

The Bauhaus Contribution

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Source: *Journal of Architectural Education* (1947-1974), Vol. 18, No. 1 (Jun., 1963), pp. 14-16

Published by: Taylor & Francis, Ltd. on behalf of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture, Inc.

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1423850>

Accessed: 26-06-2016 09:53 UTC

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designs have always appeared *above* the level of a possible vernacular style. The SOM office might be better cited as representing Mies in the marketplace. Elsewhere, the reported shadow of Wright on Johnson's work seems improbable. One wishes to see those Johnson studies done in the Wright manner to which reference is made. They would perhaps supply and make clear the connection. As for the parallel spatial concerns of Wright and Johnson, this too seems unconvincing.

The Davis House in Wayzata, Minnesota, was completed in 1952, not 1954. In its proper sequence (after the Hodgson house and before the Wiley house), its design makes better sense. The deMenil house in Houston is omitted from the chronology. Plans are uniformly and beautifully drawn. The addition of orientation and scale would have made them more useful. (I myself resort to the omnipresent Mies chair as module to determine measurements.)

As for the retrospective character of Johnson's creative work, he would appear to be going further backward in time, to the Renaissance, to the Middle Ages. Certainly his projected pavilion for his own use recalls Piero della Francesca's setting for the "Flagellation" or Ghiberti's "Sacrifice of Isaac" panel of the Baptistery doors. As for those structural traceries that appear in the Computing Laboratory at Brown University and in a study for Lincoln Center Plaza, these could be said to reflect late Gothic experiments. And

surely there is a turreted air about the Kline Science Tower for Yale. Tantalizing stuff for the architectural detective-historian. I would say we need a book of confessions from the architect himself.

H. F. KOEPER, *University of Minnesota*

Other Books Received

Inclusion here does not preclude review in a future issue.

OFFICE BUILDINGS. By Jurgen Joedicke. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1962. \$15.00

CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTURE IN GERMANY. By Werner Marschall. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1962. \$16.50

PRE-COLUMBIAN ARCHITECTURE. By Donald Robertson. New York: George Braziller, 1963. \$4.95

CHINESE AND INDIAN ARCHITECTURE. By Nelson I. Wu. New York: George Braziller, 1963. \$4.95

JAPANESE ARCHITECTURE. By William Alex. New York: George Braziller, 1963. \$4.95

WESTERN ISLAMIC ARCHITECTURE. By John D. Hoag. New York: George Braziller, 1963. \$4.95

DESIGN WITH CLIMATE: BIOCLIMATIC APPROACH TO ARCHITECTURAL REGIONALISM. By Victor Olgyay. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963. \$12.50

Letters to the Editor

The Bauhaus Contribution

Sir:

Recently some statements on the Bauhaus, Germany, have been made in your *Journal*,¹ which by omitting decisive facts result in misconceptions which need clarification.

Sufficiently detached today from the drama of the Bauhaus, which I initiated in 1919 and which I left in 1928, I wish to state—*sine ira et studio*—what in my own view was the new contribution of the Bauhaus, considered historically, in the field of education.

The most direct way to do this is to compare the Bauhaus method of education with that of two so venerable masters as van de Velde in Weimar and Frank Lloyd Wright in this country. Both men had

before me the idea of the unification of the arts. How did they try to reach this goal? Van de Velde, ingenious, inventive artist of world renown and full of stimulating enthusiasm, followed his conception that a unity of the arts could be achieved by disseminating his own personal vocabulary of form, his "line" as he called it. He considered his school in Weimar to be the proper instrument with which to consolidate his own form pattern into a "style."² Almost without exception, the work of his students shows the personal form character of the master.

In order to underline the educational importance of an *objective* method as built up in the Bauhaus in contrast to the subjective one of van de Velde, I should like to give a second example of the results

¹ Mr Gropius refers to "The Bauhaus Revisited" by Howard Dearstyne, October 1962 issue. *Ed*

² See his recently-published biography "Geschichte meines Lebens," R. Piper & Co, Munich

of an autocratically-run architectural school of fame. Recently I visited Frank Lloyd Wright's school in Taliesin which his widow valiantly carries on after his death. I saw the work of several scores of students, who were without exception turning out designs in the vocabulary of their great master. No independent approach could be found. This experience assured me again that such a method of education cannot be called creative, for it invites imitation and results in training assistants, not independent artists in their own right. Certainly the contact of the student with a great radiating artistic personality like Frank Lloyd Wright or van de Velde is an invaluable and unforgettable human experience, but here I am trying to compare educational *methods* and *goals*, which must not be confounded with the artistic potency of the teacher. A great artist is not offhand a great educator.

The assertion has been made that the Bauhaus followed the philosophy and pedagogy of van de Velde. In fact it established its educational principles in clear and conscious opposition to van de Velde's method.

Starting the Bauhaus as its responsible Director, I had come to the conclusion that an autocratic, subjective approach must block the innate budding expression of differently-gifted students, as the teacher, even with the best intention, imposes the results of his own thought and work on him. I convinced myself that a good teacher must abstain from handing out his personal vocabulary to his student, but should rather let him find his own way even via detours; that he should encourage the growth of independence in the student, and vigorously destroy his imitative reactions, or at least make him aware that he tries to harvest on foreign soil. I succeeded in convincing great artists like Kandinsky, Klee, Feininger and Moholy-Nagy that altogether we should humbly try to find a supra-individual *objective* method, a teachable common denominator for all which would be conducive to creative work. We scoffed at the arrogant idea of establishing a "style." As a basis for the creative process, we tried to study objectively natural phenomena, observing psychological and biological facts, laying the foundation, so to speak, for a science of design, and experimenting with the facts we had collected. This approach we found gave an organic and *unifying* background to all our activities. Personal expression thus became, in each individual creative process, related to the same principles recognized by all, while imitative attempts were taboo.

Accordingly, handicraft in the workshops was, right from the start, not an end in itself, but laboratory experiment preparatory to industrial production. If the initial products of the Bauhaus looked like individual craft products, this was a necessary detour for the groping student whom we avoided prodding with a foregone conclusion.³

³ I should like to draw attention to a large documentary work, recently published, which may become the standard book on the Bauhaus. Its author, Hans M. Wingler, Director of the Bauhaus-Archiv in Darmstadt, Germany, has collected material covering 1919 to 1933 in years of careful scholarly work. The title is "Das Bauhaus, 1919-1933 Weimar Dessau Berlin" (Verlag Gebr. Rasch & Co, Braunschweig). An English edition is planned.

Since the educational method is as important as the personality of the teacher—a fact which is too little recognized today—I have tried here to outline with precision the different educational aspects and attitudes at stake. Though an objective method, such as the one followed in the Bauhaus, has to take a much longer, thornier road than the autocratic one, it protects us against imitation and conformity, it preserves the uniqueness of the creative individual and, simultaneously, the spiritual coherence of the age.

This kind of education we have until now reserved for the artist, but, if we cannot give it to everybody, the gulf between him and the people will remain unbridged. If we congratulate ourselves today on the strides that have been made in releasing the young artist from the bondage in which he was formerly held by having to follow the methods and recipes of his teacher, we must realize that the greater part of the task is still before us: namely, to give to the average young person, right from the beginning of his schooling, a visual training based on objective principles, ie, on the laws of nature and the psychology of man.

Standing on such a sound foundation, the gifted individual will find his personal interpretation, but artists and public alike must start out from the same premises of universal validity; only then will the creativity of the maker find the response of the user.

WALTER GROPIUS
Cambridge, Mass

Mr Dearstyne writes:

Mr Gropius seeks to minimize the influence on his school of the great forerunner, Henry van de Velde, by asserting that he deliberately rejected the "autocratic" teaching methods of the Belgian which, in common with those of Frank Lloyd Wright, encouraged the student to imitate the form language of the master. He substituted for this "subjective" teaching method, he says, an "objective" one which allowed each student to develop in accordance with his own creative bent. Thus Mr Gropius reopens an old, old controversy. You can pick a fight at the drop of a hat in any ACSA gathering by raising this question. Those schools which have on their faculties no distinguished personalities swear by the objective method; the precious few which do or have had are all for the subjective. As for me, I was nurtured, at Mr Gropius' own school, on the latter method (Kandinsky, Klee, Mies van der Rohe, Hilberseimer) and I regret, only, that there are not enough of these great personalities to go around for, if there were, we would today have real art and architectural education.

A great teacher, like Mies van der Rohe, teaches the basic and the universal through his own vocabulary of forms. He transmits to each student, in accordance with his ability to learn, an inkling or an understanding of enduring truths. He equips the student with a sound basis on which to build his own individual creative work. This is rather like the ap-

prentice-master relationship which Gropius set up at the Weimar Bauhaus and which prevailed from the Middle Ages down to the nineteenth century. Does Mr Gropius think that Verrocchio stifled the initiative of his apprentice, Leonardo da Vinci, and Perugino that of his pupil, Raphael, when these masters transmitted to their students, along with their insight, their form vocabularies?

Mr Gropius makes another statement in his letter which cries out for rebuttal. He says, "Accordingly, handicraft in the workshops was, right from the start, not an end in itself, but laboratory experiment preparatory to industrial production." He made a similar assertion in his book, "The New Architecture and the Bauhaus." I was astonished when I read this because it is so strikingly contrary to the facts. At the time Gropius was still negotiating for the directorship of the Bauhaus, he wrote (March 3, 1919) a letter to "His Excellency, Mr Republican Plenipotentiary Paulson," some functionary of the post-war government of Saxe-Weimar, in which the following revealing sentence occurs:

I intend, if I accept the directorship which has been offered me, to put the entire undertaking on a practical, handwork basis, in the realization that, above everything else, the further extension of the already widespread art proletariat in Germany must be arrested and that capable craftsman of which there cannot be enough, must be trained in their stead. . . .¹

Gropius became director of the newly-constituted Bauhaus on April 1, 1919, and issued shortly afterward his now-famous first Bauhaus proclamation. In this, he says:

Artists, sculptors, painters, we must all return to handwork! . . . There is no difference in kind between the artist and the craftsman. The artist is an enhancement

¹ Copy of letter in Bauhaus file of Walter Gropius, photostated with his permission, and translated from the German by the writer

of the craftsman. The grace of heaven, in rare moments of inspiration, which lie beyond the control of his will, causes art to blossom unconsciously from the work of his hand. *But a foundation in handwork is indispensable for every artist. . . . Let us therefore establish a new guild of craftsmen. . . .*²

There is no suggestion in this that the purpose of training the students in the handicrafts was to equip them to make models for industrial mass-production. It was not, in fact, until Theo van Doesburg took up residence in Weimar and cast a jaundiced eye on the aims and teaching methods of the Bauhaus that the orientation of the school was altered. In a letter written to his friend, Otto Meyer-Amden at the end of March 1922, Oskar Schlemmer, then one of the Bauhaus masters, speaks of the influence of van Doesburg on the Bauhaus:

One of those here who goes eagerly to the attack is van Doesburg, the Dutchman, who is so radically interested in architecture . . . that painting scarcely exists for him. He is a very eloquent champion of his ideas, so that he draws the Bauhaus students under his spell, especially those who are interested, before everything else, in architecture. . . . He rejects handwork (the focal point of the Bauhaus) in favor of the modern means, the machine.³

Van Doesburg persuaded, not only the students, but also Walter Gropius of the error of the Bauhaus way. Thereafter, handwork to produce models for serial reproduction by industry became the watchword. Why Mr Gropius, whose school reflects so much credit upon him, feels it necessary to rewrite history, in an effort to amend certain of the supposed shortcomings of the Bauhaus, is somewhat difficult to understand.

² Translated from the German by the writer. The italics are those of Mr Gropius

³ *Oskar Schlemmer—Briefe und Tagebücher*, Albert Langen-Georg Müller, Munich, 1958, p 125. Translated from the German by the writer