, another Ziegfeld cabaret, were among the most expensive, charging covers between one and two dollars.

[51]Ibid., 212-227.

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"historical restitutions".[52] The use of natural and archaic forms at the Frolic initially accomplished two things. The references to nature and archaic history distinguished the space from the ornate and artificial Beaux-Arts historicism of traditional American theater and performance spaces without being dangerously and totally modern. Furthermore the pairing of nature and archaic history, returned the patron of the Frolic space, for however brief a time, to a mythic period when human beings were reconciled rather than alienated from their environment.

Rather than identifying "historical restitutions" as escapist, Benjamin described them as "wish images," depicting the aspirations of current society. At the Midnight Frolic, Urban's pairing of nature and history, primitivism and modernity can be understood as "wish images", describing an ideal society where technology is the source of fun and play rather than monotonous labor, where sexuality is as innocent as it was in the Garden of Eden, and where the city is an exciting urban paradise rather than a place of danger.

Benjamin recognized that while such "wish images" could provide a symbolic representation of people's utopian desires they could also degenerate into fetishes which advertised and glorified commodities. The Frolic with its potential as a

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[52]Walter Benjamin, "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century," in *Reflections*, ed. Peter Demetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: A Harvest/HBJ Book, 1978), 148; Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1989), 110-131.

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place to reconcile people with the city, to mix genders, classes and ethnic groups (although somewhat limited by the high admission fee), yet at the same time exploiting the female body and uncritically celebrating nationalism and American progress, occupied a mediating zone between fetish and representation. Because Urban returned to and frequently reworked the visual themes of the Frolic space, its potential as both fetish and representation is extremely significant for Urban's later work.

Caliban and Other 1916 Projects

Caliban: History and Description

After the collapse of the Boston Opera in 1914, the majority of Urban's commissions were for popular entertainments such as Ziegfeld's Follies and Frolics.[53] In 1916, however, Urban

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[53]Urban's success at the New Amsterdam generated other interior commissions. In December 1915, he received the job to design a semi-permanent stage set for the Strand Movie Theater in New York City. "Urban Couldn't Detect It," *New York Telegraph*, 1 December 1915; Rennold Wolf, "Urban Invades the Films," *Morning Telegraph*, 19 December 1915. Urban was paid an extravagant $5000 for the design, which also utilized the slightly more conservative Secession-inspired forms. The cubic forms and small scale repetitive patterning is similar to Josef Hoffmann's work as well as Urban's own installation designs for the Hagenbund. At the Strand, Urban continued some of the themes of the New Amsterdam Roof. He attempted to physically envelope the audience in the events on stage by creating a broad low opening with sides that curved and extended out toward the audience. Urban then "naturalized" the proscenium to suggest that it was not a typical picture box opening but instead was a terrace that the audience could physically enter into, looking out onto an exotic tropical sea. "Orders to Date," n.d., TMs, in "Adler," Production File

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designed the setting for Percy MacKaye's masque *Caliban* which was the culmination of New York City's celebration of the Shakespeare Tercentenary, commemorating the 300th anniversary of Shakespeare's death.[54] The idea for the tercentenary celebration originated at the 1914 National Convention of the Drama League, and with the consent of the government of New York City a celebration committee was formed and commissioned Percy MacKaye, known for his community pageants, to devise the masque.[55] While the organizers of the event wanted to attract a large and diverse audience their aim was to elevate public taste rather than appeal to popular standards.

Urban's design for the masque, therefore, was significantly different from his other work of this period. He created a stage using plastic sculptural forms and

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Box 1, "Strand Stage and Orchestra Set," Production File Box 31, "Strand Theater," Boston Opera File Box 4, Joseph Urban Collection.

[54]Information on *Caliban*, comes from two "Caliban" folders in Production File Box 4, Joseph Urban Collection and includes the program which contains a lengthy statement by MacKaye and description of the design by Urban, and drawings in Portfolio 23, Joseph Urban Collection. The masque was widely covered in magazines and local newspapers some of the more detailed articles include: "The Shakespearean Tercentenary Masque," *New York Tribune*, 21 May 1916, sec. 4, p. 2; "Miracles of Light in 'Caliban' Masque'," *New York Times*, 21 May 1916; "MacKaye Masque a Rare Spectacle," *New York Times*, 25 May 1916; and "Thousands See City's Shakespeare Masque," *The Evening Post*, 25 May 1916, p. 9.

[55]"The Shakespeare Tercentenary Celebration," *Theatre Magazine* 23 (February 1916): 66-67. Those active in the committee included Mary Porter Beegle, Mrs. Ben Ali Haggin, wife of the set designer, dramatic producers David Belasco and Daniel Frohman, financier Otto Kahn and Columbia University President Nicholas Murray Butler.

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ornamented with allegorical figures and archaic classical shapes (fig. 18). The sets largely relied upon pure colors and light. Absent from Urban's design were the patterning, floral and foliate motifs typical of his more popular theaters and night clubs.

MacKaye and the organizers planned *Caliban* as a community masque running for five nights between May 23rd and May 27th, involving over 1,500 performers including professional actors as well as amateurs drawn from local organizations and designed to attract an audience of 20,000 each night of the production. Urban reworked the 6,000 seat City College of New York Lewisohn Stadium at Amsterdam Avenue between W. 136th and 138th Streets to accommodate these large crowds. The masque included dramatic scenes, music, dance and pantomime. The main aim of the drama was as a:

> symbolic drama showing the growth of the art of the theatre through the ages, from the earliest civilized times. Its theme is the power of dramatized beauty over the spirits of men.[56]

The masque was loosely based upon Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*, with Prospero representing Shakespeare. It was divided into a prologue, three acts and a epilogue. Between the acts were three interludes performed by the local amateur groups. The three acts represented:

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[56]Ibid., 67. Interestingly this is comparable with the slightly later Soviet projects for mass theater, and both *Caliban* and the Soviet projects are important references for Urban's 1931 design for the Palace of the Soviets.

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> the conflict between Prospero, or the art of the theatre, and Caliban, or civilized man in the making. Caliban is pictured conspiring with Lust, Death and War, the three priests of Setebos, against Prospero, who by means of his art, is seeking to civilize him.[57]

The interludes depicted various periods of western civilization deemed significant for the art of theater. They were intended to:

> reveal...a pageant of...art, and in succession ritualistic glimpses of the art of theatre in its communal aspect during the three historical periods of antiquity, the Middle Ages and Elizabethan England...[58]

The vast scope of the pageant, with its *Gesamtkunstwerk*-inspired inclusion of diverse art forms, meant that many people, besides Urban and MacKaye were involved in the production. These partially included Mary Porter Beegle, Robert Edmond Jones, Richard Ordynski, Irving Pitchel, Grace Jenkins Anderson, Arthur Farwell and Louis Koemanich.[59]

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[57]"The Shakespearean Tercentenary Masque," sec. 4, p. 2.

[58]Ibid.

[59]Several of these people were important in Urban's subsequent career. Mary Porter Beegle, a specialist on community pageants became Urban's wife in 1917. Robert Edmond Jones was a noted avant-garde set designer and director who had studied informally with Max Reinhardt in Berlin during 1913 and upon his return worked with noted avant-garde troupe the Provincetown Players. Richard Ordynski, who had worked with Reinhardt prior to immigrating to the United States in 1914, worked with Urban on several projects including the Bandbox Theater in 1917 as well as working alongside Urban as stage director for the Metropolitan Opera. Today he is best remembered by architectural historians for his affair with Aline Barnsdall which Frank Lloyd Wright felt distracted Barnsdall from completing the master plan for Hollyhock House. Urban also remained in contact with Percy MacKaye, who during the production of *Caliban* introduced Urban to the work of his father Steele MacKaye, a significant theater designer, who created the Madison Square Garden theaters and the unbuilt

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Urban significantly transformed Lewisohn Stadium, adding a temporary section of seating to enlarge the capacity from 6,000 to 20,000, creating an immense stage at the 138th Street end and designing an arena playing space in the center. He created four playing areas to accommodate the four symbolic planes of activity within the masque (fig. 19).[60] These were the arena circle with a large hour glass in the center, known as the "Yellow Sands", used for the interludes with pantomime and dance by community and amateur performers; the cave of Setebos, located in the base of the stage on the arena level where Caliban battled with his baser human instincts; a middle stage where most of the drama unfolded, and a small inner stage behind the middle stage which represented the mind of Prospero/Shakespeare where scenes from Shakespeare's plays took place. Urban adapted the forms of classical amphitheaters for the arena circle, and Elizabethan theater architecture for the stage proper. The staging of the interludes were felt to be the most successful aspect of the play by critics. John Collier for *The Survey* wrote:

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spectatorium at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition, and an early exponent of large-scale communal theater plans, which such figures as Max Reinhardt and Samuel Rothafel later popularized.

[60]My use of four playing areas contradicts the written statements issued by Mackaye which list three areas: the cave, yellow sands, and inner stage. This neglects the middle stage featured prominently in other descriptions as a separate plane of activity. "The Shakespearean Tercentenary Masque," sec. 4, p. 2; "Miracles of Light".

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> But the impression, which will never fade, was of a ruddy or yellow sand on which the lights of a wizard pulsed in strong tides or hovered or lay still, and across which ineffable human beauty flowed, like slow waves, whirled, clashed, foamed or burned in the light of moon or of day, and died away, to be succeeded by other and other waves, in a dream-figure of gentle or impetuous mass-rhythm, of color daring and yet soft, and to the music of succeeding historical ages.[61]

The scale of the production was so vast that Urban described the commission as "theatre plus architecture."[62] Urban felt that it was his first opportunity in the United States to explore on a large scale his architectural ideas about theater:

> The two big tower constructions at either side of the stage give me an opportunity of designing a curve and tower architecture by means of which I am able to show one of the principal phases of my idea of decorative theatrical art--the idea of plasticity, so that I can show the main effect of real light and shadow."[63]

The towers, which held lights, each consisted of two giant male figures facing away from each other and with an arm resting on a pillar (fig. 18). The figures represented

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[61]John Collier, "Caliban of the Yellow Sands," *The Survey* 36 (1 July 1916): 343.

[62]"Caliban--1916," n.d., TMs, in "Caliban--Correspondence", Production File Box 4, Joseph Urban Collection, 1.

[63]"Miracles of Light,". Urban wrote: "This is the biggest piece of theatrical construction I have undertaken since I came to this country," and "It is more than theatrical work; it is theatre plus architecture." in "Caliban--1916," n.d., TMs, "Caliban--Correspondence," Production File Box 4, Joseph Urban Collection, 1. The statement also reveals Urban's involvement with the ideals of the new stagecraft, particularly the writings and designs of the Swiss stage designer Adolph Appia, particularly *La mise en scène du drame wagnérien* (Paris: Chailley, 1895); *Die Musik und die Inscenierung* (München: F. Bruckman, 1899). See also preface, footnote #37.

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variously primeval force or "strength without culture".[64] For the proscenium opening Urban designed a "cloudy curtain" which received a great amount of publicity prior to the opening and consisted of layers of gauze. At least one critic, however, remarked that the curtain did not live up to expectations and resembled painted doors which slid back to reveal the scenes.[65] Urban's watercolor elevation of the stage called for planting and proscenium murals depicting colossal ancient dramatic masques (fig. 18). Neither of these features were included in the actual construction (fig. 20). Most of the stage was unpainted, so that Urban could color it with the lights.

Caliban: Color and Light

Urban's designs for *Caliban* made emphatic use of color. He preferred brilliant, highly saturated colors in order to capture the vast audience's attention.[66] Each episode

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[64]The identification of these figures as symbols of primeval force or strength is somewhat at odds with their posture slumped over the pillars. Urban undoubtedly intended them to be read as emerging up from the block of the pillars and felt that their great height would contribute to the allegory: "They reach high into the dark night, disappearing as if they supported the sky above." In "Miracles of Light,".

[65]For the cloudy curtain see: "Permanent Theatre for Shakespeare Plays," *Theatre Magazine* 23 (May 1916): 336, and "'Caliban' Huge and Impressive," *New York Tribune*, 25 May 1916.

[66]"Caliban--1916," 1.

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received a dominant color, for instance, Urban used gold for the Egyptian scene, white for Greece and red for Rome. He implemented these color schemes by establishing the key color with tinted flood lights and employing costumes to form a brilliant contrast with the key hue.[67]

The use of color in *Caliban* varied from Urban's other set designs of the period. While he always utilized brilliant color for his sets, Urban tended to use color in conjunction with strong patterns in popular-oriented designs for Ziegfeld. *Caliban*'s color scheme drew upon Urban's earlier work with the Boston Opera, where he would utilize a single color as the key to a scene in order to express the mood of the action or the emotions of a significant character.[68] He employed color in *Caliban* to accomplish similar results. *The Evening Post*, described the Roman episode's coloristic effects:

> Red was the color that dominated the Roman scene. Cutlasses and short swords of Roman soldiers glittered red and wine-colored light played upon Caligula drawn in by slaves in a chariot, to witness a pantomime...Caliban...grasped the wand of Prospero to evoke magic visions for himself. But he conjured a Roman orgy in which the red figures of Caligula and his soldiery and the populace swarmed up the steps to the stage and were about to overcome Miranda, Ariel, and the Muses.[69]

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[67]"Miracles of Light,".

[68]K. M., "The Reopening Opera: How Urban Creates His Mimic Worlds," *Boston Evening Transcript*, 23 November 1912, sec. 3, p. 2.

[69]"Thousands See City's Shakespeare Masque," p. 9.

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Red, therefore, signalled the blood, lust, uncontrollable passions and the crowds of the Roman empire.

Urban's use of strong color schemes on such a large scale was innovative for the period. Because Urban was using new lighting equipment, adapted specially for the production, and working in a vast, open-air space, some of the effects were more successful than others.[70] The use of color and various color effects dominated media coverage of the play, both before and after its premier.

Most of Urban's color effects in *Caliban*, were not achieved through paint, but through a technically and visually imaginative use of colored lights. Urban's innovations not only affected theater design, but ultimately his use of light out-of-doors to dramatize large-scale areas of space had architectural applications as well. Urban had to design illumination for several areas including the main stage, arena and audience. He needed spotlights capable of travelling throughout the entire playing area and therefore able to throw beams up to 300'. These were housed in six light towers directly outside of the amphitheater, behind the highest row of seats. The hour glass of the playing arena housed arcs and spotlights to highlight special characters during the interludes. The decorative light towers flanking the stage provided the primary illumination for that area, while small

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[70]"'Caliban' Huge and Impressive," analyzes which color effects were successful.

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lights placed in the trees at the base of the stage provided special effects. The inner stage also had its own system of lights.[71] Urban also needed to illuminate the amphitheater so the audience could find their seats and read their programs prior to the commencement of the masque, yet shield the stage until the appropriate moment in the play. He achieved this by using small incandescent blue lights placed close to the floor in the aisles and corridors for the audience. He designed a light curtain to cloak the stage by directing the lights from the six amphitheater towers into immense reflectors on the stage.[72]

Caliban, stretched the limits of existing theatrical lighting technology. Traditional footlights, arcs and spots could not provide the flexibility of movement and range of space that Urban needed. Urban adapted lighting systems used for other purposes, such as navy search lights, for the play.[73] Urban, himself stressed the significance of this for his own work:

> This part of the problem interests me almost more than any other. The lighting for the hundreds of people, who will deploy upon the ground-circle, must be extremely powerful. A dozen arc-lamps would hardly make a pin-prick of light in this huge distance. So we are perfecting a scheme for the use of a new lamp of unprecedented power, which will provide a brilliant illumination, even to the further end of the ground circle 150 feet away. These light towers will also serve

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[71]"The Shakespearean Tercentenary Masque," sec. 4, p. 2.

[72]Ibid.

[73]"Miracles of Light,".

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> for the illumination of the stage. Footlights are out of the question; they would be too puny and insignificant on this scale of production. A large part of the effect of my scenery depends on the lighting.[74]

Urban's lighting system, in fact, was so powerful that the *New York Times* reported he had to get extra current from Con Edison for the duration of the play.[75]

The scale of *Caliban*, and the latitude Urban received as its designer, allowed him to experiment with light in ways that he had imagined, but not implemented, since his arrival in the United States in 1912. He spoke, with delight, to newspapers about the opportunity to play and paint with light on a large scale after years of being confined to using lights in tortured narrow spaces.[76] His use of light in *Caliban*, was more than painterly, however; in several instances it took on spatial, and even architectural dimensions. The two major sources of lights within the amphitheater were housed in architectural structures and received elaborate articulation, the hourglass of the yellow sands and the towers of the stage (fig. 18, fig. 19). Urban's use of an indirect system of light gave it an active, spatial, role within the play. The audience did not see the source of illumination, only the light itself. Light would move mysteriously throughout the arena, changing in color and intensity according to the

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[74]"Caliban----1916," 2.

[75]"Miracles of Light,".

[76]Ibid.

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dramatic needs of the scene. Light became an active character within the masque rather than a technical adjunct. This is clearly evident from Urban's description of one of the masque's most important events:

> I hope the prologue, with the mystic beauties of MacKaye's poem, will have its effect. After it comes the great moment--the birth of the stage--which is for me the most exciting moment, since all who come to the stadium will see what I have done. This is one of the most difficult light problems in the whole performance. The lights in the amphitheatre will gradually diminish and the stage lights will take their place.[77]

Light acted symbolically in this instance suggesting a "birth of theater" which coincided with the first illumination of the stage.

Urban's use of light in *Caliban* came from several sources and reveals his melding of elite and commercial culture. The use of a wide variety of types of light, including indirect light as well as the ability to "play" light throughout a space probably was inspired by Max Reinhardt's European productions.[78] His desire to use light symbolically was undoubtedly influenced by Adolph Appia's writings and set designs which stressed the ability of electric light to

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[77]Ibid.

[78]Reinhardt adapted and pulled together many technical achievements in terms of lights; he introduced an electric keyboard or "console" so that one person could control several batteries of lights simultaneously and play the console as if it were a musical instrument; he adapted the plaster cyclorama together with Mario Fortuny's system of soft, reflected light into the "Kuppelhorizont" or sky-dome lit by a wide floodlight of diffused light. J. L Styan, *Max Reinhardt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 118.

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present "inner" and "spiritual" concerns, and may also reflect Bruno Taut and Paul Scheerbart's interest in the spiritual properties of light.[79] Yet by 1916, the symbolic and communicative possibilities of light had also been explored in more commercial and popular settings. The 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco created a spectacular display of the latest advances in electric lighting.[80] Urban was obviously aware of these achievements as he recreated the Panama-Pacific exposition in a set for the 1915 *Ziegfeld Follies*.[81] By 1910, commercial advertisers had begun to explore the potential of colored electric signage to sell products, stressing the ability of colored lights to attract and command public attention.[82] Urban's expressive use of color and light in *Caliban* melded the exploration of light's symbolic potential by Appia, Scheerbart and Taut with popular and commercial applications of light. He built upon and expanded existing uses and theories about the

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[79]Appia, *La mise en scène;* and Appia, *Die Musik*. Appia's major set which demonstrated his ideas prior to World War I was the 1913 production of Gluck's *Orpheus and Eurydice*, staged in collaboration with Dalcroze at Hellerau. Bletter, "The Interpretation of the Glass Dream," 33-36; Scheerbart, *Glassarchitektur;* Sheldon Cheney, "The Space Stage," *Theatre Arts Monthly* 11 (October 1927): 764, 769.

[80]Timothy Rub, "Lighting Up the Town: Architectural Illumination in the Jazz Age," *Architectural Record* 174 (August 1986): 73.

[81]"Ziegfeld Follies 1915," Production File Box 37, Joseph Urban Collection.

[82]Leach, *Land of Desire*, 47-48; Electrical Advertising Has Only Begun," *Signs of the Times*, December 1912.

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communicative potential of these elements. This would become a significant component of his and others' architectural designs during the 1920s.

Caliban: Allegory

Throughout the masque and amphitheater MacKaye and Urban used figural sculptures or actors to portray abstract philosophical concepts, or allegories.

MacKaye wrote the masque to include characters such as lust, death, war and the spirit of time. He altered traditional characters taken from Shakespeare to make their allegorical function more apparent. The witch Sycorax, from *The Tempest*, became an earth spirit. Caliban, in MacKaye's masque, represents the primordial version of civilized man who responds to an evolving culture.[83] Urban provided architectural parallels which reinforced these allegories. He created a cave at the base of the stage, which visually suggested Sycorax and Caliban's earth-bound nature. Caliban's, and by extension humanity's, attempts to transcend these limitations were depicted by Urban in the allegorical sculptures of the towers (fig. 18). Urban described their significance:

> The towers right and left represent with the giant figures the primordial power of man. They reach high

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[83] "The Shakespearean Tercentenary Masque," sec. 4, p. 2.

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> into the dark night, disappearing as if they supported the sky above.[84]

And while the masque, according to the program, was concerned with "no definite period of time," images of time were ever-present in the theater, whether it was the character of the "spirit of time" or the sculptural hourglass.

The overall aim of the masque was to present: "the universality of human effort towards happiness...."[85] The allegorical elements of the masque, however, provided a strong negative presence. Lust, death, war and even time threaten the universality and happiness of art's aims. In fact, such allegories conflicted with the masque's main message, the transcendence and eternity of art. The entire performance constantly oscillated between the civilizing benefits of art and the demonic qualities of the mob.

Allegory, with its notion of the transitory quality of time, of ruin and decay, was a powerful force within the masque. This combined with the overall message of *Caliban* undoubtedly had a special resonance in 1916. Reviewers were particularly sensitive to the threat that death and war posed to the masque's call for universal culture in light of the ongoing events of World War I.[86] Urban, who had just received his American citizenship, also felt the hardships of

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[84]"Miracles of Light,".

[85]"Audience Becomes Part of Big 'Caliban' Masque," *The Morning Telegraph*, 25 May 1916, p. 5.

[86]"MacKaye Masque a Rare Spectacle,".

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war. A German-speaking Austrian, Urban undoubtedly encountered prejudice, particularly after the United States entered the war. Articles mentioning Urban declined during this period, and in 1918, his scenic artists, many of whom were European, were arrested and held for a brief period of time as spies for sketching on a Boston area beach.[87]

Caliban: Audience

While the events of World War I at times overshadowed and gave *Caliban* a greater sense of urgency, the overall aim of the show was not primarily as a plea for peace, but to promote mass interest in high culture. The program stated:

> ...since the drama is above all a social art, this has meant the arousing and focusing of all folk-arts, the enlivening of the sense of beauty and the sharpening of the desire for expression throughout the community. A right celebration could not be a matter of words or ceremonies or any mere amenity of praise. It must be democratic and civic, it must allow each to speak in his own voice and must draw all, most and least, into a supreme, communal demonstration.[88]

Caliban was planned by MacKaye and the New York Shakespeare Tercentenary Celebration Committee for a large, mass audience.

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[87]"Miracles of Light," stated: "Mr. Urban a native of Vienna, who has recently become an American...." Rennold Wolf, "Urban's Artists Mistaken for a Squad of Foreign Spies," *The Morning Telegraph*, 14 March 1918, p. 4, concluded the article: "Mr. Urban was born an Austrian, but he is a three-ply, all-wool American in spirit."

[88]Program for *Caliban*, "Caliban," Production File Box 4, Joseph Urban Collection.

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Various civic groups, settlement houses and community organizations were involved in order to bring a diversity of people to the play. The cast of around 1,500 people came from the professional Broadway and Yiddish Theaters, as well as from neighborhood organizations such as the Henry Street Settlement.[89] Some of the best seats in the amphitheater were set aside for the less affluent at the fairly low price of 25 to 50 cents.[90]

Urban responded to this social agenda by using the ancient theater, a theater type from the historical period most sympathetic to these aims, as his source for the staging and amphitheater design. He believed that this would bring the play to the audience and hold their attention.[91] Urban had previous experience with staging large-scale urban pageants. In 1908, he designed the decorations for the Kaiser Festzug, an urban pageant in honor of the Austrian Emperor which used imagery from Roman imperial triumphs. Biographical statements also suggest that Urban may have been involved with Max Reinhardt's work prior to his departure for the United States.[92] Yet Urban had never previously emphasized

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[89]"The Shakespearean Tercentenary Masque," sec. 4, p. 2.

[90]"Shakespeare Masque Greatest of Spectacles," *The Sun*, 21 May 1916, p. 4.

[91]"Caliban--1916," 1.

[92]The major large-scale pieces Reinhardt was working on during this period were *Oedipus*, *Everyman* and *The Miracle*. Urban implied that he had worked with Reinhardt when he claimed that he painted sets for *Sumurun* for the Königstheater in Budapest,

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specifically ancient forms and linked them with social ideals. This pairing in *Caliban* is significant for Urban's later, 1920s writings and designs concerning the ideal theater. It was also a fairly early exploration of these ideals in general. Max Reinhardt initially explored some of these concerns in his 1910-11 productions of Greek plays performed in circus buildings, using the large circus arena as the stage. Reinhardt did not formalize these ideas architecturally, however, until he and Hans Poelzig converted Berlin's Zirkus Schumann into the Grosses Schauspielhaus in 1918.[93] Urban's use of an oval plan was probably indebted to the writings of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. A 1913 article in the *Boston Evening Transcript*, credited Urban with always beginning his preparation for designing a set by reading Goethe.[94] In a description of the Roman Verona Amphitheater in his *Italian Journeys*, Goethe stressed the ability of the

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"Josef Urban: The New Force," sec. 3, p. 3; the chronology, probably written much later in his career or even by his wife after his death, claims that Urban worked with Reinhardt on *The Miracle* in 1910, "Chronology." Other than these references there is no strong evidence of Urban's involvement with Reinhardt productions from this period. Urban, however, knew several people who designed sets for Reinhardt including the Viennese artists Emil Orlik and Alfred Roller, as well as his brother-in-law and close collaborator Heinrich Lefler. Heinrich Huesmann, *Welttheater Reinhardt* (München: Prestel Verlag, 1983), catalogue entries, 386, 411, 497, 631, footnote 81.

[93]Huesmann, 31.

[94]"Urban Forecasts His Work," *Boston Evening Transcript*, 4 October 1913, sec. 3, p. 6.

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oval, which he called a crater, to satisfy innate audience needs to see a performance:

> To satisfy this universal need is the architect's task. By his art he creates as plain a crater as possible, and the public itself supplies its decoration. Crowded together, its members are astonished at themselves. They are accustomed at other times to seeing each other running hither and thither in confusion, bustling about without order or discipline. Now this many-headed, many-mouthed, fickle, blundering monster suddenly sees itself as united as one noble assembly, welded into one mass, a single body animated by a single spirit. The simplicity of the oval is felt by everyone to be the most pleasing shape to the eye, and each head serves as a measure for the tremendous scale of the whole.[95]

Urban and MacKaye tried to make the Shakespearean masque and Greek architecture accessible to a diverse public through numerous devices. If the design of the amphitheater was inspired by ancient theater architecture it also resembled a circus, a more popular and accessible image which many newspapers used.[96] Urban felt that the inclusion of a number of comedy scenes and the pageantry of the interludes would appeal to a broader public.[97]

The masque received mixed reviews. The attendance was not as high as the organizers hoped. Opening night only attracted about 10,000 spectators, about half of the number

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[95]Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Italian Journeys*, trans. W. H. Auden and Elizabeth Mayer (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1982), 35-36. The book was originally published in three volumes in 1816, 1817 and 1829.

[96]"The Shakespearean Tercentenary Masque," sec. 4, p. 2, reported: "From a spectacular standpoint the Masque might be described as a one-ring circus with a big sideshow in the main tent."

[97]"Shakespeare Masque Greatest of Spectacles," p. 4.

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which could be accommodated. Some critics, including Clayton Hamilton writing for *Vogue*, felt that MacKaye was too serious in his attempts to capture the attention of a large crowd and should instead study the tactics of P. T. Barnum, George M. Cohan or the organizer of Coney Island's Luna Park.[98] Others felt that the masque was successful as a spectacle, impressing the eye, but unsuccessful as a drama which should involve the emotions and intellect.[99] Still others were enthralled by the play and its staging, feeling that *Caliban* engaged the modern audience and instilled its message:

> The widening, rising fringe of gaily attired moderns in the Stadium unconsciously carried out and supplemented the historical sequence of the spectacle, so that...the heart of antiquity and the pulse of history throbbed by turns against the living body of the Twentieth Century.[100]

The structure, intentions and staging of *Caliban*, were described and analyzed for months before and after the production. While its ultimate significance for the history of American theater has yet to be examined, it played a key role in the development of Urban's architecture and thus contributed to American architecture in the 1920s. Urban's use of lighting effects, and his theories concerning the ideal theater were initially articulated in this design. His architectural application of color, important for his later

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[98]Clayton Hamilton, "Scene on the Stage," *Vogue*, 1 July 1916.

[99]"'Caliban' Huge and Impressive,".

[100]"Audience Becomes Part," p. 5.

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1930s designs, and his use of allegory, later seen in the 1927 Ziegfeld Theater, 1928 International Magazine Building and the 1926-27 designs for the Metropolitan Opera House, also are strongly indebted to *Caliban*.

Century Theater and Cocoanut Grove

Urban's most lucrative job during 1916 was the renovation of the New Theater into the Century Theater for Florenz Ziegfeld and Charles Dillingham, Jr.[101] Urban's goal was to transform Carrère & Hastings' building for serious drama and opera into a musical comedy palace. The plans called for the redecoration of the auditorium and lounges as well as the creation of a roof garden. Urban's interventions in the auditorium were minimal, his redecoration of the lounges, however, altered the stately neoclassical dignity of the original building into the festive gaiety of a musical comedy theater. This was largely achieved through Urban's new color scheme of turquoise blue and golden yellow. The Century is

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[101]During 1916, Urban also received a commission to renovate the Knickerbocker Theater, at 38th Street and Broadway, New York City. While Urban received a fee of $4000 for the work, the exact nature and appearance of this project is unknown because neither Urban's production files nor the newspapers contain information about the job. "Orders to Date" lists for June 1916 to June 1917 "Knickerbocker 4000.00". The renovated structure, which opened in October 1916, was noted for its sophisticated and subtle color scheme of sapphire blue and grey, as well as it elaborate lighting system. "'Music Master' Revived in New Knickerbocker," *New York Herald*, 11 October 1916, p. 5.

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the first documented instance of Urban's use of color in an interior to evoke a suitable mood for the activities programmed for the space.[102]

The exterior of the newly renovated theater also received unusual treatment. The building, located at Central Park West and 62nd Street was outside of the traditional theater district. Dillingham and Ziegfeld mounted one of the largest electric signs in the city on the exterior, advertising the name of the theater and its current production. They then further illuminated the exterior with floodlights at night.[103] This, they probably hoped, would counteract the out-of-the-way location, and attract potential customers to the building. While there is no indication that Urban was involved with this illumination and sign scheme, his familiarity with the use of large scale signs and exterior lighting to call attention to a building is important for his later designs.

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[102]For information on the Century Theater see: "Comic Opera Comes To Century's Stage," *New York Times*, 6 November 1916, p. 9; "'Century Girl' Has a Galaxy of Talent," *The Sun*, 7 November 1916, p. 4; Rennold Wolf, "Century Opens With the 'Century Girl'," *The Morning Telegraph*, 5 November 1916; "'Century Girl' Greets First-Night Playgoers," *The Morning Telegraph*, 7 November 1916; "Century Theatre" Production File Box 5, Joseph Urban Collection.

[103]"Comic Opera Comes," p. 9.

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Cocoanut Grove: History and Description

The creation of a rooftop cabaret occupied most of Urban's time on this job. The cabaret, named "Cocoanut Grove" after the Palm Beach, Florida night club, was Urban's most elaborate pre-1920s night club space. The commission involved reconstructing the original roof garden, which consisted of a small pavilion occupying only a corner of the roof top and large open roof deck, into a glass enclosed performance space which occupied almost all of the roof area.[104]

The overall format of the space was similar to the New Amsterdam Theater Roof with a shallow stepped stage and proscenium, a large flat area which could be used for dancing and performances, and audience space consisting of tables and

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[104]Because Urban was not a licensed architect at this time, Carrère and Hastings, the original architects of the building, served as the architects of record for the construction, creating working drawings and filing necessary documentation with the city for permits, "Century Theatre" and Century Roof" files, Production File Box 5, Joseph Urban Collection; see also Carrère and Hastings Collection, Avery Architectural Library. The working files for Carrère and Hastings, unfortunately in many instances were disposed of prior to their acquisition by Avery, but the office index lists several files for the 1916-17 renovations. For photographs of the roof garden prior to Urban's renovations see "Century Theater Files" #1 - 3, Theater Collection, Museum of the City of New York. Newspapers reported that Ziegfeld and Dillingham initially planned to spend at least $50,000 on the roof, by November they had spent over $300,000 for the theater and roof. For reconstruction of the roof garden see: "Century Can Hold $5,000," *Variety* 44 (6 October 1916): 1; "Century to Begin Anew With a Show of Beauties," *The World*, 5 November 1916, M9; Wolf, "Century Opens,". Urban billed for $32,200 for the theater, set design and roof, "Orders to Date".

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seats (fig. 21).[105] Unlike the New Amsterdam, tables for audience members were placed on broad, tiered, semi-circular platforms to provide a better view of the performances.[106] The allusion to a tropical grove was suggested by painted blue and green palm trees with bright tropical birds on a gold leaf background. Murals by the Viennese artist Rudolph Kirchner, featuring women in sea shore scenes, flanked the stage along with real palm trees. Theater critic Rennold Wolf described the effects that Urban created in the space:

> In it he has sought to produce the atmosphere of a tropical garden - an arbor of majestic palms enlivened by the chattering of birds and giving off the romantic suggestion of a wonderful Southern night.[107]

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[105]Descriptions of the space can be found in "The Cocoanut Grove," *The Sun*, 14 January 1917, p. 3; Rennold Wolf, "Cocoanut Grove Opens Joyously," *The Morning Telegraph*, 20 January 1917; "The Cocoanut Grove," *New York Tribune*, 14 January 1917, sec. 4, p. 3. Descriptions and photographs of the space can also be found in "Cocoanut Grove Completes the Century and Gives Theatregoers New Play Ground," *New York Herald*, 14 January 1917, sec. 3, p. 8; "Cocoanut Grove Doing a Record Business, *New York Hotel Review* 11 (3 February 1917): 34-35. All of these description seem to be drawn from a common source, most likely a press release describing the space and generated by the Ziegfeld Dillingham organization. Photographs of the Grove also appear in J. H. Phillips, "The Review of Interiors: Interiors for Dining and Dancing," *Architectural Review* 10 (January 1920): 19-22, and White Studio Key Book, 16,543, p. 197, Billy Rose Theater Collection, Lincoln Center Library for the Performing Arts.

[106]"The Cocoanut Grove," *The Sun*, p. 3. This seating arrangement, of course, looks forward to the tiered table arrangement at the Rainbow Room, Rockefellar Center.

[107]Rennold Wolf, "Opening of the Cocoanut Grove," *The Morning Telegraph*, 14 January 1917, p. 1.

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The tropical birds, seemingly swaying painted palm fronds and blue, green and gold color scheme all contributed to this fantasy of the south.

Cocoanut Grove: Artificial Paradise

While the Cocoanut Grove followed the general format of the Midnight Frolic in both the arrangement of space and type of performances, it was felt to differ from the New Amsterdam by being more continental or European in orientation as well as in the type of acts hired.[108] And while the decorative motifs were similar to those of the New Amsterdam Roof in both color and the emphasis on broad and somewhat abstract patterning, the overall tenor of the Cocoanut Grove decorative scheme was distinct. No allusions to history or historical motifs appeared in the decorations, rather natural motifs suggested a pre-historic paradise (fig. 21). The revues shied away from the topical commentary of the Frolic and focused more upon European and exotic acts. The first review, *Dance and Grow Thin* featured such numbers as "Way Down South", "Blue Danube," and "Hindoo" performances.[109] The second

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[108]"Ziegfeld to Conduct Shows on Roof of Century Theatre," *The Morning Telegraph*, 1 August 1916, p. 4, reported that the Century roof would be different from the Frolic because it would have European varieties as its motif, see also: "The Century Girl," *New York American*, 5 November 1916; "'Century Girl' Greets First-Night Playgoers,".

[109]"Dance and Grow Thin," *Variety*, 26 January 1917, p. 13.

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performance, *A Night in Spain*, was even more removed from topical commentary or visions of New York City. The overall emphasis was on the exotic origins and atmosphere of the space. The gold leaf was imported from Germany and shipped by submarine.[110] The palm trees were imported by train from Florida.[111] Even the name "Cocoanut Grove" evoked the famous Palm Beach night club, not as a literal reproduction, but rather as a fantasy of an ideal tropical resort:

> Cocoanut Grove at Palm beach furnished the inspiration and the name for the Urban achievement, but the latter is in no sense a reproduction of the Florida grove. As a matter of fact the artist has never seen the Palm Beach Cocoanut Grove, and in his treatment of the Century roof he has tried very earnestly to forget anything he may have heard concerning the details of the original.[112]

This emphasis upon the exotic, even the fantastic, was intended to create a unique aura for the space that differentiated it from all of its potential rivals.[113] Many newspapers described the space as a "resort," suggesting that a night at Cocoanut Grove was an escape from the cares and pressures of the city. This was reinforced by the fact that

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[110]"Cocoanut Grove Gold Leaf May Come High", *The Morning Telegraph*, 18 December 1916, p. 10.

[111]Rennold Wolf, "Real Palms Promised," *The Morning Telegraph*, 20 December 1916, p. 4.

[112]"The Cocoanut Grove," *The Sun*, p. 3. Ironically, despite this disclaimer, Urban was quite successful at evoking a Palm Beach style as he spent a great deal of time in Palm Beach during the 1920s designing several night clubs and houses in the city.

[113]"The Cocoanut Grove occupies a unique place among the theatrical entertainments of the city...," "Cocoanut Grove a New Stop for Sun Dodgers," *The World*, 19 January 1917, p. 9.

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the incredible views of the city offered through large glass windows on three sides, were cut off by curtains of silk pongee.[114]

If the roof garden functioned as a place of escape for the audience, seemingly it was one in which the artifice of the atmosphere and events of the space were frankly acknowledged. The extensive amount of gold leaf was frequently referred to in quips about the luxury and expense of the space. The *New York Herald* commented that there was so much gold, that green dollar bills clashed with the ensemble and suggested that patrons pay in gold coins.[115] The *New York Tribune* reported:

> But it might be said that the place has been gold-leafed an inch at a time, and there are a good many thousand square feet. There are parrots and flamingoes and gorgeous what-you-call-ems painted against the gold, and when Mr. Urban's inverted light is shed upon them it will be possible for Reisenweber's to charge sixty cents for a glass of water and get away with it.[116]

The artificiality of the grove permitted the sense of escape and uninhibited environment that roof gardens were supposed to

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[114]"Natural colored pongee silk curtains for the windows, with overshades of the same color, will exclude foreign light, leaving the lighting of the grove to an elaborate system of indirect illumination...," "Cocoanut Grove Completes the Century and Gives Theatregoers New Play Ground," *New York Herald*, 14 January 1917, sec. 3, p. 8.

[115]"'Laugh and Grow Thin' Opens Cocoanut Grove," *New York Herald*, 19 January 1917, p. 6.

[116]"The Cocoanut Grove," sec. 4, p. 3. Reisenweber's was a popular restaurant and night club located on Columbus Circle which Ziegfeld and Dillingham hired to manage the food and drink concession at the Cocoanut Grove.

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encourage. The novelty, fantasy and exoticism offered a contrast to routine and mundane rituals of work and home. This was best expressed in a review of *A Night in Spain* by Alan Dale:

> Somewhere to go. At last! We needed the Cocoanut Grove. With nothing on earth to do but go home--think of it, home!--after our evening at the play, we were in a bad way. Ever since the wild, pulsing life that corset and whiskey advertisements, gorgeously illuminated gave to Broadway, was snuffed out we had nowhere to go but bed. Bed!
>
> The Cocoanut Grove is open to all. You just go there, sit at little tables and dance until the "lid" is put on. By that time you have speared a semblance of jollity, and--home won't seem to frightfully dreadful, don't you know.
>
> The very quintessence of illumination may be observed at this gorgeous retreat for the home-weary. Everything that corset, whiskey and lingerie did for Broadway in the way of gaiety is concentrated at the Cocoanut Grove into one vast radiance.[117]

If, similar to the Midnight Frolic, the Cocoanut Grove offered a sense of escape, the terms of that escape were different. The space and activities of the Cocoanut Grove were completely cut off from any reference to the outside world. All references to the city, whether it was the actual view of the surrounding city and park or painted backdrops representing the urban landscape, were eliminated. Current events and politics were largely absent from the performances. At the Cocoanut Grove, Ziegfeld, Dillingham and Urban conjured up an edenic paradise without disconcerting references to history or modernity. The paradisiacal setting of the club evoked a

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[117]Alan Dale, "Cocoanut Grove Opens with Delightful Spanish Revue," *New York American*, 8 December 1917.

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sense of nature outside of current history. Yet the club was used for one of the most fashionable of contemporary entertainments. Walter Benjamin labelled the contrast of nature and contemporary objects "ur-history", stating that it revealed the origins of the present moment. Benjamin based this term on the German author Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's "urphaenomen", archetypal plant or animal forms, such as the leaf structure, that reveal the essence of biological life. For Benjamin, "ur-history" the sharp juxtaposition of nature with current, historically-determined, objects, could be used critically to reveal the transitoriness and primitivism of modern life, or could uncritically affirm the "myth" of modern progress.[118] References to nature at the Cocoanut Grove could be seen as a critique of theater and its entertainments which juxtaposed the edenic setting with fashionably dressed modern people enjoying one of the most current and transient of entertainments. This revealed the fleeting nature of commodities and the obvious artificiality of the specific event and entertainment in general. While Urban's use of nature was not a conscious attack on capitalism, there was a strong sense of irony evident in almost every discussion of the Cocoanut Grove. The frank acknowledgement of the artificiality of the space, the expense to construct it, the almost "clip-joint" prices, and particularly the frenzy of its

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[118]Benjamin elucidates this idea in the "Passagen-Werk", volume V, *Gessamelte-Schriften*, for the best explication of this see: Buck-Morss, 47, 58-77.

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clients to escape from home, revealed in the Alan Dale quote, almost become a critique of the night club's activities. Yet for many, the edenic setting and modernity of the event did not seem disjunctive but instead flowed seamlessly together, creating a new myth celebrating the notion of human progress.

The Cocoanut Grove was an ambiguous space. While artificiality was acknowledged, the audience ultimately colluded with Ziegfeld and Urban in seeing this setting as "natural". The owners of the Cocoanut Grove occupied an uneasy position ackowledging its commercial purpose of selling drinks, food and entertainment to a consuming public hungry for the excitement of the continually new but sustaining the myth that this was some sort of natural resort outside the cares and concerns of everyday life.

Ironically, the Cocoanut Grove was as transient as the entertainments it housed, existing only for a year. At the close of the first season, the night club ran afoul of city ordinances, losing its liquor license because the entrance to the club was within five hundred feet of the Ethical Culture Society's school.[119] The complaints from the Ethical Culture Society opened a series of investigations by the buildings department which revealed a number of structural problems that had to be addressed before Ziegfeld could continue to use the

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[119]"Dry Season for Cocoanut Grove," *The Morning Telegraph*, 31 May 1917, p. 12.

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Grove space.[120] Unable to make a profit, Ziegfeld lost the lease to the space and by 1918 Morris Gest and Elliot Comstock took over the theater building.[121] While Ziegfeld's Cocoanut Grove was short-lived, the decorations and name of the space evidently remained prestigious. Urban's decorations remained intact until at least 1920, and the new theater administration hired him, on at least one occasion to design sets for the roof.[122] Gest and Ziegfeld furthermore had a pitched battle concerning the rights to the name "Cocoanut Grove". Gest ultimately relinquished his claim, after a public battle in the newspapers, to the title while only slightly altering the name to the "Century Grove."[123]

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[120]Rennold Wolf, "F. Ziegfeld, Jr., Replies to Morris Gest's "Pooh-Pooh," *The Morning Telegraph*, 16 March 1918, p. 4.

[121]"Century Under New Control," *The Morning Telegraph*, 1 January 1918, p. 12.

[122]"Century Grove is Christened," *The Morning Telegraph*, 8 April 1918, p. 10: reported that the decorations were essentially unchanged. They were not altered until yet another management took over the space in 1920, see: Leo Marsh, "Century Roof to Close," *The Morning Telegraph*, 14 November 1920, p. 4. Urban evidently designed a setting for the 1919 Midnight Whirl at Century Grove, see: Rennold Wolf, "'Midnight Whirl' Really Dazzling," *The Morning Telegraph*, 29 December 29, 1919, p. 12; and "Orders to Date."

[123]Rennold Wolf, "Morris Gest Defiantly Hurls a "Pooh-Pooh" at Ziegfeld," *The Morning Telegraph*, 13 March 1918, p. 4, and John H. Rafter "Cocoanut Grove War Ended," *The Morning Telegraph*, 1 April 1918, p. 4.

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Projects 1916 - 1920

Between 1916 and 1920 Urban received commissions for several small theater and night club interiors. He used a variety of forms for these interiors, at times harking back to his earlier work in Europe, at times quoting current European motifs, and at times buildings upon his own recent work in a manner which foreshadowed his designs of the 1920s. These projects reveal the stylistic fluidity of the period and the rich underpinning of forms, symbols and ideals that informed American architecture of the 1920s.

Urban designed the "Paradise Room," a night club for Reisenweber's at Columbus Circle, in 1916 (fig. 22).[124] Unlike Urban's earlier interiors with their pervasive floral and foliate patterns, the Paradise was dominated by strong geometric panels of color. Floral motifs occur only in a few

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[124]"Orders to Date" documents that Urban received a $3000.00 fee for this commission. Reisenweber's ran the food and drink concession in the Cocoanut Grove, see "New Reisenweber's Open," *The Morning Telegraph*, 31 December 1916, p. 8; "Attractions at Reisenweber's," *The Morning Telegraph*, 18 February 1917, p. 8; "Grace Field Opens at Paradise," *The Morning Telegraph*, 4 March 1917, p. 8; "Reisenweber's Now Scene of Much Entertainment," *New York Hotel Review* 11 (30 December 1916): 40; Phillips, "The Review of Interiors," 19-22 which includes a photograph of the space; the post card collection, "New York City, Restaurants," at The New-York Historical Society, includes a post-card depicting the space as well. Most of the murals were created by Rudolph Kirchner, a Viennese artist who also worked on the Century Theater. Painted decorations of floral patterns, theatrical masques and elephants, however, were by Urban. The gently arched ceiling of the space consisted of a lattice pattern which probably housed a indirect lighting system.

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discrete murals or in actual potted plants mounted on stands similar to Urban's earlier Viennese furniture designs. Paradise, obviously inspired by the geometries and details of Urban's earlier classically-based European designs and the tonalities, austerity and attenuated proportions of the current work of the Wiener Werkstätte, was a strikingly modern interior. The space proved to be immensely popular and for a night club, fairly long lasting. The Urban decorations remained intact from December 1916 through to December 1920.[125]

In June 1917, Klaw & Erlanger commissioned Urban to redecorate and overhaul the Liberty Theater on 42nd Street, New York City.[126] Written description indicate that it was

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[125]James Fenimore Lee, "Hotels, Restaurants, Cabarets: Reisenweber's Rejuvenated," *The Morning Telegraph*, 17 October 1920, p. 8.

[126]Urban also redecorated the Bandbox Theater in early 1917. He and Richard Ordynski, a friend and the stage director of the Metropolitan Opera, formed a production company to stage intimate moderns plays. Their first and only production was Ossip Dymow's play *Nju*. Correspondence indicates that Urban redecorated the auditorium to make it appropriate for the play. He also installed a small exhibition of his sketches and designs for stage sets in the lounge. See "Bandbox Theater" file, Production File Box 2, Joseph Urban Collection; "Nju" clippings file, Billy Rose Theater Collection, the Lincoln Center Library for the Performing Arts; Rennold Wolf, "Urban and Ordynsky [sic] Produce," *The Morning Telegraph*, 6 March 1917, p. 4; Rennold Wolf, "Joseph Urban and 'Nju'" *The Morning Telegraph*, 11 March 1917, p. 4, Rennold Wolf, "Urban Sketches at the Bandbox," *The Morning Telegraph*, 26 March 1917, p. 4.

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an elaborate and sophisticated interior.[127] Newspapers reported that Urban used a color scheme of grey, gold and green. Of particular interest was the way in which Urban used grey in the auditorium. By creating graduated shades ranging from a battleship gray in the lower part to a white in the dome, Urban manipulated color to achieve the spatial effect of added height. This use of color to create spatial effects looks forward to Urban's color schemes at the New School, Atlantic Beach Club and Century of Progress Exposition during the early 1930s.

Publicity for the theater opening capitalized on the drawing powers of Urban's name for the first time. Newspaper articles created and then heightened a public desire on the part of the potential audience to view both the new play and theater by incorrectly stating that this was Urban's first architectural commission in the United States. It was suggested that by buying a ticket to the Liberty you were buying an opportunity to experience a new aspect of Urban's work.

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[127]The redecoration included a new paint scheme, curtain and proscenium treatment and a mural series based on Urban's earlier Viennese fairly tale illustrations. Urban received a fee of $5000 for his work, "Orders to Date". Rennold Wolf, "Liberty Theatre Will Be Urbanized This Summer," *The Morning Telegraph*, 29 June 1917, p. 4; Burns Mantle, "'Hitchy-Koo' in New Home," *The Evening Mail*, 28 August 1917; "'Hitchy-Koo' Moved," *The New York Times*, 28 August 1917, p. 5; "Liberty in New Dress," *New York Herald*, 28 August 1917, 4; George S. Kaufman, "Broadway and Elsewhere," *New York Tribune*, 26 August 1917, sec. 4, p. 1, "Hitchy-Koo to Move to the Liberty," *New York Herald*, 26 August 1917.

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Permanent Peace Memorial

Three projects designed in 1919 reveal a shift in Urban's work. Symmetry, geometry and archaic classical elements dominate these designs. Although decorative floral motifs are present, they no longer invade every surface but are contained within compartments. In their place, allegorical figures and classical architectural details are the primary elements of these schemes. Two of these designs, the Permanent Peace Memorial and the stage set for the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, were more "high art" in their orientation, suggesting that the shift could be credited to the nature of these projects. The third project, the Rivoli Movie Theater, however, was a commercial movie palace, thus questioning an absolute link between Urban's use of classical forms and the "high art" orientation of a project.

In January 1919, Urban published a project for a Permanent Peace Memorial to celebrate the end of World War I (fig. 23).[128] Urban criticized the predominant use of triumphal arches as victory symbols, stating that they were merely copies of Roman designs and that their traditional historical meanings representing "imperial power," and "a rallying place for armies to go forth to battle," were

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[128]Joseph Urban, "Urban Sets the Stage for a Permanent Peace Memorial," *New York Tribune*, 19 January 1919, sec. 3, p. 5; "War Memorial," Production File Box 35, and "War Memorial," Drawings Box 9, Joseph Urban Collection.

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inappropriate for the return of peace after World War I. His design consisted of a domed circular building with archaic classical elements and a figurative sculptural program. Urban proposed that it be placed on a terrace overlooking the Hudson River. The historical archetypes and allegorical program of the memorial are similar to Urban's earlier designs for *Caliban*. Sculptures were to express such concepts as "primeval force" and "fruitfulness".[129] Various parts of the building such as the entrance portico, arch and dome were directly drawn from historical archetypes. These also expressed symbolic concerns which would evoke both the past and the future in order to represent the significance of the events of World War I. Urban wrote:

> Its outermost portals are Assyrian in feeling: their rudeness and vigorous barbarism suggest the sources of man's civilization in those days when war and conquest were the only end. Within the pylon masses of the opening stands the Hall of Remembrance. It is Greek in treatment--a place of reflection upon the best that the past has brought us, and of preparation for the future, for the great Peace Hall just beyond its open columns. The hall itself is of the future. It is modern, utterly modern in conception, as modern as the thing it commemorates and the purpose it serves. In architecture and decoration it must be built out of the past and toward the future.[130]

The design had powerful affinities with the work of Urban's Viennese compatriots, particularly Oskar Strnad and Josef Hoffmann. Strnad and Hoffmann, together with their

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[129]Urban's sculptures are similar to the 1900-01 figures by Ludwig Habich representing "Strength" and "Beauty" on Joseph Maria Olbrich's Ernst Ludwig House in Darmstadt, Germany.

[130]Urban, "Urban Sets the Stage," sec. 3, p. 5.

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students at the Vienna School of Arts and Crafts designed a number of war memorials between 1914-1915 which were exhibited in 1916-17 at the Austrian Museum for Art and Industry and published in a book in 1915. Most of the monuments were austere blocks, crosses, or obelisks, however, a few, particularly those of Arthur Payr and Josef Muller are similar to Urban's memorial in the creation of a domed, classically-detailed structure.[131]

While the details of the memorial are classical, several features suggest parallels with German Expressionist architecture. Urban's combined use of historical archetypes from different periods to evoke symbolic associations recalls Poelzig and Taut's manipulation of diverse historical motifs to enrich the symbolic meaning of their designs. Urban's creation of a domed, central-plan structure as a spiritual center evokes the ideal of the city crown (fig. 23). His

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[131]"Österreichische Denkmalkunst," *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* 19 (November 1915): 177-187; Philipp Maria Halm, "Soldatengräber und Kriegsdenkmale," *Kunst und Kunsthandwerk* 18 (1915): 279-307; "Krieger-Denkmaeler," *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* 20 (October 1916): 125; K. Giannoni, "Kreigergrab und Kriegerdenkmal. Die Austellung im Österreichischen Museum," *Kunst und Kunsthandwerk* 20 (1917): 61-76; *Soldatengräber und Kriegsdenkmale, herausgegeben vom K. K. Gewerbefoerderungs-Amte* (Vienna: A. Schroll, 1915); Sekler, 372-374. Urban's Permanent Peace Memorial also has affinities with Wagnerschule projects including Otto Schoenthal's 1900 project for the Central Cemetery and Oskar Felgel's 1902 Mausoleum. Iain Boyd Whyte suggests that these mausoleum projects were influenced by the paintings of Arnold Böcklin and the Byzantine Mausoleum of Theodoric in Ravenna. Iain Boyd Whyte, *Three Architects from the Master Class of Otto Wagner: Emil Hoppe, Marcel Kammerer, Otto Schoenthal* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1989), 28-31; for Felgel's mausoleum see *Der Architekt* 8 (1902): tafel 125.

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description of the project reinforces this parallel:

> I believe we should build the Sanctuary of Peace, a shrine of the life-giving energy and creative will of mankind, a place where the primal power of the fruitful earth, man and woman, motherhood and love, and all the carrying and driving forces of mankind are symbolized in ever, lasting stone.
>
> A room with the atmosphere of the Holy Grail. A room to hold thousands beneath its triumphant dome. A room enriched and decorated by the greatest artists of our time. A room created and colored, lighted and shadowed, filled and emptied with an art, not of imitation, but of a new creation. A room where every art is brought to a special and tremendous and, above all, a simple sweep, worthy of the proportions and the purposes of the sanctuary.[132]

These shared concerns were reinforced by similarities between the Permanent Peace Memorial and several European buildings including Wilhelm Kreis's 1902 Bismark Tower, Lossnitz, Dresden, Fritz Schumacher's 1908-1911 Crematorium in Dresden, Bruno Schmitz's 1898-1913 Völkerschlacht-Denkmal in Leipzig, the war memorials published in 1917 by the Deutscher Werkbund, J. M. L. Lauweriks' 1915 War Memorial for Brussels and Rudolph Steiner's 1913-1920 first Goetheanum in Dornach.[133]

Urban's use of allegory and historical archetypes were less accessible to a broad public than his night club and theater designs. These more intellectual references form a

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[132]Urban, "Urban Sets the Stage," sec. 3, p. 5.

[133]*Kriegergraeber im Felde und daheim: Jahrbuch des Deutschen Werkbundes* (Munich: F. Bruckmann, 1917); Nic H. H. Tummers, *J. L. Methieu Lauweriks, De Hagener Impuls Netherlands* (Hilversum: Uitgeverscentrum N.V., 1968). The influence of Expressionist forms was by no means unusual, Eduard Sekler sees Expressionist features in Josef Hoffmann's war memorials, as well, Sekler, 163.

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kind of high style in his work. Interestingly this language becomes the basis for his later, popularly oriented Ziegfeld Theater and International Magazine Building.

Urban's next commission of 1919 was for a semi-permanent stage set for the Rivoli Movie Theater, completed in September of that year (fig. 24).[134] At the Rivoli, the fantasy and exoticism of the movies, was suggested by allegorical figures, dramatic masks on the stage curtain with a mythological man and woman mounted on horses and accompanied by panthers above, rather than landscape and floral patterns of the earlier 1915 Strand stage set. The main colors of the set were striking but not bright and included gold, black and white. The Rivoli set, in comparison to the War Memorial, can be seen as a return to the floral patterns of earlier night clubs. Yet the set, when viewed in conjunction with Urban's earlier spaces, was far more restrained in both color and pattern. Urban's combination of allegories framed by subdued floral and Secession motifs proved to be appealing to the movies' diverse

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[134]Helen Pollock, "'The Miracle Man' Moves to Rivoli," *The Morning Telegraph*, 8 September 1919, 5; "Rivoli Theatre" folder Production File Box 27 and Portfolio 8, Joseph Urban Collection. The theater's director, Hugo Riesenfeld, also an Austrian, rivalled Samuel "Roxy" Rothapfel in staging elaborate presentations. Aileen St. John-Brenon, "Bolm Discusses His Art at Riesenfeld Dinner," *The Morning Telegraph*, 11 May 1919, p. 2; "Hugo Riesenfeld, Virtuoso and Theatre Manager," *The Morning Telegraph*, 11 April 1920, p. 4; George Shor, "Hugo Riesenfield's Idea on Music and Prologue," *The Morning Telegraph*, 1 January 1922, p. 7; Ellen D. Tarleau, "Presentation's the Thing," *Motion Picture Magazine* 19 (November 1920): 46, 47, 111.

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audience. One reviewer encouraged people to go see again the featured movie, *The Miracle Man*, just to experience the set.

That same year, Urban used even more severe, classically-based forms for two divergent projects, the stage set for the Detroit Symphony Orchestra and the Tiger Room at Chicago's Hotel Sherman. For Detroit, Urban framed what he had defined as 'the abstract and elevated art of classical music' with architectural forms based on the "high style" vocabulary of *Caliban* and the Permanent Peace Memorial (fig. 25).[135] The set had a sober and emphatically classical atmosphere. Above the rear dado were five mural panels consisting of two scenes from Michelangelo's Sistine Ceiling and--in an abrupt shift in scale--three enlarged heads of allegorical figures from the Medici Chapel. While touches of the Secessionstil are present in the curved top of the stage front and geometric, painted band around the proscenium opening, they are subordinate to the fairly severe classical composition, which has strong

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[135]It is uncertain exactly when and for what he did this project. Drawings of the design, however, do exist. In 1919 the city of Detroit was in the process of acquiring a new auditorium for the orchestra, which was designed by the theater architect C. Howard Crane using an amphitheatre plan. "Detroit Gains Two New Music Halls," *Musical America* 30 (3 May 1919): 32; the hall was largely complete by the opening of the symphony season on October 23, 1919 but continued to be decorated through the remainder of the year. Urban's design is never explicitly mentioned in articles but the interior is described as having mural decorations, as well as curtains and hangings of mulberry velvet, "Enormous Audiences Attend Detroit Symphony Concerts," *Musical Courier*, 4 December 1919, 23. "Detroit Symphony Hall," Production File Box 15, "Stage Set for Symphony Orchestra," Drawings Box 9, Joseph Urban Collection.

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visual affinities with Second Style Pompeiian wall paintings.[136]

Urban even used this fairly severe classical style in his night club designs in this period. The Tiger Room at Chicago's Hotel Sherman had walls divided into a panelled dado and an upper mural of isolated groups of painted figures in antique dress, and animals set against a gold leaf background (fig. 26).[137] While the figures were based on Gustav Klimt's secession paintings and posters, the overall effect of the room was at once exotic and severe. Only the reflective surface of the gold leaf linked this space with Urban's earlier night club designs.

These projects hover uneasily between Urban's past and future. Their classical forms recall Urban's earlier, Viennese interiors such as the Cabaret Hölle, and foreshadow

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[136]Urban may have been to Pompeii during his early travels; he definitely saw Pompeii during his 1914 European trip. Gretl Urban recalls that the family took an extended tour of Pompeii while awaiting passage back to the United States. Carter and Cole, 68.

[137]The exact date of this project has not been determined a clipping in the Urban Collection, suggests 1921, it reports: "The Tiger Room... has been redecorated and is very striking in its new color effects...the Tiger Room, which, by the way, was decorated by Joseph Urban." *Club Fellow*, 28 September 1921 in Portfolio 38, pt. 1, Joseph Urban Collection. Mary Urban's notes, however suggest a 1923 date when she writes "The Hotel Ballrom [sic] for the Sheman [sic] Hotel was inspected in thr [sic] brief pause at Chicago," on his way back to New York from California. She then adds that he was preoccupied with his work designing sets for the Metropolitan Productions of *Pelleas*, *Tales of Hoffman* and *Falstaff*, as well as Ziegfeld's play *Kid Boots* which were produced in 1923, "Urban, Mary notes," 15. For images of the Tiger Room, see "Hotel Sherman" Production File Box 15, Joseph Urban Collection.

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his 1926-27 Ziegfeld Theater. His utilization of classical forms at the Tiger Room are curious, suggesting both a loss of high art connotations but also an attempt to invest commercial art and entertainment with the status and symbols of elite culture. Because information on the project is minimal it is impossible to determine whether Urban's use of these forms at the Tiger Room is a cannibalization of elite culture or a recognition of commercial culture's increasing vitality and significance during this period.

Exhibitions and Travel to Europe

During the first two years that Urban lived in the United States, 1912-1914, he traveled to Europe during the summer of 1914, and participated in exhibitions of set designs in Paris, Cambridge, Massachusetts and New York.[138] Both the

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[138]Urban travelled to Paris the summer of 1914 in conjunction with the Boston Opera, from there he went to Italy, where he was trapped by the outbreak of World War I. "No Opera in Boston," *Boston Evening Transcript*, 27 August 1914; Carter and Cole, 64-69. His set designs were exhibited in Paris in an international exhibition of stage setting at the Palais Royal during the summer of 1913, in a one man show at an unidentified location in New York City during October 1913, and at an exhibition of the work of European and American designers associated with the new stagecraft in Cambridge, Massachusetts organized by S. J. Hume in his studio at 38 Church Street during the fall of 1914. "Boston's Showing in Stagecraft," *Boston Evening Transcript*, 6 June 1913, p. 21; "Mr. Urban Ties His Fortunes in New York," *Boston Evening Transcript*, 8 October 1913; "Boston Sees the First American Exhibition of the New Stagecraft," *Boston Evening Transcript*, 10 October 1914, sec. 3, p. 6; Kenneth MacGowan, "America's First Exhibition of the New Stage Craft," *Theatre Magazine* 21 (January 1915): 28.

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exhibitions and the travel kept Urban abreast of the latest European trends in set design as well as art and architecture, and placed his work in an international context. The outbreak of World War I, however, halted all European travel. During these years there were no major exhibitions of theater designs in the United States. By 1919, with the conclusion of the war, Urban was able to resume his trips to Europe and began to exhibit his work again.

Early Exhibitions 1919-1921

Urban participated in several exhibitions during the early 1920s. By identifying who Urban exhibited with, one can define the artistic context in which Urban's work was viewed, and by studying what organizations sponsored these shows, one can begin to define the audience which looked at and appreciated Urban's designs.

Urban participated in an exhibition of American Stage Designs held at the Bourgeois Galleries in New York City, during the spring of 1919.[139] This show, albeit with an

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[139]See catalogue *American Stage Designs* (New York: Bourgeois Galleries, York 1919), which was also reprinted in *Theatre Arts Magazine* 3 (1919). For reviews see: "American Advancing in Art of Making Stage Settings," *New York Herald*, 13 April 1919, p. 8; "Artistic Stage Setting on View," *The Morning Telegraph*, 8 April 1919, p. 12. Stephen Bourgeois was a commercial art dealer who came from Germany to the United States in 1911. He opened the gallery in 1914, and in 1916 instituted an annual exhibition of modern art, which, over the years, included the work of Francis Picabia and Man Ray. Bourgeois was familiar with the theories and writings of

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American focus, continued the pre-World War I trend of summarizing the latest innovations in set designs. Of greater significance, however, was the Architectural League's invitation to include Urban in their annual exhibition in April 1921 at The Metropolitan Museum of Art. The League gave Urban sixty square feet of space to display his film, opera and theater designs.[140] The League's membership consisted primarily of traditionally trained, Beaux-Arts influenced architects. The set designs selected for the exhibition, not surprisingly, did not include Urban's Expressionist and Futurist-influenced work for the films *Enchantment* and *The Young Diana* but featured Secessionstil scenes of exotic locales or modern settings inspired by the Wiener Werkstätte.

The League invited Urban because of the success and widespread publicity of his designs for *Buried Treasure*. The theme of the annual exhibitions, architecture and the allied arts, was a survey of American artistic achievements. Urban's inclusion in the show, was felt to be an important and early

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Wassily Kandinsky and believed that works of art should convey spiritual experiences. For Bourgeois see Susan Noyes Platt, *Modernism in the 1920s: Interpretations of Modern Art in New York from Expressionism to Constructivism* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1985), 19-21.

[140]These included stills from the movies *Buried Treasure* and the forthcoming *Bride's Play*, sketches for the operas *Parsifal*, *Don Carlos*, *Lohengrin*, and *La Juive*, and drawings for the musicals *A Young Man's Fancy*, *Smilin' Through*, and *Rose of China*. Urban had 36 entries in the exhibition, for a complete list see: The Architectural League of New York, *Index of Exhibits: Thirty-sixth Annual Exhibition* (New York: Metropolitan Museum, 1921).

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acknowledgement of theater and film being accepted as a part of the traditional fine arts.[141]

Urban's work received exposure in other architectural venues during this period. Some of his more modern set designs were published in the July 1921 issue of *Architectural Review*.[142] Additional stills of *Bride's Play*, appear to have been exhibited in the 1922 Architectural League exhibition.[143] Together, these publications and exhibitions reveal an early knowledge prior to the opening of his office of Urban's work on the part of the architectural community. Urban's contacts and friendships with such New York architects as Ralph Walker and Raymond Hood may well date from this period.

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[141]"Urban Settings Are Displayed in Art Exhibition," *The Morning Telegraph*, 3 April 1921, p. 2. The exhibition itself, was rather dramatic, located in the unfinished wing of the Metropolitan Museum with earthen floors and raw, unfinished, shells of vaults and walls. One critic remarked that this looked like, "a sketch for the latest thing in World's Fairs." The opening of the exhibition included a costume pageant with League members dressed in Babylonian attire. Yet despite the theatrical affinities between the League's exhibition and Urban's work, the League's display was more akin to Masonic rituals and not to the community pageants, circus, or mass theater concerns which informed Urban's work. Henry McBride, "Art News and Reviews," *New York Herald*, 10 April 1921, p. 5; "Pageant a Feature of Architectural League Exhibition," *New York Tribune*, 2 April 1921, p. 3.

[142]J. H. Phillips, "The Review of Interiors: Modern Stage Decorations Part II," *Architectural Review* 13 (July 1921): 185-187.

[143]"Invite Urban To Show His Picture Sets," *New York Tribune*, 8 January 1922, sec. 4, p. 8.

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Trip to Europe: 1921

Urban's travels during the early 1920s enabled him to renew prior contacts with his Viennese compatriots and establish new associations with German designers. This resulted in a continuing exploration, on his part, of Wiener Werkstätte and German Expressionist forms and ultimately introduced him to the Constructivist-influenced European version of modernism. Urban, as well as other American artists and designers, usually said little about the influence upon or interaction with their work and that of European designers. Published statements in the mass media which commented on European work during this period tended to be jingoistic, touting the superiority of American products and work.[144] These statements, particularly in the case of Urban, whose Austrian origins made him suspiciously foreign, appear to be designed to placate the isolationist tendencies attributed to the general public. Yet the constant travel of Urban, and other people connected with the theater, to Europe, the importation and popularity of European actors, technical devices and even

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[144]"Our Scenic Art Leads the World," *New York World*, 18 January 1920; "Historic Exactness of Great Tudor Film Verified by Urban," *New York American*, 13 August 1922; Harry Acton, "Over the Gangplank," *The Morning Telegraph*, 16 August 1924, p. 12.

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directors and companies during this period reveal a rich network of European-American design interactions.[145]

In the summer 1921, Urban took an extended vacation in Europe, sailing for Germany on July 1, and returning to New York around August 19.[146] According to press statements, prior to his departure, Urban's primary aim was to visit his mother in Austria, and relax. His exact itinerary was uncertain. He stated: "I shall not travel much, just from Hamburg to Vienna and then back again."[147] It seems unlikely, however, that Urban would have missed the opportunity to visit Berlin. In the months prior to his trip, American theatrical trade magazines were filled with descriptions of the latest and most avant-garde Berlin productions, including plays at the Grosses Schauspielhaus, as well as sets by John Heartfield and George Grosz for George

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[145]Ashby Deering, "New Effect in the 'Follies'," *The Morning Telegraph*, 9 October 1922, p. 4. The 1922 Ziegfeld Follies included ballets arranged by Michael Fokine, the 1924 Ziegfeld Follies included a "Russian Number" by Alexander Yakovleff, Foreign companies included the Russian Chauve-Souris in 1922, the Ballet Suedois, which included sets by Ferdinand Leger in 1923 and Max Reinhardt's troupe in 1923.

[146]"Urban Sails for Europe," *The Billboard*, 16 July 1921, p. 31; Leo A Marsh, "Joseph Urban Here," *The Morning Telegraph*, 18 August 1921, p. 4; "Urban Returns," *The Billboard*, 27 August 1921, p. 30. According to Urban's daughter, Gretl Urban, the family visited Vienna in 1919. Other than her recollections, which center around family and the conditions of Vienna, there is no major documentation concerning this trip. Carter and Cole, 104-08.

[147]"Urban Sails for Europe." Urban is also quoted as stating this is the first time he has returned to Vienna since World War I. This, of course, conflicts with Gretl Urban's recollection of the 1919 trip.

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Bernard Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra*.[148] The set designer, Hermann Rosse, who later worked with Urban on designs for the Ziegfeld Follies, had returned from Germany in early 1921 full of accounts of theatrical innovations.[149] The German Expressionist films *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, and *The Golem*, furthermore, had just opened in New York to great acclaim.[150] During the summer of 1921, moreover, Urban was actively involved in designing the sets for Henry Savage's production of *The Merry Widow*. Savage, who arrived in Europe about a month before Urban, first visited Vienna and then Berlin in order to review the latest operettas. It is highly probable that Urban met with Savage in Berlin.[151]

What could Urban have seen in Berlin, during this summer? A production of Gerhard Hauptmann's *The Weavers*, starring Emmanuel Reicher, who had been involved in the 1916 *Caliban*, was playing at the Grosses Schauspielhaus. Walter Ruttmann's art movie, *Film Symphony* a Futurist/Expressionist montage was playing at the Marmorhaus.[152] It also seems likely that

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[148]C. Hooper Trask columns entitled, "Berlin," *Variety*, 14 January 1921, and 25 March 1921.

[149]"Editorial," *Theatre Arts Magazine* 5 (April 1921): 162-164.

[150]"Presages New Art For Screen," *The Morning Telegraph*, 3 April 1921, p. 4; and "Legendary Film at Criterion," *The Morning Telegraph*, 20 June 1921, p. 3.

[151]"European Actors Are After U. S. Engagement," *The Morning Telegraph*, 17 July 1921, p. 1; states that Savage had just returned from Europe and already had sketches from Urban.

[152]C. Hooper Trask, "Berlin," *Variety*, 12 August 1921, 2 and 19 August 1921, p. 7.

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Urban would have visited new theater buildings by Oskar Kaufmann, which had been featured in American magazines.[153] One of the most commented upon entertainments, however, was an amusement park known as "Luna Park," located on Halensee Lake at the edge of the Grunewald and decorated in an Expressionist manner with bright primitive colors of sharply contrasting hues, with a jazz staircase and a fountain illuminated by changing colored lights.[154] Urban made no public statements concerning what he saw and newspapers only commented that he had visited "the art marts of Europe." The impact of this renewed familiarity with Expressionism on his work of the subsequent year was substantial.[155] For the 1922 Ziegfeld Follies Urban designed vivid, primitive scenes, incorporating montage and transformative effects inspired by the European theater (fig. 27). Probably with Urban's advice, Ziegfeld included the work of European choreographers and set designers in this production.[156] Urban's designs for the 1922 film

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[153]"Steps Tward a New Theatre Architecture," *Theatre Arts Magazine* 5 (January 1921), 15-20. Kaufmann's Berlin Volksbühne as well as Poelzig's Grosses Schauspielhaus were illustrated in this issue.

[154]C. Hooper Trask, "Berlin," August 19, 1921, p. 7. Max Pechstein and Rudolf Belling provided the Expressionist touches at Luna Park in 1919-1920. Thomas Friedrich, *Berlin Between The Wars* (New York: The Vendome Press, 1991), 116, 190.

[155]Marsh, "Joseph Urban Here," p. 14.

[156]"Audience at the New Amsterdam Theater Sees a Notable Cast and a Notable Production," *New York Herald*, 6 June 1922. For images of the sets see White Studio Key Books 16,551 pp. 3-5, 8, 11, Billy Rose Research Center for Theater, Lincoln Center

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Enchantment, were directly inspired by Hans Poelzig's sets for *The Golem*.[157] In an interview with theater critic Oliver Saylor, published in November 1921, Urban discussed the impact of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* on his work. Urban particularly admired the use of abstract rather than realistic backgrounds to convey the mood of the film and stated that the movie was "the most extraordinary production" he had seen. He continued:

> Now, the impressions which you gain in the presence of 'Dr. Caligari' and the methods by which they are attained are related closely to the aesthetic processes which I have mentioned in music, processes which I feel are dominant in all the art today. The means by which the producers of this film have used to express insanity, terror and fear have opened up the way to new forms and thoughts and conceptions and have given me new hope for the future of our experiments with the films...
>
> I sent my whole staff to see 'Dr. Caligar.' [sic] and then I called them all together...and I gave them a short lecture about it, telling them just what it meant to me and what vistas it seemed to open up for the profession in which they were engaged.[158]

Amsterdam International Exhibition of Theatre Art and Craft

Urban's ties with European Expressionist art, architecture and theater were reinforced by his participation in the 1922 Amsterdam International Exhibition of Theatre Art and Craft,

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Library for the Performing Arts.

[157]Urban obtained stills from *The Golem*, "Golem (movie)" Production File Box 13, Joseph Urban Collection.

[158]Saylor, "Urban of the Opera," 39, 72.

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which ran from January through February 1922 in the Stedelijk Museum.[159] The show was sponsored by Kunst aan het Volk and curated by the Dutch architect Hendrik The. Wijdeveld.[160] The aim of the exhibition was to provide a comprehensive display of modern stagecraft and theater architecture.[161]

While the exhibition included a wide variety of modern designs, ranging from turn-of-the-century drawings by Gordon Craig to Futurist designs by Prampolini, the bulk of the work

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[159]Due to its great critical success, the exhibition was then transferred to London's Victoria and Albert Museum and displayed from June 3 -July 31, 1922. The organizers also considered a potential, but unrealized, United States venue. *Catalogus der Tentoonstelling* (Amsterdam Internationale Theater Toonstelling, Te Amsterdam Januari en Februari 1922). "International Theatre Exhibition Designs and Models for the Modern Stage," Victoria and Albert Museum, June 3 - July 31, 1922, London: 1922. Suffolk Howard, "International Theatre Arts in London," *Arts and Decoration* 17 (August 1922): 296; Carlton Miles, "Amsterdam Does Something New," *Theatre Magazine* 36 (September 1922): 164, 182; Gordon Craig, "Theatre Craft: The Exhibition at Amsterdam," *London Times*, 30 January 1922, p. 8a; "The Exhibition of Theatrical Art At Amsterdam," *Living Age* 313 (15 April 1922): 182-184. Sheldon Cheney, "The International Exhibition in Amsterdam," *Theatre Arts Magazine* 6 (April 1922): 140-151.

[160]The Amsterdam based organization, whose title meant "Art for the People" organized a yearly exhibition of art objects; in previous years the group planned devoted to period furniture, Chinese vases, and modern paintings. Miles, "Amsterdam Does," 164, 182.

[161]"The Amsterdam Exhibition," *Theatre Arts Magazine* 6 (January 1922): 62. The exhibition was organized by country and included the work of Russians Nicholas Roerich, Nathalie Goncharova and Michel Larionoff, Germans Cesar Klein and Leopold Jessner, the Italian Enrico Prampolini, and the Dutch designer Hermann Rosse. Urban's work formed part of the American section which included the drawings of R. E. Jones, Lee Simonson, and Norman Bel Geddes. Sheldon Cheney, who curated the American section, selected Urban's more "high art" opera sets for productions of *Parsifal, Pelleas and Melisande* and *L'Amore de tre Re*.

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was dominated by Expressionist-influenced designs.[162] Equally notable was Hendrik Wijdeveld's installation for the exhibition, which consisted of nine rooms painted grey, with Futurist designs in bright colors for the entrances and various doors. The noted British set designer Gordon Craig described the installation as a "dream palace."[163]

Many expressed disappointment with the character of the American designs, which had used photographs of original drawings. The exhibition nonetheless linked Urban's work with that of European designers.[164] The exhibition was not only significant for reestablishing the public's perception of Urban as a designer with strong European ties, but was probably important for his own work.[165] The exhibition

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[162]Cheney, "The International Exhibition," 146: "If there is a tendency which seems most likely to offer the road to the next phase it is that which is called Expressionism; but there is little in this exhibition which would help one to delimit Expressionism or even to define it as a theory of drama or production." Marion Ryan, "Here Is Gordon Craig--His Cult is With Him At the International Theatre Exhibition" *The Morning Telegraph*, 9 July 1922, p. 3.

[163]There are conflicting reports about the room's color schemes. Gordon Craig described rooms of yellow, purple, grey, black and red, Craig, "Theatre Craft," p. 8a. Miles, however, directly quotes Wijdeveld as stating: "I built half a dozen rooms, had the walls a uniform grey, made futuristic designs in bright colors for the entrance and the various doorways..." Miles, "Amsterdam Does," 164, 182.

[164]Miles, "Amsterdam Does," 164, 182.

[165]Urban visited London during a European visit in the summer of 1922. Whether or not Urban viewed the exhibition at the Victoria and Albert cannot be determined. Urban's visit which included stops in Munich, Paris, the South of France, and London extended from June 17 to August 5. However, extensive press coverage and his acquaintance with organizers and other

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provided a review of the most recent European design trends as they effected theater. Even more important, it included a large number of drawings and photographs of designs for recent European theater buildings, such as Henry Van de Velde's plans and models for the Cologne Werkbund Theater, Hans Poelzig's Berlin Grosses Schauspielhaus and Salzburg Festspielhaus, as well as Oskar Kaufmann's Berlin theaters, the Völksbuhne and Theater am Kurfürstendamm. It also displayed many experimental building designs, including projects by Bruno Taut and Wassily Luckhardt, the Dutch architect Hans Berlage's project for a Wagner Theater, Wijdeveld's plans and models for a People's Theater and the Austrian architect Oskar Strnad's theater project. Strnad's project, one of the most technically innovative at the show, utilized the popular ideal of the ancient Greek theater with its association of community ritual and involvement for his design (fig. 28). He updated the Greek theater type by having a moveable stage which could expand to encircle the audience seating, or contract depending on the demands of the play.[166]

The emphasis in these projects upon a large, mass audience, the ideal of the Greek Theater, and flexible, transforming stages, probably reinforced Urban's experience at the 1916 production of *Caliban*. These concerns were important

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participants in the show strongly suggests that he was familiar with its contents.

[166]Cheney, "The International Exhibition," 140-151.

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for Urban's later designs of theaters and community spaces in the 1920s.

Travel to Europe and European Visitors

Urban visited Europe again during the summer of 1922, departing from New York on June 17 and returning August 5. In interviews he stated that he travelled to London, Munich, Paris and Southern France. He also indicated that he toured several major German film studios, which were predominantly located in Berlin. In published statements, Urban emphasized the superiority of American theater and film; however, he also expressed admiration for exhibitions of Futurist art and sculpture that he had seen in Paris and Munich.[167]

The 1922 European visit was representative of an increased interest in Europe by Americans connected with the film and theatrical worlds.[168] Even more significant,

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[167]"Historic Exactness." In Munich Urban most likely saw the Glaspalast exhibition, which was a survey of current German art, with a particular emphasis on local, Munich artists, and the "Deutschen Gewerbeschau," an arts and crafts exhibition which included a segment by the Wiener Werkstätte designed by Oskar Strnad that was very Expressionist. A review of the *Studio*, and *Art News* of those months has not revealed any information concerning exhibitions in Paris, however, the Galerie Paul Rosenberg and Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler's galleries were famous for their exhibitions of modern art.

[168]Also travelling to Europe that summer were many of Urban's colleagues including William Randolph Hearst, Florenz Ziegfeld, Kenneth MacGowan, Otto Kahn, R. E. Jones, and Richard Ordynski. "Americans in Europe" column, *Variety*, 9 June 1922, p. 2, 23 June 1922, p. 3, 7 July 1922, p. 3, 10 July 1922, p. 3.

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however, were the number of European theatrical groups appearing in New York. The fall 1922 season included productions by several Soviet groups including the Moscow Art Theater, the Chauve Souris and the Kamerny Theater.[169]

The most celebrated European theatrical visitor to New York was Max Reinhardt, who staged *The Miracle*, during the winter of 1923-24. Reinhardt's production, designed by the American Norman Bel Geddes, was widely admired by both avant-garde and popular American theatrical and film producers. Reinhardt's relationship with his American colleagues illustrates the reciprocal influence of European and American work. Urban, who acted as an informal translator for Reinhardt and his ensemble, introduced the German director to both Ziegfeld and Hearst.[170] If Reinhardt was lionized and courted by both Ziegfeld and Hearst, it is clear that he

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[169]Oliver M. Sayler, "The Year Ahead with Europe as Preceptor," *Theatre Arts Magazine* 6 (October 1922): 267-274. The Theater Guild, an avant-garde repertory group, presented productions of the modernistically designed European plays *Masse Mensch*, and *R.U.R.* It is interesting to note subscribers to the Theatre Guild included Urban, Ely Jacques Kahn and Hugh Ferriss. Even Ziegfeld began to incorporate modern European devices and forms into the Follies, importing lighting devices from Paris and hiring the Russian choreographer Michel Fokine, famous for his work with Sergei Diaghilev's Russian Ballet, to choreograph ballets. Leo Marsh, "Ziegfeld Has New Plan for Running Follies," *The Morning Telegraph*, 6 August 1922, p. 4; Sayler, "The Year Ahead," 274.

[170]"Urban, Mary Notes," 4; "Marion's Ball a Huge Success," *The Morning Telegraph*, 15 December 1923, p. 14, lists Reinhardt as one of the box holders at a benefit sponsored by Marion Davies along with Constantin Stanislavsky, Ziegfeld, Urban and Gloria Swanson.

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admired popular American theater.[171] *The Morning Telegraph*, reported that Reinhardt viewed the Follies at least three times and bought rights to devices patented by Ziegfeld for use in his work.[172] Perhaps the greatest indication of Ziegfeld's potential influence upon Reinhardt was the decision by Reinhardt to open a musical comedy theater in Berlin after his return.[173]

Urban toured Europe again during the summers of 1924 and 1925.[174] The emphasis of these trips was increasingly upon

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[171]During Reinhardt's visit rumors abounded concerning possible collaborations between Reinhardt and the American film and theater industry. Marion Davies evidently was interested in playing the Madonna in the Miracle, "Miracle Near War Over Miss Davies", *The Morning Telegraph*, 31 December 1923, p. 14; and Hearst may have expressed interest in Reinhardt's working on Cosmopolitan Film productions, Thomas Hanley, "Max Reinhardt Signs With Hearst," *The Morning Telegraph*, 17 January 1924, p. 14.

[172]Leo A. Marsh, "Reinhardt at 'Follies'," *The Morning Telegraph*, 12 May 1923, p. 4; Leo A. Marsh, "Wire From Reinhardt," *The Morning Telegraph*, 7 June 1923, p. 4; Leo A. Marsh, "Reinhardt Gets 'Shadowgraph'," *The Morning Telegraph*, 5 December 1923, p. 4. A search of the patent indexes, however, does not reveal any devices patented by Ziegfeld.

[173]The Kömodie Theater, designed by Oskar Kaufmann, opened in November 1924, Huesmann, 59-60.

[174]His 1924 trip, from July 5 to August 15 included a visit to Reinhardt in Salzburg and touring the newest theaters in Central Europe. Harry Acton, "Over the Gangplank," *The Morning Telegraph*, 5 July 1924, 14; Harry Acton, "Over the Gangplank," *The Morning Telegraph*, 16 August 1924, 12. In 1925, Urban left on June 27 and returned August 12. The only recorded stopping point of the trip was a meeting with Ziegfeld in Paris, where Urban could have seen the Exposition des Arts Décoratifs. "Sailing on Homeric," *The Morning Telegraph*, 27 June 1925, 1; Harry Acton, "Over the Gangplank," *The Morning Telegraph*, 13 August 1925, 8; "Ziegfeld Suffers a Headache," *The Morning Telegraph*, 24 August 1925.

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architecture as Urban started to systematically visit recent European theater buildings.[175] Not surprisingly, the visits occurred during the same period that initial discussions about constructing a new Ziegfeld Theater building and a new Metropolitan Opera House building were taking place.

Constructivism and the International Theater Exposition

Urban's visits enabled him to study at first hand the work of Hans Poelzig, Oskar Kaufmann and Josef Hoffmann, architects now identified with either the Expressionist or "moderne" styles. As early as 1924, however, Urban could have seen more Constructivist and functionalist designs. While *Theatre Arts Magazine* had published examples of this work since 1920, this type of modernism did not become widely known in the United States until 1926-27.[176] Urban's 1924 visit to Austria coincided with preparations for the "International Exhibition of New Theater Techniques," which opened in the Vienna Konzerthaus in September. Organized by Frederick Kiesler, the exhibition included the work of Oskar Schlemmer, Lazlo Moholy-

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[175]These could have included Oskar Kaufmann's Kroll Opera House and the Theater am Kurfürstendamm. O. M. Eibt, "Berlin Newsletter," *The Billboard*, 9 August 1924, p. 46.

[176]Stark Young, "The International Theatre Exposition," *New Republic* 46 (17 March 1926): 103-4.

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Nagy, George Grosz, the Vesnin Brothers and Alexandra Exter.[177] Given Urban's interests and connections with the international theater world, it seems unlikely that he was not aware of the preparations for the show.[178]

An expanded and revised version of the exhibition, also curated by Kiesler, opened in New York in February 1926. The show was encyclopedic, occupying two floors of Steinway Hall and representing work from almost every major western country. Urban was a member of the honorary committee, which helped expedite the show, and also a contributor to the American section, displaying theater and opera set designs.[179]

The exhibition was dominated by Constructivist work, which theater critic Sheldon Cheney labelled as the "Kiesler -

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[177]*Internationale Ausstellung neuer Theatertechnik* (Wien: der Stadt Wien, 1924). It is unknown whether or not Urban knew Kiesler at this time; certainly they must have had several mutual acquaintances. After Kiesler's arrival in the United States in 1926, however, he counted Urban among his earliest friends. Lisa Phillips, "Architect of Endless Innovation," in *Frederick Kiesler* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1989), 19.

[178]In 1925 Josef Hoffmann asked Kiesler to install a modified version of the exhibition, "The City in Space," as the Austrian theater section in the Grand Palais at the Exposition des Arts Décoratifs. Urban's presence in Paris that summer suggests that he had ample opportunity to view the installation. Barbara Lesák, "Visionary of the European Theater," in Phillips, 43.

[179]"International Theater Show Far Exceeds Original Plans," *New York Herald Tribune*, 21 February 1926, 2. Initiated by Jane Heap of the *Little Review*, the exhibition was jointly sponsored by the Theater Guild, Provincetown Players, Greenwich Village Theater and the Neighborhood Playhouse.

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Tairoff - Prampolini sort of thing."[180] While many of the reviews were positive, even enthusiastic, that of the *New Yorker* was not:

> The genius in charge of this exhibit evidently goes on the theory that anything organized is orthodox and old-fashioned, and that to be progressing one must follow a crooked line. The result is a woeful hodge-podge; brain-taxing scrambled mess of colorless, meaningless stuff.[181]

Most, however, acknowledged the exhibition as the first substantial presentation of the new Constructivist design in the United States, which various critics summarized as an emphasis upon movement, the machine, precision, engineering and a vehement opposition to any decoration.[182] The exhibition preceded the Machine Age Exposition, also organized by the *Little Review*'s Jane Heap and long credited as the first display of Russian Constructivism in the United States, by a year.[183] The impact of the exhibition was acknowledged as extending beyond theater into other fields of design. The Russian designers presented theater as encompassing all the

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[180]Sheldon Cheney, "The International Theatre Exhibition," *Theatre Arts Magazine* 10 (March 1926): 205.

[181]M.P. [Murdock Pemberton], "The Art Gallery," *New Yorker* 2 (13 March 1926): 37.

[182]Cheney, "International Theatre Exhibition," 205; Young, "The International Theatre Exposition," 103-04; "International Theater Show Far," 2; "'Constructivism' Big Thing at Exposition," *New York Herald-Tribune*, 28 February 1926; "The New Stage-Craft," *The Nation* 122 (10 March 1926): 247-248; "Paving the Way for Actorless Theaters," *New York Herald Tribune*, 14 February 1926.

[183]For example see Stern, *New York 1930*, 335-336.

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other arts:

> The theatre has swallowed up the other arts. In these years of storm and stress, it is the theatre which catches the rhythm of the eye.[184]

Others presented the Constructivism of these sets as an essentially architectural or even engineering project:

> The new stage artist is proud to call himself "engineer." There are models of theaters in the exhibition wherein the feats of modern architectural engineering are reflected in the very design of the stage and auditorium, as well as in the actual constructions on the stage.[185]

The exhibition prompted Americans to radically rethink their own design practice. Sheldon Cheney noted:

> In four years "modern" has moved forward a considerable space again, and our best revolutionaries are likely to be caught on yesterday's ground.[186]

In comparison to the European work, many felt New York designs looked unprogressive and old fashioned. Critics predicted that Constructivism would quickly be incorporated into the American theater:

> Those who have been privileged to see parts of the exhibition in the unpacking period are prophesying constructivist numbers in our revues--and what unparalleled opportunities are give here to the gymnastic actor!--and, Shakespeare and Sheridan, and even Ibsen, in "skeleton lay-outs."[187]

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[184]S. Margoline, "The Russian Theatre of Today," *The Little Review*, Winter 1926, 9-10.

[185]"'Constructivism' Big Thing."

[186]Cheney, "The International Theatre Exhibition," 205.

[187]"'Constructivism' Big Thing,"; Cheney, "The International Theatre Exhibition," 203-206.

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As a participant in the American section, Urban's sets were undoubtedly seen as conservative in relation to the European work. He slowly assimilated Constructivist ideas and forms, picking and discarding elements depending upon their appropriateness for his work. His sets, for example, became more three-dimensional, often featuring a gigantic machine almost projecting out into the audience. The 1927 production of *Showboat* opened with a huge paddle boat taking up the entire stage. This, however, was incorporated into fairly traditional sets which emphasized the scenic prettiness of the south. His 1928 production of Ernst Krenek's opera *Johnny Spielt Auf* (fig. 29) at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York City, and the 1930 musical *Flying High*, were overtly modern and mechanistic. In his architecture, Urban also incorporated the lessons of Constructivism. The 1928 design for the Reinhardt Theater and the 1929 "Silver Ball" stage at Madison Square Garden were bare skeletal stages surrounded by the audience. At the Reinhardt Theater, Urban furthermore celebrated such mechanical and functional devices as signs and fire escapes in his design of the exterior.

Just as significant for Urban were Constructivist ideas. Theatricality and spectacle were identified as positive design ideals, because they frankly acknowledged the artificial, man-made character of theater. Mass entertainment, such as musical revues, boxing and the circus were praised for their broad appeal and elicitation of an unintellectualized almost

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automatic response from their audiences.[188] The celebration of the frankly theatrical and popular culture remained constants in Urban's work.

Wiener Werkstätte Showroom

On June 8, 1922, the New York showroom of the Wiener Werkstätte of America, Inc. opened at 581 Fifth Avenue.[189] Urban organized this branch of the Viennese workshops, famed for their modern craft productions, renovated the second floor loft space into a showroom and designed the interiors and furniture for the shop. His primary motive in undertaking this venture was to assist his Viennese compatriots, who were impoverished and close to starvation due to the circumstances of World War I, by providing them with a potentially lucrative American market for their work.[190] Yet the Werkstätte

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[188]Young, "The International Theatre Exposition," 103-04; Adolf Loos, "The Theatre," *Little Review*, Winter 1926, 92, 94, 96.

[189]Rosenthal and Ratzka, 173 incorrectly state that Urban opened the showroom in 1919.

[190]Janis Staggs Flinchum, "The Wiener Werkstätte of America, Inc." (Master's thesis, Cooper-Hewitt/Parsons Masters Program in the History of Decorative Arts, 1998). The thesis, written under my supervision, studies how the American branch related to previous Werkstätte installations, documents the objects displayed in the show room and explores the reasons for its demise. While Ms. Staggs Flinchum examines Urban's display techniques she does not explore the architecture of the space. Portfolio 39, Joseph Urban Collection; F. E. W. Freund, "Vienna's Joy Seek to Live," *International Studio* 76 (November 1922): 149-152; Carter and Cole, 106-108. All of these accounts, particularly Carter and Cole with their interviews of Gretl Urban, stress how disturbed Urban was by the

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endeavor, also offered Urban an opportunity to promote modern design in the United States and broaden his horizons and reputation as a designer.[191]

The showroom, which consisted of five display rooms, a private office for Urban and storerooms, was admired for its varied yet unified setting (fig. 30). It was one of the first installations in the United States to display individual pieces of modern design in a completely modern setting. Articles describing the showroom commented upon the unusual color, lighting effects, spatial arrangements, materials and ingenious methods of display.[192]

Located on the second floor of the building, the shop had an unusual show window installation in order to attract

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circumstances of his colleagues when he visited Vienna in 1921.

[191]See typescripts in Portfolio 39 and "Urban Exhibits New Art Works," *The Morning Telegraph*, 9 June 1922.

[192]"Urban Exhibits New Art Works,"; Freund, "Vienna's Joy" 149-52; "Exhibition Brings Viennese Art Here," *New York Times*, 25 June 1922, sec. 2, p. 6; "1,000 Viennese Artists Show Their Work," *New York Times*, 14 June 1922, p. 19; David Lloyd, "A Workshop Background by Urban, With Reflections On the Viennese Revolt," *The Evening Post*, 17 June 1922; "Seen in New York," *Good Furniture* 19 (August 1922): 98-99; "Shall We Succumb to Modern Art?" *Decorative Furniture* 43 (September 1922): 68-69; William Laurel Harris, "Back to Duncan Phyfe - Or Forward to Art Nouveau," *Good Furniture* 19 (December 1922): 257-259; "Viennese Art Craft Shown in New York," *Current Opinion* 73 (August 1922): 252-255; Leon Solon, "The Viennese Method for Artistic Display," *Architectural Record* 53 (March 1923): 266-271. Stern, *New York 1930*, 322, corrects the common assumption that this was the first showroom of modern European design in the United States. The 1917 Scandinavian Art Shop preceded the Werkstätte. Urban's shop however, was the most sophisticated in terms of matching modern designs with modern interiors.

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pedestrian attention (fig. 31). The window was dominated by a life-size gilt statue of a classically-inspired nude male. This was set against a background of black and green panels. Urban used a color scheme of black, a cool clear green and touches of silver throughout the shop interiors. Urban created unusual lighting effects by utilizing delicate, cone-shaped crystal chandeliers, or recessed lights placed above glass ceilings (fig. 32). Unusual, almost startling proportions occurred throughout the space, whether in the shapes of the domed central reception room, very narrow doors that were twelve feet high, or chairs with tall slender back rests which bypassed the upper limits of the chair frame (fig. 30). These were complemented by Urban's use of conventional architectural elements. Moldings no longer defined the cap and base of walls but were flattened out to frame panels of color or patterns (fig. 32). The unusual placement of these elements made them into decorative patterning rather than architectural definers of space. All served to create a sense of surprise and even mystery throughout the showroom.

The showrooms were seen as being resolutely modern, eliminating any references to period styles. Leon Solon, a noted color-consultant and ceramicist who frequently commented on designs for architectural journals, stated:

> ...it is a sharp breaking away in interior ornamentation from the rigid control of conventional architectural treatment inherited from the sixteenth century. We are

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> made to feel that a new order of values has been inaugurated in interior decoration;...[193]

This modernity was predicted as appealing to a certain audience. William Laurel Harris wrote that the furniture and interiors would not appeal to conservative people:

> ...but rather to progressive leaders in present day ideas who feel that in our times there must be progress and perpetual change in decorative arts as there are in all the arts and sciences.[194]

Urban was more hopeful of a broad-based audience and emphasized both the innovative and traditional aspects of the showroom, describing it as:

> ...exotic, but tempered down with a sense of architectural proportion so that it keeps a proper degree of conventionality.[195]

The modernity of the showroom also encompassed a strong sense of style. If many commentators simply identified the space and products as modern, without definition, they also frequently attempted to pin down the style that it represented. David Lloyd, in the *Evening Post*, went to great lengths:

> Crispness is its chief aim. It expresses a horror of dullness....It bestirs itself to entertain. It is ostentatiously simple. It wears its ornament sparingly. Plain surfaces are favored, and not only plain but of a scrubbed, showed, almost peeled character. In form it has a trick of truncating shapes; in line it deals with a geometric sheerness and angularity. It has a fondness for expanses that becomes at times almost an affectation,

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[193]Solon, "Viennese Method," 266.

[194]Harris, "Back to Duncan Phyfe," 259.

[195]"Urban Exhibits New Art Works,".

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> but there is nothing ponderous in the way it disposes volume.[196]

F. E. W. Freund, instead saw the forms of the Werkstätte as an emphasis upon a certain quality or spirit which he identified as typically Viennese:

> This ever renewed joy of living is perhaps the principal reason why Vienna's art is always fresh. Her artists could not, even if they wished, go on doing the same thing year in and year out. Her tradition is not to continue the old styles over and over again, but to create in the same spirit as the older generations. Thus a real continuity of "spirit" instead of "style" can be observed in the art of Vienna.[197]

To be Viennese for many of these critics, in 1922, was to be at the forefront of modernism.[198] Austia, was portrayed as a modern, universal, state, in which the ideas and peoples of different ethnic groups and races were brought together. Urban described how Austrian peasants encountered other cultures:

> After having completed his apprenticeship, he went on his wanderjaht [sic], and brought back new ideas in Art, which he consciously or unconsciously conveyed to his neighbors through his workmanship. Again, during the long and frequent wars, the peasant was forced to serve as a soldier, and, possessing an observant mind and a retentive memory, he involuntarily acquired something of the culture of other lands.[199]

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[196]Lloyd, "A Workshop Background,". Some of these ideas come from Urban's press releases. One states: "Ostentatiously simple, always gay, their main objective is to avoid to dull." Untitled three-page typescript, n.d., TMs, Portfolio 39, Joseph Urban Collection, 1.

[197]Freund, "Vienna's Joy," 150.

[198]Lloyd, "Back to Duncan Phyfe," and "Seen in New York", 98.

[199]Untitled five-page typescript on letterhead, n.d., TMs, Portfolio 39, Joseph Urban Collection, 2-3.

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F. E. W. Freund described Vienna as a "meeting ground for many races."[200]

What the critics did not mention, however, was that women formed the majority of designers at this modern Viennese art organization.[201] While the names of male designers, such as Josef Hoffmann or Dagobert Peche, were well-known, by World War I women dominated the Werkstätte. Indeed, Mathilde Flögl, Fritzi Löw, Maria Likarz and others were extremely versatile and productive designers. One can imagine that a fair amount of their work was displayed in Urban's shop. Critics may have ignored or have been unaware of the extensive presence and influence of women at the Werkstätte, but one wonders if American architectural critics' subsequent labelling of Viennese work as frivolous and not truly modern was influenced by this factor.

With the Werkstätte, Urban also re-ignited one of the essential questions of modern design, the relationship of art to industry. Many appropriately stressed the anti-industrial bias of the Werkstätte, linking the Werkstätte to the philosophies of William Morris and recognizing the unique, largely hand-crafted, nature of the objects displayed in the

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[200]Freund, "Vienna's Joy," 150.

[201]Isabelle Anscombe, *A Woman's Touch: Women in Design From 1860 to the Present Day* (New York: Elisabeth Sifton Books/Viking, 1984), 103-107; Werner J. Schweiger, *Wiener Werkstätte: Design in Vienna 1903-1932*, trans. Alexander Lieven (New York: Abbeville Press, 1984), 119.

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showrooms.[202] Objects no longer had to be merely functional but could be artistic, seemingly emphasizing their elite, "high art" basis.[203] Yet Urban, with extensive experience in designing sets for popular consumption, also tried to promote the designs of Werkstätte members as a populist form, linking the designs of Josef Hoffmann and Dagobert Peche to the folk culture of Austria.[204]

Urban, somewhat uneasily, straddled the boundary between high art and popular culture, with the Werkstätte. He wanted to promote modern design to the largest possible group. The conclusion of one of his press releases reveals the ambiguity between popular culture and high art which is at the heart of Urban's oeuvre:

> The Fine Arts are ever distant from the individual: from them he can never derive the pleasures of ownership and uninterrupted enjoyment. While within the reach of almost everyone, the Commercial Arts, continually subvert the artistic possibilities of their materials to the

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[202]"Viennese Art Craft," 252; "Urban Exhibits New Art Works,".

[203][Wiener Werstätte,] untitled five-page typescript on letterhead, Portfolio 39, 4; "Urban Exhibits New Art Works,"; "Exhibition Brings," sec. 2, p. 6.

[204][Wiener Werkstätte,] 2-3 states: "The great inspiration for the Artist in his work is the fact that the Austrian peasant is a naturally gifted Craftsman. It may not seem fair to apply the term "peasant" to an Art which through the tradition of centuries has reached an accomplished craftsmanship that is rarely equalled. Yet, in the peasants - the women, more so than the men - there exists an inborn feeling for Art....This love of Craftwork has passed from one generation to another...As to the men, there is no doubt but that they had ample opportunity in the churches and in the castles of their lords, to observe objects of decorative Art. The guild system, with its wonderful traditions of craft, taught the youth a beautiful regard for fine handiwork."

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> necessity of economic success. Little thought is given to the individual. He must be satisfied with something that appeals to the masses, or go without.[205]

Urban promoted the Werkstätte to an American audience. The press releases and articles attempt to appeal to American values. The freedom of the artists, the ethnic and racial diversity of Austria and the grounding of the Werkstätte in a folk culture--meant to signify popular culture--was intended for consumption by an American audience.

Urban's main objective in forming the Wiener Werkstätte was to sell commodities. The design of the showroom and methods of display were innovative and had a profound impact on subsequent commercial architecture and display techniques. While Urban utilized techniques that he had mastered in the theater, such as an effective color scheme to set the mood for the installation and subtle lighting, he used these towards new ends, the glamorization and promotion of goods (fig. 33).

Even though the showroom was located on the second floor, Urban's window display was so unusual that it immediately attracted attention (fig. 31). Leon Solon describes the impact of this installation:

> When walking down Fifth Avenue recently I happened to remark a life-size gilt figure in a second floor window which had all the appearances of a remarkable work of art in the archaic manner. This combined with the title of the concern housed therein, which was in a language rarely seen in public places of recent years, excited

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[205]Ibid., 5.

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> sufficient curiosity to make inspection an urgent matter.[206]

The window installation created an intense desire on the part of Solon to visit the premises. This desire was ennobled by the fact that all overt traces of the commercial were eliminated from the premises. Urban referred to the installation as a "show that does not cost a cent - to see."[207] The *New York Times* reported: "There is no appearance of the store in the beautiful rooms..."[208] This was reinforced by the fact that some pieces such as the gilt statue of a nude male in the window and Klimt paintings were on loan from Austria and not for sale (fig. 30). These items were present to inform the American public about modern Austrian art. The integrated installation did not immediately suggest that you were in a commercial store, surrounded by saleable objects (fig. 32). Freund, writing in the *International Studio*, observed that the visitor first noted the entire installation and only gradually focused on single pieces:

> After having been put in the right mood as it were, the visitor can then start to inspect the various pieces of art. There can be no doubt that for any kind of luxury trade this kind of arrangement has many advantages over the old one of the mere "store," with its absence of

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[206]Solon, "Viennese Method," 266

[207]"For Mr. Whitney," n.d., TMs, Portfolio 39, Joseph Urban Collection, 1.

[208]"Exhibition Brings Viennese Art Here," sec. 2, p. 6.

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> design, and it proves that "art in trade" has a most important role to play.[209]

In some instances, objects were placed in a cabinet, which the visitor was encouraged to open in order the discover and inspect the various goods. Solon analyzed how Urban used bands of black decoration to subtly focus visitors' eyes on the various displays.[210]

The historian William Leach has analyzed how merchants increasingly created and exploited environments of desire to sell goods. He describes the use of color, glass and light as the visual vocabulary of desire transforming lifeless objects into "icons worthy of worship." Leach identifies Urban as one of the major figures in the development of this vocabulary, but does not discuss the Werkstätte showroom.[211] The Wiener Werkstätte showroom was an early and significant example of this vocabulary. Modern in style, the space integrated color, glass and light to create a sense of intimacy and mystery (fig. 33).

Urban used his extensive theatrical design commissions to further promote and familiarize the American public with the Werkstätte. Fabrics designed by the Werkstätte were used for

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[209]Freund, "Vienna's Joy," 151.

[210]Solon, "Viennese Method," 270.

[211]Leach, *Land of Desire*, 143-145, does refers to the Cocoanut Grove and Reisenweber's and a 1915 fashion show at Gimbel's but does not go into detail about other projects. Park, 37, identified the Werkstätte as a conduit of modernism, but again, does not elaborate.

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stage curtains in the 1922 Follies and at the Rialto Theater.[212] The 1922 Follies also had a widely acclaimed scene "Laceland" which featured huge swatches of lace against a black background, a motif identical to the lace installation at the Werkstätte showroom. Furniture, fabrics and lighting fixtures from the Werkstätte appeared in the 1922 movies *The Young Diana*, and *Enchantment*.

Urban also relied on his own reputation to promote the Werkstätte. One of the press releases stated:

> That it is a show worth seeing is incontrovertible as soon as the name of the famous Austrian scenic artist is connected with it. For, to the theatre-going public, his name is a guarantee of amazing and artistic excellence.[213]

Newspapers reporting on the opening of the shop emphasized the fame of Urban and his connections with Ziegfeld and Cosmopolitan Productions. Yet if Urban's reputation initially advertised the Werkstätte, the showroom also broadened and enhanced Urban's image. Articles describing the installation frequently tried to define the "Viennese" spirit of the designs. Urban, as the leader of the venture, became the embodiment of all things Viennese.[214] This exotic image of Urban, as the personification of the Viennese "joy of life,"

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[212]"Urban Exhibits New Art Works,".

[213]"For Mr. Whitney", 1.

[214]Freund, "Vienna's Joy," 150.

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became a permanent part of his public identity.[215] The association with the Werkstätte also classified Urban as a champion of modern art.[216] Most significantly, it broadened Urban's reputation from that of a set designer to that of an architect and interior designer. F. E. W. Freund wrote:

> Viennese artists have been known for this wonderful art of "interior decoration" for years, and Joseph Urban belongs in their front rank.[217]

His standing as a designer was further increased by the exhibition, which he designed of the Werkstätte from September 19 through October 22, 1922 at the Chicago Art Institute and by Solon's article in *Architectural Record*.[218] His reputation as a "renaissance" artist, capable of designing in any medium, may well stem from this moment. The article on the showroom in *Current Opinion* stated:

> Of Joseph Urban we can only say that his versatility is as amazing as his power. His latest achievements include stage settings at the Metropolitan Opera House, a re-creation of the proscenium of the Rialto Theater in New York; and Cosmopolitan screen productions.[219]

While Urban's Werkstätte showroom was identified as an important early step in the development of modern American

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[215]See both MacGowan, "Profile: Caprice Viennois," 21-23; and Teegan, "Joseph Urban," 251-256.

[216]MacGowan, "Caprice Viennois," 22.

[217]Freund, "Vienna's Joy," 151.

[218]"Art Institute News Letter," 12 September 1922, TMs, Stack 708 17311 A784we 1921-23, Art Institute of Chicago Archives, 51. My thanks to Janis Staggs Flinchum for this citation.

[219]"Viennese Art Craft," 255.

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design, the actual venture was a financial disaster. Though the showroom may have stayed open up until 1924, after the initial year it received little attention. Urban, himself, suffered severe financial losses in the endeavor.[220] With the Werkstätte interiors, however, Urban consolidated a design vocabulary of forms, colors and materials that would inform many of his architectural designs of 1925-1928. The Ziegfeld Theater, the many Palm Beach commissions and the International Magazine Building were all progeny of Urban's Werkstätte design.

Projects 1921-1925

The influence of the Werkstätte can be seen in several architectural commissions of 1922-23.[221] While Urban still used allegorical figures, they were more firmly integrated into his designs. The proportions of various elements became more attenuated and the details less reliant upon classical prototypes. Urban began to use overall patterning again, although it was more geometric and delicate in form.

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[220]Carter and Cole, 108; Stern, *New York 1930*, 322; Schweiger, 114, 116.

[221]During the summer of 1922, Urban created a series of murals based on his Viennese fairy tale illustrations for the Fulton Theater. This commission was significant because Norman Bel Geddes was also involved with the project. Urban, however, had little to do with the overall redecoration of the theater. Leo A. Marsh, "Urban Paintings for Fulton," *The Morning Telegraph*, 20 August 1922, p. 4; "Fulton Presents New Appearance," *The Morning Telegraph*, 20 September 1922, p. 16.

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Urban's new proscenium for the Rialto Movie Theater was the first example of his Wiener Werkstätte-influenced work (fig. 34).[222] The proscenium combined a Wiener Werkstätte curtain composed of decorative overall geometric patterning, side panels composed of painted and enlarged reproductions of Giotto's murals and Wiener Werkstätte patterned panels above the murals.[223] A slender attenuated white frame was set into this composition. The continuation of the upper horizontal molding beyond the frame's vertical pilasters, combined with the placement of the pilasters inside the stage opening, however, meant that the frame did not function as a traditional proscenium, defining or delimiting the stage opening. Urban's frame was itself framed, and became an allegory or emblem of framing. Urban had long questioned the traditional proscenium and how it separated audience and actors.[224] At the Rialto he addressed the symbolic convention of the proscenium, transforming it into a sign

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[222]Hugo Riesenfeld, who had previously commissioned Urban's work on the Rivoli, was responsible for this project. "Rialto Theatre," Production File Box 26 and Portfolio 8, Joseph Urban Collection; "Stage Rearranged at Rialto Theatre," *New York Herald*, 11 June 1922, p. 7; LuLu Merrick, "In the World of Art," *The Morning Telegraph*, 9 July 1922, p. 12.

[223]For the Wiener Werkstätte provenance of the curtain see "Urban Exhibits New Art Works," p. 14; "Stage Rearranged At Rialto Theatre," p. 7; Merrick, "In the World of Art," p. 12.

[224]K. M., "The Reopening Opera," sec. 3, p. 2; "Settings At The Opera," *Boston Evening Transcript*, 11 January 1913, sec. 3, p. 6; "Caliban--1916," 1-2; "Miracles of Light,".

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announcing the events taking place within its confines and turning it into an analysis of the notion of the framing.

Urban's largest project of this period was the reconstruction of the Park Theater into the Cosmopolitan Theater for William Randolph Hearst (fig. 35).[225] Urban created a Colonial Revival interior "softened slightly by original modern treatment."[226] While the Colonial style was undoubtedly picked by Hearst, who had a pronounced fondness for period revival styles, the impact of the Wiener Werkstätte showed in the delicate detailing, tonal harmonies and subtle overall patterning of the walls.[227]

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[225]Hearst intended the theater to be the flagship theater of his Cosmopolitan movie production company. "Cosmopolitan Theatre" folders, Production File Boxes 6, 7, and Portfolio 8, for watercolor of stage wall niche, Joseph Urban Collection; "New Cosmopolitan Theatre Will Be Colonial in Design," *The Morning Telegraph*, 29 July 1923, p. 5; Joseph Mulvaney, "Artists and Artisans Working Three Shifts to Building Cosmopolitan," *New York American*, 29 July 1923, sec. E, p. 5; "Cosmopolitan Finest of Theatres," *New York Evening Journal*, 1 August 1923; "Marion Davies in New Role," *New York Evening Telegram*, 2 August 1923; "Cosmopolitan Sets Standard in Playhouses," *New York American*, 2 August 1923, p. 7; "Cosmopolitan Theatre Built For Comfort," *Washington Herald*, 19 August 1923; "The Newest New York Picture-Play House," *Arts and Decoration* 19 (October 1923): 40; "Cosmopolitan Theatre--" "Better Theatres Section" *Exhibitors Herald* 18 (13 October 1923): VI; 31; "Hearst Interests Start Chain of Film Houses," *The Morning Telegraph*, 25 February 1923, p. 1; "Say Hearst Plans Chain of Theatres," *New York Herald*, 25 February 1923, p. 4.

[226]Quotation from "Artists and Artisans Working Three Shifts," sec. E, p. 5.

[227]For Hearst and period revival styles see W. A. Swanberg, *Citizen Hearst: A Biography of William Randolph Hearst* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1961), 385, 424; for Cosmopolitan Theater see ibid., 426-428.

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Urban continued to try to erase the boundary between audience and stage. He created a small, shallow semicircular stage with walls which continued the architectural treatment of the auditorium (fig. 36). All of this suggested that the stage was not the traditional theater stage, but an intimate room within a room.

The theater was also notable for its exterior electric signage. Hearst placed three of the largest electric signs in the city on the facade. The name of the theater was on a 114' sign while another, announcing the star and title of the movie, was described as "the largest sign ever flashed on Broadway."[228] Urban had minimal, if any, involvement with the exterior signage. The transformation of an architectural elevation into a huge electric poster, however, would play a significant role in Urban's 1920s theater designs.[229]

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[228]"Cosmopolitan Finest of Theatres,".

[229]Urban's last project prior to commencing his architectural practice was the 1925 renovation of the Club de Montmartre in Palm Beach, Florida for Florenz Ziegfeld. Urban updated and reworked the visual motifs of his earlier nightclubs for this space, in particular drawing from the Midnight Frolic and Cocoanut Grove. Work on the Club de Montmartre also introduced Urban to one of his important clients, Anthony Drexel Biddle. "Montmartre Theatre" folder, Production File Box 22, Joseph Urban Collection; "Ziegfeld Will Open Palm Beach Theatre," *New York American*, 27 October 1925; Bernard Simon, "Ziegfeld to Operate Playhouse at Palm Beach," *The Morning Telegraph*, 27 October 1925, p. 4; "Society Attends Theater Opening At Palm Beach," *New York Herald-Tribune*, 15 January 1926, p. 17; Bernard Sobel, "Palm Beach Palms," *The Morning Telegraph*, 7 February 1926, p. 4; The "Chatterbox," "Palm Beach Days and Nights," *The Morning Telegraph*, 28 February 1926, p. 6; *New York Herald-Tribune*, 7 March 1926; "$220 a Seat to Attend Premiere of a Revue," *New York Herald Tribune*, 7 March 1926, p. 17; Lloyd Wheeler, "Palm Beach S'Amuse," *Theatre Magazine*

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Conclusion

The fourteen years before Urban officially opened his architectural office were rich with commissions, contacts and ideas that informed his subsequent practice. His melding of exotic historical and natural motifs in his night clubs formed an important precedent both for his own work as well as for the atmospheric movie theaters, long thought to be a characteristic building type of the 1920s. Rather than abruptly returning to architecture, Urban had gradually created a reputation and a series of designs which encouraged his change of focus. The theater had not only provided him with a number of interior design commissions but had served as a conduit for an interchange between European and American design ideas. Historians Peter Wollen and Nancy Troy have each demonstrated the significance of the decade of the 1910s and the impact of the fields of theater, interior design, fashion and decorative painting on establishing modernism and providing the context for the dialogue and some of the visual aspects of 1920s modernist practice.[230] In the United States, Urban played an important role, along with better-known figures such as Alfred Stieglitz, and Frank Lloyd Wright, to name just a few, in the introduction and promotion of modernism. In abandoning the realism of older stage sets,

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43 (April 1926): 12.

[230]Wollen, 17-18; Troy, 224-225.

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the historical styles of architecture and interior design, Urban replaced these with an emphasis upon more expressive and abstract design qualities such as color, light, geometry. In an 1913 article on the Russian set designer Leon Bakst, Urban stressed Bakst's, and by implication his own, significance for modern art.

> The success of Bakst and his Russian contemporaries leads to a hope that the principles for which they stand will not stop with the ballet. The artistic principles which he has developed belong to all art.[231]

If Urban subsequently focused on architecture, he never forgot the significance of theater for modern American design. When asked in a 1928 interview to discuss the sources of modern American architecture, Urban was quick to respond, "Primarily...the influence in the new direction has come from theatre."[232]

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[231]Urban, "A Slav Art Invasion," sec. 3, p. 2.

[232]Jerome Tischkoff, "Urban Sees New Love of Color," *Cincinatti Post*, 10 May 1928, clipping in Portfolio 36, Joseph Urban Collection.

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CHAPTER 2

THE ZIEGFELD THEATER:
FROM ALLEGORY TO ADVERTISING

The Ziegfeld Theater opened on February 2, 1927 with a dazzling array of lights, celebrities and publicity (fig. 5). Joseph Urban, a newspaper marvelled, had designed an: "exquisite temple out of steel and stone and fabrics from the looms of fairyland."[1] Located in New York City on 54th Street and 6th Avenue, the Ziegfeld Theater stood physically apart from the Times Square theater district. The forms of its exterior elevations further differentiated the building from the exotic revival styles and elaborate electrical signs that characterized typical legitimate theaters. Architectural critics identified the building's emphasis on program, mass and stark details as strikingly modern. Urban, they stated, had created something radically new in theater and American architecture.

The theater was one of a group of a half a dozen buildings completed by Urban's office between December 1926

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[1]Burton Davis, "Thru the Peep-Hole," *The Morning Telegraph*, 4 February 1927, 2. A very brief summary of the building's history illustrated by the notable photographs of the building's interior and exterior from the Theater Research Division, Lincoln Center Library of Performing Arts appears in Nicholas van Hoogstraten, *Lost Broadway Theatres* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1991), 227-230; Stern, Gilmartin, Mellins, *New York 1930*, 239, describes the theater; and Carter and Cole, 233-245, discuss the last minute construction efforts, Ziegfeld's response and some of the more significant productions.

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and February 1927. These buildings were the first structures to be constructed by the new firm, and provide a powerful statement of Urban's design concerns, sources and position within the architectural community. The remainder of the buildings are located in Palm Beach, Florida and include the Sunrise Building and Paramount Theater, opened in December 1926, Marjorie Merriweather Post's house Mar-a-lago (fig. 37), the Bath and Tennis Club, the renovation of the Oasis Club, all completed in January 1927, and the addition of a dining room to Anthony Drexel Biddle's house, Villa del Sarmiento.[2] Similar to the Ziegfeld, the Palm Beach buildings all employ a picturesque stylistic vocabulary, and episodic plans consisting of a series of coloristically different yet decoratively interrelated spaces ultimately concluding in the largest, and most elaborate, communal space. Both the New York and Palm Beach structures incorporate sculpture and murals to elaborate the identification, social function and atmosphere of the buildings. The Palm Beach buildings, however, were specifically designed for the climate and resort atmosphere of Florida and utilized a stylistic vocabulary that can be explicitly linked to a period revival style based on Spanish architecture. The impact of these buildings, therefore, was predominantly local and their influence was limited. Of the six buildings, the Ziegfeld Theater received the most

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[2]Brown, "Urban's Work in Palm Beach," 21-63.

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attention in the popular and architectural press and most broadly represents Urban's initial sources, aims and impact.

History and Description

Florenz Ziegfeld began to publicly air a desire for his own theater in the fall of 1923.[3] Traditionally, Ziegfeld booked his productions at the New Amsterdam Theater although occasionally he used other venues. His interest in having his own theater dated back to the brief and financially disastrous Century Theater venture of 1916. By the mid 1920s Ziegfeld's increasingly more extravagant sets, stars and costumes meant that he needed larger and larger auditoriums to regain his costs. The New York City economy and real estate market during the mid-1920s encouraged an unprecedented boom in theater building construction and made his recurring wish for a theater financially feasible.[4] Many legitimate theaters, however, dated from the 1900s and were old-fashioned in their

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[3]Leo A. Marsh, "'Follies' Opening Thursday of Next Week to be Last," *The Morning Telegraph*, 10 October 1923, p. 4, quotes Ziegfeld as stating that no existing theater is large enough for his productions; "Ziegfeld After Local Theatre," *The Morning Telegraph*, 9 February 1924, reports Ziegfeld's interest in obtaining the Lyric Theater.

[4]"Theatre Boom for Times Square Within Next 12 Months," *Variety*, 11 February 1925, p. 16; "Heard on Broadway," *Theatre Magazine* 43 (11 February 1925): 16; Howard Barnes, "The Broadway Real Estate Racket," *Theatre Magazine* 50 (November 1929): 15-16, 76.

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decorations, lighting and stage equipment as well as ventilating systems.

By December 1924 Ziegfeld entered into negotiations with William Randolph Hearst and Arthur Brisbane to finance a new theater bearing his name.[5] The agreement, formalized in June 1925, was for the development of two sites on 54th Street and 6th Avenue, as separate theaters called the Ziegfeld and the Billie Burke. Newspapers speculated that this would result in a possible chain of national theaters bearing the Ziegfeld name.[6] Urban had been linked with the building since December 1924. Newspaper gossip columns indicated that Urban was designing a theater for Hearst and already had drawn plans.[7]

The June 1925 announcements, however, state that the theater was to be jointly designed by Urban and the famed theater architect Thomas Lamb. The published perspective of the project in the June 21, 1925, *New York Times*, reflects Lamb's designs and sketches in the Thomas Lamb archives at

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[5]George Gerhard, "The Screen," *New York Evening World*, 18 December 1924.

[6]"Ziegfeld Signs for New House," *The Morning Telegraph*, 11 June 1925, p. 1; "Flo Ziegfeld Details New Theatre Plan," *New York American*, 14 June 1925, p. 2; "New Theatre and Group of Buildings for Sixth Ave.," *New York Times*, 21 June 1925.

[7]Sam Comly, "Timely Reflections From the Screen," *The Morning Telegraph*, 18 December 1924, p. 14; "Urban, Mary notes," 14-15; and Swanberg, 465. Hearst intended this project, along with the possible commission to design Marion Davies's California house, to lure Urban to move west as the artistic designer of Cosmopolitan Productions. Despite the fact that Urban ultimately rejected Hearst's offer and opened an architecture office, he retained the commission and Hearst's interest in the project.

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Columbia University indicate that his involvement dates back to July 1924. Lamb, who was evidently Arthur Brisbane's favored architect, executed a series of designs for the theater between July and December of 1924. Generally, Lamb's designs depict a rather stiff neoclassical theater building. Elements, such as a roof garden and a cornice-level frieze of Ziegfeld's initials provide some indication of the theater's occupant. But the number of different designs, and variations on plans, suggest that Lamb had problems meeting Ziegfeld's expectations. This, in part, was undoubtedly due to Ziegfeld's inability to articulate his own desires concerning the building besides wanting it to be modern and have the most up-to-date equipment. In announcing the plans, Ziegfeld stated:

> Up to now I have been very well content with the accommodations of the New Amsterdam and the Ziegfeld Cosmopolitan theatres, for both of them are models of modern stage architecture. But, through the very perfection of these two theatres, I shall be able to build what I call a super-theatre that will startle the public by its modernity and equipment.
>
> Special features of the theatre will include a revolving stage, hydraulic stage, and a remarkable electrical equipment, capable of producing all sorts of stage effects. There will be a cooling plant, capable of keeping the theatre at 50 degrees if desired. The architecture features will also include many of the remarkable architectural developments of the motion pictures theatres.[8]

While providing a punch-list of equipment, the statement gives very little design guidance as to what Ziegfeld considered to

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[8]"Flo Ziegfeld Details."

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be modern. Urban, who already had a clearer understanding of Ziegfeld's taste, campaigned hard for the opportunity to actually design the theater. Mary Urban's biographical notes provide insight into the situation:

> Brisbane did not have W.R.s imagination and was principally interested in the Theater as a real estate investment. Bitter were the arguments, he favored Lamb as an architect, who would construct a theater that would meet all the requirements and be a paying proposition Urban wanted to create for Flo Ziegfeld a Theater absolutely unique to house the type of productions that only Flo Ziegfeld was capable of introducing to the New York public....Brisbane could not risk any thing for the sake of an experiment but with Ziegfeld and W.R. on his side Urban finally gained his point and was allowed to proceed according to his own plan for the Theater. It meant that Hearst had to purchase Brisbane's interest in the land.[9]

By April 1925, Urban had become active in the design process.[10] When he departed for Europe on June 27, 1925, he was firmly in charge of the theater design. The first set of preliminary working drawings for the building in the Lamb archives, dated July 17, 1925 and bearing the titleblock "Joseph Urban Thomas Lamb Architects," are for Urban's

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[9]"Urban, Mary notes," 14-15.

[10]"Urban and Powell in City Thursday," *Albuquerque Journal*, 10 April 1925; "Joseph Urban Back From Coast," *New York Journal*, 16 April 1925, both clippings in Portfolio 38, pt. 2, Joseph Urban Collection.

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design.[11] Lamb's office produced the working drawings, and probably resolved many of the details and technical issues.[12]

The July 17 drawings in the Lamb collection reveal that the general layout of Urban's preliminary design was remarkably close to that of the completed building. Both consist of a basement lounge, elliptical auditorium and second floor foyer placed underneath the auditorium balcony. The set does not contain an exterior elevation; however, a longitudinal section matches the forms of a rendered exterior elevation, which is preserved in a photograph at the Billy Rose Theater Collection at Lincoln Center and simply dated "1925" (fig. 38).[13]

Urban divided his design into a wide center section, with narrow side sections. He employed a series of striking contrasts of color, texture and styles to dramatize the facade through the creation of startling juxtapositions of forms. The first four stories of the curved central section are clad in white stone and have simple over-scaled classical details

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[11]Roll 148, Thomas Lamb Archives, Drawings and Archives Collection of the Avery Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.

[12]Urban lacked an architecture office at the time and was still working out of his studio in the Cosmopolitan Productions Building at 127th Street. "Urban, Mary notes," 2. He did, however, receive a license to practice architecture in New York State in 1925. "Architectural Degrees," Production File Box 1, Joseph Urban Collection.

[13]Drawing No. 9, July 17 1925, Roll 148, Thomas Lamb Collection; "Ziegfeld Theater" MWEZ+ n.c. 23,703, Billy Rose Theater Collection, Lincoln Center Library for the Performing Arts.

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which evoke an archaic temple front. The side piers and upper three floors are clad in blue-black brick. The piers terminate in curving, stepped forms, reminiscent of Dutch gables, and are crowned with silhouettes of classically-garbed female figures supporting a huge covered bowl. At the eighth floor the central section sets back to reveal the landscaped terrace and circular, bell-roofed gazebo of the roof garden. While the gentle curve of the central section suggests the elliptical auditorium within, the overall impression of the facade is of a series of thin, almost decorative layers collaged together. Urban used allegorical sculpture and electric signs to identify the building's function and owner. A frieze of two gigantic theatrical masks interspersed between classically garbed women arranged in positions similar to Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*, runs across the fourth story. Above the cornice of this section two nude males pull levers as if to hoist the pedimentally shaped electrical sign which advertises the production within. The frieze of female figures when seen in conjunction with the sign, which reads "Glorifying the American Girl," suggests the birth of the latest Ziegfeld beauty.

For whatever reasons, the first elevation was unsatisfactory. Both Ziegfeld and Urban left for Europe that summer with the purpose of further studying the theater designs. According to Ziegfeld's statements they conferred with Reinhardt about the future productions and decorations of

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the new theater building, indicating that they probably discussed both Hans Poelzig and Oskar Kaufmann's theater buildings for Reinhardt.[14] The two then went to Paris and London.[15] In August, Urban returned to New York with drawings for the theater.[16] These drawings most likely, represented the final design of the structure and resulted in working drawings for the building dated December 7, 1925.[17]

Urban's final facade design presented a much more coherent and unified design than the first version yet retained its spectacular qualities (fig. 38).[18] Urban clad

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[14]Harry Acton, "Over the Gangplank," *New York Telegram*, 26 July 1925. The theater buildings include Poelzig's Grosses Schauspielhaus, Berlin, proposed Festspielhaus, Salzberg and Kaufmann's Komödie and Theater am Kurfürstendamm, Berlin.

[15]"Ziegfeld Suffers a Headache," as noted in Chapter 1, Urban could have seen the Exposition des Arts Décoratifs during this visit.

[16]Acton, "Over the Gangplank," 13 August 1925, p. 8.

[17]Roll 147, Thomas Lamb Collection.

[18]Demolition at the site had been on-going since plans for the theater were first announced. "Ziegfeld Signs For New House," p. 1. Construction on the foundations commenced shortly after the working drawings were completed in December 1925. "Zieggy-Hearst All Apple Pie," *Variety*, 17 February 1926, p. 21. The opening of the theater was delayed for several weeks due to problems with the building department concerning the fireproofing of the auditorium mural. Interestingly, Urban assigned Sue Goldklang, his assistant, and Gretl Urban, not the staff architects, to resolve the problems with the city, "Decorative Painting May Delay Ziegfeld: Urban's Art Work Hung But Not Approved by Building Department," *Variety*, 19 January 1927, p. 37. "Ziegfeld Theatre Time Frame" 1927, TMs in "Letters, Articles" folder, Production File Box 1, 1; Gretl Urban tape 2, Production File Box 46, Joseph Urban Collection; see also Carter and Cole, 235, 238. The theater opened with Ziegfeld's production of *Rio Rita*, a musical set in the southwest, on 2 February 1927.

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the exterior entirely in white marble and expanded the overblown central classical elements of the first design to cover the entire elevation.[19] Unlike the earlier design the central section swelled gently out, expressing the elliptical auditorium within. This section was framed by an over-scaled false proscenium consisting of broad, flat, fluted pilasters culminating in a simple entablature. Between the pilasters stretched an over-scale frieze of repeating curvilinear decoration.[20]

The building was flood-lit at night by hidden lights. Urban originally intended to omit electric signs on the exterior believing the grandiosely scaled elevation filled with theatrical references a sufficient advertisement of the entertainments within. He wrote:

> The elevation--the strong decorative elements of this part of the facade have nothing to do with usual

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[19]Urban maintained the basic divisions of his earlier scheme, using a wide central section flanked by narrow piers and dividing the elevation into three horizontal bands.

[20]Urban had used this motif earlier on columns for the temple scene for the Metropolitan Opera's 1920s production of Richard Wagner's *Parsifal*, see Carter and Cole, 122-123. The exact source for this unusual and exotic motif is unclear. In general character it appears to be Byzantine or Islamic, which Urban could have seen during his 1891 stay in Egypt, or in his numerous trips to Venice. Mary Urban noted that he frequently used motifs from San Marco: "...Urban spent Hours with Mary , in St . Marks looking at his beloved details in the mouldings, (Urban used these beautiful design in most of decorations . in his house , in the furniture , in almost all of his building the y reoccur like a light motif)." spelling and punctuation Mary Urban, "Urban, Mary notes," 7.

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> architectonic proportions. They are meant as a poster for the theatre.[21]

This omission of electric signage was a radical departure in New York City theater architecture. H. I. Brock, writing for the *New York Times* commented on this aspect of the building:

> Perhaps the most surprising announcement of the architects is that there will be no electric light signs on the front of the house. The facade will be illuminated with hidden lights and will itself serve as the signs of the theatre. In that illumination the massive ornaments above the mock-proscenium arch on either side and the two-story bay, which continues the swell front above the cornice, will--to judge--by Mr. Ferriss's drawing--give a very striking and interesting effect. If it is a theatrical effect, that is every bit as it should be.[22]

Undoubtedly at Ziegfeld and Hearst's insistence, however, the theater had both an electric sky-sign on the roof and house sign on the side when it opened (fig. 5).

The Ziegfeld, critics agreed, was radically new. Its newness, both Ely J. Kahn and H. R. Shurtleff insisted, was not just because of its startling novelty, but due to the fact that Urban's design came out of the principles of modern architecture. Kahn wrote:

> The Ziegfeld theory, apparently, is that the kind of architecture that theatre owners have produced for some years past is not necessarily the final word in design. The pathetic Adamesque creations, Italian Palaces in the latest interior decorator manner, need not be a steady

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[21]Urban, *Theatres*, n.p.

[22]H. I. Brock, "An Egg-Shaped Playhouse is New York's Latest: Joseph Urban Turns From Scenery to Architecture and Plans a Theatre With Highly Original Features," *New York Times Magazine*, 7 November 7, 1926, sec. 4, pp. 11-12. Hugh Ferriss set up his business as an independent free-lance renderer and illustrator in 1915.

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> diet. The Ziegfeld building cannot be labelled historically, so it will be fitting to say that it is modern in conception.[23]

Kahn and Shurtleff identified modernism as resulting from the frank expression of the oval auditorium form on the exterior, through the use of the bowed facade. While Urban employed unusually scaled and exotic ornament, he also left vast expanses of the exterior blank resulting in a stark and simple elevation. Shurtleff noted that the severity and gradual modulation of scale from the massive base to the thin cladding of the upper two office stories caused these floors to be read as a "curtain wall," reflecting the modern concern of expressing construction techniques. Finally, the sparing use of ornament gave the few decorative elements of the facade great emphasis. This suggested that their role went beyond mere embellishment of the facade to form a visual expression of the function and forms of the building (fig. 5).

Visitors to the theater passed through a brief vestibule and entered directly into the auditorium (fig. 40). Urban complemented the oval floor plan of the auditorium with a domed ceiling, creating an inward-turning self-contained space. The shape of the room was emphasized by the uninterrupted sweep of seating, the absence of mouldings or

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[23]Ely J. Kahn, "The Ziegfeld Theatre, New York," *Architectural Record* 61 (May 1927): 385. See also H. R. Shurtleff, "Architectural Notes, The Ziegfeld Theatre, New York," *The Arts* 11 (March 1927): 148-149.

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applied ornament (fig. 6). The impact, according to critic Henry T. Parker, was profoundly architectural:

> Being man of theater as well as architect, Mr. Urban pondered sight and hearing. He avoided angles; he put by nearly every detriment to clear-sounding speech and song. Above all, he gave lines to a playhouse. The curve of the single balcony is agreeable to follow; the outlining of the rectangular proscenium tempts the eye. The walls-fortunately boxless-slope away with both grace and dignity. No enforced and awkward jointure sets a ceiling upon the whole. An architect not a jerrybuilder, has conceived an auditorium.[24]

While the space had a unified and easily comprehended plan, it was anything but austere. Enlivening the auditorium was a vast mural, entitled "The Joy of Life," which stretched over the ceiling, walls and even balcony underside (fig. 6). Designed by Lillian Gaertner, a protege of Urban's, and executed in the Yonkers studio, the mural pulsed with small-scale medieval figures, flowers, trees, castles and animals in an overall color scheme of gold, green and black.[25]

The proscenium opening was a shallow round arch surrounded by a broad gently undulating gilded frame (fig.

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[24]H.T.P. "Ziegfeld Theater," *Boston Evening Transcript.*

[25]Lillian Gaertner's family were friends of Urban's, with his encouragement she went to Vienna and studied with Josef Hoffmann. Upon her return she did several murals for Urban's studio including the Palm Beach Florida, Club de Montmartre. "Lillian Voight Gaertner," *New York Sun*, 18 November 1927, says that the mural was painted in 20 feet square canvas sections, and took 8 months to complete. The mural contained over 800 figures varying from 8 to 12 feet in height. According to Carter and Cole, 234, who base much of their information on relatively recent interviews with Gretl Urban, the mural took 18 months to paint. See also Lillian [Gaertner] Langseth-Christensen, *A Design for Living* (New York: Viking, 1987).

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41).[26] A forestage, based on the Elizabethan theater, stretched across the front of the proscenium and provided an intimate playing area. The entire stage area was kept relatively shallow so that productions would be in relief rather than in perspective. Urban believed this was the best way to present the large choruses of Ziegfeld's musicals.[27]

Beneath the auditorium was a circular lounge with a shallow half-domed ceiling in what Henry T. Parker described as "cool and pearly," tints.[28] The main gathering space, however, was the second floor foyer fitted beneath the auditorium balcony and opening onto the front in a balcony (fig. 42).[29] The bell-shaped half-dome ceiling, undulated down from the front windows to the entrance into the space. The overall color scheme of yellow and white and the more open patterning of the foyer created a lighter sense of space in

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[26]The auditorium was lit by a combination of direct and indirect light. The stage equipment included a cyclorama and some of the most sophisticated lighting of the time. "Ziegfeld Glorifies an Avenue," *New York Post*, 29 January 1927; "The Ziegfeld Theater, New York," *Architectural Forum* 46 (May 1927): 415-416; Urban, *Theatres*, n.p.. The backstage facilities, evidently were among the most comfortable, modern and spacious of the period. Carter and Cole, 234, 238.

[27]Joseph Urban, "Happiness Depicted in Ziegfeld Theatre," *New York Telegraph*, 6 February 1927, p. 12.

[28]H.T.P. "Ziegfeld Theatre."

[29]The foyer was identified as a special amenity. Most theater forced patrons into the basement or onto the streets for smoking or discussions during the intermissions. H.T.P. "Ziegfeld Theatre."

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comparison with the auditorium. Urban described the color scheme as a:

> Springtime mood in deliberate contrast to the full blooming joy of life depicted in the decoration of the auditorium.[30]

The large windows of the second story foyer dominated the facade. At night the pedestrian could glimpse views of the room and the audience as they strolled through the chamber. The windows became an advertisement of the luxury and glamour contained within, luring the passer-by into the theater. Critic Henry T. Parker described them as "almost symbol of the new house."[31]

The building, its auditorium and plays received rave reviews from critics and evidently from audience members alike. One of the most enthusiastic fans of the building was Florenz Ziegfeld. Gretl Urban recalled Ziegfeld's reaction to the building:

> I was fussing with some artificial flowers that were out of line when Flo made an unexpected appearance. He came up on the stage, and we both looked out into the auditorium. Even in the faint working light we were aware of its beguiling beauty. Flo put his arm around me and said, "Your father sure hit the jackpot this time."

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[30]Urban, "Happiness Depicted." Gaertner is not credited with the foyer paintings; most likely they were designed by Urban and executed by his scene painting studio.

[31]H.T.P. "Ziegfeld Theatre,": "Until smoke spreads the unescapable mantle, it (the facade) will stand almost silvery in the play of light upon the stone-work. Silvery and also golden; for in the midst of the facade is a tall curving window, a bay of appropriate magnitude, opening upon a balcony, flooded from within by lights both soft and rich."

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> When I came back on stage, there was Flo with his legs straddled over the seat in the front of him, looking around with a beatific smile on his face. That's the way I like to remember him--sitting in his very own theatre built by Joe Urban.[32]

Architectural Language: From Allegory to Advertising

In his first design of the Ziegfeld Theater elevation, Urban amalgamated motifs and ideas from a remarkable number of diverse sources (fig. 38). The playful handling of classical details and over-scaled proportions are clearly related to the work of Urban's European colleagues Josef Hoffmann and Oskar Kaufmann. Yet Urban's use of color as well as the almost vernacular character of the brickwork--the materials and stepped gable forms recalling Dutch colonial architecture of New York--also reveals the influence of German and Dutch Expressionist architecture.[33] The impact of Frank Lloyd Wright as well as the recently arrived Eliel Saarinen upon Urban's work also can not be discounted.[34]

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[32]Carter and Cole, 238-239.

[33]This could be a playful allusion to Ziegfeld's previous headquarters the New Amsterdam Theater.

[34]Wright's designs for the 1919-1921 Hollyhock house including an unrealized theater as well as his 1914 Midway Gardens, would both be relevant sources for Urban's work in terms of their visual forms and function. Eliel Saarinen's 1922 Chicago Tribune Tower competition entry with its allegorical figures and Expressionist stonework also could have influenced Urban's design.

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Of even greater significance, however, is Urban's somewhat awkward combination of references to his own earlier American designs. The decorative patterning, smaller scale allegorical figures, contrasting materials, and layered sense of the facade are reminiscent of Urban's night club spaces (fig. 15). These references are reinforced by the clear inclusion in the facade design of the top story roof garden. In contrast, the gigantic scale, classical details and huge dramatic masks of the central section, however, obviously derive from Urban's high art designs for *Caliban*, the Stage Setting for the Detroit Symphony and the Permanent Peace Memorial (fig. 18). The startling exterior use of color, in the striking contrast of black for the upper stories and sides and white for the central portion, as well as the unusual elliptical forms of the piers and rooftop gazebo also would have reminded some viewers of Urban's modern design for the Wiener Werkstätte showroom (fig. 30). His inclusion of electric signs as part of the architectural design acknowledges both Ziegfeld and Hearst's desire for large and elaborate signs as previously demonstrated at the Century Theater and Cosmopolitan Theater. The dominance of the signs also allude to the technical innovations, particularly in lighting, that were characteristic of Ziegfeld's productions.

These multiple references provided two layers of meaning for the elevation. They drew upon established associations with Urban as the designer of the modern and exotic, equally

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versed in commercial culture and high art. This in turn both elevated and advertised Ziegfeld and the productions within the building. The masks, allegorical Ziegfeld girls and signs of the exterior advertises the labor, technology and beautiful bodies which contributed to Ziegfeld's productions.

If Urban's design was awkward, it was also in the context of 1925 New York, startlingly modern. The striking colors, decorative, but ahistorical, use of materials and patterns were unusual for any building in New York, much less a typical theater. This combined with the unusual proportions and references to European modernism made the design fit Ziegfeld's desire to be novel and modern.

Urban's final design for the exterior relied almost exclusively upon the high art vocabulary of *Caliban* and the Wiener Werkstätte showroom while eliminating overt references to his night club designs (fig. 39). The completed Ziegfeld Theater revealed the influence of Urban's Viennese origins and training, particularly the work of Josef Hoffmann. The distended classical forms of the Ziegfeld suggest the enlarged details of several buildings by Hoffmann, particularly work executed at the outbreak of World War I such as the 1914 Austrian House at the German Werkbund Exhibition in Cologne or the 1913-1915 Skywa-Primavesi House in Vienna.[35] Urban's

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[35]Urban, of course, knew Hoffmann from Vienna and renewed contact with him after World War I, especially in conjunction with the opening of the Wiener Werkstätte showroom. Urban also helped Hoffmann's son, Wolfgang, find employment when he immigrated to the United States. For Hoffmann's somewhat brief

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combination of overblown classical details on the exterior with a highly patterned interior also found parallels in Oskar Kaufmann's two slightly earlier Berlin theaters the 1925 Komödie and 1923-24 Theater am Kurfürstendamm.[36] The Ziegfeld facade additionally recalled, despite vast differences in locations, a tradition of 19th and early 20th century theaters, such as the 1874-88 Vienna Burgtheater by Gottfried Semper and Urban's professor Karl von Hasenauer. This was due to Urban's expression of the elliptical auditorium space on the exterior and his use of a classical vocabulary.[37]

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reminiscence of Urban see "Biographical Material", n.d. TMs, Production File Box 41, Joseph Urban Collection.

[36]Kaufmann's 1924 Krolloper is of significance; the Komödie and Theater am Kurfürstendamm, however, have added importance because they were managed by Reinhardt. Huesmann, 59-60. Urban knew Kaufmann and consulted with him on the design of the Metropolitan Opera House in 1927, "Urban Seeks Advice From Art Builders," *The Morning Telegraph*, 31 July 1927, pp. 1, 2. Urban, subtly differentiated his work from Kaufmann's in his elimination of ornament on the interior and eschewal of historically based decoration. In 1929 he wrote: "The modern decorative movement towards larger, smoother and less ornamented surfaces has its peculiar applicability to the playhouse, where the eye should not be distracted from the players by too ornate detail. Yet there is something undeniably exciting and truly theatrical in the rococo interior of the Residenz theatre in Munich (Cuvilliés, arch.) and Oskar H. Kaufmann, beginning with a rigid simplicity in the Volksbühne and other houses in Berlin, has had delightfully amusing recourse to the Chinese baroque for the Theater am Kurfürstendamm and the Komödie also in Berlin." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 14th ed., s.v. "Theatre, Modern Exteriors and Interiors," by Joseph Urban.

[37]Kaufmann's 1913 Berlin Volksbühne also falls into this tradition. These theaters, as Urban noted in his *Encyclopedia Britannica* entry, however, typically were built on a wide street or square, allowing a view of all four elevations.

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Yet Florenz Ziegfeld was notorious for having definite opinions about "beauty" and how that could be used to attract publicity and a large audience. How did the modernity of the theater express the extravagant commercial popular spectacle of the Ziegfeld Follies? And how did its sensational forms satisfy Ziegfeld's voracious desire for publicity? The building was equally a result of Urban's inspiration and the commercial demands of Ziegfeld. If upon first inspection the exterior appears to be the result of Urban's high art vocabulary, a closer examination reveals that Urban drew upon both high and commercial architecture, theater design and advertising to formulate a visual language that would address and entice a diverse potential audience.

In part, Urban's architectural language at the Ziegfeld drew upon an unorthodox combination of Ziegfeld's popular musical revues with avant-garde theatrical works from Germany and Austria. Urban's interest in avant-garde German theatrical productions was reinforced not only by Ziegfeld's desire to acquire the latest European novelties but by similarities in the style and format of Ziegfeld's Follies with that of avant-garde productions.[38] A fast-paced discontinuous dramatic structure, expressive sets and a large

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[38]Chapter 1 for Ziegfeld's interaction with European theater.

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chorus, made the Follies a comic inversion of Expressionist drama.[39]

During the 1910s Ziegfeld's plays regularly featured innovative mechanisms, such as the unfolding telescope stage. The Follies, furthermore, frequently included numbers celebrating technological achievements as well as skits on social events then in the news. In the early 1920s, however, Ziegfeld began to downplay the Follies' episodic revue format, mechanical forms and obvious references to technology and commercial culture. *Rio Rita*, which, opened the Ziegfeld Theater in 1927, relied upon a narrative to thematically

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[39]For characterizations of Ziegfeld Follies: Seldes, "A Tribute to Florenz Ziegfeld," 130-146; Toll, *On With the Show*, 295-315; Stone. For Expressionist theater see John Willett, *The Theatre of the Weimar Republic* (New York & London: Holmes & Meier, 1988); Michael Patterson, *The Revolution in German Theatre 1900-1933*, (Boston, London & Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981). Comparisons of Ziegfeld with European theater rarely occur in current historical and critical literature. As Chapter 1 indicates, there was a lively exchange of information, and some early reviewers commented upon the similarities, Sayler, *Our American Theatre*; Louis Sherwin, "Musical Comedy, and the Dreier Drama: America's Ascendancy and Supremacy in a New Theatrical Art Form," *Vanity Fair* 7 (February 1917): 59, 106; unidentified newspaper clipping in Ziegfeld Clipping File, entitled: "The Modern Revue and How it is Put Together," Billy Rose Theater Collection, Lincoln Center Library for the Performing Arts; "Partners in 'The Follies'." For a discussion of high-art connections between Europe and American theater see Mardi Valgemae, *Accelerated Grimace: Expressionism in the American Drama of the 1920s* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1972); and Valgemae, "Expressionism in the American Theater," in *Expressionism as an International Literary Phenomenon*, ed. Ulrich Weisstein (Paris: Librarie Marcel Didier, 1973), 193-203.

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connect the musical (fig. 43).[40] The production was set at an unspecified time in musical comedy Mexico and its cast contained characters from the mythical old west, including a heroic Texas Ranger. The show relied primarily upon lavish scenery, large chorus numbers and tableaux for its impact. *Rio Rita* used elaborate technical equipment to achieve its visual effects and featured a locale troubled by uneasy U.S. - Mexican relations. Nevertheless, the play did not allow any obvious display of machinery or mention of political issues to disrupt its fantasy of the Rio Grande.

This gradual elimination of any overt references to technology was paralleled by Urban's design for the theater exterior. The earlier 1925 design for the theater combined decorative theatrical allusions with two male figures raising an electric sign (fig. 38). In the final version light was used only for its visual effect and signs were abolished Urban purposely rejected the by-then standard electrical advertising signs (fig. 39). Instead, he reformulated the notion of advertisement by creating what he called an exterior architectural poster. The form and decoration of the facade, he felt, were the only necessary indications of the building's function.

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[40]See *Rio Rita* program in *Rio Rita* Clippings File, Billy Rose Theater Collection, Lincoln Center Library for the Performing Arts; Percy Hammond, "The Theaters," *New York Herald-Tribune*, 3 February 1927; J. Brooks Atkinson, "The Play," *New York Times*, 3 February 1927; Burton Davis, "'Rio Rita' Glorifies New Ziegfeld Theatre Opening," *The Morning Telegraph*, 4 February 1927, p. 2.

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Urban and Ziegfeld's gradual deletion of technology and popular conventions from their plays and the building was the result of a complex group of factors. Exterior billboards and electrical advertising signs had come under increasing scrutiny and criticism for their expense and visual clutter. As a result of such criticism, Ziegfeld removed billboards advertising his productions on the highways and railroads leading into New York City.[41] Ziegfeld, furthermore, had started to turn away from the revue format with its nudity and topical humor in the early 1920s. This was due to the increased commercial success of book musicals which provided a story to unify the events on stage as well as pressure from interest groups to "Purify" the presentation and contents of the New York Stage.[42]

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[41]"Ziegfeld Obliges Billboard to Go," *The Morning Telegraph*, 12 April 1924, p. 4, reported that Ziegfeld was removing the 64 billboards on highways and railroads coming into New York at the request of Mrs. W. L. Lawton, chairman of National Committee for the Restriction of Outdoor Advertising, and that he was also relinquishing his electric sign in Times Square which reputedly cost $50,000 a year. See also Gilbert Seldes, "Posters and Billboards," *New Republic* 46 (10 March 1926): 74-75; "High Cost of "White Way" Electric Advertising," *Literary Digest* 8 (23 February 1924): 72-73; Walter Winchell, "The Real Broadway," *The Bookman* 66 (December 1927): 378-383.

[42]"Ziegfeld Out to Clean Stage," *The Morning Telegraph*, 27 June 1926, p. 3; "Ziegfeld Plans to Clean Stage," *The Morning Telegraph*, 2 March 1927, p. 2; Burton Davis reported that Ziegfeld didn't want the word revue used for the Follies because of its vulgar associations, Burton Davis, "Around the Show Shops," *The Morning Telegraph*, 9 February 1927, p. 4; "Another Stage Purification Campaign," *Literary Digest* 84 (7 March 1925): 26-27. For impact of the book musical see Robert C. Toll, *The Entertainment Machine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 128-135.

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But Urban and Ziegfeld's turn away from the technological and topical subjects combined with the increased emphasis upon visual effects and emblems was probably reinforced by an awareness of avant-garde Expressionist productions. Georg Kaiser's 1918 play *From Morning Till Midnight* denounced the mechanistic aspects of modern society and eliminated any obvious mechanical forms from the set.[43] Yet at the same time the play relied upon sophisticated lighting systems and a film-like staging. Kaiser used technology for its visual and emotional effects yet tried to conceal how these effects were produced. This repression of technology resulted in an increased emphasis upon visual forms. The play emphasized ordinary objects such as a tree, that through placement and distortion were given extraordinary importance. Kaiser, however, never indicated what this heightened significance meant and thus abstracted the tree into an exaggerated but empty emblem. While European hostility towards technology was a reaction to the horrors of World War I, Urban and Ziegfeld's de-emphasizing of machines appears to have been simply a stylistic shift.

Urban designed the scene entitled, "Florida, the Moon and You," for the 1926 play *No Foolin*, in a similar manner (fig.

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[43]For analysis of *From Morning Till Midnight*, see Patterson, pp. 62-88. The play was staged in translation in New York during the Spring of 1922, see Sheldon Cheney, "Staging the Expressionist Drama," *Shadowland* 6 (July 1922): 45-66.

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44).[44] The set consisted of a huge revolving ball covered with small mirrors. As the ball descended onto the stage, concealed colored lights played across its faceted surface, it then split in half to reveal a dancing Clare Luce. Yet as the song and remainder of the set indicates, the constantly transforming globe was, in fact, the moon. Through faceted, reflective glass and lights, Urban transformed the everyday moon into a glittering orb, making it emblematic of the scene.[45]

The design for the Ziegfeld Theater facade can be understood in light of Ziegfeld and Kaiser's emphasis on visual effects and the resulting abstraction of meaning. The facade was a series of enlarged frames which revealed at the center yet another frame, the false proscenium, filled with an oversized band of ornament (fig. 5). Urban gave this ornament exaggerated architectural significance. When viewed in conjunction with the false proscenium, however, the band

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[44]*No Foolin'* clipping file, Billy Rose Theater Collection, Lincoln Center Library for the Performing Arts, including a synopsis of the play; "Artistic Revue, Offered by Florenz Ziegfeld," *Wall Street News*, 28 June 1926; White Studio Key Books, 16,556 pp.355, 356, 360; George Jean Nathan, "The Week in Theatre," *The Morning Telegraph*, 4 July 1926, p. 4.

[45]The globe appears to be similar to the revolving balls of dance halls that have come to be emblematic of the "Roaring Twenties". However, I have been unable to determine when they came into widespread use. It would be unlike Urban and Ziegfeld to use something for a major effect that was common feature of run-of-the-mill entertainment spaces, and more probable that their use of the globe stimulated widespread imitation.

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suggested a prosaic form, the fringe of a rising theater curtain.

This type of treatment of ordinary objects has been identified as an allegorical mode of expression by the German critic Walter Benjamin. In a 1928 study, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, Benjamin analyzed the allegorical language of 17th century baroque drama in order to suggest parallels with Expressionist drama.[46] He differentiated allegories from symbols in their reliance upon the concepts of history and time. This frequently resulted in the use of or allusion to ruins or decay in allegories.[47] In turn, this suggests the transitory, arbitrary, fragmentary quality of the emblem. Meaning, for allegorical emblems, could be continuously exchanged. Allegory, he suggested, allowed for a multiplicity of potential meanings and thus became an abstraction which devalued the meaning of the object.[48] Yet, Benjamin noted, the attempt at signification also had the effect of elevating this language and giving it a certain power. Allegory, therefore produced objects whose meanings were both elevated and valueless.

In formulating the architectural language for the Ziegfeld exterior, Urban relied heavily upon the classical and

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[46]Walter Benjamin, "Epistemo-Critical Prologue," *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: NLB, 1977), 53-56.

[47]Benjamin, *Origin*, 159-167; Buck-Morss, 168-170.

[48]Benjamin, *Origin*, 175-182; Buck-Morss, 175-181.

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allegorical forms of his earlier *Caliban* and Permanent Peace Memorial (fig. 18). The allegorical mode of expression had been particularly appropriate for these two projects, each deeply concerned with the passage of time and the ruinous nature of war. Yet neither the transitory quality of history, nor a sense of ruin or decay, were initially significant for enjoying or interpreting the Ziegfeld Theater. Urban's use of allegory on the Ziegfeld exterior merely resulted in a show-stopping facade but not in layers of incredible significance which enriched the viewer's understanding of the building and the productions it housed. Besides indicating a generalized notion of theater, the Ziegfeld facade could mean anything and was both elevated and debased.

The ambiguity of the Ziegfeld's forms, therefore, suggest a compromised attempt to enrich the significance of the building through decoration. Ambiguity, however, was also an essential characteristic of advertising. Urban's allegorical forms did not give elaborate meaning to the Ziegfeld Theater, but created a distinctive and eye-catching facade. This is consistent with the form and purpose of advertisements. During the period that Urban designed the Ziegfeld Theater, the advertising industry began to place increased emphasis on the visual rather than written aspects of an ad. The industry felt that visual images could make more convincing

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associations in the mind of the viewer.[49] Designers of ads used visual allegories to link a complex set of associations with a product.[50] Commodities such as tires and cars, furthermore, frequently received dramatic visual treatment, such as an enlarged scale or mysterious spotlighting, so that the industry could suggest a distinctive aura without having to verbally specify the product's qualities.[51]

A year after Urban completed the Ziegfeld he wrote:

> Architecture and advertising--the two outstanding practical arts of America--were bound to collide. At their highest there is indeed a natural affinity between the two. A beautiful building is the sandwich board of its owner. Renaissance palaces advertised the power and culture of the Medici.[52]

If the Ziegfeld exterior was the sandwich board of its owner, how did Urban's use of allegory and exaggerated effects advertise Ziegfeld's assets? Within a city composed of dozens

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[49]Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 153-155; A Commercial Art Manager, "The All-Over Illustration Gains in Popularity," *Printer's Ink* 135 (24 June 1926): 196, 198, 201, 202.

[50]W. Livingston Larned, "The Dynamic Illustration That Gives the Reader a Jolt," *Printer's Ink* 135 (10 June 1926): 129-130, 132; W. Livingston Larned, "Be Subtle When You Use Pictorial Allegories," *Printer's Ink* 137 (11 November 1926): 97, 100, 101, 104; W. Livingston Larned, "The Allegory and the Symbol Enter Industrial Advertising," *Printer's Ink* 137 (30 December 1926): 80, 83, 84. See also Judith Williamson, *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising* (London: Marion Boyars, 1978).

[51]Marchand, 264-284; A Commercial Art Manager, "Innovations in Spotlight Illustrations," *Printer's Ink*, 134 (28 January 1926): 99, 100, 104, 105.

[52]Joseph Urban, "Wedding Theatre Beauty to Ballyhoo," *The New York Times Magazine*, 19 August 1928, p. 10.

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of theaters, Urban wanted to identify the entertainment purpose of the building yet differentiate it from all its rivals. Ziegfeld wanted to separate his theater from other similar buildings and he needed the theater to elevate his practice above that of his rivals. By 1925, Earl Carroll, Irving Berlin, New Wayburn and George White all staged successful annual revues.[53] None, however, had their own specially designed theater. Additionally, New York City was during this period experiencing an unprecedented boom in theater building construction.[54] H.I. Brock writing for the *New York Times* summarized the major architectural trends in recent theater design:

> There is a fashion in theatres as fixed--and as fleeting--as the fashions in the frocks that are supposed to come from Paris....There is the Belasco period--self-consciously sensuous--the temple-of-art idea. There is the Winthrop Ames, or Little Theatre period, self-consciously simple and meticulously well-bred inside and out. There is the crop of commercial theatres with blank walls on side streets. There is the Theatre Guild period which returns to the Belasco idea with more sophistication--the current sophistication which accepts period furniture as its hallmark.
>
> However, in general, no very real difference appears between an old theatre and a new theater except in the progressive elaboration of the stage machinery.[55]

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[53]Gerald Boardman, *American Musical Theatre: A Chronicle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 398-401.

[54]"Theatre Boom," p. 16; "Heard on Broadway," 64; Barnes, "The Broadway Real Estate Racket," 15, 16, 76.

[55]Brock, "Egg-Shaped Playhouse," sec. 4, pp. 11-12.

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Urban transformed the visual vocabulary of legitimate theaters and reformulated the exterior conventions of movie picture palaces in order to create the Ziegfeld. The unique features of the Ziegfeld designs differentiated it from the typical staid classicism of legitimate theaters.[56] On the other hand, the Ziegfeld's sensational shapes suggested something of the exoticism of movie theaters, particularly John Eberson's atmospheric movie theaters.[57] Its starkness and simplicity, however, distinguished it from the typical revival styles of a movie palace. Urban wrote of his designs for the exterior:

> There is no single solution to the problem of harmonizing advertising and beauty. One way out is to use materials and light so as to stamp the building as a theatre. In my first design for the Ziegfeld Theatre the swelling and proscenium-like front, which is now marked out by floodlights at night, was to have had the same prominence in daylight through the contrast of white marble against blue-black brick.[58]

Urban intended the exterior's unusual proportions and exotic details, to be a sign, furthermore of the specific type of entertainment, modern musicals. He wrote:

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[56]Urban was quite clear in his intention to differentiate the Ziegfeld from legitimate theaters, Kahn, "Ziegfeld Theatre," 385.

[57]Lary May, *Screening Out the Past* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 153-157; interestingly Eberson's first New York atmospheric theaters, the Universal Theater in Brooklyn and the Valencia in Jamaica, Queens, also opened in 1927; Richard Stapleford and Jane Preddy, *Temples of Illusions: The Atmospheric Theaters of John Eberson* (New York: Hunter College, 1988).

[58]Urban, "Wedding Theatre Beauty," p. 10.

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> The whole idea back of the Ziegfeld Theatre was the creation of an architectural design which should express in every detail the fact that here was a modern playhouse for modern musical shows.[59]

The unusual exterior, therefore expressed its theatrical purpose through the swell of the auditorium, false proscenium and allegorical masks. The overblown proportions and exotic details were meant expressly to identify the modernity, whimsy, and unusualness of the productions within. This poster served not only to advertise the entertainments but differentiate the theater from its competitors.

Urban designed the Ziegfeld facade not only to announce the attractions within, but to entice the passer-by into the theater. He used devices from the world of advertising to achieve this purpose.[60] Advertisements frequently encouraged a viewer's interest in a product by insinuating he/she into the space of the ad. A set of associations that are visually intriguing but initially difficult to decipher, were devised to invite the viewer to participate in the ad by decoding its

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[59]Urban, *Theatres*, n.p.

[60]Urban was probably very familiar with the world of advertising. Images of his buildings and night clubs were frequently used as advertisements, the Ziegfeld Theater was featured in an ad for I. Miller shoes, *The Morning Telegraph*, 6 February 1927, p. 6; and images of Urban's night clubs at the St. Regis Hotel were used to advertise those spaces in the *New Yorker*, 4 (18 August 1928): 34; (15 December 1928):, 94; (5 January 1929): 79; (19 January 1929): 79. Furthermore in 1929 Urban drew images for an advertising campaign for Cadillac cars that were published in the *Saturday Evening Post*, "Cadillac & Packard Sketches" and "Cadillac Car", Production File Box 4, Joseph Urban Collection.

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message.[61] The 1927 advertisement for Certain-teed building materials combined an oversized genie, an oriental bazaar and a panoply of buildings ranging from mosques and pagodas to modern skyscraper cities (fig. 45).[62] It is not immediately evident what these varied images have to do with linoleum and roof shingles. The combination of images, when read in conjunction with the text, suggests that only the range of color and style provided by Certain-teed can meet the restless changes in modern public taste. In a similar manner, critical reviews of the Ziegfeld indicated that the scale and exoticism of the decorative frieze made it initially difficult to comprehend. Described as an immense oriental pattern or a writhing band of pretzels, the frieze commanded attention.[63] Only through a thorough examination of the facade, could a viewer understand that the decoration suggested a curtain. Thus through an interpretation of the frieze, the viewer was invited to enter metaphorically into the facade.

Contemporary advertisements also involved viewers by positioning them as actors in a visual image.[64] For instance, the ad for the 1929 REO Flying Cloud automobile puts you in the driver's seat, creating a longing for the freedom

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[61]Williamson, 72.

[62]*Saturday Evening Post* 199 (26 February 1927): 147.

[63]T-Square, "The Sky Line," *The New Yorker* 2 (27 November 1926): 82; Shurtleff, "Architectural Notes," 149.

[64]Williamson, 75-78; Marchand, 360-363.

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of the open road and power of speed increasingly difficult to obtain on crowded 1929 roads (fig. 46).[65] Only the superior REO Flying Cloud, it suggests, can let you experience this sensation. At the Ziegfeld Theater, viewers were also drawn into a narrative of anticipated events. The exterior depicted an audiences' penultimate moment of desire, the curtain rising on a stage about to be filled by the forthcoming show. During the day, the Ziegfeld Theater presented a blank screen onto which each viewer could project their personal fantasies or memories of the musical within (fig. 5). At night, during the performance, floodlights illuminated this facade, and the large windows of the foyers, allowed glimpses into a lavishly decorated space filled with elegantly attired people (fig. 39). Thus the audience became performers on a grand exterior stage in front of a large metropolitan crowd. The message to the passer-by was clear. For $3 - $6 dollars, you, too, could be glorified by Florenz Ziegfeld and Joseph Urban for a few hours.

Urban's elimination of explicit electric signs, in his final design, and his attempt to create meaning solely through visual forms ironically wrenched the notion of the advertising poster from its conventions and resulted in a loss of specific meaning. Urban's omission of electric signage was also startling, given both Ziegfeld and Hearst's previous fascination with having the biggest and brightest electric

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[65] *Saturday Evening Post*, 9 June 1928, 69.

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signs. Shortly after the building's completion, Urban conceded to the addition of electric signs and a year later, an entrance marquee.[66] As early as 1928, Urban criticized his own efforts to downplay the commercial intent of the Ziegfeld Theater.

> Long before the coming of our advertising age the designers of theatres had to recognize that the peculiarly public nature of dramatic art made it necessary for the playhouse to attract attention and tell its story at as great a distance as possible.
>
> It used to be an esthetic story....For a theatre this meant that the exterior had to gain its beauty from the way it showed us in its massed walls the essential inner parts of the playhouse--the stage towering above the auditorium, the auditorium rising out of the anterooms and corridors through which the public streamed. Now the congested city of the modern west throws in the advertising sign, the fire escape, and the marquee. Unless these things are made part of a complete and pleasing design, the theatre and its architect have failed.[67]

Though Urban admired the poster-like quality of the Ziegfeld exterior, beginning in 1928 he also tried to more directly

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[66]It is unclear exactly when the electric signs were added to the building. As late as November 1926, Urban was still planning for the exterior to not have electric signs, Brock, "Egg-Shaped Playhouse," sec. 4, pp. 11-12. None of the renderings by Ferriss or Urban include electric signs. All photographs of the completed building, however, have signs, some published as early as May 1927, see "The Ziegfeld Theater," *Architectural Forum*; and Kahn, "Ziegfeld Theatre,". For the addition of the marquis, see: Thomas Van Dycke and Philo Higley, "Around the Show Stops," *The Morning Telegraph*, 2 March 1928, p. 4; and "Ziegfeldiana," *The Morning Telegraph*, 28 September 1928, p. 3.

[67]Urban, "Wedding Theatre Beauty," p. 10.

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address and incorporate the commercial aspects of theater building.[68]

Interior Sources and Language

The Ziegfeld interior, many agreed, far more successfully presented Urban's architectural ideals and visual forms. His colleague, Ely Jacques Kahn wrote:

> The interior, apparently, interested Mr. Urban more than his exterior, for here he has emphasized his break with the classic tradition by hurling to one side the entire category of architectural forms and has expressed his own version of what a theatre might be.[69]

Urban deliberately rejected the traditional fan-shaped plan and boxes and instead employed a unified seating arrangement within an elliptical plan (fig. 6, fig. 40). The shape of the plan was intended to recall the oval spaces of classical theaters. Urban wrote:

> The much-used fan shape in theatre construction is a section of a circle and as such is only part of the perfect architectural form. It can never assume the aesthetic form of a room. For that reason I immediately discarded the idea of a fan-shaped auditorium.
>
> The nearest approach to the ancient theatre which the building lot permitted was an elliptical ground plan. The ellipse was rigidly adhered to throughout in spite of all difficulties and is only interrupted at the

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[68]In his 1929 *Theatres* book the only comment he makes upon the Ziegfeld Theater exterior is about the poster-like image. The book only contains one exterior illustration, a rendering by Urban which includes exterior electric signs and a fire escape, but ones which he has designed to be a more integral part of the facade.

[69]Kahn, "Ziegfeld Theatre," 386.

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> proscenium by a very slight opposing curved which projects over the orchestra.[70]

The elliptical auditorium plan together with the absence of traditional upper level boxes suggested that the audience was unified in the dramatic events rather than divided into separate social segments. The presence of the forestage, based on the Elizabethan theater, further promoted the audience's involvement and interaction with the events (fig. 41). Urban wrote of the forestage:

> ...it puts the artist in intimate touch with his audience. He is no longer a dim figure, lost in the atmospheric background; he is in the same room with his listeners.[71]

Urban furthered the audiences' involvement with the play by making them the actors before, during and after the entertainment. Mary Urban noted that Urban intended the audience to be a part of the dramatic events:

> The beautiful surroundings for gay and beautiful women...this theatrical bit of By play was using the audience to heighten the effect of the entertainment , the glittering g [sic] audience with the richly gowned women preening themselves for the admiration of the crowd was a carefully calculated part of the show.[72]

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[70]Urban, "Happiness Depicted," p. 12.

[71]Ibid.

[72]"Urban, Mary, notes", 14, Mary Urban's spelling and grammer retained. The success of this tactic was evident in the newspaper articles describing opening night where separate columns were devoted to the socializing before, during and after the play. "Thousands See Ziegfeld Open New Theater," *New York Herald-Tribune*, 3 February 1927; "City's Elite See Ziegfeld Open," *The Morning Telegraph*, 3 February 1927, p. 1; and Davis, "Thru the Peep-Hole," p. 2.

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Urban felt that architecture and interior decoration could play a key role in establishing the appropriate mood in the audience. Urban designed the color, decorations and shape of the space to stimulate a gay and festive atmosphere. In describing the Ziegfeld Theater interior, he wrote:

> The closer the contact between the players and the audience, the more festive the mood and the more the audience feels part of the whole occasion. Therefore the decoration of this particular theatre is a part of the gay, colorful happenings on the stage and not, as is usually the case, a stiff architectonic affair, which coldly and disdainfully withdraws from the stage picture. The auditorium should join the play: and when everything laughs and scintillates in the brilliance of the stage, the entire auditorium should share in the laughter and with its own brilliance help carry the mood to its peak.[73]

Urban believed that his use of architecture to create an atmosphere sympathetic to the activities of a building was a new approach in theater design and even architectural practice.[74] His manipulation of the audience through the environment extended to the decorations, space and even the spatial procession of the entire building. Urban's description of the second floor foyer demonstrates his approach:

> Between the acts the foyer is designed to give relief from the gayety of the show and permit the

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[73]Urban, "Happiness Depicted," 12.

[74]In an interview about the Ziegfeld Theatre he stated: "All is so different here from the theater audiences have known. The walls were cold. The stage was inclosed in Greek columns. When the curtain went up a parliament might be in session on the stage. Now when the curtain goes up the audience should simply feel that here comes the excitement." "Ziegfeld Opens new 'Glorified' Theater Tonight," *New York Herald-Tribune*, 2 February 1927.

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> audience to return renewed in its capacity for responding to it.
>
> I have accomplished the emotional renewal of the audience, said Urban, by making the foyer tranquil with spring blossoms and cool decorations. The temperature in the auditorium will be kept up to the temperature of excitement. The temperature in the foyer will be lowered for repose.[75]

Instead of establishing a single mood for the entire building, Urban took a more complex, almost psychological, approach. His plan led the audience along a predetermined path through separate spaces that formed a sequence of different spatial events and emotional atmospheres which would stimulate response to and appreciation of the entire evening at the theater.

Urban, furthermore, believed that theater architecture should meet the special needs of each type of theatrical production. Different types of buildings should be designed for movies, operas and musicals.[76] At the Ziegfeld Theater, he created a building specifically designed for Florenz Ziegfeld's productions:

> This theater could not be used for anything else but a Ziegfeld show...I made it so. Before the curtain goes up it should prepare the audience so that nothing but a Ziegfeld show would suit them.[77]

Yet the building can not be solely understood as the product of Urban's individual inspiration. He synthesized references

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[75]"Ziegfeld Opens New 'Glorified' Theater Tonight."

[76]Urban, *Theatres*, n.p.; Urban, "Theatre," in *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

[77]"Ziegfeld Opens New 'Glorified' Theater Tonight."

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to commercial and elite theater buildings and productions in the Ziegfeld design. These served as subtle references for the audience, prompting their interpretation, appreciation and interaction with the theater building and the productions it housed.

Urban's elliptical auditorium plan and forestage were part of a long-standing and important theatrical reform tradition which sought to erase the emotional and physical distance between performers and audience and bind them together into a cohesive whole. Architects designing in this vein frequently turned to idealized examples of the ancient and Elizabethan theaters as the historical models which best expressed this communal ideal. Intellectually this tradition grew out of the writings of composer Richard Wagner and philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche and their concern with the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or total work of art, in which a community unites all of its artistic efforts to achieve one common artwork. Wagner and Nietzsche both identified Greek civilization and in particular Greek tragedy with this concept

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of *Gesamtkunstwerk*.[78] As an architect working in turn-of-the-century Vienna, Urban was well aware of these ideas.[79]

From the late 19th century on there were several important projects which attempted this integration of audience and performers, including Henry Van de Velde's 1914 Cologne Werkbund Theater, the Perret Brothers 1911-12 Paris Theatre des Champs-Elysées and 1925 Theatre for the Paris Exposition des Art Décoratifs. Max Reinhardt's Vienna theaters, including the temporary 1922 Redoutensaal and the 1924 Theaters in der Josefstadt, provided important models for the use of the Elizabethan-inspired forestage. Commenting upon this tradition, Urban wrote in *Theatres*:

> Late in the 19th Century, it was acknowledged that theatre building had reached a dead point. Many reforms were suggested. The important ones attacked the real cause of the evil, the wing stage. Nearly all of the experiments in reform reach back only indirectly to the antique stage, but are more closely related to the Shakespearean stage, which also recognized the importance of the contact between actor and audience. From Schinkel

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[78]Richard Wagner, "The Art Work of the Future," in *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, tran. William Aston Ellis (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd., 1892); and Wagner, *Beethoven*, tran. Albert E. Parson (New York: G. Schirmer, 1883); Friedrich Nietzsche *Human, All-Too Human: a book for free spirits*, tran. R. J. Hollingdale, intro. Erich Heller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. and ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Modern Library, 1992).

[79]The best English studies of turn-of-the-century Viennese aesthetics are Schorske, and McGrath. The major expression of Gesamtkunstwerk was the Secession's 1902 Beethoven exhibition, see Marian Bisanz-Prakken, *Gustav Klimt Der Beethovenfries* (Salzburg: Residenz Verlag, 1977). Urban, of course, was familiar with the exhibition, and he quoted a figure from Alfred Roller's frieze in the exhibition in his design for the 1920 Metropolitan Opera production of *Parsifal*.

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> to Semper and the present day, many great and important architects and artists have tried and are still trying to find a form of stage and auditorium expressive of our time.[80]

The interest in designing a theater space which would unite spectator and performer into a meaningful whole also generated many unrealized theater projects including H. Wijdeveld's 1919 People's Theater, Peter Behrens' 1900 Festspielhaus and Oskar Strnad's 1920 Circular Theater (fig. 28). Typically these designs featured variants on the theater in the round ideal, placing the performers in the middle of the audience and frequently extending the action through and around the auditorium space. In many designs both the playing area and auditorium were flexible and could be shifted into different configurations from scene to scene. Visionary theater projects were frequently published in periodicals such as *Theatre Arts* and exhibited.[81] Urban was well-acquainted with these projects, and included them in a section of his *Encyclopedia Britannica* essay on "Theatre, Modern Exteriors and Interiors."[82] The majority of these designs, both built and unbuilt, were an attempt to capture a large, mass audience

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[80]Urban, *Theatres*, n.p.

[81]"Steps Towards a New Theatre Architecture;" Amsterdam Internationale Theater Toonstelling, *Catalogus der Tentoonstelling*.

[82]Urban mentions projects by Norman-Bel Geddes, Frank Lloyd Wright, Frederick Kiesler, Robert Edmond Jones and Oskar Strnad. As Urban was designing the Ziegfeld, yet another project was being designed in Europe, Walter Gropius's Total Theater for Erwin Piscator.

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for the serious, even avant-garde theater.

Out of this rich background of oval plan theaters with communal ideals, two sources are particularly relevant for Urban's design of the Ziegfeld Theater. These are Hans Poelzig's design for Max Reinhardt at the Berlin Grosses Schauspielhaus and Urban's earlier 1916 design for the community pageant *Caliban*. Urban knew both Max Reinhardt and Hans Poelzig; he was also very familiar with the Grosses Schauspielhaus building.[83] Reinhardt's 1919 Berlin Grosses Schauspielhaus, designed by Hans Poelzig, had a domed circular plan auditorium, and a sequence of unrelated spaces complemented by sensational architectural forms which can be compared with Urban's later Ziegfeld (fig. 47).[84] The result was a spectacle which overwhelmed the audience and detached them from the world outside. This occurred in a space made strange by the pairing of two archetypes, nature and history. Poelzig combined the lobby's evocation of an underwater realm and the cave-like space of the auditorium, with historical references to the Greek theater, the Alhambra and the Palace at Knossos. The repetition of associations with nature connected the diverse spaces of the building. Within the auditorium Reinhardt employed a thrust stage surrounded on

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[83]"Over the Gangplank," *New York Telegram*, 26 July 1925.

[84]Huesmann, 31-40; Julius Posener, *Hans Poelzig: Reflections on His Life and Work*, ed. Kristin Feireiss (New York: The Architectural History Foundation, 1992), 119-128.

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three sides by seats in order to evoke the Greek ideal.[85] He used processions through the auditorium or even, in the case of *Danton's Death*, placed actors in the audience to sweep viewer's up into the emotions and actions of the drama.

Ziegfeld and Urban's own earlier practice in the design of the Follies and creation of night club spaces undoubtedly made them sympathetic to the practice and architecture of the Schauspielhaus. Ziegfeld's musicals, such as *Rio Rita*, also consisted of a sequence of unrelated elements such as songs, stand-up comics and tableaux.[86] In *Rio Rita*, a nominal storyline and plot, however, provided an illusion of continuity in an otherwise discontinuous series of theatrical events.[87] In an attitude similar to that which he had toward technology, Ziegfeld liked the staccato effects of the revue

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[85]This, unfortunately, was combined with a traditional proscenium stage which resulted in poor acoustics any time the play occurred behind the proscenium. Kenneth MacGowan, "The Circus Theater," *Century Magazine* 105 (November 1922): 128-140; Karl K. Kitchen, "Berlin's 'Great Playhouse'," *Theatre Magazine* 32 (December 1920): 372, 408.

[86]See *Rio Rita* program in *Rio Rita* Clippings File, Billy Rose Theater Collection, Lincoln Center Library for the Performing Arts; Hammond, "The Theaters,"; Atkinson, "The Play,"; Davis, "'Rio Rita' Glorifies," p. 2.

[87]Ziegfeld's first book musical was *Sally* which opened December 21, 1920. While he continued to stage annual shows of the Follies, by 1923 he increasingly focused on book musicals including the 1923 *Kid Boots*, 1924 *Annie Dear*, and 1925 *Louie the 14th*. Urban had experience with the fore-runner of book musicals, he designed sets for two transitional operettas the 1919 *Apple Blossoms* and the 1921 *Love Letter*. These Viennese-inspired operettas helped to promote the public's interest in book musicals and included in their casts two of the book musicals greatest future stars Fred and Adele Astaire. See Boardman, 342-343, 356-357, 366, 383-384, 394-395, 399.

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yet sought to camouflage its form.

Urban's arrangement of interior spaces at the Ziegfeld Theater was indebted to both Ziegfeld and Reinhardt. The Ziegfeld Theater was made up of discontinuous programmatic components: auditorium, lounges and stage (fig. 42). Each occupied a different spatial position within the building, each had a different plan and shape. In a manner similar to that of Ziegfeld and Reinhardt, Urban attempted to unify these diverse areas through circulation and decoration, making the auditorium the event through which visitors had to pass in order to gain access to all other spaces.

Associations with nature and history, furthermore, abounded throughout the Ziegfeld theater interior. Urban identified the elliptical auditorium plan as an adaptation from ancient theater, while the shape of the stage came from the Elizabethan theater.[88] The costumed figures in Gaertner's mural referred to both biblical and medieval themes (fig. 6).[89] Linking these historical fragments was a continuous overlay of allusions to natural forms. The color schemes of the main public spaces evoked the various seasons.[90] The shape of the auditorium reminded viewers of

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[88]Urban, "Happiness Depicted," 12.

[89]See photographs of the mural published in Kahn, "The Ziegfeld Theatre, New York,"; "Producer Outdoes Himself in Creating His Playhouse," *The Morning Telegraph*, 23 January 1927, 12.

[90]"Ziegfeld Opens New 'Glorified' Theater,".

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an egg.[91] The patterning of the mural provided a shimmering screen of foliage and flowers.

Yet, if Poelzig and Reinhardt's Berlin theater is an important inspiration for Urban's work it is not the only source. In many ways the Ziegfeld Theater plan is a direct descendent of Urban's 1916 design for *Caliban* (fig. 18). The elliptical plan of the Ziegfeld auditorium with its references to antique theaters, the Elizabethan-inspired forestage and the aim of community involvement all can be traced back to the earlier design.

Working on *Caliban* introduced Urban to the designs of Steel MacKaye, in particular his 1892 Spectatorium project.[92] MacKaye, who was the father of *Caliban* author Percy MacKaye, designed the Spectatorium for the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition. The 1893 panic, however, arrested construction at mid-point and the auditorium was never completed. MacKaye wanted the auditorium to house a huge audience in close contact with the performers. He devised entrances so that the actors could process through the audience space. He planned to utilize every technical invention in order to create a flexible playing area capable of a variety of effects. The

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[91]"New Ziegfeld Theatre, Seating 1,632, Has Novel Egg-Shaped Auditorium," *New York Telegraph*, 5 December 1926, 4.

[92]Percy MacKaye, "The Theatre of Ten Thousand: Steele MacKaye's Spectatorium," *Theatre Arts Magazine* 7 (April 1923): 116-126; Walter Prichard Eaton, "Steele MacKaye," *Theatre Arts Magazine* 11 (November 1927): 827-837; Urban, "Theatre," in *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

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audience would be overwhelmed and involved with a series of quickly changing and spectacular events that would take place all around them. When Percy MacKaye showed Urban his father's designs he was reportedly overwhelmed.[93] Urban included Steele MacKaye in his *Encyclopedia Britannica* essay and credited him with being "the first to produce a notable plan for a circus-theatre." Urban evidently thought that MacKaye was an important link between European and American ideals. He compared MacKaye's designs with Max Reinhardt and identified *Caliban* as an important outgrowth of the older MacKaye's concerns:

> It was along the lines of this MacKaye theatre that Max Reinhardt built when he developed his performances of Greek tragedies in circus building into the finally realized Grosses Schauspielhaus in Berlin (Hans Poelzig arch.) Here he came close to the true conditions of the classic stage, with the actors appearing on a semi-circular orchestra floor almost in the midst of the spectators, and then retreating up steps to a completely equipped stage with sky-dome, revolving stage and all the modern appurtenances. The son of Steele MacKaye, Percy MacKaye, realized many of the values his father had planned in his open air performances of "masques" at St. Louis, New York and Cambridge, Mass. between 1912 and 1927.[94]

Neither *Caliban* nor the Grosses Schauspielhaus, however, fully provide the model for Urban's integration of audience and performance. While *Caliban* included community involvement

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[93]"And during the production of Caliban in 1916, when I showed some of these design to Joseph Urban, 'Why!' he exclaimed, 'in Germany we have not yet developed anything so comprehensive in theatrical invention.'" MacKaye, "The Theatre of Ten Thousand," 119.

[94]Urban, "Theatre," in *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

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through the use of community groups as participants in the play, the audience remained passive during the actual play. Unlike the Ziegfeld audience, *Caliban*'s viewers remained mere spectators of and not participants in the event.

The American Movie Picture Palace provided the best model for creating an auditorium for a mass audience.[95] The Ziegfeld's balcony was treated as a raised extension of the orchestra and not a removed and distanced gallery. Urban eliminated private boxes and thus abolished the theater's traditional indication of superior social status.[96] In

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[95]Writings on the motion picture palace tend to either be from a preservation point of view or by film historians. The best surveys of motion picture theaters are Ben M. Hall, *The Best Remaining Seats* (New York: Bramhall House, 1961); and David Naylor, *American Picture Palaces: The Architecture of Fantasy* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1981); film historians Lary May and Douglas Gomery provide the best insight into the business of motion picture theater design, see May; Douglas Gomery, "The Picture Palace: Economic Sense or Hollywood Nonsense?" *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* (Winter 1978): 23-36; and Gomery, "U.S. Film Exhibition: The Formation of a Big Business," in *The American Film Industry*, ed. Tino Balio (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1976), 218-228. Charlotte Herzog, "The Movie Palace and the Theatrical Sources of Its Architectural Style," *Cinema Journal* 20 (Spring 1981): 15-37, traces the evolution of the picture palace. Work by architectural historians on the movie theater has just started. Maggie Valentine completed a 1990 dissertation on S. Charles Lee which she has subsequently published, Valentine, *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk: An Architectural History of the Movie Theatre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994). See also Stapleford and Preddy.

[96]While Thomas Lamb did not play a large role in the design of the Ziegfeld Theater, by 1926 he had extensive experience with motion picture theater design. It is possible that he was a source of information on recent trends and designs in this type of theater. Urban, however, was at the same time designing the Paramount Theater in Palm Beach, Florida, a motion picture theater, and could have come into contact with the industry's analysis of auditoriums through his own work.

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picture palaces such open seating arrangements were felt to erase a sense of class distinction and gather disparate social groups into a cosmopolitan and homogenous whole.[97]

The series of atmospheric movie theaters, initially designed by architect John Eberson and then copied by numerous other firms, also forms an important parallel with the Ziegfeld.[98] Starting around 1922-23 Eberson created a number of movie theaters throughout the United States with auditoriums composed of architectural elements that suggested historical ruins of various exotic origins, including Spanish and Venetian, paired with light effects which created the illusion of an outdoor setting. A sophisticated lighting system evoked a sequence of the different times of day starting with sunrise and concluding with night. These effects, similar to the Ziegfeld, extended the illusion of the stage into the space of the auditorium. Eberson, however, always utilized historical revival styles and never attempted a "modern" atmospheric theater.

In 1923 Samuel "Roxy" L. Rothafel explored the possibility of an even more radical movie-theater design. He proposed an egg-shaped playhouse--perhaps of his own design--without balconies or boxes and seating 5,000 people:

> Instead of elaborate architectural decorations, the walls of the egg-shaped auditorium are bare and white. But as the lights go down, we are suddenly flooded with colored

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[97]May, 166.

[98]Stapleford, n.p.

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> light from a thousand reflectors cleverly hidden in the walls. Then, as a hidden orchestra plays, the walls that a moment ago appeared bare, become alive with changing panoramas--a forest, a sea, a great city--each in turn painted on the walls by colored light projects above.[99]

It is impossible to determine whether or not Urban knew of Roxy's proposal. The parallels between the two designs, however, are uncanny. In attempting to design a modern theater appealing to a mass audience with the Ziegfeld Theater Urban stood at the cross-roads of high and commercial culture.

While Urban's decision to extend the illusions and decorations of the stage into the auditorium may have been influenced by both Poelzig and American movie picture palaces, the decorative vocabulary of the Ziegfeld, particularly its flatness and obvious modernity was not (fig. 6). The actual decorative vocabulary of the Ziegfeld interior comes directly out of Urban's earlier designs for night clubs, particularly the New Amsterdam Roof Garden, Cocoanut Grove and the Palm Beach Florida Club de Montmartre (fig. 15). These projects also paired references to nature and history in a distinctly modern style. The use of this decorative patterning at the Ziegfeld may have evoked associations with the earlier interiors. As all of the earlier spaces were also associated with Ziegfeld, the recurrence of this decorative motif

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[99]S. L. Rothafel, "Predicts Egg-Shaped Playhouse," in "Better Theatres Section of," *Exhibitors Herald* 17 (18 August 1923): 8. Roxy does not credit an architect with the design and it is so schematic that it is possibly his own invention. He was probably responding to the success of the atmospheric movie theater.

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suggested a kind of signature style. Urban's evocation of these clubs at the Ziegfeld can be understood as yet another attempt to create a communal space for performers and audience by transferring the intimacy and informality of the roof garden to a more traditional setting.

Urban and Ziegfeld undoubtedly intended the combination of nature and history at the Ziegfeld Theatre to suggest a world transformed, a timeless paradise (fig. 6). If the auditorium decorations achieved this goal, they would, according to Benjamin's terms, be symbols, outside of time, fusing nature and history together into a whole in which visual form and content were integral.[100] Similar to the New Amsterdam Theater Space, the decoration then could be understood as a "wish image," a symbolic representation of people's desires. Yet if Ziegfeld and Urban transferred the vocabulary from the earlier roof garden to the Ziegfeld Theater, they did not transfer its corresponding practices and functions. By 1927, Ziegfeld's productions had ossified into opulent and fairly conventional musical comedies which relied upon stately numbers and spectacular effects.[101] The

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[100]Benjamin, *Origins*, 165-166; Buck-Morss, 168.

[101]Stone, 131-144. The 1952 movie *Singin' in the Rain*, summarizes this visually in the "Broadway Melody" number by presenting three different stagings of the same number with increasingly more stately movements and formal dress, the Ziegfeld version was the most stately and formal. One of the rare exceptions to this was Ziegfeld's 1928 production of *Showboat*, which aspired to be a modern American opera, and came close to some of the sachlich effects of Brecht and Weill's musicals in its use of vernacular music and speech and

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Ziegfeld Theater had become the place where the American Girl was "glorified" for the tired business man.[102] Rather than functioning as a "wish image" the Ziegfeld decorations operated more as fashionable fetishes or allegories, subject to the pressure of time. This fragmented nature and history, form and content.[103] If Urban intended the Ziegfeld to be "a place where people coming out of crowded hours and through crowded streets may find life carefree, bright and leisured," he also intended the theater to respond to the specific needs of its owner and site. In his book *Theatres*, Urban wrote:

> Each theatre must be designed for a specific purpose. Every type of dramatic entertainment, opera, drama, revue, and the motion picture, demands its own kind of stage and auditorium. Climate, site and social usage, also play a large part in the development of the current theatre. In the six theatres which follow, the effort has been to differentiate between the principal elements of dramatic entertainment and to find an expression for each appropriate to site, climate and use.[104]

Theater buildings, therefore, were grounded in historical time. While the Ziegfeld Theater provided an illusion of existing outside of time, this illusion conflicted with the building's urban setting and its musical comedy function. Urban described the theater as "a representative home for the

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frank treatment of racism.

[102]"Ziegfeld Admits He's Naturally Lazy, But Works Harder Than Anybody He Knows," *The Morning Telegraph*, 19 February 1928, sec. 3, p. 12; Charles Dale, "About Show Business," *Theatre Magazine* 52 (October 1930): 15, 16, 72.

[103]Benjamin, *Origins*, 166; Buck-Morss, 168.

[104]Urban, *Theatres*, n.p.

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most successful form of theatrical production in the busiest and gayest city in the world."[105] Without these conditions, Urban suggested, the building would cease to be useful, stating: "This theatre could not be used for anything but a Ziegfeld show."[106] A sensation of time even pervaded the interior space: in the procession of different types of space from lounge to auditorium to foyer and in their decorations, which contrasted the spring of the foyer with the summer of the auditorium.[107]

Rather than being infused with meaning, moreover, the primary decoration of the auditorium, Lillian Gaertner's mural "The Joy of Life," was ultimately meaningless (fig. 6). Urban envisioned the mural as providing visual entertainment and setting the appropriate mood prior to the commencement of the show, but fading into an unobtrusive background once the lights were dimmed and curtain rose. He explained the subject matter of the mural:

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[105]Urban, *Theatres*, n.p.

[106]"Ziegfeld Opens New 'Glorified' Theater,".

[107]Urban, "Happiness Depicted," 12; "Ziegfeld Opens New 'Glorified' Theater,". Benjamin comments on the allegorical preference for the overripe, the full bloom of summer: "However, nature was not seen by them in bud and bloom, but in the over-ripeness and decay of her creations. In nature they saw eternal transience, and here alone did the saturnine vision of this generation recognize history," Benjamin, *Origins*, 179. Urban, interestingly, preferred the "decadent" periods of art such as the Baroque and Hellenistic because their sensual qualities directly addressed people, Alvin Johnson, *Pioneer's Progress: An Autobiography* (New York: The Viking Press, 1952), 323.

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> The painting of the auditorium has no tale to tell, no continuous action as its basis. Under a roof of flowers and foliage, among castles and hamlets, on meadows and in wood, hunting, laughing, running, leaping, music-making, singing, kissing, loving--human beings in mad, happy medley--no deep meaning, no serious thoughts or feelings--only joy, happiness--that is all, a trance of color.[108]

The mural enveloped the room in a scintillating surface consisting of costumed figures on a patterned background, in order to establish an appropriately gay and joyous mood for the featured play. Yet the decoration had little relationship to the two major historic references, the auditorium the elliptical auditorium plan based on the ancient theater and the Elizabethan forestage.

In his study of German drama, Walter Benjamin examined this illusion of unity and how it was achieved by the joining of fragments. Instead of understanding the combination of nature and history as a type of paradise, Benjamin felt that the ultimate analogy with this joining of fragments was the ruin. A ruin is literally composed of historical fragments within a landscape. Benjamin defined the allegorical ruin as an accumulation of fragments tied together by a repetition of stereotypes.[109] Based on a compilation of historical and programmatic fragments and a repetition of stereotypical references to nature, the Ziegfeld Theater can be understood

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[108]Urban, "Happiness Depicted," 12.

[109]Benjamin, *Origins*, 177-182. He observes that the *Gesamtkunstwerk* is the summit of the allegorical mode, providing an elaborate, never-ending series of frames, rather than a single artistic object, ibid., 181.

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as an elaborate frame, ruin, or even folly which could only exist within its specific landscape and be meaningful only in conjunction with its appropriate function.

The notion of the allegorical ruin not only embodies the Ziegfeld's formal structure but clarifies the building's subsequent use. If Urban succeeded in creating a theater building only appropriate for Ziegfeld shows, he also guaranteed the theater building's demise. With the death of Ziegfeld in 1932 the theater was altered and converted into a motion picture theater, then a television studio, and briefly revived as a legitimate theater before being demolished in 1966.[110]

Ziegfeld Theater: Subsequent Influence

If Urban ultimately viewed the Ziegfeld Theater as a compromised design, he did not entirely abandon the forms or ideals of the building. Rather, he reworked the Ziegfeld's visual and programmatic ideals to incorporate modern commercial and legal requirements and re-used both the monumental language of the exterior and the interior forms on more appropriate spaces.

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[110]Hoogstraten, 228-230.

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The Monumental Exterior: The Ziegfeld Chain

Urban continued to use the massive, classical and allegorical exterior language of the Ziegfeld through 1929. Several projects sought to reproduce the Ziegfeld form either through creating a chain of identical Ziegfeld Theaters or establishing an urban district filled with similarly-styled buildings. This potential repetition of Ziegfeld forms throughout the city and across the country would make Urban's grand architectural language significant, familiar and popular.

Shortly after the opening of the Ziegfeld Theater, Florenz Ziegfeld announced plans to build a chain of Ziegfeld Theaters in Chicago, Philadelphia and Boston as well as another New York theater.[111] The theaters were to be exact duplicates of Urban's design. Ziegfeld's decision to create a theater chain was inspired by motion picture studios, such as Paramount, which erected chains of similar theaters throughout the country.[112] During the 1920s, the film industry adapted the retailing industry's chain-store strategy

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[111]"Ziegfeld Plans 4 New Theatres like 'Rio Rita's'," *The Morning Telegraph*, 19 May 1927, p. 2.

[112]In justifying his plans, he made explicit reference to the movie chains and stated: "that legitimate theaters do not keep pace with the swift strides made in the motion picture palaces." "Ziegfeld Plans," 2.

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in order to attract a large audience and maximize profits.[113] Chains of movie theaters created expectations for certain types of physical amenities. At the movie picture palaces the public expected a decorative interior spectacle in a historical revival style with the latest innovations in electricity and climate control. Ziegfeld wanted to combine the motion picture industry's guarantee of certain amenities with elements which were recognized as being uniquely Ziegfeld. The move was a clear attempt to capture a national mass audience for his productions, which had hitherto been confined largely to New York with only small tours for rehearsals or extremely successful shows. In announcing his plans for a chain, Ziegfeld emphasized the Ziegfeld stable of stars, hit shows, sensational Urban architecture and the latest in climate control.[114] The dream of an Urban-inspired

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[113]Gomery, "U.S. Film Exhibition," provides the best analysis of the sources and practice of film industry movie theater chains.

[114]Plans for a chain of Ziegfeld theaters continued through 1929. The scheme for a Chicago theater progressed far enough to have a site. "Ziegfeld Will Build Show House Here," *Chicago American*, 26 July 1928; "Chicagoan to Build Theatre for Ziegfeld," *New York Times*, 23 January 1929. Ziegfeld's ambitions became international with the announcement of a potential London replica of Urban's design. "Ziegfeld to Have London Theater," *Detroit Free Press*, 20 January 1929. Urban reportedly was going to serve as an advisor for the London theater.

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chain of theaters, however, crashed along with the stock market.[115]

The Monumental Exterior: The International Magazine Building

The Ziegfeld Theater was also a key component in William Randolph Hearst's plan to establish a cultural center located around Columbus Circle.[116] Hearst had started acquiring properties in the area in 1906 with the hope that the Hudson River Bridge would cross at 57th Street. By 1925 with the bridge location still a question, Hearst wanted to make the area into "a lively centre of night life in New York," and thus divert the trend of building theaters on Broadway and Seventh Avenue to the Columbus Circle area.[117] Urban was to be the architect of two additional projects in the area, the International Magazine Building and the Metropolitan Opera House. His designs for these structures also rely upon the grand allegorical language of the Ziegfeld Theater exterior. These three buildings would have dominated the area and

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[115]Ziegfeld suffered severe losses in the depression of 1929 and by 1931 he was close to bankruptcy. Stone, 264; Eddie Cantor and David Freedman, *Ziegfeld the Great Glorifier* (New York: Alfred H. King, 1934), 159; Charles Higham, *Ziegfeld* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1972), 202, 208; Carter and Cole, 242-244.

[116]"Erlanger-Zieggy Split, Rumor Through Hearst Theatre Deal," *Variety*, 7 January 1925, 21, 58; Swanberg, 263, 464-465; Stern, Gilmartin, Mellins, *New York 1930*, 619, 621.

[117]"Erlanger-Zieggy Split," 21, 58; Swanberg, 263, 464-465.

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created a district distinguished by its concentration of cultural institutions and coherent visual forms.[118] Beginning with the Ziegfeld Theater at 54th and Fifth Avenue, continuing up to the Metropolitan Opera House at 57th and Sixth and then over to the International Magazine Building at 57th and Eighth Avenues, the recurring allegorical sculptures, massive, modern yet classically based building forms would have firmly defined the visual boundaries of this proposed center.[119] It would have been rivalled only by the later Rockefeller Center and Lincoln Center, which, in many ways, are direct descendants of Hearst and Urban's scheme.[120]

Plans for the International Magazine Building date back to 1926 when Hearst commissioned Thomas Lamb to design a six-story office building for 57th Street and 8th Avenue.[121]

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[118]Urban had already created a similar architectural district in Palm Beach, Florida. He used similar plans and forms for Mar-a-lago, Marjorie Merriweather Post's house, the Bath and Tennis Club and the Sunrise Building that established a unity despite differences in function and location. The Bath and Tennis Club and Mar-a-lago, in fact are quite close to each other, the Sunrise building is located on North Country Road. Brown analyzes his Palm Beach architectural vocabulary and concludes that all of these buildings shared a similar public conception, Brown, 64-92, 109-111.

[119]The area also included other buildings that Urban had been involved with: The Cosmopolitan Theater on Columbus Circle and the Century Theater on Central Park West between W. 62nd and 63rd Streets.

[120]Stern, Gilmartin, Mellins, *New York 1930*, 617; Victoria Newhouse, *Wallace K. Harrison, Architect* (New York: Rizzoli, 1989), 34, 199-203.

[121]Stern, Gilmartin, Mellins, *New York 1930*, 621. Lamb's drawings for the project are in the Thomas Lamb Archives.

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Shortly after, however, he changed the project, elaborating it into a headquarters building for his magazines and gave the job to Joseph Urban in association with George Post and Sons.[122] Historians have long speculated that Hearst's decision was based on his knowledge that Otto Kahn had recently commissioned Urban to design the Metropolitan Opera House nearby.[123] Correspondence in the Otto Kahn archive, however, suggests that Urban's connection with Hearst was equally useful for Kahn in the Metropolitan Opera project.[124]

The building opened a year after the Ziegfeld Theater in April 1928 and housed Hearst's periodicals including *Cosmopolitan*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Harpers Bazaar* and the

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[122]George B. Post and Sons were responsible for preparing the working drawings and designing the interiors while Urban designed the exterior. H. V. Wilkins, "International Magazine Building Nears Completion," *New York American*, 5 February 1928; H. V. Wilkins, "New Building Will House 10 Publications," *New York American*, 15 April 1928.

[123]Stern, Gilmartin, Mellins, *New York 1930*, 621, repeated in Carter and Cole, 182.

[124]"May I remind you to get Urban to suggest to the Hearst people the advantage of constructing an arcade through their property, running from the new Opera House to Eighth Avenue. Maybe, we can manage to get some revenue out of this." Otto Kahn to Edward Ziegler, 26 February 1927, TMs, Metropolitan Opera Files 1927, Otto Kahn Collection, Firestone Library, Princeton University. Hearst developed his real estate holdings in partnership with Arthur Brisbane. According to Mary Urban, Thomas Lamb was Arthur Brisbane's favored architect, "Urban, Mary notes," 14. The replacement of Lamb with Urban could be a signal of Hearst's involvement with the project. In any event, the relation between Hearst, Kahn and Urban is complex and dates back at least to 1915 when Ziegfeld tried to get both Hearst and Kahn to back the Century Theater project, Florenz Ziegfeld to Otto Kahn, January 1, June 8, and July 1, 1915, TMs, Personal correspondence "Z" 1915, Otto Kahn Collection.

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International Studio (fig. 48). Urban and Post designed the six-story structure as a base for an additional seven stories. Unfortunately, there is no indication of the intended appearance of these extra floors.[125] Most of the exterior elevation is rather severe, Urban dramatized the structure, however, by placing heroic columns surmounted by whimsical urns at each corner and on each side of the 57th Street and Eighth Avenue entrances.[126] The column bases are embellished by allegorical sculptures carved by Henry Kreis representing Sport and Industry, Comedy and Tragedy, Music and Art, Printing and the Sciences.[127] Urban intended the decoration

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[125]The Urban Collection has little documentation of this project. The George B. Post Collection, The New-York Historical Society has the working drawings for the building, the only known drawings for the addition in this collection date from the mid-1940s, probably from around 1945-46, and show a tower addition with Urban's heroic columns removed. International Magazine Building, Tube 353, George Post Collection, The New-York Historical Society.

[126]The resemblance with the Ziegfeld Theater was immediately noticed. "Although less ornate that the theatre, the Eighth Avenue structure, which is built of sandstone on a granite base, bears strong resemblance to it in many of its details...." "Eighth Av. Structure Nears Completion," *New York Times*, 29 January 1928, sec. 2, p. 19.

[127]Henry Kreis was born in Germany in 1899 and apprenticed as a stone carver and under Joseph Weckerle, a Munich sculptor. He came to the United States in 1923 and worked as a master stone carver. The International Magazine Building was Kreis's first major commission. His studio was in Essex, Connecticut. He made sculpture for the Erie, Pennsylvania Court House, the Social Security Board Building and the Ware Department Building in Washington, D.C., the United States Post Office in the Bronx, New York as well as coins and medals. "Sculpture by Henry Kreis," Section of Fine Arts, Public Buildings Administration, Federal Works Agency, 1940, TM. Inslee A. Hopper, "A Note on Henry Kreis," TM. Both from the files of Dr. Marlene Park. My thanks to Dr. Park for sharing this

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and articulation of the building to convey both the building's function and its membership in the Columbus Circle art center.[128] Hearst's newspaper the *New York American*, most likely with Urban's permission, described the building as having: "allegorical significance."[129] Urban reinforced this with his own statement:

> ...this structure should have the character of a public building, for a large part of our culture, at least of our literature, sport, housekeeping, fashion is born and developed here.
>
> Interests for mechanics and labor questions are discussed and written about, and that is what I try to tell in the sculptures. The sculptures are brutal and strong in their forms, so that they fit not only to the expression of the architecture, but they give good light and shadow effects, and can be seen. Do not look at them from their realistic standpoint; look at them from their decorative standpoint.[130]

The International Magazine Building's public character, location and program determined Urban's design and shaped his conception of modernism. He wrote:

> A more or less public building of the character of the International Magazine Building should easily be located in the hurry and bustle and crowds of the city, and it

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information.

[128]"$2,000,000 Building for the Hearst Publications," *Real Estate Record and Guide* 121 (11 February 1928): 9: noted that the building was "meant to convey the fact that it houses industries whose purpose is to exert influence on the thought and education of the reading public. At the same time the style of architecture is intended to make the structure a fitting addition to the musical and art interest which are locating in the Columbus Circle district."

[129]Wilkins, "International Magazine Building Nears Completion."

[130]Joseph Urban, "Architecture Must Reflect Modern Life," *New York American*, 14 April 1928.

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> should be distinctive and tell to the passerby in the best possible manner in its exterior what is going on the inside.[131]

Yet while the over-scaled columns and sculptures make the building distinctive, there is a strong element of parody. Gretl Urban revealed that the building was a gentle but ironic poke at Hearst's pretension to be an "emperor of newspapers."[132]

The building also reveals Urban's shift away from this allegorical language. Urban's statements and those of the *New York American*, place increased emphasis upon the building's modernity as defined by its height, set-backs, mass and revelation of interior plan on the exterior.[133] These concerns echo the designs and writings of Urban's colleagues Ely Jacques Kahn, Raymond Hood and Ralph Walker.[134] If the

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[131]Urban, "Architecture Must Reflect Modern Life."

[132]Gretl Urban states that her father was bored with Hearst's stupidity and felt sorry for him, Gretl Urban tape 2, Production File Box 46, Joseph Urban Collection. T-Square, "The Sky Line: Where Credit is Due--Urban--But Is it Art?" *New Yorker* 4 (24 March 1928): 75, perceptively picked up on this quality writing: "This is theater architecture to be sure. At first survey, I feel that it is perhaps a stunt. It has an 'exposition' quality, observable in other of Mr. Urban's designs."

[133]Wilkins, "International Magazine Building Nears Completion,"; Wilkins, "New Building Will House 10 Publications,"; Urban, "Architecture Must Reflect,".

[134]Arthur Tappan North, ed., *Ely Jacques Kahn* (New York: Whittlesey House, 1931), includes many of Kahn's writings discussing modern architecture. Stern, Gilmartin, Mellins, *New York 1930*, 551-585. Carol Willis, "Zoning and Zeitgeist," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 45 (March 1983): 47-59; Willis "Drawing Towards Metropolis", in *The Metropolis of Tomorrow*, Hugh Ferris (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1986), 157

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building had received the additional seven stories, it would have become a "tall office building" comparable to those by his three colleagues. Urban's discussion of the building is similar to statements by the other architects:

> The modern architect tries to develop new forms for the new and changed living conditions or our day.
>
> I do not know why we should adopt anything in the exterior form of houses if we have not adopted the old customs and manner. Our manner of living is so changed that the form and decoration of our buildings have to find another expression.
>
> Think only of the speed with which we move in this city--remember what you see as you drive by in an automobile.[135]

Increasingly involved in a search for an architectural language expressive of modern life, Urban ultimately abandoned classically-derived elements and allegorical forms.

The Monumental Exterior: Metropolitan Opera House

The major project of this period and the linchpin of the Columbus Circle development scheme was the Metropolitan Opera House.[136] From 1925 until 1928, Otto Kahn, director of the

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[135]Urban, "Architecture Must Reflect;" Ely Jacques Kahn, "On What Is Modern," in *Ely Jacques Kahn*, 12-15, and "On Decoration and Ornament," 20-21; Ralph Walker, *Ralph Walker, Architect* (New York: Henahan House, 1957); R. T. Walker, "The Barclay-Vesey Telephone building, McKenzie, Voorhees & Gmelin, Architects," *American Architect* 130 (5 November 1926): 387-399.

[136]The major sources of archival information concerning the project are the Joseph Urban Collection, Butler Library, Columbia University; the Metropolitan Opera Archives; and the Otto Kahn Collection, Firestone Library, Princeton University.

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Metropolitan Opera Company, tried to develop a site at 57th Street and Sixth Avenue as the new home for the Opera Company. Urban's involvement with the project lasted from early 1926 until October 1927.[137] The history of the Metropolitan Opera House building has been extensively covered.[138] Stern, Gilmartin, and Mellins describe the development of the project, the ill-fated design collaboration between Urban and Benjamin Wistar Morris, as well as analyze Urban's designs and his sources at great length. The chronology of the project, therefore, will only be briefly summarized, only adding and emending a few points.

Urban submitted drawings for his first design of the Metropolitan in February 1926 (fig. 49).[139] Stern, Gilmartin and Mellins identify this as the amphitheater proposal,

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[137]The earliest document confirming Urban's involvement is a letter from Kahn to Edward Ziegler dated 28 February 1926. However, when Kahn announced the purchase of the site and plans for a building he obviously had already consulted with an architect. It seems likely that Urban's involvement would date back to December, 1925. Kahn and Urban's relationship extended back for several years; Kahn had backed two of Urban's ventures. Kahn's papers indicate that he loaned Urban money in 1917, most probably for the Bandbox Theater project with Ordynski, Kahn to Urban, 14 April 1917, TMs, Personal Papers "U - 1917". Kahn again loaned money to back the Wiener Werkstätte showroom in 1922, Ziegler to Kahn, 28 January 1922, Ziegler to Kahn, 29 March 1922, TMs, Personal Papers "Z - 1922", Otto Kahn Collection.

[138]Stern, Gilmartin, Mellins, *New York 1930*, 618-628; Carter and Cole, 221-231; Mary Jane Metz, *The Many Lives of Otto Kahn* (New York: Pendragon Press, 1963), 97-102; Carol Herselle Krinsky, *Rockefeller Center* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 23.

[139]Portfolios 9, 11, 13, 19, 20, 21, 22, Joseph Urban Collection.

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consisting of an oval auditorium buttressed by four corner towers and dominated by a huge central spire. While the plan conformed to Kahn's program of a 4,000 - 4,500 seating capacity with all seats having clear sight lines, reduced boxes, and the inclusion of apartments or offices as an income-generating feature, it directly contradicted Kahn's main image of the complex as he presented it to other board members:

> It is not contemplated that the new Metropolitan need be a monumental and ornamental building, rivalling European Opera Houses in appearance. Our conception is that it should be plain, simple, dignified, seeking its distinction rather in being perfectly adapted to its purpose, both on the stage and in the accommodation to the public, than in outward appearance.[140]

Instead, Urban's proposal was for a monumental but modern building rivalling European opera houses. A cross between the faceted German office buildings of the 1920s such as Fritz Höger's Chilehaus in Hamburg, and the Stadtkrone-inspired community buildings by Poelzig and Taut, the proposal was distinctly German Expressionist in form.[141] The circular

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[140]Otto Kahn to R. Fulton Cutting, 26 December 1925, TMs, Metropolitan Opera Archives.

[141]Stern, Gilmartin, Mellins, *New York 1930*, 621, identify the various possible sources for the design as Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue's Convocation Tower, Madison Square, 1921; Donn Barber's Broadway Temple, 1925, Fritz Höger's Chilehaus, the commercial Gothic structures of Howell & Stokes as well as Harvey Wiley Corbett. The scheme is also, however, strongly reminiscent of several other German designs from the period most particularly Poelzig's design for the Dresden Fire Station of 1916-1917, and his Town Hall project for Dresden of 1917. It is also reminiscent of Bruno Taut's several Stadtkrone projects. Stern, Gilmartin, Mellins, hypothesize that the main tower could have been glass. A photostat of a

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plan and embellishment of the exterior with repeating colossal attached columns culminating in allegorical figures, however, also suggest the continued influence of *Caliban*. Urban was obviously still working in the monumental allegorical language of the Ziegfeld Theater building although on an even more grandiose scale. Kahn commented, somewhat drily:

> He has conceived a very beautiful monumental building, but, in my opinion, his plans are based upon a fundamental misconception of what we want.[142]

Urban continued to work on the design of the building through 1926. By November 1926, he had designed Scheme 6, which evidently met with Kahn's approval. At that point Kahn began to search for a more established architect for Urban to collaborate with. Kahn looked at the work of C. Howard Crane, Starrett and Van Vleck and possibly others before selecting Benjamin Wistar Morris.[143] Kahn stipulated that Urban serve as Associate Architect and that the design be developed from

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drawing of the project in the Urban Collection, Portfolio 16, dated February 22, 1926 reveals that the body of the tower was masonry, while the crown was evidently glass. This looks forward to the crystalline crowns of slightly later New York City office buildings such as 1932 Cities Service Building by Clinton & Russell and Holton & George as well as William Van Alen's 1930 Chrysler Building and Shreve, Lamb & Harmon's 1931 Empire State Building.

[142]Kahn to Ziegler, 28 February 1926.

[143]Portfolios 9, 11, Joseph Urban Collection, for Scheme 6; Kahn to C. Howard Crane, 21 February 1927, TMs, Starrett and Van Vleck to Kahn, 9 February 1927, TMs, "Wolab 1927," Otto Kahn Collection.

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Urban's Scheme 6.[144] As documented by Stern, Gilmartin and Mellins, the collaboration quickly disintegrated into a competition. By June 1927, Urban and Morris had developed their own separate schemes. Urban's Scheme IX, presented to Kahn on June 25 and 26, was his final version of the Metropolitan project (fig. 50). Both architects made separate study trips to Europe that summer, Urban visiting Berlin, Hamburg and the Magdeburg Theatre Exhibition.[145] He also viewed Erwin Piscator's production of *Hopla, wir leben* in Berlin.[146] By October, Urban realized that all hopes for a collaboration or for Board support of Scheme IX were dead. He withdrew from the partnership and published his designs. All

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[144]On the stipulation that Urban be an associate and that the team develop scheme 6 see Kahn to Benjamin Morris, 25 February 1927, TMs, and Morris memorandum, 26 February 1927, TMs, "Wolab 1927," Otto Kahn Collection. That Kahn would have desired another architect to collaborate with Urban is not surprising, given that he had not constructed a single building in the United States at this time and that his other major New York City project, the Ziegfeld Theater, was done in association with architect Thomas Lamb.

[145]Urban to Kahn, 28 September 1927, TMs, "Wolab 1927," Otto Kahn Collection: "Of course, I saw Reinhardt and Haisait and met Geheimrat Architect Dulfer, the architect of the Duisburg Opera House and five or six other new opera houses in Germany. He is one of the most experienced builders of large theatres. I saw everything that Berlin and Hamburg and the Magdeburg Theatre Exhibition had to offer in new stage construction."

[146]"German Stagecraft Leaves Urban Dizzy," *New York American*, 26 September 1927, 8, simply reports that he attended the opening performance of *Hopla, wir leben* by Ernst Toller. The play opened at the Theater am Nollendorfplatz on September 3, 1927, John Willett, *The Theatre of Erwin Piscator* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1978), 84-87; Interestingly, Gropius was working or had completed the Total Theater Project for Piscator while Urban was in Berlin, Willett, 117-118.

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accounts of the Metropolitan Opera project suggest or state that Otto Kahn firmly supported Urban's project.[147] While Urban and Kahn remained on good terms after Urban's withdrawal from the project, Kahn did not fully support Urban's design but allowed Urban to make every effort to win Board support for his designs.[148] Kahn, in fact, had come to favor Morris' proposal over Urban's. On August 1, 1927 he wrote to Edward Ziegler, the assistant general manager of the Metropolitan Opera:

> As to the plans for the House, I am bound to say that my wife and I (as well as those of the director who have seen both plans) have a decided preference for Morris's plans over Urban's.[149]

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[147]This is in part based on a memo by Urban which states: "Mr. Kahn said I should influence boxholders for my ideas and schemes." Urban memorandum, 17 October 1927, TMs, Metropolitan Opera Archives. This statement however does not indicate when Kahn said this. Another memorandum from the same date, however, indicates some doubt on Urban's part stating: "Mr. Morris in his letter of September 29th 1927 to Mr. Kahn states that the experts which he consulted objected to Scheme IX on the grounds of inferiority of sight lines and acoustics. If Mr. Kahn should take this report seriously No. IX would be dead." Urban memorandum, 17 October 1927. Gretl Urban stated unconditionally that Kahn supported Urban's scheme, Gretl Urban tape 3, Production File Box 46, Joseph Urban Collection; Carter and Cole refrain from stating that Kahn definitely supported Urban's scheme but suggest that he did in several phrases, Carter and Cole, 223, 229; Stern states that the boxholders, not Kahn, preferred Morris's scheme, Stern, Gilmartin, Mellin, *New York 1930*, 628.

[148]Kahn to Urban 7 November 1927, TMs, "Metropolitan Opera 1927"; and Kahn's support for Urban as the architect of the Reinhardt Theater, Urban to Kahn, 20 July 1928, TMs, "Reinhardt Productions 1928," Otto Kahn Collection.

[149]Kahn to Ziegler, 1 August 1927, TMs, "Wolab - 3", Otto Kahn Collection, 2.

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Whether or not Urban knew of Kahn's lack of support and what role that played in his decision to publish his plans cannot be ascertained. Kahn declined to put into writing any further statements concerning the failed collaboration.[150]

Urban divided the exterior of Scheme IX into three components which reflected the three major programmatic activities of the Opera complex: administrative offices and workshops; auditorium; rental apartment tower (fig. 53).[151] Each section was distinguished by varying heights and

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[150]Kahn to Morris, 24 October 1927, TMs, "Wolab 1927", Otto Kahn Collection: "I am fully aware of the necessity of putting a formal end to the relationship to which you refer under "3." Actually, as I told you verbally, it is ended. The reason why a little time must yet elapse before the formal proceedings are consummated I shall be glad to explain to you verbally when I next have the pleasure of seeing you." and again: "Your resume is quite accurate, but, inasmuch as the luncheon meeting last Friday was a family affair and the proceeding of a confidential character, I would prefer that no record be kept of them." Kahn to Morris, 1 November 1927, TMs, "Wolab 1927", Otto Kahn Collection

[151]It appears that the exterior of Scheme IX was more successful with Kahn than Morris's Scheme C. Morris recorded in a memorandum summarizing a meeting, of Scheme C: "note is made of the fact that both Mr. and Mrs. Kahn were not entirely pleased with the exterior treatment, and that Mr. Cravath questioned the exterior as perhaps representing too strongly one of the phases of modern design in Europe and this country." Morris memorandum, 18 July 1927, TMs, "Wolab 1927", Otto Kahn Collection. Perhaps worried that Urban's design for the entire complex would impinge on his authority as Architect, Morris sought assurances that Urban would not be involved with the design of the studio. A memorandum states that Kahn: "fully understands that Mr. Urban is not to have any part in the Architectural work of the Studio Building; that Mr. Urban's participation in the Architectural fees would be restricted to the Opera House proper and that he would not be called upon for Associate services in connection with the proposed Studio Building." Morris memorandum, 14 July 1927, "Wolab 1927", Otto Kahn Collection.

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articulation but knit together through Urban's emphasis upon verticality, similar massing and materials. While as Stern, Gilmartin, and Mellins have suggested Urban's apartment tower achieved a profile similar to that of Raymond Hood's American Radiator Building, in overall conception it was more elegant and austere.[152] Scheme IX was obviously influenced by several recent American buildings; however, it also was shaped by the work of Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright.[153]

Urban stated that the exterior details of the structure were not fully resolved, probably due to the requirement of melding together three distinct programmatic entities. He emphasized that several concerns, however, had governed his treatment of the envelope. First, the exterior reflected the interior plans, which resulted in the three-part arrangement. Second, the exterior honestly expressed its construction. The verticality of the elevations, Urban felt, represented the steel structure.[154]

Urban's main concern, however, was to create an appropriate monumentality. Given Kahn's stated dislike for the monumentality of European designs, both modern and

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[152]Stern, Gilmartin, Mellins, *New York 1930*, 627.

[153]The building obviously owes a great debt to Sullivan's skyscrapers and banks, but in particular to Wright's City National Bank, Mason City, Iowa of 1909 and his Press Building Project of 1912.

[154]Deems Taylor, "An Impressive Home for the Metropolitan Opera Company; Joseph Urban's Project for the New Structure," *Musical America* 46 (8 October 1927): 2.

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traditional, Urban had to achieve balance an external distinction worthy of the cultural institution and at the same time creating a "democratic" aura. Shortly before his August 1927 trip to Europe, Urban stated:

> Every effort will be made to create as "monumental" a building as the greatest opera company in the world deserves,...yet with a view toward the architectural harmony of the street and section in which it will stand.[155]

Since the character of Columbus Circle was still in transition from a "noisy, dark, rather soiled thoroughfare," to an area of "theatres and gigantic hotels," it was not difficult to pick architectural monuments to harmonize with.[156] Urban's recently completed Ziegfeld Theater and the International Magazine Building, under construction, provided the source for the stripped classical style and allegorical embellishments of Scheme IX.[157]

Yet Urban clearly placed decreased significant upon the monumental allegorical language. Ornament was kept to a minimum and sculpture was banished to the top of the auditorium elevation where it was visible but not emphatic. In its place Urban came to prefer an architectural language based upon the physical realities of New York City. As early

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[155]"Architects of New Metropolitan Sail to Study Opera Houses Abroad," *Musical America* 46 (6 August 1927): 2.

[156]Taylor, "An Impressive Home," 3.

[157]Taylor, rather coyly alludes to this through his references to the area's theatres and "a publisher's building", Taylor, "An Impressive Home," 3.

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as 1926 Urban called for an opera house designed in reference to the realities of New York:

> There is only one style of architecture that would do for a new opera house in New York, and that is the modern New York style. It should be representative of New York, a skyscraper with towers and terraces in the revised Babylonian style of New York.[158]

In all of Urban's schemes, he primarily achieved monumentality through the great height of the apartment tower and not through classical references and allegorical embellishments. Urban emphasized that the realities of Manhattan's real estate market and building code also played a key role in determining the exterior. Deems Taylor wrote:

> The new Metropolitan is a democratic opera house. Whether the directors consider it one or not, they have made it one by demanding an auditorium to accommodate 5000 people. It must be built in a city whose land values are calculated, not by the acre, but by the square foot, a city whose building code is the result of a combination of swarming traffic, narrow streets, and lofty buildings. Opera is the most expensive of all art-forms. In no country has it even paid its way, and I doubt if it can in this one....
>
> And if the Metropolitan is to have tenants, why should they not be housed in a tower? I have no doubt that when the first opera houses were built, their sponsors thought wistfully of the amphitheatres of Greece and Rome. But the opera houses arose, none the less, the inevitable

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[158]"Kahn Awaits Voice of Public on Opera," *New York Times*, 16 January 1926, 1. The quote comes from "an official of the Metropolitan Opera," which Gregory Gilmartin, I believe, correctly attributes to Urban. Gilmartin criticizes Urban's statement for being "pictorial," in contrast to the pragmatism of Hood, Kahn, and Walker. However, he does not take into account the early date of this statement or the context in which it occurred, which is a brief quote trying to create an image of what the building could be, Gilmartin, 280.

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> result and expression of contemporary social and economic conditions.[159]

With Scheme IX Urban moved away from the allegorical language of the Ziegfeld to the American modernism practiced by his colleagues Kahn, Hood and Walker. His design partook in the ongoing dialogue attempting to define modern American architecture. His emphasis upon height, mass, and expression of construction and program on the exterior, reflected general ideas of how to achieve a modern vocabulary. Sheldon Cheney summarized how the design expressed American modernism:

> ...the envelope enclosing this structurally correct theater is in line with progressive architectural practice, honestly expressing the functions of the building, free from mere "period" ornament, and yet achieving a typical American decorativeness out of its sheerness, its massing and the disposition of the openings in the soaring facades.[160]

The mixed-use complex, furthermore, was an early super-block which revealed the influence of Ferriss and Corbett's 1925 Titan City Exhibition as well as Raymond Hood's contemporaneous 1927 design for a City of Towers.[161] Urban's rooftop playgrounds, foreshadowed a favorite theme of modernism, later developed in the proposal for Rockefeller

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[159]Taylor, "An Impressive Home," 6.

[160]Sheldon Cheney quoted in "Urban Opera House Plan Rouses Chorus of Praise," *Musical America* 46 (22 October 1927): 3.

[161]For Titan City see Willis, "Drawing Towards Metropolis," 161; Stern, Gilmartin, Mellins, *New York 1930*, 332-334; for Hood see Stern, Gilmartin, Mellins, *New York 1930*, 577; and Carol Willis "Raymond Hood City of Towers" exhibition brochure, (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art at Philip Morris, 1984).

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Center as well as in Hugh Ferriss's *Metropolis of Tomorrow*.[162] Urban, furthermore, employed a sophisticated system of underground roadways and vehicular entrances in order to accommodate the traffic created by the various users of the complex. The inclusion of sophisticated traffic systems, with separate levels for different types of transit, had been an ideal since the turn-of-the-century, but received new attention in the visionary planning schemes of the 1920s.[163] Both Deems Taylor and Sheldon Cheney believed that Urban's Scheme IX, placed him firmly in the center of modern American architectural practice. Taylor wrote:

> This is a city of towers, and the Woolworth, American Radiator, Bush Terminal, Ritz Tower and Candler buildings are a few proofs of the fact that beauty can arise triumphantly out of necessity. *In die Beschraenkung erzeigt sich der Meister*. To me this new Metropolitan seems admirable for the very reason that it is an unmistakable product of America rather than of Europe. Its simplicity, frankness of structure, and soaring lines are a fitting symbol of the athletic eagerness and vitality of a land where man still cherishes the precious illusion of hope, still dares to try to touch the sky with his fingertips.[164]

On the interior Urban's primary concern was to create a space with excellent acoustics and good vision for 5,000 spectators.

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[162]Le Corbusier is usually credited with the popularization of this idea among architects. However, in Urban's case, it is likely that an alternate tradition, the theatrical roof garden inspired this idea. The first form of the roof garden in New York City theaters, was an open-air, landscaped roof-top terrace. See Stephen Burge Johnson.

[163]Especially Harvey Wiley Corbett, see Willis, "Drawing Towards Metropolis," 160.

[164]Taylor, "An Impressive Home," 4.

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He replaced the traditional horseshoe auditorium arrangement with a fan shape (fig 51). In accordance with Kahn's mandate, the number of private boxes were reduced from 51 to 35. Urban explained his scheme in a letter to Morris:

> The object of the plan is to have as few as possible, or preferably no seats, loges, boxes or balconies right and left of the stage, the concentration of all seats being in the form of an amphitheatre with the idea that every one in the audience has almost the same view of the stage and that the loges are in back of the amphitheatre or at their starting point on the sides as far removed from the proscenium as conditions will permit.[165]

Urban adapted the forestage of the Ziegfeld Theater to the Metropolitan and created two side stages as well as a removable apron to extend and make the stage more flexible. It could have been used for processions and pageants as well as more intimate chamber pieces. Urban enunciated the precedents for his design in a letter to Morris:

> The spirit of this scheme originated in 1872 by Wagner in the Bayreuth Theater and has been followed down to date by Littman in the Regentment Theater (1901); the Munich Kunstler Theater (1908); in Posen (1910), by H. Seeling in the Stadtische Oper Charlottensburg (1912); by Oskar Kauffman in his reconstruction of the Kroll Opera (1924).[166]

Urban stated that he had no definite scheme of interior decoration, but images of the auditorium and the grand foyer, reveal some of his concerns (fig. 52).[167] The half-domed

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[165]Urban to Morris, 5 October 1927, TMs, Metropolitan Opera Archive.

[166]Urban to Morris, 5 October 1927.

[167]The Urban collection contains two drawings dated June 1927, #18 transverse section, a watercolor, ink and graphite drawing which suggests the decoration of the proscenium and

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auditorium as well as the double-height grand foyer are dominated by classical forms and allegorical sculptures. The decorative vocabulary of the Opera interiors is in a spirit of classical rationalism and evokes Urban's European heritage stretching back to Schinkel and continuing through to Otto Wagner and Adolf Loos. The overall configuration of the interior, however, does have some resemblance to Poelzig's third version of the Salzburg Festspielhaus.

Urban wanted the auditorium to have an audience involvement similar to that of the Ziegfeld Theater:

> The rows of seats should not be arranged in a straight line, but should curve around the form of the orchestra pit and come as near as possible to a semi-circle to lose the stiffness of the Bayreuth amphitheatre. The soft curved lines allow the audience to see each other and feel the reaction of each other to the performance. The same line should be carried out in the loges so that the people in the loges have the same feeling of social connection which strengthens the feeling of festival. But under no condition should this line of loges that the form of the so-called horse-shoe or lyre form which as in the present house result in a number of boxes right and left which have very bad sight and detract the attention from the main point, the stage.[168]

In a manner similar to the Ziegfeld, Urban sought to reinforce the connection between spectator and performer by treating the

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immediate stage area; and #17 longitudinal section, also in watercolor, ink and graphite which suggests color and decorative schemes for the lobby and auditorium spaces, Portfolio 22, Joseph Urban Collection. Portfolio 28 contains images also from around June 1927, "Sketch of Proscenium" a perspective watercolor, also indicates the auditorium decoration. This image is similar in concept but slightly different in details from #17. A print, probably by Donald Douglas, shows the perspective of the lobby.

[168]Untitled four page manuscript, 13 June 1927, TMs, Portfolio 11, Joseph Urban Collection, 3.

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auditorium elevations as if they were an expansion of stage sets. Here, however, Urban used a grand classical style akin to his 1925 design for the opera *La Vestale* and similar to the exterior forms. Instead of the dramatic contrast between interior and exterior of the Ziegfeld, the design for Scheme IX was based on a much more consistent use of architectural forms throughout all of the spaces.

Urban believed that current opera lacked a great musical genius who would give new form to the media and was therefore in a transitional stage. New methods of presentation were necessary in order to keep the public interested in the opera. Not surprisingly, Urban turned to the Circus Theater ideal of MacKaye and Reinhardt with its processions and crowd involvement. The new opera house should be designed in accordance with the new methods of production. To maintain the status quo would, Urban felt effectively kill opera:

> We must not let it become merely a social affair that is participated in by the few. We must try by new methods of presentation to keep the interest of the people and keep this art alive. We are on the path to produce all the big works of the past in a new way. That is the intention of all the big opera houses today and we have to provide a new kind of stage so that they will have the facilities to work with. The peep-show stage alone is no longer sufficient.[169]

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[169]Untitled four page manuscript, 13 June 1927, Portfolio 11, 2. Morris, dismissively labelled this as a concern with the spectacular side of Opera." He suggested that this was merely a passing fashion in his report of his European tour: "Director general Tietjen said in effect that after the War for a year or two there was a debased taste in evidence and that opera degenerated toward a spectacular and pantomimic expression; that this was a passing fancy and that the trend even since has been increasingly toward high class opera..."

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The impresario of spectacles, Max Reinhardt, greatly admired Urban's design.[170]

If Urban's Metropolitan Opera designs were shaped by the specific needs of opera in New York, there is also evidence that he became increasingly interested in a more universal form language. This is evident in his use of a flexible stage which could accommodate a variety of performances, and perhaps even in the use of a classically derived architectural language.[171] Greek, rather than antique, theater begins to appear as a reference. In a rather polemical conclusion to his written notes on Scheme IX, Urban links Greek theatrical ideals with his plan for a democratic seating arrangement by including a quotation from an article by Paul Kerby:

> Do they not consider the twentieth century has outlived these ideas of segregation; and should not the private seclusion of any part of a public audience be made impossible in the opera house, as it has long been in all other theatres?
>
> Did not the ancient Greeks in their huge national theatres show how to retain social dignity and yet refrain from snobbishness?[172]

"Report of Benjamin W. Morris on trip to France, Germany and Italy, July 27th to September 22nd, 1927," n.d., TMs, 21, "Wolab 1927," Otto Kahn Collection.

[170]Taylor, "An Impressive Home," 2.

[171]This would coincide with Adolf Loos's notions of the classical as the universal western vernacular. Urban, of course, was familiar with Loos's work; whether or not there is a direct influence is uncertain.

[172]Untitled four-page manuscript, 13 June 1927, Portfolio 11, 3. The quotation is from Paul Kerby, "Thirty-six Questions for Opera Directors," *Singing*, 2 June 1927, 9.

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The Monumental Exterior: The Music Center

Urban took the series of ideas he had developed in the course of designing the Ziegfeld Theater, International Magazine Building and the Metropolitan Opera House and used these as the basis for his visionary design for a Music Center. He published the project in his 1929 book *Theatres*.[173]

Abandoning the constraints of a particular site, Urban envisioned the theater as sitting in a park-like setting or dominating a civic square (fig. 53). This enabled him to combine the massive and monumental advantages of building in the round--a condition he associated with European theaters--with the concerns of American modernism.[174]

On the exterior, Urban eliminated any recognizable classical details and limited allegorical references to a few statues placed on the mezzanine level. He emphasized those elements which had contributed to the modernity of his earlier designs: program, mass and circulation. Different programmatic components such as the elevator and fire towers, curved amphitheater, the stage loft and offices were pulled out from the block and given the appropriate mass, height and fenestration. Circulation, both in terms of automobile transport to the building and pedestrian travel through the

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[173]Urban, *Theatres*, n.p.

[174]For his comments about the European tradition see Urban "Theatre" in *Encyclopedia Britannica*; Urban, "Wedding Theatre Beauty to Ballyhoo," 10.

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complex structured the size of the entrances and resulted in the low bands of promenades wrapping around the exterior.

Within, the two major performance spaces were designed to be flexible auditoria capable of housing plays, recitals, concerts and operas (fig. 54). These universal spaces could be totally transformed through the use of light and sliding partitions. As such, they formed a departure from Urban's previous idea that "each theatre must be designed for a specific purpose."[175] In creating these spaces, Urban hoped to achieve a *Gesamtkunstwerk* uniting all the arts, performers and community into a performance expressive of the desires and aspirations of the period. In order to promote this idea Urban proposed a forestage without a proscenium in the main auditorium and designed a reproduction of an ancient theater in the smaller auditorium. This would, Urban believed, engender the appropriate reaction from the audience:

> Its psychology is that of the Greek theatre, a mass of people concentrated on the stage. There is no distinction between persons, as little difference of advantage for the individual in seeing and hearing as the Greek theatre presented. Here, as in the Greek theatre, the drama is the thing, social significance nothing.[176]

Acknowledging the need for some social activities, however, Urban provided a foyer and outdoor promenade.

Urban used light, in conjunction with color, to provide the major articulation of the interior space. He wrote:

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[175]Urban, *Theatres*, n.p.

[176]Urban, *Theatres*, n.p.

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> The decoration of this room is plastic, dependent entirely upon light to reveal it. At the time of performance it is unlighted, vanished. At the intermission it can again become apparent to divert the unoccupied gaze. Changing lights can give it movement, and colored light, mood.[177]

Fluted surfaces or plain blocks of masonry would catch and reflect the light's movement and color (fig. 55).[178] This enabled Urban to transform the auditorium and the audience's mood on a moment-by-moment basis. Urban's description of light at the Music Center suggests the crystalline, transformative qualities associated with German Expressionism. The white marble walls of the main auditorium would be lit in such a manner that "the whole room seems radiant and the walls themselves appear luminous."[179] The lighting scheme, flexible auditoria spaces and social intent of the Music Center suggest that Urban intended it to be the American equivalent of the German "Stadtkrone" or city crown, capable of generating a community's spirituality, renewal and transformation.

Yet Urban's use of light also had sources in commercial culture. The ability of the auditorium lighting system to reproduce the effects of a day from sunrise to night suggests John Eberson's atmospheric movie theaters which recreated the

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[177]Urban, *Theatres*, n.p. Urban's use of light in this manner dates back at least to the 1916 production *Caliban*.

[178]The use of vertical fluting is reminiscent of Poelzig's 1920-22 Salzburg Festspielhaus and 1925 Capitol Cinema in Berlin.

[179]Urban, *Theatres*, n.p.

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light and atmospheric effects of a day. Even closer in style and lighting effects was the Theatre Pigalle, a Parisian movie theater completed in 1929, which had a modern-styled domed auditorium ceiling with a lighting system that could be changed to suit the mood of each scene.[180]

The sophisticated acoustics, telescoping auditorium ceiling, communal ideals and lighting effects of the Music Center have frequently been identified as important sources for Radio City Music Hall.[181] Equally significant, however, is how Urban derived the Music Center design from a melding of commercial and high architectural forms and ideals.

Advertising: The Commercial Vernacular

Urban's attempt to make the Ziegfeld facade an architectural poster advertising the productions within was quickly compromised by the addition of signs and a marquee. Urban summarized the difficulties of fusing popular forms and commercial needs with the traditions of architecture:

> It is no simple problem, this business of building theatres in Babylon. But if our designers face it squarely they can find a way to fuse advertising and art

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[180]"The Last Word in Theaters," *Literary Digest* 102 (14 September 1929): 24. Urban was undoubtedly familiar with the theater. Morris visited the theater when it was under construction during his 1927 Summer tour, "Report of Benjamin W. Morris," 6. It seems unlikely that Urban, who also visited Paris during his 1927 summer tour, would have missed seeing the space. "Urban Finds Stage Mechanics Over Emphasized," 3.

[181]Stern, Gilmartin, Mellins, *New York 1930*, 638; Krinsky, 166.

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> into an architectonic style peculiar to the theatre. At least they have the example of the modern automobile.[182]

In his next theater project, the 1928 design for the Reinhardt Theater, he acknowledged and addressed commercial and legal necessities such as the advertising sign, fire escape and marquee (fig. 56). Urban proposed to use a flat black glass cladding on the elevation to form the background for a fire escape embellished with lights and a gold colored railing. The fire escape culminated in a tower like central pinnacle and formed the frame for advertising signs and the marquee. Urban described the concerns which generated the facade:

> The exterior of this building is planned for three purposes only--to show that it is a theatre, to allow the necessary means of entrance and exit and to carry out with some distinction the requirements of the fire laws.[183]

Urban had long been familiar with electric signs. Earlier projects such as the 1916 Century Theater and the 1923 Cosmopolitan Theater had possessed huge exterior electric signs. Urban's decision to make signage an integral part of the design, however, seems to stem less from his earlier experience and more from his inability to eliminate signs at the Ziegfeld. In a description of the Reinhardt Theater he criticized architects who refused to confront the issues of advertising, and by inference his own design for the Ziegfeld:

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[182]Urban, "Wedding Theatre Beauty to Ballyhoo," 10.

[183]Urban, *Theatres*, n.p. Urban's use of advertisements for the Reinhardt parallels Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown's later flat facades which were also influenced by advertisements.

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> ...none of them has touched the far more difficult problem of harmonizing advertising and beauty.
>
> If the architect does not do this, he might just as well design nothing at all. No matter how beautiful his conception, no matter now firm his proportions, how exquisite his details, the result will be utterly ruined by the publicity people with their electric lights.[184]

If, Urban stated, some found the Reinhardt Theater garish, its commercial purpose and the necessity of standing out amidst the bustle of New York and height of its skyscrapers dictated a "decorative scheme of such force."[185]

In the design of the Reinhardt Theater Urban turned away from treating the building as a sculptural mass. Here, black reflective glass, gold trim and lights created a taut skin. Urban came to increasingly prefer these materials and their floating, weightless quality. He wrote:

> The new surfaces that are so much utilized in interior decoration--flashing enamels, colored glass, metal trim--should play a large part. At night, when the theatre comes into its own, all the new methods of illumination from panels of frosted glass to tubes of vapor light--must contributed to the striking beauty of the facade.[186]

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[184]Urban, "Wedding Theatre Beauty to Ballyhoo," 10.

[185]Urban, *Theatres*, n.p. Urban also stated: "On the lower stories of our building, the part that is seen at close range by people in the street, it has been the custom to employ columns and other architectural features of the older styles, but these embellishments are fast disappearing. Formerly people could enjoy these beautiful things at leisure, and the important buildings often faced an open square that afforded a good view. But now the pedestrians pass in crowds and people go by quickly in automobiles. Any ornament must be bold almost to crudity in order to register in a flash." Hubert Van Vechten, "Urban, Architect, See Granite City," *New York Evening Post*, 8 April 1927, 4.

[186]Urban, "Wedding Theatre Beauty to Ballyhoo," 10.

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This enabled the building to stand out against the ponderous masses of the surrounding city and would have captured and reflected the images of buildings and crowds passing-by and entering the theater. If the Ziegfeld Theater exterior was a screen onto which potential audience members could project their fantasies and desires of the productions within, the Reinhardt facade was a mirror reflecting the surrounding theater district, the Reinhardt advertisements, the potential viewer and collapsing them into one image. Mirrors in advertisements are devices which unify a spectator with an image of themself that is both desired and alien from his/her everyday experience.[187] The Reinhardt facade would have reflected the image of potential audience members glamorized by their association with the theater district and Max Reinhardt's productions, for the fleeting moment as they purchased their tickets and entered the theater building.

The use of new materials, however, also allowed Urban to achieve another goal, that of bringing greater color into exterior architecture. Urban shared this concern with his colleagues, Hood, Kahn, Leon Solon and Ralph Walker. The primary way they had previously achieved this was through the use of colored brick and glazed terra cotta. At buildings such as Buchman & Kahn's 1926-27 Two Park Avenue, this resulted in bright but limited patches of color. The

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[187]Williamson, 60-64.

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reflective surfaces and color inherent in glass allowed for even greater color possibilities, Urban speculated:

> When we look at the City at night...we see lights of many tones. Some are dazzling white; others are soft and warm. A building can have the same distinctiveness of tone in the daytime. Its color may express its personality. Beautiful colors will surely be used for the exterior of buildings of the future. These colorful structures, will have charm on gloomy, gray days as well as when the sunlight tints them. All degrees of light, shadow and night illumination will have their part in modifying and enhancing the color effects.[188]

The color scheme of the Reinhardt, in fact, illustrates the nature of the dialogue between Urban and his colleagues. Raymond Hood had first used a black and gold exterior color combination for the American Radiator Building, a structure which Urban listed in his article on the Reinhardt Theater as being a successful "sandwich board" for its owner.[189] By translating this combination into black reflective glass, Urban took its color and light potentialities a step further. This in turn inspired Hood, who quoted the black glass and gold combination in his design for the 1928 Ideal House in London.[190]

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[188]Untitled manuscript on color, "Excerpts from Magazines," Production File Box 15, 4.

[189]Walter Creese, "American Architecture from 1918-1933" (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1949), II: 7-8, credits Urban with proposing the color scheme to Hood; as Stern, Gilmartin, Mellins, *New York 1930*, 576, counter, however, the documentary evidence is not clear as to whether or not Urban had any role in this building's color scheme.

[190]Andrew Saint, "Americans in London: Raymond Hood and the National Radiator Building," *AA Files* no. 7 (September 1984): 30-43.

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The interior of the Reinhardt Theater was an abrupt departure from Urban's other theater designs.[191] The acting area extended out beyond the proscenium to wrap around the entire orchestra seating space (fig. 57). This type of stage, called a space stage, had been used by Adolph Appia, Leopold Jessner and with greater elaboration, the Russian Constructivists.[192] Urban's use of this type of stage was encouraged by Reinhardt's own experience and theories about theatrical productions. In a 1927 article the theater critic Philip Carr summarized Reinhardt's ideas:

> It is not merely a matter of advancing the stage and altering the nature of the setting. The whole conception of a stageland irretrievably separated from audienceland must, Reinhardt believes, be abolished. Everything must be done to bring the actor into close touch with his audience and to persuade the audience that it is not merely a distant spectator but an integral part of the performance itself. So you must abolish the curtain. You must bring the characters through the audience onto the stage whenever you can. You must decorate the auditorium or part of it in sympathy with the decoration of the stage.[193]

Urban employed this type of stage again in the temporary stage for the 1929 Silver Benefit at Madison Square Garden and in

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[191]The interior articulation of the auditorium, in a manner similar to the Music Center, was kept to a minimum. Urban proposed simple red drapes for the walls and a vaguely allegorical ceiling mural. Constantly changing light effects would provide the scenery for the productions.

[192]Cheney, "The Space Stage," 762-772.

[193]Philip Carr, "A Vision of the Theatre of the Future," *New York Times Magazine*, 9 October 1927, 6.

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his 1932 design for the Palace of the Soviets.[194]

The greatest difference between the Reinhardt Theater design and Urban's other theaters, however, was the arrangement of the audience. Instead of treating the audience as a community, Urban manipulated the seating so that individual audience members were isolated from the larger whole. Urban placed the majority of seats in tiers of boxes. Each box had a view of the stage but had no visual or aural connection with surrounding boxes. Shepard Vogelgesang wrote:

> No curtain separates actor and audience. The audience, "a curtain of faces," is for the actors--it surrounds them with living reactions to the emotions they portray. For the audience there are only the actors among them, massing or scattering for a time before a shaft of light or against darkness in which a few objects give the time and place to the scene. In contrast to the social Baroque theatre from which most present day playhouses are descendant, the audience is largely invisible to itself.[195]

Urban's almost projector-booth like arrangement, in effect created a series of private screening rooms for the audience. An incredibly unusual plan, the Reinhardt Theater focuses upon the individual's experience rather than the audience as a communal whole. Ultimately, this would have reinforced the middle-to upper class profile of the audience that normally would attend a Max Reinhardt production in New York. Reinhardt probably intended the theater to be an extension of

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[194]Oliver Sayler, "Stage Without a Frame to Be Seen Here," *The World*, 13 January 1929, 8. For the Palace of the Soviets see Portfolio 1, Joseph Urban Collection.

[195]Shepard Vogelgesang, "The Reinhardt Theatre, New York," *Architectural Record* 64 (December 1928): 461.

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his Berlin Komödie Theater and Viennese Theaters in der Josefstadt which specialized in fairly middle-of-the-road productions. He frequently transferred plays between these two European theaters and probably would have used the New York theater to create a chain of playhouses featuring elegant but light-weight productions.[196]

In frankly acknowledging the realities of advertising in his Reinhardt Theater design Urban did not completely discard the formal language of the Ziegfeld Theater exterior. As early as 1928 he visualized reworking the Ziegfeld forms to incorporate these modern realities. In describing his ideas for a hypothetical motion picture theater, Urban stated:

> Here again one might use the proscenium effect of the outside of the Ziegfeld Theatre, but with a great recessed space in which--almost as if on the stage itself--painting and lights could play ingenious and provocative games with the incidents, characters and titles of the picture.[197]

His 1931 Motion Picture Theater project developed this concept further (fig. 58). The primary elevation of the proposed building consisted of red neon letters, bevelled aluminum sheets and opaque ultramarine glass. The aluminum sheets formed a base for changing illuminated letters announcing the current attraction. Despite its functionalist appearance, the project clearly took the Ziegfeld's architectural poster as the point of departure and transformed this into the major

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[196]John Warren, "Max Reinhardt and the Viennese Theatre of the Interwar Years," *Maske und Kothurn* 29 (1983): 127-128.

[197]Urban, "Wedding Theatre Beauty to Ballyhoo," 10.

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design components. At the Motion Picture Theater, Urban intended to replace the false proscenium of the Ziegfeld with a changeable aluminum and neon signs that would promote the current shows.

The Commercial Language of Desire

While Urban criticized and transformed the Ziegfeld exterior language, he continued to employ the spectacular effects of the Ziegfeld interior in his work. He confined the use of spectacle, however, to building types such as luxury stores and night clubs which were used by a limited class of well-to-do patrons.

Night clubs and restaurants utilizing the effects employed on the Ziegfeld interior formed the basis of Urban's practice. Between 1928 and 1933 Urban designed 11 of these spaces in New York City, Pittsburgh, Detroit, Cincinnati and Chicago. The first of the clubs was similar to the Ziegfeld auditorium in style and subject matter (fig. 59).[198] By 1929 Urban began to break up the overall murals with panels of mirrors, black glass, or a highly reflective single color (fig. 7).[199] His last commissions of 1933 eliminated all

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[198]See the St. Regis Hotel Roof, New York City and the Hotel Gibson Roof in Cincinnati.

[199]See the Central Park Casino, Urban Room at the William Penn Hotel in Pittsburgh, The Urban Room at the Hotel Bossert in Brooklyn and the Seaglade Room at the St. Regis.

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patterning and relied on color, light and reflective surfaces to shape the space.[200]

At the Ziegfeld, Urban used color, light and pattern to establish a receptive atmosphere for the featured play. He exploited this approach in his night clubs in order to create environments suitable for consumption. Reflective materials, elaborate lighting effects and vivid colors were the tools by which he created "astonishing and artistic results."[201] In particular, color was the primary vehicle through which a psychologically appropriate atmosphere for dining, dancing, drinking and spending money could be created:

> Colors play a most conspicuous part in securing desired results. They must please the eye, enhance the beauty of women, stimulate the appetite by making food attractive, promote gaiety, and in a broad sense be striking in novelty.[202]

At the 1932 Chatterbox Room in Pittsburgh he used "tropical vermillion, hyacinth blue, clear lemon and deep night blue" to

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[200]See the Urban Room, Congress Hotel, Chicago, the Paradise Restaurant, New York and the Park Avenue Restaurant, New York.

[201]"Stage Genius Visits City," *Detroit News*, 7 November 1932, in Portfolio 35, part 2, Joseph Urban Collection.

[202]"Stage Genius Visits City." Another description of the Book-Cadillac Roof described bold colors as the Urban keynote creating a sense of carnival and festiveness and quoted Urban as saying "One shouldn't wake up in the morning in a room full of strong colors. But they do help in the places where one goes for a good time." Helen C. Bower, "Artist Visions Skyscraper of Glass and Bold Colors," *Detroit Free Press*, 6 November 1932, in Portfolio 35, part 2, Joseph Urban Collection.

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create a playful almost childlike atmosphere.[203] For the Hotel Bossert, Urban used sliding screens to create two different color schemes for the room's two primary functions. During the day, green leather screens provided the main color note for a sober and business-like lunch spot. These unfolded in the afternoon to reveal murals of brilliantly colored flowers paired with elephants to create a festive and fantastic space for afternoon tea and evening entertainments (fig. 60). In the night clubs Urban used color to create spaces in which "Palette...indeed ministered to palate."[204]

Urban employed mirrors, black glass and other reflective surfaces to give a sense of activity and movement to the space. At the Central Park Casino he surfaced the ballroom ceiling in black glass (fig. 7).

> By leaving the ceiling undefined in this way height is given the room and the festive quality of the crystal chandeliers and the people below is doubled by reflections.[205]

In later spaces he paired mirrors with changing colored lights to increase the sense of movement. The result of these effects were described in reference to the Chatterbox room:

> Mirrors on either side of the exuberant painted panels serve as the architectural elements of the room which acts as the agent to set the room into motion. To this

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[203]"In Mayfair," *Pittsburgh Sun Telegraph*, 14 October 1932, in Portfolio 35, part 2, Joseph Urban Collection.

[204]*William Penn Points*, June 1929, 11, Portfolio 33, Joseph Urban Collection.

[205]"Central Park Casino," *Architectural Record* 66 (August 12 1929): 99.

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> stimulation of motion through the reflection of the painted decoration, Urban has added rotating lights that paint the room in motion. When the animation of the girls moving gracefully in winsome gowns is added Urban's joyous picture is complete.[206]

Frequently described as futuristic, fantastic and even bizarre, these spaces were felt to represent the latest in modern decoration.[207] Their dramatic effects were identified as having their origins in the world of theater. In discussing Urban's Central Park Casino design, *Theatre Arts Magazine* speculated on the impact which theater had in the world of design:

> The theater is one of the greatest modern economic forces. It is a determining factor in establishing fashions throughout the entire panorama of cultured living. Its influences is powerful in the obviously related fields of clothes, accessories, furniture, textiles and interior decoration. Commercial enterprise today recognizes this important economic influence. Leading artists of the theatre, because of their training and ability to stir the imagination, are being called upon to incorporate the dramatic in almost every phase of business and industry.[208]

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[206]"In Mayfair."

[207]The St. Regis was described as: "The club rooms are done in gay, flamboyant fashion, by Urban, the ultra fashionable designer, they are the last work on modern decoration." "Remodelling the '400' Into the 1500," *Buffalo Courier Express*, 12 May 1929, in Portfolio 33. The Hotel Gibson Roof Garden was called modernistic and bizarre, "The Roof, --Garden of Allurement," *The Gibsonian*, undated clipping in Portfolio 36 while the Urban Room in the Congress Hotel was described as not modernistic but ultra modern, Louis St. Cyr, "Joseph Urban Room Opening Chicago's Premier Social Event," unidentified clipping, Portfolio 35, part 2; The Central Park Casino was labelled as "futuristic and almost bizarre." "Casino Not to Be 'Excessive'" *Boston Herald*, 2 June 1929, Portfolio 33, all clippings in Joseph Urban Collection.

[208]"Modern Interior Decoration Borrows Dramatic Influence from the Theatre," *Theatre Arts Magazine* 13 (August 1929): 634.

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The modernity and theatricality of these spaces were meant to appeal to middle and upper income patrons with pretensions to being modern and up-to-date. They suggested that a new, more democratic, sensibility had come to structure these "resorts" and the leisure activities they housed. Wealth or an aristocratic background were no longer prerequisites for admission, newspapers hinted, a sophisticated sense of taste and a chic demeanor instead provided entree.[209] The Urban style, as attendance reports indicated, seemed to be a successful draw.

> Just what it is that makes a dancing place popular and smart is often not quite explainable. In the case of the St. Regis roof, success is no doubt due to the efforts of Mr. Tony Biddle who sponsored it, and Joseph Urban whose orange and gold decorations have made it known throughout the country as one of the loveliest restaurants.[210]

Urban also reworked the Ziegfeld notion of the exterior as an aesthetic poster advertising the business within into a design for commerce. His 1929 Bedell Store did not use any exterior signs to advertise the luxury clothing store (fig. 8). Instead Urban combined highly reflective black glass cladding, large showroom windows and a central metal grille illustrating the history of fashion to visually advertise the store to the passerby. Shepard Vogelgesang felt that the store was part of a modern American architectural trend which recognized the

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[209]"Remodelling the "400" Into the 1500."

[210]"This Modern World," *Albany Evening News*, 15 July 1929, Portfolio 33, Joseph Urban Collection.

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advertising potential of all architecture. In writing about the design he stated:

> Since the completion of the American Radiator Building, architecture has been frequently spoken of as "a good medium of advertisement." More recently Fifth Avenue has exhibited examples of what might be termed "advertising fronts."[211]

But increasingly for some critics, this frank acknowledgement of commercial reality corrupted the aesthetics of architecture.[212]

The Ziegfeld Theater and the designs it generated were, from 1931 on, increasingly dismissed as moderne not modern. A cursory examination of Urban's career would seem to indicate that he also found these works "moderne." His next major commissions, the Atlantic Beach Club, the Palace of the Soviets and especially the New School for Social Research were, emphatically "modern" in their forms and aesthetic standards.

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[211]Shepard Vogelgesang, "Architecture and Trade Marks," *Architectural Forum* 50 (June 1929): 897.

[212]Lewis Mumford, "Notes on Modern Architecture," *New Republic* 66 (18 March 1931): 122.

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CHAPTER 3

DEFINING MODERNISM:

THE NEW SCHOOL FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH

From January 1 through 4, 1931, the New School for Social Research held an open house to celebrate the completion of its new building on W. 12th Street in New York City (fig. 61). During those four days, over 10,000 people streamed through the building's doors to inspect the structure. Some, New School President Alvin Johnson reported with great satisfaction, stayed for hours.[1] Joseph Urban's innovative modern design for the new building accomplished Johnson's goal of bringing the institution into the public eye and attracting attention to its activities. Just two months after the building opened Johnson reported that several organizations were holding their conventions in the building, that public lectures in the auditorium were selling out, and that the enrollment for the winter term had doubled.[2]

The New School building was one of the first buildings in

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[1]Alvin S. Johnson to Agnes de Lima, TLS, 1 January 1931, "deLima, Agnes 1921-1931" folder, Series I, Box 2, Alvin Saunders Johnson Collection, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library. Johnson may have exaggerated the attendance, however, given that he was writing to Agnes deLima, a close friend and confidante and later the Director of Public Relations for the New School, any exaggeration of numbers can be attributed to Johnson's excitement about the opening rather than a conscious attempt to impress.

[2]Alvin S. Johnson to Agnes deLima, TLS, 29 March 1931, "deLima, Agnes 1921-1931" folder, Series I, Box 2, Alvin Saunders Johnson Collection, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

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New York to be designed in accordance with the new "functional" principles of modern architecture.[3] As such it not only attracted a great deal of public interest but came under intense scrutiny by architectural critics, who at this time were also formulating their definitions of modernism.[4] Both positive and negative responses were good publicity for the building. Johnson wrote: "I am willing to take a good deal of punishment for having done a thing that has shaken New York out of its complacency."[5]

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[3][Alvin S. Johnson], *The New School for Social Research*, (New York: Aldus Printers, 1930), n.p.: a promotional book for the building states "As a glance at the facade shows, the type of architecture is modernist. It is straight forward, rational and unafraid." "Functionalism Is Keynote of the New School for Social Research," *Art Digest* 5 (15 January 1931): 6: notes "Every feature, interior and exterior has been worked out from a functionalist point of view, producing a unit which is, as one writer put it, "one of the most distinctively modern pieces of architecture in New York." Philip Johnson, "The Architecture of the New School," *The Arts* 7 (March 1931): 393: "The New School for Social Research deserves critical comparison with modern architecture in Europe. Very few American buildings reveal any influence of the International Style, with which the names of Le Corbusier, Oud, Gropius and Mies van der Rohe are associated."

[4]In particular see the Philip Johnson review; Douglas Haskell, "Architecture, The New School," *The Nation* 132 (25 February 1931): 221-223; Edmund Wilson, "Aladdin's Lecture Palace," *The New Republic* 67 (10 June 1931): 90-92; Helen Appleton Read, "The New School," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 4 January 1931, B15. These essays will be extensively examined in the section on the critical response to the building.

[5]Johnson to deLima, 1 January 1931.

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Urban and his colleagues viewed the New School as his most significant building.[6] Yet for many, the building was clearly a departure from the exuberant forms, theatrical references and fashionable interiors that characterized his earlier work. Does the New School design mark an abrupt shift in Urban's work, as he succumbed to the latest European styles? Or can the New School be placed within the context of his earlier work and be seen as evolving out of themes and concerns present in his previous designs?

The shift in style from the Ziegfeld to the New School in Urban's work is paradigmatic of American architecture in general during this period, which included Art Deco, Art Moderne and the International Style.[7] What does the New School reveal about the practice and definition of modernism in the United States at this time? As later shaped by certain institutions, most notably the Museum of Modern Art and the Graduate School of Design at Harvard University, modernism in architecture came to be identified with a kind of formalism which stressed that design should focus upon the intrinsic

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[6]Carter and Cole, 203; Alvin Johnson, *Pioneer's Progress*, 321; Ely Jacques Kahn, "Autobiography", n.d, TMs, Drawings and Archives Collection of the Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University, Chapter II, 23.

[7]Leland Roth, *A Concise History of American Architecture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 231; William Jordy, *American Buildings and Their Architects: The Impact of European Modernism in the Mid-Twentieth Century* (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1972), 58-73, 117-145; David Handlin, *American Architecture* (London: Thames & Hudson 1985), 167-196; Carol Willis, "The Modern Skyscraper, 1931," *Syracuse University Library Associates Courier* 29 (Spring 1984): 29-41.

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properties of architecture, program, structure and materials.[8] Context, both physical and social, as well as an interaction with other art forms were discouraged. Urban with his background in theater, interest in promoting social even symbolic responses to his designs, and fascination with context, most definitely could not be identified as a modern architect under these strictures. Any definition of the New School as "modern," causes certain questions to be asked. What was the nature of "modern" architecture at this time? How did American practice relate to European ideals? And what was the interaction between architecture, the other arts, and commercial culture?

History and Description of the Project

Founded in 1919 as a center of scholarly research and a school of adult education, the New School provided an alternative to conventional American institutions of learning.[9] The school was located in complex of six townhouses on W. 23rd Street. From 1919-1922 the institution balanced two functions: being a center of advanced research and providing a forum where adults past college age could continue to study and take

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[8]Riley, 15-16; Hitchcock and Johnson, 17-77; Herdeg, 78-97; Pommer and Otto, 163-164.

[9]Peter M. Rutkoff and William B. Scott, *New School: A History of The New School for Social Research* (New York: The Free Press, 1986) is the best source of information on the institution.

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advanced courses.[10] Not only was the mission of the school unusual but the composition of its student body was also atypical, consisting of almost two-thirds women.[11] An economic crisis in 1922 forced the school to refocus its mission. Under the leadership of Alvin Johnson (president from 1922-1944), the school concentrated on its adult education component and suspended the expensive advanced research program. The curriculum after 1922 also shifted from one exclusively focused on the social sciences to more cultural subjects.[12]

The expiration of the lease for the W. 23rd Street properties in 1929, caused the institution to look for a new home. Johnson realized that a new, more centrally located building could attract a larger and broader-based audience. This in turn would provide an economic cushion that would enable him to resume the program of advanced research.[13] Writing at the opening of the building in 1931, Johnson revealed the new building's role in his overall plan:

> The idea of the New School was from the beginning a splendid one. But we could not grip the real imagination of New York, in our old setting. Now we can; but it will

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[10]Ibid., 20-23.

[11]Ibid., 26; during this time women made up 40% of national college students, and 35% of New York State college students.

[12]Ibid., 34-37.

[13]Ibid., 43-46.

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> be a long labor to make something significant out of our strategic advantage.[14]

Johnson, clearly, had major concerns which contributed to the design of the building. He wanted a striking building which would generate attention and ultimately revenues for the institution. He told Urban that there was no money for construction, "unless the building plans appeal to our friends."[15] He wrote his friend Agnes deLima that the building had to be "fronted sufficiently to command attention and draw resources to itself."[16] He also wanted a building which was sympathetic to the program of the institution it housed and a visible symbol of its goals. In describing the project to Urban, Johnson recalled that "I dwelt on the imperative need of a building that should express the ideals of the school, give visible form to its personality."[17] Johnson had also determined that he wanted a modern design. This would not only give the building sufficient originality but express the institution. Johnson later wrote:

> The New School is a living organism superior to material form. It could have functioned in clothes of classical, Gothic, rococo make, if necessary. Nevertheless it was inevitable, since the New School had free choice, that it

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[14]Johnson to deLima, 1 January 1931.

[15]Johnson, *Pioneer's Progress*, 321.

[16]Alvin S. Johnson to Agnes deLima, 26 December 1929, TLS, "deLima, Agnes 1921-1931" folder, Series I, Box 2, Alvin Saunders Johnson Collection, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

[17]Johnson, *Pioneer's Progress*, 320-321.

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> should choose a modern type of architecture and carry it through with the utmost consistency.[18]

The choice of a modern design not only coincided with institutional needs but with Johnson's personal preference. Johnson confessed that: "I had long since become an addict of modern "functional" architecture."[19] Historians of the New School, Peter Rutkoff and William Scott, attribute Johnson's interest in modernism to the influence of Lewis Mumford, who had taught at the institution off and on since 1924, and trustee member Albert Mayer, an architect and urban planner.[20] This interest was reinforced by Johnson's trips to Europe in the early 1920s and again in the late 1920s.[21] Though Johnson's interest in modernism was probably encouraged by Mumford and Mayer, he had arrived at it independently. Johnson himself dated his interest in architecture back to his days at Columbia University, when with an architect friend, Theodore Clark, he went on excursions to visit buildings.[22] Johnson solicited Mumford to teach at the New School after reading his 1924 book on architecture, *Sticks and Stones*, indicating that he already had a knowledge of and enthusiasm

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[18]*New School Bulletin* 5 (2-6 March [1931]), in "New School Bulletin 1932/33," Series II, Box 9, Alvin Saunders Johnson Collection, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

[19]Johnson, *Pioneer's Progress*, 320.

[20]Rutkoff and Scott, 48.

[21]Rutkoff and Scott, 48; Johnson, *Pioneer's Progress*, 332, 334.

[22]Johnson, *Pioneer's Progress*, 162-163.

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for modern design.[23] His interest in modern architecture continued throughout his career. In a 1932 trip to Europe he met up with the noted city planner Werner Hegemann to tour Berlin's modern architecture, and arranged for a guide to take him to see Vienna's modern apartment houses.[24]

Johnson also had definite ideas about what type of modern architecture he wanted for the building. While stating that he wanted something "functional" he rejected hard-line European functionalism as too austere.[25] He narrowed his selection to either Frank Lloyd Wright or Joseph Urban. He admired the work of Wright but worried that Wright's strong personality and aesthetic preferences would result in a monument to Wright and would not reflect Johnson's understanding of functionalism:

> He would give us a building to his mind, not to my mind. It would be "functional," but function is a relative term. To me it meant the expression of the needs and spirit of the individual enterprise. To Frank Lloyd Wright it meant the expression of the needs and spirit of the new time, as he foresaw it prophetically. [26]

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[23]Donald L. Miller, *Lewis Mumford: A Life* (New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, c.1989), 171-2.

[24]Alvin S. Johnson to Agnes deLima 19, 26, June 1932, "deLima, Agnes 1932-1933" folder, Series I, Box 2, Alvin Saunders Johnson Collection, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library. Hegemann taught a course on city planning at the New School in 1933/34 year; *New School Bulletin* 1933/34.

[25]Beulah Amidon, "New Schoolman," *Survey Graphic* 25 (March 1936), 158.

[26]Johnson, *Pioneer's Progress*, 320.

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Urban, Johnson felt, shared his vision. Trustee Charles Mayer, of J. H. Taylor Construction Company, Inc., arranged for a meeting between Urban and Johnson, probably in the late spring of 1929. Johnson made such a compelling presentation about the needs and vision of the school, that Urban agreed to take the job on speculation. In a highly unusual move, Urban delayed his design fees until money for the building was secured and reduced his overall fee from a reported 15% for building and 25% for interiors to a flat 6%. During the summer of 1929, the two met on an almost a daily basis to work out the details of the program and refine the plans. Johnson recalled:

> That summer is memorable to me for my close association with so infinitely interesting a man as Joseph Urban. Very soon he had the general scheme of the work outlined; but each detail had to be considered and reconsidered in relation to other details. I'd produce the probabilities as to the use of a particular room. Then the color scheme would need to be established; also the color scheme of everything else on the floor.[27]

Urban presented the plans to the New School board in September 1929.[28] The design was published in October as the school commenced the fall term.[29] Johnson then initiated a vigorous

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[27]Ibid., 322.

[28]Ibid., 325.

[29]"Modernistic Building for Research School," *New York Times*, 10 October 1929; "Urban Designs Social Study School," *New York Journal*, 10 October 1929; "Joseph Urban to Design Social Research School," *New York Herald Tribune*, 10 October 1928.

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campaign to raise funds for the construction.[30] Urban's designs were Johnson's greatest selling point. He included images of the building in the *New School Bulletin*, and published a luxurious booklet complete with renderings, plans, and a description of how the building would meet the program and aims of the institution, in order to persuade Trustee members, friends of the school and students to buy mortgage bonds.[31] By Spring, 1930, he had raised enough money to start construction.[32] The Fall 1930 *New School Bulletin* reported that the brick walls had just been finished and the windows were about to be installed.[33] Although portions of the murals and rooms still had to be completed, the New School

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[30]Rutkoff and Scott, 46-47; and Johnson to deLima, 26 December 1929.

[31]Johnson created an endowment campaign based on a five-year pledge from the board and students and secured loans from friends of the school which enabled him to raise money for the purchase of the site and construction. Given that this occurred during the first year of the depression, Johnson was extremely fortunate in being able to raise the money; however, many people in 1929-30 believed that the Depression would be short lived. New School *Bulletin* October 21-25, November 18-22, November 25-29, 1929, "New School Bulletin 1928/29," Series II, Box 9, Alvin Saunders Johnson Collection, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library; Alvin Johnson, *The New School for Social Research*, New York: Murbull Press, 1930; see also Rutkoff & Scott, pp. 45-46.

[32]*New School Bulletin* (20-24 January, 24-28 February 1930), in "New School Bulletin 1929/30" folder, Series II, Box 9, Alvin Saunders Johnson Collection, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

[33]*New School Bulletin* (Fall [pencilled in /29 but contextual evidence indicates 1930]), "New School Bulletin 1929/30" folder, Series II, Box 9, Alvin Saunders Johnson Collection, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

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opened on January 1, 1931 in time for the commencement of the winter term.[34]

The building as completed substantially follows Urban's September 1929 design. The only major revision to the entire project was a change of color and cladding for the facade (fig. 62). Urban had initially proposed a central section clad in white stone and framed with black brick sides. Perhaps due to considerations of cost he changed the cladding of the central portion from stone to brick, creating alternating horizontal bands of black and buff brick (fig. 61). This central portion cantilevers out from the second through seventh floors. Each floor was marked by a continuous band of horizontal windows stretching across the front and sides of the cantilever. These ribbon windows, among the earliest used for a major building in New York City, proclaimed Urban's knowledge of European modernism. The black granite-clad entrance and blue-black brick-faced side portions, originally housing the elevator and stair towers, were recessed behind the cantilever central section.

Within, Urban grouped the instruction facilities on the basement, ground and second floors, the administration on the third and research, exhibition and studio areas on the fourth, fifth and seventh (fig. 63). The sixth floor was reserved as an apartment for the school's major benefactor, Daniel

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[34]Johnson to deLima, 1 January 1931.

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Cranford Smith, and it eventually reverted back to the school for use.

The ground floor auditorium was the largest and most architecturally significant space of the building (fig. 64, fig. 65). Urban created an oval plan for the room culminating in a dome composed of eight suspended concentric stepped bands of perforated plaster. A broad round arch marked the proscenium and was echoed in the curving piers of the side stage. Alvin Johnson took credit for the oval plan, claiming that he felt it created greater intimacy for speaker and audience.[35] Urban, however, had a long history of using oval theater plans, the most recent being the Ziegfeld Theater.

Formally, the oval shape of the auditorium and how it fit into and transformed the rectangle of the building was the dominant theme of the interior. A shift in floor levels in the middle of each story from the second through the fourth stories, indicated the curve of the auditorium ceiling below (fig. 63). The absence of columns and openness of space on the upper floors also echoed the void created in the center of the structure. Urban revealed the auditorium ellipse in the convex rear wall of the lobby, resulting in the tension between the rectilinear entrance wall and curved inner wall (fig. 66). Finally the echo of the auditorium form expanded downwards, resulting in the sunken circle of the basement dance floor. The formal dominance of the void was also

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[35]Johnson, *Pioneer's Progress*, 323-324.

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important in terms of the functioning of the plan. Circulation and mechanical services, with a few exceptions, were pushed to either side of the structure, leaving the central core of space free for the school's activities.

The building was also identified as being emphatically modern because of the absence of applied ornament. Yet, the building was not unembellished. Most articulation either emphasized the geometries and space of the room or expressed the properties of the materials and methods of construction. In the entrance lobby Urban reinforced the difference between the curving auditorium and rectilinear entrance walls through terrazzo floor panels and a ceiling cove which echoed their forms (fig. 66). Repeated horizontal metal bands provided a durable surface for the dado. The juncture between wall and ceiling was articulated by a small band of incised vertical flutes.

These spaces were activated by Urban's use of color throughout the building. Shepard Vogelgesang reported that 90 colors were used and most of them were strong in tonality. The significance of color for the building was announced on the facade by the brick banding and the blocks of red, blue, green, orange and purple which showed through the ribbon windows. On the interior each room would have several different hues, with every separate surface receiving its own distinct shade.

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The innovative color scheme was further complemented by three significant modern mural sequences. Urban had originally suggested the incorporation of murals to Johnson.

> We were to have two large, square rooms, on the third and fifth floors. Urban pointed out that they would be good rooms for mural paintings, not subtle decorations on the wall, like the murals of Puvis de Chavannes, concessions to the architects who wished to enclose the occupier entirely in the measured space, but paintings that enticed the mind abroad, like windows looking out on real life.[36]

Because of the publicity that the building had already received before its completion, the agent for Jose Clemente Orozco and a friend of Thomas Hart Benton's approached Johnson to solicit the commission. The murals by Benton, Orozco, and Camilo Egas, which predate the mural cycles of Rockefeller Center and the WPA, foreshadow the later works in both subject matter and styles.[37] It is not surprising that Urban recognized the potential for murals in the building. He had previously designed several spaces incorporating mural sequences. In most of his earlier spaces, however, the murals served as a decorative adjunct to the architecture. One can

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[36]Ibid., 327.

[37]Articles written about the New School shortly after it opened only mention the Benton and Orozco murals, a later pamphlet "New School 1919-1939" mentions the Egas but does not specify where it was located. The Benton murals were sold to the Equitable Life Assurance Society of the United States in 1984 and moved to the corporation's building at 787 7th Avenue. Emily Braun and Thomas Branchick, *Thomas Hart Benton: The America Today Murals* (New York: The Equitable Life Assurance Society of the United States, 1985). The Orozco murals are still in place, see Alejandro Anreus, "Orozco in Gringoland: The Years in New York, 1927-34, 1940" (Ph.D. diss., The City University of New York, 1997).

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only speculate whether the innovative color scheme prompted Urban to think of murals as independent from his architecture.

Urban also applied modern principles to his handling of the lighting in the building. Unlike his earlier designs where he treated light fixtures as decorative objects, Urban used simple ceiling boxes or fairly minimal exposed fixtures of bulbs and reflectors at the New School (fig. 9). The primary purpose of these fixtures was "for a pleasant distribution of illumination."[38] In the auditorium he placed strips of light around four circles of the dome that diminished in wattage as the dome stepped down (fig. 65). Urban utilized recessed cove lights in the entrance lobby and dance floor (fig. 66, fig. 67). In both these spaces, he placed the lighting behind curved ceiling coves which outlined the geometries of each room. These lights emphasized and even dramatized the room's architecture. Vogelgesang wrote:

> These examples of strip and cove lighting taken with the illuminating system of the auditorium contribute the newest uses of architectural lighting to be seen in the building.[39]

Urban's design for the New School more than met Johnson's goals for the building. The building provided ample publicity for the institution, attracting new students and

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[38]Shepard Vogelgesang, "The New School for Social Research," *Architectural Record* 69 (February 1931): 143.

[39]Ibid.

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stimulating organizations in other cities to try to establish similar institutions.[40] Johnson wrote:

> my business manipulations had set up a plant costing a million, and a kind of plant which has given us vastly more publicity and general discussion than Al Smith's $60,000,000 Empire State Building...[41]

Johnson also felt that Urban's building succeeded in embodying in physical form the spirit of the New School. From the moment the design was published, the building was treated as a physical symbol of the institution's goals. In 1930, Johnson wrote of the design:

> As a glance at the facade shows, the type of architecture is modernist. It is straight forward, rational and unafraid. Such is the spirit of the New School There is a touch of cosmopolitan in the architecture. So is there also in the constitution of the New School. The modern mind is not limited by national boundaries. The modernism of the architecture is in no sense a repudiation of the values of earlier orders. What was most gracious and dignified in the older architecture finds itself expressed here in modern form. The New School is no depreciator of times gone by. It seeks to

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[40]Johnson to deLima, 29 March 1931. Johnson wrote of the school's national and international reputation: "The New School has profoundly impressed visitors not only from the city but from all parts of the country and abroad. A strong groups of educators and other intellectuals has been organized in Los Angeles to launch a similar organization under the same name, and a group of English scholars has consulted the Director of the School on the possibility of creating a similar institution in London. A Spanish architect has visited the New School to obtain advice and suggestions on a project for developing a New School in Madrid." "New School Report of Director 1931-1932," n.d., TMs, in "New School Report of Director 1931-1932" folder, Series II, Box 8, Alvin Saunders Johnson Collection, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

[41]Johnson to deLima, 29 March 1931.

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> win a realistic understanding of the spirit of the past; but it lives in the present.[42]

The modernity of the building placed the New School at the forefront of the artistic avant-garde in New York City. It was one of a handful of buildings to receive extensive reviews in the literary and art periodicals, including reviews in *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, *Survey*, *The Arts*, *Art News*, and *Parnassus*.[43] Johnson was deeply pleased with the aesthetics of the building. It had, indeed, captured his notion of modernity. Writing to Agnes deLima on the day the building opened to the public, Johnson exclaimed:

> The building is indescribably exciting: the auditorium has come out like a dream of peace: library and lounge floors, which are bound into a unit, are one of the most stunning architectural pictures you have ever seen. Out of our poverty has risen far and away the most interesting building that has been erected in New York in many a year.[44]

Johnson's enthusiasm for the project was shared by Urban and

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[42]Johnson, *The New School*, n.p.

[43]Wilson, "Aladdin's Lecture Palace," 90-92; Rita Susswein, "The New School for Social Research," *Parnassus* 3 (January 1931): 11-12; Haskell, "Architecture: The New School;" "Grown-Up Schoolhouse," *The Survey*, 65 (15 January 1931): 421; Ralph Flint, "Modernity Rules New School of Social Research," *Art News* 29 (17 January 1931): 3-4; Philip Johnson, "The Architecture of the New School;" "Functionalism Is Keynote." The modernity of the building, together with the mural program was an attempt to establish the New School as an avant-garde art center. The building opened with two exhibitions which were an exhibition on contemporary domestic furnishing organized by Edwin Avery Park and a painting exhibition curated by the Societé Anonyme under the direction of Katherine Dreier, see Rutkoff and Scott, 54-64; Flint, "Modernity Rules," 3-4.

[44]Johnson to deLima, 1 January 1931.

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his office. Shepard Vogelgesang wrote:

> During the erection of the building the enthusiasm of the architect, the client and these painters communicated to everyone engaged in the work. Few buildings have opened with an equal air of suspense. Few buildings have ever had so much experiment and intense conviction at stake.[45]

Urban's interest in the project was evident in an October 16, 1929 letter to his friend Richard Ordynski, describing the project and clients:

> The backers are rich people from Chicago and New York - the intelligence the highest I have met here, the spirit the most modern one I have come into contact with in this country.[46]

Urban's letter suggests that the New School commission did mark a significant change in his practice in at least one respect, the chance to work for intelligent patrons committed to modernism. The New School offered an unprecedented opportunity for Urban to define and express his vision of modernity. Was this modernity an abrupt rupture with Urban's previous work or a transformation of earlier intellectual and design concerns?

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[45]Vogelgesang, "The New School," 139.

[46]The primary backers were lawyers George Bacon and George H. Davis, realtor Joseph Milner, retired businessman Daniel Cranford Smith and Albert and Charles Mayer, principal partners of Taylor Construction Company. Joseph Urban to Richard Ordynski, 16 October 1929, TLS, "Johnson" folder, Production File Box 17, Joseph Urban Collection. Ordynski was the Metropolitan Opera Stage director during the early years of Urban's tenure, the two collaborated on several projects including the Bandbox Theater and a dramatic workshop at the Riverdale Country School. See Chapter 1 for the Bandbox Theater. For the Riverdale program see *Theatre Arts Monthly* 3 (June 1919): back cover and (October 1919): 300.

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Urban's Modernity: Sources and Definition

Urban's modernism was the result of a complex synthesis of a variety of visual and intellectual sources. It is necessary to identify these sources before attempting to define his understanding of "modern." In designing the New School, Urban drew from the fields of architecture, color theory and theater. He based his design on a combination of his own experience, his continued knowledge and promotion of the latest European and American design issues, and his interaction and awareness of the concerns of the New School and its faculty.

Architectural Sources

Urban's design for the New School cannot be easily separated into quotations from specific earlier buildings or projects by other architects. While some have noticed an affinity between the New School facade and the Van Nelle factory in Rotterdam, and others have identified Poelzig's Grosses Schauspielhaus as the source for the New School auditorium, the design is based on a complex interweaving of the concerns and forms of Urban's own earlier design with his knowledge of current European architecture and the general concern with the style and form of current school architecture.

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The black and off-white coloration of the New School facade is a direct descendant of Urban's earlier designs for the Ziegfeld Theater and the Jewish Art Theater (fig. 38, fig. 68). The first scheme for the New School proposed, in a manner identical to the first scheme for the Ziegfeld and the Jewish Art Theater, a projecting central white section framed by black piers. At the Ziegfeld, Urban had originally proposed such a color scheme in order to create a dramatic architectural poster which would give the building a unique prominence during the day (fig. 38).

In the designs for the Jewish Art Theater, which date to June 1929, shortly before or just as Urban commenced the New School project, he again uses a black and white exterior color scheme (fig. 68).[47] In the first scheme for the Jewish Art

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[47]The Jewish Art Theatre was published in Urban, *Theatres*, n.p. It is the least developed of all of Urban's theater projects and may have been created only for the book. For drawings, see Portfolio 27, Joseph Urban Collection. Yet the project also could have been a speculative response to the Yiddish Art Theater's problems of 1928-29 in securing a permanent home. In 1928 they were forced out of their Second Avenue Theater and took up residence in the City Theater on 14th Street; by June 1929 they were again forced to move, locating by September in Proctor's Theater on Fifth Avenue and Broadway. Maurice Schwartz during the 1928 crisis solicited Otto Kahn for money. Kahn's response to Schwartz in a June 8, 1928 letter, has remarkable parallels to Urban's description of a Jewish Art Theater a year later. Kahn wrote: "A Yiddish theatre which merely imitates the Broadway theatres serves no useful purpose and promotes no artistic interest. A Yiddish theatre which draws its inspiration from the soul and traditions of the Jewish race and which aims mainly to depict its mentality, feelings, problems, and ways of living, its humor and pathos, is entitled to sympathy and respect, and should mean in its way and in its effect a genuine contribution to American art." Kahn to Schwartz, 8 June 1928, TLS, "S 1928, 1929" folder, Personal Files, Otto Kahn

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Theater he creates an emphatic contrast between the white central section which floats out from the black reflective base and sides. The side areas are dramatized through spectacular fixtures which serve as both lights and signs for the building as well as oversized tragic and comic masks flanking the entrance. In the second, published, design, Urban retained the color scheme but scaled down the light fixtures/signs and eliminated the masks (fig. 69). The differences between the two elevations, in part, result from Urban's desire to tone done the advertising and drama of the exterior. He wrote:

> Jewish life in a big city is still somewhat a neighborhood life--owing, partly at least, to the tradition which makes it desirable to live within easy reach of the synagogue. In these big Jewish communities life is rarely lived as gaily as in the main streams.[48]

In the caption accompanying the facade illustration, he made this even more explicit noting: "The Jewish Art Theatre houses a community drama, less in need of competitive advertising than private theatres."[49] While less aggressive than the use of black and white in the first Ziegfeld Theater design, the color scheme still functions to pull the theater out from the existing fabric. Urban's first proposal for the New School can be understood in conjunction with the Jewish Art Theatre

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Collection, Firestone Library, Princeton University.

[48]Urban, *Theatres*, n.p.

[49]Ibid.

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design (fig. 62). Similar to the theater, the New School was supposed to function as a community center for the neighborhood and for the institution. Yet, the school building was also supposed to promote and attract attention for the institution, as Johnson's writings indicate. Urban's initial use of black and white gave the building the dramatic contrast needed to pull it out from the surrounding context; the absence of spectacular forms and sculptures would hopefully identify it as a community and not commercial endeavor. This was in keeping with Urban's belief that color could express an institution's personality.[50] Either due to cost or a change in aesthetics, the completed exterior combined the contrasting planes of black and white into alternating horizontal stripes of masonry. The striped facade still created an exterior which was distinctive from the surrounding three and four story 19th century townhouses "redolent of lavender and old lace." [51] The horizontality of the striped facade, however, scaled down the building, while its tonality was harmonious with that of the neighboring structures. Urban used color in conjunction with style to separate the New School from the other structures on the block, yet through his manipulation of scale and tonality, the structure respected the neighborhood fabric.

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[50]Unititled manuscript about color, n.d., "Excerpts from Magazine."

[51]Flint, "Modernity Rules," 3.

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If Urban drew from the reservoir of his own experience in designing the New School exterior, he also transformed this vocabulary through his study and interest in recent European modern designs. The ribbon windows, cantilevered volume, horizontal treatment of the facade, and lack of any applied decoration all proclaim the building's affinity with European modernism. By 1929, Urban had started to examine and study European architecture. Reference negatives in his archives include images of J. J. P. Oud's Hook of Holland houses, Karl Schneider's 1927 House at Altona, near Hamburg, Germany, Le Corbusier's Villa Stein de Monzie at Garches and the Van Nelle Factory in Rotterdam.[52] The relationship with the Van Nelle Factory is reinforced by the fact that shortly after the New School's completion, the factory's owner, Cees van der Leeuw, spoke at the New School in a program together with Urban.[53] The two delivered separate speeches addressing:

> the interaction, in modern design of the human rights of the worker, the technical requirements of the process and the architectural harmony of the building.[54]

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[52]Glass Plates Box 44, Joseph Urban Collection.

[53]Haskell, "Architecture," 222, makes direct reference to the Van Nelle factory; Wilson, "Aladdin's" 90, doesn't specifically mention but continually refers to the building's industrial and factory sources; Philip Johnson, "Architecture of New School," 396, describes the influence as "Dutch constructivism."

[54]"Johnson" folder, Production Files Box 17, Joseph Urban Collection; *New School Bulletin* no. 11 (13-17 April 1931); van der Leeuw's lecture was entitled "Modern Factory Architecture," while Urban's was "Human Aspects of Modern Architecture."

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If the Van Nelle factory was the most obvious visual source for the New School, in terms of the horizontal articulation of the building, functionalism, and emphasis upon ribbon windows, Walter Gropius's 1926 Bauhaus building in Dessau, Germany was probably also an important reference for Urban. The first design for the New School exterior, consisting of a cantilevered white volume divided into horizontal bands by ribbon windows and floating over a dark base, has particular affinities with the Dessau Trade School wing at the Bauhaus. Urban seems to have used the ribbon window more as a sign of his affiliation with European modernism than as an element generated by the interior needs of the building. Typically, European architects used ribbon windows to indicate the non-load bearing construction of an exterior wall and to symbolize the illumination of large, and often open, interior spaces.[55] While the ribbon windows at the New School resulted from non-load bearing exterior walls, they did not provide maximum illumination to the stepped and staggered interiors. Urban used the ribbon windows, furthermore, on a vertical building located on a midblock site, a condition that European modernist architects typically responded to by using glass curtain wall construction. In this Urban was similar to his friend Raymond Hood, who also used ribbon windows on his 1931 midblock skyscraper, the McGraw Hill Building. While Urban

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[55]Traditional vertical windows, in fact, admit equal if not more light.

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produced an elegant exterior, it was not in the strictest sense a functional elevation.

The Bauhaus building can also be seen as a significant reference for the New School in terms of its program. A nontraditional school of higher learning, the Bauhaus was conceived of as an artistic center. Given Alvin Johnson's interest in stressing the New School's nontraditional mission and in promoting the New School as a center of avant-garde art, the Bauhaus design has obvious relevance for the later building.[56] While it is impossible to determine whether or not Urban visited Dessau during his 1927 European tour, he obviously knew of the German building and its program.[57] Clippings in his scrapbook include an article on the Bauhaus. The 1926 International Theater exposition, curated by Frederick Kiesler and for which Urban served on the honorary committee, included Bauhaus faculty member, Oskar Schlemmer's designs for the Triadic Ballet and the 1927 Magdeburg exhibition, which Urban visited and studied in detail,

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[56]Johnson also greatly admired Gropius's work, *Pioneer's Progress*, 162.

[57]In a letter to Otto Kahn, Urban mentions that he had visited Berlin, Hamburg and Magdeburg; he also discusses a meeting with Reinhardt, indicating that he had travelled to Salzburg. Joseph Urban to Otto Kahn, 28 September 1927. In the article "Urban Finds Stage Mechanics Over Emphasized," *Musical America* 46 (1 October 1927): 3, the highlights of the trip are listed as Paris, Florence, Nice, Prague, Vienna, Dresden, Berlin, Hamburg, Salzburg and Magdeburg, but the article continues by saying that he spent the majority of his time in Germany and "His inspection included practically every city where technical directors and mechanical engineers had a new device or a new idea to offer..."

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included other Oskar Schlemmer pieces as well as designs related to the theater by Bauhaus students.[58]

The conception of the building as a community center pointed to yet another set of architectural sources. Some of the first published statements concerning the New School suggest that the interiors will adopt the color schemes, lighting effects and restful furnishings of a social club, rather than a traditional school.[59] This was undoubtedly meant to evoke the informality and leisure associated with clubs and was particularly evident in the New School library and lounge. Alvin Johnson wrote:

> We had planned the fourth and fifth floors together, as the social home of the students. The adult student has little time for library work. In the old New School buildings we had a small library in an isolated room. It was visited very rarely by the students. What we had in mind in planning the floors was a delightful reading room, which would draw lounging students down the stairs to magazines and new books when conversation ran thin.[60]

The New School with its programmatic mixture of instruction and amusement, use of color and combination of oval and

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[58]"New Construction Methods," *Architectural Record* (October 1929), clipping in Portfolio 33, Joseph Urban Collection, features the Bauhaus and the Van Nelle factory. The Bauhaus photo was by Raymond Hood's employee Walter Kilham, Jr. The 1926 New York International Theater Exposition included examples of Schlemmer's designs for the Triadic Ballet, *International Theatre Exposition* (New York: Steinway Hall, 1926); the 1927 Magdeburg exhibition included Masks by Schlemmer as well as a model for an experimental stage by Heinz Loew, *Die Deutsche Theater - Ausstellung* (Magdeburg: Mitteldeutschen Ausstellungs Gesellschaft, 1928).

[59]"Modernistic Building for Research School."

[60]Johnson, *Pioneer's Progress*, 322.

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rectilinear forms, evokes the architecture of slightly earlier Soviet worker's clubs by Konstantin Melnikov and Ilia Golosov.[61] Though there is no concrete evidence that Urban knew these buildings, his contacts with Frederick Kiesler and others as well as his interest in Russian art and architecture may have made him aware of the structures.[62] The use of the club metaphor, however, may also be a result of Urban's concurrent work on the Atlantic Beach Club, a social club organized by his friend Anthony Drexel Biddle, Jr (fig. 70).[63] More moderne than modern, the club building, which opened in June 1930, is a transitional work retaining some of the dramatic flamboyance and mood-evoking interiors of Urban's earlier designs yet using an increasingly simplified architectural vocabulary with pure colors of brightly saturated hues. The exterior of the club building was primarily composed of austere cubic blocks painted white, red

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[61]Ilia Golosov's Zuev Club, 1927-29, Melnikov's Kauchuk Club, 1927-28, Frunze Factory Club, 1928 and Svoboda Factory Club, 1928, all in Moscow.

[62]Urban's familiarity with Russian architecture dates back to his 1896 commission for the Czar Bridge in St. Petersburg, also his article "A Slav Art Invasion" sec. 3, p. 2.

[63]Portfolio 29a, Portfolio 30, Joseph Urban Collection; "New Atlantic Beach Club Attracts Society's Attention," *New York Evening Post*, 28 May 1930; "Biddle Heads Extravagant L.I. Project," *New York American*, 1 June 1930; "Atlantic Beach Club Will Open With a Dance," *New York Evening Post*, 21 June 1930; Louis Sherwin, "Stage Sets or Beach Clubs, Urban's Style is Distinctive," *New York Evening Post*, 20 June 1930; "Atlantic Beach Club," *Architectural Forum* 55 (August 1931): 157-164.

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and yellow: the terrace walls, however, curved in an attenuated S-shape reminiscent of Urban's Viennese and Palm Beach designs. On the interior Urban employed solid areas of bright colors, such as red, blue and yellow to create a distinct identity and location for each space (fig. 71).[64] In such social areas as the reading room and veranda he continued the use of highly saturated hues but employed them in decorative patterning in order to create an appropriately festive or recreational atmosphere. The simplification of forms and the shift in color vocabulary, however, anticipate the New School design.

A different concept of community, however, shaped the New School's most significant space, the ground floor auditorium. The oval-plan, domed auditorium recalled Urban's earlier projects of *Caliban* and the Ziegfeld Theater, where he used oval plans as a method of bringing the audience and performers into closer contact (fig. 19, fig. 40. Similar to the Jewish Art Theater, he used grey for the interior with little or no decoration in order to create a flexible and neutral space which could be used for a variety of purposes and not detract from the activities on stage (fig. 72). His description of the audience for the Jewish Art Theater, foreshadows how he must have intended the New School community to use the auditorium:

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[64]This probably reflected the influence of Kiesler and others who exhibited designs in the 1926 International Theatre Exhibition.

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> Jewish folk theatres have always been an integral part of such a neighborhood life with a sort of double community--one community of artists, actors, playwrights, directors, designers, to whom the theatre is a home and a work shop, and another community of the audience. In such a theatre you may see, year after year, week after week, day after day, the same playwrights and players, the same plays and audiences. For such, the playhouse is not only the stage and the auditorium, but the green room on one hand and the foyers on the other.[65]

Urban was briefly involved with trying to set up a drama school at the New School. He solicited his colleague, Richard Ordynski, to head a program at the institution. All of this, again, situates the New School within the reform tradition of theater, a distinction the auditorium shared with the Ziegfeld Theater as well as with many other of Urban's earlier theater designs.

Yet the New School auditorium went beyond the earlier projects (fig. 65). Instead of being designed for a specific type of theater, the auditorium was intended to be as flexible as possible, accommodating the numerous activities--lectures, concerts, theatrical performances--envisioned by its function as the school center. The stage was fairly simple, having no elaborate machinery or equipment such as a turntable or cyclorama. The articulation and decoration of the auditorium were, in comparison with Urban's other theater as well as other New York City theaters, austere, having no decoration and a predominantly grey color scheme. Shepard Vogelgesang wrote:

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[65]Urban, *Theatres*, n.p.

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> ...the variability of its use as theatre, lecture and concert hall necessitates corresponding flexibility of character. This is effected by foregoing any decorative scheme other than the special proportion of the room and the manner of illumination.[66]

Johnson, additionally felt that the typical mode of illumination within the auditorium should be "soft and diffused, as from an opening to the sky."[67] Together the light, color, community ideals, flexible stage and oval plan, demonstrate the continued, even strengthened influence of the antique theater. Urban wrote of the Greek Theater:

> The Greek Theatre held the emotions of actor and audience as in a cup. So perfectly could one hear that the rustle of garments in the stillness was audible to the last of 17,000 persons. Every individual sat in a direct line of vision. There was no strain either on actor or audience but instead an overwhelming sense of spiritual contact, due to the presence of the actor and audience within the same undivided space.[68]

The New School auditorium was similarly designed for maximum visibility and audibility, while the oval shape was felt to "draw the audience together."[69] That the New School auditorium could be understood as an updated, modern, version of ancient theaters, is reinforced by the frequent comparisons Alvin Johnson made between classical and modern times, during this period. Writing in 1931, he identified a remarkable kinship between modern and classical cultures. The art of

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[66]Shepard Vogelgesang, "The New School for Social Research, New York City," *Architectural Record* 67 (April 1930): 305.

[67]Johnson, *The New School*, n.p.

[68]Urban, *Theatres*, n.p.

[69]Johnson, *Pioneer's Progress*, 323.

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modern architecture art was similar to Greek art in "striking out boldly away from precedent," and being "faithful to their conception of function and right reason."[70]

The oval plan, domed ceiling, communal ideal and atmospheric lighting have elicited frequent comparisons between the New School and Hans Poelzig's Grosses Schauspielhaus (fig. 47). Both buildings belong to the same family of circular-plan theaters with an integration of performance and audience space. Urban, furthermore, knew the earlier building and its designer rather well. But beyond belonging to the same tradition of theaters, it is doubtful that the Grosses Schauspielhaus had a direct influence on the Urban auditorium. Urban had, by 1929-31, his own very rich experience as a theater designer to draw upon. He furthermore was well aware of the technical and acoustical problems of the Berlin building as well as the poor resolution of its seating arrangements.[71] Most notably, however, Urban did not employ the sensational forms of the earlier theater, instead viewing the auditorium as a "chaste solution." The Grosses Schauspielhaus auditorium was a surprise, a spectacular revelation after a sequence of highly dramatic and visually

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[70]Alvin Johnson, *Deliver Us From Dogma* (New York: The American Association for Adult Eduction, 1934); and *New School Bulletin* (2-6 March [1931]).

[71]MacGowan, "The Circus Theater," 132; Kitchen, "Berlin's 'Great Playhouse'" 372, 408.

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unrelated spaces.[72] In comparison, the New School auditorium almost didactically informs the visitor of its presence throughout the building, bulging out into the lobby and causing spatial displacements of floor levels from the basement through fifth floors.

Affinities also exist between the atmospheric lighting effects and simplified, streamlined forms of the New School and several modern European movie theaters, most notably Erich Mendelsohn's 1927-28 Universum Cinema, in Berlin and Poelzig's 1925 Capitol Cinema, also in Berlin.[73] But even these spaces are more elaborately decorated than the New School Auditorium. If any one European theater design can be identified as being an important reference for the New School auditorium it is, most likely, Walter Gropius's Total Theater project of 1927 for Erwin Piscator.[74] Gropius acknowledged that his design grew out of the van de Velde, Poelzig, Perret tradition, but created an unornamented flexible space with glass brick

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[72]While this may have resulted from the fact that Poelzig had to create the theater within an existing building, both his color schemes and forms of the lobby/lounge space and auditorium heightened the differences between the rooms.

[73]Urban could have easily seen or discussed the Poelzig cinema during his 1927 trip. He only made a brief trip to see his mother in 1928; however, the Mendelsohn cinema was published in 1929, Howard Robertson, "The Architecture of Tension," *The Architect and Building News* 122 (6 December 1929): 702-707; Alvin Johnson, also admired Mendelsohn's work, *Pioneer's Progress*, 163.

[74]Winfried Nerdinger, *Walter Gropius* (Berlin: Bauhaus-Archiv, 1985), 94-99; *Walter Gropius' Total Theater Design of 1927* (Cambridge: Busch-Reisinger Museum, 1992).

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ceiling and glass walls and constantly transforming auditorium space. While the design was published in Germany in 1928, it cannot be documented that Urban knew the project. He did however, see some Piscator productions during his 1927 trip to Europe and expressed great interest in his work.[75] In a curious twist of fate, Piscator, who fled Nazi Germany, came to New York in 1940 and founded the Dramatic Workshop at the New School. Thus unknowingly, Piscator finally established the department that Urban had offered to his friend Ordynski in 1929, and used a space which might have been inspired by his own Totaltheater. He unfortunately, found Urban's flexible theater with its minimal technical equipment poorly suited for his elaborate effects.[76]

At the New School, Urban drew upon his earlier designs to create types. These could be visual--in the case of the black and white facade scheme--or social, in the use of the club or communal theater concepts. Urban's use of these types added significance, even meaning to the New School design, suggesting the notion of distinction from the surrounding city

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[75]"Urban Finds Stage Mechanics Over Emphasized," 3; records that Urban went to see an "ultra-modern play" which was undoubtedly *Hoppla, wir leben*, and found on first glimpse the effects so dizzying that he had to leave in mid-act, but returned on a subsequent night to see the entire play. The next year, when asked what he wanted to see the most if he was going to Europe Urban included in his list "the very interesting productions at the Piscatorbühne in Berlin," as well as "Vsevolod E. Meierhold, the "Volkskünstler" of Russia." "The Great World Theater, *Theater Arts Monthly* 12 (April 1928): 231.

[76]Rutkoff and Scott, 172-189.

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or the idea of a community center. If types enriched the New School's architecture they were also transformed through the aesthetics and forms of European modernism. How did the interaction between Urban's types and European modernism affect the New School's architectural messages and how did that shape his understanding and definition of modernity?

On the most obvious level, the use of European modernism was meant to serve as a symbol of the school's engagement with modern society. It also served to visually distinguish the New School from more traditional universities with their neoclassical and Gothic Revival buildings. The New School was a part of an overall collegiate reform movement in the United States during the early 20th century. Many academic institutions were dissatisfied with the ideals and values felt to be promoted by large American universities. Some institutions restructured the curricula and requirements without changing the architecture. In 1925 Rollins College President Hamilton Holt abolished lectures and recitations and replaced them with a free elective system. Black Mountain College, founded in 1933 by John Andrew Rice and heavily influenced by the theories of John Dewey, had no required courses or grades, and instead created a living and learning environment where students and faculty constantly interacted in a variety of setting including meals, walks, classes and

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dances.[77] In colleges such as Yale and Harvard the desire to reform led to a resurgence of collegiate values expressed through the establishment of a core curriculum and the house system and visually in the use of Gothic styles and the quadrangle plan. For many institutions the most dire spatial need was for a sense of cohesion which was generally achieved through the adoption of an overall campus plan and the adherence to one style, usually a historical revival style.[78] The New School sought to distinguish itself from large universities and from such conservative colleges as Columbia, Harvard and Yale. For the board of trustees and administration this distinction probably acquired a particular urgency. Around the same time as the New School commission, Yale, Harvard and Princeton were criticized for continuing to build in revival styles. In particular, Yale's 1927 Sterling Library, a gothic revival building matching the dominant style of the campus, was criticized for using a style inappropriate

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[77]Martin Duberman, *Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community* (New York: G. P. Dutton & Co., 1972), 24, 34-53.

[78]Mary Beth Betts "The Campus Plan and the Organized Institution: A Study of American Collegiate Architecture in the 1920s and 1930s" paper for seminar in American Culture/ Values for Professor Richard Wade, Fall 1982; see Charles Klauder and Herbert Wise, *College Architecture in America* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929); Jens Larson and Archie Palmer, *Architectural Planning of the American College* (New York: McGraw Hill Book Co., 1933); Alfred Granger, "The Architectural Style of the College Group," *American Landscape Architect* 3 (July 1930); 22-27; Paul Venable Turner, *Campus: An American Planning Tradition* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1984), 215.

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to the building's function. William Harlan Hale, a student at Yale, complained of the Sterling Library:

> ...our colleges are likely to become museums of gilt and glory rather than workplaces of simplicity and directness. Thus we do not get a library built with plain materials and designed for a maximum of light and air and freedom. We get a ponderous palace instead, heavily Gothic or deadly classical, equipped with fortunes of useless ornament and insufficient details.[79]

The debate over Sterling Library links architecture with the educational goals. Sheldon Cheney made this explicit in discussing the state of modern design for school buildings:

> If I confess that I found but one university building, or project for the building, related to the subject we are studying, I may follow with the statement that I believe that just about represents the place we have come to in education. The higher learning today is either traditional or material. It comes not from the inner soul. An inspirational teacher is a menace; a creative artist at a university is a disturbing element.[80]

The New School trustees and administration identified their institutional structures and goals as innovative and radically different from that of traditional universities. A modern building was practically an imperative. That Urban and Johnson succeeding in making this visual distinction explicit is evident from Helen Appleton Read's review of the building:

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[79]William Harlan Hale, "Old Castles for New College," *Architectural Forum* 54 (June 1931): 729; and William Harlan Hale, "Yale's Cathedral Orgy," *The Nation* 134 (29 April 1931); 471-472. It is somewhat ironic that Alvin Johnson's papers are housed at Sterling Memorial Library.

[80]Cheney, *New World Architecture*, 364-5. Cheney does not specify what this one project is, the only modern school structure that he illustrates, however, is the New School facade.

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> ...The New School is consistently progressive and could hardly subscribe to the point of view prevalent in the majority of American colleges which prescribe Gothic and Tudor styles of architecture as the only suitable background for an institution of learning. I refer to the Gothic and Tudor libraries, gymnasium and dormitories which are pointed to with pride by the Yale, Harvard and Princeton alumni.[81]

Even in 1939, when it was "hard to recall the hubbub raised in 1931 by its modernist facade," the administration felt that the building served as a visual symbol of the institution's ideals signifying its difference from traditional schools:

> Even as one enters the door one is aware of this brave aim to meet the challenge and thrust of vital contemporary issues. Here are no long halls or corridors, sedate in somber browns or greys; no box-like classrooms, bespeaking the tight and tidy departmentalizing of subject matter. Instead there are the bold and ingenious treatment of spaces and surfaces, unexpected plans and curves, at once aesthetically satisfying and stimulating, an effect heightened by the dominating and lavish color scheme of walls and ceiling: vivid deep blue contrasting with vigorous red or green or orange.[82]

The New School was the first American institution of higher learning to self-consciously use modern architecture. It was not until the late 1930s and 1940s that other institutions began to design buildings using a modern style including Moore and Hutchins's 1938 designs for Goucher College, Frank Lloyd Wright's 1938 master plan for Florida Southern University, and

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[81]Read, "The New School," p. B15.

[82][Agnes deLima], *1919 New School 1939*, publicity brochure, "New School Publicity Pamphlets, 1925-1949" folder, Series II, Box 8, Alvin Saunders Johnson Collection, 28-29.

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Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer's 1939 master plan for Black Mountain College.[83]

Color Theory

One of the key components of the New School's visual modernity and distinction was Urban's use of color in the building. Critics were, for the most part, impressed by Urban's color scheme and how it created a new reading of interior space.[84] Even Urban's staff agreed that at the New School Urban had adopted a new approach to one of his favorite topics, color.[85]

The exterior of the building announced the importance of color in determining the visual experience of the school.[86]

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[83]Turner, 252-259.

[84]Haskell, "Architecture," 221; Philip Johnson, "The Architecture of the New School," 398, both admired the color scheme, only Wilson, "Aladdin's," 90-91, criticized Urban's use of color.

[85]Otto Teegen, "Joseph Urban's Philosophy of Color," *Architecture* 69 (May 1934): 261 wrote: "In the interior treatment of the New School for Social Research, completed in 1930, he adapted a new approach. Here color was used as a positive force--in large masses on plain plaster wall surfaces. The colors are bright, but used with such good relationship that the combinations are always pleasing and give a perfect expression to the forms they are."

[86]William Muschenheim, an employee in the office, took credit for the color scheme in a 1985 interview. "The Reminiscences of William Muschenheim," interview by William Jordy, 26, 27 December 1985, Oral History Research Office, Columbia University. As discussed in Chapter 4 while Muschenheim was responsible for refining and working out the details of the color scheme, it was not solely his invention and was executed

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The horizontal bands of the ribbon windows revealed blocks of brilliant color on the interior, ranging from red to blue to purple. Urban employed color throughout the building, often having as many as ten different shades within a single room. These shades were not intertwined in patterns but rather used as blocks of color with each architectural surface receiving a single shade. The use of highly saturated hues as pure tone, not pattern, was new in Urban's work. In an interview for *Parnassus* Urban explained the primary rationale behind the color scheme:

> Warm colors...are located where they receive the most light, cold where there is most shadow, a change of plane is generally emphasized by a change of color, thus walls have one set of colors, ceiling another. By thus modelling the wall surfaces of a room the box-like property of four walls is given an expression of contrasting filled spaces and void spaces; the monotony of the enclosing areas is transformed to an imaginative statement of the space enclosed, and given a character by the emotional statement of color.[87]

As Urban's quotation suggests not only had the palette of the New School changed significantly from his earlier work, but the intent behind using color had also shifted. Earlier schemes at the Ziegfeld Theater and night clubs were planned to establish a mood appropriate to the entertainments offered. At the New School Urban first stressed the spatial qualities of color and then referred to the "emotional statement of color." This suggested a more abstract, nondefinitive

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within the parameters established by Urban.

[87]Susswein, "The New School," 11.

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interpretation of a room in sympathy with its function but not manipulative of its audience. Shepard Vogelgesang, further defined the intent behind the New School color scheme stating that additional considerations included:

> ...balance of accent, focusing attention at a desired point in the room, maintenance of a diagrammatic scheme to add to the legibility of planning where needed, and selection of colors for their emotionally reactive values. By confining color to the actual planes of the building accenting structural features--columns, for example, are generally kept white--architectural values are enhanced and color given its proper function in building.[88]

As Vogelgesang indicated, color served a variety of functions within the building, providing orientation and focus, creating an emotional reaction. The primary function, however, was to create a new reading of the interior space, not as box-like rooms but as a series of interconnecting planes which come together to enfold certain activities and then disjoin to create another use, another space. Otto Teegen described the impact of the application of color to create space:

> The color is in fact the form, the volume. One does not feel that certain architectural surfaces have been painted, but that these architectural planes and volumes are actually color planes and color volumes which have been composed to make a room or a library, as the case may be.[89]

All of this indicates that Urban had not only studied color intensely, examining the interaction of various tones and the establishment of color harmonies for their visual response,

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[88]Vogelgesang, "The New School," February 1931, 143.

[89]Teegen, "Joseph Urban's Philosophy of Color," 261.

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but that he was also well acquainted with various color theories which dealt with not only perceptual issues but color's symbolic and emotional overtones. Unfortunately, while Urban' employees often referred to Urban's color theory, they never defined what that color theory was and what sources it was drawn from. Three different spaces, a classroom, the auditorium and the dance studio therefore, will be analyzed to further define how Urban used color at the New School before suggesting what Urban's color theory was.

The classrooms were located on the second floor (fig. 9). While each room had a different color scheme, they were undoubtedly interrelated, conforming to an overall color pattern that was distinctive of that floor and was probably felt to be appropriate for classrooms, as opposed to a lounge or library.[90] Classroom #5 was the largest classroom on the floor, seating 222 students and facing the front, or north, side of the building.[91] The podium was placed at the front of the rectangular room on the short side of the rectangle. The room had a pale yellow ceiling and a grey floor. White columns framed the podium and the wall behind it consisted of a narrow horizontal strip of pale blue-grey at the top of the

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[90]Portfolio 7, Joseph Urban Collection, has a number of color schemes, including two of the classrooms for the second floor; however, the administration floor is most thoroughly documented and reveals an overall treatment of either red, grey and black or blue, grey and black offices.

[91]The color scheme is reconstructed based on a color scheme for the room in Portfolio 7, and Vogelgesang's description of the room's color scheme, "The New School," February 1931, 149.

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wall and indigo blue curtains, blocking the light, across the remainder of the wall. The east and west side walls were treated in an identical fashion. The area adjacent to the front wall, about one third of the side wall, was painted a deep green-blue from floor to ceiling, pale yellow double doors were placed next to this area, above which began a white strip, about one third the total height of the wall. The remainder of the wall was painted a deep orange. The rear wall was a grey-blue.

Urban concentrated the cooler, darker colors toward the front of the room, creating a sense of constriction or focus on the part of the seated students looking toward the lecturer. Brighter, warmer tones were placed on the side creating a spatial expansion, even a sense of buoyancy, while the rear was a fairly neutral color. Urban used color harmonies rather than color contrasts. He placed the colors in a progression of unfolding but interrelated hues from blue to green to yellow to orange. There were no outright complementaries although the front of the room was enlivened by the yellow ceiling meeting the blue wall and the subtle color undertones of indigo blue, which has a reddish cast, adjacent to a deep green-blue. Psychologically, Urban enveloped the student with warm hues, perhaps to evoke a sense of buoyancy, even contentment, and framed the lecturer in more cool, intellectual tones that drew the eye to the area because of the darker shades. The overall color scheme complemented

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the architecture and reinforced a clear understanding of walls, ceiling, doors and columns. Yet depending on one's spatial position and role in the classroom, the overall perception and reading of the color scheme varied dramatically. The most striking difference occurred between the position of lecturer and student. While color in Classroom #5 can be interpreted from an emotional or psychological perspective, its overwhelming purpose was directional and spatial.

Urban used color to create very different effects in the ground floor auditorium (fig. 65).[92] Because the auditorium had to accommodate a variety of events including lectures, plays, concerts and movies, Urban kept the color scheme neutral, using grey, black and touches of red. The walls and ceiling of the auditorium were painted nine shades of grey, modulating from the darkest tones at the base of the walls to the lightest at the top of the ceiling. Urban painted the reveals of the proscenium arches and ceiling rings red. The carpet matched these reveals. The stage doors and seat backs were black, while the chairs seats were dark grey.

The color scheme of Classroom #5 was highly individual using custom-mixed hues in color combinations which reflected the Urban office's specific taste. In contrast, while the overall scheme of the auditorium is uniquely "Urbanesque," the

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[92]The color scheme is described by Vogelgesang, "The New School," February 1931, 146. The auditorium and its color scheme was restored in 1992 by Prentice Chan Ohlhausen.

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individual colors are more standard, even universal.[93] This use of a more standard palette not only reflected the diversity of the auditorium's functions and the need for a flexible container to accommodate those functions, but the more public character of the space, which was used for school events, lectures and performances for the general public and outside organizations.

Similar to the classrooms, the auditorium colors provided direction, space and symbolism. The red-colored ceiling and proscenium reveals focused attention on the stage. The grey walls and ceiling, on the most elementary level created a neutral canvas which could be painted with lights to achieve different coloristic and atmospheric effects. Rita Susswein observed:

> It is a study in grey and red, the tones of which blend as they are affected by the different colored lights. By a change in the lighting effects, the entire atmosphere of the auditorium may be altered to suit the many phases of its uses.[94]

However, Urban also modulated the grey tones from dark to light to create a sense of luminosity and spatial expansion towards the top of the dome. This was felt to suggest, as

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[93]The term universal is used to convey the sense of standard, easily recognized and matched colors, i.e., the primaries-- red, blue, yellow-- and white, grey, black. While Urban's colors in the auditorium were custom-mixed, and probably not easily matched the hues suggest that they are drawn from a standard palette. Universal, in this sense does not have the spiritual and metaphysical overtones that the De Stijl palette has.

[94]Susswein, "The New School," 11.

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previously noted, the atmosphere of an open air theater. In this instance color functioned both spatially and symbolically, evoking the communal ideal of the ancient theater.

The most arresting use of color occurred in the basement dance floor (fig. 67).[95] Urban used black for the ceiling, with the recessed rectangular lighting cove over the sunken dance floor colored white. The spectator's floor was covered in a semi-reflective dark blue Marbleoid, while the circular dance floor was a light-colored maple. The columns were also slightly reflective, coated in brushed aluminum paint. The upper quarter of the walls and areas framing the doors were painted in white. The main portion of the walls, however, were painted in panels of highly saturated, bright colors combining both cool and warm tones. The colors progressed from deep blue, yellow, red, cobalt blue, delft blue, emerald green, orange, and ocher. Urban did not employ direct complementaries, but his placement of blue next to yellow, red adjacent to blue, and green next to orange, probably did cause an afterimage which would suggest a third, transparent, complementary color.[96]

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[95]The color scheme is reconstructed based on Vogelgesang, "The New School," February 1931, 148; color scheme for the dance studio in Portfolio 7; color perspective in Portfolio 26, Joseph Urban Collection.

[96]Faber Birren, *Color Perception in Art* (West Chester: Schiffer Publishing, 1986), 55; Sanford Wurmfeld, *Color Documents* (New York: Hunter College Art Gallery, 1985), n.p.

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Color in the dance studio created panels of floating, almost filmic tonalities. This dematerialized sense of space was heightened by the luminous quality of the ceiling cove lighting and the reflective surfaces of the ceiling, floor and columns.[97] Urban's interest in light and color was shared and perhaps inspired by Frederick Kiesler. In his 1928-30 Film Guild Cinema building, Kiesler clad the foyer in asymmetrical compositions of black and white tiles and sheathed the auditorium walls and ceiling in black in order to "color" these areas with moving and still film projections. The Guild's lack of funds, however, forced him to abandon this scheme. Urban's dance studio achieved a similar quality of luminous color without relying upon expensive, and possibly nonexistent, technology.[98]

Urban envisioned the dance studio as a fairly informal space, where the audience could move, stand or sit. Alvin Johnson recollected:

> According to Urban, in the periods of history when the dance really meant something, religiously and socially, the dance floor was a circle with space for the spectators to sit or stand all around. The spectators

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[97]David Katz, a gestalt psychologist, characterized the effects of colors as surface colors, the colors of substantial things and objects; film colors, that of the sky; and volume colors, such as a jar of colored liquids. David Katz, *The World of Color* (London: Kegan Paul, 1935). While Urban's use of color is technically surface color, he is trying to create effects more like film or volume color. See also Birren, 35; Wurmfeld, n.p.

[98]Stern, Gilmartin, Mellins, *New York 1930*, 264; R. L. Held, *Endless Innovations: Frederick Kiesler's Theory and Scenic Design* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1967), 104-07.

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> felt themselves part of the performance; often a spectator would be inspired to join in the dance, or groups would dance in circles adjacent to the central circle. A decadent aristocracy thrust the dancers up on a stage, with the spectators viewing them from below, fixing their attention on a show of legs no more edifying than the trays of frogs' legs in a fish market. We would sink our dance floor instead of elevating it, and the spectators, seated or standing, would get a sense of the grace and beauty of movement of the dancers' whole bodies.[99]

In a room dedicated to movement, the panels of color meant that both the dancers as they moved through space, and the spectators as they followed the performance, experienced a constantly shifting perception of the space. The spectators most likely retained an afterimage of the dancer, in a complementary color, as they moved from panel to panel. For the dancers the space must have seemed, at times, kaleidoscopic. Aside from suggesting an archetypal world of vivid visual sensation, the dance studio color scheme had no specific emotional or symbolic meaning. Instead its primary effects were formal, the interrelationship and interaction of color and its perception.

The dance studio was frequently used during the early days of the New School building. From 1931 to 1940 the noted dancer Doris Humphreys taught a workshop in modern dance in the space. This was supplemented by courses taught by Charles Weidman and Hanya Holm. The New School was a center for modern dance.[100] Further investigation is needed into how

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[99]Johnson, *Pioneer's Progress*, 323.

[100]Rutkoff and Scott, 59-60, 229.

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dancers used this space and whether or not they liked working with the sunken circular floor. In the case of Doris Humphreys, however, there is strong evidence of her attitudes toward the space. While Humphreys probably enjoyed performing in Urban's auditorium--she shared his enthusiasm for the work of Adolph Appia and frequently used a series of platforms similar to Urban's set designs--she emphatically disliked circular dance spaces:

> To begin bluntly, my opinion is that these circular stages are highly injurious to the dance. This is for a very obvious reason. The dance is a visual art, but unlike good sculpture, it is not equally arresting from all angles, it is at its best from only one direction.[101]

Urban's color scheme was felt to be modern. Douglas Haskell wrote:

> Throughout the building the color in particular is handled with a similar directness. Instead of different colors for separate rooms, there are different colors for the separate walls in the same room; and four primary tones well keyed serve in this fashion for the entire building. Thus the interiors become less like a series of boxes than interweaving spaces bounded by variously colored planes; sometimes, too, separate areas of the same wall receive different colors to demark separate areas of use--the yellow end of the room will be the lounge, and with the blue begin the picture galleries.[102]

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[101]Doris Humphreys, *The Art of Making Dances*, ed. Barbara Pollack (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1959), 89; of her sets she wrote: "The abstract architectural stage appealed to me, however, and by 1928, I was using a set of blocks of graded sizes on which to place my dancers. These served as levels of various kinds, low, or placed high, and also as mountains, houses, doorways, windows, altars.", ibid., 144.

[102]Haskell, "Architecture," 221.

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At the New School color begins to actually shape space, providing readings which add to and enrich the architecture. Philip Johnson suggests that this new approach to color is highly indebted to De Stijl and the Bauhaus:

> The color is for the most part excellent. The practice of painting different walls different colors is typical of early work of the group de Stijl in Holland and Bauhaus work in Germany. The color schemes in some rooms are identical with those of the Bauhaus, though in others quite original.[103]

Is this, in fact, the case? Color played a significant role in many different examples of European modern architecture including De Stijl, the Bauhaus, housing estates in Germany and Vienna, as well as the works of Mies van der Rohe, Ernst May, Le Corbusier, and Bruno Taut. While Urban's use of filmic planes of color may have been inspired by such De Stijl works as Gerrit Rietveld's Schröder-Schräder House and Theo van Doesburg's architectural projects, his use of color to organize rather than break down architectural space, and his palette does not relate to De Stijl.[104] Instead Urban's color scheme with its intense tones and saturated hues is closer to the colors of Bruno Taut in his Berlin apartment complexes or Karl Ehn's Karl Marx Hof in Vienna as well as Josef Frank's Viennese apartment complexes. Johnson's comparison with the Bauhaus, however, raises interesting

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[103]Philip Johnson, "The Architecture of the New School," 398.

[104]Mildred Friedman, ed., *De Stijl: 1917-1931 Visions of Utopia* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1982); Nancy Troy, *The De Stijl Environment* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983); Urban probably knew of these projects through Kiesler.

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parallels. Urban's color theory was probably compatible to the evolving, and sometimes conflicting theories of color being formulated at the Bauhaus by Johannes Itten, Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee and Josef Albers.[105] These placed emphasis upon the spatial role of color, the importance of a viewer's perception of color and the spiritual possibilities of color. It is impossible to know whether or not Urban was familiar with these theories, but both Urban and the Bauhaus artists developed from a German tradition which started with the author Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and painter Philipp Otto Runge.[106] While European modernism, in the United States, came to be associated with austere white or transparent exteriors, Urban's New School was one of the few visible reminders of modernism's more colorful side.

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[105]Johannes Itten, *The Art of Color: The Subjective Experience and Objective Rationale of Color*, trans. Ernst van Haagen (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1961); Josef Albers, *Interaction of Color* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963); Hans Wingler, *The Bauhaus Weimar Dessau Berlin Chicago*, ed. Joseph Stein, trans. Wolfgang Jabs and Basil Gilbert (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1978).

[106]William Muschenheim, who had worked in Berlin with Behrens and in Vienna, probably had some familiarity with Bauhaus color theory, "The Reminiscences of William Muschenheim," 20, 28. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Zur Farbenlehre*, trans. Charles Lock Eastlake (Tübingen: J. G. Cottaschen, 1810; reprint Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1970); Philipp Otto Runge, *Farben-Kugel* (Hamburg: Friedrich Perthes, 1810).

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Theater

In Urban's previous works, such as the Ziegfeld Theater, theories of theater played an equal role with architectural concerns in determining the shape of the building. Given the key position of the auditorium in the building did the theories and practice of modern theater play a significant role in the design of the New School? If so, had Urban's conception of theater remained similar or had it been transformed?

By 1929, when Urban received the New School commission, he was well aware of the latest avant-garde European theatrical productions. He had seen and admired the work of Erwin Piscator, was familiar with the stagings of Vsevolod Meyerhold, and had viewed a wide range of avant-garde theater design in the 1926 International Theatre Exposition organized by Frederick Kiesler.[107] At first, Urban's interest and admiration for Piscator's work, however, was tempered by his belief that the technical and mechanical aspects of the production were overemphasized. In 1927, he described the production of *Hoppla, wir leben*:

> Not that it was not interesting and a miracle of mechanical ingenuity, quick changes and vastness, but the sheer mechanical dizziness that resulted from too rapid and complex play upon the senses made it impossible to remain. In this production motion pictures, music and shadows thrown on a huge screen were summoned to the aid

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[107]"Urban Finds Stage Mechanics," 3; "The Great World Theater," 231.

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> of the presentation before the real play began. The result was an actual numbing of the senses rather than the enhancement of the mood of the drama.[108]

While Urban did not sympathize with the effects of the play, his comments about the productions "numbing of the senses" touches upon one of the essential elements of Piscator's theater, the intentional distancing of the spectator.[109] By 1929, however, a more mechanistic, montage-like quality began to occur in Urban's sets. The Metropolitan Opera's 1929 production of *Johnny Spielt Auf*, by Austrian composer Ernst Krěnek featured a three dimensional train that during one scene pulled into the railway station (fig. 29). The 1930 musical *Flying High*, included an airplane. The celebration of machines in these stage sets suggests an influence of European set design. By the late 1920s, however, Urban had increasingly come to identify the movies as the most innovative dramatic form. In 1930 Urban signed a contract with Fox Studios to design sets in color for the talking pictures.[110] The contract was short-lived and only resulted in sets for such melodramas as *East Lynn* and *The Man Who Came Back*, and the movie version of Mark Twain's fairytale ,*A*

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[108]"Urban Finds Stage Mechanics," 3.

[109]John Willett, *The Theatre of Erwin Piscator* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1978), 107-111; C. D. Innes, *Erwin Piscator's Political Theatre* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 102-107; 136-143.

[110]"Picture Plays and Players," *New York Sun*, 15 April 1930; "Signs Contract With Fox For Movies," *Yonkers Herald*, 16 April 1930.

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Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court.[111] Urban's designs for these films were fairly conventional. A 1930 essay by Urban, exploring the possibilities of set design for the films, reveals a more avant-garde sensibility. He acknowledges the influence of contemporary German art, praising Karl Blossfeldt's 1928 book of photographs, *Urformen der Kunst*, as opening up new possibilities of vision. Even more radical was his belief that motion picture design, in a manner similar to architecture, could incorporate an expanded field of vision, creating an almost epic sense of space:

> ...the point of view of the moving picture is flexible, architectural. The cinema can utilize the same property of motion past objects which the observer of architecture experiences. In architecture the point of view is infinite, varying with each step, each turn of the head and movement of the eye. This quality can be approximated in the moving picture and translated into terms of space shown flatly but with unlimited changes of viewpoint.[112]

Urban proposed a new type of cinema, calling upon a visionary approach to cinema architecture, new methods of cinema photography, and projection systems that would result in a total spatial experience. This proposal closely approximated Piscator's Total Theater.

> If pictures ever become truly extra dimensional and sculptural, then some scheme like a vast amphitheatre,

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[111]"Joseph Urban Is in Town," *New York Telegraph*, 20 December 1930. For *East Lynn* see "East Lynn," Production File Box 8, Joseph Urban Collection.

[112]Joseph Urban, "The Cinema Designer Confronts Sound," in *Revolt in the Arts: A Survey of the Creation, Distribution and Appreciation of Art in America*, ed. Oliver M. Sayler (New York Brentano's 1930), 243-244.

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> with action taking place in the center of the audience on any plane beneath the roof, may become a possibility.[113]

Urban's proposal has it origins in earlier cinematic total environments, such as Samuel (Roxy) Rothafel's 1923 visionary cinema scheme and John Eberson's atmospheric movie theaters.[114] Yet rather than create an illusion of totality, Urban's scheme emphasized a constantly changing experience with juxtapositions and even intercutting of effects. This spatial experience can only be united--if desired--by the viewer. Similar to Piscator, Urban's conception of a new theater architecture stresses a collage or montage of space.[115] This overtly artificial gluing together of heterogenous pieces or parts banishes the *Gesamtkunstwerk* illusion of totality and acknowledges the artificiality and arbitrariness of the union of different components.

The concept of montage illuminates many aspects of the New School design. On the exterior, Urban allowed blocks of brightly saturated color to show through the glass of the ribbon windows, creating a literal collage of interior and exterior space. In his handling of the school program, Urban did not seek to spatially or decoratively unify the diverse

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[113]Urban, "The Cinema Designer," 244.

[114]See Chapter 2 on the Ziegfeld Theater for a discussion of these proposals.

[115]Willett, *The Theatre of Erwin Piscator*, 108; Innes, 187-188; and John Willett, *Brecht in Context: Comparative Approaches* (London: Methuen, 1984), 112; 129.

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components of the institution but separated them into their own floors with their own unique space and color schemes. This separation of activities was also distinct from the typical modernist solution of the open plan, a universal space for all activities. The significance of montage, however, is most evident in Urban's color schemes for the building, where different colors are employed for the different architectural parts of floor, wall and ceiling. As Douglas Haskell noted the color schemes also shifted if the function within the span of the wall shifted.[116]

Yet, despite these modernist influences, Urban designed the New School auditorium without any elaborate stage equipment, and instead created an austere playing platform. Shepard Vogelgesang described the rationale behind the auditorium design:

> Beside the lighting apparatus and a floor trap there is no stage equipment, no gridiron and only such fly galleries as are needed to accommodate the motion picture screen with a velvet mat. Whatever scenery is to be used will be indicative of the mood, time and place of action, not pictorial.[117]

Urban further elucidated his ideas about the types of productions that would take place in the auditorium in a letter to Richard Ordynski:

> On the main floor of the school will be a theatre for 600 people built on the most modern principles - No scenery - no machinery. The quality of word and action and atmospheric lighting will be the production. Maybe we

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[116]Haskell, "Architecture," 221.

[117]Vogelgesang, "The New School," February 1931, 141.

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> will use cubes and platforms and curtains as you remember we did at the Riverdale School.[118]

Rather than elaborating the stage through machinery, Urban chose to emphasize the stage as a convention, reducing it to its minimal terms, platform, arch, lights. For the New School Urban proposed a variant on what Sheldon Cheney defined as the "architectural stage:"

> The formal standing-out stage, the architecturally pleasing platform for acting, pushed up and forward into easy view of the audience, disembarrassed of the proscenium arch and its encumbering machinery...It is the true answer to the call for a plastic stage in harmony with the plastic actor, for it is always and wholly "in the round."[119]

The architectural stage, as Cheney indicates grows out of ancient and Elizabethan traditions. Modern precedents abounded for Urban's architectural stage including Jacques Copeau's 1919-1920 Theatre du Vieux Colombier in Paris and Max Reinhardt's 1922 Redoutensaal in Vienna. The aim of these types of theaters were to make the audience active participants in the dramatic events. Rather than barraging the audience with sets, the architectural stage let the audience assume a critical role in interpreting the staged events presented to them.

Epic theater, as practiced by both Piscator and Bertolt Brecht in Germany during this period, was an attempt to merge montage with the theatrical conventions, and critical audience

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[118]Urban to Ordynski, 16 October 1929.

[119]Sheldon Cheney, "The Architectural Stage," *Theatre Arts Monthly* 11 (July 1927): 479.

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of the architectural stage. While Piscator was the leading practitioner of epic theater in Germany during this period, Brecht was its principal theorist. Although Brecht served as a dramaturge for Max Reinhardt in 1924, Urban's knowledge or even familiarity with Brecht's work cannot be ascertained. Similar to Urban, however, Brecht evolved out of a thorough grounding in the German theatrical tradition and tried to integrate conventions from such popular culture forms as films and musicals into his work.[120] Furthermore, Brecht, like many German artists, had passed through a brief Expressionist phase. Epic theater provides a critical method, evolving out of similar intellectual traditions and concerns, to analyze the structure of the New School auditorium and building.

The German critic and friend of Brecht's, Walter Benjamin, formulated several key concepts for epic theater: the relaxed audience, the obvious and familiar plot, the untragic hero, interruption, quotable gesture, didactic play, critical actor and theater on a dias. While the notion of a "theater on a dias," has direct connections with the architectural stage, other concepts such as the relaxed audience, and interruption, which was often bound together with the quotable gesture, have even greater critical

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[120]Walter Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*, trans. Anna Bostock (London: New Left Books, 1973); Willett, *Brecht in Context*; John Willett, *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht: A Study from Eight Aspects* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1959); Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. and trans. John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964).

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significance for assessing the architecture of the New School. Interruption in the epic theater served to stop the action, and to detach the viewer from becoming emotionally involved with the events on the stage, and create a space for the viewer to analyze and critique what they had seen. The interruption often caught or framed a telling and characteristic gesture which revealed the conditions structuring the scene. This creates an episodic structure.

The New School auditorium interrupts the rest of the building at various levels (fig. 63). It pushes out into the lobby, carves a circle in the basement and results in shifts in level from the second through fifth floors. It accomplishes these interruptions by "gestures" indicating the oval, domed shape of the auditorium. The viewer encounters these gestures within the separate worlds of the dance floor, classrooms, administration offices and library and lounge space, each made distinct through color and plan. The gestures do not so much unify the building into a seamless whole as they interrupt the activities of each area. This is reinforced by the significant difference between the auditorium and the other spaces in terms of the color scheme and plan. This difference, furthermore, is in accordance with the theory of montage in theater which stresses the distinct qualities of different media, such as drama, music, and stage set. The New School auditorium, a flexible theater accommodating a variety of purposes and the main public space

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of the building, therefore has a distinctly different plan and color scheme from the rest of the building.

Epic theater's concept of the relaxed audience, furthermore, coincides with both the New School's conception of their community and the architectural stage's audience. Walter Benjamin presented the audience and stage of the epic theater as:

> ...the stage is no longer "the plank which signifies the world" i.e. the magic circle, but a convenient public exhibition area. For its stage - the public is no longer a collective of hypnotized test subjects but are an assembly of interested persons whose demands it must satisfy.[121]

Sheldon Cheney, discussing the architectural stage, describes the audience in more romantic terms but still sees them as an interpretative, decision-making body:

> ...in freeing the audience-mind from picture-recognition, one concentrates interest on the playing and the play; that making the setting almost wholly unreal, one intensifies the reality of that inner core of drama that speaks to the soul.[122]

The New School hoped to establish a community which supported the institution, through enrollment in classes, and attendance at extracurricular functions. Their engagement with the building and institution was not meant to be as passive spectators, but as a thinking and critical members of the community. During his administration, Johnson had successfully involved the students in organizing the

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[121]Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*, 2.

[122]Cheney, "The Architectural Stage," 480.

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curriculum, expressing their concerns and desires and ultimately in supporting the institution.[123] Johnson defined the New School:

> The New School has established itself as an institution for continuing the education of the intellectual adult...They desire and need direct intellectual relations with the ablest thinkers of the time.
>
> In the past they have enjoyed such relations at the New School. Men like John Dewey, James Harvey Robinson, Charles A. Beard, John B. Watson, Graham Wallas, Wolfgang Köhler, John Masefield, Alfred Adler, Thorsten Veblen, Sandor Ferenczi, have given courses of lectures at the school, not from a remote rostrum but intimately, like master craftsmen working out their ideas in the presence of other craftsmen who may observe, select what they need, and occasionally take a hand in the work.[124]

If modern European architecture provided the inspiration for the visual forms of the New School, modern theater provided the structure and means for the institution's audience interaction.

Defining Modernism

> There was no question of recalling the past; the building was to function in the present and if possible forecast the future.
>
> Shepard Vogelgesang[125]

Was the modernity of the New School building, simply an essay in the latest fashion from Europe? In a recent essay on Urban, Gregory Gilmartin seems to indicate that this is the

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[123]Rutkoff and Scott, 34.

[124]Johnson, *The New School*, n.p.

[125]Vogelgesang, "The New School," February 1931, 139.

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case:

> The International Style challenged the basic tenets of Urban's architecture. It abandoned the principles of classical composition that had held together the disparate threads of his work, and it pointed an accusing finger at the gulf between scientific rationalism and the tissue of sentiments, customs, and traditions that persisted in everyday life.
>
> Urban had begun his career by rebelling against historicism, an architecture of invocation in which the forms of the past were recreated as challenges to contemporary life. When he died in 1933 architecture was turning towards a movement that claimed to discern the future form of building and of society. And between these two orthodoxies, Urban had sought a more modest goal, making theater of the present moment.[126]

Gilmartin states earlier in the essay that Urban's primary value was as a bridge linking "European modernism with American commercial art," thus suggesting that any attempt to change his vocabulary can be understood as pandering to fashion. The strong visual disjunction between Urban's earlier work and the New School can support an interpretation of Urban's sudden interest in "functionalism" as the adoption of the latest fashionable trend. Urban, due to the lack of building during the Depression, prior to his death in 1933 received only a few commissions after the New School. Ultimately, the brevity of Urban's career after the New School makes it difficult to determine his commitment to modernism.

How did Urban and his office define and use "function" at the New School? Texts written by Urban's office stress that

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[126]Gilmartin, 282-283.

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function played a strong role in determining form.[127] Office member Shepard Vogelgesang's presentation of the building's exterior first design emphasizes how structure and the contrast between the horizontal expanse of interior space and the vertical massing of the building shape the facade:

> The scheme in design is that of a succession of horizontals encasing a composite, vertical space. The color is black enframing a creamy, white mass. Black is carried through the white mass in horizontal bands the width of the structural unit, which is brick. This further repetition of a horizontal component in the vertical mass not only emphasizes the structural materials but also reaches the entire scheme of the facade. It is the conception carried to its minutest detail.[128]

Vogelgesang's February 1931 article on the New School focused upon describing the construction of the auditorium, the acoustics of the space, the ability to broadcast performances in the auditorium on the radio, the heating and ventilation equipment as well as the lighting system. His emphasis upon the building's mechanical, electrical and structural aspects

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[127]Texts accompanying the publications of the New School designs and completed structures were written by Urban office member Shepard Vogelgesang. These were radically different in tone and in concerns from the office's earlier writings. The lyrical descriptions of processions, space, colors and the audience's mood invoked by these forms which characterized the earlier writings were replaced by matter-of-fact lists of programmatic functions and their locations, materials, and construction methods. The relative austerity of the language evoked an almost mathematical or scientific tone.

[128]Vogelgesang, "The New School," April 1930, 305.

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suggests that these functional components shaped the architecture of the institution.[129]

A closer reading of the Vogelgesang texts, however, reveals that Urban had a richer conception of functionalism than might first be expected. For Urban, the occupants of the building and how they used and even perceived the structure was an essential component of "functionalism."[130] The cantilever of the building not only provided better light, and a space for the heating systems, but on the exterior created a kind of modern portico which would provide: "additional sheltered sidewalk space in front of the entrances" (fig. 61).[131] The facade, furthermore, battered inward one foot from top to bottom, not because of any structural or legal requirements but in order to:

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[129]While it cannot be easily determined whether or not Urban employed the newest and most scientific methods of construction, it is safe to assume that the acoustical, electrical and heating and ventilating systems of the school were fairly advanced. Theater buildings were among the few structures where the need to provide a comfortable environment for a large group of people made the investment in advanced systems worthwhile. Ironically, as a theater architect, Urban would have had a better knowledge of such systems than many more overtly functional architects. For the use of advanced systems in theaters see: Reyner Banham, *The Architecture of the Well-tempered Environment* (London: The Architectural Press Ltd., 1969), 175-178; 200-204.

[130]This definition of functionalism was used in both Europe and the United States. Louis Sullivan, "The Tall Building Artistically Considered," in *Kindergarten Chats and Other Writings* (New York: Dover Publications, 1979); and Bletter, "Introduction" in Behne, *The Modern Functional Building*, 43.

[131]Vogelgesang, "The New School," February 1931, 141.

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> prevent the optical impression of the building leaning over the street, to rectify the tendency toward concavity in a line composed by joining vertical and horizontal members such as the window uprights and brick coursing.[132]

The building design thus took into account optical perception, student comfort and even, through the use of a portico, provided an exterior gathering space which would signify the institution's community orientation.

Urban's modernity harmonized with Alvin Johnson's vision of functionalism, as the "needs and spirit of the individual enterprise." From its inception the New School's administration saw its purpose as being the study and understanding of modern society. In the beginning the sociological and political aspects were stressed; under Johnson' direction it was expanded to include a broad range of topics:

> The fundamental interest of the mature adult lies in the understanding of his own times; and however essential the social sciences are to such understanding, the movement of ideas in other fields is no less essential. Hence the choice of a modern type of architecture for the New School building.[133]

The New School's program was in accordance with Urban's own notion of modern life. Urban believed that machines had liberated human beings from work and thus produced an increased amount of leisure time.[134] This new time required

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[132]Ibid.

[133]Alvin Johnson, *Notes on the New School Murals*, (New York: The International Press, 1944), n.p.

[134]Vogelgesang, "The New School," February 1931, 139.

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new institutions and a new type of architecture. Urban based his New School design on function, the social needs, use and perception of the institution. In 1933, Urban gave his most complete definition of modernism and how it related to architecture:

> We start to know that the old ornament has long done its duty and the many new ones we tried do not express our life.
>
> We have to understand the spirit of our time and we have to create an appropriate FORM WORLD to express this spirit.
>
> Art is only real if it is an expression of life.
>
> new form world has to grow out of the same ground as life itself. Any art form has to be born out of our daily life - out of our home and out of work working place - in closest contact with man and all the objects he uses and lives with.
>
> The artist has to feel the form and mould it in a design - truthful and logical.[135]

The New School's architectural modernism was not a machine-age scientific modernity, a politically radical vision of society or even the brave new world as best expressed in the early writings of Le Corbusier. It was, rather, a tempered modernism with a humanistic basis. It was not a call for a radical rupture with history or the previous institutions, but one to be expressive of one's time. This is reflected in Urban's use of certain aspects of the modern style--the ribbon window, and lack of ornament--modified by his stylistic and the school's functional concerns. If the architecture was at

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[135]"Notes for 1933 Architectural League," [1933], TMs, "Remarks by J.U.," Production File Box 26, Joseph Urban Collection.

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times, dramatic, it ultimately was concerned with creating a place for the institution and its students. If one accepts the New School as an example of modern architecture, then one also accepts that modern architecture during this period had many diverse interpretations.

Recent scholarship has provided a more complex interpretation of "functionalism." Historians, such as Tim Benton, have suggested that no one definition of "functionalism" can be applied to the architecture of the 1920s and 1930s, and that while many architects were willing to use the term, few subscribed to the concept that function should determine form or be the primary basis for aesthetic judgements.[136] In his study of American modernity, Terry Smith contrasts the direct functionalism of American architect Albert Kahn with the symbolic functionalism of European modernists, suggesting that the European use of "functionalism" with its dependency upon visual imagery was more a matter of style than function.[137]

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[136]Stanford Anderson, "The Fiction of Function," *Assemblage* 2 (February 1987): 19-31; Tim Benton, "The Myth of Function," in *Modernism in Design*, ed. Paul Greenhalgh (London: Reaktion Books, 1990), 41-52.

[137]Terry Smith, *Making the Modern: Industry, Art, and Design in America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 57-92. Smith defines Albert Kahn's direct functionalism as: "while refusing to apply the symbols of mass production to his official, commercial, and industrial building, he developed a designing procedure, expressed above all in his office organization, which applied the principles of mass production to all of the categories in the hierarchy of architectural practice." ibid., 92.

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Urban cannot be considered to be among the direct functionalists, such as Albert Kahn, or the radical-polemical functionalists, such as Ernst May, Hannes Meyer and Mart Stam. Similar to many modern architects including Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe, Urban catered to a bourgeois clientele and celebrated the progress of modernity. Rather than prescribing a system of forms, however, Urban chose to struggle towards the future, to, in a sense, work things through. The theorist and playwright Bertolt Brecht best explained the dilemma of the artist trying to honestly confront the new conditions of modern society:

> It is impossible to explain a present-day character by features or a present-day action by motives that would have been adequate in our fathers time. We allowed ourselves (provisionally) not to inspect motives at all...in order at least not to impute false ones, and showed actions as pure phenomena by assuming that we would have to show characters for some time without any features at all, this again provisionally.[138]

Architecturally, Urban's designs for the New School seem as if they are an abrupt shift in his career. But when the New School is compared with the work of other artists, both architects and theater directors, the relationship with the past becomes clearer. For directors such as Piscator and Brecht, links with earlier directors, particularly Max Reinhardt were a form of apprenticeship. Similar to the New School student, these directors evolved their own vocabulary through the examination of existing methods. While Brecht and

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[138]Brecht, 30.

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Piscator eventually rejected Expressionism they both had previously produced Expressionist plays. The concepts of epic theater, in many instances were a reformulation and reworking of earlier material with significant changes in terms and viewpoints. Urban's continually transforming architectural vocabulary can be better understood in light of these working methods rather than in the traditional terms of the great architect's unchanging genius and ideals.

Not surprisingly Urban shared this transformative vocabulary with other modern German architects, all who had some connections with theater. Peter Behrens, Bruno Taut, Erich Mendelsohn, Walter Gropius and even Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, had through the 1920s worked through a variety of "styles." It is the consistency of their later post-1930 work, which has often dominated characterizations of their careers. Urban, who died in 1933, did not have that luxury.

Distinguishing True Modernism: The Critical Response

Alvin Johnson and Urban extensively publicized the innovative modernity of the New School building. Illustrations of Urban's design appeared in October 1929 newspaper articles describing the new proposal, New School bulletins, and the 1930 promotional booklet.[139] Urban, furthermore, had

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[139]"Modernistic Building For Research School;" *New School Bulletin*, 21-25 October, 18-22 and 25-29 November 1929; Johnson, *New School*, n.p.

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displayed plans and perspectives of the building in the 1930 Architectural League Annual Exhibition.[140] All of this created an atmosphere of great expectation. The completed building received at least eleven reviews in newspapers, general literary magazines, art periodicals and architecture publications.[141] All concurred that the New School represented a new, more functionally based modernism and was a pioneering building in New York City.

Positive reviews of the building largely accepted and praised the terms of the structure as they had been defined by Alvin Johnson and Urban.[142] These critics agreed that the New School was a functionalist building, free of decoration, reflecting honest use of proportions, materials, and program. The rounded corners of the lobby were singled out as respecting the heavy flow of traffic in that area, while the auditorium plan was praised for providing uninterrupted sight

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[140]The Architectural League of New York, *Index of Exhibits Forty-fifth Annual Exhibition*, February 1 to March 2, 1930. Urban showed: "Perspective Front Elevation," "First Floor Plan," "Class Room Perspective," "Auditorium Perspective," "Talk Over Corner Perspective," "Lecture Hall Floor Plan."

[141]Haskell, "Architecture;" Wilson, "Aladdin's;" Read, "The New School," B15; Philip Johnson, "The Architecture of the New School;" Edward Alden Jewell, "Concerning Urban's Latest Architectural Adventure," *New York Times*, 4 January 1931, X13; "New School," *Scientific Monthly* 32 (May 1931): 479-480; "Grown-Up Schoolhouse;" Vogelgesang, "The New School," February 1931; Susswein, "The New School;" Flint, "Modernity Rules;" "Functionalism Is Keynote."

[142]See Flint, "Modernity Rules;" Jewell, "Concerning Urban's;" Read, "The New School," B15; Susswein, "The New School;" "Functionalism is Keynote;" "New School," *Scientific Monthly*; "Grown-up Schoolhouse."

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lines, maximum seating, and excellent acoustics in an intimate space (fig. 65, fig. 66).[143] Many, furthermore, admired Urban's innovative color scheme, and the quality of light--both natural and artificial--throughout the building.[144] Edwin Alden Jewell wrote: "In fact the auditorium would seem to be constructed, as it were, in terms of light."

These critics unhesitatingly accepted that the modernity of the building symbolized the modernity of the institution. Two critics, Edward Alden Jewell and Helen Appleton Read, however, realized that Urban's designs were more than a mere transcription of European modernism. Rather than simply copying European forms, Urban synthesized these visual types and at times reworked them to suit the needs of the school. Jewell noted that:

> The facade is dignified, thoroughly modern without being freakish, and "functional" in the least wobbly sense of that rather elastic term.[145]

Helen Appleton Read, commented that at times "severity and utility have been dramatized and stylized," but felt this was due in large part to its newness:

> Paradoxically the logic and utilitarian simplicity of the New School produce a more sensational appearance than any

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[143]For the lobby discussion see Susswein, "The New School," 11; for the auditorium see Flint, "Modernity Rules," 3-4; "New School," *Scientific Monthly*, 479-480; Susswein, "The New School," 11; Jewell, "Concerning Urban's," X13.

[144]Flint, "Modernity Rules," 3-4; Jewell, "Concerning Urban's," X13; Read, "The New School," B15; Susswein, "The New School," 11.

[145]Jewell, "Concerning Urban's," X13.

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> elaborate traditional could possibly have effected. Super-Baroque palaces for moving pictures, gargantuan Roman baths for railway stations and 50-story Gothic towers for office building have inured the public taste to American transcriptions to classical styles. But build a reasonable structure based on the sound architectural principles of use determining form and it becomes a sensation.[146]

Three of the reviews, however, were sharply critical of the building. They are the longest, and ultimately most interesting responses to the structure. Reviews praising the building, for whatever reasons, did not feel compelled to justify their positive response with an elaborate analysis of the structure. Those critical of the design did. Surprisingly, only one of the negative reviews, "Aladdin's Lecture Palace," written by Edmund Wilson took the conservative position that the New School's modernity was inappropriate for the institution. Wilson was frankly hostile to the building's functionalism:

> But the truth is that there is an inescapable fallacy at the bottom of the "functional" idea as applied to a building like the New School. Industry and business have impoverished life. Institutions like the New School are supposed to enrich it. How can you get a building appropriate to enrichment by imitating that which is poor?[147]

Wilson, however, was even more hostile to the New School's revised mission of adult education and lamented the institution's veering away from its original goals. For Wilson, Urban's architecture represented the institution,

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[146]Read, "The New School," B15.

[147]Wilson, "Aladdin's," 90.

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signifying the "impoverished" condition of its current mission. Since Wilson was writing for the *New Republic*, the journal with which many of the school's original--and by 1931 disenfranchised--founders were affiliated, his review was probably partisan.

The two reviews by Philip Johnson and Douglas Haskell focus on whether or not the New School was a truly modern building. Inspired by modernist literary and art criticism, both writers were formulating a modernist and critical response to current architecture. Philip Johnson's criticism of the New School was part of a larger attempt on his part to formulate guidelines for the International Style which would culminate in the 1932 Museum of Modern Art exhibition, "Modern Architecture - International Exhibition," and a book, co-authored by Henry Russell Hitchcock, entitled *The International Style: Architecture Since 1922*.[148] Johnson had abstracted visual rules from European modern architecture which he felt constituted a style. Urban's design of the New School, Johnson ultimately felt, imitated without understanding the forms of the new architecture. While Johnson admired the color scheme, he criticized the building for being too monumental and ornamental. He was particularly disturbed by what he felt was a lack of relation between the plan and facade, the structure and the auditorium form.

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[148]For Johnson's role and goals in promoting European modernism in the United States see Riley; and Pommer and Otto, 158-166.

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> In the New School we have the anomaly of a building supposed to be in a style of architecture based on the development of the plan from function and the facade from plan but which is as formally and pretentiously conceived as a Renaissance palace. Urban's admiration for the New Style is more complete than his understanding.[149]

Johnson, somewhat pointedly, did not include Urban in the Museum of Modern Art Exhibition. The New School's absence from subsequent histories of American architecture, may in large part be due to Johnson's omission.

Historians have been fascinated by this article, given Johnson's subsequent influence upon American architecture gained through his affiliations with the Museum of Modern Art and Harvard University, and as a practicing architect who has dominated the profession for decades.[150] Urban apparently was not disturbed. When Urban agreed to Alvin Johnson's request for an oval auditorium he commented, in an apparently nonchalant remark, that "he would be pounded by the cub architectural critics for designing a nonfunctional room."[151]

Far more scathing, Douglas Haskell noted that most architectural writing of the period was superficial and complimentary. He felt there was a need for a detailed, analytical assessment of buildings:

> Architects are just aching to get away from the false attitude of the professional press, in which

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[149]Philip Johnson, "The Architecture of the New School," 398.

[150]Riley, 45; Stern, Gilmartin, Mellins, 116; Peter Eisenman and Robert A. M. Stern eds., *Philip Johnson: Writings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); Gilmartin, 282.

[151]Johnson, *Pioneer's Progress*, 322.

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> praise is taffy and dispraise is circumventuitously hinted at.[152]

Haskell criticized Urban and the New School for indulging in a fashionable and novel modernity. Similar to Philip Johnson, he felt that the interior space did not justify the exterior cantilever and the auditorium form defied the laws of function and acoustics. The tone of the article was acerbic, taking as its premise that the building had been designed in accordance with the fashionable whims of a brainless society lady:

> Yet how simple, really, is the up-to-date woman? How natural was Marie Antoinette? Perhaps the processes of fitness that had shaped the entrance and the decor so well began to seem to slow. Or perhaps when she said "simple" what the lady really meant was "novel," and when she said "functional" she was thinking "European." At any rate, before the building was finished it had acquired some quite exotic features...[153]

Yet Haskell, at the same time, sincerely praised Urban's handling of the entrance sequence, and the color schemes

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[152]The letter includes a list of architects to be sent copies of Haskell's reviews in order to entice them to subscribe. Urban's name is included in the list. Douglas Haskell Collection, Drawings and Archives Collection of the Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University Manuscripts. All box numbers are temporary as the collection is currently being processed, box numbers are provided together with file folder names however, which should enable future researchers to access the collection. Douglas Haskell to Circulation Department, *The Nation*, 11 December 1930, TLS, "Personal DH - 1930 DH Chronology" Box 22-3, Douglas Haskell Collection. Miles David Samson first drew my attention to this letter in a talk at the College Art Association, February 4, 1993, "Douglas Haskell's Fifth Column: Lay Journalism and the Avant-Garde," in the session "Imaging the American Architect," chaired by Mary Woods. Samson is currently working on Haskell.

[153]Haskell, "Architecture," 222.

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throughout the building. Alvin Johnson, evidently, was deeply disturbed by this review and wrote a letter to the editor of *The Nation*. In his response, Haskell revealed a rather extraordinary understanding of the goals behind building and apologized for his tone:

> I regret mainly that Dr. Johnson should take the weaker rather than the stronger line of argument. The more he tries to defend the clumsy planning and inept expression of the building, the deeper he will be mired. What was it that caused the difficulties? The desire to make a picture striking, bold, dramatic, smart. If Dr. Johnson or his friends were to argue that the result in those psychological terms was worth the sacrifice, then the issue would be joined, and they would be stating what I believe to be their real conviction as the building actually expresses it. People who like the building will like it in those terms.[154]

While Haskell frequently criticized aspects of Urban's work, his correspondence reveals that he held Urban in high esteem. In the same letter he wrote of Urban:

> Mr. Urban, the architect, is one of the finest spirits in the whole profession. He is generous, large and artistically sensitive and conscientious.[155]

Later in the same letter Haskell stated:

> Incidentally, in Mr. Urban I still admire the integrity of the artist which I mentioned in the article, a certain thoroughbred character in him that gives even his least successful buildings something the opportunistic architects of the general run can never confer.[156]

Haskell, later revised his opinion on parts of the New School.

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[154]Douglas Haskell to Mr. Hazlitt, 3 March 1931, TL, "DH Personal 1931 DH Chronology," original Box 22-4, Douglas Haskell Collection.

[155]Ibid.

[156]Ibid.

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When he reviewed Radio City Music Hall, he praised the stepped ceiling of the auditorium and acknowledged its derivation from the New School and noted that he had given Urban "insufficient credit for the innovation."[157]

If Johnson excluded Urban from history, Haskell ultimately would have included both Urban as a modernist and the New School as an important example of modernism. Haskell later was commissioned to write descriptions, which were never published, of various modern New York City buildings for the WPA guidebook to New York He included the New School as a significant example of modern architecture, and his description stands as his final comment on the building:

> When erected this was the last work in smartness for a clientele that wished its architecture as well as its psycho-analysis on the latest models. The architect was Joseph Urban, the ponderous and well-loved designer of countless theater sets for the Ziegfeld Follies and for the Metropolitan Opera. The building as a first attempt in New York (1931) to apply certain European "modern" theories and attitudes associated with "functionalism" ran into numerous awkwardness both in plan and expression; but despite these failures achieved a certain warmth and heartiness often lacking in models of the style.[158]

Ultimately, Wilson, Philip Johnson and Douglas Haskell's critical reviews of the New School building are significant for their attempts to define the grammar of modernism. In

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[157]Douglas Haskell, "Roxy's Advantage Over God," *The Nation* 136 (4 January 1933): 11.

[158]Drafts of descriptions of various NYC buildings for WPA guide to NY, n.d., TMs, "DH Personal Miscellaneous" Box 22-5, Douglas Haskell Collection.

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criticizing the New School they also inadvertently revealed some of the larger issues which shaped what could be included and what should be excluded from the canon of orthodox modernism.

Architecture is a Language: The Grammar of Modernism

> ...architecture is a language, in which plan, structure and form are as thought, sentence, and sound. If words are used for what they do not mean, and syntax is all at odds, there can be no very deep significance to the rhyme. In architecture the conditions are almost intolerably complex.
>
> Douglas Haskell[159]

In their reviews of the New School, Johnson and Haskell attempted to apply a system of rules to the building. This system, they believed, provided the guidelines to which all modern architecture should conform and could therefore be applied to evaluate and judge whether or not a building fell within or without the elite category of "modern". Both men believed that the interior plan as shaped by the program and structure dictated the exterior design. Johnson articulated this the most clearly:

> The purpose or function of the building as restricted by the exigencies of purely structural requirements is the major factor in the creation of the plan. The architect employs this plan as a starting point for the ultimate design of the whole building, which thus develops rationally from within. The interior arrangement inevitably determines the general formation of the

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[159]Haskell, "Architecture," 223.

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facade.[160]

For both Johnson and Haskell, the New School failed to conform to this standard at two critical points, the design of the exterior facade, particularly the use of the cantilever, and the ground floor auditorium (fig. 61, fig. 65).

The resolution of structural support, cantilever and ribbon windows was extremely problematic for both critics. A cantilever, they felt, should only be employed if it results in interior space which can physically be used by humans.[161] Haskell stated that there should be a minimum eight foot distance between column and cantilever. At the New School there was only a three foot distance and the intervening space was occupied by double-glazed windows and heating units. The ribbon windows, both further suggested, indicated an unbroken space within, which in reality was quite frequently several different spaces. The result was what Haskell termed "a 'functional' false front."[162] According to these standards

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[160]Philip Johnson, "The Architecture of the New School," 393.

[161]The relation of column, heating unit, ribbon window and cantilever are of course, remarkably similar to the workshop wing of the Bauhaus which was one of the buildings featured in the MOMA exhibition and *International Style* publication.

[162]Haskell, "Architecture," 222. Urban indicated the difference on the exterior by allowing the interior color scheme to show through the windows, different colors would indicate a different space. Johnson further criticized the plan for being arbitrarily divided into separate spaces, he felt it should be unified into a single space. This would result in the extension of the cantilever and ribbon window across the entire facade. Johnson also criticized the exterior brickwork for being too decorative; the inward batter of bricks as too expensive and the overall symmetrical quality of the building

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Urban, of course, was not the only modern architect to use the ribbon window incorrectly; Le Corbusier, for example, at the Villa Savoy, which consisted of a variety of spaces, used ribbon windows around the entire second floor.

On the interior, both critics were deeply disturbed by the arbitrariness of the auditorium shape.[163] Oval spaces were among the most difficult conformations for acoustics. While Haskell and Johnson had to admit that the space was successful acoustically, they felt that it achieved this through extreme measures, the addition of a specially designed perforated acoustic ceiling screen. Johnson felt that the oval forms, evident in both the plan and ceiling dome ignored the structural realities of steel frame construction. He found the disruption of the rest of the building by the auditorium a blatant disregard of "economies of construction." According to him, if the space of the auditorium had to be radically different from that of the rest of the building, it should

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as too monumental. Johnson felt that the interior arrangement of the building should have resulted in an asymmetrical exterior, Philip Johnson, "The Architecture of the New School," 393, 395.

[163]Both also criticized the combination of lounge and library as well as the placement of lecturer in front of a window. These criticism result from both critics applying the standards of traditional schools to the New School. Classes for the most part were at night, eliminating the problem of backlighting the lecturer. The school was as much about places of interaction as it was about scholarly study, thus a different conception of a library.

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have been pulled out into a separate pavilion.[164] The auditorium was a result of an arbitrary whim comparable to that of "Beaux Arts designers," the ultimate insult.

While Haskell disliked the arbitrariness of the oval plan, he was more concerned by the visual melding of acoustical screen with structure evident in Urban's treatment of the ceiling dome. Even the garishly decorated Paramount Theater, Haskell complained, resolved the differentiation of screen and structure in a clear and unambiguous manner so that "the most ignorant truck-driver patrons would [not] take them for anything else than what they are."[165]

In making a linguistic analogy between architecture and language, Haskell suggested that architecture could be comparable with "thought, sentence and sound." Haskell and Johnson's guidelines for assessing the New School, however, have less to do with thought and sound and more to do with grammar. In their vision of modernism, architecture is like a sentence in which nouns, verbs and participles have to agree in tense and be properly constructed. To have a cantilever without a space capable of human occupation is similar to having a dangling participle. In citing function as a determining form Johnson and Haskell rely on a traditional reading of program, one in which school, lecture rooms and

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[164]This ignored both the realities of the New York City real estate market and the shape of a typical Manhattan lot.

[165]Haskell, "Architecture," 222.

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libraries have unchanging functions unaffected by institutional or contextual needs. In the case of the auditorium, their conception of function is even more austere, depending primarily on acoustics and structure.

Urban's definition of function, as discussed in the previous section, was far more flexible, encompassing perceptual, social and contextual issues. If architecture was a language, for Urban it was not about the rules of grammar but the system of signifying meaning. West 12th Street consisted primarily of three to four story 19th century townhouses which formed a strong street wall. The New School's cantilever allowed the building to become part of this context and to distinguish itself from it at the same time. The cantilever was aligned with the older buildings while the side and entrance areas, the parts of the building which actually connected with the adjoining structures, were slightly set back. The three feet of space created on the inside by the cantilever provided for a second set of windows which insulated the building from the noise and cold, a traditional Viennese detail. Yet, the cantilever also expressed the spatial arrangements of the interior. The circulation areas which included the entrance lobby and the two stair towers, were placed in the recessed areas, while the major school spaces, the library, board room and classrooms, cantilevered out. The placement of circulation on either side of the building, meant that the center was left free for the

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most important programmatic parts of the institution, the auditorium, library, and lounge. Finally in providing an modern version of an exterior portico, the cantilever symbolized the community, the shelter of the institution within.

Urban's intent in the auditorium was to make it both flexible and intimate, creating a ceremonial center for the New School community. References to earlier religious and theatrical architecture combined with the space's communal importance were meant to enrich modern assemblies with a sense of mythical origins. If architecture functioned as a grammar of correct and incorrect usage for Johnson and Haskell, for Urban it was a lexicon providing a plurality of mutually enriching meanings. If modern architecture was about establishing the correct prototype for the two critics, for Urban it was about understanding the archetype.

"Designed for the Up-To-Date Woman": Modernism and the Exclusion of the Other

Douglas Haskell, Philip Johnson, and Edmund Wilson's frequently mentioned concerns about whether or not the New School for Social Research was truly modern, went beyond questioning Urban's adherence to the correct grammar of modern design. Various references by these critics suggest that they believed Urban's credentials as a modernist architect were

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suspect. The institution itself, these critics also imply, was not one capable of commissioning a truly modernist design. Their concerns seem to be about Urban's Viennese background, his associations with theater, and both the school's and Urban's affiliation with and promotion of women.

Philip Johnson opens his review by stating that the New School is one of the first buildings that can be compared with seminal European work. He then continues with a negative reference to architecture influenced by Vienna as a kind of false modernism.

> Most of the architecture, however, which passes for modern in our country has combined earlier manners, such a Viennese or Paris, 1925, with the mania for verticalism so predominant in our skyscrapers. Not in any sense can these works be considered a part of the style which is finding vigorous expression especially in Germany, France, Holland, Russia, and Japan.[166]

Anyone familiar with Urban's biography would realize the subtle allusion. His background and previous works in Vienna were examples of false modernism. Is Urban capable of producing a truly modernist work? Johnson's answer, as he examines detail after detail, is no. His dismissal of the exterior brickwork as "ornament" reinforces Johnson's initial allusion to Urban's background. When Johnson finally analyzes the library space he makes the comparison evident, for anyone who had missed it thus far (fig. 73):

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[166]Philip Johnson, "The Architecture of the New School," 393.

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> In the mouldings [sic] of the bookcases and the ornamental treatment of the railing, Urban is working in his own Viennese tradition.[167]

In the next paragraph, Johnson delivers the coup-de-grace: "Urban's admiration for the New Style is more complete than his understanding."[168]

While Douglas Haskell does not make any reference to Urban's Viennese origins in his New School review, his earlier articles do. Similar to Johnson, Haskell's use of Vienna suggests a false and fashionable modernism. In a December 1928 article on "The American Designers," Haskell wrote:

> So suddenly has this "modern manner' descended on America, so hectic is the competition to be the first, so necessary in a gallery to set a stage or have the Parisian or Viennese touch, that it has been possible for only the most steadfast characters to retain their integrity.[169]

Clearly these references to Vienna conjure up negative associations. What does the term, Vienna, signify? The continued pairing of Vienna with Paris is an obvious reference to the 1925 Paris Exposition des Arts Décoratifs and its acknowledged influence on modern America architecture of the mid to late 1920s. By placing Paris and Vienna in a negative opposition to Germany, Holland and France, Johnson is differentiating what otherwise might be mistakenly identified

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[167]Ibid., 398.

[168]Ibid.

[169]Douglas Haskell, "The American Designers," *Creative Art* (December 1928), clipping in "Personal DH - 1928 - DH Chronology," Box 22-4, Douglas Haskell Collection.

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as similar modern designs. Johnson, in particular, was not only interested in distancing "his new style" from other modern buildings but also in distinguishing it from earlier examples of modern architecture by such designers as Frank Lloyd Wright, Peter Behrens, and Otto Wagner. For Johnson, as Terence Riley has demonstrated, the modern architectural world commenced in 1922.[170] Urban quite clearly had been practicing in Vienna and the United States prior to that date. Therefore Vienna not only called up associations with the false modernism of the 1925 fair, but also Urban's turn-of-the-century Viennese career.[171] This suggested that he was both too old and too corrupted by his background and affiliations to be able to accomplish anything but an "admiration for the New Style."

Urban's theatrical associations also undermined his credentials as a modern architect. Haskell states that Urban even with his "stage director's ingenuity," had trouble resolving various architectural features with the building's function. The reference suggests resolutions based on sleight-of-hand or trickery rather than on rational architectural principles. Edmund Wilson was even more critical of Urban's theatrical affiliations:

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[170]Riley, 15-16.

[171]The predominance of women designers in the Wiener Werkstätte from World War I on, may have also have prejudiced critics, see Chapter 1.

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> Joseph Urban, the architect of the New School, is a brilliant theatrical designer--at least as far as the "Ziegfeld Follies" go. But when he tries to produce a functional lecture building, he turns out a set of fancy Ziegfeld settings of factories and offices, where we keep expecting to see pretty girls in blue, yellow and cinnamon dresses to match the gay colors of the ceilings and walls.[172]

Urban's association with the popular Ziegfeld Follies compromised his ability to design architecture, or even, Wilson suggests, any type of high art production. Urban was doubly cursed as a theater designer and as a designer of commercial entertainments. Theater was both an inappropriate reference because it undermined the formal, self-referential quality of modernist architectural practice and it mixed commercial with high art conventions.

Wilson's statement, however, also points to another difficulty, the association of Urban and the institution with women. As a designer of spaces and productions in which women were highly visible--the Ziegfeld Follies, several theaters and night clubs--Urban was viewed as an architect who celebrated women. His scenic design studio and early architecture practice, furthermore, had often employed women as key designers and representatives for the office. Even more problematic, however, was the strong presence of women at the New School. At least two-thirds of the student body were women, and Johnson had given the students a large say in the curriculum, support and governance of the institution.

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[172]Wilson, "Aladdin's," 91.

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Douglas Haskell's equation of the New School with women is evident in several vehemently sexist comparisons that he makes in the review:

> It must be that the New School for Social Research was designed for the up-to-date woman. It is bold just where she is bold.[173]

Haskell's image of the school as largely dominated by women was so strong that an early draft of his unpublished entry on the New School for the WPA guide refers to the institution as a "center for adult leisure time education, especially of women." Did the presence of women at the New School influence these critics' perception of the design as not truly modern? Feminist art historian Griselda Pollock has argued that modernist history and criticism is an exclusionary practice:

> ...what modernist art history celebrates is a selective tradition which normalizes as the only modernism a particular and gendered set of practices?[174]

Clearly women and modern architecture did not mix. To see the modernity of the building as a symbol of the institution was to identify modernism with women. It was imperative to differentiate the true modernism of the International Style from the false modernity of Urban's New School. It was also imperative to distinguish the New School from the aims of real scholarship and learning. This is evident in Haskell's

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[173]Haskell, "Architecture," 221.

[174]Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art* (London: Routledge, 1988), 50.

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conclusion. After comparing architecture with language, Haskell writes:

> But I am talking into the wind. How could I have made such a mistake? The ladies do not really care to study syntax and philology. Look at the floor plans. Only one floor among seven contains classrooms proper: among these four out of six have quite gratuitously impossible shapes. No, it is on the clubrooms that the main effort has been concentrated. In the library, which in the ordinary school would be quietly segregated, there is a grand double stairway. The people go up and down, up and down. It leads to the salon. They say, "Don't you think it's pretty good, for America?"[175]

If Haskell and Johnson wanted to make claims of internationality even universality for their vision of modernism, it was one which excluded certain peoples, histories and types of culture. Modern architecture's roots in turn-of-the-century practice were ruthlessly excised, its rich series of interactions with dance, music, theater were denied, its engagement with popular and commercial culture repressed. Johnson and Haskell's promotion of modernism in the United States created a hermetic world that was designed by and for men. Women, even when they commissioned or inhabited these spaces, could only exist as subjects of a male controlled universe.

Given the significant proportion of women at the New School, how did Urban address and position the female audience? This, perhaps, was the most significant departure from his earlier work. If Urban was always concerned with a

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[175]Haskell, "Architecture," 223. One wonders how Haskell would have criticized Alvar Aalto's Vipurii Library which also has a monumental staircase connecting two levels.

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female audience in his earlier designs, he tended, in the night clubs, restaurants and theaters, to objectify women into desirable objects for male consumption.[176] At the New School, however, Urban no longer created environments intended to flatter the female audience, but used color and space to create inhabitable rooms for study, discussion and lectures. Women were no longer on stage. In one instance, the basement dance floor studio, Urban placed the dance floor slightly below the floor grade, in order to counteract the tendency to display dancers (fig. 67). Only at the staircase linking library to lounge and art gallery did Urban create a stage of display (fig. 73). Here, however, the occupant of the staircase top could equally be subject and object, surveying the room below as well as being, at times caught in a tableaux.

Aftermath: The Influence of the New School in Urban's Work

In the remaining two years of his life Urban designed at least twelve projects. Of these five were for hotel night clubs or

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[176]This discussion is inspired by Beatriz Colomina's investigation of how women are addressed and positioned within the domestic architecture of Le Corbusier and Adolf Loos, Colomina, "The Split Wall: Domestic Voyeurism," in *Sexuality and Space*, ed. Beatriz Colomina, Princeton Papers on Architecture, I, (New York, Princeton Architectural Press, 1992), 73-128.

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restaurants.[177] Another project, the 1933 New York City apartment for author Katherine Brush evolved out of the design issues Urban had developed in conjunction with collaborative groups of architects and decorative artists such as the American Union of Decorative Artists and Craftsmen (AUDAC) and the American Designer's Gallery.[178]

In his other projects from this period, the 1931 design for a Small Suburban Motion Picture Theater, the 1931-32 suburban house for New School faculty member Dr. Max Lerner, the 1931 project for a cooperative apartment house at the Atlantic Beach Club, the 1931 competition entry for the Palace of the Soviets, the 1933 project with Raymond Hood and Wallace Harrison to develop mass-produced small country houses, and the 1932-33 color scheme for the Chicago Century of Progress Exposition, Urban continued to develop the themes and visual

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[177]These included the 1931 Park Avenue Restaurant in New York City, the Urban Room, Congress Hotel, Chicago, Mayfair Room, Book-Cadillac Hotel, Detroit and the Chatterbox, William Penn Hotel, Pittsburgh, all of 1932 as well as the 1932-33 Paradise Restaurant in New York City, see Chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion.

[178]For the Brush apartment see: "Apartment for Katherine Brush, New York City," *Architectural Record* 73 (March 1933): 174-175; "Apartment of Katherine Brush in New York," *Architectural Record* 74 (November 1933): 354-57; "Katherine Brush Goes Completely Modern," *House and Garden* 68 (January 1933): 34-35; "Modern Setting for Katherine Brush," *House and Garden* 65 (February 1934): 40; Roberts, Mary Fanton, "Remembering Joseph Urban--Timeless Modernism," *Arts and Decoration* 44 (August 1936): 10-13, 47, and Rosemarie Haag Bletter, "1930-1945: The World of Tomorrow. The Future with a Past," in *High Styles: Twentieth Century American Designs*, ed. Lisa Philips (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1985), 104. Urban's interaction with AUDAC and the American Designers Gallery is analyzed in Chapter 4.

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forms that he had used at the New School.[179] Of all these projects, however, the Palace of the Soviets Competition best represents Urban's continued exploration of context, flexible auditorium, epic space, and his new use of color.

Palace of the Soviets

In September 1931 representatives of the Soviet government asked Urban to enter a limited and paid competition to design a new Palace of the Soviets.[180] There is no known material

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[179]For the Small Suburban Motion Picture Theater see: Chapter 2, Irvin L. Scott, "A Motion Picture Theater for a Suburban Town in New York," *Architectural Record* 70 (August 1931): 111-114 reprinted in *Theatre Management* 26 (October 1931); Portfolios 18, and Map Case, "Miscellaneous Designs for Hotel and Theater Decorations," Joseph Urban Collection. For the Lerner House see: "A Small Suburban House," *Architectural Record* 70 (November 1931): 363-364; clippings on house from *Art Digest*, 15 February 1932 and *New York Times*, 22 February 1932, in Portfolio 35, pt. 1; "Little House," Production File Box 18, Joseph Urban Collection. For Country House Competition see Portfolio 13; "Little House Designs," Production File Box 18, Joseph Urban Collection; "Country Home Development Proposed for Mass Production," *New York Times*, 29 January 1933. For Atlantic Beach Club Cooperative see "Atlantic Beach to Have Co-Operative," *New York Evening Post*, 12 September 1931 and Portfolio 30, Joseph Urban Collection.

[180]Peter Lizon, "The Palace of the Soviets: Change in Direction of Soviet Architecture" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1971); Antonia Cunliffe, "The Competition for the Palace of Soviets in Moscow, 1931-1933," *Architectural Association Quarterly* 2 (1979): 36-48; Jean-Louis Cohen, *Le Corbusier and the Mystique of the USSR: Theories and Projects for Moscow, 1928-1936*, trans. Kenneth Hylton, (Princeton: Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), 164-203. Charlotte Benton entry, "Palace of Soviets Competition, Moscow," *Le Corbusier Architect of the Century*, ed. Michael Raeburn and Victoria Wilson (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1987), 174-175.

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documenting why the Soviet government selected Urban, however, the recently completed New School and his extensive theater experience may have been factors.[181] Additionally, Urban's more moderate modernism may have appealed to the Soviet Government in comparison with that of the Russian architectural avant-garde.[182] The Soviets divided the competition into three phases, a "preliminary assessment" of proposals by various Soviet architectural organizations and some individual Soviet architects, an invited competition of twelve international architects, and an open competition for both Soviet and foreign participants. This resulted in a total of 272 entries which were all judged at the same time by the Council for the Construction of the Palace. Along with Urban, the Council asked Boris Iofan, Ivan Zholtovsky, German Krasin (The Soviet Union), Erich Mendelsohn, Hans Poelzig, Walter Gropius, (Germany), Armando Brasini (Italy), Ragnar Östberg (Sweden), William Lamb (the United States), Le Corbusier and Auguste Perret (France) to submit proposals for

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[181]Urban makes reference to his design of the New School in the report submitted with his drawings, indicating that this may have been a factor in his selection. "A Report of the Underlying Considerations and Recommendations for the Proposed Design and Construction of the Palace of Soviets, Moscow, U.S.S.R." 1 December 1931, TMs, Portfolio 1, Joseph Urban Collection, 3.

[182]It is also interesting to note that with the exception of Le Corbusier and Gropius, other invitees practiced a more moderate modernism and some, particularly Mendelsohn and Poelzig, had experience with theaters. Urban's work, of course shares affinities with both German designers and in 1931 Urban was one of the few American architects who had designed and constructed a modern-styled theater.

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the second stage. Entries from this phase were due December 1931. In February 1932 the combined results of the competition were announced with three prize winners each in the first, second and third prize categories. Urban won a third prize but was not asked to participate in the final, closed, stage from March - July 1932. Finally in May 1935 the government asked one of the first-prize winners, B. M. Iofan, to develop his design in conjunction with Vladimir Shchuko and Vladimir Gelfreikh.

A large amount of Urban's correspondence and notes concerning the project remain in his archives and provide a glimpse into his working method.[183] Urban performed extensive research for the project within the three month period. He obtained detailed photographs, maps, descriptions and ordinances in order to study the site. He acquired photographs of other recently constructed Soviet buildings and contacted recent visitors to the Soviet in order to get a sense of the current atmosphere.[184] He wrote and met with a number of potential consultants on various aspects from electrical systems, parking, acoustics, to library administration.

The program for the competition stipulated the site, a

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[183]Portfolio 1, Joseph Urban Collection.

[184]This included Kastner's Ukrainian Theater project, the Moscow Museum of Art, a Lenin Library Project as well as other competition designs for the Palace including those by Nikosky, Iofan, and Ladovsky.

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wedge-shaped plot in the historic center of Moscow with a direct visual relationship to the Kremlin and bounded by Soimonovskija prospekt, Volkhonka ulitsa, Lenivka ulitsa, and Kropotkinskaya.[185] The main component of the complex was a huge auditorium which could accommodate 15,000 people and hold as many as 1,500 people on the stage. This would be used for meetings of the Supreme Soviet but should also accommodate mass pageants, movies and exhibitions. A smaller theater, holding 6500 people would be used primarily for congresses and conferences but could have some theatrical performances as well. A series of four auditoria were to be used for government business conferences. The complex also had to include space for administration offices and support services. While the government did not dictate how the various components should be linked or even the height and massing of the complex they did require that it be designed as "a monumental structure and should be of suitable materials." The style of the architecture should express:

> a. the character of the epoch, expressing the will of the toiling masses to build socialism.
>
> b. the special designation of the edifice;
>
> c. its significance as an artistic architectural memorial in the capital of the U.S.S.R.[186]

Urban, who had not been to the Soviet Union since the design

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[185]"Specifications for the Palace of Soviets," [1931], TMs, Portfolio 1, Joseph Urban Collection, 7.

[186]"Specifications for the Palace of Soviets," 7.

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and construction of the Czar Bridge over the River Neva in St. Petersburg in 1896, initially had some difficulties finding the appropriate expression of the socialist epoch. In a query regarding the specifications, Urban asked if the reference to mass pageants meant costume pageants.[187] He later confessed to *New York Times* art and architecture critic Edward Alden Jewell that:

> ...he had to scrap several preliminary designs which smacked of a splendor sacred to the old regime, before he finally hit upon something that might appeal to the proletarian Soviet.[188]

In his final design for the project, Urban separated the three main components of the complex into individual building groups and dispersed them across the site (fig. 10). He placed the main auditorium, Group A, at the corner of the wedge. The auditorium plan and acoustical profile of the ceiling resulted in a fan shaped building with a roof that flared up and out from the rear of the stage to the auditorium entrance. A series of red clad vertical elements projected out of the entrance elevation, and were probably intended to house stairs and elevators. Behind these were steel sash ribbon windows

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[187]Urban to Mr. Nikitin of Amtorg Trading Corporation, 15 October 1931, TL, Portfolio 1, Joseph Urban Collection.

[188]Edward Alden Jewell, "In the Realm of Art," *New York Times*, 14 February 1932.

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alternating in horizontal bands with white stone. The base and roof of the building were clad in a black stone.[189]

On the interior, Urban created a simple space whose shape in both plan and section was dictated solely by acoustics (fig. 74). The space was enlivened through the color and materials. He used an intensely saturated color scheme of grey, red and orange. Each color was placed on a distinct surface and given a distinct material. The auditorium ceiling was to be an orange-red glass mosaic, the walls a grey stone, the aisles and steps a dark grey material, the space frame proscenium a pale white material, and the back wall of the stage as well as the auditorium seats a deep red.

Urban placed the Smaller Theater, Group B and the four auditoria, Group C, at the opposite end of the site near the street and transportation system (fig. 10). The exterior details of these complexes were less fully resolved. Urban pulled out different types of spaces and expressed them through the exterior massing. He was planning to use grey, black, red and white stone on these elevations and would have continued the modern vocabulary of the main hall. Group B, the second largest auditorium of the complex, had a wedge shape

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[189]While Urban employed a formal vocabulary similar to that of his other 1929-1933 projects, the massing and monumentality of the complex are reminiscent of the Metropolitan Opera project and the Music Center. The similarity reinforced by the fact that Urban studied the Palace of the Soviets through models, a technique which he also used for the Metropolitan Opera, but did not seem to frequently use, based on the remaining documentation, for other projects.

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which anchored that area of the site. Group C was a series of three rectilinear blocks linked to Group B in such a manner to form an enclosed courtyard. The area between the two complexes terraced into different levels and was to be used for large outdoor rallies.

In a manner similar to the New School Urban both created a new context for the Palace of the Soviets while respecting the area in which it sat. The disposition of the buildings, he stated, were based on their function and the available land. The program of Groups B and C required spaces for intense work and study which should be separated from the mass demonstrations housed in Group A. Urban performed detailed traffic studies and placed Groups B and C, which he felt would be constantly used, closest to pre-existing traffic lines. Group A was situated in order to attract the large numbers of people who would attend mass rallies at the complex. The curved entrance elevation of the building was set directly on axis with the most likely rallying and entry point into the complex. Urban used exterior color to emphasize the different relations of each major group to the city. The treatment of Groups B and C in black, grey, red and white was more delicate, in keeping with their strong relationship to the street, which would result in a daily and more detailed observation of the building. The color scheme of Group A was more broad and massive, meant to be viewed from a distance and serving as an architectural backdrop for the massive outdoor

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rallies. The entire complex was orchestrated in relation to how it both shaped and interacted with the city.

> I feel that Group A should stand alone on the high point of the plot. The enormous mass of the hall is surrounded by small buildings housing offices connected with the events going on in the big hall. The smaller low buildings melt the enormous proportion of the big center mass down to human scale, down to the life of the streets. The big masses of the hall are only fully seen at the main facade where the wide plaza and the ramp down to the Krapotkinskaja nab. give a distance and scope large enough to balance the proportions of this colossal structure.[190]

Yet if Urban developed the site in conjunction with the existing context of the city, he also aligned his buildings and created outdoor spaces that generated a space distinct from that of the city. This is particularly evident in the terracing of the main plaza, resulting in a series of distinct spaces and the inclusion of a courtyard in Group C. Urban both linked the complex to the context of Moscow and yet clearly distinguished it from the space and architecture of the historic center.

Urban usually developed his color scheme as the planning for a building became more substantive. Since the Palace of the Soviets only developed to a competition stage it is not possible to analyze in detail Urban's use of color. The presentation drawings indicate, however, that Urban intended to continue to use the strongly saturated color palette that

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[190]"Addenda to Report of the Underlying Considerations and Recommendations for the Proposed Design and Construction of the Palace of Soviets, Moscow, U.S.S.R." 7 December 1931, TMs, Portfolio 1, Joseph Urban Collection, 2.

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he had developed at the New School (fig. 10). The bright exterior color scheme differed from the pale pastels or deep earth tones that characterized earlier building constructed under the czars. It also evoked a universal Constructivist aesthetic and color symbolism that was pervasive throughout Soviet design during the 1920s in order to signify that this was a building designed with "socialist principles". Urban used color architecturally to signal different functions and spaces. As at the New School he assigned different colors to different planes which would add additional spatial readings to the building. The reddish tints of the main auditorium were not only symbolic of the communist party but were probably intended to be an appropriately celebratory color for the pageants and spectacles taking place in the space. With this scheme, however, Urban moved away from the film or volume color effects of the New School to surface color. Each color, such as the orange-red glass mosaic and grey stone walls, was used in a manner that emphasized the materiality of the color.

In designing the auditorium, Urban appears to have moved towards a functionalism more in keeping with Philip Johnson and Douglas Haskell's ideals (fig. 74). Similar to Konstantin Melnikov's worker's clubs as well as other competition entries, acoustic concerns structured the fan shaped plan and vaulted ceiling. Urban wrote:

> An elliptical or round form of ground plan is so opposed to the unusually difficult acoustic problem here that it

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> was considered best to avoid such forms in the plans of both large halls.[191]

While Urban shifted closer to functionalist concerns he also developed another modernist notion which had been present at the New School, the ideal of a universal and flexible theater space.[192] Rather than designing a traditional stage, Urban proposed a series of stepped platforms, which he called "estrade" that had a huge passage connecting the steps directly to the plaza as well as side entrances connecting it to the street. A wood veneer curtain could screen off the back stage in order to create a lecture space, or open for theatrical performances.

Yet if this plan abandoned the elliptical shapes of Urban's earlier designs, it did not reject the community ideals. In fact the Palace of the Soviets, with its program of spontaneous mass pageants and processions of the Soviet people must have appealed to Urban precisely because of the community ideals that he could associate with his earlier projects such as *Caliban* and the Reinhardt Theater. Urban, furthermore, did not entirely abandon references to the classical theater. Instead of echoing its form he abstracted

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[191]"Addenda to Report," 3.

[192]While he proposed using a hydraulic lift and a turntable for the auditoria, he still continued to be opposed to having elaborate mechanical equipment on stage, writing: "The overcrowding of the stage with machinery and mechanical apparatus is expensive and impractical. The cost is out of proportion to the effect achieved and it is more or less a temporary 'mode.'" "A Report of the Underlying Considerations," 5.

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certain principles, such as an emphasis on excellent acoustics and communal participation. Similar to classical amphitheaters, he used circulation at the Palace of the Soviets as the key to creating successful audience interaction. He labelled the main passage from the plaza to the stage a "vomitory," and envisioned the circulation of demonstrations, groups and brigades from plaza to auditorium to street.[193]

The Palace of the Soviets also continues the episodic structure of the New School. The acoustical gesture of the main auditorium in Group A structures the entire footprint of the building, front elevation and roof profile. Urban creates an even more radical montage of separate parts, dismembering the complex into separate buildings spaced out along the site, in order for the viewer to clearly see and comprehend the various functions of the institution.[194] The Moscow structure furthermore would be supported by an engaged but relaxed socialist audience.

Urban exhibited the design in a one-man show at the Architectural League in February 1932. The project received ample praise with Lewis Mumford writing: "his design for the

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[193]Ibid., 7.

[194]Urban's discussions of the plaza emphasize providing a sense of space and a place for large open air meetings and as a buffer zone between the more noisy events sheltered in the main auditorium with the more quiet activites of the smaller auditorium (Group B) and four auditoria (Group C). "A Report of the Underlying Considerations," 1.

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Palace of the Soviets in Moscow was surely more effective than that which mysteriously took first place."[195] He made prints of his proposal which he sent to friends and anyone who was interested enough to inquire. Urban seemed poised to take advantage of the national and international stature he had gained from the competition. The continuation of the Depression and his own ill-health, however, prevented him from further developing the architectural ideas and the connections garnered from the competition. Urban's satisfaction with the project, however, is evident in a letter written to his friend Deems Taylor, shortly after he had submitted the entry:

> I just finished my plans for the Palace of the Soviets - five minutes later than I should have. It was hard work day and night but a great, great pleasure.[196]

The project offers the tantalizing suggestion that Urban's commitment to modernism was at once more profound than many of his contemporary and subsequent critics believed, yet still less stylistically and socially orthodox than many would prefer.

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[195]"The Skyline," *New Yorker* 8 (19 March 1932): 71; also Jewell, "In the Realm of Art."

[196]Joseph Urban to Deems Taylor, 9 December 1931, TL, Portfolio 1, Joseph Urban Collection.

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CHAPTER 4

PRACTICE, PROMOTION AND PROFESSION: THE INTERACTION BETWEEN THEATER AND ARCHITECTURE

From 1926 until his death in 1933, Urban simultaneously administered a scenic design studio in Yonkers, New York and an architecture office in New York City. At first, the two offices collaborated on Urban's buildings. The Yonkers office, for instance, created the murals for the Ziegfeld and Paramount theaters as well as those for several night clubs.[1] The scenic design studio also had vast experience with testing color and light effects for theater and movies sets, providing a basis for the sophisticated color and light schemes of later projects.[2] Urban, however, gradually transferred and transformed many aspects of theater design into architecture. Were there similar work procedures and shared interests between the two offices? How did Urban's career as a set designer translate and influence his practice, promotion and profession as an architect?

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[1]"Ziegfeld Time Frame," February 1927, TMs, "Misc. Letters," Production File Box 1, Joseph Urban Collection; "Hotel Gibson," Production File Box 15, Joseph Urban Collection; "Palm Beach Society Attends Opening of New Film Theatre," *New York Herald-Tribune*, 10 January 1927, p. 23.

[2]"Settings at the Opera," *Boston Evening Transcript*, 11 January 1913, sec. 3, p. 6; "Viennese Art Wrought on The Shore of Boston Bay," *New York Times*, 7 November 1915; Henry M. Neely, "Close-Ups of the Movie Game," *Philadelphia Evening Ledger*, 14 November 1921.

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Practice

The Yonkers Scenic Design Studio

During the first four years of Urban's New York theater practice he maintained the scenic studio in the Boston area neighborhood of Swampscott, Massachusetts, that he had initially set up for his work at the Boston Opera.[3] Urban moved his scenic design studio from Massachusetts, to Yonkers, New York in 1919.[4] At first the studio worked in a loft, but then moved into a renovated skating rink at 217 Waverly Street, Yonkers, where it continued to be for the rest of his career.

Numerous newspaper and magazine articles described Urban's method of designing and creating a stage or movie set.[5] Commissions started with a period of intense research. He thoroughly read the libretto and studied the costumes,

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[3]For a description of the Swampscott studio see Adalbert Albrecht, "The Opera's Factory of Illusions," *Boston Evening Transcript*, 25 September 1912, sec. 3, p. 2.

[4]Memorandum to Otto Kahn, [6 December 1919], TMs, "U," Otto Kahn Collection, Firestone Library, Princeton University.

[5]Albrecht, "The Opera's Factory," sec. 3, p. 2; "Urban Forecasts His Work," *Boston Evening Transcript*, 14 October 1913, sec. 3, p. 6; "Viennese Art Wrought;" William E. Lewis, "Artistic and Aesthetic Side of 'Ziegfeld's Follies,'" *Morning Telegraph*, 22 July 1915, p. 12; "Urban, the Ambidextrous," *New York Times*, 17 June 1917; "Urban at Work on Stage Settings," *New York Dramatic Mirror*, 77 (7 July 1917): 2; Johnson, "Marietta Serves Coffee," 31-33, 132.

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buildings and even the literature of the period. While Urban was concerned with historical accuracy, he was more interested in the inner expression and meaning of a scene. In a 1913 interview Urban stated:

> 'Stimmung' (atmosphere) in the stage setting is the main thing and it can only be attained if the atmosphere, the mood, of the piece is grasped. Thus the stage director may, in a certain respect, become the commentator upon the poet or the composer, but on no account may he [the stage director] become his slave.[6]

After completing his research Urban produced scaled watercolor elevations and plans for each scene. These were precise descriptions of the material, space and colors of the set. The studio scene painters would use these drawings to create a model of each set which was tested under the appropriate lights. After Urban approved the models, construction on the actual sets began. While Urban only created the initial sketches he continually checked on the design as it developed to insure that it met his original intentions. Urban remained involved with the sets, supervising the lighting, working with the stage directors and technicians through the opening of a show.

By 1924-25 he had begun to collaborate with other designers including his daughter and Hermann Rosse on creating sets for a production.[7] Urban spent increasingly less time

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[6]"Josef [sic] Urban: The New Force at the Opera," *Boston Evening Transcript*, 6 April 1912, sec. 3, p. 3.

[7]Gretl Urban Tape 2, (magnetic tapes), Production File Box 46, Joseph Urban Collection; *Louie the 14th*, and *Annie Dear* programs Billy Rose Theater Collection, Lincoln Center Library

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at the scenic design studio, going there usually only in the evening to check on progress.

The New York Architecture Office: 5 E. 57th Street

The size and exact organizational structure of Urban's architecture office is unknown. By 1929, however, the office consisted of about five architects, an engineer and office manager.[8] Architects Irvin L. Scott and Otto Teegen as well as office manager Sue Goldklang apparently worked for Urban from the very beginning.[9] Other architects who worked for Urban included William Muschenheim, Shepard Vogelgesang, Donald Douglas, Elroy Webber and probably Wolfgang Hoffmann. Initially Scott ran Urban's office in Palm Beach, Florida,

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for the Performing Arts; Ashby Deering, "Gretl Urban Makes Her Debut As Scenic Artist of 'Louie the 14th,'" *Morning Telegraph*, 22 March 1925, sec. 1, p. 4; "Urban's Successor," *Morning Telegraph*, 29 June 1924, sec. 1, p. 3.

[8]"The Reminiscences of William Muschenheim," 30, 48-49.

[9]Irvin Scott (1896-1952) received his architecture degree from Cornell University in 1923; after travelling on scholarship to Europe and Africa he joined Urban's office in 1926. After Urban's death in 1933, Scott, together with Otto Teegen, managed the office until 1941. He then joined the Army, becoming project manager for the development of bases in Newfoundland. At the conclusion of World War II he became a partner in the firm of Shreve, Lamb & Harmon Associates. "Irvin L. Scott Dies." Otto Teegen (1900-1983) received his M.Arch. from Harvard University and joined Urban's office in 1926. After his partnership with Scott dissolved in 1941 he worked for Ely Jacques Kahn and then became architect for the State University of New York from 1949 until his retirement in 1964, "Otto J. Teegen;" Gretl Urban Tape ; "Scott 'Inherits' Urban Fame."

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Teegen oversaw the Ziegfeld Theater construction and Urban commuted between Florida and New York.[10] After the completion of the Palm Beach projects, Scott returned to New York where he was the associate in the office, while Teegen continued to supervise construction in the field.[11]

Urban revised but did not significantly alter his methods of design in his switch from theater to architecture. This accommodated the typical architectural design and construction phases of preliminary design, design development and construction documents. He believed that the architect should have total control over all aspects of design and construction with every detail conforming to an overall scheme. In a 1930 interview Urban stated:

> An architect to do justice to his constructions, must do as much as he can himself, and personally supervise whatever is beyond his powers. He must know the problems of ventilation. He must intimidate the plumber until that wretch distributes his pipes in keeping with the general scheme. He must sketch, plan and consult on every detail, and the more of an expert he is in all the related fields, the more unity will he achieve.[12]

Urban often explored different versions of a design before settling on one scheme. The Metropolitan Opera House design had a least twelve different schemes.[13] More frequently, however, Urban seemed to quickly come up with the basic plan

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[10]Gretl Urban Tape 2.

[11]"Scott 'Inherits' Urban Fame."

[12]Codie, "Excels Because He Does Not Specialize," p. 9.

[13]Portfolios 6, 9, 11, 16, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, 25, 28, Joseph Urban Collection.

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or spatial arrangement of the building while having alternate versions of the facade. Typically, as at the Ziegfeld Theater and New School, Urban moved from a preliminary design with stark contrasts of colors and parts to a final plan with a more integrated coloristic and formal solution.[14]

Urban associated with such established firms as Thomas Lamb for the Ziegfeld Theater and George B. Post and Sons for the International Magazine Building during the first years of his practice. By 1929, however, Urban had gained enough experience to administer projects solely through his own office, although he would frequently rely on consultants for acoustics.[15]

During the first few years of his practice there was a degree of collaboration between the scenic studio and the architecture office. Gradually, however, Urban placed increased emphasis on his architectural practice. In a 1928-1929 interview he stated:

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[14]For the first version of the Ziegfeld Theater facade see "Ziegfeld Theater," call #MWEZ+ n.c. 23,703; Roll 148, Thomas Lamb Collection. For initial version of New School elevation see Portfolio 26, Joseph Urban Collection.

[15]Floyd Rowe Watson consulted on the New School acoustics, Floyd Rowe Watson to Joseph Urban, 21 June 1930, TL, "Johnson," Production File Box 17; G. T. Stanton on the Palace of the Soviets, Urban to G. T. Stanton, 11 February 1932, TL, Portfolio 1; both in Joseph Urban Collection.

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> But now I don't do anything but architecture any more, except the designs for the Metropolitan Opera House and Ziegfeld's Follies. The rest of the time I do the work I like, modern architecture.[16]

Urban's interest in his architecture stemmed from the significance he placed upon the profession. He viewed it as the preeminent art to which everything else was subordinate.[17]

The most extensive description of the office and Urban's working procedures comes from William Jordy's 1985 interview with William Muschenheim, who worked for the office from 1929 until Urban's death in 1933. Muschenheim came to the office after studying at Peter Behrens' Master School of Architecture at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. A recent graduate, he had only worked for one firm prior to Urban's. In the office, Muschenheim was responsible for developing the color schemes for the New School interiors and the Century of Progress exhibition. When asked to describe the office, Muschenheim replied:

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[16]"Urban Once Built for Stage, But Now He Builds Buildings," *Paris Herald*, undated clipping, Portfolio 36, Joseph Urban Collection.

[17]"Architecture--great architecture--is always representative of its own age and the theatre artist is forced to adjust himself to the physical limitations the architect sets for him." "By Joseph Urban Chairman of the exhibition of the Arts of the Theatre," 1933, TMs, "Remarks by J.U.," Production File Box 26, Joseph Urban Collection, 2.

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> Well he had that office in the rear, that you evidently have seen photographs of, and then we were at the front of the building which had windows on three sides. That was a drafting room. Irving [sic] Scott was sort of in charge there, the way Alexander Popp was in the Behrens school. And then there was an engineer--I just can't remember the name at the moment--and there was a secretary who was absolutely devoted to Urban.[18]

Muschenheim recalled little or no interaction with the scenic design studio, although he did remember Urban showing him sketches for sets.[19]

Muschenheim claimed that Urban rarely interfered once he had given someone responsibility for a job. In the interview Muschenheim claimed sole responsibility for the color schemes of the New School and Century of Progress exhibition. Muschenheim undoubtedly deserves credit for developing and refining these innovative schemes.[20] Most of the

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[18]"The Reminiscences of William Muschenheim," 48-49.

[19]Ibid., 23-24. While the scenic design studio was working on murals for night club spaces designed by the architecture office during this period it is likely that Urban or Scott probably coordinated work between the two office.

[20]Muschenheim came to Urban's office because he admired Urban's work with color, ibid., 20-21, 28.

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preliminary design work for the New School, however, had already been completed, including the color scheme for the exterior of the building and the auditorium, when Muschenheim started at the office.[21] New School President Alvin Johnson, furthermore, credits Urban with defining the overall principles of the building's color scheme.[22] During the planning of the Century of Progress exhibition, Urban's increasingly deteriorating health forced him to take a less active role in the implementation of the color scheme. Yet, according to Otto Teegen, who was the field supervisor for the office in Chicago, Urban was heavily involved with the development of the color scheme.

> His last view of the grounds had been in the previous September, when no more than five of the buildings were erected, painting had not been started, and the landscape was a barren waste. At this memorable conference we went

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[21]Ibid., 25.

[22]Johnson, *Pioneer's Progress*, 322.

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> over all the details of the color and lighting of the buildings, now numbering close to a hundred--the elevations, plans, and locations of which he had been able to study only on blueprints. Yet there was not a single detail in that entire discussion, lasting two days, which he did not visualize immediately and exactly. He knew the colors and their locations on each building and gave full instructions as to how he wished them to be lighted so as to obtain the best effect at night. He had a picture in his mind which with all our efforts and tolerable success we failed to equal.[23]

Teegen's description and Muschenheim's reminiscences provide insight into Urban's working method. He delegated responsibility and seldom intervened in someone's work yet retained full control over the design and his aesthetic and symbolic aims. Urban stated in an interview:

> The trouble with modern architecture...is that too much of it is piece work, without sufficient conformity to one general design. If a building is to reflect the efforts of artistic planning, it must be harmonious up to the minutest detail. It is artistic blasphemy to entrust the ventilation, plumbing, decoration and even fitting to separate contractors. The result of such rashness is bound to be a clashing of effect which practically cries aloud for adjustment. Personally I could not live, work or breathe in such a house.[24]

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[23]Teegen, "Joseph Urban's Philosophy of Color," 271. William Muschenheim's article on the Century of Progress Color Scheme relies heavily on the terminology and theory that Urban had developed in his set designs. See: William Muschenheim, "The Color of the Exposition," *Architectural Forum*, 59 (July 1934): 2-4, and compare with "Chicago Fair," [1933], TMs, "Remarks by J.U.," Production File Box 26, Joseph Urban Collection.

[24]Codie, "Excels Because He Does Not Specialize," p. 9.

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From 1928 on Urban increasingly transferred the functions formerly performed by the Yonkers studio over to his architecture office.[25] This transferral with its accompanying shift in formal and symbolic implications, can be most clearly be seen in a detailed examination of two of Urban's most central themes, color and light.

Color

Color played a key role in Urban's set designs. "Urban blue", a deep blue-green composed of various tones, was his signature color. A vivid and innovative use of all colors, however, characterized the sets. Urban frequently used one color as the key to a scene, expressing both the mood of the action as well as the locale in which it took place. In sets for Offenbach's *Tales of Hoffmann*, Urban used gold for the house of Spalanzani, purple and bluish-green for Venice, and grayish blue for the house of Antonia (fig. 3). Contrastingly colored objects, costumes or spotlights within a scene would signal specific characters or recurring thematic motifs.

Urban used colors in his sets to signal emotions or moods. According to one reviewer he "has worked with colors, canvas and a new technique suited to his new purposes, in playing on our emotions through a sense of color and

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[25]The 1933 Arts of Theater exhibition was assembled and laid out in the 57th Street office rather than in Yonkers. "Arts of the Theatre," *New York Evening Post*, 11 February 1933.

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proportion."[26] Urban felt that there was an intrinsic link between color and music. In a 1912 interview he stated:

> ...the color scheme...is in the music, as you would probably agree. It should be duly accentuated on the stage by certain harmonious effects. Modern artists are appreciating more and more the intimate concordance between color and sound.[27]

Urban's belief in color's symbolic potential and its relation to sound came out of his knowledge of German color theory. Goethe, in the *Zur Farbenlehre*, proposed a physiological approach to color, but frequently imbued certain shades with symbolic properties and moods and discussed the potential parallels between combinations of color and musical harmony.[28] This was further developed at the turn-of-the-century by artists such as Wassily Kandinsky, who sought to define consonances between specific colors and sounds.[29] Yet Urban's approach to color never approached the specificity of Kandinsky. For instance, Urban's use of purple and blue grey to define the Venetian scene in the *Tales of Hoffmann* evoked multiple associations:

> Before had come the wondrous Venetian scene with its suggestion not merely of the Venice of poetic imagination but of colors born of it that Veronese and Tintoretto set on their canvases, that Rubens divined out of the opulence of his mind and spirit in the Flemish north.

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[26]"Settings at the Opera," sec. 3, p, 6.

[27]K.M., "The Reopening Opera," sec. 3, p. 2.

[28]Goethe, *Zur Farbenlehre*.

[29]Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, intro. and trans. M. T. H. Sadler (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1977), 23-45.

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> And since we are of the twentieth century; there must be a suggestion of Beardsley, too, in dwarfed and ape-like minstrel twanging at his lute.[30]

In the Venetian scene, color suggested richness and fantasy with a whiff of decadence.

Urban used color in a similar way for his interior designs of the 1910s. Night clubs were usually decorated in a combination of gold, blue and black, suggesting luxury, festivity and exoticism. Urban continued to use color in this manner for some of his first architectural commissions of the 1920s. Blue, green, gold and black dominated the 1927 Ziegfeld Theater interior (fig. 6). Urban used the decorations and colors to subtly emphasize the domed oval shape of the auditorium space, but even more importantly to evoke an appropriate response from the audience.

> The closer the contact between the players and the audience, the more festive the mood and the more the audience feels part of the whole occasion. Therefore the decoration of this particular theatre is a part of the gay, colorful happenings on the stage and not, as is usually the case, a stiff, architectonic affair, which coldly and disdainfully withdraws from the stage picture. The audience should join the play: and when everything laughs and scintillates in the brilliance of the stage, the entire auditorium should share in the laughter and with its own brilliance help carry the mood to its peak.[31]

With his architectural interiors, Urban shifted from a purely symbolic use of color that had dominated his stage sets, to a more psychological application, using the moods and response

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[30]"The Opera Outdoes Itself," *Boston Evening Transcript*, 26 November 1912.

[31]Urban, "Happiness Depicted," 12.

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which he felt colors evoked to make the audience receptive to the products being offered. As early as 1915, store and shop designers had developed color schemes to enhance and sell the objects on display.[32] By the mid 1920s, theater managers had also picked up on the psychological effects of color. Movie theater trade magazines featured articles describing colors, their effects and how they could be best used in a theater interior. Color, one such 1926 article claimed was a key component in creating the desired atmosphere at a theater.

> In itself as pure and exquisite a pleasure as music, color, with its power to attract attention, to stimulate emotion, to cheer and animate, or quiet and subdue, can be made to create and build up a suitable atmosphere for any situation.[33]

In Urban's early architectural commissions, figurative murals or painted decoration played an important role in establishing the color scheme of a space. In a manner similar to John Eberson's use of historic architectural quotations combined with an illusionistic sky in his atmospheric movie theaters, first introduced in 1923, the Ziegfeld theater mural depicted medieval figures, castles and villages. Although the mural itself had "no story to tell", the presence of figures

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[32]In 1914 the New York store McCreery's hired artist Joseph Cummings Chase to redecorate the store and plan and supervise the windows, main-floor decorations and interior color schemes, Joseph Cummings Chase, *Face Value: Autobiography of the Portrait Painter* (New York: Rolton House, 1962), 57; Joseph Cummings Chase, *Artist Talks* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1933), 12-13; Leach, "Strategies of Display," 119-129.

[33]Jack Savage, "Color Important in Achieving Coolness During Summer," *Exhibitors Herald, Better Theatres Section*, 15 May 1926, 53-54.

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and buildings could allow the viewer to construct a narrative linking the various depicted objects (fig. 6).[34] While such narrative elements were helpful in stage sets as symbolic features or to move the action along, Urban quickly realized that they were less necessary for establishing a mood for a space. By 1929, he had largely switched to using decorative floral and foliate patterning in his spaces. He described his reasons for this shift in a 1929 proposal for the Kaufmann Department store in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania:

> An office building of gigantic proportions, with corridors fifty feet high and hundreds of feet long, with numerous elevators and thousands of people passing through, should not be decorated with allegorical or mythological subjects which would require time and space for study and enjoyment.
>
> When hurrying through the streets, of all the beautiful shop windows the most attractive is the florists, filled with beautiful flowers. One can rush by and, without being diverted from his thoughts, can still catch a glimpse and enjoy the beauty of the color and the form of the flowers.[35]

This use of pattern was particularly appropriate for the stores, restaurants and night clubs that Urban designed. Urban selected colors and patterns which would enhance the patron and establish a receptive mood for the consumption of food, drink or entertainment (fig. 59).

> Colors play a most conspicuous part in securing desired results. They must please the eye, enhance the beauty of women, stimulate the appetite by making food attractive,

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[34]Urban "Happiness Depicted," p. 12.

[35]Teegen, "Joseph Urban's Philosophy of Color," 258.

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> promote gaiety, and in a broad sense be striking in novelty.[36]

Color schemes for these architectural commissions must have been coordinated between the scenic and architectural studios. By 1929-1930, however, Urban increasingly abandoned pattern for either planes of color or black glass reflective surfaces. In 1929 Urban hired William Muschenheim, who recalled having little if any interaction with the scenic studio, indicating that color had become the property of the architecture office.[37]

In these later projects Urban would typically use one color per surface. Different walls, projecting and recessing planes within the same space, however, would each be painted a different tone, creating a complex system of color within a single room. Urban's colors tended to be highly sophisticated customized mixes, rather than pure tones. His overall palette was bright.[38]

Teegen and others frequently alluded to but never defined Urban's methods of creating a palette and his knowledge and use of color theory. Urban's most definitive statement about

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[36]Untitled typescript on color, n.d., TMs, "Excerpts from Magazines," Production File Box 15, Joseph Urban Collection, 2-3.

[37]"The Reminiscences of William Muschenheim," 23-24.

[38]Portfolio 7, for color schemes of various rooms at New School; Jeanette Kilham, "Potentialities of Paint in Interior Design," *Architectural Progress*, November 1930, clipping in Portfolio 35 pt. 1, both in Joseph Urban Collection.

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color reveals his background in theater and his transformation of that experience into architecture:

> Every color like a sound has a specific quality, a value of its own and these qualities modify each other in combination. Their relations, like that of sounds produces a certain atmosphere. Colors and combinations of colors create tension or they create repose. They can be played contrastly, composed as the notes of a scale are composed until a whole is achieved which, like a symphony, can be translated in no other media or expression.[39]

This later interpretation of color acknowledges the multiple possibilities of color operating on psychological, symbolic and formal levels. While Urban states that colors have "specific qualities", his discussions of individual projects never define what those qualities are but instead always stress the overall relationship between colors. By refusing to link a color with specific emotions or symbols Urban returned to the roots of his color theory in Goethe's *Farbenlehre*. The interpretative, contingent quality of color, as it combines with other tones to create atmospheres which cannot be translated into any other media also suggests color's playful, fantastic quality. The German critic Walter Benjamin, best defined this understanding in a 1926 essay:

> In short: pure color is the instrument of fantasy, the land of dreams for a child lost in games, and not the rigid canon built by artists.[40]

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[39]Urban "Chicago Fair," 2.

[40]Walter Benjamin "Pouring Over Children's Books," quoted in Manlio Brusatin, *A History of Colors*, trans. Robert H. Hopcke and Paul Schwartz (Boston: Shambala, 1991), 148. This is also echoed in Albers, *Interaction of Color*, 2: "What counts here - first and last - is not so-called knowledge of so-called

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Urban's most sophisticated use of color was at the 1931 New School and the 1933 Century of Progress Exposition. In these projects he continued to use color expressively. He wanted to create a "spirit of carnival" through strong, clear direct pigments at the Century of Progress.[41] At the New School he used subdued grays, dark blues and pale yellow to create an appropriate area for study in the library, or vibrant blues, reds, greens and oranges for the activity of the dance studio.

Urban, however, also started to use colors for new purposes in these projects. Color at the New School and Century of Progress, began to function architectonically to shape, create and define space, as well as to clarify the direction of movement through the building and the program of its spaces.[42] Urban's use of color at the New School reflects the influence of a more formalist approach to color practiced by such artists as El Lissitzky and others

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facts, but vision - seeing. Seeing here implies Schauen (as in Weltanschauung) and is coupled with fantasy, with imagination." The most significant architectural writing on color during the 1920s was Léon Solon, *Polychromy; architectural and structural, theory and practice* (New York: The Architectural Record, 1924). Solon's book differed from Urban's theories in that he stressed traditional architectural values of color, where color could occur, what architectural readings it should relate to, and historical color schemes, such as a "Greek" color palette.

[41]Urban, "Chicago Fair," 1.

[42]Teegen, "Joseph Urban's Philosophy of Color," 261; see also Chapter 3.

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associated with International Constructivism.[43] Yet despite these shifts in his handling of color, Urban's color schemes were rooted in theater and renewed by theater's inspiration. His use of color became a major component of his architectural work and inspired Raymond Hood, Ely Jacques Kahn and others. At first, Urban's evocation of a mood through color in architecture created pleasing environments for consumption. Gradually, color not only enticed but set up its own formal system of signification. By the time of this transformation, color was no longer coordinated with the scenic studio but intensely studied and defined within the architecture office.

Light

The invention of electric lighting revolutionized the theater. Electricity made possible a variety of effects in terms of color, intensity and placement of lights.[44] Urban's experience as a set designer in Europe had exposed him to the latest visual and technical innovations in theater, particularly the work and theories of Adolph Appia. Urban was one of the first set designers in the United States to explore and present the visual possibilities of electric light in his

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[43]Which he could have seen as early as 1924 in the "International Exhibition of New Theater Techniques," see Chapter 1.

[44]Richard and Helen Leacroft, *Theatre and Playhouse* (London: Methuen, 1984), 122-129.

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scenery. Urban described the significance of light for the theater.

> What we have come to know as modern stage settings can be said to have their inception with the discovery and refinement of electricity. By means of electric light a whole new world opened up to the designer. He was able to both realize things and the mask things which had been impossible before.[45]

From his initial designs for the Boston Opera in 1912 on Urban often made inventive use of light. His methods were so unusual at that time that he often held lighting rehearsals for the stage technicians before a production opened, so that they could master the complex and sometimes rapidly shifting effects.[46]

Urban's use of light in the 1916 masque *Caliban* at New York City's Lewisohn Stadium epitomizes the technical, formal and expressive possibilities of light (fig. 18).[47] Urban utilized all available types of regular and stage lights from bulbs to arc lamps. Inspired by Navy search lights, he created a powerful spot which could throw a 300-foot beam. Colored lights, spots and indirect light created environments

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[45]"By Joseph Urban Chairman of the exhibition of the Arts of the Theatre," 2.

[46]"Urban, the Ambidextrous."

[47]As Tim Rub points out in his article, "Lighting up the town," 73, the 1915 Panama-Pacific Exposition in San Francisco was extremely significant for architectural lighting designs. Urban was well aware of the exhibition; his archives contain images of the show and he recreated the "Tower of Light" at the exposition for the 1915 Follies in Scene 8 "Across the Continent," "Ziegfeld Follies 1915," Production File Box 37, Joseph Urban Collection.

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and expressed the intent of various scenes. The *New York Times* noted:

> Now the yellow sands were fairly bathed in hot sunlight as the Egyptians trod their ritual measures: now you saw only the cool, white temple of Miranda singled out of the darkness...now contrasting lights of amber, of silver and of blue played on Brutus in his tent, on his spectral visitor, and on the sky beyond. Working with a huge and wingless stage, Professor Urban looked to the lights to set his scenes and paint his landscapes. They did.[48]

Light not only illuminated and heightened the action of *Caliban*, but became an integral part of the arena's architecture. Urban designed the stage light towers and arena hourglass as sources of illumination and plastic parts of the set. Instead of using an opaque curtain to hide the sets, he created a curtain of light to keep the audience from seeing the sets until the masque began. With *Caliban*, Urban extended the possibilities of light from set design into architecture.

By the 1920s, managers of both motion picture theaters and regular theaters had realized the potential of light not only in actual theatrical productions but as an important component of the theater building.[49] In a 1926 article in a motion picture trade magazine, *Exhibitors Herald*, Jacob Gilston wrote that lighting in theaters served three purposes, the utilitarian function of providing appropriate illumination, the artistic function of creating an aesthetic

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[48]"Mackaye Masque a Rare Spectacle."

[49]For the use of lights in atmospheric theaters see Stapleford; and Leach, "Strategies of Display," 103, which identifies light as an early and significant component of marketing goods for stores.

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environment, and the dramatic function of:

> various lighting effects in color, form and intensity necessary to provide atmosphere and emotional stimulus for the musical or dramatic offering.[50]

Urban had started to think about the possibilities of using lighting techniques inspired by the theater for non-theater projects as early as the 1910s. In an article from around 1913-14, Urban speculated on the possibility of using indirect light to illuminate cities. These types of lights would, he felt, eliminate the glare of current street lights and preserve the color and shape of objects as if in day light.[51]

Urban quickly realized the potential of light for his theater architecture. He utilized both direct and indirect lights in the Ziegfeld and Paramount Theaters to create architectural focal points within the auditorium as well as to establish an appropriate mood for the production. In a 1929 description of his project for a Music Center (fig. 55), he wrote:

> The auditorium itself lives or disappears through lights. . .The decoration of this room is plastic, dependent entirely upon light to reveal it. At the time of performance it is unlighted, vanished. At the intermission it can again become apparent to divert the unoccupied gaze. Changing lights can give it movement, and colored light mood.[52]

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[50]Jacob Gilston "The Elements of Theatre Lighting," *Exhibitors Herald*, 23 January 1926, 25.

[51]"Indirect Light May Illuminate Future Cities," unidentified clipping probably from the *Christian Science Monitor*, Portfolio 37 pt. 1, Joseph Urban Collection.

[52]Urban, *Theaters*, n.p.

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Although based upon his set design experience, lighting, by 1929 had become the province of the architecture office. The 1929 Central Park Casino, used both direct and indirect light (fig. 75). Urban used a theater lighting system, flood lights, for most of the building either in glazed diffusing transoms or in metal diffusing fixtures. Lights recessed behind opal glass plates illuminated other areas. While the quality and intensity of light was unusual, the actual fixtures were still somewhat traditional. In the ballroom Urban used a conservative crystal chandelier fixture (fig. 7). His lights for the pavilion and small dining room had unusual modernist details but conformed to traditional fixture designs in their placement and overall shape (fig. 76).[53]

Urban's use of light in the Bedell Store of the same year, however, was more innovative (fig. 8).[54] Similar to *Caliban*, Urban used light for its formal and expressive possibilities. Exterior show cases with ceilings of diffused light created brilliant and softly gleaming environments which enhanced the displays. Furthermore Urban designed fixtures which functioned as architectural components of the building. On the exterior, three white fixtures projected out of the wall, like cubistic sculptures and formed a contrast with the black glass cladding of the rest of the building. Within the

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[53]"Central Park Casino," *Architectural Record* 66 (August 1929): 99, 108.

[54]Vogelgesang, "Architecture and Trade Marks," 897-900.

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vestibule, structural columns culminated in inverted bell-shaped forms with lights concealed in the edges of the bells. These fixtures acted as both sources of illumination and an important part of the architecture.[55]

With the New School, Urban achieved a successful integration of architecture, color and light. Felt by both lighting and architectural professionals to be one of the most advanced systems of architectural lighting, most fixtures at the New School were either recessed behind coves, or use simple light boxes (fig. 9).[56] Ceiling light coves in contrasting colors form the rest of the ceiling, created oscillating, vibrating planes of color and illumination that enlivened the spatial experience of the school. At the New School one was not distracted by the fixture, but rather focused upon the quality of light and the interaction between light and color. Urban had come full circle back to his earliest stage designs, yet the New School lighting treatment was handled only by the architecture office. Theater had introduced Urban to new lighting technologies, made him eager to explore each technical innovation and made him aware of

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[55]While Urban's use of light fixtures as architectural elements at the Bedell store was directly inspired by Hans Poelzig's 1919 Grosses Schauspielhaus in Berlin, his own 1916 light towers and curtain for Caliban may have also been an inspiration for this approach to light. Stern, Gilmartin, Mellins, 319, identify the Poelzig design as the sole source.

[56]Thomas A. Pilkey, "The New School for Social Research, New York - A Gem of Modern Lighting," *Lighting*, March 1931, clipping in Portfolio 35, pt. 1, Joseph Urban Collection; Vogelgesang, "The New School," February 1931, 143.

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light's ability to create an environment. Urban, at first, had heavily relied upon his theater experience to inform his handling of light in his architecture commissions. By 1929, however, Urban's exploration of light's spatial and expressive possibilities became the primary concern of his architecture office.

In both the structure of the office as well as the exploration of two important themes, color and light, Urban closely relied upon his experience as a set designer to inform his architecture. At first the scenic design studio worked closely with the office in developing color and light schemes. As his architecture practice grew, Urban increasingly relied upon his architecture office to perform these functions. Even more significant than this transferral of activities from one office to the other, was how Urban drew upon and transformed his theater experience to inform the promotion and profession of his career as an architect.

Promotion

The Cult of Personality

Urban promoted and practiced his architecture profession in a manner strikingly dissimilar to that of traditional American architects. He drew upon his "star" status in the theater and film worlds to inform his promotion of his architecture

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practice. The American theatrical and film worlds from the 1910s through the present have been dominated by "stars", leading actors, actresses and sometimes directors.[57] A star's association with a production is a key ingredient in selling it to a large, mass audience. A star's personality, both on stage and off, is frequently styled into an instantly recognizable appearance and set of personal traits. Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire are immediately recognizable from the opening frame of their 1935 movie *Top Hat* even though you only see their feet. Today, stars populate every profession including sports, politics, business and architecture.[58] While American architecture had its share of notorious personalities, initially it had little use for the "star" and little interest in attracting a large, diverse audience. The field traditionally catered to a fairly small, elite and wealthy group of patrons who commissioned designs for

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[57]Richard Koszarski, *History of American Cinema: An Evening's Entertainment: The Age of the Silent Feature Picture*, vol. 3. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1990), 259-262; Tino Balio, "Stars in Business: The Founding of United Artists," in *The American Film Industry*, ed. Tino Balio (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1976), 153-172; May, 99-146.

[58]Even the worldly profession of architecture has its stars, which are used to attract clients and sell products. Photographs of Michael Graves, Tod Williams and Billie Tsien sell clothes. For instance, see Michael Graves in a Dexter Shoe advertisement, *New York Times Magazine*, 4 October 1987, p. 47. Feature-length articles on the personal and professional life of Peter Eisenman make the work of this architect, known for his use of theory, accessible to a broad public, John Taylor, "Mr. In-Between: Deconstructing with Peter Eisenman," *New York* 21 (17 October 1988): 46-52.

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buildings. The increasingly diverse clientele of the early twentieth century, however, required different ways of selecting architects. Joseph Urban, with his background in the theater and film world radically reshaped the public persona of the architect.

The notion of personality, as the historian Warren Susman has it, is a significant component of 20th century culture.[59] During the early 20th century emphasis shifted from an individual's character, a group of traits which were both social and moral, to personality, an individual's idiosyncracies, personal needs and interests. The desire to develop this "quality of being Somebody", Susman suggests, grew out of the perception that a new order, a mass society, was emerging. Personality enabled someone to differentiate themselves from the crowd yet, at the same time, the fascination, magnetism and attractiveness of personality would also capture and hold the attention of a mass audience. The type of cultivation and promotion of a "star's" personality had strong roots in the operatic and theatrical worlds but reached new heights in the movies beginning in the 1910s. In an era in which hundreds of movies, often using standardized plots, were being made on a weekly basis, stars became one of

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[59]Warren I. Susman, "'Personality' and the Making of Twentieth-Century Culture," in *New Directions in American Intellectual History*, ed. John Higham and Paul K. Conkin (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 212-226.

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the most significant ways to attract an audience.[60] A 1927 report described the importance of stars for the economics of movies.

> In the "star" your producer gets not only a "production" value in the making of his picture, but a "trademark" value and an "insurance" value, which are very real and very potent in guaranteeing the sale of this product to the cash customers at a profit.[61]

A star's unique appeal guaranteed audiences. By the late 1910s, studios would combine pictures featuring stars with their other movies into a "block", forcing theater owners to rent the entire unit of pictures in order to have the star vehicles. The drawing power of a Mary Pickford or Douglas Fairbanks was so powerful that studios could not only use them to subsidize their other movies but eventually charge more for the privilege of renting blocks with Pickford and Fairbanks films. Film stars, therefore, not only individuated movies but through that individuation increased prices.[62]

Film studios promoted stars by altering and stylizing their personality to match that of the screens rolls they played. This was accomplished through feature articles in fan

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[60]Eileen Bowser, *History of the American Cinema: The Transformation of Cinema 1907-1915*, vol. 2 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1990), 103-108.

[61]Halsey, Stuart & Co. "Prospectus," 27 May 1927, reprinted in Balio, 204.

[62]Balio, 157-158.

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magazines, press releases and gossip columns.[63] Thus the star's personality, on screen and off, was a major aspect of promoting and selling movies.

Joseph Urban came to the United States in 1912 to work as the artistic director of the Boston Opera. During his tenure at the Boston Opera House, local newspapers frequently printed feature articles on his career, scenic studio, methods of work, as well as the evolution of designs for specific operas.[64] In interviews, Urban stressed his alignment with European modernism through his affiliation with the Vienna Secession, explained his philosophy of design, and discussed his prior achievements, particularly his European architectural commissions. These included such exotic and prestigious projects as the Abdine Palace in Cairo, Egypt, the Czar Bridge in St. Petersburg, Russia and the Esterhazy Castle in Hungary.

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[63]When Mary Pickford wanted to change her screen image from "Little Mary" to that of a more mature woman she utilized these resources in order to prepare and then gauge her audience's response. The movie *Rosita* in which she played a grown woman, was preceded by an article entitled "My Life Story" in *Ladies Home Journal* in which she linked the roll shift with her recent marriage to Douglas Fairbanks. This was followed, after the release of the movie, with a poll gauging audience response. Balio, 165-167.

[64]"Josef [sic] Urban: The New Force at the Opera," sec. 3, p. 3; H.T.P., "At the Opera House: An Annex for Rehearsal and Other Changes," *Boston Evening Transcript*, 19 October 1912, sec. 3, p. 4; "Work At The Opera House," *Boston Evening Transcript*, 9 September 1912; "Opera As a Republic," *Boston Evening Transcript*, 3 August 1912 sec. 3, p. 4.

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After the collapse of the Boston Opera in 1914, Urban was hired by Ziegfeld to design sets for the *Follies* and other productions.[65] Urban's sets for the 1915 Follies elicited such lavish critical praise and box office returns that Ziegfeld began to promote Urban in a manner similar to his other theatrical stars (fig. 77). Urban's name was prominently featured in programs, and at least a portion of each review of a new production would be devoted to a description of the sets.[66] Articles continued to describe Urban's methods of work and background, but they also began to report on his daily movements and activities including his move from Boston to Yonkers, or the arrest of his scene painters for sketching on a Boston beach during World War I.[67]

In December 1919, Urban signed a contract to design movie sets for William Randolph Hearst's Cosmopolitan Productions.[68] His employment by Hearst was seen as a sign

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[65]Ziegfeld was a master of publicity, frequently generating events to attract the press and thus sell tickets to productions and promote his stars. By 1915, Ziegfeld had a publicist who regularly placed articles in the newspapers and magazines. See Stone; Toll, *On With The Show*, 295-315; Seldes, 130-146.

[66]*Ziegfeld Follies 1915* program; Lewis, "Artistic and Aesthetic Side;" "Art in 'The Follies'," *Boston Evening Transcript*, 29 June 1915, p. 21.

[67]Rennold Wolf, "Urban's New Home," *Morning Telegraph*, 21 March 1917; Wolf, "Urban's Artists Mistaken," 14.

[68]Louella Parsons, "Joseph Urban Engaged," *Morning Telegraph*, 14 December 1919, p. 4.

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of the film industry's increased interest in movies as an art form. Part of film's potential to be the greatest twentieth century artistic field, critics believed, lay in the fact that it attracted a large mass audience, far more numerous and diverse than that of opera, theater, art or architecture. Urban emphasized this in a 1920 interview.

> The motion picture offers incomparably the greatest field to any creative artist of the brush or blue-print today. It is the art of the Twentieth Century, and perhaps the greatest art of modern times.[69]

As a movie set designer, many agreed, Urban had the opportunity to shape the artistic and architectural sensibilities of a widespread American public.

Urban's sets were highly successful and diverse. He designed atmospheric evocations of historic architecture for period spectacles, modern Viennese-influenced spaces for current movies and futurist sets for fantasies. While Urban stated that his film designs were meant to complement the actors, they frequently, stole the show. A 1922 review of *When Knighthood Was in Flower* commented:

> This picture shows that artistic movies don't have to come from Germany or any place else--no, not by a long shot, while we have "The Cabinet of Dr. Urban" on this side of the water.
>
> Marion Davies is featured in this film, but as is the case in most of his pictures, Joseph Urban simply gallops away as the star.[70]

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[69]Johnson, "Marietta Serves Coffee," 33.

[70]"On the Screens in City Theatres," *New York Sun*, 15 September 1922, p. 16.

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By 1922, magazines were reporting that Urban sets had a significant effect on public taste, offering lessons in interior design by showing audiences modern, artistic interiors.

Urban's name became a key ingredient in marketing Cosmopolitan Productions movies. Promotional brochures described in detail the expense, size and detail of the sets. Movie brochures, advertisements and even theater marquees prominently featured his name along with those of the actors and director.[71] In 1921, the *Morning Telegraph* related that the phrase "Settings by Joseph Urban" had been prominently displayed in electric lights on the marquis of the Criterion Theater.

> It signalled the complete "arrival" of Urban as a factor in screencraft and marked the first time an art director has been accorded recognition. . . .[72]

The success and popularity of Urban's sets encouraged Cosmopolitan Productions to promote Urban in a manner similar to its star actors and actresses. Urban's name guaranteed the audience of a Cosmopolitan movie a truly artistic set. Carefully crafted versions of Urban's biography, descriptions of his house, office and personality began to appear in newspapers and magazines. Cosmopolitan took Urban's former

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[71]See promotional booklet for *When Knighthood Was in Flower*, Billy Rose Theater Collection, Lincoln Center Library for the Performing Arts; advertisement of *Enchantment*, *Morning Telegraph*, 30 October 1921, p. 5.

[72]"Urban Starred On Broadway in Electric Lights," *Morning Telegraph*, 20 March 1921, p. 4.

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European architectural career and condensed it into a careful formula of nobility, exoticism and modernism. This biography appeared in fan magazines such as *Photoplay Magazine*, press releases, gossip columns by Louella Parsons and even art journals. These articles were frequently accompanied by photographs or drawings of Urban, often showing him in his studio at work.[73] Ultimately Urban himself became somewhat of a movie star making a cameo appearance with other celebrities such as Ziegfeld and Otto Kahn in the 1929 movie *Glorifying the American Girl*, as well as being represented after his death in the 1936 movie, *The Great Ziegfeld*.

Widespread public knowledge of Urban's biography meant that the audiences could expect certain qualities in his movie designs. It also grounded and interpreted sets which might have otherwise been thought of as bizarre or foreign. The appeal of Urban's film sets was so great that it stimulated public desire to experience an Urban space. Urban stated:

> My return to architectural work was by an unusual avenue. No architect can hope to succeed if he constructs buildings at the touch. But it was just such unsubstantial buildings that gave me some standing as an architect and led me back once more to my original work. The castles, houses and other counterfeit buildings that I designed for the movies were produced in magazines and brought my name to the fore.[74]

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[73]Johnson, "Marietta Serves Coffee;" Percival F. Reniers, "Urban a New Recruit for Motion Pictures," *New York Evening Post*, 3 July 1920, p. 6M; Sayler, "Urban, of the Opera," 39, 72; F. E. W. Freund, "Joseph Urban Scenic Artist," *International Studio* 76 (January 1923): 357-359.

[74]Codie, "Excels Because He Does Not Specialize," p. 9.

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Hearst moved his movie production company to California in 1924. For over a year Urban commuted between the two coasts, as Hearst tried to persuade him to settle permanently in California. By late 1925, however, Urban had decided not to move to California but, instead, open an architecture office in New York. In December 1926 Urban leased and occupied an office from Douglas L. Elliman & Co. in 5 East 57th Street, a new twenty-one story office tower.[75] Urban credited a Dallas couple, the Camps, as being his first patrons when they commissioned him to recreate a house from his sets for the film *Zander the Great*. Their commission, which was never built, was just one of several job possibilities including the Ziegfeld Theater, several Palm Beach buildings and the Metropolitan Opera at this time.[76] Together these projects provided enough work to support an architecture office. Urban's inauguration of his American architecture practice was unusual in the amount of media interest it generated. Some

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[75]"Architectural Offices Leased," *New York Commercial*, 1 December 1926.

[76]Codie, "Excels Because He Does Not Specialize," p. 9. Urban was working on the Ziegfeld Theater since June 1925, "Gossip of the Stage and Screen," *New York Evening Post*, 1 July 1925, p. 12; the Metropolitan Opera House since February 1926, Stern, Gilmartin, Mellins, 621, and Otto Kahn to Edward Ziegler, 28 February 1926, TL, "Metropolitan Opera File - 1926," Otto Kahn Archives, Firestone Library, Princeton, University. Urban had been involved with the design of the Marjorie Merriweather Post House, Mar-a-lago, since the Spring of 1925 and possibly also the Bath and Tennis Club. See Brown.

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newspapers ran articles entitled "Joseph Urban, Once Architect, Becomes Architect Again."[77]

A June 25, 1927 profile on Urban published in *The New Yorker* demonstrated Urban's ability to utilize his "star" status as an architect.[78] "Caprice Viennois" was written by Urban's colleague from the theatrical world, Kenneth MacGowan. It was part of a series of articles featuring such well-known people as Otto Kahn and Arturo Toscanini. In a manner similar to movie-star fan magazines, or the current *People Magazine*, the profiles provided an intimate and seemingly immediate account of a celebrity's personality, background, daily activities and interests. Urban was only the second architect to be "profiled" by *The New Yorker*; the first was Ralph Adams Cram, who was featured in a very stiff and formal article in 1926.[79]

MacGowan repeated Urban's by-then standard biography but stressed his personal response to those events, his physical presence and personality. MacGowan opened the article with a vivid description of Urban as soft and indolent with a strong Viennese accent. He then added to this portrait:

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[77]Brock, "Joseph Urban, Once Architect."

[78]MacGowan, "Profile: Caprice Viennois," 21-23.

[79]"Profiles: Seven Centuries Late," *New Yorker* 2 (13 March 1926): 15-16. An article on Cass Gilbert in another magazine appeared at around the same time as the Urban profile, W. Tittle, "Creator of the Woolworth Tower," *World's Work* 54 (May 1927): 96-102. These articles, to my knowledge, are the earliest feature stories on living American architects in general literary magazines.

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> Nobody that I know in the theatre has so much personal charm independent of good looks. Something between a Sachertorte, a Viennese evening sky, and a friendly Bernhardinerhund.
>
> And yet Joseph Urban has the vitality of two or three athletes and the assiduity of an endurance flier.[80]

If breezy in tone, the narrative subtly stresses several facets of Urban's life which help build an image of him as an architect. MacGowan folds into the standard biography statements which suggest Urban's knowledge, ability and commitment to architecture. When MacGowan describes Urban's 1896 commission for the Abdine Palace in Cairo, he manages to insert Urban's academic qualifications as a graduate of Vienna's technical and design schools into the narrative.[81] MacGowan also emphasizes Urban's lifelong commitment to modernism. He describes Urban's affiliation with the modern art movement in turn-of-the-century Vienna, his sponsorship and design of the 1922 New York Wiener Werkstätte showroom in order to indicate that Urban's current involvement with modern aesthetics is not just a reflection of the latest fashion but a lifelong concern.

MacGowan concludes the article by suggesting Urban's potential to create innovative modern American architecture.

> ...Urban's own office is a model of tasteful originality, all of a chaste white, set off with a fine black-beaded

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[80]MacGowan, "Profiles: Caprice Viennois," 21.

[81]"And so at twenty-three, well acquainted with girders and gutters but with one year still to go in the Academy, Urban got his first commission and departed for Cairo to decorate the Abdine Palace for the young Khedive." Ibid.

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> molding. Given opportunity and intelligent patronage, Urban should vitalize American architecture with a freshness, a daring, and a dramatic appropriateness which it lacks.[82]

MacGowan's narrative allowed the reader intimate contact with Urban. At the conclusion of the profile readers were meant to feel as if they had been personally introduced to the actual man. Accounts such as this encouraged interest in Urban and thus a desire to see and perhaps even commission one of his designs.

Feature-length articles about Urban continued to appear throughout the remainder of his career. These followed the tone established by MacGowan in trying to capture Urban's appearance, voice and surroundings as the writer interviewed him about his career and current projects. Urban's aura was so powerful that one reporter, somewhat ironically, settled for describing the office and interviewing Urban's office manager, Sue Goldklang, for a feature on an upcoming Architectural League exhibition that Urban was organizing.[83] The reporter only caught a glimpse of Urban through his private office door as Goldklang ran in and out of the room.

The media seemingly kept track of Urban's every move, reporting on trips abroad and even his social life.[84] Lists

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[82]Ibid., 23.

[83]"Arts of The Theatre."

[84]For example: "Reception Awaits Roerich," *New York Times*, 16 June 1929, reports Urban's attendance; "Many Events Mark Unusually Lively Newport Weekend," *New York Evening Post*, 22 July 1929 documents Urban's visit to Newport, Rhode Island

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published in newspapers of Urban's dinner guests could range from socialite Tony Biddle to architects Raymond Hood and Frank Lloyd Wright.

Intense public interest in a celebrity and the promotion of that interest was standard for figures in the dramatic world. This attention, however, was highly unusual for architects. For the first half of the nineteenth century, American architects were regarded as little better than tradesmen. They had little formal education, and generally came from low to middle class backgrounds. H. H. Richardson was one of the first American architects to receive attention in the form of articles and books. Marianna Griswold Van Rensselaer published a monograph on Richardson's life in 1888.[85] She recounted his background, career and aspects of his personality. Van Rensselaer's biography linked Richardson's design methods, buildings and personality into a cohesive whole. The book, however, was not written until after Richardson's death. None of the articles or books published about his work during his life discussed his

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with Tony Biddle, Portfolio 33, Joseph Urban Collection; "Urban Seeks Advice From Art Builders," *New York Telegraph*, 31 July 1927, details Urban's plans for his European trip; "Give Dinner Dance for Max Reinhardt," *New York Times*, 28 November 1927 describes Urban's attendance at a dinner for Reinhardt at the St. Regis Hotel, New York City, Portfolio 34, Joseph Urban Collection.

[85]Marianna Griswold Van Rensselaer, *Henry Hobson Richardson* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and company, 1888).

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personality or biography.[86] Richard Morris Hunt also helped to change the American architect's status. Similar to Richardson, Hunt was educated at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and descended from a wealthy and aristocratic family, was sought after for his professional and artistic services as well as for his social skills and cultivated manner. Hunt and Richardson established a role model for the American architect that was followed by members of the succeeding generation including architects Charles McKim, Stanford White, Cass Gilbert and James Russell Pope. These architects often came from patrician or highly educated families, they attended college and belonged to elite social organizations. Clients were not only business acquaintances but often friends, colleagues and relatives drawn from their family circle, schools or clubs. This increased interest in an architect's background, social skills and education placed a growing emphasis on his biography and personality.[87]

Articles written about a living architect might give a skeletal outline of birth, education, and significant commissions, but they primarily describe a building and its

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[86]Henry Van Brunt, "The New Dispensation in Monumental Art," *Atlantic Monthly* 43 (May 1879): 633-641; *Austin Hall, Harvard Law School, Cambridge, Mass., Monographs of American Architecture* I (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1885); *Description of Drawings for the Proposed New County Buildings for Allegheny County, Penn.* (Boston: Printed for Private Circulation, 1884).

[87]Andrew Saint, *The Image of the Architect* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 72-95. See also Paul Baker, *Richard Morris Hunt* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1980).

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sources without reference to biography or personality. Very few articles, for instance, appeared on the work of McKim, Mead & White during the lifetimes of the main partners. Those which did appeared in architectural journals and discussed the building, and perhaps the firm's design philosophy. The personalities of the partners were totally subsumed in their work.[88]

After Charles McKim's death in 1909, a number of biographical articles appeared in such periodicals as *Current Literature*, *The Nation*, and *Harper's Weekly*.[89] Colleagues, friends and employees contributed anecdotes concerning McKim's working method, relationships with clients, and dedication to projects like the establishment of the American Academy in Rome. Buildings such as the Pierpont Morgan Library and Pennsylvania Station became expressions of his architectural ideals and determined, intellectual and refined personality.

This suggests that the architect's personality was a privileged commodity available only to a few. McKim's partner Stanford White was noted for his exuberant temperament. White used his personality to attract clients, persuade them to

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[88]Henry W. Desmond and Herbert Croly, 'The Work of Messrs. McKim, Mead & White," *Architectural Record* 20 (September 1906): 153-206.

[89]*Current Literature* 47 (November 1909): 522-527; *Harper's Weekly* 53 (October 1909): 31; *The Nation* 89 (23 September 1909): 287-288; and particularly Charles, Moore, *The Life and Times of Charles Follen McKim* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1929); and Brown, Glenn, "Personal Reminiscences of Charles Follen McKim," *Architectural Record* 38 (November 1915): 575-582.

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conform with his architectural ideals and above all make a lot of money for the firm. An acquaintance described the allure exuded by White toward his clients:

> His relation to the merchant class and to the swell mob was of a personal, galvanic kind. He excited them, he buffaloed them, he met them on all sides at once.[90]

These remarks also suggest why architects were reluctant to fully exploit personality. Having a strong personal aura, the author hints, was somewhat lower class.[91] White's notorious death in 1906 and the subsequent scandal concerning his private life undoubtedly reinforced the profession's hesitancy and distaste for publicity.[92] The lesson of Stanford White for American architects must have suggested that publicity, interest in biography and personality were not only low class but extremely dangerous for good business.

This negative attitude toward personality was shared by Frank Lloyd Wright. During the initial decade of his career, Wright had an ambivalent attitude toward the emphasis upon an

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[90]John Jay Chapman, "McKim, Mead and White: Especially Concerning the Influence of Stanford White on American Architecture," *Vanity Fair* 13 (September 1919): 37, 102, 104.

[91]This is echoed in a description of White as having: "lowered his standards to the ignorance and vanity of a wealthy but half-educated clientele..." "The Artist in Our World," *The Nation* 83 (July 1907): 5-6 and reprinted in *American Architecture and Building News* 90 (7 July 1906): 6.

[92]As a result of White's notoriety, McKim had a breakdown causing him to retire from practice. Many former friends and colleagues were reluctant to be publicly associated with White and the firm suffered economically. Leland M. Roth, *McKim, Mead & White, Architects* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), 333-334.

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architect's personality. Wright had successfully promoted himself during this period through lectures, publications and exhibitions. As an artist, Wright allowed a sense of his personality to enter into his professional persona both in the highly individual style of his writing and in the structure and location of his office, a studio of apprentices attached to his home.[93] Yet if Wright allowed a sense of his personality to shape his public identity as an architect, he was also extremely wary of it. In a 1900 lecture, "The Architect", Wright suggested that a prominent personality got in the way of a good architectural practice.[94] Similar to McKim, Mead & White, Wright also learned the negative lessons of public interest in his peroneal life. His career almost ended because of his desertion of his family in 1909, the sensational murder of his companion Mamah Borthwick Cheney in 1914, and equally notorious divorce from his second wife Miriam Noel during the 1920s.[95]

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[93]David Van Zanten, "Frank Lloyd Wright's Kindergarten: Professional Practice and Sexual Roles," in *Architecture A Place for Women*, ed. Ellen Perry Berkeley, (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), 55-61.

[94]"Another feature of his [the architect's] plight is that not wholly respecting himself (how can he?) he is apt to be a hypersensitive individual, and like other unfortunates who depend upon prominence of personality to get in the way of the 'choosers' he is interested in pretty much everything as long as he counts one and at that No. 1." Frederick Gutheim, *Frank Lloyd Wright on Architecture: Selected Writings 1894-1940*, (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1941), 11, originally reported in *The Brickbuilder* 9 (June 1900): 124-128.

[95]Robert Twombly, *Frank Lloyd Wright: An Interpretive Biography* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973): 172, 182-192.

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Free of this American perspective, Urban had already successfully exploited public interest in his biography and personality as a set designer and was willing to use that interest in order to promote his architectural practice. As a foreign born and educated architect, Urban lacked the traditional means of access to clients through family, school and social affiliations. Urban instead used widespread knowledge about his opinions, social skills, working habits and design to attract clients, set himself apart from other architects and create a public desire to experience an Urban space.

Urban's attitude toward his role as an architect differed from that of more traditional American architects. This became evident in Urban's collaboration with Benjamin Wistar Morris on the new Metropolitan Opera house. Benjamin Wistar Morris epitomized the traditional, conservative American architect. He came from a well-to-do family, related to the Pierpont Morgans, and belonged to elite social clubs. He studied architecture at Columbia University and the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and worked for Carrère and Hastings before opening his own firm.[96]

In earlier collaborations, Urban provided the design while the other offices produced the working drawings, supplied technical support and supervised construction. Urban and Morris, however, vied for primary design responsibility.

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[96]Stern, Gilmartin, Mellins, 621.

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The two architects disagreed about everything from the actual design of the project to their conception of each other's role in the collaboration. While Morris was the principal architect, Urban had been involved with the project since 1926 and had a vision of how the building should look and function.[97] When Morris received the commission in 1927, he immediately tried to relegate Urban to the role of a technical advisor on stage issues. Otto Kahn stated, however, that the collaboration was of a general nature.[98]

Their differences quickly escalated into a media battle. Urban had already divulged his vision of the building to the press, describing a modern skyscraper apartment tower and democratic auditorium seating plan. Morris and his conservative colleagues, in turn, tried to use the press to denigrate Urban's abilities. Negative remarks about Urban made by Kenneth Murchison with Morris in attendance, appeared in the *New Yorker*.[99] In a memo to Kahn, Urban summarized Murchison's remarks:

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[97]Urban was involved in the project by February 1926, Otto Kahn to Edward Ziegler, 28 February 1926; "Opera House Plan Passed by Board of Metropolitan," *Musical America* 43 (30 January 1926): 1, describes a building very close to Urban's earliest known scheme.

[98]Benjamin Wistar Morris to Otto Kahn, 21 February 1927, TL; Kahn to Morris, 25 February 1927, both in "Metropolitan Opera - 1927," Otto Kahn Collection, Firestone Library, Princeton University.

[99]"The Talk of the Town: Opera Houser," *New Yorker* 3 (9 April 1927): 19.

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> Member of staff of New Yorker when interviewing Morris met [Kenneth] Murchison in his office. Murchison said before Morris and Interviewer "Don't worry Urban won't touch a pencil or brush to this opera house, we will see that he is kept well behind the footlights."[100]

Forced to apologize for this blunder, Morris revealed his frustration with Urban's more successful manipulation of the media, couching his apology between implicit criticisms of Urban's discussions with the press.

> It is my feeling that publication of any data leading to preconceived ideas by the public in regard to this project, especially in view of its complexities, is ill advised and somewhat prejudicial to the Opera Board. Personally, I have only given to reporters notes of a biographical nature and nothing whatsoever in regard to the detailed problems connected with this project. I need hardly say that the reference to you in the "New Yorker" is as objectionable to me as it could possibly be to you....I would think it desirable--and far safer....that no further interviews be granted, nor data furnished for articles unless and until information is given out by the Opera authorities.[101]

Later in the letter, Morris denied responsibility for Murchison's remarks and insinuated that Urban had been doing most of the talking to the press.

By June 1927, the collaboration had disintegrated to such a point that each architect separately presented his own design in a meeting with Otto Kahn.[102] When Morris left for

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[100]Joseph Urban to Otto Kahn, 17 October 1927, TMs, Metropolitan Opera Archives.

[101]Benjamin Wistar Morris to Joseph Urban, 1 July 1927, TLs, "Metropolitan Opera - 1927," Otto Kahn Collectin, Firestone Library, Princeton University.

[102]Benjamin Wistar Morris, "Memorandum of visit to the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Kahn, Cold Spring Harbor, Saturday and Sunday, June 25th and 26th, 1927," [26 June 1927], TMs, "Metropolitan Opera - 1927"; and Joseph Urban to Benjamin W.

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Europe to visit various European theaters at the end of July, Urban decided to mount his own European expedition.[103] Although still paying tribute to their partnership, Urban totally upstaged Morris in terms of the publicity he gained for his trip.[104] Morris left quietly and without fanfare. Urban left to such headlines as "Urban Seeks Advice from Art Builders."[105] He used these articles to clearly ally himself and his design with modern European trends in architecture. Upon his return, articles detailed Urban's visits with such leaders of modern European stage craft as Max Reinhardt, and with notable modern exponents of theater buildings, Hans Poelzig and Oskar Kaufmann.[106] Urban furthermore used the press to disparage Morris's more conventional and conservative trip and designs.

> Opera houses in Europe yield nothing as a basis for the problem in New York. Mr. Urban asserts: "They were built from aristocratic principles and have limited capacity.[107]

Morris, 30 June 1927, TL, "Wolab - 1927", Otto Kahn Archives, Firestone Library, Princeton University.

[103]Morris, "Report of Morris on trip to France. . . ."

[104]"Architects of New Metropolitan Sail," 1, 2, suggests that the two architects were travelling together, Urban, however, dominated the article.

[105]"Urban Seeks Advice From Art Builders," *Morning Telegraph*, 31 July 1927, pp. 1, 2.

[106]"Urban Finds Stage Mechanics Over Emphasized," *Musical America* 46 (1 October 1927): 3; "German Stagecraft Leaves Urban Dizzy," p. 8.

[107]"Architects of New Metropolitan Sail," 1, 2.

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Only a few sentences later the article reveals that among the main stops on Morris's trip were the traditional Paris Opera House and Milan's La Scala. Shortly after both architects returned to New York, Urban realized that the collaboration and his scheme were doomed. In response to this, he showed illustrations and descriptions, which national newspapers then reprinted, of the project to Deems Taylor of *Musical America*.[108] Although Urban realized that this action effectively ended his collaboration with Morris, his designs, at least were widely published, praised and criticized. In October, 1927 Urban resigned from the project. While Morris must have welcomed Urban's resignation, he undoubtedly was appalled at the publicity. He could not begin to understand Urban's motives and attributed his actions to an unstable, artistic temperament. In an October 28, 1927 memorandum he wrote:

> Mr. Urban had failed to understand the terms of his engagement and succumbing to a stress of artistic temperament, had acted most unwisely, unethically and in an unfortunate manner, particularly in publishing his plans in a totally unauthorized manner, and without consulting his principals or the Architect...[109]

Morris may have found Urban's actions unwise, yet Urban had

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[108]Taylor, "An Impressive Home," 1-4, Taylor's article was then summarized in national newspapers, for instance see "Metropolitan Opera to Look Like a Cathedral," *New York News*, 8 October 1927.

[109]Benjamin Wistar Morris, "Memorandum of Lincheon Meeting of the Directors of the Metropolitan Opera Company," 28 October 1927, TMs, "Wolab 1927," Otto Kahn Collection, Firestone Library, Princeton University.

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already planned for such an event, stating as early as July that if the collaboration failed or if the building was not built he retained the rights to his drawings and could publish them under his own name.[110] Urban proved to be correct in both assumptions. The opera house, after a change of sites, was never built.[111] A new Metropolitan Opera House was not successfully planned and completed until 1966.[112]

By having his plan published in *Musical America* and the national newspapers, Urban successfully created an interest in his designs among architects and opera aficionados and perhaps those who generally followed "high brow" culture. He continued to work on the project at least through 1929.[113] He undoubtedly hoped that widespread public knowledge of his design would eventually influence any future Metropolitan Opera project and might eventually lead the board to turn to him and his plans. He succeeded in his first aim. While Morris's design was barely discussed, Urban's was illustrated

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[110]Joseph Urban to Benjamin Wistar Morris, 5 July 1927, TL, "Metropolitan Opera - 1927," Otto Kahn Collection, Firestone Library, Princeton University.

[111]Stern, Gilmartin, Mellins, 628-633.

[112]Wallace Harrison had collaborated with Urban and Raymond Hood on some conceptual designs in the early 1930s, "Little House Designs," Production File Box 17, Joseph Urban Collection. When the Lincoln Center Opera House was completed in 1966, Harrison invited Mary Porter Beegle Urban and Gretl Urban to see the building. Gretl Urban Tape 3, (magnetic tape) Production File Box 46, Joseph Urban Collection.

[113]In his 1929 publication *Theatres*, Urban included the Metropolitan Opera House design as well as a variant on the design, the Music Center project.

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and described both during and after his career. Urban's vision of the Metropolitan Opera House was ultimately the dominant image of the 1920s scheme and influenced the design of some of New York City's most important theaters, Radio City Music Hall and Lincoln Center.

If Urban's approach to his role as an architect disturbed and at times conflicted with such traditional practitioners as Benjamin Wistar Morris, there is evidence that others understood and used Urban's techniques. His friends and colleagues Ely Jacques Kahn, Raymond Hood and Ralph Walker were similarly outside traditional architectural circles. By the late 1920s they had adapted Urban's techniques. In 1931, the three were profiled in the *New Yorker*. The article captures their exploitation of personality and celebrity status

> They are three little men who build tall buildings, and who probably rake into their offices more business than any other architects in the city....They change their professional notions once a week. They plan great projects...They are constantly publicized interviewed, quoted.
>
> All this is more surprising when one realizes that architecture has long been an aristocratic, leisurely profession. Its great ones are graduates usually of Yale and Harvard, whose daughters make their debuts at Sherry's. The blue book of architecture and the Social Register are still one. The three little men are only in the telephone book.[114]

Prior to 1928-29, the only articles published by or on living American architects occurred in trade journals and were

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[114]Allene Talmey, "Profiles: Man against the Sky," *New Yorker* 7 (11 April 1931): 24-26.

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explications of designs or theory. By 1930, however, there were numerous interviews and profiles of American architects in such general literary magazines as the *Saturday Review of Literature*, *Outlook* and *American Magazine*.[115] Urban led the way with interviews in the *New Yorker*, and *The Spur* and in general interest in his career.[116]

The increased interest in an architect's personality and the benefits which celebrity status could bring to a designer outside of the traditional architectural mainstream combined with the difficulty in obtaining architectural commissions during the early years of the Depression, probably encouraged Frank Lloyd Wright as well. Wright sought to end his public isolation during the late 1920s by publishing articles, granting interviews, exhibiting his work and giving lectures.[117] During this period, he frequently associated with

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[115]This is based on a review of the Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature. Only two earlier articles on living American architects appear, the *New Yorker*'s 1926 piece on Ralph Adams Cram, and W. Tittle, "Creator of the Woolworth Tower," 96-102. These pieces, however, still promote the concept of the architect's character, rather than personality. Articles on Frank Lloyd Wright, Ralph Walker and Raymond Hood began to appear in the early 1930s, for Hood see: *American Magazine* 112 (October 1931): 52-53; Arthur Strawn, "Sky-Rocket," *Outlook* 155 (7 May 1930): 30 -31. For Ralph Walker see: "Architecture," *North American Review* 231 (June 1931): 528- 531; and for Wright see "American Architect," *Outlook* 157 (11 March 1931): 358; Sheldon Cheney, "Prophetic Artist," *Saturday Review of Literature* 8 (23 April 1932): 677-678.

[116]MacGowan, "Profiles: Caprice Viennois;" Anne Lee, "A Close-Up of Joseph Urban," *The Spur* 44 (15 November 1929): 63, 144.

[117]After a fourteen-year hiatus, Wright began to publish additional segments of his essay, "In the Cause of Architecture," *Architectural Record* 63 (January, February,

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Urban, Hood, Kahn and Walker.[118] In 1932 he published his autobiography effectively confronting the negative stories of his life by offering his versions of the story.[119]

Even traditional conservative architects began to promote interest in personality during the 1930s. One senior statesman of the architectural world, Cass Gilbert, appeared in a poster promoting American spirits and values.[120] The

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April-June 1928): 49-57, 145-151, 350-356, 481-488, 555-561; 64 (July, August, October, December 1928): 10-16, 98-104, 334-342, 507-514; Wright had a one-man exhibition at the Architectural League in 1930, "Skyscraper's Designer Will be Honored," *New York World*, 25 May 1930 and "Glass Skyscrapers," *Architect* 13 (14 June 1930): 239; he started to lecture around 1930, speaking at Princeton University in 1930 and the New School in 1931, Twombly, 160-161.

[118]"Artists Luncheon at Casino," *New York World*, 12 October 1929; "Frank Lloyd Wright to Build," *New York Evening Sun*, 12 October 1929; "Skyscraper's Designer Will be Honored"; Henry H. Saylor, "Editor's Diary, Friday, May 16," *Architecture* 62 (July 1930): 44; Saylor, "Editor's Diary, Friday, February 27," *Architecture* 63 (April 1931): 238; Saylor, "The Editor's Diary, Wednesday, September 16," *Architecture* 64 (December 1931): 369.

[119]Wright, *An Autobiography*.

[120]The poster was produced by the Elliott Service Co. New York, 9-19-27 and was part of a series which featured the inventor Thomas A. Edison, Senator Frank B. Kellogg and the engineer George W. Goethals promoting American values. While the posters feature close-up portraits suggesting that these men have a "star" quality, the text promotes character rather than personality. The text for the Gilbert poster reads "Labor, thrift, intelligence, courage and integrity are the foundation stones of success and good citizenship. A man who practices these virtues need have no fear of failure." Cass Gilbert. "Cass Gilbert Famous American architect, who has designed many noted structures including the well-known Woolworth Building, several State Capitols, municipal libraries, banks, court houses, colleges and U.S. Government buildings." Cass Gilbert Collection, Architectural Collections, The New-York Historical Society.

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celebrity architect, of course, received his fictional apotheosis in Ayn Rand's 1943 novel, *The Fountainhead*.[121]

An increasingly diverse group of clients during the 1920s also desired alternate systems of finding and evaluating an architect. Urban's biography with its exotic locales and commissions from European nobility provided a unique and glamorous background which few American architects could rival. Knowledge of his social skills, commitment to modernism and hard-working yet amiable personality were an equally unusual combination in a field seemingly dominated by either business-like and conservative designers or modern and temperamental architects.

Anthony Drexel Biddle was one of Urban's early and most important clients. An impoverished blueblood, Biddle had married for money and socialized with a young wealthy "jazz age" crowd.[122] It is not surprising that Biddle would want an architect outside of traditional circles to provide something different and new. Urban met Biddle in Palm Beach during his 1925-6 renovation of the Club de Montmartre. The goal of the club was to attract the increasingly young and glamorous social set of Palm Beach with modern entertainments and decor. Biddle, a backer of the venture, asked to meet with Urban in order to inquire if he would design the Bath

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[121]Ayn Rand, *The Fountainhead* (Philadelphia: Balkiston, c. 1943).

[122]Brown, 7; Carter and Cole, 171-173.

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and Tennis Club, a new Palm Beach social and athletic club. The widely known qualities of Urban's personality and designs in addition to the successful renovation of the Club de Montmartre attracted Biddle. He subsequently became one of Urban's most loyal patrons, commissioning designs for an addition to his Palm Beach House, the Paramount Building, the Central Park Casino and the Atlantic Beach Club. The two also became close friends, frequently socializing together.[123]

Exposure to Urban's set designs and knowledge of his personality not only led to commissions but created public demand for Urban-designed spaces. Urban's biography made designs accessible and desirable to the public that otherwise might have been negatively viewed as foreign, decadent and uncomfortably modern. The 1928 Hotel Gibson roof garden in Cincinnati opened with the following headline: "The Roof, --Garden of Allurement, Colorful - Exotic - Bizarre! The Newest Masterpiece of Joseph Urban, foremost exponent of modern art in decoration." The article continued, the room:

> ...ignores the conventions of color form and arrangement. Modernistic art has created here an atmosphere that deeply impresses one with its uniqueness, daring and fantasticness.[124]

At the Hotel Gibson patrons were offered a chance to experience a glamorous total environment, which had previously

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[123]Gretl Urban Tape 2, goes into great detail about Biddle and Urban's friendship.

[124]"The Roof, --Garden of Allurement," clipping in Portfolio 36.

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only been vicariously experienced in Urban sets for plays and movies. In using this space, the articles suggests, patrons also became unique, daring and fantastic. This desire to experience the glamour of an Urban space and thus become glamorous led to a series of night club commission in Detroit, Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Chicago and New York, as well as jobs for stores and restaurants. Whatever the individual stylistic predilections of these clients were, the appeal of an "Urban Room" as some of the night clubs were called, would bring in customers and thus sales. Urban's name became a trademark which would guarantee certain spatial qualities and experiences. Newspapers reviewing these spaces attested to this fact. *Variety* announced the opening of the Bedell Store in New York City with the following headline "34th St. Store Front Decorated in Theatre Way by Urban - Draws", while the *Dupont Magazine* analyzed the Urban allure in night clubs and articles with an article entitled "Environment Tempts the Patron of the Modern Restaurant."[125] Interestingly the various Urban roof gardens were remarkably similar in color and decoration yet each was perceived as being a unique space.

If Urban's biography was most successfully exploited in conjunction with commissions for theaters, clubs and stores, the emphasis on his strong ties to modernism also led to a

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[125]F. R. Price, "Environment Tempts the Patron of The Modern Restaurant," *The Dupont Magazine*, September 1929, clipping in Portfolio 33, Joseph Urban Collection; "34th Street Store Front Decorated in a Theatre Way by Urban - Draws," *Variety*, 12 June 1929, 1.

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series of commissions. The 1929 profile on Urban in *The Spur* concluded with the following statement:

> Small wonder that Joseph Urban is an exponent of modern art; that everything he does is expressive of the modern mode. He is a pioneer in it. It was new to him thirty years ago. He has grown up with it.[126]

The perception of Urban as a modernist, promoted by articles and interviews, was a powerful one. In 1929, Alvin Johnson, the President of the New School for Social Research was looking for an architect to design a new building for his institution. Johnson wanted a modern "functionalist" building and thus narrowed his list of designers to two architects, Frank Lloyd Wright and Joseph Urban. Urban's buildings at that date included the Ziegfeld Theatre, the Palm Beach Florida houses, clubs, and theaters, the International Magazine Building, and the Bedell Company Store, structures which were definitely new in style but hardly "functionalist" by any traditional definition. Urban's image as a modern architect in this case probably did more to attract Johnson's attention than his actual commissions. The New School commission, in turn, did much to promote Urban's reputation as a modernist and may have resulted in the invitation to compete for the Palace of the Soviets.

Urban successfully used his celebrity status to advertise himself as an architect, promoting his designs, work methods and personality as part of the package. In doing so he

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[126]Lee, "A Close-Up of Joseph Urban," 144.

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attracted clients, such as Biddle, night club owners and Johnson, that he otherwise would not have had access to and who, in turn, were looking for an architect outside of the traditional realm.

Urban's Writings

Urban capitalized on general interest in himself and his architecture with a barrage of published statements, articles and even a book on his work. From 1912-26, Urban had frequently been interviewed, contributed articles about a specific project or discussed his general views on theater and film design in the press. With the opening of his architecture office in 1926 and the completion of some of his first American architectural projects in 1927, these pieces dramatically increased in number.[127] His writings, unlike those of traditional architects, were intended for a nonspecialist audience and frequently targeted for publication in the mass media. Technical information was usually omitted, theory and history were simplified. Urban employed a highly expressive writing style intended to catch a reader's

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[127]This is demonstrated by the years covered in the scrapbooks of clippings in the Joseph Urban Collection, Portfolio 37 covers from around 1911 to 1920; Portfolio 38 part I covers from 1920 to 1923, Portfolio 38 part II from 1923 to 1927; Portfolio 34 covers 1927 to 1928; Portfolio 36 from 1928 to 1929; Portfolio 33 from 1929 to 1930; Portfolio 35 Part I January 1931 to November 1932; Portfolio 35 Part II from November 1932 to 1933.

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attention and emotionally involve them in the viewpoint or space being described. Articles entitled "Wedding Theatre Beauty to Ballyhoo" or sentences such as "A theatre is more than a stage and auditorium. It is a place in which to experience a heightened sense of life," are typical of the superlatives and emotionally charged language of Urban's texts.[128]

Urban's expressive writing style was indebted to Florenz Ziegfeld, Jr. and William Randolph Hearst. When asked to describe the Follies, Ziegfeld wrote:

> It is all, from every aspect, bubbling, sparkling, foaming with the ardent spirit of exhilarating American youth. This defines the distinctiveness of the Follies.[129]

Ziegfeld did not describe the themes of the Follies, the structure of the play, or the types of acts, but instead sought to evoke a certain spirit or mentality. This imagery could suggest a slightly naughty but high class quality that Ziegfeld wanted to link with the Follies.

Urban wrote statements which could serve as press releases for each completed architectural project. Journalists would frequently excerpt portions of these texts and integrate them into their articles on the building. At times, newspapers would simply reprint Urban's statements in

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[128]Urban, "Wedding Theater Beauty to Ballyhoo," 10.

[129]Florenz Ziegfeld, "Florenz Ziegfeld Defines the Follies," unmounted clipping, [1924], Ziegfeld folder, Theater Collection, Museum of the City of New York.

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full.[130] Newspapers rarely identified the information as coming from the Urban office but instead let it pass as an objective article on the building. These press releases largely eliminated the potential work for a newswriter and thus increased the possibility of press coverage for a project. Even architectural journals frequently used Urban's descriptions or those written by friends and employees.[131]

Providing a description of a building was not new or unusual. McKim, Mead & White, for example, frequently wrote summaries of their completed buildings. These included a description of the building's style, plan and materials.[132] Urban's writings, however, also shaped how the media and public responded to his designs. The tone and intent of Urban's descriptions, however, were radically different from traditional summaries. His description of the 1929 Central Park Casino, is an example. In discussing the ballroom, Urban wrote:

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[130]Alva Johnson, "607 Celebrate at Gay Opening of Central Park Casino," *New York Tribune*, 5 June 1929; "Park Casino Opens Tonight," *New York Telegram*, 4 June 1929; Nancy Randolph, "Parks Casino a Chromatic Wow," *New York News*, 3 June 1929.

[131]Urban's friend Ely Jacques Kahn wrote the review of the Ziegfeld Theatre, "The Ziegfeld Theatre, New York," 384-393; His employee Shepard Vogelgesang wrote, "The Reinhardt Theatre, NY," 461-5 as well as "The New School for Social Research," 138-150; while employee Irvin L. Scott wrote "A Motion Picture Theatre," 111-114.

[132]See description of the Metropolitan Club, "Metropolitan Club Description," Metropolitan Club, Box #82, McKim, Mead & White 1950 Collection, The New-York Historical Society.

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> Through rhythmic line and sensuous color are established the moods of a room....The line of the mural composition is like the wave of a conductor's baton beginning dance music. Crystal-like, a spray of sunlit water lends these room freshness and festivity; dim reflections in the black glass ballroom ceiling give space and a movement in sympathy to the life of the room.[133]

The highly charged language of such a description goes beyond a simple recounting of style, material and plan and instead seeks to evoke an emotional, expressive response. Such statements instructed viewers how to appreciate and respond to the space and thus hopefully created a desire to patronize the casino. These types of statements, of course, had their origins in Urban's discussions of his theater and film sets. Integrated into architectural discussions, they completely transforms the use and impact of traditional building summaries.

Urban's long career as a set designer, the successful completion of the Ziegfeld and Paramount Theaters and the publicity surrounding his Metropolitan Opera House project established him as an expert on theater design. In 1928 he was commissioned to write an essay on modern theater architecture for the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. "Theatre, Modern Exteriors and Interiors" is an erudite and critical review of conditions that modern theaters must address such as site, acoustics, visibility, lighting, city ordinances and signage.[134] Urban identifies the different types of theater

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[133]Alva Johnson, "607 Celebrate at Gay Opening."

[134]Urban, "Theatre, Modern Exteriors and Interiors."

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buildings currently being constructed, including opera houses, movie theaters and revue theaters. The essay, furthermore reveals Urban's knowledge of theater architectural history and theory.[135] Urban also managed to include his own buildings in the essay. The Ziegfeld and Paramount theaters are mentioned as examples of different theater building types.

Urban's best known publication was his 1929 book, *Theaters*.[136] The book combines a brief historical essay summarizing the development of theater architecture from the Greeks to modern times, with descriptions and illustrations of six of Urban's theater building projects. Urban was encouraged to write the book by Edith Isaacs, the editor of *Theater Arts* magazine in 1928.[137] The book was published to positive reviews in 1929.[138]

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[135]Ibid., throughout the article, he refers to such important nineteenth century designers as Schinkel, Garnier and Semper as well as avant-garde twentieth century projects by Steele Mackaye, Wright, Bel Geddes and Strnad. His discussion of Reinhardt and Copeau's theories of integrating audience and performance demonstrates his awareness of and allegiance to modern theatrical theory. Interestingly another contributor to the Encyclopedia's theater section was Sheldon Cheney, who the next year published his book, *The Theatre*, (New York: Longmans, Green and co., 1929), which covered, in a vastly expanded form some of the same material. The two may have exchanged ideas during the course of writing their Encyclopedia entries.

[136]Urban, *Theatres*.

[137]Joseph Urban, typescript draft of "Theatres", (1929), TMs, "Remarks by J.U.," Production File Box 26, Joseph Urban Collection.

[138]J. Brooks Atkinson, "The Vital Question," *New York Times*, 8 December 1929; "The Draftsman's Library," *Pencil Points* 11 (June 1930): 57; John Mason Brown, "Two On the Aisle," *New*

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In the first section, Urban summarizes the history of theater architecture. He defines architecture as an art, stating that its role is as an "aid to man in the effort to establish a relation between his life and his environment." This definition reveals Urban's roots in the Secession ideal of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which stresses the transformative and expressive power of art.[139] He praises the Greek, Roman, Renaissance and Elizabethan theaters. These buildings united audience and performers:

> There was no picture-frame division, such as our present-day theatre knows. The Greek Theatre held the emotions of actor and audience as in a cup.[140]

Good theater design is also, in Urban's view, an expression of the *zeitgeist*, or spirit of the times:

> From Schinkel to Semper and the present day, many great and important architects and artists have tried and are still trying to find a form of stage and auditorium expressive of our time.[141]

York Evening Post, 17 December 1929, p. 14; Walter Prichard Eaton, "Plays and Playhouses," *New York Herald-Tribune Books*, 19 January 1930, sec. 10, p. 12.

[139]Other statements from *Theatres* which are related to the conception of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* include: "Today the theatre at its best retains an ecstasy akin to its religious origin. Like religion, the theatre is a record of the effort to transcend every-day experience." When discussing the Greek theater Urban states: "There was no strain either on actor or audience but instead an overwhelming sense of spiritual contact, due to the presence of the actor and audience within the same undivided space."

[140]Urban, *Theatres*, n.p.

[141]Ibid.

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By following this historical survey with a discussion of his own work, Urban places his designs in a lineage of theater architecture starting with the Greeks and continuing through Semper. The section on his own theater projects includes two built designs, the Ziegfeld and Paramount Theaters, two unbuilt but previously published commissions for the Metropolitan Opera House and the Reinhardt Theater and two purely visionary projects for a Jewish Art Theater and a Music Center. The illustrations blur the distinction between the built and unbuilt. Urban used soft-focus photographs of the Ziegfeld and Paramount thus minimizing the difference between those projects and his unbuilt designs.

In its format *Theatres* was a hybrid architectural publication. It is not a technical publication reviewing current building practices and problems associated with a single building type.[142] Instead, Urban focuses on his own designs and writes for a general, nonspecialist audience. Neither is *Theatres* a traditional monograph surveying an architect's designs.[143] Urban combines a historical overview, text and illustrations of his own work, with theories of theater's social and cultural role in society.

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[142]Paul Zucker, *Theater and Lichtspeilhäuser* (Berlin: E. Wasmuth A.G., n.d.); and R. W. Sexton and B. F. Betts, *American Theatres of Today* (New York: Architectural Book Publishing Company, [1927]).

[143]*A Monograph of the Works of McKim, Mead & White, 1879-1915*, 4 vols. (New York: Architectural Book Publishing Company, 1914-1920).

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Neither is Urban's essay a polemic, or theoretical treatise, in the manner of Wright's essays, "In The Cause of Architecture," or Le Corbusier's *Vers Une Architecture*.[144] Unlike these authors, Urban does not seek to establish a comprehensive theory that will promote his work and instruct other architects.

In writing *Theatres* Urban combined different genres of architectural writing. The historical overview relies on traditional architectural critiques of discussing the history, current conditions and possible future of a topic, which stems from a tradition of writing such as Viollet-le-Duc or Gottfried Semper's treatises.[145] Urban's discussion of his projects at first seems indebted to Schinkel or Olbrich's publications of their works.[146] These books, however, are predominantly visual. Instead, descriptions of some of the

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[144]Frank Lloyd Wright, "In the Cause of Architecture;" Le Corbusier-Saugnier (sic), *Vers une Architecture* (Paris: Vincent Fréal, 1923).

[145]Gottfried Semper, *Der Stil in den technischen und tektonischen Künsten, oder praktische Aesthetik*, vol. 1 (Frankfurt: Verlag für Kunst und Wissenschaft, 1860); vol. 2 (Munich: Friedrich Bruckmann, 1863); Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, *Entretiens sur l'architecture*, 2 vols. (Paris, A. Morel, 1863-1872). In content, the essay, of course is also highly indebted to Richard Wagner's theories on opera.

[146]Carl Friedrich Schinkel, *Sammlung Architektonischer Entwürfe, enthaltend theils Werke welche ausgeführt sind, theils Gegenstände, deren Ausführung beabsichtigt wurde*, 1-18 heft (Berlin: Verlag von Ludwig Wilhem Wittich, 1819-1831); 19-24 heft (Berlin: Verlag von Duncker und Humblot, 1833-1835); 25-28 heft (Berlin: Verlag von George Gropius, 1836-1840); Joseph M. Olbrich, *Architektur von Olbrich* (Berlin: Wasmuth, 1901-1914).

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theaters are modified versions of Urban's press releases on each building. The language, however, is far more neutral.

More relevant for the overall format and tone of the text of *Theatres*, are the special editions of movie books describing the history and making of a particular production published in conjunction with its opening.[147] Cosmopolitan Productions published at least two such books for their movies. The book for *When Knighthood Was in Flower* was lavishly illustrated with photographs, embellished with decorative borders and printed on high quality paper. While the text states that the movie was the most beautiful and expensive production ever created, it avoids the highly charged language of movie press releases. Instead, the text relies largely on statistics, quotations from experts and rather neutral descriptions to discuss the production. Such books were sold to the general audience as a souvenir in the lobby of the movie theater. The tone of the text, quantity of illustrations, and quality of the book-making evoke parallels with Urban's *Theatres*. Thus Urban combines writings that generally appeared in a more popular context, with those that were more sophisticated in appeal. Critics, however, did not seem to be bothered by this mixture.

Theatres was written as Urban's major theatrical

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[147]*When Knighthood Was in Flower* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, [1922]); *Enemies of Women* (publication place and publisher unknown, c. 1923). Both in files under movie title at Billie Rose Theater Collection, Lincoln Center Library for the Performing Arts.

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commissions seemed to be at an end. He had completed the Ziegfeld and Paramount Theaters; the Metropolitan Opera and Reinhardt projects were unlikely to be built. If Urban mixed formats in the writing of *Theatres*, including history, theory, polemics and a documentation of his work, the book is ultimately an attempt to create broad public interest in his work and to reach for enlightened patrons. The concluding paragraph of the book is a direct plea to potential patrons to commission architecture worthy of the age and of the country. Coming at the end of Urban's narrative it is also an invitation to commission him, if one liked his theories and designs, to build a theater:

> America, like Athens at her great period, has material means in abundance. America, moreover, is free from the influence of the now dying royal conservatism and bureaucracy, which, in Europe, still crushes the vitality of the living with the weight of history and tradition. American life belongs to the future! America has the means and the opportunity; has she a spiritual endowment comparable with that of the Greeks, two and a half millenniums ago? The age has yet to give proof of this. It lies with America to allow a great promise to perish or to mature.[148]

The promise, of course, is the designs contained within the book.

The Image of the Office

Urban also represented and promoted himself as an architect through the design of his office. Interest in theatrical and

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[148]Urban, *Theatres*, n.p.

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film stars often extended to the environment in which they lived and worked. Because film stars either worked on location or in rather ramshackle studios, primary emphasis was placed on a star's house. Photographs and descriptions published in both fan magazines and design journals described these homes as an extension of the star and his or her personality, especially as they were characterized by their films.[149] Pickfair, the home of Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks, was probably the most well-known example of a celebrity home. The architecture, furnishings, grounds of the house as well as the activities which took place there, were seen as representing Pickford and Fairbanks's modernity, glamour, athleticism and enjoyment of leisure, qualities which were also promoted in their movies.[150]

Shortly after Urban joined Cosmopolitan Productions a now unidentified newspaper clipping in Urban's scrapbook, possibly from Hearst's *New York American*, described his Yonkers, New York house. Entitled, "The $1.50 a day House that Urban built," the article discussed how he transformed an 1880s Shingle Style house into a modern, aesthetic home.[151] The article indicates that Urban transformed an old, uncomfortable and unattractive house into a modern, casual and artistic

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[149]May, 234.

[150]Ibid., 146, 234.

[151]"The $1.50 a Day House that Urban Built," clipping in Portfolio 37, Joseph Urban Collection.

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home. It also suggests that Urban's modern film set designs reflect his own life style. Seeing Urban's modern sets, furthermore, could inspire other people to create new and artistic homes.

Yet Urban's home did not provide a sufficiently powerful public image. After this c. 1920 article, description and photographs of the house no longer appear in the media.[152] Rather Urban's offices were repeatedly published as the spaces which best represented him. This is first apparent in a 1920 profile entitled "Marietta Serves Coffee," by Julian Johnson.[153] The article opens with a description of Urban's office at the Cosmopolitan Studios in Harlem. Johnson discusses the quality and type of light, color of the furniture and various significant accessories such as the coffee service and books. He then characterizes Urban as "the most distinguished master of environment, light and color that we Anglo-Saxons know in theater."[154] By first depicting the environment in which Urban creates his sets, Johnson indicates there is a vital connection between what Urban designs and where he designs. The office in this article becomes a

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[152]There are many possible reasons why Urban did not promote his house; he could have viewed the Victorian exterior as being at odds with his modern image, felt that the Wiener Werkstätte interiors were somewhat dated, or that he did not want to attract other commissions for residences, typically the least lucrative projects with the most demanding clients.

[153]Johnson, "Marietta Serves Coffee," 31-33, 132.

[154]Ibid., 32.

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metaphor for Urban's talents. Johnson continues the piece with a discussion of Urban's frequent conflicts with retardataire film and theater directors. Again the office serves as a metaphor for Urban's work. The office library, which takes up on end of the room with:

> shelves bending beneath art-books in half a dozen languages on the universal appeal.[155]

demonstrates Urban's superior erudition and artistic ability. The contrast between the office and the rest of the studio building provides an analogy for the contrast between Urban's artistic vision and the mundane concerns of the movie directors.

> Like most film arenas, there is nothing especially aesthetic about the place until you come into the cave wherein...Urban...keeps just a few of his artistic jewels.[156]

The office is a sanctuary removed from the grime and bustle of the studio. Its high curtained windows let in the light but keep out the unappealing view. Just as Urban is trying to introduce artistic concerns to the movies, so his office introduces an aesthetic environment into the space where movies are shot and produced.

The notion that the office could represent Urban and his work continued with the opening of his architectural firm at 5 E. 57th Street. The office consisted of a reception room, a large drafting area and Urban's private office. Fairly

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[155]Ibid., 31.

[156]Ibid.

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detailed accounts and photographs provide information concerning the appearance of the reception room and private office.[157] The only information that exists concerning the drafting area, however, is that it continued the color and decorative elements of the other spaces.[158] Evidence indicates that Urban modified the office over time, stripping away some decorative elements. The predominant impression, however, was always one of simplicity (fig. 78). The color scheme was black and white with a few touches of red. Furniture and decorative details, such as the black wooden chairs with backs divided into a nine-square grid or black beaded molding were found in every room in order to give the entire office a sense of unity. The strong sense of geometry, provided by the furniture and the square, rectangular and curvilinear shapes of each room, also gave the office a strong coherence. Similar to designs by the Wiener Werkstätte, the overall impression was modern and simple but also luxurious.

In both the reception room and private office, Urban displayed art from his personal collection (fig. 78, fig. 79). The art, including a Chinese statue of Buddha and a painting

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[157]For photographs of the office see: "Reception Room, Offices for Joseph Urban, Architect," *Architectural Record* 69 (January 1931): 37-39; Portfolio 2, Joseph Urban Collection; Production File Box 34, Joseph Urban Collection. For written description see: Lee, "A Close-Up of Joseph Urban," 63, 144; MacGowan, "Profiles: Caprice Viennois," 23; "The Reminiscences of William Muschenheim," 31-32; "Arts of the Theatre."

[158]"The Reminiscences of William Muschenheim," 32; Lee, "A Close-Up of Joseph Urban," 63.

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by Egon Schiele, often contributed a touch of exoticism to the space. Urban emphasized their strangeness and artistic aura by carefully setting each piece apart from the office through the use of recessed niches, pedestals and panelled walls. The exotic was admired, even contemplated for inspiration, but not allowed to disrupt work.

Urban's private office was dominated by his library and large work table. 1931 photographs of the space indicate that he displayed renderings and photographs of his own designs, but did so in an unusual manner. These images were placed on low ledges against the book shelves. They occupied their own space, slightly below eye level, and distinct from the zones of art or reference. Urban's sense of modernism can be understood from his office design. The rooms are primarily composed of color, space and simple wood--not metal--furniture. Art, history and some decorative details are allowed to exist but not dominate. Indeed the emphasis on space, color and light are more in keeping with the later Atlantic Beach Club, New School and Palace of the Soviets.

Urban incorporated certain elements of domestic architecture into the space. The scale, material and design of the black chairs were more akin to dining room rather than office furniture. This "lived-in" quality was reinforced in the private office by the presence of a low, broad upholstered armchair. The placement of Urban's eclectic and exotic art collection, furthermore, gave the office a personal

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appearance. These items obviously provided comfort as well as visual and intellectual stimulation. Yet, they also suggested that Urban truly inhabited the office in a meaningful way and that the plan and decoration of the space represented Urban, his taste, habits and personal pleasures.[159]

If Urban used elements from domestic architecture to create a sense of personal expression in an office, he did not allow these elements to dominate the image of the space. The impression engendered by the overall color, plan and furnishings, of Urban's office was that of a place of work, not a home. If the chairs provided a sense of comfort the predominance of desks, large flat working surfaces and drafting tools reinforced the primary function of the space, that of designing architecture. The various rooms of the office closed off into discrete separate entities so that reception, drafting and Urban's private office would not interfere with each other. In Urban's office the shape of the

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[159]The notion that an office was a significant expression of a person for Urban is reinforced by his design for the personal office of Alvin Johnson, the president of the New School. Johnson wrote: "When we had finished the design [of the New School] Urban said, 'There is one room I haven't discussed with you--your office. I know you better than you know yourself, and you'll have to accept my judgement.'" Urban not only provided Johnson with a well-lit and spacious room but a highly individual office. The space was unusual, incorporating a semi-circular alcove into an otherwise rectilinear plan and having "Byzantine" red walls. In the center of the chamber was a reproduction of the Hellenistic statue, the Aphrodite of Cyrene, a personal gift from Urban to Johnson. Both the color of the walls and the statue reflected Johnson's personal aesthetics. Johnson, *Pioneer's Progress*, 323, 325.

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room combined with the panels of opaque glass gave the space a cloistered quality, the opposite of the open, flowing spaces that architects preferred to use in the design of residences. Finally, the subdued tonalities of the color scheme, black, grey and white, with only a few touches of red further reinforced the idea that this was a place of work and concentration. In a 1929 profile on Urban, Anne Lee described this quality.

> An atmosphere of efficiency pervades the room. It appears to offer freedom from restraint. It is altogether the kind of setting wherein one would expect to find a man of Urban's resourcefulness and temperament. It is an atmosphere to stimulate clear thinking--to establish a mood for work.[160]

That Urban successfully represented himself through his office is evident from the publications and photographs of the space. At this point the majority of American architectural offices were merely efficient places of work. Urban's office was one of the few in which a notion of his designs and of him as an architect was indicated not only by illustrations of his work on the walls but by the space itself.

Striking in its modernity, the office functioned as an extension of Urban's design aesthetic and personality. In making his office function in this manner, Urban drew upon the film world's manipulation of a celebrity home and also upon his own training and practice as an architect in Vienna. Urban and the architects connected with the Vienna Secession

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[160]Lee, "A Close-Up of Joseph Urban," 63.

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strove to create a total environment for each commission which would not only be appropriate for the activities of the space but create a suitable mood to encourage these activities.[161] The creation of a total environment, however, rarely extended to the architects' own space. Both Olbrich and Hoffmann's offices were fairly unremarkable. Urban's Vienna studio, however, evidently was a space which he decorated to express his aesthetic ideas and to provide a place to work.[162]

Architects, from at least Sir John Soane on, have frequently used their office as a place to display work and impress clients.[163] Urban's office fits into this tradition and yet stands apart from it. Prior to the 1920s there was little popular interest in American architectural offices. Photographs and description were usually confined to the technical section of trade journals.[164] Most offices consisted of utilitarian drafting rooms with more ornate reception areas and private offices for principles. These

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[161]Examples of this are Josef Hoffmann's 1902 installation for the Beethoven Austellung at the Secession Building, Urban's numerous installations for the Hagenbund, Hoffmann's 1906-1911 Palais Stoclet, Joseph Maria Olbrich's numerous houses including the 1898 Villa Friedmann in Vienna and numerous houses in Darmstadt including the 1900-1901 Grosses Glückert Haus.

[162]For an image of the studio see Carter and Cole, 35.

[163]Soane used the Breakfast Room in his house at #12-14 Lincoln's Inn Fields (1812).

[164]For instance see the article on McKim, Mead & White's office, D. Everett Waid, "The Business Side of an Architect's Office," *The Brickbuilder* 22 (December 1913): 267-270.

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rooms would include copies of prints or busts, illustrations of the firm's work and antique or period revival furniture. While striving to create a comfortable or even impressive space for the client, the furniture was simply selected rather than designed. McKim, Mead & White's office at 101 Park Avenue illustrates this point.[165] Furnished with Colonial Revival pieces, reproductions of Renaissance architecture and panelled in oak, the reception room suggests the firm's preferences for the Colonial and Renaissance Revival styles but does not give a real sense of their interior designs or of their personalities. Neither McKim, Mead & White were personally involved in the decoration of the rooms.

Frank Lloyd Wright's Oak Park office is the one major exception. Published in the 1899 *House Beautiful*, the octagonal double-height office space, suspended lighting, furniture and every detail represented Wright's aesthetic, his notions of architectural practice and training.[166] As other scholars have discussed, Wright intended the office to be radically different from traditional architecture offices.[167] Attached to his house in suburban Oak Park, Illinois, the office setting provided a striking contrast to the downtown office building spaces of most firms. This was reinforced by

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[165]Waid, "The Business Side of an Architect's Office," 267-270.

[166]Alfred Granger, "An Architect's Studio," *House Beautiful* 7 (December 1899): 36-45.

[167]Van Zanten, "Frank Lloyd Wright's Kindergarten," 55-61.

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the position of the office within the house, balancing the Wright children's playroom and suggesting that the studio was a kind of adult kindergarten. Urban, who knew Wright, was probably aware of the Oak Park space through publications. Yet while Urban wanted his office to represent him and his practice, he was equally insistent that the overall form and location be professional, not domestic.

By the late 1920s professional interest had increased in the architecture office as a designed space. *Architectural Record* featured a series of offices in the 1928, 1930 and 1931 issues.[168] Most of the American offices published in the magazines tended to be decorated in revival styles or European-influenced modern. While a greater sense of design pervades these spaces, they tend to be impersonal and do not express a sense of the architect's identity. The only office published which could compare with Urban's was that of another architect with strong ties to the theater and film worlds, the French architect Robert Mallet-Stevens.

That Urban successfully represented himself through his office is evident from the description of the space published in newspapers and popular magazines. For Anne Lee, a

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[168]"Architects and Their Offices, I. Rob Mallet-Stevens," *Architectural Record* 64 (October 1928): 275-277; "Architects and Their Offices II. Carl Jules Weyl, Los Angeles," *Architectural Record* 64 (December 1928): 466-467; "Portfolio of Current Architecture: Featuring Architects' Offices," *Architectural Record* 68 (August 1930): 140-153; and the article on Urban's Office, "Reception Room, Offices for Joseph Urban," 37-39.

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description of the office was second only to a description of Urban in indicating the aura of the man and his architecture.[169]

Profession

Given Urban's nontraditional background, it is important to examine his interaction with the American architectural profession. Whom did Urban associate with? What professional organizations did he belong to? What was the critical response to his work? Little of Urban's correspondence survives, nor does that of his closest colleagues in the profession. Unfortunately, Urban's involvement with professional organizations, the issues and tone of his discussions with colleagues can only be suggested and not analyzed in detail.

Urban's closest associates in the architectural world were Ely Jacques Kahn, Raymond Hood and Ralph Walker. The four met on a regular basis for four-hour lunches at the Architectural League dining room. Ely Jacques Kahn recalled the atmosphere of these lunches:

> Joseph Urban joined [the League] and he brought with him a spirit of European design. Weekly luncheons became the rule as all described their various works. All of us were busy on major works - Urban for theatre design; Hood on Radio City; Walker on the proposed hall for the Philadelphia concerts. The luncheons were held not only

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[169]"The impression made by the studio is only second to that made by its occupant." Lee, "A Close-Up of Joseph Urban," 63.

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> at Mori's for a splendid meal and a grand bottle of Chianti but also in the various homes, giving each of us an insight into the domestic atmosphere of the other's life. Frank Lloyd Wright joined when he came to the city, also Eliel Saarinen.[170]

Urban, as well as Kahn and Hugh Ferriss belonged to the Theater Guild, a group which staged avant-garde productions including Russian Constructivist and Futurist works.[171] Urban's own theater and film sets were also highly admired by the architectural world. His film sets were exhibited by the Architectural League in a special section of its 1921 annual exhibition.[172] The 1922 Wiener Werkstätte show room, furthermore, was featured in the architectural press.[173] Ely Jacques Kahn, whose father was Austrian, may have met Urban through a circle of Austrian acquaintances. Austrian performers, directors, musicians and designers formed a strong and close-knit circle in 1910s and 1920s New York. Kahn and Urban frequently assisted young Austrian designers by providing them employment in one of their offices.[174] Ralph

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[170]Kahn, "Autobiography," Chapter 2, p. 22.

[171]"Heard on Broadway," *Theatre Magazine* 33 (February 1922): 90, documents Kahn's involvement; for Ferriss see: Willis, "Drawing Towards Metropolis," 153.

[172]The Architectural League of New York, *Index of Exhibits: Thirty-sixth Annual Exhibition, New South Wing, Metropolitan Museum, April 1 to April 30, Inclusive, 1921* (New York: The Architectural League of New York, 1921).

[173]Freund, "Vienna's Joy Seeks to Live," 149-152; Solon, "The Viennese Method for Artistic Display," 266-271.

[174]"The Reminisicences of William Muschenheim," 50; Langseth-Christensen, 17-34.

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Walker had seen Urban's 1912-1914 set designs for the Boston Opera Company. The vivid impression that these sets made caused Walker to ask Urban, years later, to participate in a symposium on the question of a new architecture.[175] Urban, however, had the closest friendship with Raymond Hood. The two frequently socialized together and exchanged ideas and criticisms concerning their designs.[176]

Urban's friendship with these three architects centered around the Architectural League. He started to exhibit his architectural work in the League annual shows in 1927 and became a member in 1928. By 1930, Urban had become active in the programming and exhibitions of the organization. He was instrumental in initiating a series of exhibitions focusing on the work of a single architect.[177] He also designed several installations for the annual exhibition. In particular his design for the 1933 show was widely praised as an innovative

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[175]Ralph Walker, "Joseph Urban, the Man," *Architecture* 69 (May 1934): 271-272.

[176]Gretl Urban Tape 2; Raymond Hood to Joseph Urban, 23 May 1933, TLs, "Misc. Architecture," Production File Box 21, Joseph Urban Collection; their closeness is also uncannily captured in a photograph of the participants in the 1929 Metropolitan Museum of Art Exhibitions, while most of the group stare directly at the camera, Urban and Hood turn towards each other, "Metropolitan Museum of Art Exhibition Photographs," Production File Box 21, Joseph Urban Collection.

[177]This commenced in 1930 with an exhibition on Frank Lloyd Wright for which Urban designed the approach and setting. See announcement of exhibition Architectural League to Frank Lloyd Wright, 29 May 1930, Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, Taliesin West. Urban was featured in a 1932 special installation, Edward Alden Jewell, "In the Realm of Art, *New York Times*, 14 February 1932.

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display employing walls and partitions to shape the room into a series of spaces corresponding to themes and vignettes (fig. 80).[178] With this exhibition, Urban expanded the League's traditional presentation of "allied arts"--mural painting, stained glass and sculpture--to include a Theater Arts component, showing the work of Robert Edmond Jones, Hermann Rosse, Norman Bel Geddes and others.[179] He won the League's highest award, the medal of honor, for the installation. Urban's "luncheon club" was instrumental in the League's activities during the late 1920s and early 1930s. With the death of Urban in 1933 and Hood in 1934, Ely Jacques Kahn recalled, that particular cycle of activities and the atmosphere they generated at the League came to a close, and Kahn, for one, was never active in the League again.[180]

Urban's interest in expanding the boundaries of architectural practice also led to his participation in a

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[178]For photographs, notes and clippings see: "Architectural League Exhibit," Production File Box 1; Portfolio 2, Joseph Urban Collection. Henry H. Saylor, "The Editor's Diary, Friday 17," *Architecture* 67 (April 1933): 213-214; Lewis Mumford, "The Sky Line: The Architects Show Their Wares," *New Yorker* 9 (4 March 1933): 57-58; Barry Byrne, "Modern Architecture," *Commonwealth* 17 (5 April 1933): 634-5; "Annual Exhibition of the Architectural League of New York," *Pencil Points* 14 (March 1933): 140-141. Some critics, such as Douglas Haskell, felt that the content of the show did not live up to its presentation, Douglas Haskell, "Architecture," *The Nation* 136 (1 March 1933): 242.

[179]Interestingly, Urban commenced his architectural career by using theater to shape his architectural practice; this installation, his last architectural work, folded theater back into architecture as an art of space.

[180]Kahn, "Autobiography," unnumbered chapter, p. III.

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number of a cooperative associations of architects and designers, including the American Designers Gallery, founded in 1928 and the American Union of Decorative Artists and Craftsmen (AUDAC), also founded in 1928.[181] These organizations linked architects Urban, Hood, Walker, Kahn, Eliel Saarinen and William Van Alen with theater designers Lee Simonson and Frederick Kiesler and interior designers Donald Deskey, Paul Frankl and Kem Weber. The aim of the organization was to design and display furniture and unified interior arrangements for the modern home. The designs were supposed to be modern, in the use of new materials, affordable, and address new life styles, particularly apartment living.[182] Through these organizations Urban participated in cooperative design installations at the Newark Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and The Brooklyn Museum, as well as at numerous galleries. The installations

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[181]For the American Designers' Gallery see: Margaret Hess, "Modern Art Devoted to Practical Uses is Shown at Exhibit of American Designers," *New York Evening World*, 12 November 1928; Walter Rendall Story, "American Designers Show Their Work," *New York Times Magazine*, 25 November 1928; "Another Exposition of Modern Art Takes Its Bow," *Decorative Furnisher* 55 (December 1928): 77-78; T-Square, "The Sky Line: Half and Half--Rash Industry--To Please All of the Many Moderns," *New Yorker* 4 (15 December 1928): 119-120; Douglas Haskell, "Cheaper Better Rooms," *Creative Art* 4 (May 1929): 40-41; for AUDAC see: "Decorative Artists Form Union," *Architectural Record* 64 (August 1928): 164; Donald McGregor, "Audac In Brooklyn: a Great Museum Host to Moderns," *Good Furniture* 36 (June 1931): 322-325; C. Adolph Glassgold, "Audac Exhibit of Modern Industrial and Decorative Art at the Brooklyn Museum," *Creative Art* 8 (June 1931): 437-8.

[182]"Decorative Artists to Form Union," 164.

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frequently consisted of each designer creating an entire space, such as a den, dining room or bedroom, in order to fully demonstrate the potential of modern design to create new modes of living.[183]

Urban's strongest professional ties, therefore, were with such modernist American architects as Hood, Kahn, and Walker. His major professional affiliation was with the Architectural League, an organization which was sympathetic to modernism and to an interaction with art, design and theater, as opposed to more traditional institutions such as the American Institute of Architects or the National Academy of Design. Urban's professional connections aligned him with a progressive but not radical wing of American architectural modernism. This is evident in his definition of modernism in a 1930 interview:

> Architecture should be as much a part of the time and of the place as the current news. It is about time that we outgrew ancient cultural styles and intermediate mushroom growths. To have a colonial or Renaissance house nestled

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[183]For the exhibit at The Brooklyn Museum see McGregor, "Audac In Brooklyn," 322-325; Glassgold, "Audac Exhibit of Modern Industrial and Decorative Art," 437-8. For the Metropolitan Museum of Art exhibit see: *The Architect and the Industrial Arts: An Exhibition of Contemporary American Design* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1929). For Newark see: "History of Rugs Revealed at Exhibit," *New York World*, 9 March 1930. Urban's involvement with these groups and the publicity they received may have led to the commission to design Katherine Brush's 1933 apartment as well as a prototype furniture line for the Mallin Furniture Company, of which at least some furniture was actually produced, see Portfolio 55, Joseph Urban Collection.

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> in the heart of New York is as absurd as doing modern day jobs with Colonial or Renaissance tools.[184]

Urban did not subscribe to a purely functionalist conception of modernism, which tended to stress particular aspects of modern culture such as engineering, precision, and machinery. For Urban modernity was to be in touch with the "needs of [the] cultural environment of American life."[185]

Yet Urban's background and design philosophy also led him to other architectural affiliations. Urban's age and training distinguished him from most of his American colleagues. He was about ten to fifteen years older than Kahn, Hood or Walker. His younger friends had been trained at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris or schools affected by the Ecole. Their first projects were strongly influenced by a traditional classical vocabulary. The 1920s marked their coming of age as professionals and their first use of a self-consciously modern style. Urban, however, had come into his professional maturity in 1900s Vienna. At that time, he had been connected with and espoused the philosophies of the Secessionstil. He frequently reminded people in both interviews and articles that by the late 1920s he had not just discovered modernism but had been involved with promoting modern causes for almost

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[184]Codie, "Excells Because He Does Not Specialize," 9. This concurs with Edwin Avery Park's definition of modernism when he states that an artist; "is of his day, living and absorbing its life, and expressing himself through it, or conversely, it through him." Park, 5-6.

[185]Codie, "Excells Because He Does Not Specialize," 9.

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three decades. This background gave Urban an authority as a modern architect which distinguished him from his friends. His employee, William Muschenheim, suggested that Urban's turn of the century involvement with the Secessionstil meant that he was familiar with the roots, the sources of modernism. This ultimately gave Urban his own approach to architecture which did not fall comfortably into either art deco or European-influenced modern styles.[186]

Urban's special status was reinforced by the fact that he maintained ties with his European colleagues. He kept in contact with such Viennese compatriots as Josef Hoffmann and Oskar Strnad. On several of his trips to Europe he visited German architects Hans Poelzig and Oskar Kaufmann. Urban was familiar with Peter Behrens's work and may have had contact with him as well. Muschenheim, who had studied with Behrens before entering the Urban office, recalled that he was specifically hired because of that experience. Urban also helped to arrange a 1930 New York exhibition of work by Behrens's students.[187]

Only Frank Lloyd Wright could rival this group in age and decades-long commitment to modernism. By the late 1920s Urban was an important New York connection for Wright, and may have

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[186]"The Reminiscences of William Muschenheim," 54.

[187]"Austrian Envoy Opens Borough Model Exhibit," *Brooklyn Standard Union*, 22 April 1930.

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arranged for Wright's lectures, exhibitions and awards.[188] Upon at least one occasion Urban also donated money to Wright for Taliesin.[189] It is not certain when the two first met; however, they may have met while Wright was working on Hollyhock House. Construction on the Hollywood house was supervised by Rudolph Schindler, a Viennese architect who knew Urban. From 1920 on, Urban visited Hollywood on several occasions.[190] During this period, Aline Barnsdall was having an affair with Richard Ordynski, a close friend of Urban's and a former colleague at the Metropolitan Opera House. There seem to be too many connections between the two for them to not have come into contact. By the late 1920s, Wright and Urban were in direct communication. Letters in the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation at Taliesin West date as far back as 1927, the tone of the correspondence informal and intimate with Urban signing letters "your old devoted friend," and Wright

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[188]"Artists Luncheon at Casino;" "Frank Lloyd Wright to Build;" "Skyscraper's Designer Will be Honored;" Saylor, "Editor's Diary, Friday, May 16," 44; Saylor, 238; Saylor, "The Editor's Diary, Wednesday, September 16," 369; announcement of exhibition Architectural League to Frank Lloyd Wright.

[189]Frank Lloyd Wright to Maginel Wright, 8 November 1928, TL; Sue Goldklang (Secy. to Mr. Urban) to Frank Lloyd Wright, 3 August 1927, TLs, Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, Taliesin West.

[190]"Now on Coast," *Morning Telegraph*, 16 July 1920; "Joseph Urban in Los Angeles to Design Settings," *Morning Telegraph*, 1 August 1920, document Urban's first known trip to the West Coast. He travelled frequently to California until he resigned from Hearst's Cosmopolitan Productions.

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calling Urban "My dear Josie."[191] One indication of Wright's esteem for Urban is evident in his 1932 *An Autobiography*:

> Henry Churchill introduced me in the very satisfactory auditorium designed by big-hearted Jo Urban. Jo designed the building for the New School and I could not refrain from saying complimentary things about it. It seemed so remarkable that it should be there in New York at all. Jo Urban is one Viennese gift to the country, that has not gone wrong. Jo's touch is as Mozartian as his character is Falstaffian. He is responsible for more lyrical beauty in our world of decoration than anyone I know.[192]

This is lavish praise from Wright, who was notoriously stingy in acknowledging his architectural colleagues, and indicates the depth of his respect for Urban.[193]

As a lifelong advocate of modernism, Urban was aware of and participated in the new movement of European-influenced modernism in America. By 1929-30 some American architecture critics and designers started to incorporate this new aesthetic into their work. This crystallized in New York during 1931 when a series of new buildings, such as the New School, exhibitions and articles focused attention on defining the new "International Style." One of the vehicles for promoting this new style was the 1931 "Rejected Architects

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[191]Frank Lloyd Wright to Joseph Urban, 1 January 1931, TL; Joseph Urban to Frank Lloyd Wright, 10 September 1932, TLs, Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, Taliesin West.

[192]Wright, *An Autobiography*, 344.

[193]Later, in the second edition, published after Urban's death, Wright deleted the incident. Whether this was due to the fact that Urban's name no longer was a powerful reference for Wright to make, or to his general miserliness when it came to praising other architects is unknown.

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Exhibition," organized by Philip Johnson.[194] The show featured the European-inspired modern work of six young architects who had been rejected from the Architectural League annual exhibition. Interestingly enough two of the rejected architects, William Muschenheim and Elroy Webber worked in Urban's office, demonstrating his openness to new ideas. Urban, according to Muschenheim, did not approve of the League's actions.[195]

The best example, however, of Urban's engagement with European modernism can be seen in his involvement with the short-lived architecture program at the New School. Announcements of a New School architecture workshop appeared in the September 1931 newspapers.[196] It seems likely that Urban, who was very close to New School president Alvin Johnson, played a key role in the selection of the faculty for the program. The faculty comprised a combination of Urban's "modernist" colleagues from the League---Hood, Kahn, Walker, Lamb, and Corbett--with more European-influenced modern practitioners such as Henry Churchill, Joseph Hudnut, Philip

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[194]Philip Johnson, "Rejected Architects," *Creative Art* 8 (June 1931): 433-435.

[195]"The Reminiscences of William Muschenheim," 53-54.

[196]"Architectural School Opens," *New York American*, 12 September 1931; "Architects Will Study Needs of East Side," *New York Herald-Tribune*, 27 September 1931; see also Alvin S. Johnson, typescript of "New School Report of Director 1931-1932," section on "The Architecture Workshop," [1932], TMs, "New School Report of Director 1931-1932," Series II, Box 8, Alvin Saunders Johnson Collection, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University.

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Goodwin, and Lawrence Kocher. The initial project was a quintessentially modern program with social overtones, the reconstruction of the Lower East Side. For whatever reasons, the school did not succeed, closing at the end of the academic year, and no further mention of it occurs.[197]

The New School, however, continued to include lectures and exhibitions on architecture as part of its programs through the 1930s.[198] The school held a series of lectures on modern architecture by Urban, Wright as well C. H. van der Leeuw, a hard-line functionalist critic from Rotterdam.[199] Even more significant was a 1933 exhibition, New Trends in Architecture, organized by Lawrence Kocher on the modern home.[200] Kocher's installation, in a manner similar to German housing exhibitions, sought to compare new solutions

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[197]It would have been the most progressive educational institution for architecture in the city at that time.

[198]Housing seems to have been a primary concern: "E. Kahn to Lecture on Housing," *New York Times*, 14 March 1935, p. 40; "Lecture by R. D. Kohn on Housing Problems," *New York Times*, 15 March 1936, p. 13; "Plans for Lectures on Housing Problems," *New York Times*, 15 April 1936, p. 19; "New School to Offer Housing and Architecture Course," *New York Times*, 21 September 1936, p. 21; "J. Ruhtenberg to Give Lectures on Architectural Problems," *New York Times*, 31 January 1937, p. 13; "New School to Give Housing Courses," *New York Times*, 27 August 1939, p. 11.

[199]"Rotterdam Critic Disappointed by Radio City Plans," *New York Herald-Tribune*, 28 April 1931; Henry Saylor, "Editor's Diary, Monday, April 27," *Architecture* 64 (July 1931): 43.

[200]"Architects Show Modern Trends," *New York Times*, 22 January 1933, sec. X-XI, p. 1; Barry Byrne, "Two Shows," *Commonweal* 17 (22 February 1933): 463-464.

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with the old. He paired photographs of clothes, cars, sports with the buildings of their period.

> The clear purpose is to indicate that unity of housing and decoration with living, its activities and appurtenances, is essential to a rounded civilization.[201]

These series of photos culminated in a display of models and drawings for proposed low to moderate income housing. Walter Bearmann, William Muschenheim, Kocher, Alfred Class, Alfred Kastner, Howe & Lescaze were among the architects included in the exhibition. Urban collaborated with Raymond Hood and Wallace Harrison to design single family, mass produced houses for the show.[202]

The New School architecture programs quickly turned into a more conventional lecture series. The brief attempt to use the school as a forum for both the modernists of the 1920s and the European-influenced practitioners who would increasingly dominate the 1930s, however, was a reflection of Urban's own evolving concerns and his belief that there could be a dialogue and collaboration between the two views.

The Critical Response

Theater had been a positive term in American architecture during the 1920s. The Ziegfeld Theater was identified as

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[201]Byrne, "Two Shows," 463-464.

[202]"Little House Designs," Production File Box 18.

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modern because of the boldness of its forms and the expression of the interior on the exterior. H. R. Shurtleff wrote:

> After the first impact of its newness is over that which seems gigantesque in it, resolves into something both strong and trenchant.[203]

Even the flamboyant massing and details of the International Magazine Building received critical approval from Lewis Mumford.

> This is theatric architecture, to be sure. At first survey, I felt that it is perhaps a stunt. It has an "exposition" quality, observable in other of Mr. Urban's designs. But whatever he does goes with a swing. One feels back of the design a vigorous, compelling personality.[204]

The use of the term "theater", during the 1920s meant modern, bold even functional architecture.

By 1929, however, a small group of critics including Henry- Russell Hitchcock, Douglas Haskell, Philip Johnson and Lewis Mumford began to use European modern architecture as the yardstick by which to measure modern American architecture. In a 1929 article entitled "Decorative Modernism" Haskell criticized the Metropolitan Museum of Art exhibit of interiors by Urban, Hood, Walker and others, because they did not treat their spaces as containers filled with light and because their furniture, although made of modern materials, failed to measure up to the functional-looking furniture of Mies van der Rohe and Marcel Breuer. Although Haskell felt that the

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[203]H. R. Shurtleff, 149.

[204]T-Square, "The Sky Line: Where Credit Is Due--Urban--But Is it Art?" *New Yorker* 4 (24 March 1928): 74-76.

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exhibition had many virtues, it was not, he implied truly modern, but a lesser decorative misunderstanding of modernism.[205] "Moderne" designs such as Urban's 1929 Bedell Store began to be reviled. Lewis Mumford wrote:

> Bedell is modernist not modern - the esthetic collywobbles of the pusher, the advertiser, the booster.[206]

By 1931-32 these criticisms had coalesced into more stringent definitions of what was truly modern and what was not. Truth to modern materials and function were frequently identified as the hallmarks of modern architecture. Lewis Mumford wrote:

> To be modern is to make the least fuss possible about the superficies of a building: it is to concentrate upon the essential and, above all, to do nothing merely for the effect.[207]

Urban had also changed his concept of architecture and modernity. At times, his buildings were felt to succeed as part of the new International Style. The critic for *Art News* felt that Urban's 1931-2 design for the Palace of the Soviets epitomized the International Style with its socialist concerns.

> ...he has given the Russian leaders a massive series of buildings very much in the new International Style that should appeal to their proletariat ideals and also to their sense of the dramatic. He visualizes a huge central hall that will house thousands upon thousands,

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[205]Douglas Haskell, "Decorative Modernism," *The Nation* 128 (20 March 1929): 354.

[206]Lewis Mumford, "Notes on Modern Architecture," *New Republic* 65 (18 March 1931): 122.

[207]Mumford, "Notes on Modern Architecture," 121.

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> both as audience and as patriotic spectacle. These plans are treated to liberal doses of blaring Soviet red, since the whole ceiling of the main auditorium is to be done in solid crimson mosaic. Only six leading world architects of the newer persuasion were invited to participate in this distinguished competition.[208]

Even Lewis Mumford, who generally disliked Urban's work, praised the Palace of the Soviets and the Atlantic Beach Club Cooperative Apartment schemes:

> ...his design for the Palace of the Soviets in Moscow was surely more effective than that which mysteriously took first place, and his study for a beach-front hotel, with a maximum of privacy for each room, was excellent.[209]

But as Chapter 3 on the New School indicates, Urban's attempts to use European influenced modernism were often felt to be incorrect. This was due to that fact that for some, by the early 1930s, "theatrical" had become synonymous with a decorative approach to modern architecture. In 1931, Lewis Mumford praised the restraint of Ely Jacques Kahn's Squibb Building noting:

> It is a great relief after the fireworks, the Coney Island barking the theatrical gew-gaws that have been masquerading as le style moderne around Manhattan during the last few years.[210]

Urban's strong ties with the theater had become a critical liability with certain groups.

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[208]"Joseph Urban: Architectural League," *Art News* 30 (20 February 1932): 9

[209]Lewis Mumford, "The Skyline," *New Yorker* 8 (19 March 1932): 71.

[210]Mumford, "Notes on Modern Architecture," 121.

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Conclusion

From the beginning of his American architecture career, Urban effortlessly shifted between professional roles--architect, interior designer, stage set designer--and styles--Moderne and International Style. This facility was troubling to those critics looking for consistent ideologies and approaches to architecture. Today, it is equally troubling to historians asked to summarize Urban's career. Historians are forced to abandon any attempt at a consistent stylistic analysis and look for coherence in other aspects of Urban's work. In a 1988 interview, Timothy Rub the curator of an Urban exhibition at the Cooper Hewitt Museum stated: "Urban was somewhat of a stylistic chameleon, but there's a lot of thematic and typological consistency in his work."[211] Gregory Gilmartin in a 1991 essay states:

> In the 1890s, Urban assimilated the art nouveau; in the 1900s, both Hoffmann's Secessionstil and the monumental *Junge Klassizität* of Berlin; in the 1920s he incorporated German Expressionism into his repertoire; and by 1930, the machined vocabulary of the International Style. His aim was always to "express our modern life" or create "an expression of modern trends," to celebrate the present moment rather than reform it.[212]

No attempt to understand Urban's architecture, however, can do so without addressing his relationship with and use of

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[211]Beth Dunlop, "Interview: Timothy F. Rub on the Work of Joseph Urban," *Decorative and Propaganda Arts Journal*, Spring 1988, 117.

[212]Gilmartin, 273.

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theater. During his career, theater served as a conduit for European artistic form to come to America, it presented an early and innovative use of color, light and space--key components of Urban's designs and of that of the American 1920s, and provided a source Urban's reinterpretation of his professional role and standing. Theater provides the continuous thread throughout Urban's practice, producing inspiration for Urban's designs as well acting as a model for his career. In particular, his theater experience helped him to promote his architectural practice and define his professional role. His colleague, Ely Jacques Kahn summarized the significance of Urban's European training and theatrical work for his overall work:

> Urban was of a different stamp, strongly European, fascinated by the theatre, its people backgrounds, his architectural contributions were always colored by the love of the theatre.[213]

While Urban was omitted from architectural history for many years he was not forgotten by architects. His range of acquaintances among American architects during the 1920s and 1930s was wide. It is clear that his design and architectural ideals had a profound influence on the work of Raymond Hood and Ralph Walker, but he also influenced the subsequent generation of architects. He collaborated with Hood and Wallace Harrison on the small house project. Harrison's subsequent work at Radio City and later at Lincoln Center were

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[213]Kahn, "Autobiography," Chapter II, p. 23.

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strongly shaped by Urban's theater designs and ideals. He met Nathaniel Owings, of Skidmore Owings and Merrill, during the design of the Century of Progress Exposition. Owings later wrote of that work:

> Louis Skidmore, Joseph Urban and I, along with handlebar-mustachioed Vogelgesang and red-haired, toothbrush-mustached Otto Teegen, produced something absolutely new in the United States.
>
> There was a certain eerie quality about the uncompromising huge, flat, windowless surfaces, strange in volume and shape, as they blazed in crude, primitive, startling color combinations. There were several variations of wine red and violet, umbers and ochers against the sky or each other; sometimes smoldering, sometimes blazing in the sun, etched against the enormous panorama of the lake.[214]

Perhaps the unusual blue-green of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill's first significant project, Lever House, has its origins in Urban's use of color.

Most of Urban's interiors have vanished along with many of his buildings. Yet if one dines in a mirror-lined or black-glass lined restaurant, if one admires a brightly-colored exterior, or if one goes to a circular theater that has a "democratic" seating plan and seeks to erase the boundary between audience and performer, one is admiring the legacy of Joseph Urban.

Urban's transfer of his celebrity status from the theatrical to architectural worlds profoundly influenced the professional role and public perception of American

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[214]Nathaniel Owings, *The Spaces in Between* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1973), 57.

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architects. From the 1930s on American architects gave interviews, wrote autobiographies and sometimes even made recordings, that had a broad public appeal. This rose to new heights during the 1980s with "star architects" Graves, Stern, Eisenman and Meier appearing on television, selling shoes and suits and being profiled in the *New York Times Magazine* as well as *Vanity Fair*.[215]

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[215]Taylor, "Mr. In-Between," 46-52; Suzanne Stephens, "The Fountainhead Syndrome," *Vanity Fair* 48 (April 1984): 40-44; Robert A. M. Stern "Pride of Place," an eight-part television series documentary aired on American public television in 1986.

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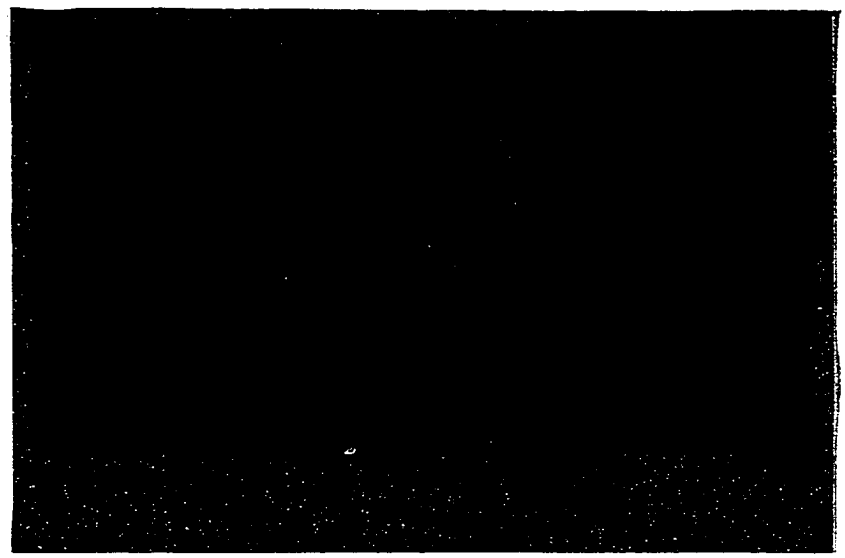


Figure 1. Joseph Urban, Rathhauskeller, Vienna, 1898-99 (Columbia University)

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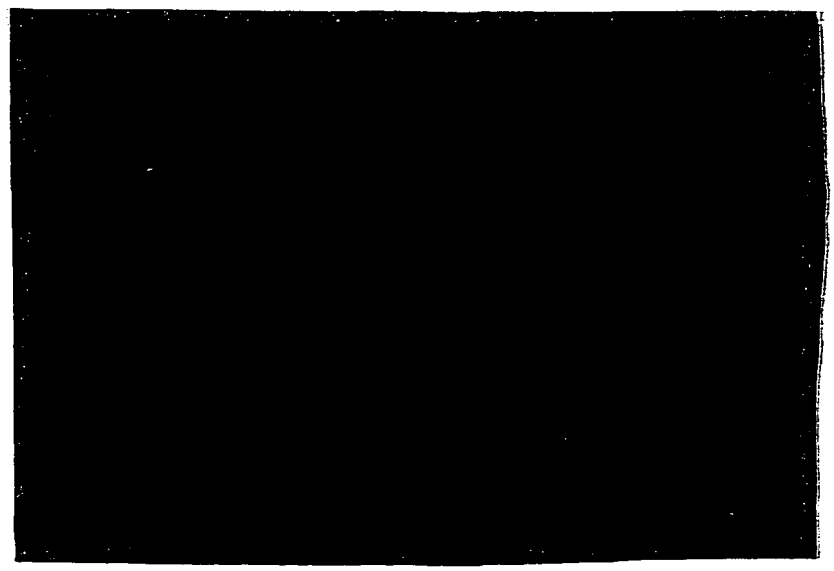


Figure 2. Joseph Urban, Hagenbund Exhibition, Vienna, ca. 1902-1909 (Columbia University)

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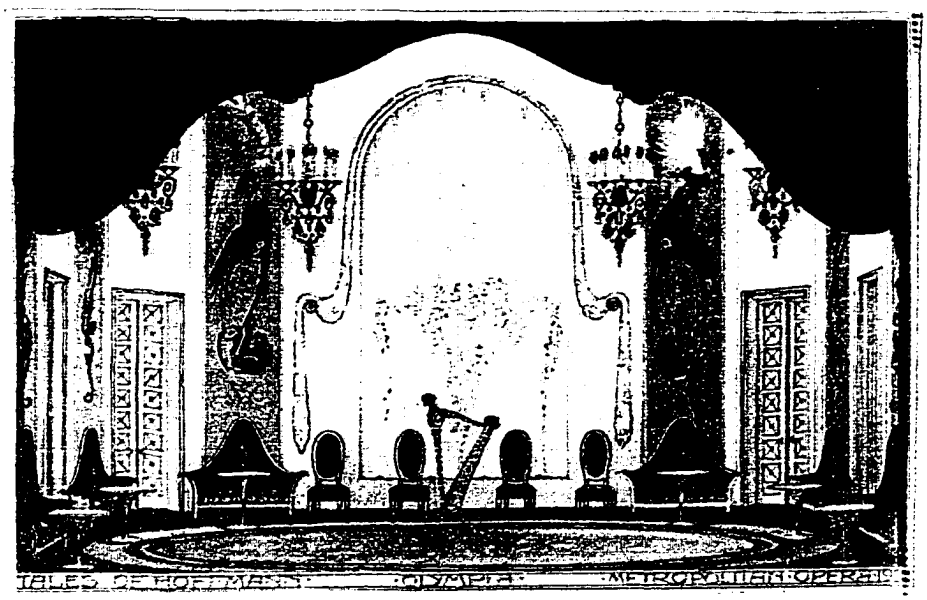


Figure 3. Joseph Urban, Perspective of Set Design for "Olympia" Scene, *Tales of Hoffmann*, Metropolitan Opera, New York, 1924 (Columbia University)

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Figure 4. Joseph Urban, Still from *Enchantment*, 1921 (Columbia University)

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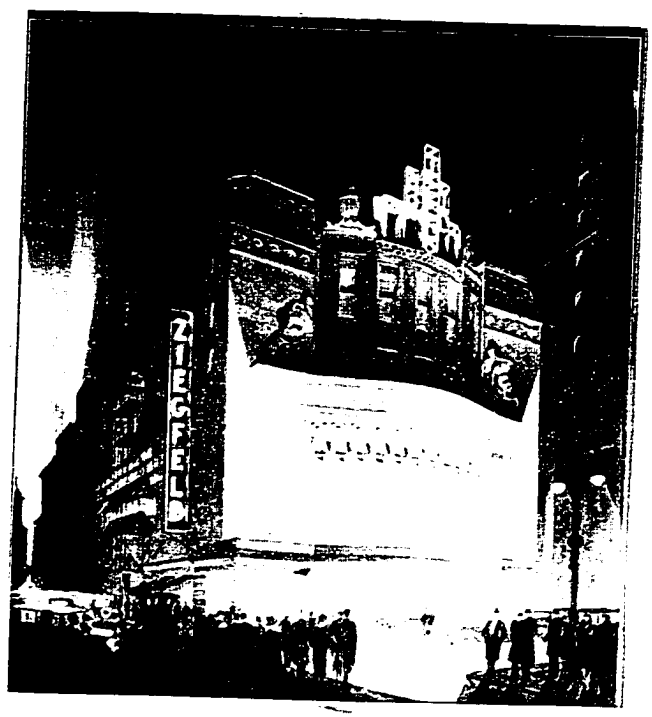


Figure 5. Joseph Urban, Perspective of Ziegfeld Theater, New York, ca. 1927 (Columbia University)

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Figure 6. Joseph Urban, Ziegfeld Theater Auditorium, New York, 1927, Sigurd Fischer, Photographer (Columbia University)

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Figure 7. Joseph Urban, Ballroom, Central Park Casino, New York, 1929 (Columbia University)

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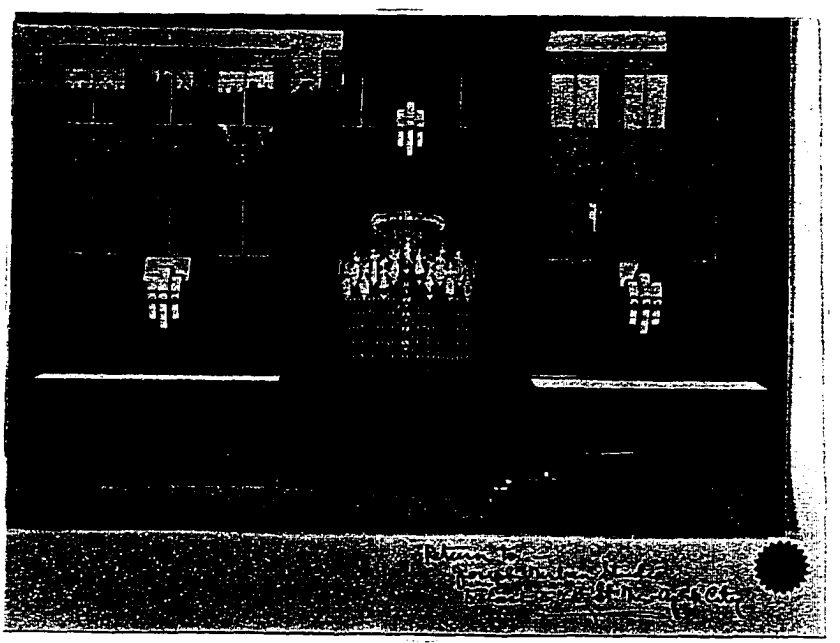


Figure 8. Joseph Urban, Bedell Store, New York, 1928, Sigurd Fischer, Photographer (Columbia University)

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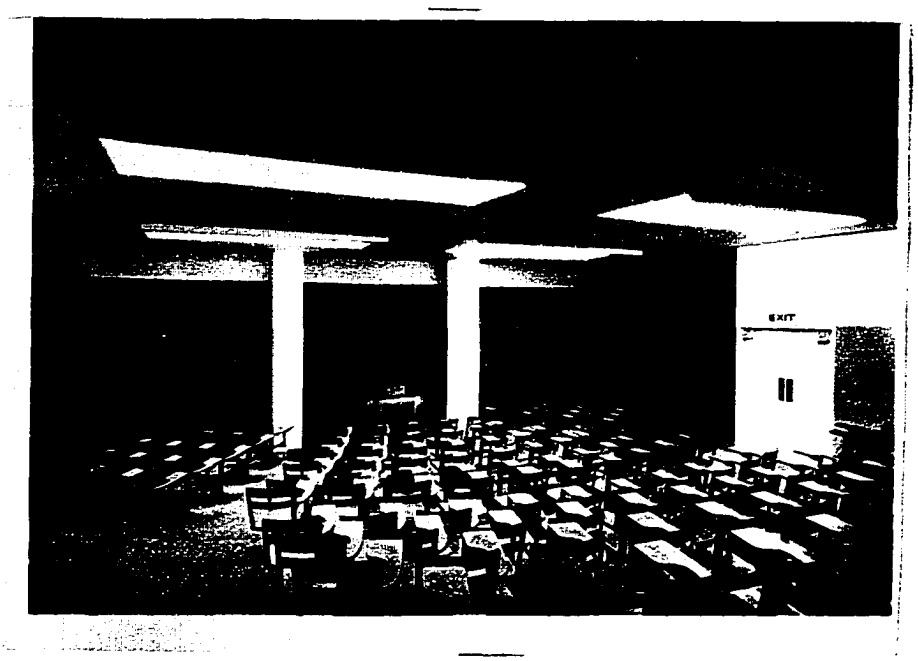


Figure 9. Joseph Urban, Main Front Classroom, New School, New York, 1931, Nyholm and Lincoln, Photographers (Columbia University)

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Figure 10. Joseph Urban, Aerial Perspective, Palace of the Soviets Competition, Moscow, 1931 (Columbia University)

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Figure 11. Joseph Urban, Winter Garden, Apartment Interior, Vienna, ca. 1906 (Columbia University)

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Figure 12. Joseph Urban, *Garden of Paradise*, 1914, (Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations)

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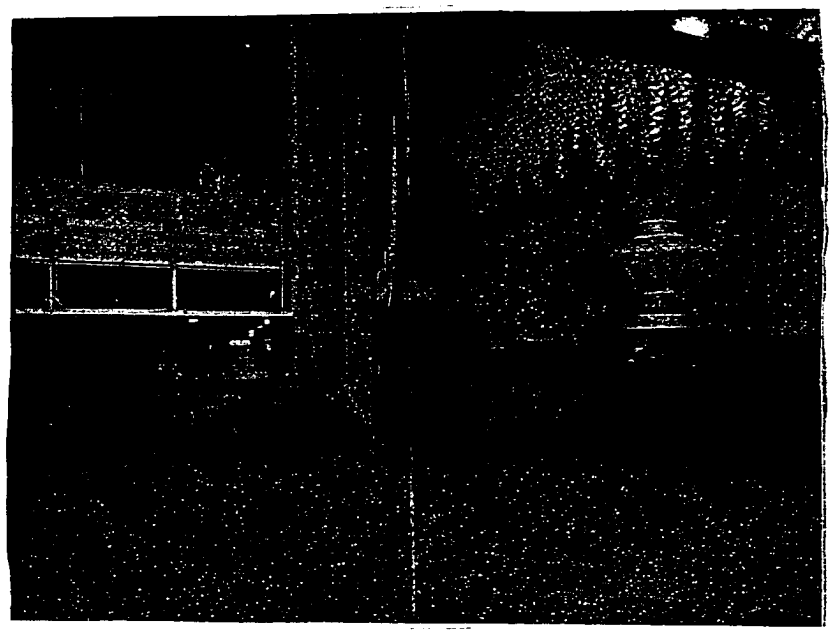


Figure 13. Joseph Urban, New Amsterdam Roof Garden, New York, 1915 (Columbia University)

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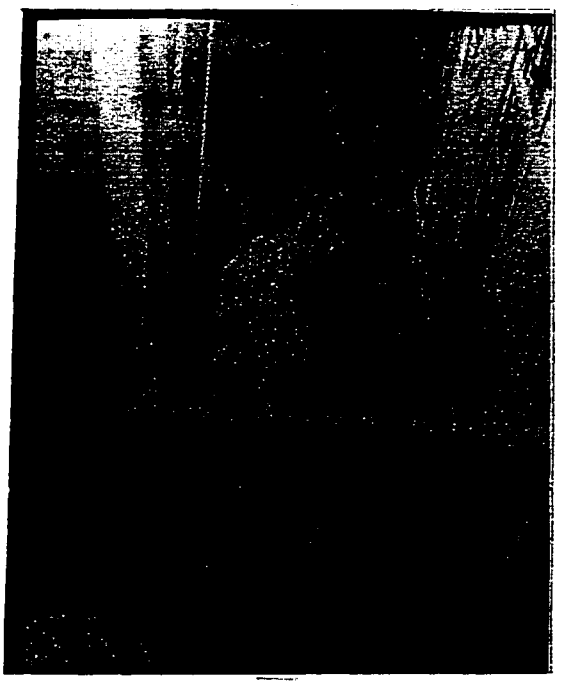


Figure 14. Joseph Urban, *Midnight Frolic*, 1915, White Studio, Photographers (Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations)

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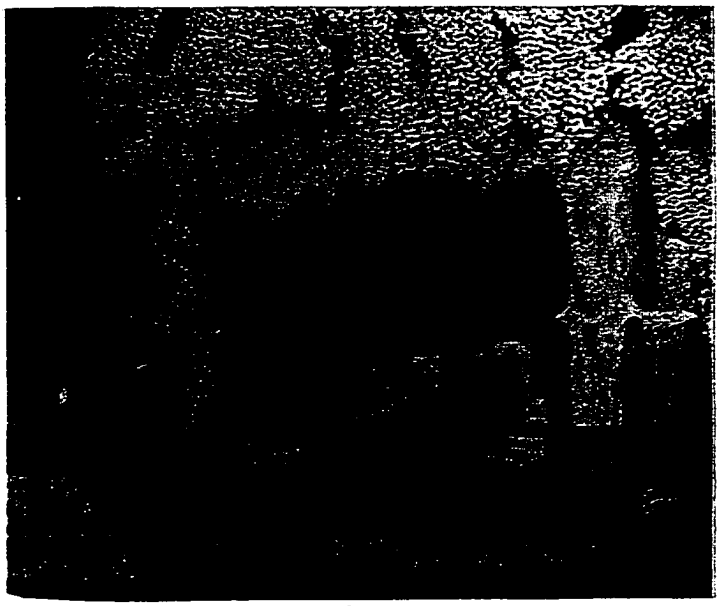


Figure 15. Joseph Urban, New Amsterdam Roof Garden, New York, 1915, White Studio, Photographers (Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts Astor, Lenoxand Tilden Foundations)

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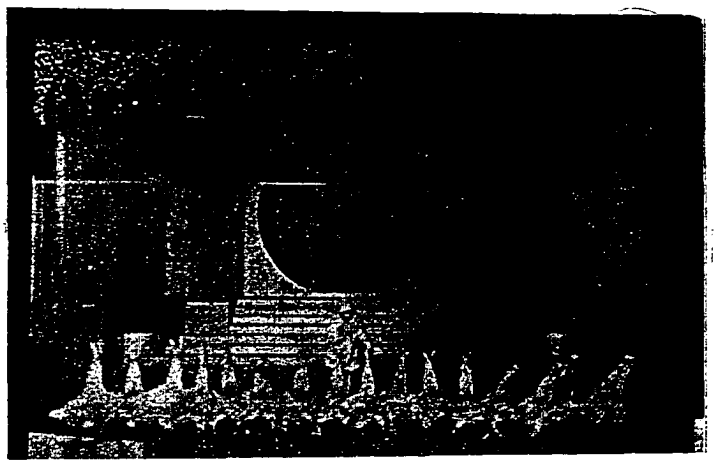


Figure 16. Joseph Urban, New Amsterdam Roof Garden, New York, 1916, White Studio, Photographers (Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations)

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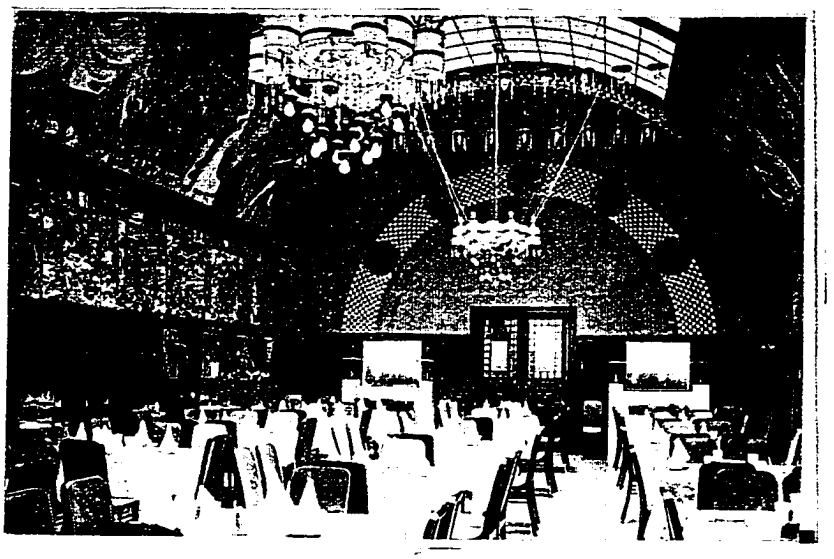


Figure 17. Joseph Urban, Restaurant Paul Hofner, Vienna, 1906 (Columbia University)

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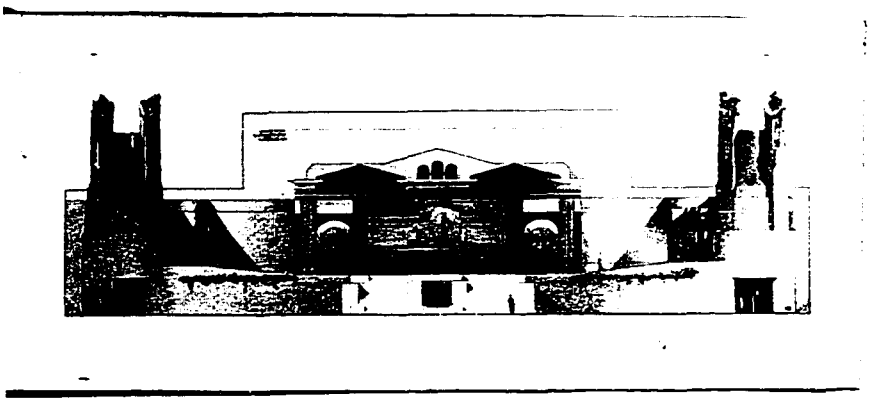


Figure 18. Joseph Urban, Elevation, *Caliban*, New York, 1916 (Columbia University)

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Figure 19. Joseph Urban, Plan, *Caliban*, New York, 1916 (Columbia University)

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Figure 20. Joseph Urban, *Caliban*, New York, 1916 (Columbia University)

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Figure 21. Joseph Urban, Cocoanut Grove, New York, 1917 (*Architectural Review*, January 1920)

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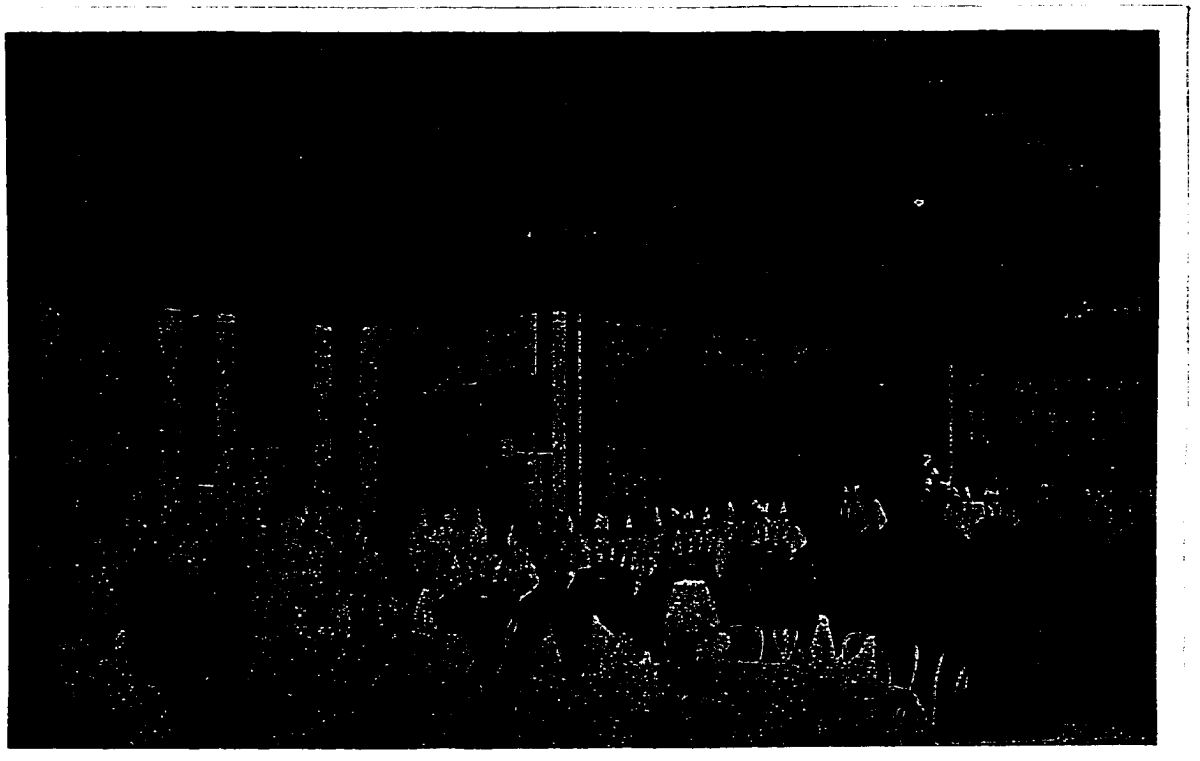


Figure 22. Joseph Urban, Paradise Room at Reisenweber's, New York, 1916 (*Architectural Review*, January 1920

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Figure 23. Joseph Urban, Perspective, Permanent Peace Memorial, 1919 (Columbia University)

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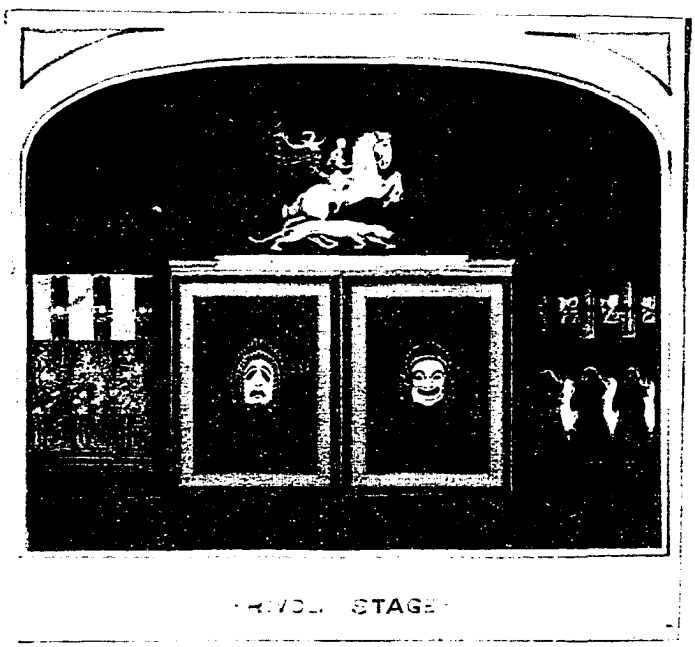


Figure 24. Joseph Urban, Elevation, Rivoli Theater Proscenium, New York, 1919 (Columbia University)

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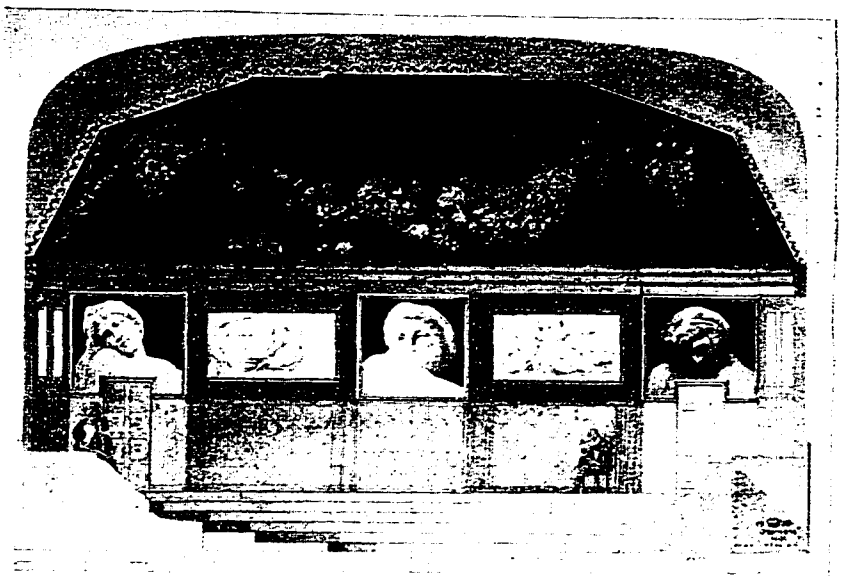


Figure 25. Joseph Urban, Perspective, Stage Set for the Symphony Concerts, Orchestra Hall, Detroit, 1919 (Columbia University)

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Figure 26. Joseph Urban, Tiger Room, Hotel Sherman, Chicago, 1919 (Columbia University)

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Figure 27. Joseph Urban, *Song of the Flame*, 1922, White Studio, Photographs (Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations)

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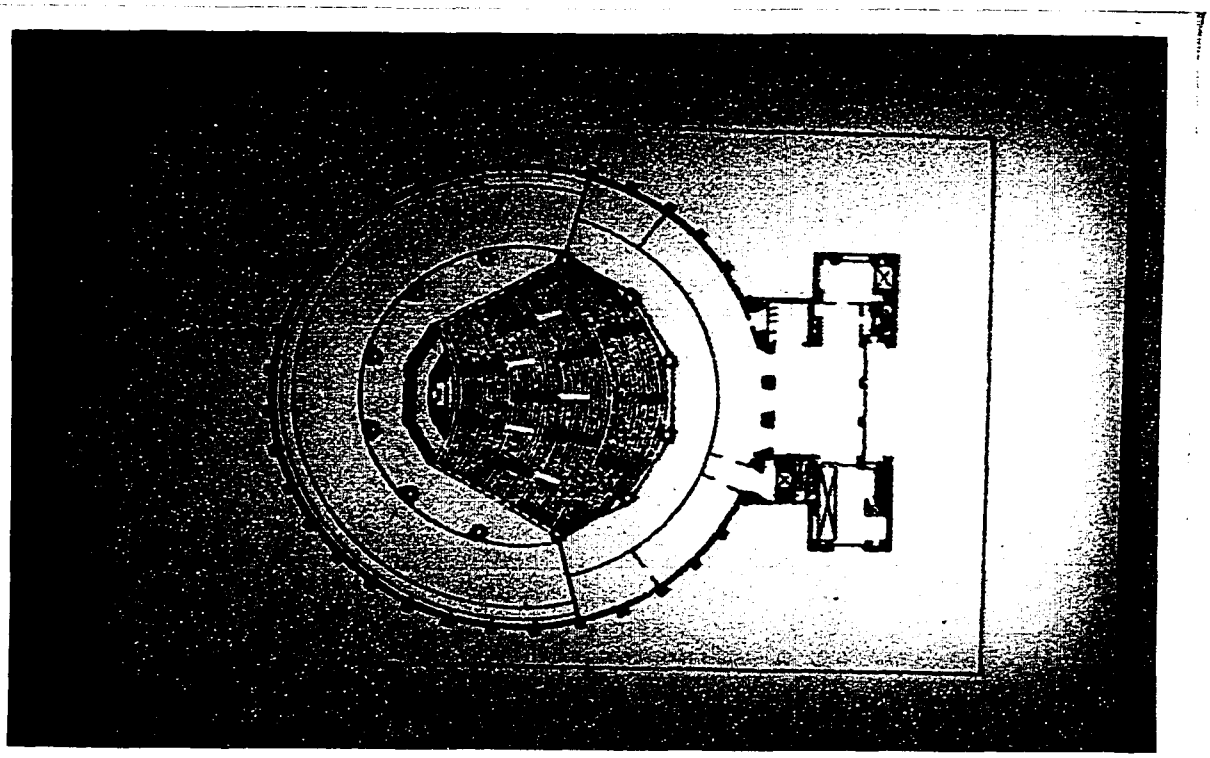


Figure 28. Oskar Strnad, Project of a Circulatory Stage in a Theatre (*Encyclopedia Brittannica*, 1928)

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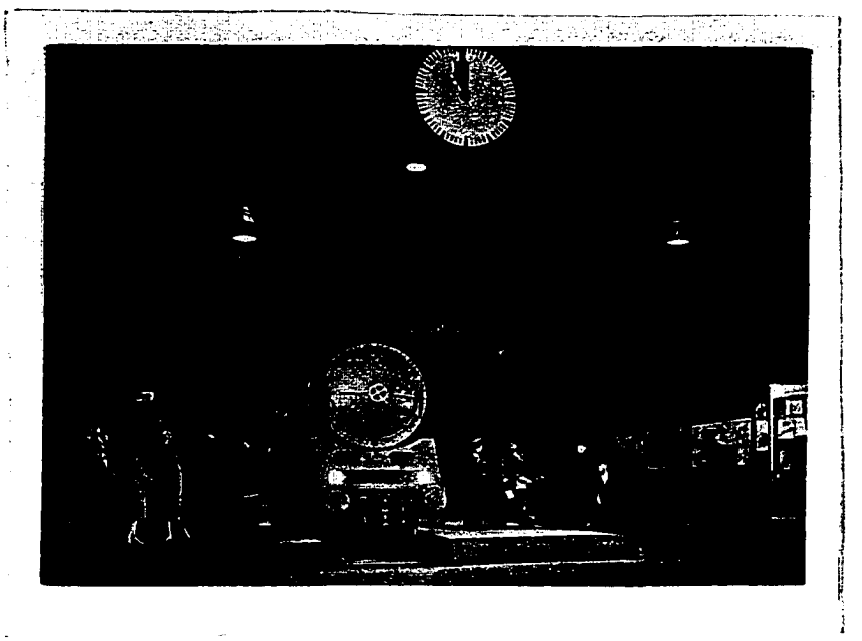


Figure 29. Joseph Urban, *Johnny Spielt Auf*, The Metropolitan Opera, New York, 1928 (Columbia University)

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Figure 30. Joseph Urban, Entrance Rotunda, The Wiener Werkstätte of America, New York, 1922 (*Columbia* University)

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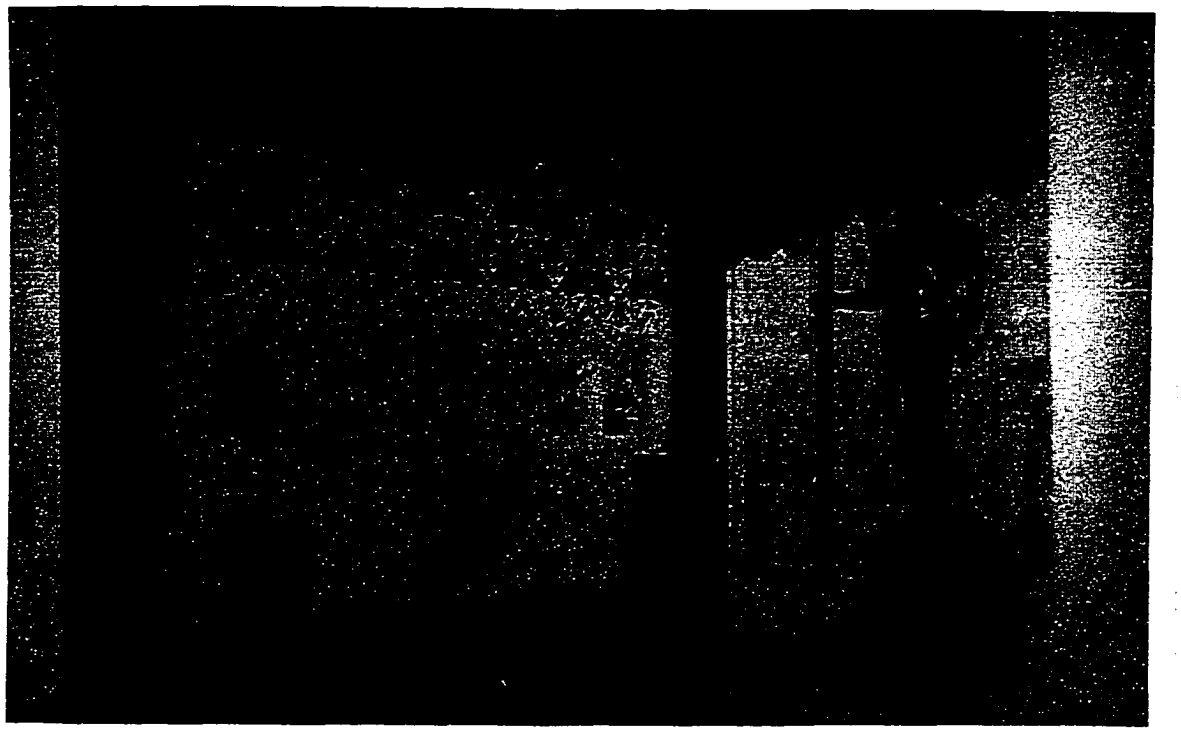


Figure 31. Joseph Urban, Show Window, The Wiener Werkstätte of America, New York, 1922 (*Architectural Record*)

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Figure 32. Joseph Urban, The Wiener Werkstätte of America, New York, 1922 (*Architectural Record*)

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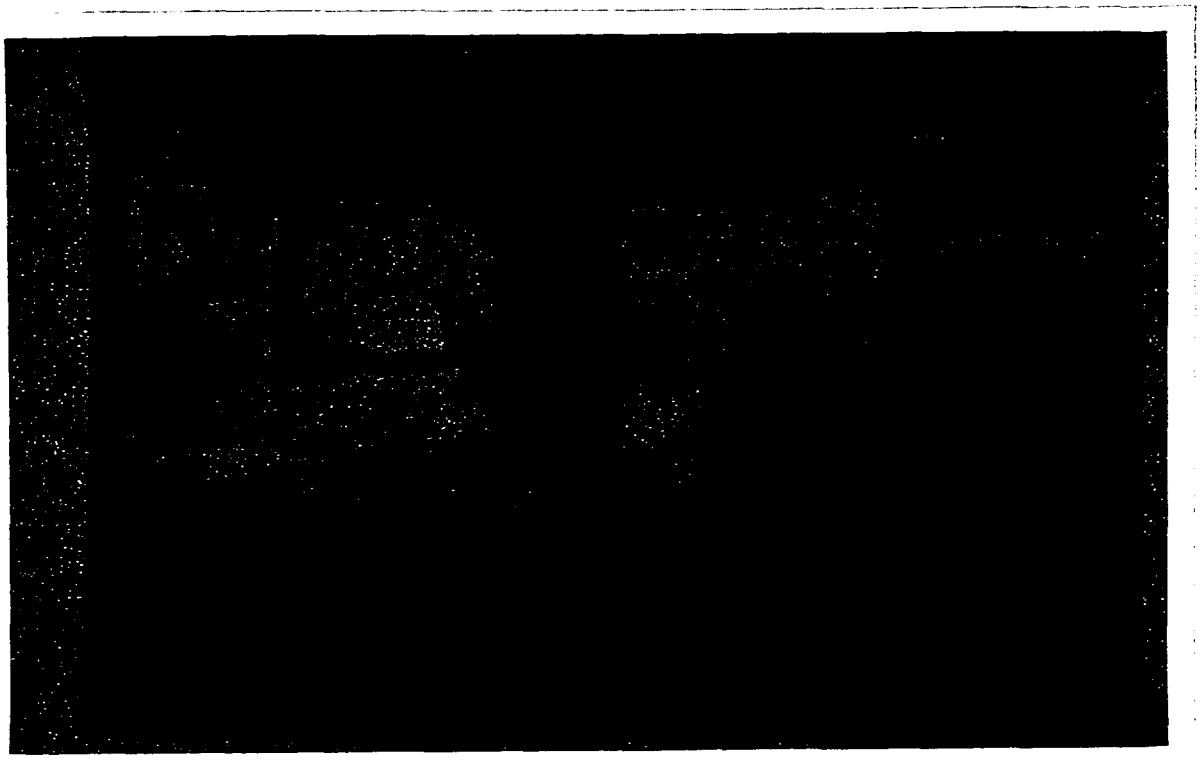


Figure 33. Joseph Urban, Lace Display, The Wiener Werkstätte of America, New York, 1922 (*Architectural Record*)

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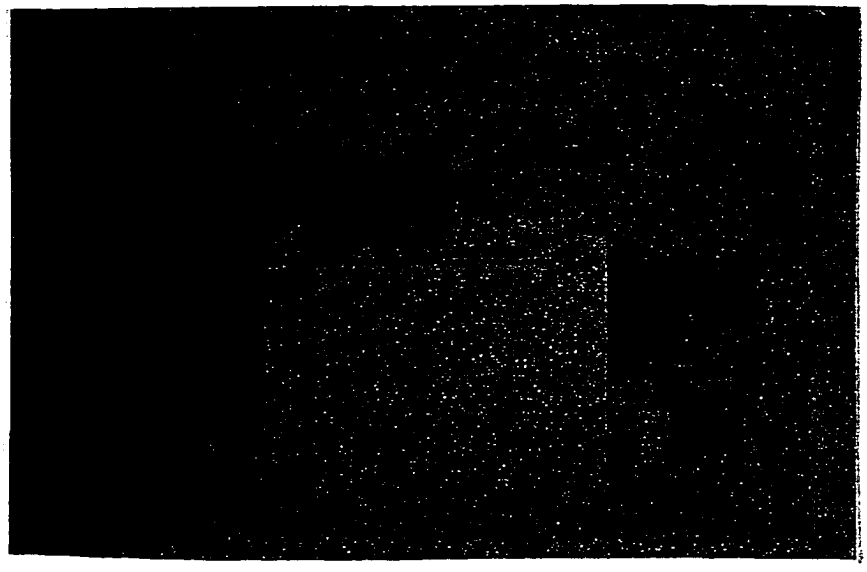


Figure 34. Joseph Urban, Elevation, Rialto Theatre Proscenium, New York, 1922 (Columbia University)

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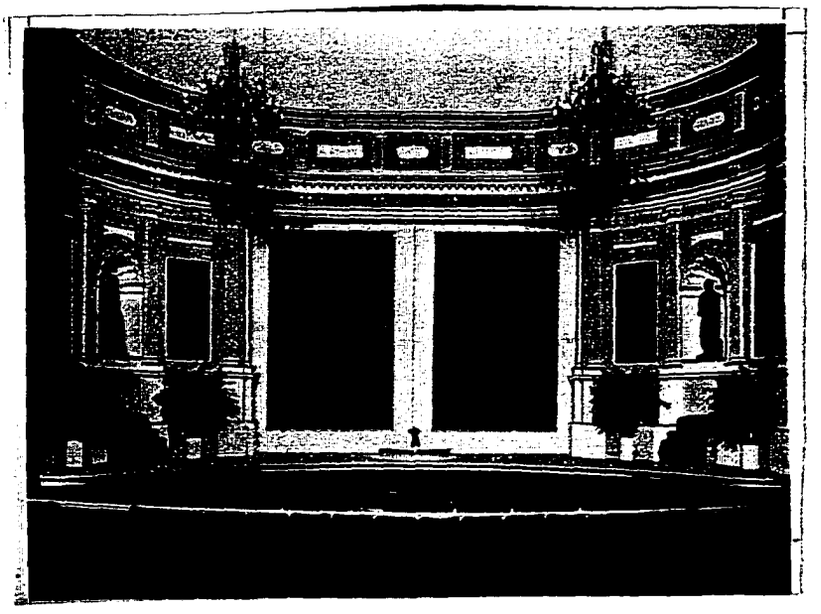


Figure 35. Joseph Urban, Cosmopolitan Theater, New York, 1923 (Columbia University)

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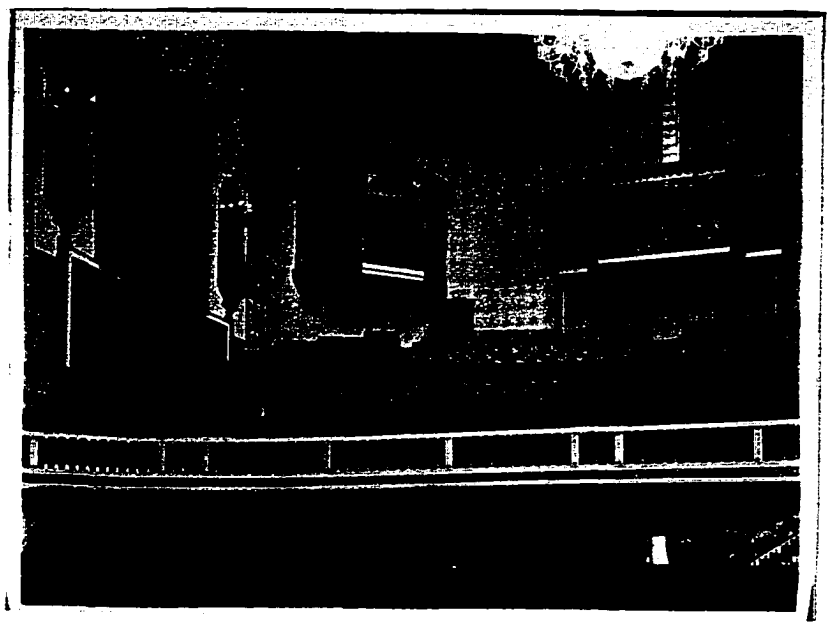


Figure 36. Joseph Urban, Cosmopolitan Theater, New York, 1923 (Columbia University)

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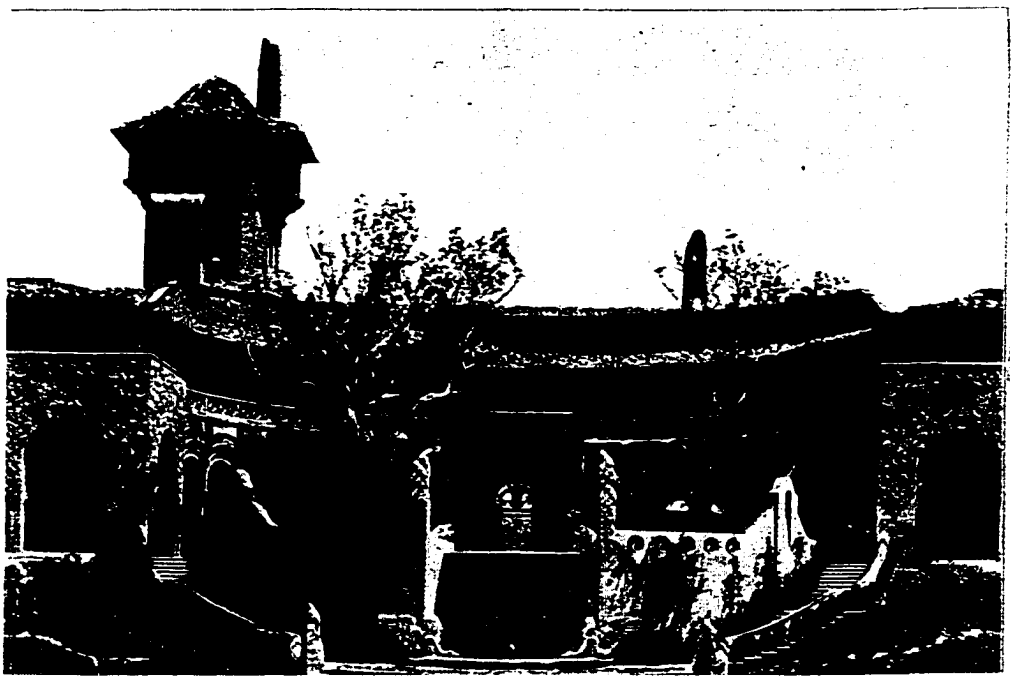


Figure 37. Joseph Urban, Mar-a-Lago, Palm Beach, 1926 (The *American Architect*, June 20, 1928)

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Figure 38. Joseph Urban, Elevation, First Design, Ziegfeld Theater, New York, 1925 (MWEZ + n.c. 23,703, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations)

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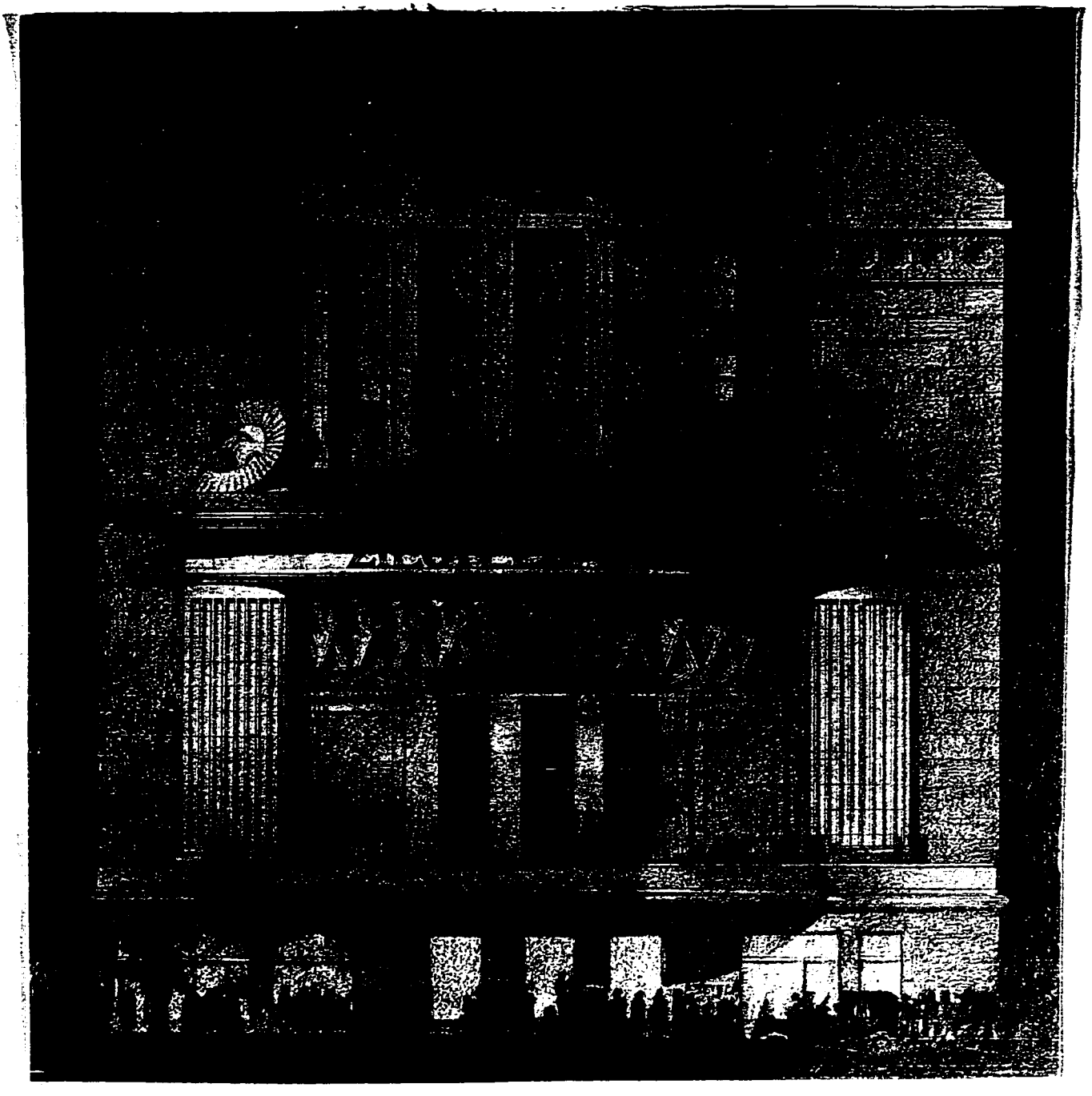


Figure 39. Joseph Urban, Elevation, Final Design, Ziegfeld Theater, New York, 1926 (Theaters: US: NY: Ziegfeld Theater B File, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations)

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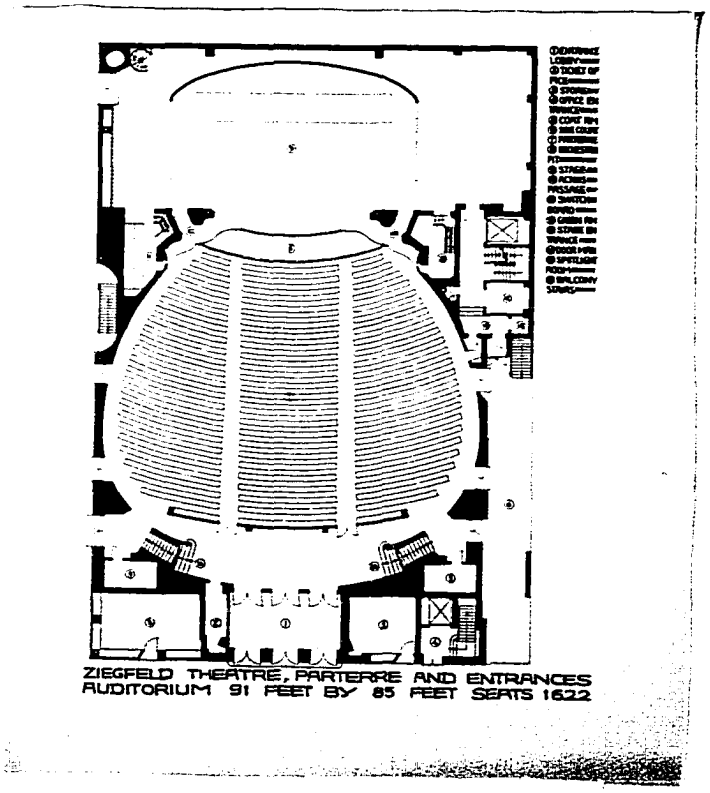


Figure 40. Joseph Urban, Plan, Ziegfeld Theater, New York, 1926-27 (Columbia University)

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Figure 41. Joseph Urban, Proscenium, Ziegfeld Theater, New York, 1927 (Columbia University)

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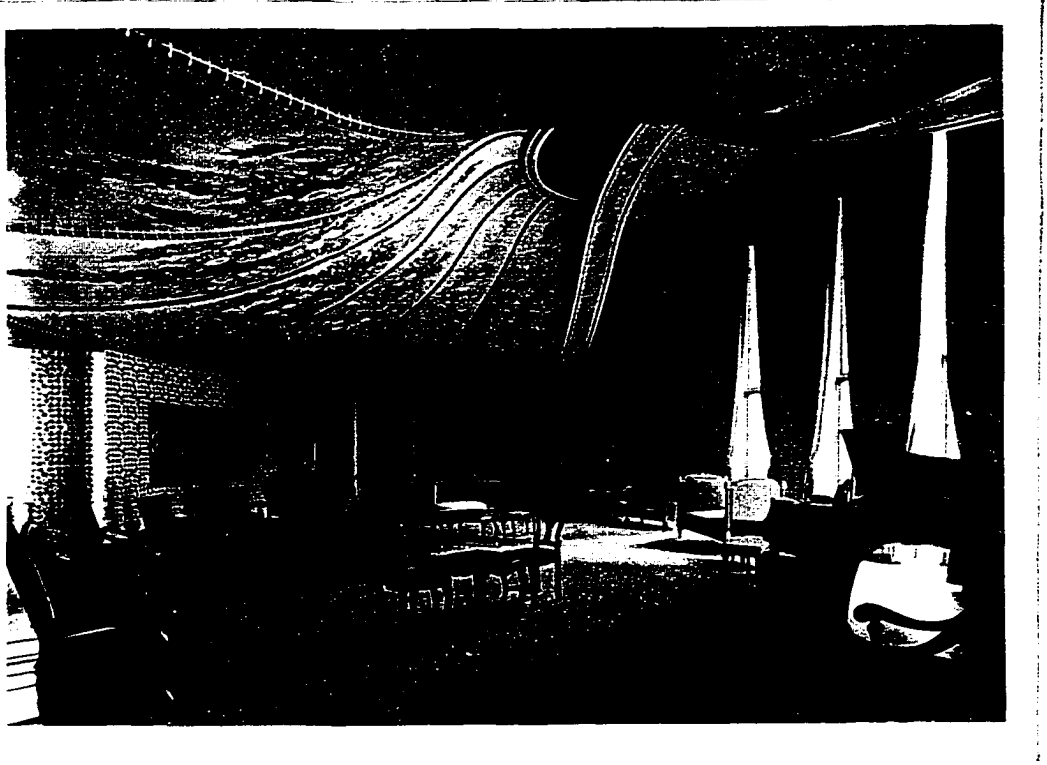


Figure 42. Joseph Urban, Second Floor Foyer, Ziegfeld Theater, New York, 1927 (Theaters: US: NY: Ziegfeld Theater B File,Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations)

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Figure 43. Joseph Urban, Elevation of Curtain, *Rio Rita*, 1927 (Columbia University)

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Figure 44. Joseph Urban, *No Foolin'*, 1926, White Studio, Photographers (Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations)

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Figure 45. Advertisement for *Certain-teed*, 1927 (*Saturday Evening Post, 1928*)

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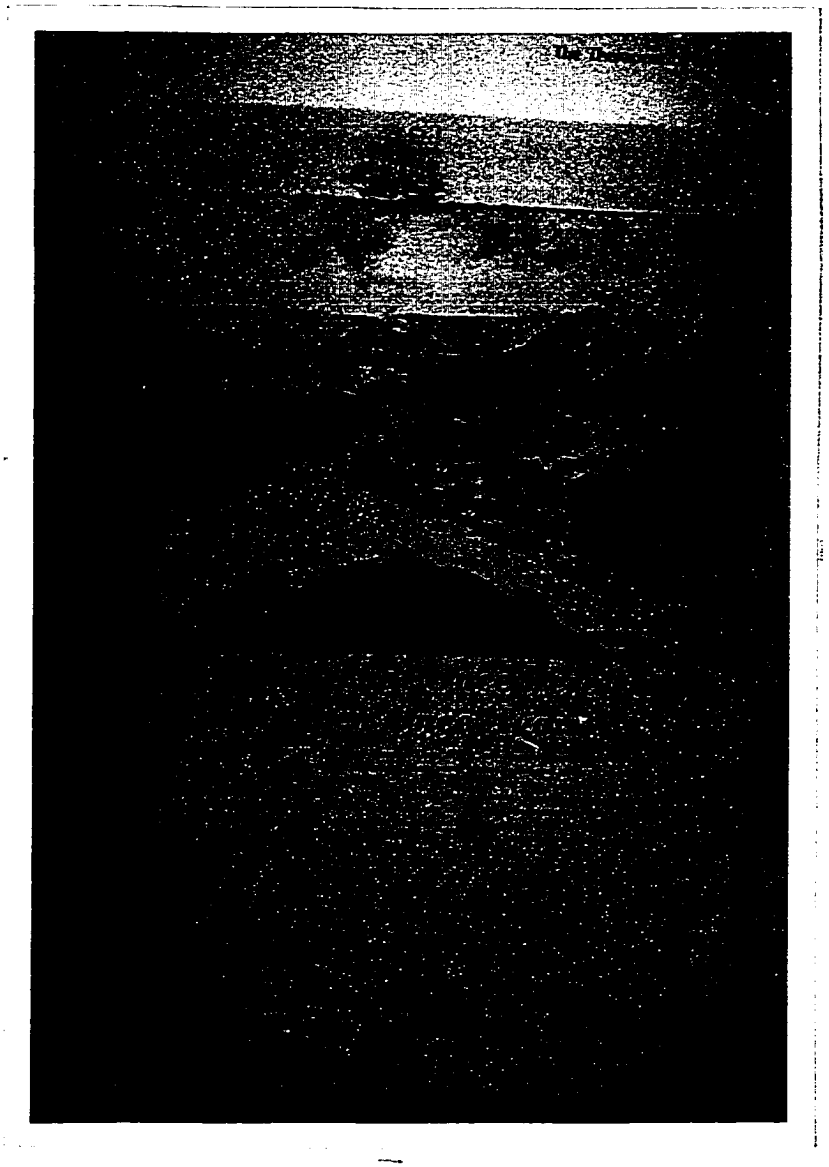


Figure 46. Advertisement for REO Flying Cloud, 1928 (*Saturday Evening Post*, 1928)

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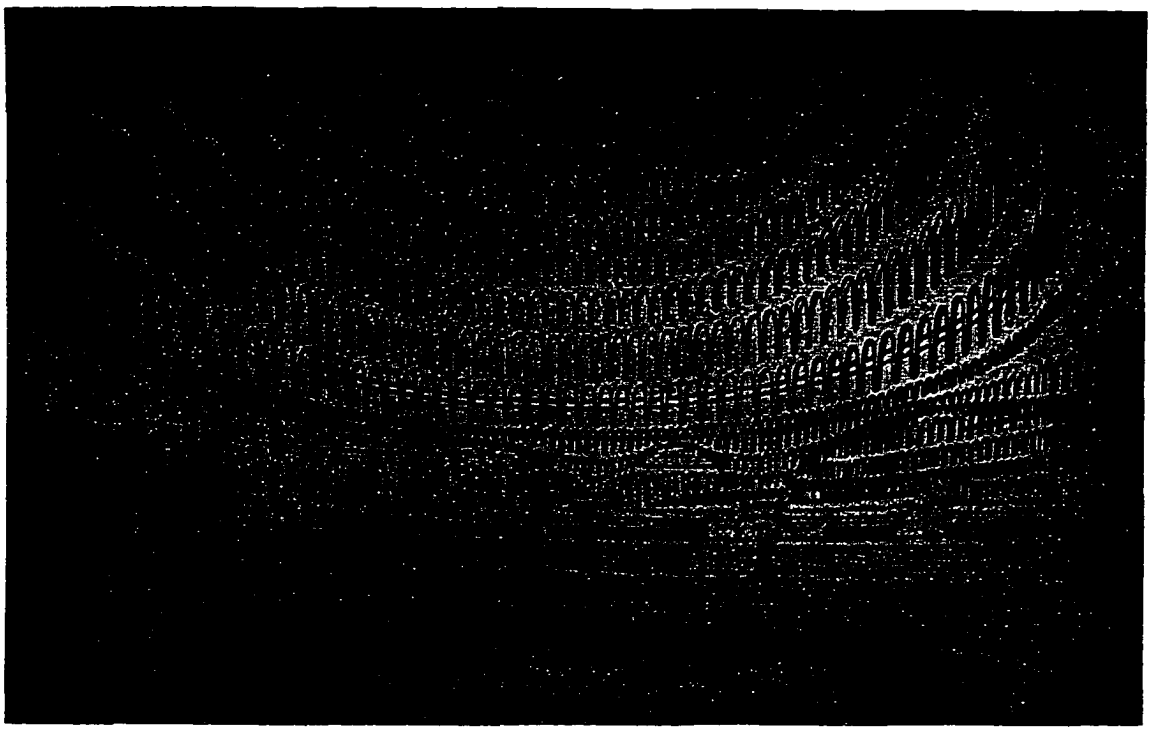


Figure 47. Hans Poelzig, Grosses Schauspielhaus, Berlin, 1919 (*Theatre Magazine*, 1920)

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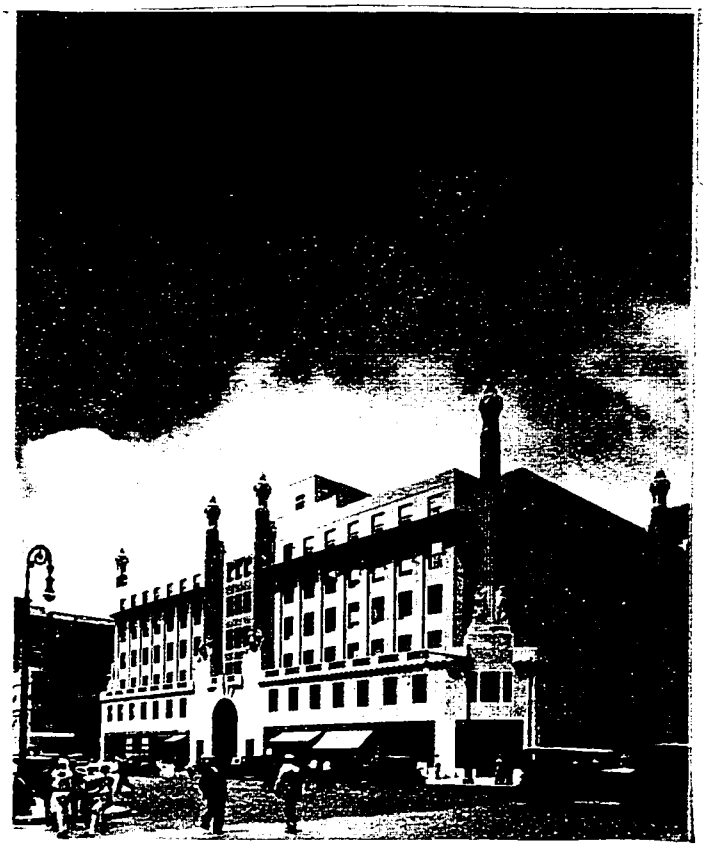


Figure 48. Joseph Urban, International Magazine Building, New York, 1928 (Columbia University)

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Figure 49. Joseph Urban, Perspective, Study for Opera on a Coliseum Plan, New York, 1926 (Columbia University)

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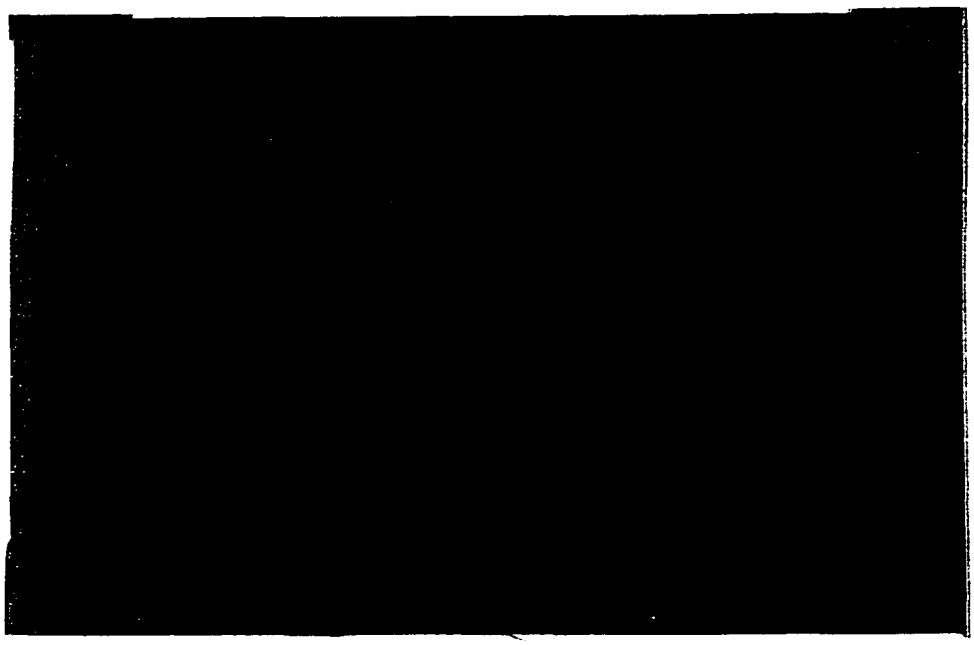


Figure 50. Joseph Urban, Elevation, Scheme IX, Metropolitan Opera, New York, 1927 (Columbia University)

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Figure 51. Joseph Urban, Plan, Scheme IX, Metropolitan Opera, New York, 1927 (Columbia University)

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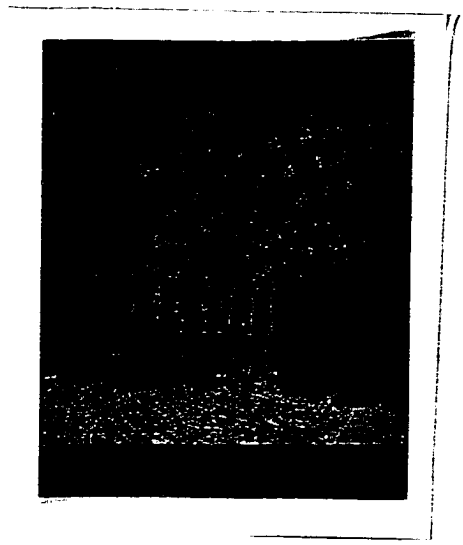


Figure 52. Joseph Urban, Perspective of Auditorium, Scheme IX, Metropolitan Opera, New York, 1927 (Columbia University)

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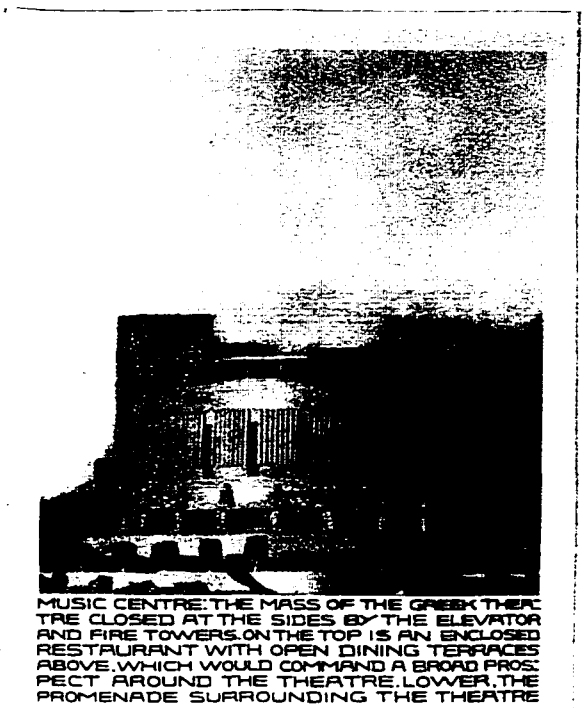


Figure 53. Joseph Urban, Perspective, Music Center, New York, 1929 (Columbia University)

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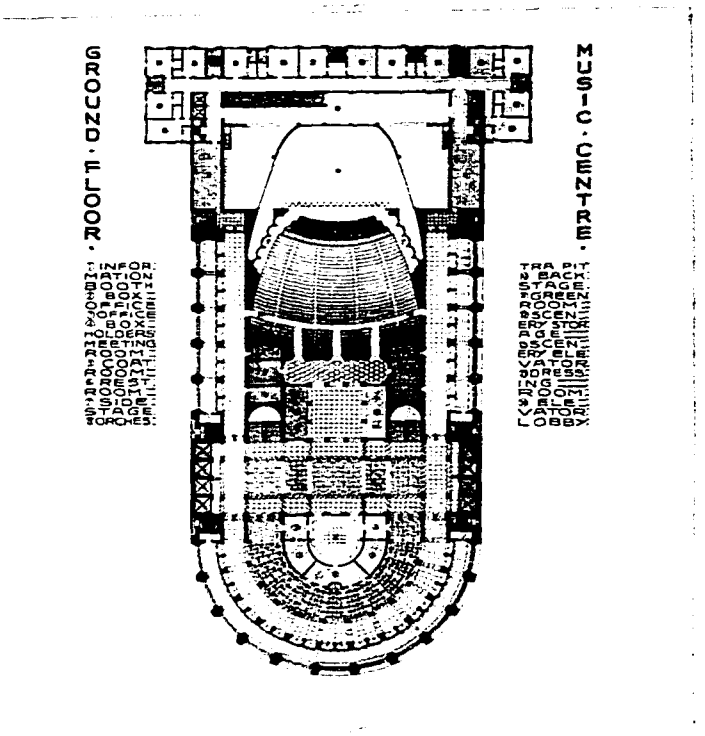


Figure 54. Joseph Urban, Plan, Music Center, New York, 1929 (Columbia University)

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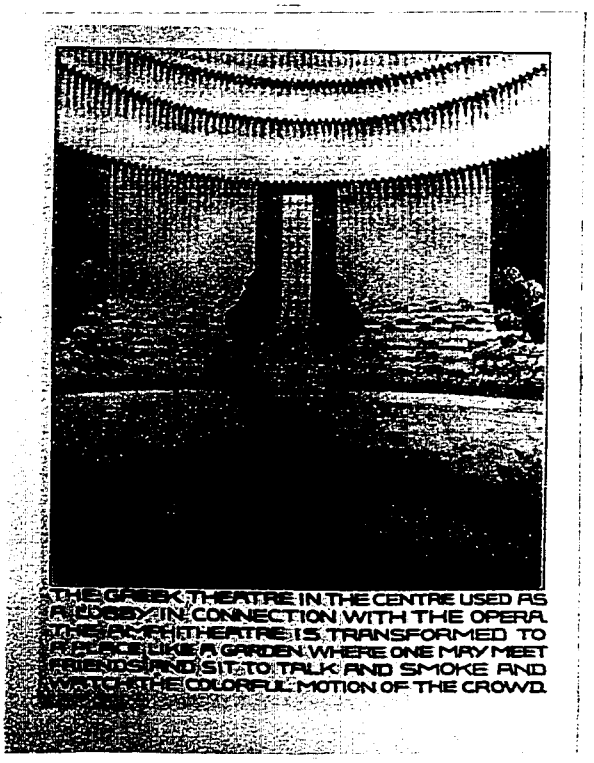


Figure 55. Joseph Urban, Perspective of Greek Theatre, Music Center, New York, 1929 (Columbia University)

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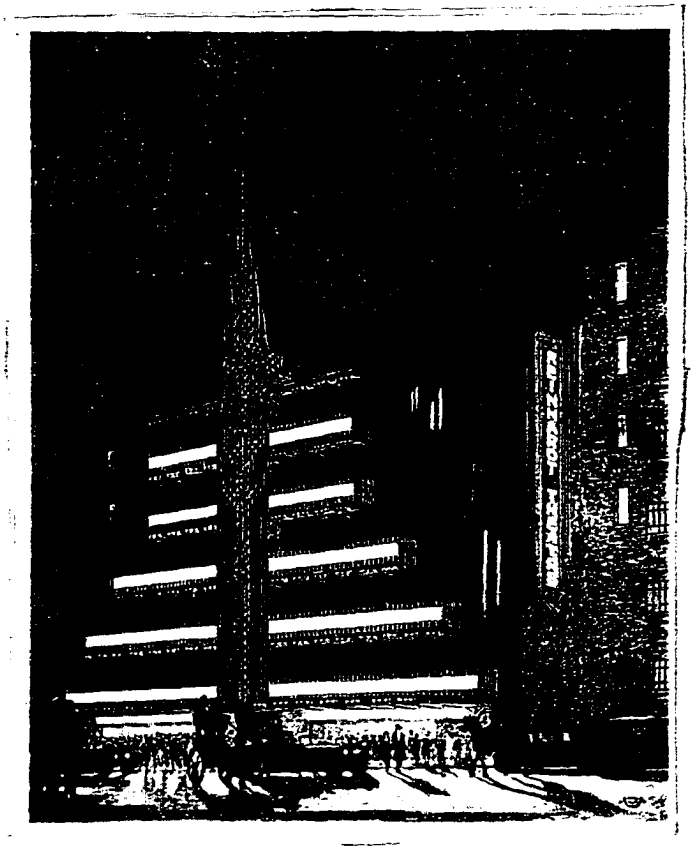


Figure 56. Joseph Urban, Perspective, Reinhardt Theatre, New York, 1928 (Columbia University)

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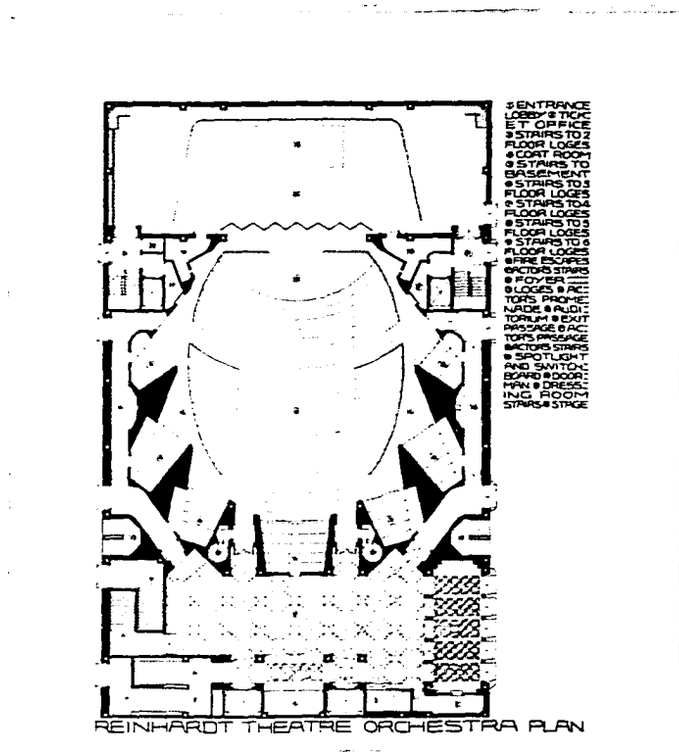


Figure 57. Joseph Urban, Plan, Reinhardt Theatre, New York, 1928 (Columbia University)

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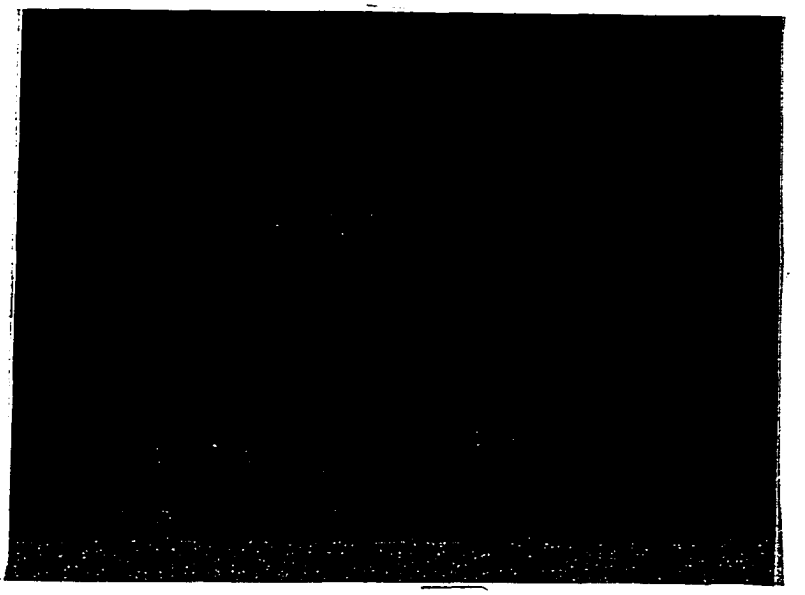


Figure 58. Joseph Urban, Model of a Moving Picture Theater, Westchester County, New York, 1931, Nyholm and Lincoln, Photographers (Columbia University)

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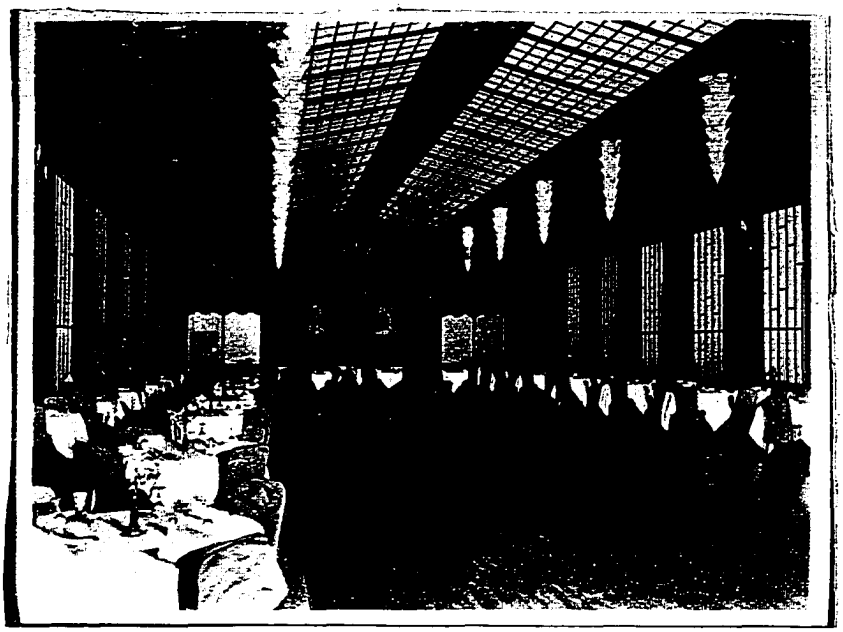


Figure 59. Joseph Urban, Urban Room, Hotel Gibson, Cincinatti, 1928 (Columbia University)

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Figure 60. Joseph Urban, Hotel Bossert, Brooklyn, 1928 (Columbia University)

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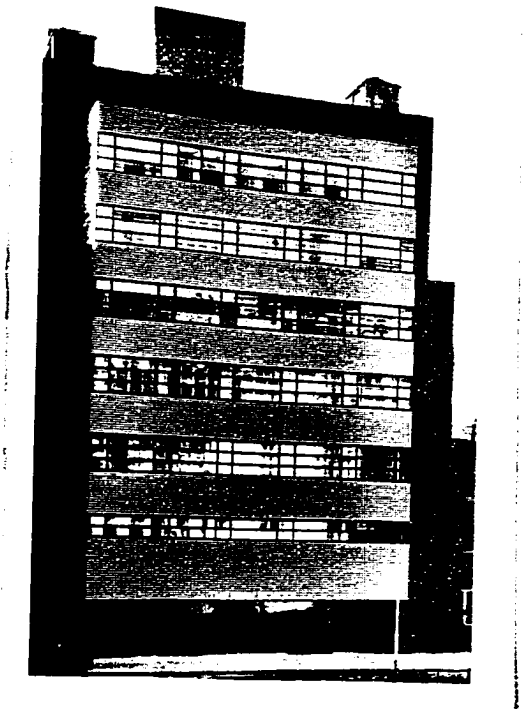


Figure 61. Joseph Urban, New School, New York, 1931, Nyholm and Lincoln, Photographers (Columbia University)

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Figure 62. Joseph Urban, Perspective of First Design, New School, New York, 1929 (Columbia University)

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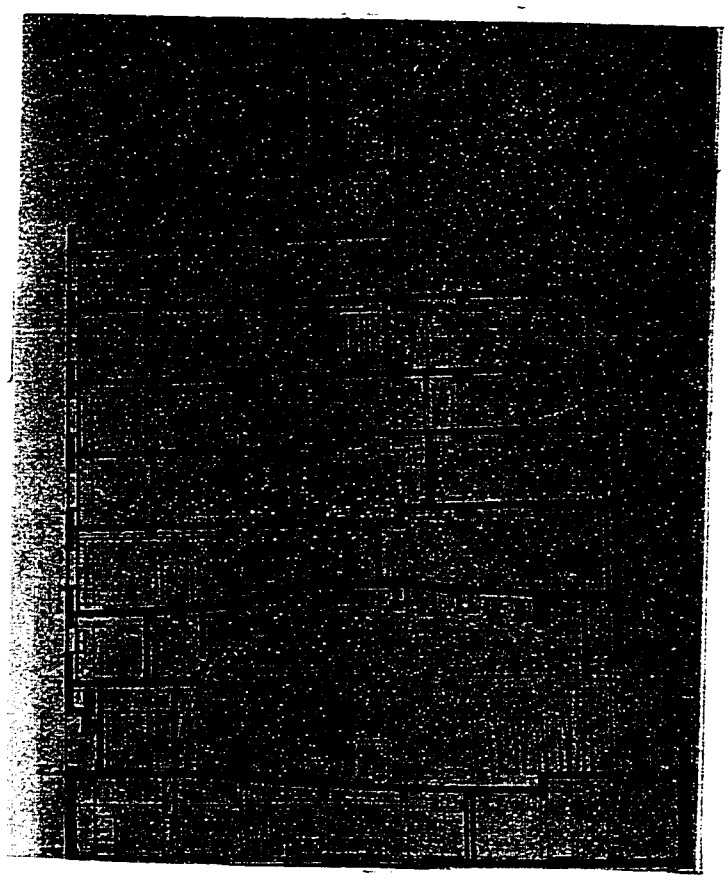


Figure 63. Joseph Urban, Section, New School, New York, 1931 (*Architectural Record*, 1931)

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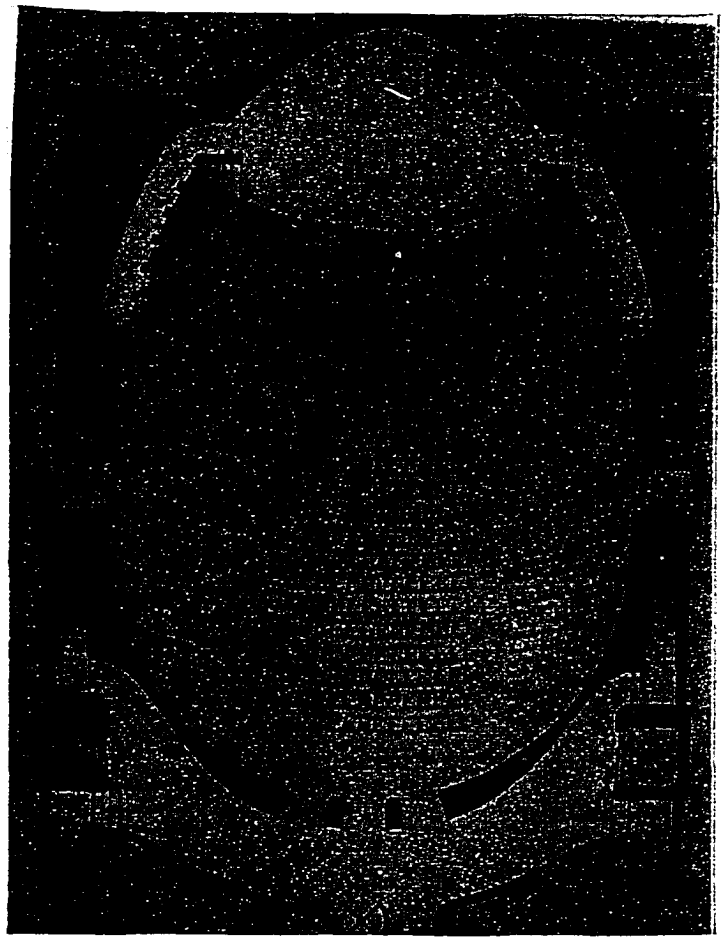


Figure 64. Joseph Urban, Plan of Main Auditorium, New School, New York, 1930 (*Architectural Record*, 1930)

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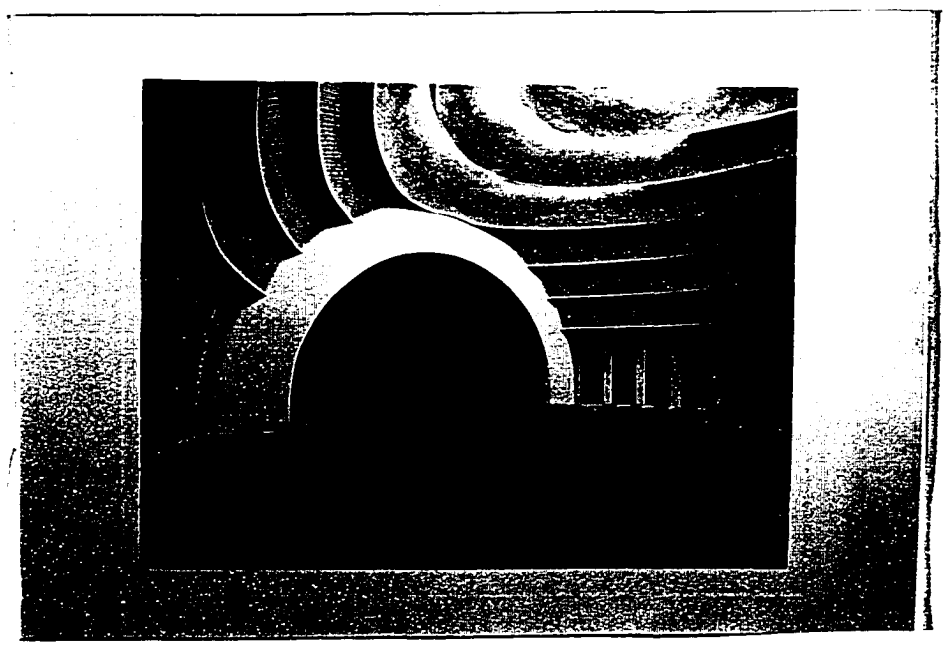


Figure 65. Joseph Urban, Auditorium, New School, New York, 1931 Nyholm and Lincoln, Photographers, 1931 (Columbia University)

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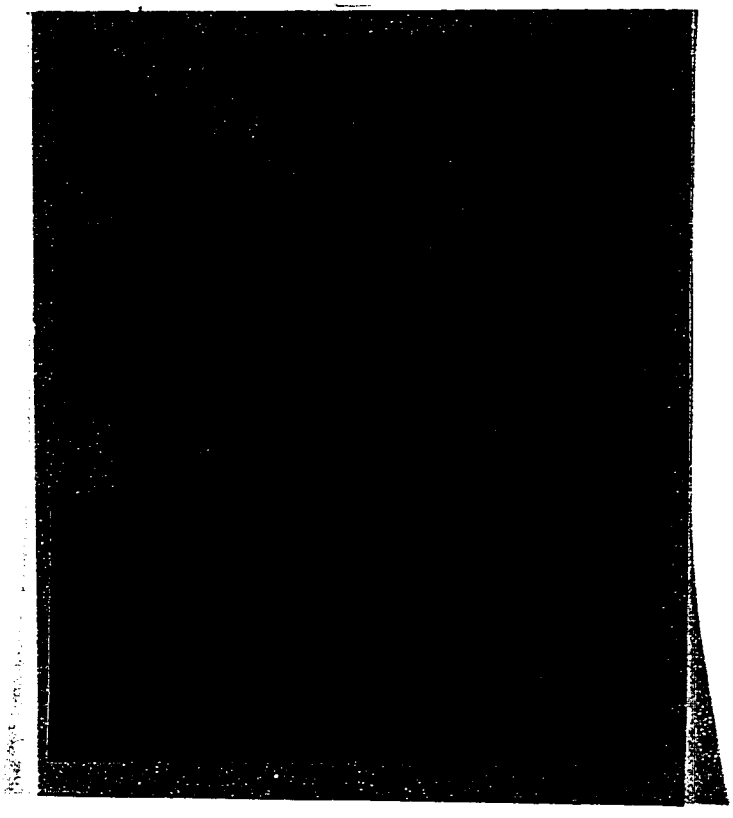


Figure 66. Joseph Urban, Entrance Lobby, New School, New York, 1931, Nyholm and Lincoln, Photographers, (Columbia University)

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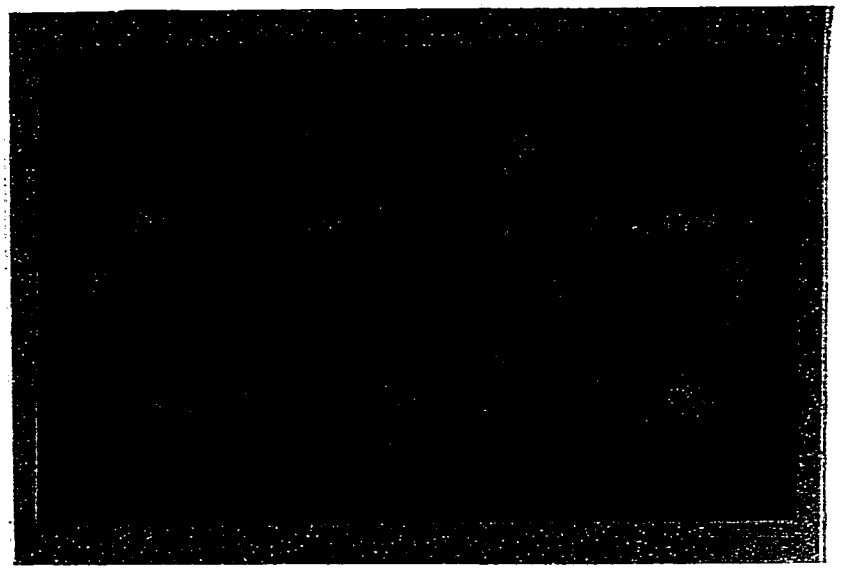


Figure 67. Joseph Urban, Dance Floor, New School, New York, 1931, Nyholm and Lincoln, Photographers, (Columbia University)

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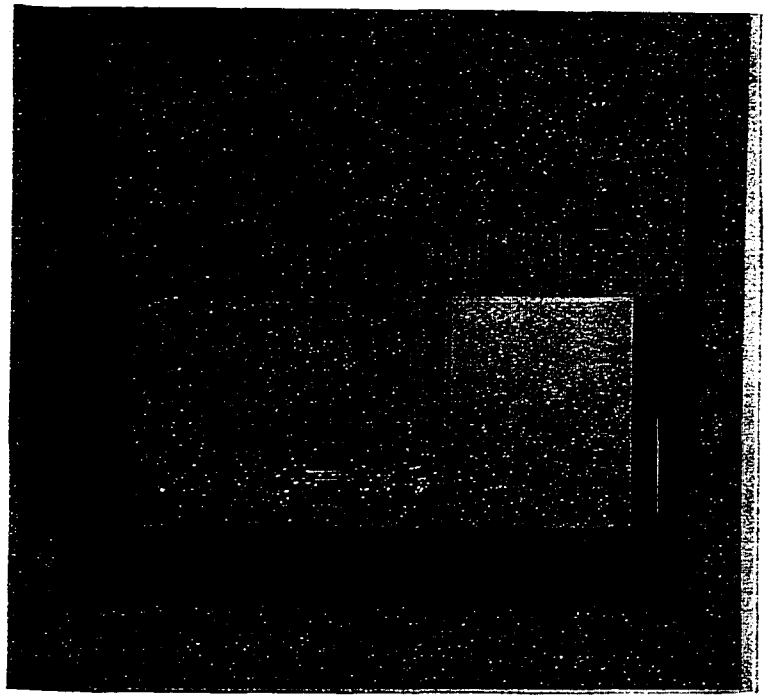


Figure 68. Joseph Urban, Elevation First Design, Jewish Art Theatre Project, 1929 (Columbia University)

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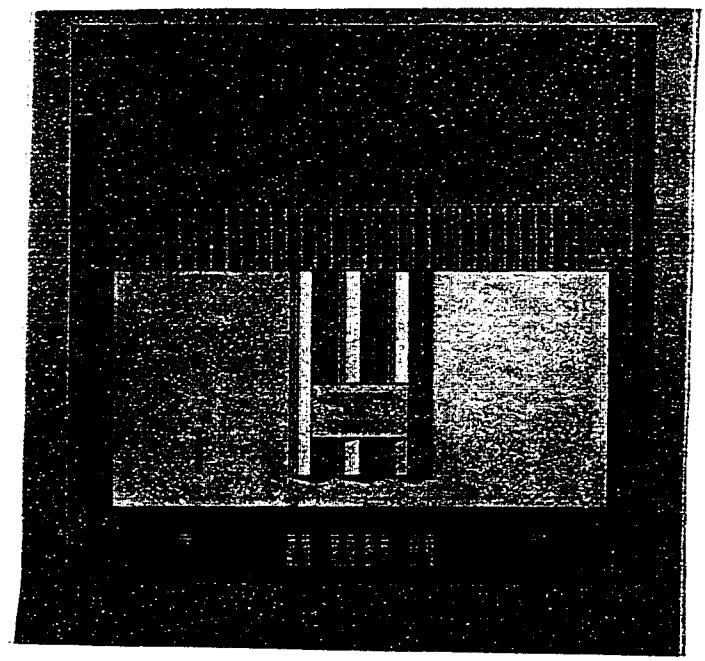


Figure 69. Joseph Urban, Elevation Second Design, Jewish Art Theatre Project, 1929 (Columbia University)

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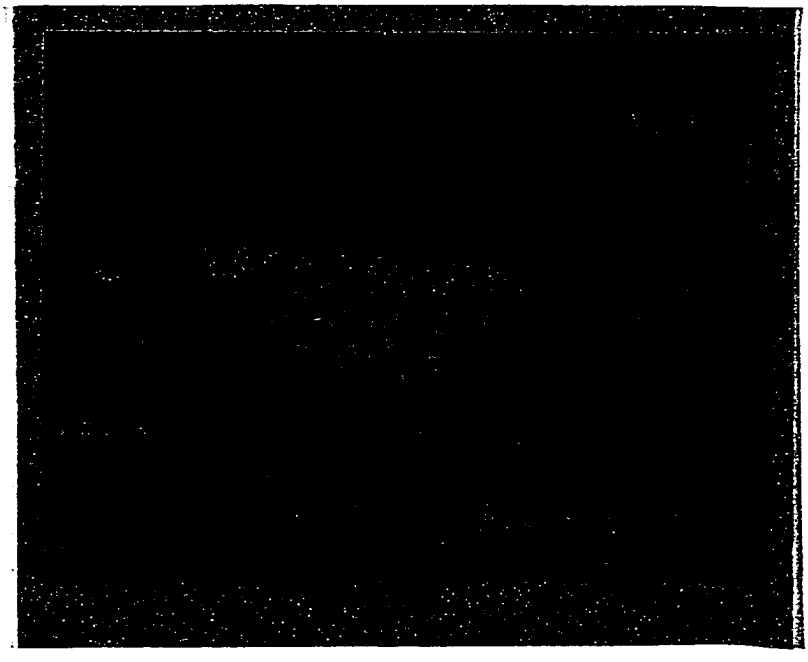


Figure 70. Joseph Urban, Atlantic Beach Club, Atlantic Beach, New York, 1930, Nyholm and Lincoln, Photographers (Columbia University)

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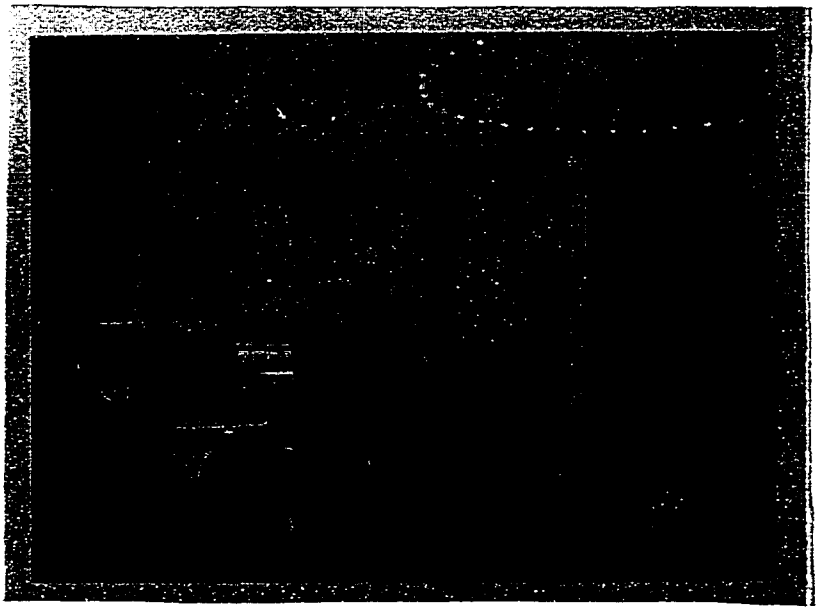


Figure 71. Joseph Urban, Interior Atlantic Beach Club, Atlantic Beach, New York, 1930, Nyholm and Lincoln, Photographers (Columbia University)

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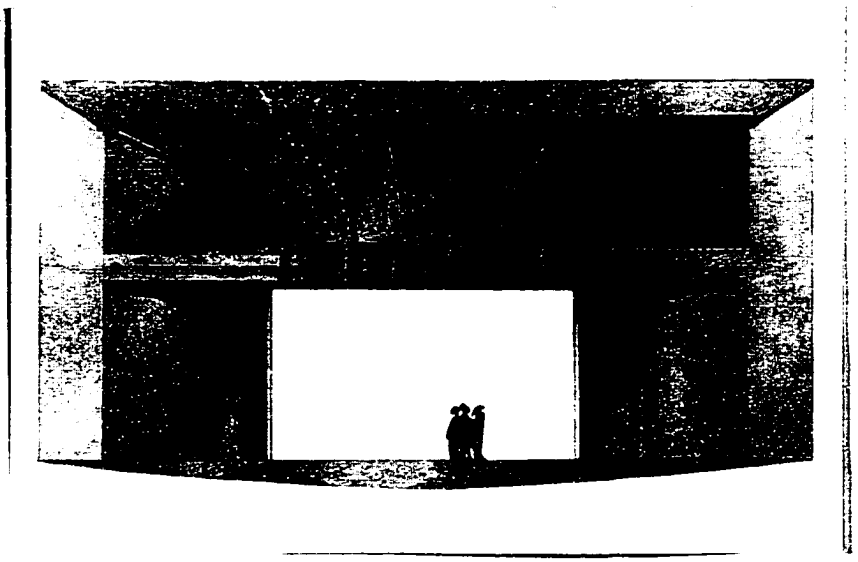


Figure 72. Joseph Urban, Perspective of Proscenium, Jewish Art Theatre Project, 1929 (Columbia University)

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Figure 73. Joseph Urban, Library, New School, New York, 1931, Nyholm and Lincoln, Photographers (Columbia University)

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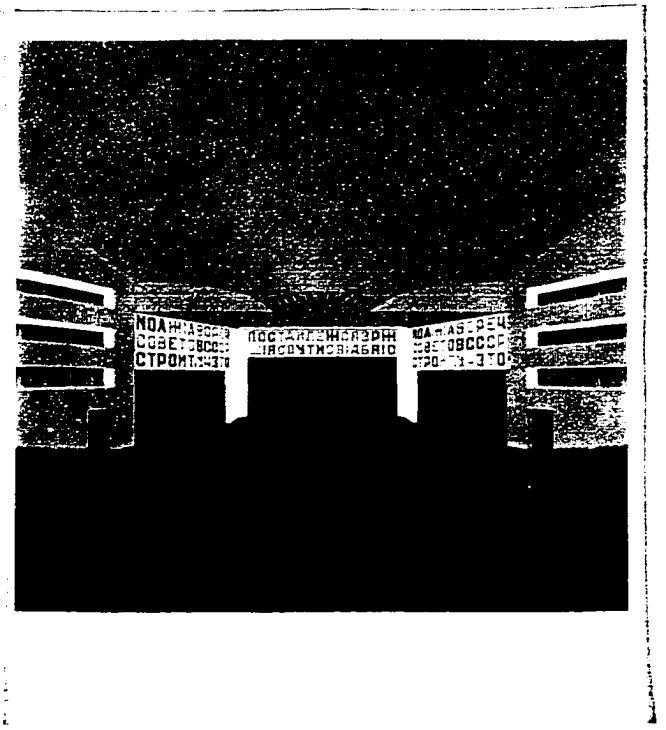


Figure 74. Joseph Urban, Perspective of Auditorium, Palace of the Soviets Competition, Moscow, 1931 (Columbia University)

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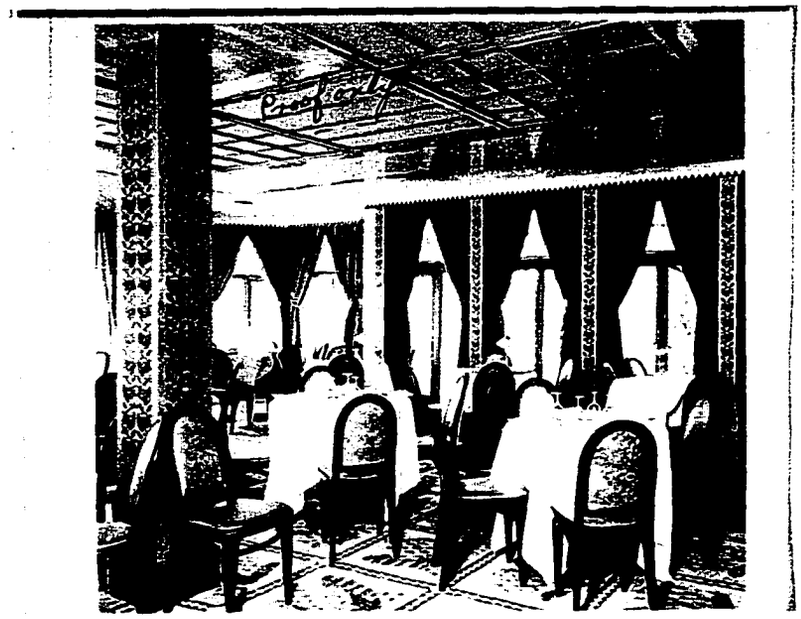


Figure 75. Joseph Urban, Central Park Casino, New York, 1929 (Columbia University)

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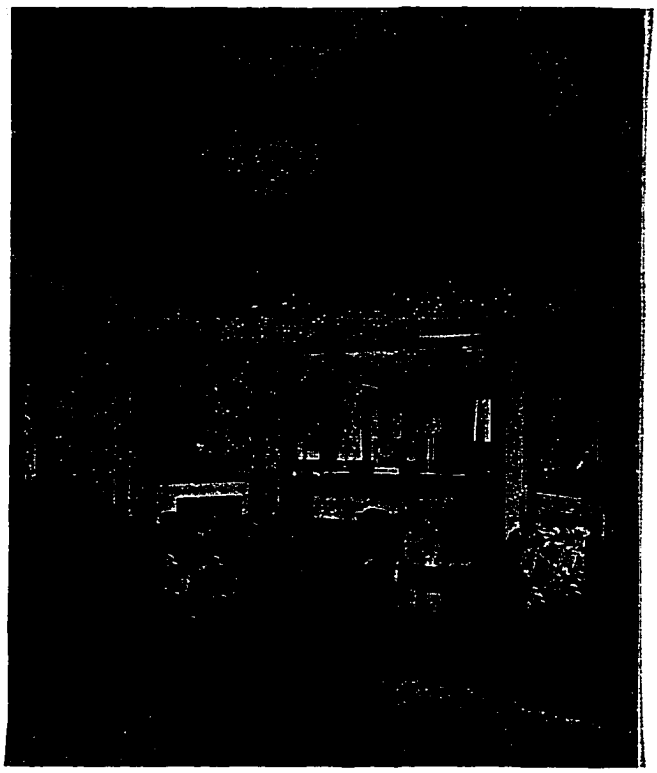


Figure 76. Joseph Urban, Light Fixture, Central Park Casino, New York, 1929, Sigurd Fischer, Photographer (Columbia University)

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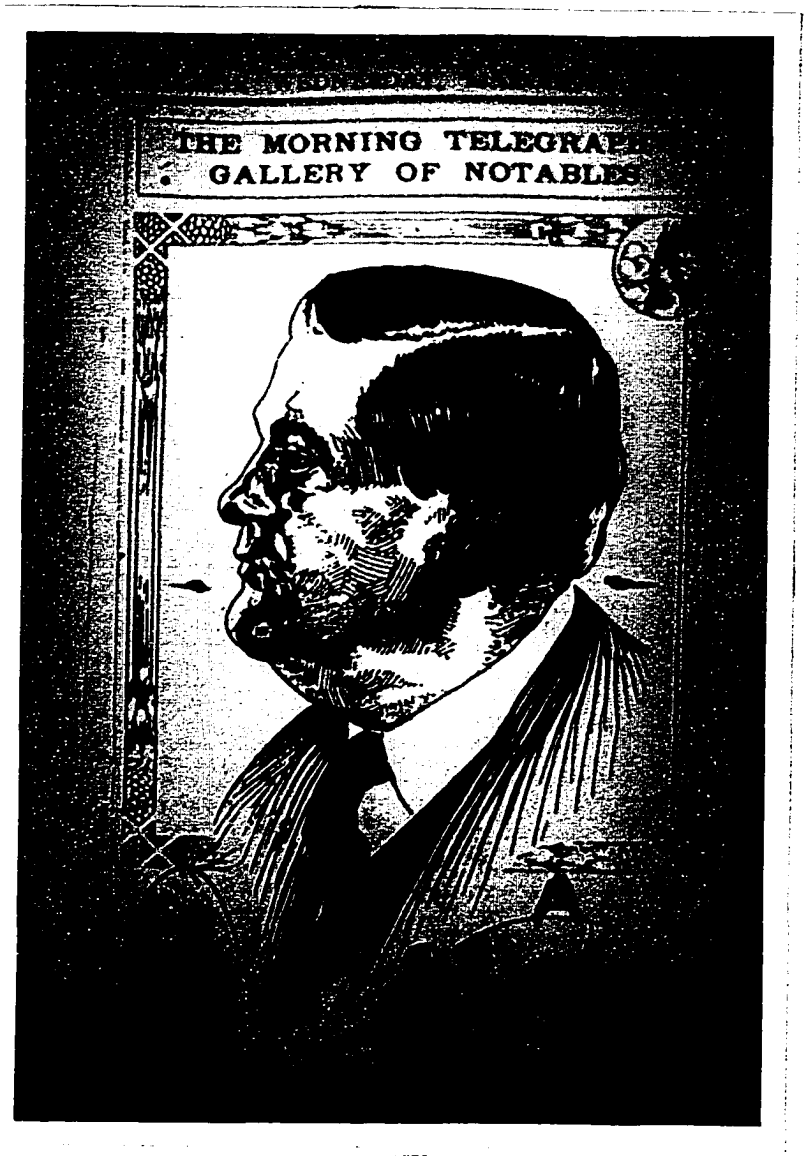


Figure 77. T. C. Almen, Joseph Urban "The Morning Telegraph's Gallery of Notables, (*Morning Telegraph*, 1916)

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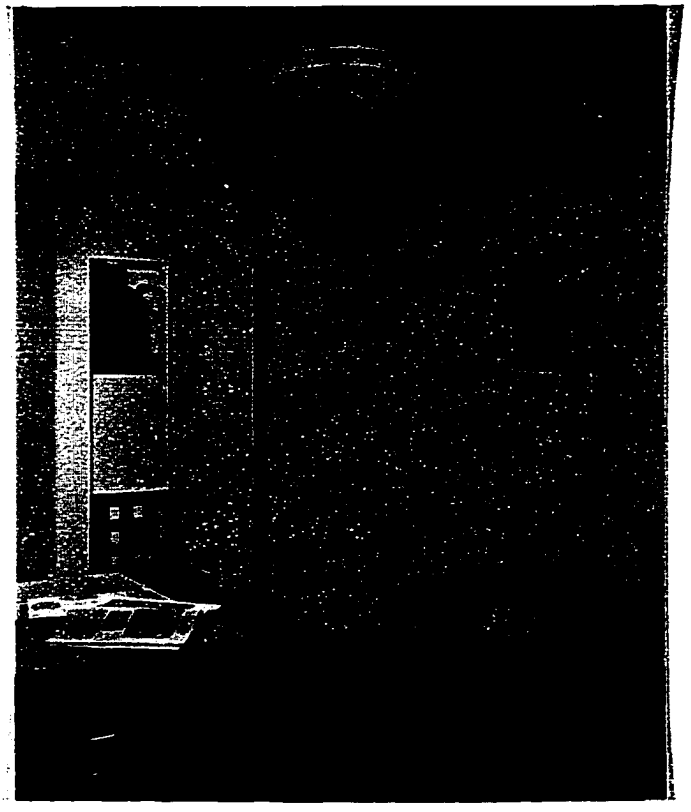


Figure 78. Joseph Urban, Reception Room, Office of Joseph Urban, Architect, New York, 1931, Nyholm and Lincoln, Photographers (Columbia University)

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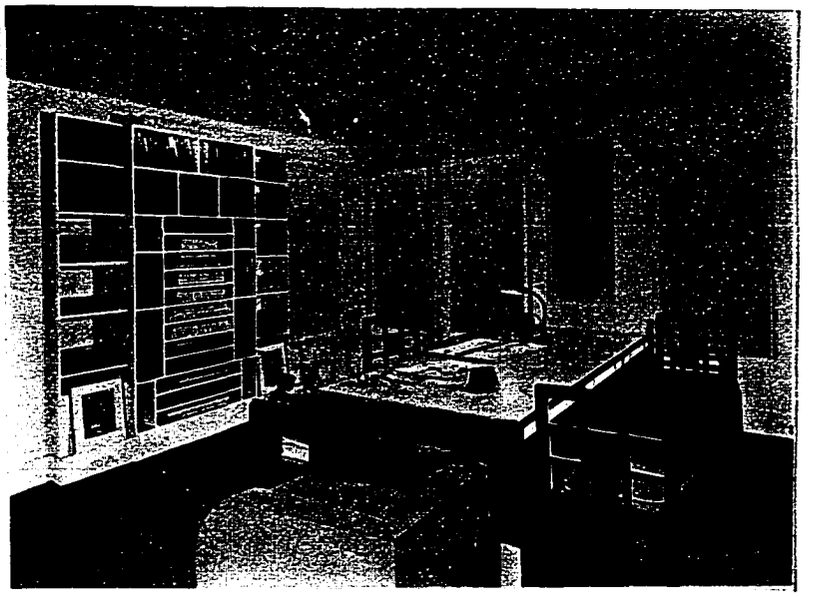


Figure 79. Joseph Urban, Private Office and Library, Office of Joseph Urban, Architect, New York, 1931, Nyholm and Lincoln, Photographers (Columbia University)

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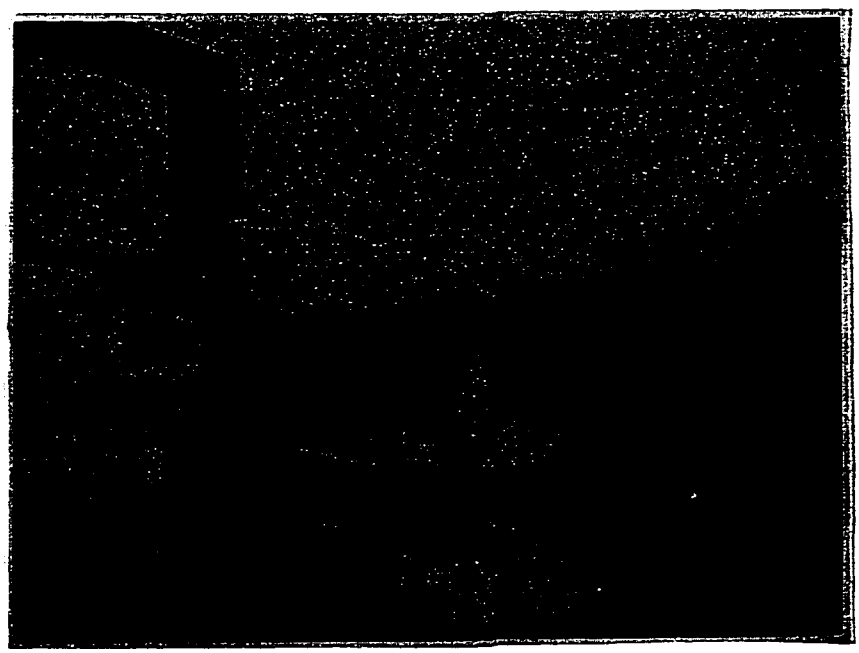


Figure 80. Joseph Urban, Architectural League Exhibition, New York, 1933, Nyholm and Lincoln, Photographers (Columbia University)

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