

# The Building at Dornach

## GA 288

*23 January 1920, Dornach*

### Lecture I

As a sort of episode inserted between the lectures now being given, I should like to-day to bring forwards a few things about our building, so that our friends may find in what will be said, a sort of foundation for their own work. We shall have, in the near future, to take strong measures in different directions for the benefit of the cause, so that the Dornach Building, the “Goetheanum”, should be made the centre of the movement for Spiritual Science from the point of view of Anthroposophy for which we intend to work. It would be of great importance if the Goetheanum could also be made known to the outer world, so that those who have not at present an opportunity of seeing it, may become acquainted with it. The very way in which this building is put before the spiritual culture of the present time may, if brought to the consciousness of our contemporaries in the right manner, work in the direction, which we consider is the needful direction for the age. So to-day, when I have said, I wish to provide a foundation for that which others will carry forth into the world, I will once more give you a little of what I have already expounded here in other connections, so that from what is contained in these episodic lectures, a complete conception of the whole may be formed.

To begin with, it must be stated that the Dornach Building has grown out of the Anthroposophical conception of the world. The Building was able to grow forth from this for the very reason that when this conception is rightly understood, it will itself possess the inner force with which to create its own artistic forms and figures. Once again, I should like to repeat what I have said before in other connections, that if any of the spiritual tendencies of the present, which with their various programmes come before the world to-day, had at any time required a building of their own, some architect or other, and some artist or other would have been approached, who would have built a house in such and such a style, in which the movement it was built for could have been carried on. There would have been an external relation between what went on within it and the building itself, which might be either of the Renaissance period, or of ancient Gothic style.

There must not be any such merely external relation between the conception of the world which is to be given forth at Dornach and that which encloses its activities. The relation between them is to be an inner one. Every detail connected with the housing of our activities, every detail of form and figure had to proceed from the impulses of this world-conception itself. If you bear this in mind, you will see, that this is connected with the position Spiritual Science or Anthroposophy claims in the whole development of mankind. The life of modern humanity has become simply intellectual; it has become so because for centuries modern humanity has hardly received any other education than that of thought. When forms have to be created, people turn to those already existing to some one or other of the old styles of architecture; just as when they wish to make anything artistic or such-like, they do not turn their minds to the conception of the world, but to something which has been substituted in its place. What actually brought this state of things about? You see, in everything of note in human culture there have always been two streams flowing together. The presence of those two streams can be traced far back in the historical development of mankind. One of these, which has achieved its greatest intellectual development in the last few centuries, can be traced back to what we may call the Old Testament outlook on the world. We must never lose sight of the fact that one of the essential tenets connected with this was the command: "Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image of the Lord, thy God". The pictorial representation of that which is of a spiritual nature, was lacking in the one stream of human development. And this still holds good up to the present day in the modern development of this stream.

Many schools of thought and of philosophy, many different sciences and popular conceptions of the world have been built up, but none of these have, of themselves, succeeded in creating artistic forms. All that has been achieved is the establishment relationship with the inartistic element of the present day conception of the world. Our modern age is not concerned with creating new forms, or with giving shape to what is capable of representation.

But really there are two entrances into the world of the spirit; it may be entered in the intellectual way in which it is penetrated by the monotheistic religions, in which case the thought element, the intellectual, is principally developed. By this means great progress can be made along the lines followed in our most recent times. Or, on the other hand, the element which is to be found in the imaginative may be cultivated, the element of vision, of life in course of formation. modern humanity has not much living relation with this latter element. It revives by-gone styles, old methods of artistic representation, but never identifies itself with them. Indeed, things have gone so far that, on the one hand those who wished to create artistically had an actual fear of every kind of philosophy, for it is quite reasonable to stand in some sort of fear of the modern world-conception, which is imaginative an intellectual. Put on the other

side this has been a great disadvantage in another sense to the development of modern humanity. This disadvantage itself is the sign of decadence of recent times.

Some time ago in this very place, I drew attention to the fact that in all the present struggles of humanity there is something of the Jehovah-striving of the Old Testament, that in a sense an endeavor was being made to make each individual people what the Old Helm wanted to make of themselves and that Christianity, as such, has not fully entered the hearts of modern humanity. And so a certain intellectual thinking, an intellectual feeling concerning humanity as a whole, has in a one-sided way grown up round our social life. But man as man, Or man as a community, can never be understood from a purely intellectual standpoint.

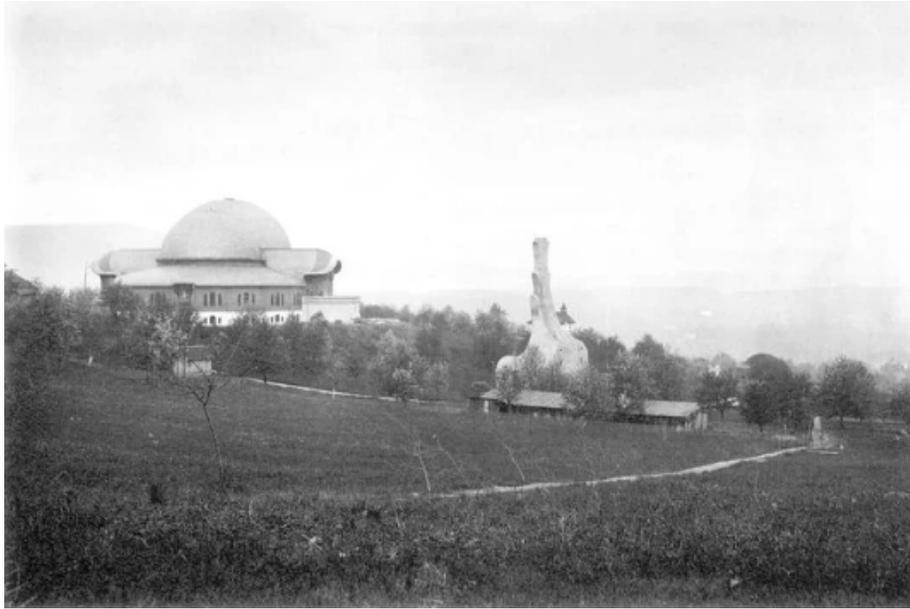
What man is, that in him which enables him to take his place in social life, can only be understood if we rise to imaginative conception. Anyone who is acquainted with the law to which such things are subject, is aware that even the Fairy Tales, the legends and various mythologies contain more wisdom concerning the real nature of man than does modern science, which does not even possess the means of giving man an explanation as to himself. People are afraid of the inpouring of the spiritual, which can only manifest in our human civilisation in the form of pictures; they dread it. But our civilised life will never be raised until men's hearts are once again filled with a conception of the world not only capable of forming from itself thoughts, but of creating forms and permeating the whole of life. We want to make a beginning, yet in its own way it is intended to show all that can be accomplished by a really creative conception of the world at the present time and more especially what it must do in the future. In a sense you see before you, in a picture, all that is characteristic of the conception of the world which is studied here, when you are confronted with that which is meant to be representative of it, when you see the Goetheanum on its hill, at Dornach.

If we wish to describe in a few words the special characteristic of this conception of the world, it is this: The realisation that in this age a new spiritual life must be revealed to man. And as we approach the building which is to stand for the spreading of this new spiritual life, we cannot but feel that a new revelation is to be made. Anyone who draws near to it cannot help feeling that something will reveal itself here, something new in the development of humanity. The very shape of the building impresses you with the sense of something new making its way into the development of man. Two cylinders of circular shape, in neither of which is the circle complete, covered with hemispheres equally incomplete, expresses the duality of that which is revealed and of that which comes to meet it. The very predominance of the two domes conveys an impression to the observer, as he draws near, that something is enclosed herein, something enclosed but which intends to make itself known.

Do not take what I am now saying in a symbolical sense; take it in an artistic sense and you will then develop the right understanding for it. I shall have to speak further about these things, but this evening we will begin by making a survey of the different effects produced by the contours of the building, seen from without. Let us begin by supposing that someone approaches if from the North-East from any point around the hill on which the Goetheanum is erected. He would then see a Building (Picture 1) which could be in no other form. This is the feeling which ought to be experienced, when directly confronting that which stands as the representative of a new world-conception.



**1. View from Arlsheim looking south.**



**2. View from the east.**



**3. View from the north**

It is first of all necessary to study the different forms. It was in 1908 that the thought first occurred to me to erect a building with twin domes. But much of the original plan had to be altered, for it had originally been intended to put it in a city, in Munich, where it would have been surrounded by houses, where the outer architecture would not have had to be so much considered. When the building had to be remodelled to stand upon its present hill, it became of

course necessary to so plant the outer architecture that it might produce the right effect from the different points of view in the neighbourhood. Here let us begin by noticing that the building stands on a sort of platform, not absolutely on the ground.



#### 5. View from the west

We now draw rather nearer to the Building and this is a picture of the principal entrance. Kindly observe you begin by entering the substructure and that, as we shall see, the staircase by which we ascend to the auditorium belongs to the substructure of the Building. Having ascended that, we then enter by the main door into the real Inner Hall. The Building stands rather above the level of the actual surface of the ground. It will be apparent to anyone who approaches the Building, especially when he finds himself opposite the main door, that an attempt has here been made to depart from the usual purely mathematical-geometrical-mechanical structure forms, and to discover organic ones. Of course those people who are quite accustomed to the old conception and who believe that the geometrical-dynamic can alone rightly hold a place in the art of building and in architecture will have many objections to bring against this introducing the forms of architecture into organic forms. All these objections are known. But here we have actually dared to make the attempt. Then, however, we had to think the whole thought of the Building as of a living organism. No one will understand what I mean by this, unless he himself really makes the endeavour—which very few people will do as yet—to turn his feelings away from all that is symbolical and intellectual, from everything merely mechanical and mathematical, and allows himself to be carried into a really organic-artistic, a feeling way of thinking. This does not imply that the form of an organic being is symbolically expressed in the structural forms, it means that in order to understand an organic being we must realise that a quite special sort of intuitive thought-form is necessary. We shall have to

become accustomed to these intuitive forms of thought. And we then ought to be able to find these architectural forms even coming of themselves quite originally and elementally, out of the intuitive thinking.

I should like to draw your attention to something of which most people in the present day have no suspicion. It may be said that in nature there are organic forms. Structural forms are made, more or less modelled on some such organic forms in nature, structural forms which in a sense are a symbolical expression of the organic forms of nature. But nothing of that kind has been done. There is no direct prototype in nature of structural forms here. And if a man seeks for such in nature, it only shows that he has failed to understand the whole basic thought of what is in question here.

To be capable of understanding an organism is a very different thing. For when a man really understands a natural organism, he then possesses a kind of thinking which is able to find organic structural forms quite independently of nature. But such forms as these must be discerned in complete independence, they must be created from out of their own form-essence. They will then, if they result from a real living structural thought, bear the nature of the organic. What then is the nature of the organic? Well, take as an example the most complicated organism, man, and then take merely the lobe of his ear; if you have the right intuitive thinking and feeling, you will say that the lobe of the ear, situated where it is, could be no other than it is; in its place it must be just as it is. It is the right width, the right height, and is properly rounded off, and so on. And this must be so in every single form in this organically conceived Building. Each detail, in that it represents a part of the whole, must make evident in its own form that it is indispensable. The very smallest appendage in the different parts of the Building must be as manifestly indispensable as the lobe of the ear, or an arm or a hand is to the human organism.

Nothing here has been copied from nature. And if these forms remind anyone of this, that or the other, it only shows that he is not judging of the Building from the standpoint of Art, but that his opinions are inartistic. If the forms in the Building remind one of anything—and what is there that people have not been reminded of—human eyebrows and eyes and so on—that only proves that he is judging of each thing on its own merit, especially; whereas each detail in the Building only has a significance in its connection with the whole and must be so understood.

The next picture shows the same, a little nearer.



#### 10. West wing with west motif

Below we see the entrance; facing us are the cloakrooms; and to the right and left, where the substructure extends in a circular direction, is the well of the staircase. We then go up the stairs and through the main door, by which we enter the inner building. The *motive* which we encounter in the main entrance is one of those organic motives to which we have been referring. If you take the various motives that are to be found on the different sides of the Building you will find that they are always formed in accordance with the organic principles of metamorphosis, so that the one always grows forth as a development of the other. For instance, look at the motive here, above the principal entrance. If you can feel it in its forms, you will feel the same form again in the motives of the window of the side-terrace, which you can distinctly see here to the South. (Figure 14) The motives of the windows are apparently quite different. But in studying them you will see that they develop out of that one over the principal Entrance in the same way as, according to Goethe's principle of Metamorphosis, the different organs of the blossom develop from the leaf. It is again a metamorphosis of the same motive. We can only develop a living thought of the Building, if we really inwardly and intuitively grasp the principle of metamorphosis.

In what is attached right and left of the Principal Entrance you can see that the attempt has been made, just as it is in nature itself, to cause one motive to proceed out of another; although there has been no copying of what is organic. In every line and surface you can see that they all proceed from the same principle—like that same principle which causes the cheek to be

carried from the temple of the forehead in a human face. The evolving of the cheek from the temple of the forehead might really be taken as a subject of inner study. Only while doing so we must be free from the purely intellectual ideas of the world. We must be able to view the world in forms, without beginning to symbolise. We then shall be able to see how one surface, one form, proceeds out of the other in such a way that they might really have grown forth; and besides that, they really belong to the place where they are. Now in the whole of this building there is not a single thing that is mere symbol. At the time when our movement still had many people in it who were full of sectarianism and false mysticism—which tendencies indeed I had to fight over and over again—but when there were these tendencies in the different persons who came into our movement from so many different quarters, persons of artistic natures who happened to come among us were often horrified at this tendency to symbolise. These members valued a Rose-Cross, a cross with seven roses, far higher than a really artistic motive. Now in this building we may say that this has been definitely overcome and that what is really creative in a conception of the world has been expressed in forms without any transition though the symbolical.



**23. West entrance with northern staircase**

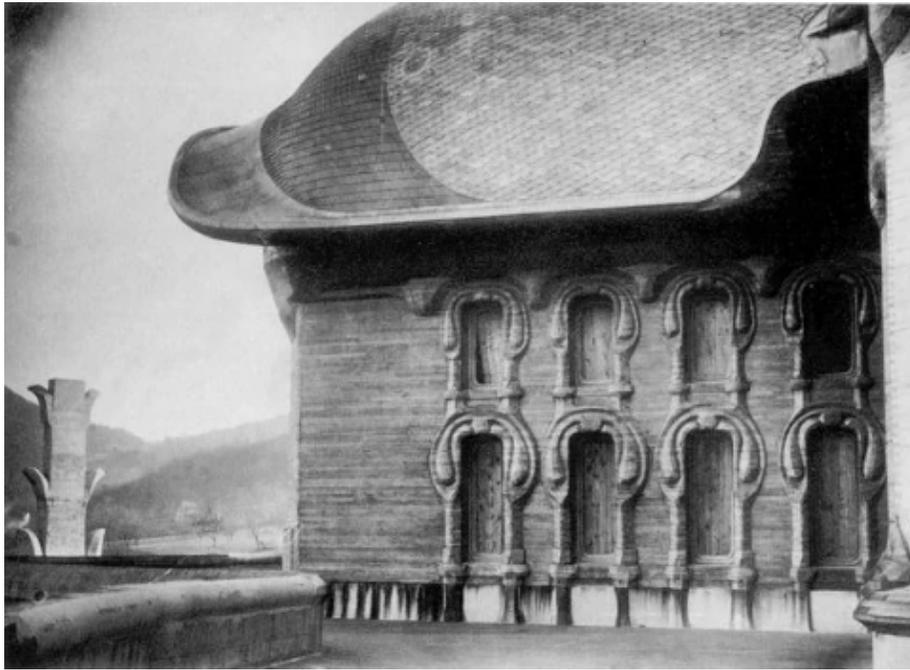
I want you to notice that in the forms, (though of course all this is only a beginning) an attempt has been made so to shape the surfaces that they lean towards the corresponding centres of support. (*Kräfte-Lagen*). For instance, if you go in at the principal entrance of the substructure, you will see the arches. If you study the forms of these arches you will find them so constructed that their lines follow the distribution of weight of the building. Towards the door, where

the weight is less, the arch is wider; where the arch curves towards the building it bends inwards, the curve is arrested. Thus the forms of the arches correspond to the distribution of weight. If you can feel the forms in this way, you have grasped a structural thought.



**12. Terrace from the northeast with Duldeck House to the right**

We now obtain a view of the North side. In the part between the principal entrance and the one wing, you can see the motive of the principal entrance in metamorphosis. There you can study the metamorphosis of the separate forms, which allows for the motive of the side-wall which is to follow. When you go in at the principal entrance the motive meets you, whereas here you pass it by. An organic structural thought should express whether a motive is one that is to meet the eye, or is to be passed by. It is the same motive, in different states of metamorphosis. Similarly that which finishes it above, which overhangs the motive—is only a metamorphosis of that which is the motive of the main portal. It is differently formed, but has only become different in the course of its metamorphosis; it is the motive of the principal entrance.



**13. North wing from the west**

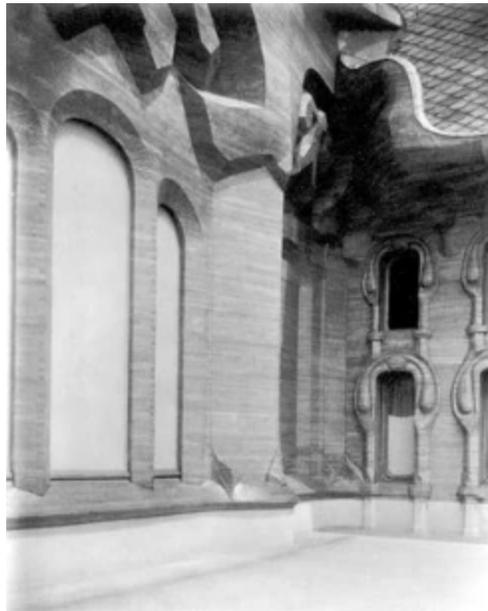
Here you have the side-view of the side-terrace. In the motive of these windows, you can study how organic shapes are formed. The motive completing the windows above is precisely the same as that you have just seen over the windows and the motive over the principal entrance, only in an organic growth it is the case that metamorphosis comes about through that which in the one structure is wider and more forceful, becoming contracted and condensed in the other; what in its earlier state as in a more primitive form, extends to more ramifications. It is just in this that metamorphosis consists, and here you can see it carried out. And I should like to draw attention here to the fact that in the whole building the endeavour has been made to develop structural truth, architectural truth. That is actually very little understood in the world to-day. You can here see the overcoming of the mere Renaissance idea. The setting of windows is not merely decorative, but as you see it arises from below. In the whole building there is not anything to be found which does not convey its actual purpose.

Nothing in this building lies, whereas in the present-day conception of architecture there is an enormous amount of untruth and deception. In our civilisation there is so much untruth in our forms that it can hardly be wondered at that so much of what men say is untrue too. Here the endeavour has been made that everything shall absolutely and truthfully express what it actually is. This can never be the case in symbolism, which always contains something arbitrary. I want you to take note of this.



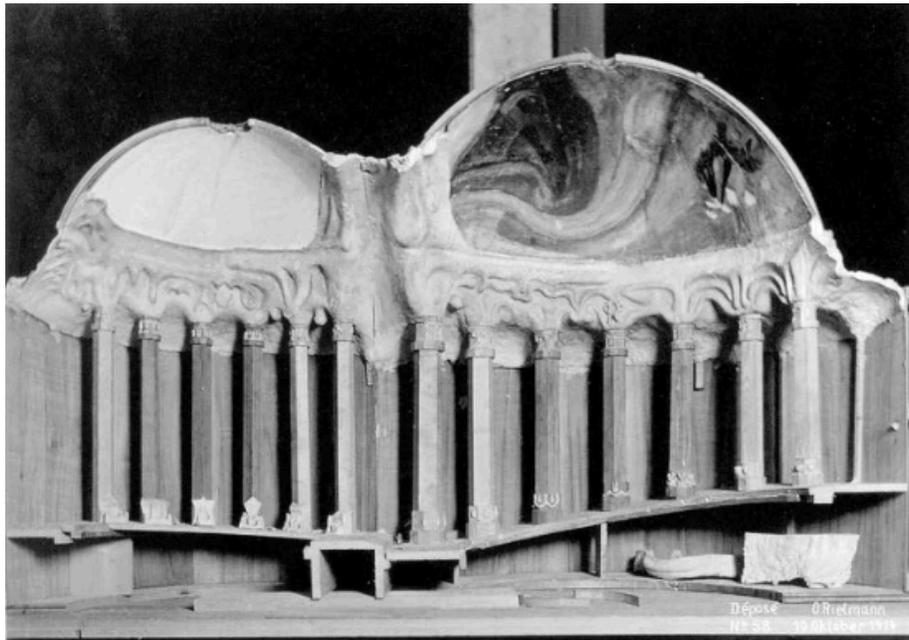
**14. Southwest side from the southeast**

Here we have the facade of the side terrace. You see in metamorphoses that which is above the principal entrance. Of course, you must bear in mind that whatever you see here is nothing but a new beginning. I always say over and over again, to all who will listen, that if I had to construct the building over again, it would be very different. This is just an attempt. But in its different parts you can see what we really intended, how the organic structural thought has been carried out, and how, for instance, the merely mathematical-geometrical-dynamic column formation has been developed into the organic, so that nowhere is the principle, merely of support or of burden in evidence, but everywhere the principle of growth can be seen, the coming forth of one from another. And as we shall see tomorrow, there is a marked effort to carry out this idea in the architecture of the interior.



**16. Terrace, corner of the south wing**

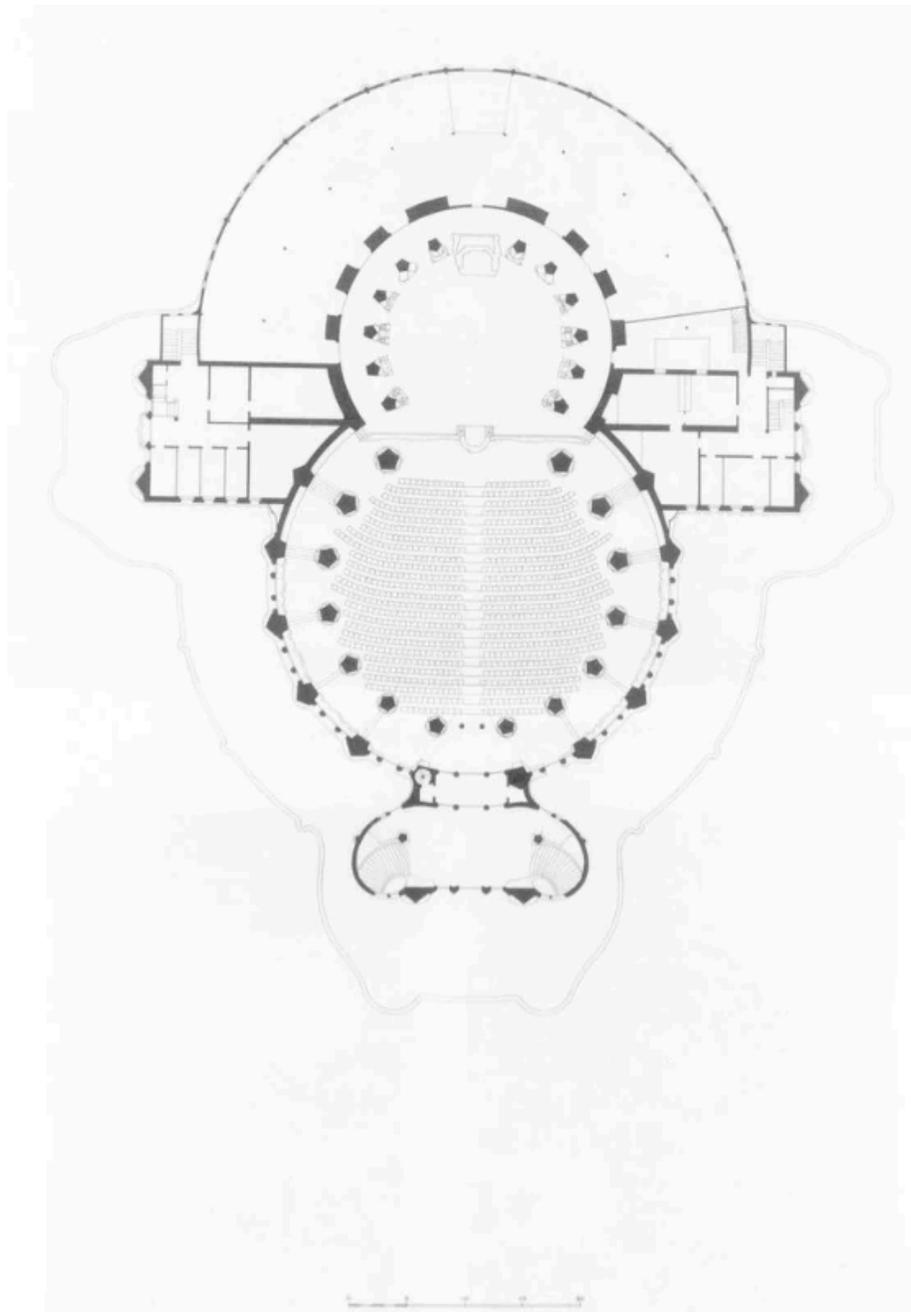
This is the juncture seen from the side, seen from the corner.



**22. Interior model of the architraves**

The model of the building. Here you have the picture of my original model. I wanted first of all to give you a conception of the idea one receives in approaching the building. I wanted to show you the effect it ought to produce when you walk round it. now show you the inner part,

in my original model, carried out in wood and wax. This model was the basis of the whole building. You see it here cut in two through the centre. You can thus see under the great cupola the seven columns which, in succession, encircle and enclose the auditorium. Here in the middle is the place of the Drop-Scene, and here beneath the smaller cupola you see 6 of the 12 columns which encircle that space. As here seen, the building is divided from West to East. In the East will stand the principal Group: the Representative of Humanity, in the midst of the Luciferic and Ahrimanic elements. Concerning the principle by which these columns with their capitals and architraves were constructed, I shall speak tomorrow.

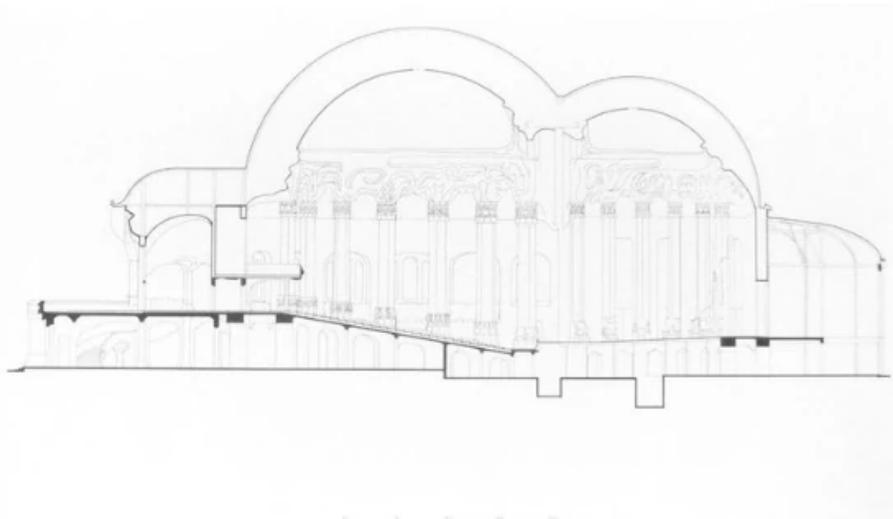


## 20. Ground Plan

Here we have the ground-plan of the building, the principal entrance with the staircase on either side, the auditorium, and the space beneath the small cupola, the place in which the Mystery-plays and the Eurythmic-representations and so on, will be given. These two spaces will be divided by the curtain. On the line dividing the two will be the speaking-desk, on both sides of this dividing line are the two side-alleys, for the use of those engaged in the representations, and their dressing-rooms and so on.

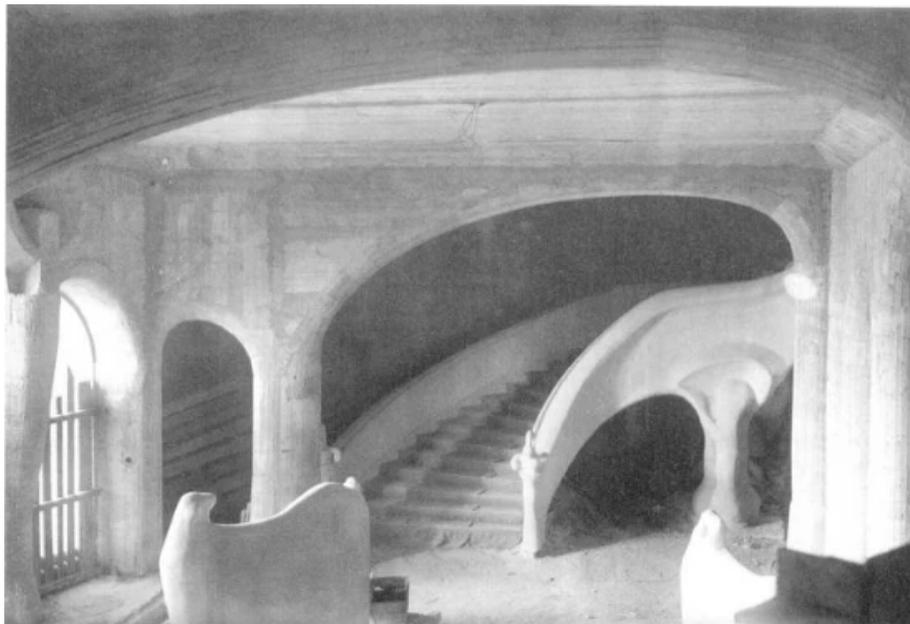
This ground-plan will show you that certain things were indispensable to the building. Whenever I refer to this ground-plan I am always anxious lest the actual structural thought should be misunderstood. I once gave a lecture in Dornach on this ground-plan and its form, drawing a comparison between it and the human form. Some of my listeners jumped to the conclusion that the building was a symbolical image of the human form. That is absolutely not the case; but if a man is able really to understand the human form and how on the one hand it is an instrument for thinking and on the other hand for willing and that both these are held together by the power of feeling; if he understands the whole human structure, the formation of the head, and limbs and the trunk, with the heart system as the centre, he then would also be able to construct other organic forms. And this is one of these other organic forms. On this account when one sees this and the organic form of man together, it is possible to find a certain relation between them. But there is absolutely no question of the one being modelled on the other, for the Building here is in its organic architectural form constructed from out of that which is organically creative in nature and from cosmic activity itself.

You will be able to see the same in the transverse section that I will now show you.



### 21. Longitudinal section from the south

The small cupola, as connected with the great cupola. This cut through the centre from East to West. The whole Building has but one axis of symmetry and everything is arranged in accordance with that. That necessitates the structural thought being a living one, for the more highly evolved organism develops along a certain axis. Certain lower organic forms alone evolve from the centre; and we may take it, that as a result of the attempt that has been made here, certain more perfect forms of building than the centrally constructed (*Zentralbauten*) ones, will be developed, because a first beginning has been made to follow the principle of organic growth along an axis.



### 23. West entrance with northern staircase

Here you have the vestibule into which one enters through the door of the substructure; and this is the stairway by which one ascends to the terrace. You see that, forming part of and attached to the balustrade of the stairs is a remarkable structure. What this actually is can perhaps only be completely grasped by one who is able to look away from everything merely intellectual, in order to see only the artistic. When this form was about to be made, I said to myself: anyone going up these stairs must have some sort of halting-place, to bring about in him the right frame of mind. Now just look at these three directions of space. But it will not suffice to look at them, you must notice how they droop over and bulge out, how weighty they are, bending over with their own weight. If you take the whole form into your feeling, they will be to you, the expression of the mood which it would be desirable for you to have when you ascend these stairs. Anyone who goes up them will have a premonition that here, in this

Goetheanum Building, he will find something which will give firmness, security and strength to his life, which will give him something to his balance. One ought to have that feeling here, for simply from that feeling did the form arise. I might say that besides this, one should feel that the form must be what it is, for although it is not slavishly copied from them, it does resemble the three semi-circular canals which form the small auditory bone of the human ear. If this organ of the human ear is injured a man falls, he loses his balance. It is an organ of balance in the human organism, a diminutive organ of balance.

Now one cannot help feeling that there must be something here to help us to enter the Hall in a properly balanced frame of mind. This is no puzzled-out idea, it has been really felt. If one takes it as a thought-out thing, it will be his own fault, for it shows he has begun by reflecting and digging down and speculating. There should be no question of speculating or puzzling out, but of feeling the heavy pressure of the overhanging weight of feeling the form and in so doing, of arousing the mood that may come over one while mounting these stairs.

Here is one of those vaulted arches which can only be understood by organic structural thinking. If you stand here in the Building and feel the Building, that is, feel how you come in or out there, and how you go up the stairs, meeting all the weighty pressure of the whole Building, you will then feel this curve is expressed exactly as it should be: while at the same time you will feel what the whole structure means. The attempt has here been made to give over to the organic the work that is generally done by columns or pillars. There is nothing in this but the feeling for form that comes when one intuitively feels the supporting strength, which this particular form must convey. If anyone is reminded of an elephant or a horse's hoof he may be so but, that only shows that he does not consider it from an artistic point of view, but merely an imitative one. What is important here is the being able to feel that weight has to be supported, while that which is to bear it grows into this form, develops into it, and that this arch could curve in any other direction but this. It is not a question of copying anything, but of trying to feel the weight-carrying, weight-bearing forces, and of moulding such forces as are able to bear weight.

In the ordinary-structural-conception the geometrical-mechanical-dynamic weight-bearing and carrying, is the only feeling one has. But here in every surface and line should be expressed in the structures, the beginning of the feeling for life. If the things I have mentioned do away with all that is merely speculation, you will have understood the subject in the right way.

To-morrow we will continue and pass from the outer to the inner architecture. I believe that when all that underlies the conception of our Building is made known to the world, and it is shown that here something really new in the way of artistic forms is growing out of the

Anthroposophical conception, we shall be able to arouse a feeling for all that is being done not only in this line, but also in regard to the social question.

---

*This material is made available through the Rudolf Steiner Archive, [rsarchive.org](https://rsarchive.org), a project of the community funded nonprofit, Steiner Online Library. Please consider making a tax deductible [donation](#) to support our work.*