

2 What Was the Bauhaus? And What Can It Teach Us Today?

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In April 1919, in the small city of Weimar, Germany, architect Walter Gropius took up an office in the former home of the Weimar Academy of Fine Art. He had just taken charge of a new, state-sponsored school for art and design, the Staatliche Bauhaus. In a pamphlet decorated with a woodcut of a star-dappled Gothic cathedral he announced his intentions:

Architects, sculptors, painters—we all must return to the crafts! ... Let us then create a new guild of craftsmen, without the class distinctions that raise an arrogant barrier between craftsman and artist! Together let us desire, conceive, and create the new structure of the future which will embrace architecture and sculpture and painting in one unity and which will one day rise toward heaven from the hands of a million workers like the crystal symbol of a new faith.¹

In that single paragraph, Gropius set an agenda that would shape first European, then American, and ultimately global art and design for a hundred years. Anyone who has walked into a modern office has seen Marcel Breuer's steel tube chairs; anyone who has visited Tel Aviv or Cambridge, Massachusetts, or any number of other cities, has seen the glass-and-concrete handiwork of Bauhaus-trained architects.

Yet the influence of the Bauhaus has extended far beyond its ubiquitous design sensibility. From its inception, the Bauhaus has been an emblem of the hope that design would create the kind of society politics could not. The life of the Bauhaus as an institution precisely tracked that of the Weimar Republic, the chaotic democracy that preceded Hitler's Third Reich. From 1919 to 1933, the Bauhaus lived on the largesse of government subsidies, individual donations, and to some degree the sale of its own designs. This foundation allowed the school to model a new kind of multidisciplinary community—artistic, technological, and social all at once. Though the school employed far fewer women than men, and though it informally encouraged women to concentrate in areas such as weaving and dance, the school was one of the first in



Figure 2.1 The Bauhaus building in Dessau, Germany, and the “Bauhaus Manifesto and Program” published in 1919 by Walter Gropius. © 2018 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.

Germany to admit men and women on an equal basis.² The school's curriculum and social style quickly came to define the modern art school. Through both, Gropius and his colleagues hoped to produce a new kind of person. Professionally, this “New Man,” as he was often called, would be able to blend the arts and crafts. Psychologically, he would be a person who could draw on feelings, sensations, and reason all at once, and so be able to keep himself whole and sane before the onslaught of industrial modernity. For the founders of the Bauhaus, the New Man was meant to be a new kind of citizen, and the Bauhaus itself was meant to be a living, breathing model of a newly democratized society.

In the late 1930s, as Hitler consolidated his power, Gropius and many of his colleagues fled to the United States. When they did, they brought the social, psychological, and professional ideals of the Bauhaus with them. They transformed the Bauhaus into a prototype for institutions as diverse and influential as Black Mountain College and the Aspen Institute. Their teachings reshaped key parts of engineering education in America, most notably at the Illinois Institute of Technology and MIT. Across the Cold

Umfang der Lehre.

Die Lehre im Bauhaus umfaßt alle praktischen und wissenschaftlichen Gebiete des bildnerischen Schaffens.

A. Baukunst,
B. Malerei,
C. Bildhauerei

einzelne Gebiete aller handwerklichen Zweiggebiete.

Die Studierenden werden sowohl handwerklich (1) wie zeichnerisch-malerisch (2) und wissenschaftlich-theoretisch (3) ausgebildet.

1. Die handwerkliche Ausbildung - sei es in eigenen, allmählich zu ergänzenden, oder fremden durch Lehrvertrag verpflichteten Werkstätten - erstreckt sich auf:

- a) Bildhauer, Steinmetzen, Stukkatores, Holzbildhauer, Keramiker,
- b) Tischler,
- c) Schmiede, Schlosser, Gießer, Dreher,
- d) Tischler,
- e) Dekorationsmaler, Glasmaler, Mosaiker, Emailleure,
- f) Buchbinder, Holzschneider, Lithographen, Kunststricker, Ziselöre,
- g) Weber.

Die handwerkliche Ausbildung bildet das Fundament der Lehre im Bauhaus. Jeder Studierende soll ein Handwerk erlernen.

2. Die zeichnerische und malerische Ausbildung erstreckt sich auf:

- a) freies Skizzieren aus dem Gedächtnis und der Fantasie,
- b) Zeichnen und Malen nach Köpfen, Akten und Tieren,
- c) Zeichnen und Malen von Landschaften, Figuren, Pflanzen und Stillleben,
- d) Kompositionen,
- e) Ausführen von Wandbildern, Tafelbildern und Bilderschreinen,
- f) Entwerfen von Ornamenten,
- g) Schriftzeichnen,
- h) Konstruktions- und Projektionszeichnen,
- i) Entwerfen von Außen-, Garten- und Innenarchitekturen,
- k) Entwerfen von Möbeln und Gebrauchsgegenständen.

3. Die wissenschaftlich-theoretische Ausbildung erstreckt sich auf:

- a) Kunstgeschichte - nicht im Sinne von Stilgeschichte vorgetragen, sondern zur lebendigen Erkenntnis historischer Arbeitsweisen und Techniken,
- b) Materialkunde,
- c) Anatomie - am lebenden Modell,
- d) physikalische und chemische Farbenlehre,
- e) rationelles Maßverfahren,
- f) Grundbegriffe von Buchführung, Vertragsabschlüssen, Verdingungen,
- g) allgemein interessante Einzelvorträge aus allen Gebieten der Kunst und Wissenschaft.

Einteilung der Lehre.

Die Ausbildung ist in drei Lehrgänge eingeteilt:

I. Lehrgang für Lehrlinge,
II. " " " Gesellen,
III. " " " Jungmeister.

Die Einzelbildung bleibt dem Ermessen der einzelnen Meister im Rahmen des allgemeinen Programms und des in jedem Semester neu aufzustellenden Arbeitsverteilungsplanes überlassen.

Um den Studierenden eine möglichst vielseitige, umfassende technische und künstlerische Ausbildung zuteil werden zu lassen, wird der Arbeitsverteilungsplan so eingelegt, daß jeder angehende Architekt, Maler oder Bildhauer auch an einem Teil der anderen Lehrgänge teilnehmen kann.

Aufnahme.

Aufgenommen wird jede unbescholtene Person ohne Rücksicht auf Alter und Geschlecht, deren Vorbildung vom Ministerrat des Bauhauses als ausreichend erachtet wird, und soweit es der Raum zuläßt. Das Lehrgeld beträgt jährlich 100 Mark. (Es soll mit steigendem Verdienst des Bauhauses allmählich ganz verschwinden). Außerdem ist eine einmalige Aufnahmegebühr von 20 Mark zu zahlen. Ausländer zahlen den doppelten Betrag. Anfragen sind an das Sekretariat des Staatlichen Bauhauses in Weimar zu richten.

APRIL 1919. Die Leitung des Staatlichen Bauhauses in Weimar:
Walter Gropius.

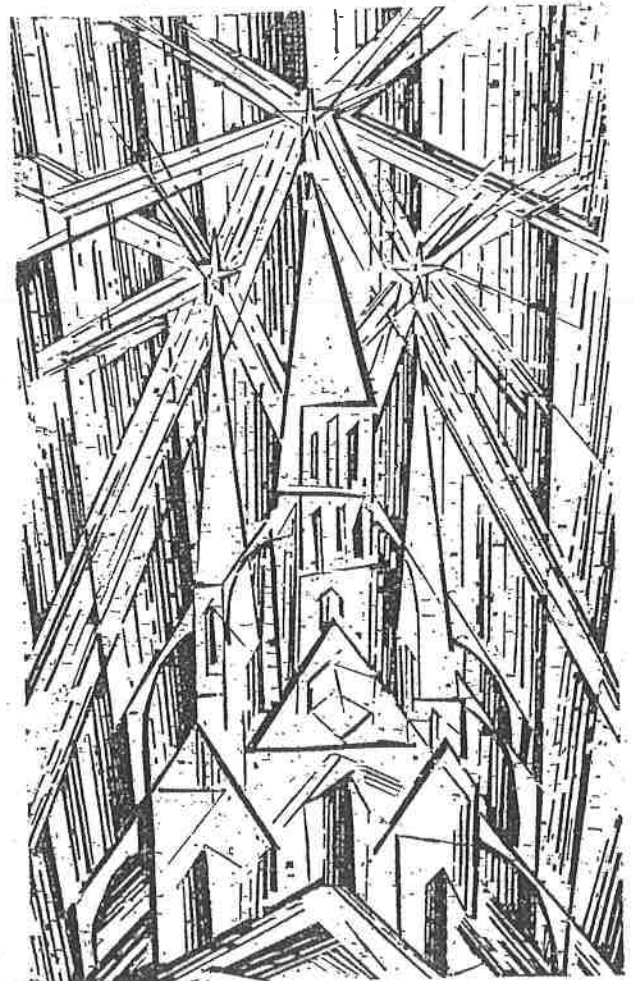


Figure 2.1 (continued)

War, they helped normalize the integration of art and technology and at the same time helped promote the importance of a new kind of worker who could bring these areas together. By the 1960s, the New Man who had emerged from the rubble of World War I, the multitasking artist-scientist-craftsman who would change the world through creativity and design rather than politics, had become a model for the multimedia artists of downtown Manhattan and the commune-builders of the American counterculture. And he is still very much with us today.

The Bauhaus in Weimar

From the beginning, Gropius anchored the Bauhaus's search for a new society and for a new kind of citizen in older struggles to humanize industrial production. The Bauhaus had deep roots in the arts and crafts tradition of William Morris and John Ruskin.³ Morris and Ruskin sought to combat the alienating effects of industrialization by embracing handicraft, everyday utility in design, and rich, often handmade materials. Gropius too saw the blending of art and craft as a way to improve everyday life, but he also celebrated the machine and the factory. Before he came to the Bauhaus, Gropius belonged to the Deutscher Werkbund, a community of artists, designers, and industrialists who sought to improve the design of everyday goods with the aid of mechanical production and so to provide goods of the highest quality to ordinary citizens. Gropius believed that industrial technologies could transform production by empowering artists to make a new kind of work, and could transform consumption by making that work available to ordinary people. In short, machines could be tools of democratization.

Such ambitions meshed nicely with the founding goals of the Weimar Republic. The republic's constitution, written not far from the Bauhaus and published in August 1919, transformed the German Reich into a parliamentary democracy. The republic's first leaders emphasized industrial reforms, ensuring workers the rights to an eight-hour workday and collective bargaining. At the Bauhaus, Gropius tried to instill a similarly egalitarian culture. Students dressed informally and served on the school's governing council. Faculty were not called "professor" but the far less magisterial "master." From the start, Gropius tried to set painters and craftsmen on equal footing. He imagined that students and their teachers would engage in "mutual planning of extensive, Utopian structural designs—public buildings and buildings for worship—into the future."⁴

In Weimar, the Bauhaus had no way to pursue Gropius's architectural vision because it lacked an architectural workshop. The school's early years also produced relatively few examples of what we now consider canonical Bauhaus style. What they did produce, however, was a new way of training the artist-craftsman. Every student at the Bauhaus was required to take a six-month "preliminary course" taught by the painter and mystic Johannes Itten. The preliminary course was unlike anything offered by ordinary art schools at the time. Itten was a follower of the neo-Zoroastrian sect of Mazdaznan, a group devoted to the pursuit of self-realization and the development of spiritual community through vegetarianism, breathing exercises, fasting, and sexual self-control. In his course, Itten fused the Mazdaznan emphasis on the body with the development of artistic skills. He created a series of exercises in which students

explored colors and textures and their interrelations. Before they tried to paint or draw or otherwise represent the world, Itten wanted his students to feel their materials in their bodies. He required them to practice breath control and meditation, and to move their bodies in patterns suggested by the shapes with which they were working.

Itten aimed to create more than a new kind of worker. "The Preliminary Course concerns the student's whole personality," explained a 1922 Bauhaus pamphlet, "since it seeks to liberate him. ... The personality of each student is allowed to develop freely in his work in order to enable him to contribute to the practical realization of the common idea."⁵ At its most basic, the preliminary course sought to elicit the indwelling creativity of individual students and help them apply it. Yet threaded through this ideal was a fundamentally political project and one that the early Bauhaus shared with other modernist movements. Itten's students were to free their personalities in order to serve the "common idea." That is, their individual integration of personal and professional skills was meant to model and help bring into being a more integrated and authentic social order. At a time when party politics had become a matter of life and death across Germany, the preliminary course proposed artistic training as a mechanism for fostering individual psychological change, and through it, collective political improvement.

When Gropius and others tired of Itten's mysticism and forced him to resign in 1922, the Hungarian artist László Moholy-Nagy took his place at the head of the preliminary course. Moholy had come from Berlin, where he painted severely abstract canvases and experimented with photograms, a type of cameraless photography. He shared Itten's faith in the transformative powers of art, but he also celebrated the liberating power of industrial technology. "Everyone is equal before the machine," he wrote in 1922. "I can use it, so can you. It can crush me; the same can happen to you. There is no tradition in technology, no class-consciousness. Everyone can be the machine's master or its slave."⁶

Together with Josef Albers, a recent Bauhaus graduate, Moholy transformed the preliminary course. Moholy and Albers did continue to urge students to form themselves as whole people and to use their training to do it. They also retained and celebrated the political thread that ran through Itten's pedagogy. Henceforth however, there would be no more Mazdaznan mumbo jumbo. Instead, students would learn to design for and within an industrial society. "Individualism is not primarily a school concern, for individualism stresses particularity and separateness," wrote Albers. "It is the task of the school to integrate the individual into the society and the economy and to have him partake in the activities of his time."⁷

Moholy and Albers were not alone in their turn toward industry. In 1922, a Dutch artist named Theo van Doesburg had come to Weimar and begun teaching his own classes, outside the school. Van Doesburg was a leader of a new Dutch movement, *De Stijl*, alongside painter Piet Mondrian. Van Doesburg and Mondrian promoted a pared-down aesthetic favoring sharp geometric forms and solid colors—an aesthetic much more in synch with the mechanical forms of modern industry than with the neomedieval handicrafts of Ruskin and Morris. Thanks in part to van Doesburg's influence, as well as increasing pressures on the school to train designers who could work more closely with manufacturers, the Bauhaus began to change. Gropius stopped talking about crystal symbols and started talking about the need to embrace heavy industry. "I seek unity in these [artistic and industrial] ways of life," he wrote in a circular sent to the Bauhaus faculty in February 1922. "Why is it that we can appreciate equally well the form of a well-built automobile, an airplane, and a modern machine as individual works of art beautifully formed by creative hands? It is by no means our nature to reject one or the other."⁸

The Bauhaus was a state-sponsored institution, though, and even as it reached out to industry, it remained vulnerable to political pressure. In the spring of 1924, members of the German *Völkische* movement, a precursor to the Nazis, pushed the parliament of Thuringia, where Weimar was located and whose Ministry of Education funded the school, to cut back on its funding. They questioned the number of faculty the school employed, the school's cosmopolitan orientation, and especially the "moral qualities of the Director."⁹ Gropius mounted a robust defense, pointing to the number of students trained, the exhibitions of student work, and the international reputation of Bauhaus faculty, but the Thuringian ministers were unsatisfied. By the end of the year, the right wing had become a majority in the parliament and had cut the school's funding to such a degree that it was forced to close.

The Bauhaus Moves to Dessau

The closure of the Weimar Bauhaus marked the end of its early, experimental phase and the beginning of the period for which it remains best known today. The newly conservative Weimar no longer wanted the Bauhaus, but other cities competed to house the school. Led by airplane designer and industrialist Hugo Junkers, a coalition of businessmen from the city of Dessau, not far from Berlin, won out, and in 1925 Gropius and his colleagues set up shop there. For a time, the economic and political pressures of Weimar eased. Thanks to a close collaboration with Junkers as well as municipal and state authorities, the Bauhaus enjoyed a sudden abundance of funding. Gropius hired

new professors, a number of whom had graduated from the Weimar Bauhaus. The school began publishing a newsletter and a book series. It established its first architecture department. And perhaps most important of all, it opened a new campus designed by Gropius: a single, interlinked complex of buildings that gleamed with white-painted brick and vast expanses of glass. One wing had several floors of workshops and classrooms; another featured offices. A six-story dormitory for students towered over the whole, with balconies on every floor. A two-story bridge connected two of the buildings, with offices on its first floor and space for an architecture department and Gropius's own office above. The complex also included a large exhibition space, a theater, a cafeteria, and a gym—any of which could be reached, like any other part of the campus, simply by following the halls. No one need ever step outside.

The new campus instantly became a visible symbol of the ways Gropius and his colleagues had repurposed the school's founding ideals. More than 1,500 visitors from all over Europe attended its opening in December 1924. What they saw was both a hypermodern piece of architecture and an infrastructure for a highly collaborative community of artists and designers. The new campus was a self-contained world, with everything a person needed to keep body and soul together, and with the easiest of access to friends. Xanti Schawinsky, a student at the time, recalled that Gropius's campus created an easy comradeship: "All you had to do to call a friend was to step out onto your balcony and whistle," he wrote.¹⁰ It might not have been a Gothic cathedral, but the new campus seemed to many to have finally brought into being the kind of intimate community of purpose promised in 1919.

The campus also signaled a reorientation of the Bauhaus mission. The turn away from romanticism, mysticism, and handicraft that had begun in Weimar exploded into a full-on embrace of architecture, heavy industry, and modern mass production. Alongside the core campus complex, Gropius designed and oversaw the construction of six semidetached townhouses for Bauhaus faculty. These houses were entirely fitted out with products from Bauhaus workshops, and their interiors were painted by their new inhabitants. They quickly became international models of what modern living might look like. So too did Herbert Bayer's new typeface, which appeared on all Bauhaus publications. The traditional German script then in general use featured elaborate curls and other decorative flourishes, and a complex pattern of capitalization. Bayer's typeface was as clean and cool as a bar of aluminum—no flourishes, not even any capital letters—and wondrously easy to read.

Not everyone was thrilled with the school's new direction. "Architecture became the new principal field of study," explained T. Lux Feininger, the son of the man who had etched the Gothic cathedral for the pamphlet of 1919. "The new unity of art and

technology came to a standstill. ... The dreams of a regeneration of society hardened into specialization. Authority, structure, re-entered the scene."¹¹ It might be more accurate to say that the ideal of the unity of art and technology simply scaled up to include architecture and publishing. But the tone of the school did change. Local officials had reminded Gropius and his colleagues that at the end of the day, they would need to justify the city and the state's investment by intensifying their collaborations with industry. In part for that reason, Gropius centralized his authority. The collaborative decision-making of the early Weimar years disappeared. Masters were called professors once again.

The effort to form a new kind of worker only intensified, however, and the preliminary course remained the centerpiece of Bauhaus teaching. Moholy and Albers may have shown little concern for their charges' spiritual growth, but they continued to require their students to become adept in working with a wide array of materials. These encounters were meant to simultaneously engage the whole range of the students' senses and train them for the array of professional possibilities then emerging.¹² Their internal, psychological wholeness and their professional flexibility would free them to embrace the industry that had alienated so many before them. The New Man must "achieve a natural balance of intellectual and emotional power" wrote Moholy; only then, wrote Gropius, could "the work of the new man ... become an organic part of unified industrial production."¹³

For models students needed only to look at the first generation of Bauhaus professors to have been trained by the Bauhaus itself. Marcel Breuer could paint and make furniture; Herbert Bayer could design buildings and whole publication programs. Most of the Dessau faculty were men—of the school's thirty-five professors, only six were women, and only one of those women, Gunta Stölzl, a professor of weaving, had been trained at the Bauhaus.¹⁴ Yet almost all of the first Bauhaus graduates could paint, draw, photograph, design appliances, costumes, and posters, and weave a rug. Visitors to the Dessau campus could see individual examples of student work, and if they toured the faculty housing, they could see how Bauhaus designs could be used to create a unified aesthetic environment. At Dessau, architecture largely remained the province of male instructors and students, but the buildings were filled with industrial designs created by men and women alike. These designs continue to define Bauhaus style today. Marianne Brandt's semi-globe teapot and her arch-necked desk lamp; Anni Albers's weavings; Josef Albers's color block paintings; Oskar Schlemmer's geometric designs for the theater; the abstract paintings of Paul Klee, Wassily Kandinsky, and Moholy-Nagy; and above all, the architecture of Walter Gropius—between 1925 and its closure

in 1933, the Bauhaus created much of the visual vocabulary of twentieth-century modernity.

To an increasingly nationalistic, right-wing German government, however, the cosmopolitanism of the Bauhaus had begun to seem traitorous. Never mind that the Bauhaus put Germany at the center of the international design world. To fascists, the Bauhaus had become an emblem of anti-Aryan community. The story of how the Bauhaus changed as the Nazis came to power is long and complex and has been well told elsewhere.¹⁵ To understand the Bauhaus's lingering importance for our own time, it is enough to note that in Dessau, and in the end for a few tumultuous months in Berlin, the school and its leaders had to battle on two fronts: one, to continue to bring the Bauhaus vision to life in the world of art and design; and two, to keep the Bauhaus funded and functioning as an institution. In 1928, Gropius left the school to pursue his own architecture practice and Hannes Meyer, a well-known Marxist, became its leader. Meyer lacked Gropius's political tact and offended many inside and outside the school. In 1930, he was replaced by the architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. By that time, the political conflicts that had long surrounded the school had infiltrated its student body. In 1932, a Communist faction even demanded the elimination of the preliminary course.

Mies fought ferociously to save the school. But the political climate made that impossible. Nazi critics attacked from all sides. The Bauhaus was a nest of Bolsheviks said some, a nest of Jews said others. Even the flat roofs of Bauhaus buildings were suspect—after all, said the fascists, northern countries needed peaked roofs; only the non-Aryan nations of warmer climes did not.¹⁶ In 1932, a group of Nazi representatives from the Dessau city council toured the Bauhaus. Two days later, their leader published an article entitled "What Will Become of the Bauhaus?" in a local newspaper. He answered his own question thus:

The disappearance of this so-called "Institute of Design" will mean the disappearance from German soil of one of the most prominent places of Jewish-Marxist "art" manifestation. May the total demolition follow soon and may on the same spot where today stands the somber glass Palace of oriental taste, the "aquarium" as it has been popularly dubbed in Dessau, soon rise homesteads and parks that will provide German people with homes and places for relaxation. "The robe has fallen, the Duke must follow."¹⁷

The New Man in the New World

And so he did. By the summer of 1933, the Bauhaus had closed its doors for good. The end of the Bauhaus as an institution, however, dramatically enhanced the reach and

influence of its ideals. In the late 1930s, many former Bauhaus professors emigrated to the United States. Alongside refugee German intellectuals such as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, and together with American artists, industrialists, and academics, they transformed American cultural life. Gropius went to Harvard, where he became chair of the university's department of architecture. Mies van der Rohe migrated to Chicago, designed much of the campus of the Illinois Institute of Technology, and then went on to architect such icons of modernism as the 1958 Seagram building in Manhattan. László Moholy-Nagy went to Chicago, where he founded what was first called the New Bauhaus and later the IIT Institute of Design. Moholy's student György Kepes first joined him there, then moved to MIT, where he established one of the most influential postwar arenas for art-and-technology collaborations, the Center for Advanced Visual Studies (CAVS). Herbert Bayer went to New York, where he developed important exhibitions for the Museum of Modern Art and designed advertisements for Walter Paepcke's Container Corporation of America. Ultimately he played a key role in helping Paepcke turn the small town of Aspen, Colorado, into a center of American intellectual life.

To map the Bauhaus community's impact on American life after World War II would take an entire volume.¹⁸ American architecture, advertising, engineering education, museum display—all changed dramatically under the influence of individual Bauhaus emigres. Collectively however, the emigres brought with them two key elements of the German Bauhaus, one organizational and the other psychological. Into a Cold War America in which many dreaded the powers of bureaucracy, Bauhaus emigres brought antibureaucratic models of organization based on artistic and technological collaboration and egalitarian social ideals. And to an America preoccupied with the psychological fragmentation and alienation of what novelist Sloan Wilson called "the man in the gray flannel suit," they introduced the New Man, psychologically integrated, multi-skilled, independent, and democratic.

Perhaps the easiest place at which to see the impact of these two contributions is Black Mountain College. Today the rural North Carolina school, which operated from 1933 to 1957, is remembered as the epicenter of midcentury American avant-garde painting, dance, and poetry. This is no surprise given that its students included figures such as painter Robert Rauschenberg, sculptor Kenneth Snelson, filmmaker Stan VanDerBeek, and writer Francine du Plessix Gray. Its faculty was just as illustrious, featuring at one time or another the poet Charles Olson, the painter Willem de Kooning, architect Buckminster Fuller, and composer John Cage. But when Josef and Anni Albers arrived in 1933, Black Mountain was a small college devoted to providing a general education in line with the liberal educational philosophy of John Dewey.

Like Dewey, the designers of Black Mountain's curriculum put art at the center of human experience. The school's founding president, John Andrew Rice, hired Josef Albers to run the school for that reason. Albers arrived speaking hardly any English. When students asked him what he would teach, he often answered "To open eyes!"¹⁹ He quickly began teaching courses in painting and basic design that grew directly from his work in the preliminary course at the Bauhaus in Dessau. He taught students to see colors in relationship to one another, to feel their way into different materials, and to imagine themselves as builders of a new, more democratic society. "I don't think there was one comment he made pertaining to the visual world that he didn't intend to pertain to the human world," one of his students recalled. "He told us over and over that there is no meaning to teaching art unless it is a teaching for how to live your life. This was not a little side note. It was fundamental to his teaching."²⁰

Albers's teaching carried with it the legacy of the Bauhaus vision of the New Man, as did the work of his fellow emigres. In 1938, the director of the New Bauhaus in Chicago, László Moholy-Nagy, updated his 1928 book *The New Vision* for American audiences and published it in English. He cited John Dewey and American Progressives as inspirations for his teaching philosophy and explicitly tied the goals of the Weimar Bauhaus to his work in Chicago.²¹ The aim of all his teaching, he wrote, was to make a new kind of person. As he put it, "Not the product, but man, is the end in view."²² In Germany, the New Man was meant to salvage the world through industry. In America, he was meant to do the same thing, but in a liberal-democratic context. "The revolutionist should always remain conscious that the class struggle is, in the last analysis, not about capital, nor the means of production," wrote Moholy in *The New Vision*. "In actuality it concerns the right of the individual to a satisfying occupation, work that meets the inner needs, a normal way of life and a real release of human powers."²³ John Dewey couldn't have said it better.

At Black Mountain College, Albers took the doctrine of the New Man one step further toward American liberalism. In his 1942 memoir, the school's founding president, John Andrew Rice, recalled that "Black Mountain was to be education for democracy." The definition of the kind of democracy it would exemplify, however, owed at least as much to the Bauhaus as to any American individualism. "The democratic man, we said, must be an artist," wrote Rice. "The integrity, we said, of the democratic man, was the integrity of the artist, an integrity of relationship."²⁴ At Black Mountain College, as at the Bauhaus, students would be introduced to multiple materials and multiple modes of perception and would become multiply skilled in ways that served the arts and industry. But as they mastered the relationships among materials and among their own senses, they would also develop the kinds of emotional flexibility

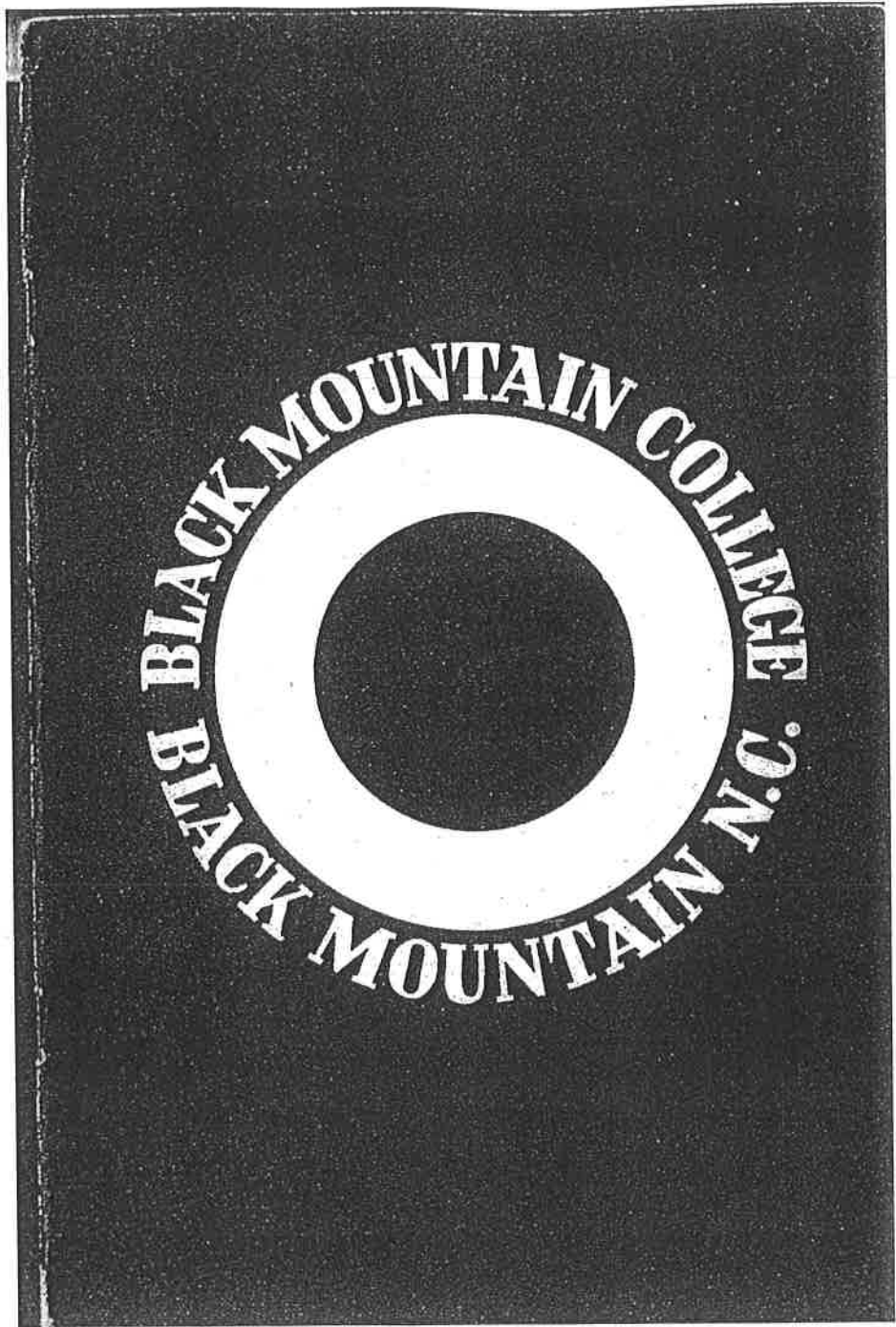


Figure 2.2

Black Mountain College logo and Josef Albers's drawing class, ca. 1939–1940. Courtesy of the Western Regional Archives, State Archives of North Carolina.



Figure 2.2 (continued)

and collaborative individualism that would turn the College into a model of a new, less hierarchical America. In his Black Mountain versions of the preliminary course, Albers even talked about colors and forms as if they were citizens in an ideal liberal democracy. They should “know about each other” and “pay attention to each other,” he said. They “should not exist for themselves.” They should “cooperate ... integrate ... get along.”²⁵

Albers headed Black Mountain College from 1933 to 1949, and in those years the school became, like the Bauhaus itself, an emblem of an alternative way of organizing

egalitarian sociability. While the tensions of World War II and the early Cold War swirled through American society at large, Black Mountain College modeled a world in which art and design and attention to the senses produced the kind of collaborative, benevolent polity that state-level politics had so clearly failed to establish. In later years, Albers's students and colleagues would take pieces of that model with them into the heart of the New York art world and the San Francisco counterculture. Buckminster Fuller's geodesic dome, which he prototyped at Black Mountain in the summer of 1948, became the preferred form of housing on the communes of the 1960s. The Happening, a performance art form pioneered by John Cage at Black Mountain in 1952, became a quintessential genre of political theater. And the notion that a democratic community could be formed by turning away from politics and back toward the senses, toward expression, and toward design as a way of organizing activity defined much of the American counterculture.

Conclusion

Today the legacy of the Bauhaus can be seen everywhere from the floors of furniture stores to the desert sands of the Burning Man Festival in Nevada. We have become so accustomed to the geometric modernism of Bauhaus teapots and lamps that we no longer have any idea where they came from, or that they even have an origin at all. For its part, the Burning Man Festival looks like just another spectacular eruption from the creative volcano that is the San Francisco Bay area. But dig a little deeper and you can see the Bauhaus influence—in the geodesic domes in the dust and above all in the collaborative production of technology-centered art that drives so much of the event. Like the Bauhaus, and like Black Mountain College, Burning Man celebrates the fusion of art and technological craft and means to model an alternative and freer society.

Though few may remember the Bauhaus as an institution, its governing beliefs suffuse our culture today. Creativity, collaboration, innovation, design—these are the watchwords of higher education and the corporate sector around the globe. The kind of interdisciplinary training the Bauhaus pioneered has gone mainstream, not just for artists but for computer scientists, product designers, marketers, and engineers. The hope of blending work and play and of transforming the workplace into a model of egalitarian community that once animated the Bauhaus now lights up the California headquarters of Google and Facebook.

And that should give us pause. When Itten and Moholy and Albers taught the preliminary course, they hoped that their students might help create a society that mirrored their classrooms. Such a society would be collaborative, person-centered, and

expressive. It would take advantage of the latest developments in manufacturing and design. And it would operate on its own terms, far from the concerns of states. In reality, however, the freedom of such a society depended even then on the strength of political institutions. The Bauhaus came to life alongside the Weimar Republic and depended for its survival on the munificence of the republic's democratically elected representatives. Likewise, Black Mountain College could not have survived in the post-war years without tuition paid by students using the G.I. Bill. And for all its much-hyped entrepreneurship, Silicon Valley's computers and software would never have come into being without several generations of research supported and managed by the federal government.

In this context, the fate of the original Bauhaus, like the fate of the Weimar Republic, reminds us that individual genius, small group collaboration, and even the exquisite design of systems and tools will never be sufficient foundations for democracy. The Bauhaus was founded on the belief that the pleasure of art and technology, properly united, could defuse the tensions of politics and perhaps even replace them. But its struggles as an institution and the means of its demise tell us something different. They remind us that if we want to have the kind of society the Bauhaus fought for, not to mention the kind of beauty it brought into the world, we will need to embrace both the unity of art and technology and the agonistic struggles of democratic politics.

Notes

1. Walter Gropius, "Program of the Staatliche Bauhaus in Weimar," published by the Staatliche Bauhaus, Weimar, April 1919; rpt. in Hans Maria Wingler, *The Bauhaus: Weimar, Dessau, Berlin, Chicago* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1978), 31.
2. Ulrike Müller, Ingrid Radewaldt, and Sandra Kemker, *Bauhaus Women: Art, Handicraft, Design*, English-language ed. (Paris: Flammarion, 2009), 7–15. See also Alice Rawsthorn, "Female Pioneers of the Bauhaus," *New York Times*, March 23, 2013, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/25/arts/25iht-design25.html>.
3. There are many excellent histories of the Bauhaus. I've drawn extensively on two: Frank Whitford, *Bauhaus* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984), and Éva Forgács, *The Bauhaus Idea and Bauhaus Politics* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1995). Excellent accounts of the Bauhaus's early years can also be found in Elaine S. Hochman, *Bauhaus: Crucible of Modernism* (New York: Fromm International, 1997); Herbert Bayer, Walter Gropius, and Ise Gropius, *Bauhaus, 1919–1928* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1938); Hans Wingler, "Origin and History of the Bauhaus," in Wingler, *The Bauhaus*, xviii–11; and Magdalena Droste, *Bauhaus, 1919–1933* (Cologne: B. Taschen, 1998).
4. Gropius, "Program of the Staatliche Bauhaus in Weimar," quoted in Wingler, *The Bauhaus*, 32.

5. "Exhibition of the Work of Journeymen and Apprentices in the Staatliche Bauhaus Weimar, April-May 1922," rpt. in Wingler, *The Bauhaus*, 54. It is clear that the Bauhaus's founders shared an aspiration for wholeness with contemporary Gestalt psychologists, many of whom were working in Berlin. Yet there is little evidence that Gropius and his colleagues in fact engaged with Gestalt psychology directly. See Karen Koehler, "More Than Parallel Lines: Thoughts on Gestalt, Albers, and the Bauhaus," in *Intersecting Colors: Josef Albers and His Contemporaries*, ed. Vanja Malloy (Amherst, MA: Amherst College Press), 45–64.
6. László Moholy-Nagy, "Constructivism and the Proletariat," May 1922; quoted in Whitford, *Bauhaus*, 128.
7. Josef Albers, "Creative Education," from "Sixth International Congress for Drawing, Art Education, and Applied Art in Prague, 1928," rpt. in Wingler, *The Bauhaus*, 142.
8. Walter Gropius, "The Viability of the Bauhaus Idea: Notes of February 3, 1922," rpt. in Wingler, *The Bauhaus*, 51.
9. Walter Gropius, "The Staatliche Bauhaus and the Thuringian Landtag," from the newspaper *Deutschland* (Weimar), no. 114, April 24, 1924; rpt. in Wingler, *The Bauhaus*, 84–85.
10. Schawinsky, quoted in Forgács, *The Bauhaus Idea*, 134.
11. T. Lux Feininger, quoted in Whitford, *Bauhaus*, 186.
12. As art historian Éva Forgács has argued, the Dessau Bauhaus focused less on the construction of a single *Gesamtkunstwerk* and more on developing student-artists as wholes in themselves. See Forgács, *The Bauhaus Idea*, 142–143.
13. László Moholy-Nagy, *Von Material zur Arkitektur* (1928), quoted in Forgács, *The Bauhaus Idea*, 142; Walter Gropius, *The Scope of Total Architecture* (1962), 20; quoted in Forgács, *The Bauhaus Idea*, 143.
14. Müller, Radewaldt, and Kemker, *Bauhaus Women*, 14 and 43–49.
15. For starting points, see Whitford, *Bauhaus*, 192–196, and Peter Hahn and Christian Wolsdorff, *Bauhaus Berlin: Auflösung Dessau 1932, Schliessung Berlin 1933, Bauhäusler und Drittes Reich: Eine Dokumentation* (Weingarten: Kunstverlag Weingarten, 1985).
16. Whitford, *Bauhaus*, 195. For an account of the aesthetic of the flat roof, see Adolf Behne and Paul Westheim, "Zur Ästhetik des flachen Daches," *Das neue Frankfurt*, no. 7 (1926–1927), 163–164; rpt. as "The Aesthetics of the Flat Roof," in Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimendberg, *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 449–450.
17. Hoffman (no first name), "What Will Become of the Bauhaus?" *Anhalter Tageszeitung*, July 10, 1932; rpt. in Wingler, *The Bauhaus*, 177.
18. Pieces of the story have already been well told. For starting points, see James Sloan Allen, *The Romance of Commerce and Culture: Capitalism, Modernism, and the Chicago-Aspen Crusade for Cultural Reform* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Gwen Finkel Chanzit and Daniel

Libeskind, *From Bauhaus to Aspen: Herbert Bayer and Modernist Design in America* (Boulder, CO: Johnson Books, 2005); Frederick A. Horowitz and Brenda Danilowitz, *Josef Albers: To Open Eyes: The Bauhaus, Black Mountain College, and Yale* (London: Phaidon, 2006); Victor Margolin, *The Struggle for Utopia: Rodchenko, Lissitzky, Moholy-Nagy, 1917–1946* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Reinhold Martin, *The Organizational Complex: Architecture, Media, and Corporate Space* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003); Jill E. Pearlman, *Inventing American Modernism: Joseph Hudnut, Walter Gropius, and the Bauhaus Legacy at Harvard* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007); Franz Schulze, *Mies van der Rohe: A Critical Biography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Fred Turner, *The Democratic Surround: Multimedia and American Liberalism from World War II to the Psychedelic Sixties* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013). For the influence of Bauhaus artists and designers in Europe and the Soviet Union, see the essays collected in Philipp Oswalt, ed., *Bauhaus Conflicts, 1919–2009: Controversies and Counterparts* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2009).

19. Josef Albers, quoted in Frederick A. Horowitz, "What Josef Albers Taught at Black Mountain College and What Black Mountain College Taught Josef Albers," *Journal of Black Mountain College Studies* 11 (Spring 2011), <http://www.blackmountainstudiesjournal.org/volume-11-spring-2011/1-9-frederick-a-horowitz/>.

20. Unidentified student of Josef Albers, quoted in Horowitz, "What Josef Albers Taught."

21. László Moholy-Nagy, *The New Vision: Fundamentals of Design, Painting, Sculpture, Architecture*, trans. Daphne M. Hoffmann, rev. ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1938), 17 and 19.

22. *Ibid.*, 14.

23. *Ibid.*, 16.

24. John Andrew Rice, *I Came out of the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Harper, 1942), 328; quoted in Turner, *The Democratic Surround*, 134.

25. Albers, quoted in Horowitz, "What Josef Albers Taught."

Bauhaus Futures

edited by **Laura Forlano, Molly Wright Steenson, and Mike Ananny**

The MIT Press
Cambridge, Massachusetts
London, England

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This book was set in ITC Stone Serif Std and ITC Stone Sans Std by Toppan Best-set Premedia Limited. Printed and bound in the United States of America.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Forlano, Laura, 1973- editor. | Steenson, Molly Wright, editor. | Ananny, Mike, editor.

Title: Bauhaus futures / Laura Forlano, Molly Wright Steenson, and Mike Ananny [editors].

Description: Cambridge, MA : The MIT Press, 2019. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2018059704 | ISBN 9780262042918 (hardcover : alk. paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Design--Philosophy. | Bauhaus. | Design--Social aspects. | Design--Forecasting.

Classification: LCC NK1505 .B38 2019 | DDC 709.05/1--dc23 LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2018059704>

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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