

National Art Education Association

Walter Gropius Innovator

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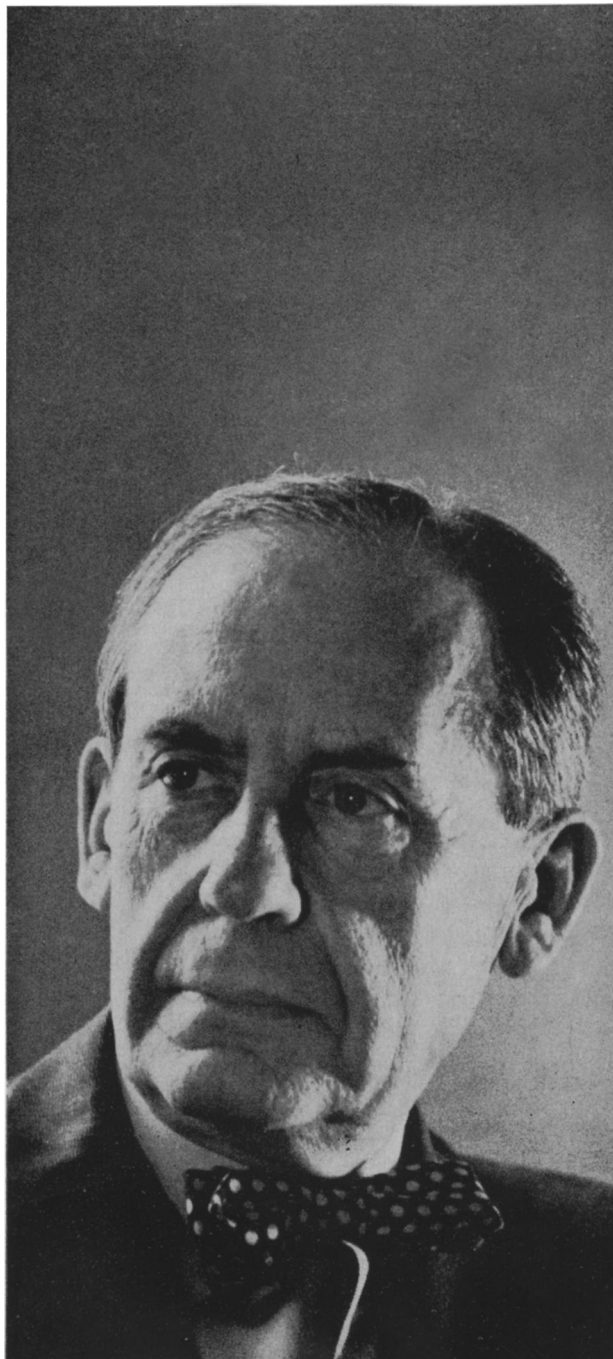
Walter Gropius

i n n o v a t o r

1

this article initiates
a series concerned
with artists
who were innovators
in their special
areas of inquiry.

by harlan hoffa

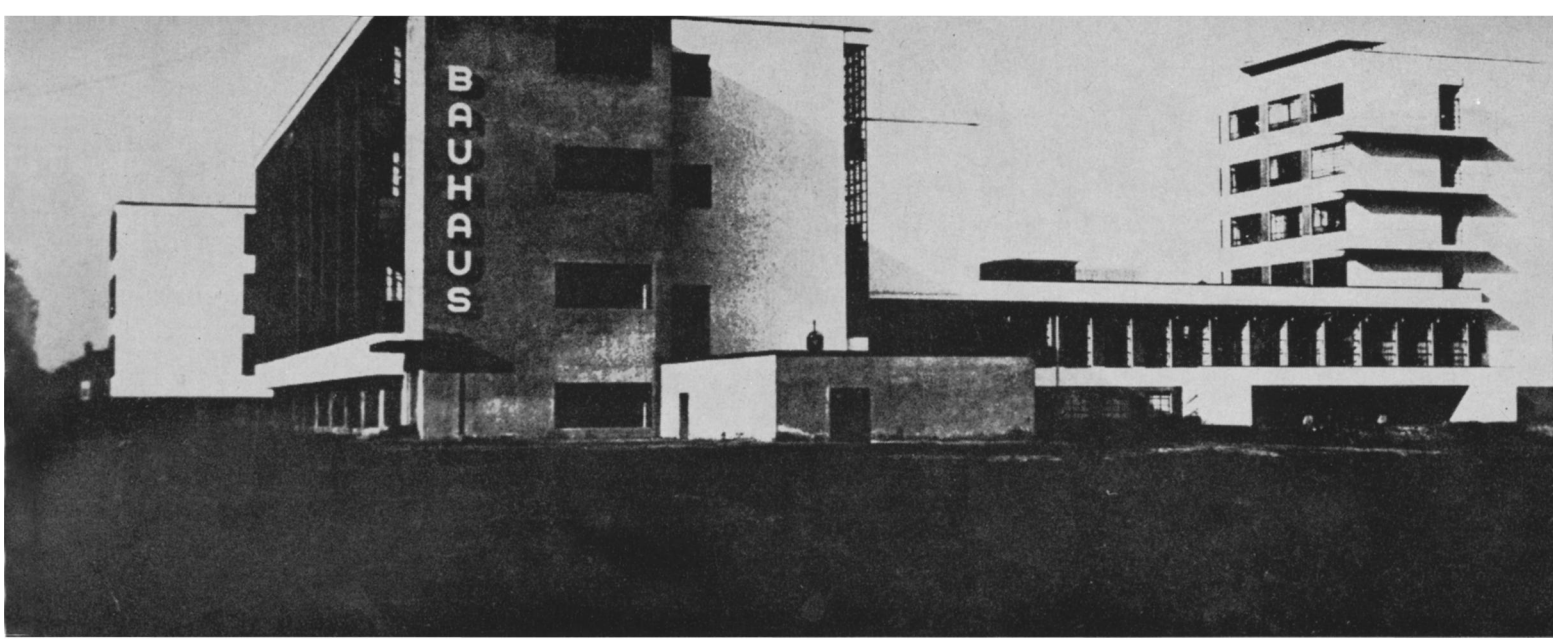


In 1937, three years after leaving his native Germany, Walter Gropius was the guest of honor at a dinner in London and it was on this occasion, just prior to his departure for the United States, that Herbert Read said, "Gropius belongs to the whole world". This acknowledgment is no less true today in 1961, nearly a quarter of a century later, for few men have so distinctly characterized their era through a lifetime of creative work or have contributed more meaningfully to it. Whenever there are discussions of contemporary architecture, community planning, industrial design, art education, the inter-relationship of the arts, or the social bases of the arts in an industrial age, the name Gropius will invariably be heard.

For art educators his primary contribution was, of course, through the Bauhaus and had this been his only known accomplishment his fame would have been well and justifiably assured. In retrospect it seems remarkable that in the brief chaotic years from 1919 to 1928 Gropius built the Bauhaus from the union of two virtually unknown German art schools into an international movement whose vitality has grown increasingly potent with the years. It would, however, be unjust to suggest that his reputation has been solely or even principally derived from this single factor. He is equally renowned as an architect, industrial designer and community planner and if, for one reason or another, the Bauhaus had never come into being his contributions in these areas would have assured him a full measure of acclaim. Art education would have been the poorer, however.

Gropius' establishment of the Bauhaus, with its program of education in art conceived uniquely for the contemporary scene, was the direct outgrowth of his sensitivity to the potentialities and the problems inherent in

harlan hoffa was recently
appointed chairman of the
art education dept., boston
university, boston, massachusetts.



the bauhaus school in dessau

the relationship of the arts to an industrial economy, and his driving desire to "bridge the disastrous gulf between reality and idealism". In 1958 he reiterated the philosophic basis for the founding of the Bauhaus as follows:

. . . A society such as ours, which has conferred equal privileges on everybody, will have to acknowledge its duty to raise the general level of responsiveness to spiritual and aesthetic values, to intensify the development of everybody's imaginative faculties, in order to create the bases from which eventually the creative act of the artist can rise, not as an isolated phenomenon, ignored or rejected by the crowd, but imbedded in a firm network of public response and understanding.

The realization that only a broad educational attempt would eventually create these premises for a greater cultural unity had caused me to establish the Bauhaus. . . .

Thus it is obvious that for Gropius the Bauhaus was not so much an end in itself as a means to an end of much more imposing significance; namely that of creating the dynamics of a rapport between the artist and the industrialized society of the 20th century.

Background: A full understanding of the significance of the Bauhaus depends to a large extent upon the ability to see it not as an isolated entity, or a historical curiosity, but as the natural consequence of an interaction of the social conditions and the aesthetic aspirations of an epoch which had its beginnings in the 1850's and which continues unabated into our own time. Mid 19th century Europe saw the growth of two apparently unrelated cultural factors which, ultimately, were to affect the formation and the unique character of the Bauhaus: the first was the increasing industrialization of Western Europe, and the second, the beginnings of the rebellion among artists against the control of art by the all-powerful academies. In a statement on the guiding principles of the Bauhaus Gropius has pinpointed their relationship as follows:

. . . the revolution in aesthetics has given us fresh insight into the meaning of design, just as the mechanization of industry has provided new tools for its realization. Our ambition was to rouse the creative artist from his other-worldliness and reintegrate him

into the world of realities; and at the same time to broaden and humanize the almost exclusively material mind of the business man.

As early as the 1850's individual craftsmen in England and much of Western Europe were becoming painfully aware of the difficulty of competing with the flood of cheap products from industry. In an effort to counteract the disfranchisement of the craftsman William Morris attempted, in the 1880's, to establish the superiority of hand craftsmanship over the products of industry by advocating a return to the medieval conception of a community of craftsmen. While Morris' efforts were seemingly predestined to failure, his concern with the problems of the isolation of the artist-craftsman from the mainstream of economic life was shared by many thoughtful persons, and in Germany this concern led to the formation of the Deutsche Werkbund in 1907. The Werkbund was established to serve as a cooperative agency wherein artists and designers could utilize their skills and aesthetic sensitivities in the solution of problems of design for industry. This organization ultimately lost its force due to the inability of artists to understand the processes of industrial production but it was through his early leadership in the Werkbund that Walter Gropius first recognized the necessity of unifying the arts into a cohesive and productive force in a society that was increasingly objective and materialistic.

The Beginnings: In 1910, after three years in Berlin as an assistant to Peter Behrens, Gropius opened his own office and by the outbreak of World War I he was firmly established as one of Europe's foremost architects. This early reputation grew almost wholly from the design of two buildings, the Fagus shoe-last factory (1911) and the Werkbund Exhibition Building (1914), in which the potentialities of steel framed-glass-sheathed structures were exploited to a degree never before known—and seldom since equaled. World War I interrupted his work as an architect but while serving with the German Army Gropius was summoned to an audi-

Gropius

innovator

ence with the Duke of Sachsen-Weimar to discuss taking over the directorship of the Weimar School of Arts and Crafts. He asked for and was granted "full powers in regard to reorganization" and in the spring of 1919 assumed control of the Weimar School of Arts and Crafts and the Weimar Academy of Fine Arts which he united as Das Staatliche Bauhaus Weimar. This constituted

. . . the first step toward the realization of a much wider plan—in which (the) primary aim was that the principle of training the individual's natural capacities to grasp life as a whole, as a single cosmic entity, should form the basis of instruction throughout the school. . . .

He realized that

. . . to make this possible would require a whole staff of collaborators and assistants: men who would work not automatically as an orchestra obeys its conductor's baton, but independently although in close cooperation, to further a common cause.

The "collaborators and assistants" whom Gropius assembled in the Bauhaus were drawn initially from two groups: artists of unchallenged creative capacity and skilled craftsmen, the students working equally with both. The roster of the faculty at the Bauhaus has much of the character of a Who's Who in Art for it included, at one time or another, such greats as Paul Klee, Wassily Kandinsky, Lionel Feininger, Gerhard Marcks, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Marcel Breuer, Mies van der Rohe, Josef Albers, Oscar Schlemmer and Herbert Bayer.

This faculty, imposing though it may be, was only the means whereby the idea of the Bauhaus was implemented, however, and for art educators it is the conceptual scheme behind the Bauhaus which is of primary significance. A complete analysis of this scheme was put forward by Gropius in 1923 in *Idee und Aufbau des Staatlichen Bauhaus Weimar* (translated in part in *Bauhaus 1919-1928*) and in 1937 in *The New Architecture and The Bauhaus*. The essence of these writings is captured in one sentence from the first source:

The guiding principle of the Bauhaus was . . . the idea of creating a new unity through the welding together of many arts and movements: a unity having its basis in Man himself and significant only as a living organism.

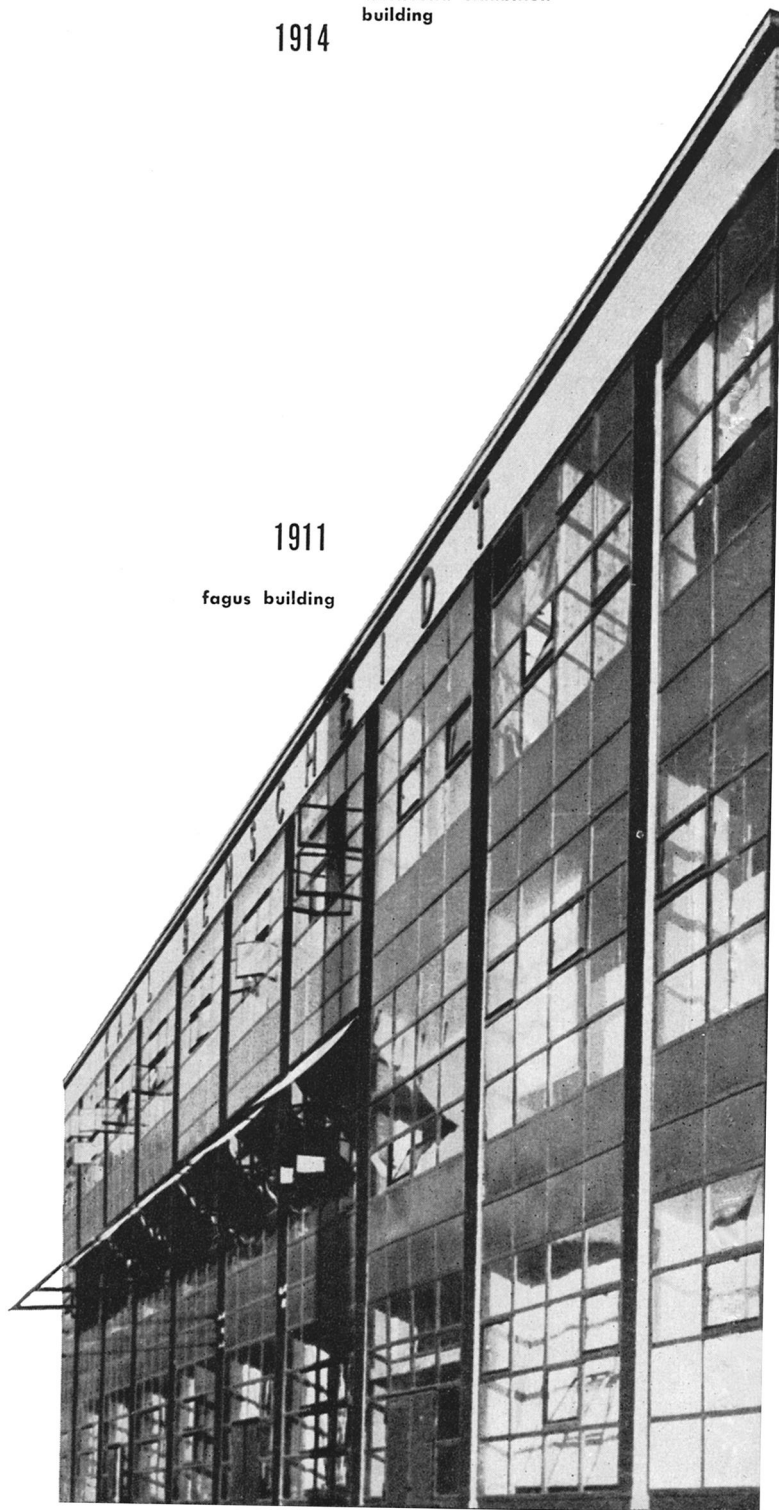
The words "unity" and "synthesis" are often used in Bauhaus publications and it is perhaps by breaking down the hierarchies within the arts that the Bauhaus has most significantly influenced art education. The re-

photographs courtesy of the institute
of contemporary art and fred stone.



1914

werkbund exhibition
building



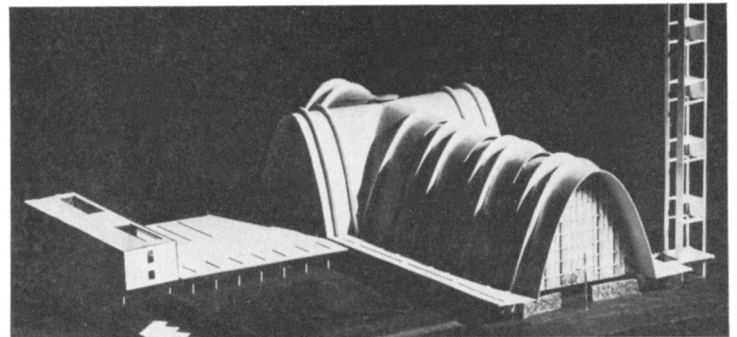
1911

fagus building

discovery of a fundamental unity between the "fine" and the "applied" arts, between "art" and "craft" and between the object designed for industrial production and the unique product of an individual artist or craftsman, has contributed greatly to the removal of artificial barriers to a universality of aesthetic experience. The Bauhaus shared with art educators the assumption that art should be in the public domain, rather than the private property of a self-appointed minority of aesthetes, collectors and patrons, or scholars and critics.

The Curriculum: The means by which the Bauhaus objectives were attained are implicit in the dual artist-craftsman instructorship system (effective until 1925) and in the curriculum itself. The curriculum was structured in three strata with screening procedures between each of those levels. The first period of study, known as Preparatory Instruction, lasted for six months and consisted of elementary training in design and experiments with different materials. This program was developed by Johannes Itten and later refined by Moholy-Nagy and by Josef Albers. It covered the entire range of Bauhaus teaching in elementary form. At the end of this program the students were screened by their faculty and only those who had demonstrated a satisfactorily high level of achievement in the quality of their work and in their "personal capacity" were permitted to continue on to the second phase, known as Technical Instruction. The Technical Instruction was undertaken as a legally bound apprentice in one of the training workshops (stone, wood, metal, clay, glass, color or textiles) and was supplemented by the advanced study of nature, analysis of materials, theory of space, color and composition, technical construction and representation, and instruction in materials and tools. At the end of three years of study the pupils, "if proficient enough", were granted a journeyman's certificate from the local trades council and, after an examination, a certificate was issued by the Bauhaus attesting to the completion of their programs. Especially promising students were allowed to continue into a third phase of the program known as Structural Instruction, the duration of which varied according to the circumstances and talents of the individual concerned. This was essentially a work-study arrangement in cooperation with a local trade group or industry and upon successful completion of this phase the student received a Master diploma.

(Continued on page 26)



torreon church
a mexican project by walter gropius.
the shells are reinforced concrete. three
of the shells overlap each other
admitting light between their edges.



—the dormitories

she says, than the mastering of the techniques of embroidery.

The paragraphs on design are, perhaps, too brief. However, the emphasis on creativity is there. After each stitch is explained, there is a picture of a completed piece showing how it has been put to use. These numerous and excellent illustrations are delightfully free and original. In fact, there is much more originality within the pages of the book itself than is promised by the end papers. Nine by eleven inches in size—it is, over all, a handsome book.

In the limited field of embroidery, this book seems to be the definitive work and should be interesting to the art teacher, and invaluable to the home economist and the textile student and designer.

Jewel H. Conover, S.U.N.Y., Fredonia, N. Y.

Integrated Teaching Materials by R. Murray Thomas and Sherwin G. Swartout, State University of New York, College of Education at Brockport. Publisher: Longmans, Green and Co., Inc., New York, N. Y. Price \$6.75.

The authors state in the Preface that the purpose of this textbook is to help both new and experienced elementary and secondary teachers to “improve their skills in choosing, creating, and using teaching materials.” The materials are of almost infinite range and include books, magazines, newspapers, photographs, pictures, films, slides, recordings, charts, radio and television programs, posters, displays, models, puppets, maps, lettering, bulletin boards, electric boards and real-life situations. This ambitious volume covers 545 pages and consists of 23 chapters divided into 7 sections. Black and white illustrations are found throughout.

The question may be raised as to the value of such a book to art teachers. Perhaps, its greatest value lies in the range of teaching-materials suggested. Then, too, art teachers might make use of the technical information in the Photographic Materials Section in which is described production of motion pictures, film strips, slides and the like. They may find the chapter on creating TV programs useful. However, chapters 13 and 14 dealing with creative graphics, one on “Design Techniques” and the other on “Materials to Use,” present information which is already a part of the art educators background. Portions of the book such as the necessarily brief presentation on displays and on how to make puppets and stages are still other examples of little use to art teachers. While chapters dealing with posters, bulletin boards and puppets may be of some value to classroom teachers or librarians who lack an art background, the reviewer questions that use. There are art education publications which answer this need better.

The first chapter, “Conveying Ideas Skillfully,” comprises what appears to be a rationale for later ones. As an art educator, the reviewer wonders why in such a book the nature of communication is discussed mainly in terms of verbal symbols. No such clear view is given of communication through visual symbols as found in expressive drawing, painting, photography, posters, displays and constructions. Perhaps, here is a key to what appears to the reviewer to be only a surface view of art. In illustrations given, art is often used more as a hand-maiden to other school activities than it is used for its own values which are generally ignored. Emphasis is placed on a representational idea of things, that is, a factual level rather than one which is richly expressive. This book points up a trend all too prevalent in schools where use is made of audio-visual and art materials without considering the qualitative aspects of art.

Julia Schwartz, Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida

GROPIUS . . . *from page 15*

Development and Dissolution: By 1923, four years after its inauguration, most of the initial objectives of the Bauhaus had been reached and the first major Bauhaus exhibition had been acclaimed throughout Europe. In spite of this unquestioned international success, the Bauhaus faced continual local harassment from the tradition-bound populace and the indifferent civic government of Weimar. When in December, 1924, the situation in Weimar became so “malevolent, obtuse and so inflexible as constantly to endanger the growth of the institution”, Gropius and the entire faculty jointly announced their resignations. Many offers to reestablish the school in other communities throughout Germany were immediately forthcoming and in the spring of 1925 most of the students and faculty of the Bauhaus moved to Dessau where the mayor, Dr. Fritz Hesse, had promised new buildings and, more importantly, a freedom from governmental pressures. By 1928 the Bauhaus was firmly established in Dessau and Gropius, feeling the compulsion to return to private practice and renewed political enmity, resigned as director naming Hannes Meyer as his successor. It is at this point that any further consideration of the man, Gropius, and the school, the Bauhaus, must be undertaken separately. The Bauhaus continued to operate in Dessau until 1933 (with Mies van der Rohe becoming director in 1930), at which time the local political situation compelled the Bauhaus to move to Berlin. The Nazis forced the final closing of the Bauhaus in 1935 and the disbanded faculty and students scattered across the face of Europe and to the United States, reinstituting the Bauhaus principles and teachings in forward looking colleges,

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INFORMATION STUDIES SURVEY

An Invitation To Participate

The National Art Education Association is making a survey of research studies and creative projects in art and art education that are currently underway or that were completed during the 1959-1960 school year. Through its Information Studies Committee, the National Art Education Association invites you to participate in the survey with the hope that information contributed will help advance knowledge of current conditions, present trends, and possible approaches and solutions to problems in our field.

The information gained through the survey will be summarized by the Information Studies Committee and reported in an issue of ART EDUCATION. The report will also be available to other interested individuals and groups who are not members of NAEA.

Your interest and cooperation will be appreciated. If you are able to participate, please complete the survey form and return it by February 15, 1961 to:

Miss Edith M. Henry
Chairman
NAEA Information Studies
1830 Faust Avenue
Long Beach 15, California

GROPIUS . . . from page 26

universities and art schools throughout this country including Yale, Harvard, M.I.T., Black Mountain College and Illinois Tech. Gropius resumed a full time career as an architect and designer in Berlin in 1928, in England after 1934, and in the United States after 1937. In this country he also returned to teaching, serving as chairman of the Department of Architecture at Harvard University from 1938 until his retirement in 1952. As for the Bauhaus, although it ceased to exist as a specific institution in 1935, its tradition and influence have continued unabated; particularly in the United States where Mies van der Rohe, Breuer, Albers, Bayer, Feininger, Moholy-Nagy and Kepes have found the freedom to teach and to create denied them in the Germany of the 1930's. The world of art, and education in the arts, is infinitely richer for the continuing spirit of these men, and particularly for the guiding genius of Walter Gropius whose feat of inspirational alchemy created the idea that was the Bauhaus.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

- 1883 Born, Berlin, May 18.
1903-07 Student of Architecture, Munich Hochschule and Berlin Hochschule.
1907-10 Assistant to Peter Behrens, Berlin.
1910-14 Private practice, initial acclaim as outstanding architect resulting from design of Fagus factory (1911) and Cologne Werkbund Exhibition (1914).
1914-18 Military service in German Army.
1919 Amalgamated Weimar School of Arts and Crafts and Academy of Fine Arts as "Staatliche Bauhaus, Weimar",

assumed directorship.

- 1912 Continued as Director when Bauhaus moved to Dessau.
1928 Resigned as Director of Bauhaus, resumed private practice of architecture in Berlin.
1929-34 Active participation in private and governmental agencies concerned with research into large scale, low cost housing.
1934-37 London; partnership with Maxwell Fry, A.R.I.B.A.
1937-52 Professor of Architecture and Chairman of the Department of Architecture (1938-52), Graduate School of Design, Harvard University.
1952-60 Private practice as member of Architects Collaborative, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

RESOLUTIONS

All members interested in submitting resolutions to be considered by the Resolutions Committee for submission to the Association at its Biennial Conference in April should send the text of the resolution to the NAEA Washington office:

Resolutions Committee
National Art Education Association
1201 16th Street N. W.
Washington 6, D.C.