

Bauhaus Dream-House: Imagining the (Un)gendered and (Un)disciplined Social Body

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... the awakening of the whole man through trauma, lack, terror, hard life experiences or love lead to authentic artistic expression. Dearest ladies, I do not underestimate the human achievement of those who remained at home during the war. but I believe that the lived experience of death to be all-powerful.¹

— Walter Gropius First Lecture to the Bauhaus, 1919

PROLOGUE AND ABSTRACT

The paper argues that the body, consciousness and unconscious of the student are the subject matter through which architectural education reproduces the discipline and the profession. This occurs through historically specific forms of institutionalized fantasy which emerge during major societal crises such as war and destabilize traditional masculine identity. The fear and repression of instability of patriarchal masculinity is at such times replaced by institutionalized "dreaming" — fantasies drawing on instability as a pleasure — a traditionally "feminine" position.¹

Bauhaus reminiscences suggest Bauhaus education relied on a creative re-enactment of war trauma and, for a short time, instability and decenteredness were institutionalized as pleasure. Identity at the Bauhaus was "feminized." However, Gropius as an ex-soldier insisted that war and its associated release of creativity were exclusively masculine experiences. This contradiction caused internal and external political frictions and was resolved only by a new and permanent "neuter" model of identity still associated with the modernist designer today.

This rereading of the Bauhaus shows that the construction of a new disciplinary identity through institutional fantasy rather than its economically limited innovation in mass production may form the real legacy of the Bauhaus for the twentieth century.

FROM WITHIN: PLEASURES OF DISINTEGRATION

There stands a man, a man
As firm as any oak tree, oak tree,
Maybe he has lived through many a tempest, tempest, tempest,
Maybe by tomorrow he will be a corpse,
Like so many brothers before him, him, him.'

— Song sung by Bauhaus members
for Lyonel Feininger's feast day

Throughout Europe the carnage and losses of the First World War had a major impact on the population. Winners and losers across the continent united in their experience of war trauma and rejection of the past. Germany was the greatest loser of the War, with enormous casualties, reduced territory, and economic and social problems far

worse than those of the victors. Its cultural crisis was therefore extreme.

The crisis extended symbolically from collective identity to architecture. Architectural forms associated with the old social order were rejected. Bruno Taut wrote⁴:

It was not possible to make use of any pre-war traditions, for that period was perforce regarded as the cause of the misfortunes of the past, and because every achievement of those days seemed more or less to hang together with the origins of the war.

Wounded in the war, Gropius acknowledged its breakdown of identity. He wrote⁵:

Today's artist lives in an era of dissolution, without guidance. He stands alone. The old forms are in ruins, the benumbed world is shaken up, the old human spirit is invalidated and in flux toward a new form. We float in space and cannot yet perceive the new order.

The solution was the creation of new kind of human being. Gropius continued⁶:

First man must be constructed; only then can the artist make him fine new clothing. The contemporary being must begin anew, to rejuvenate himself, to achieve a new humanity, a universal life-form of the people.

Bauhaus students had been through the war. Magdalena Droste writes⁷ that many "arrived direct from active service, hoping for the chance to make a fresh start and give meaning to their lives". T. Lux Feininger observed⁸ in 1919: "Almost all have been in the army, it is a new type, a new generation ... these young people are not babies". The fresh start began with re-enacting wartime experience. For example, Herbert Bayer's enthusiasm⁹ for the (partly fictional) Bauhaus "entrance examinations" seems based on its resemblance to the experience of the battlefield:

When I saw the first Bauhaus proclamation, ornamented with Feininger's woodcut, I made inquiries as to what the Bauhaus really was. I was told that "during the entrance examinations every applicant is locked up in a dark room. Thunder and lightning are let loose upon him to get him in a state of agitation. His being admitted depends on how well he describes his reactions." This report, although it exaggerated the actual facts, fired my enthusiasm.

Other evocations of military experience abounded. Tut Schlemmer wrote¹⁰: "a Bauhaus garment was designed, the Bauhaus whistle and the Bauhaus salute were invented."

A mythical worship of physical integrity flourished. Mystical doctrines, such as Mazdaznan, an ancient Persian religion related to Zoroastrianism introduced by Itten, promised to restore wholeness of the body. Mazdaznan encouraged students to adopt monastic dress and coiffure. Schreyer¹¹ wrote: "When one day Itten declared that long hair was a sign of sin, his most enthusiastic disciples shaved their heads completely. And thus we went around Weimar".

Students constructed precise rules for reading the body. Paul Citroen wrote¹²:

When we shook someone's hand we could tell more about him from the handshake, the dryness or dampness of his skin, and other signs, than he would find comfortable. His vocal pitch, his complexion, his walk, every one of his involuntary gestures gave him away. We thought we could see through any person, because our method gave us advantage over the unsuspecting.

Itten's teaching actively used pedagogy to reform the identities and beliefs of students. In the Introductory Course he asked them to draw the war and directed the highest praise to an abstract drawing by a student who had never been a soldier. The condemned majority accepted this with admiration. The students acceptance of these procedures showed they recognized their bodies as institutional objects. Perhaps the most extreme representation of this was a bizarre ritual instituted by Itten. Paul Citroen¹³ wrote:

There was, among other things, a little needle machine with which we were to puncture our skins. Then the body would be rubbed with the same sharp oil which had served as a laxative. A few days later all the pinpoint spots would break out in scabs and pustules — the oil had drawn the wastes and impurities of the deeper skin layers to the surface. Now we were ready to be bandaged. But we must work hard, sweat, and then, with continued fasting, the ulcerations would dry out. At any rate, that's what the book said. In actuality the puncturing didn't go according to plan or desire, and for months afterward we would be tormented with itching.

Such extremes of self-denial were clearly masochistic in nature. They rewarded pain and obedience with precious praise and a sense of social belonging. At the same time, displacing fears of the disintegration of identity onto physical actions of the body, they made these fears controllable.

The Bauhaus' also challenged the dominant fiction through festivals and the Bauhaus theater workshop, which were closely related to one another. Festivals in particular commanded the greatest enthusiasm. Felix Klee¹⁴ wrote:

My dear friend, you have no idea how important festivals were at the Bauhaus — often far more important than the classes. They made the contact between master, journeyman and apprentice far closer ... The masters radiated their influence on the students in the most positive way. They could develop all the more freely because they had enough time and were not hindered in their personal development by an overly rigid schedule. And there was a reciprocal action by the students on the teachers. One could call it a living "give and take" such as I have never again come across to such an extent.

Festivals played with gender identity. Oskar Schlemmer¹⁵ used the Bauhaus festivals to reverse gender roles: "[o]n the stage at the Ilmschlosschen Schlemmer had set up two sets featuring headless characters. The boys took the women's parts and vice versa." Through negotiated play — the "living 'give and take" — masters (and presumably students) "could develop all the more freely" because they were not constrained by an "overly rigid" identity. Festivals were powerful because they were non-curricular; everyone

participated freely in their spectacle. Through the festivals Bauhaus members learned to fantasize multiple identities.

Through the Bauhaus theater, in contrast, the Bauhaus collective learned to fantasize a singular identity. The Bauhaus theater mechanized the actor's appearance and gestures into new singular, androgynous, mechanical and reproducible forms. Schlemmer¹⁶ continued:

Let us consider plays consisting only in the movements of form, colors and lights. If the movement is purely mechanical, involving no human being but the man at the switchboard, the whole conception would have the precision of a vast automaton.

The positive absence of a singular subjectivity and the cross-gender experiments in Bauhaus Festivals were codified in the theater into a universal neutrality and homogeneity, erasing gender difference in the process. Patriarchal order was being restored—voluntarily through the theater from within—and at the same time far less voluntarily from without.

FROM WITHOUT: FEAR OF DISINTEGRATION

Many Weimaraners called us Bauhäusler, and it sounded like convict—it had the taste of horror and fear."

— Lothar Schreyer, *Hope for a New World*, 1993

The citizens of Weimar too lived out the psycho-social legacy of the war. They however saw the experience of social disintegration as a terror and projected it onto the Bauhaus community. By 1924 Bauhaus students and staff had become the focus of strong local criticism. The popular press, local politicians, leading cultural figures and even employees of the old Academy rejected Bauhaus teaching and united to remove the Bauhaus from the city. In *Architecture and Politics in Germany, 1918-1945*, Barbara Miller Lane cites¹⁸ Konrad Nonn, a local journalist, who feared that "[t]he subjectivism of instruction at the Bauhaus ... only releases instincts which lead to chaos."

The threat to gender boundaries figured particularly powerfully in the local consciousness. Most students had rejected conventions of dress and appearance. Tut Schlemmer wrote:¹⁹ "[a]t first people let themselves go. Boys had long hair, girls short skirts. No collars or stockings were worn, which was shocking and extravagant then ..."

Weimaraners saw this as promiscuity. The *Weimarische Zeitung* in an article dated 13 June 1924²⁰ claimed that licentiousness was rife at the Bauhaus, that one student had become pregnant and another had had an affair with a master. The article warned that people must be prevented from sending their sons and daughters there.

Weimaraners rejection of the Bauhaus as a hotbed of sexual depravity also linked sexual morality to political morality, correctly aligning a loosened sexual order with a threat to the political order. The *Zeitung* article continued²¹ (my brackets):

And the consequence of all this [Communism] which can be seen in the life of the Bauhaus community!!! ... We don't need to name individual cases in which [immorality] ... is publicly celebrated by the students.

Finally, sexual transgression also became identified with a threat to sanity. A Weimar publication²² "listed instances of immoral behavior among students and faculty ... and it described cases of insanity among the students caused, it said, by the teaching methods of the school." Weimaraners contained the threat of the Bauhaus by dismissing the school as sexually licentious and mad, terms historically reserved for women who stray outside the patriarchal order. Such condemnation strengthened traditional views present within the school from the very beginning and speeded up the school's return to traditional gender relations.

THE RETURN TO ORDER: THE LAW-OF-THE-FATHER

The dominant fiction will be seen not only as that which mediates between the subject on the one hand, and the symbolic order and the mode of production on the other, but as that which functions to construct and sustain sexual difference.²¹

— Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, 1992

The return to the dominant fiction was gradual and irreversible. The androgyny of the theater was a leading but not isolated manifestation. From 1923 onwards, with the growing focus at the school on standardization, mass production and collaboration with industry, Gropius affirmed that "the artist of today should wear conventional clothing". This was, of course, male clothing.

Patriarchal values had been present at the school from the beginning. The veneration of father figures begun already with Itten²⁴:

Itten exuded a special radiance. One could almost call it holiness. We were inclined to approach him only in whispers; our reverence was overwhelming, and we were completely enchanted and happy when he associated with us pleasantly and without restraint.

Gropius too became a figure of worship during his directorship and even more so afterwards. It was Gropius, not Meyer or Mies, who was credited with Bauhaus successes and became its symbolic figurehead. The catalogue of the 1938 exhibition of the Bauhaus at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, which has become the most widely disseminated document of the Bauhaus, embodies this perfectly. Gropius' first appearance on page 14 represents and heightens his status as originator and author of the Bauhaus (the signature as the sign of authorship) and as patriarch (his large photograph above a small "picture" of his wife). Further proof of his productive capacity is contained in his curriculum vitae on the same page and, more significantly, in the buildings pictured on the opposite page. His photograph and buildings precede even the Bauhaus manifesto. The next spread of the catalogue contains his 1919 Bauhaus manifesto; the next, photographs of "the family"—twelve male Bauhaus masters complete with signatures. His essay on the organization of the Bauhaus then follows.

In contrast, women at the Bauhaus were marginalized. This is reflected in the paucity of documentation relating to female students as well as specifically sexist Bauhaus policies in the few documents that exist. References to female students appear in a few meetings of the Council of Masters and occasionally in speeches. Although the 1938 catalogue claimed that one third of Bauhaus students were female, this is difficult to discern from the photographs and names of the authors of work shown, which are overwhelmingly male. Gunta Stadler-Stölzl, who ran the weaving workshop where almost all of the female students worked, is the only workshop mistress included in the biographical section, probably because it made the greatest profits for the Bauhaus business. Marianne Brandt, the mistress of the commercially successful metal workshop is not included.

Weimar legislation had given women equality of access to study. In 1920, therefore, there were²² 78 male and 59 female students at the Bauhaus whereas Gropius²³ had originally anticipated 100 men but only 50 women. As the two genders continued to apply in equal numbers, the entry of women students at the Bauhaus was restricted. Women paid higher fees (180 marks for women and 150 marks for men) and were limited in numbers. In a 1920 decision Gropius and the Council of Masters²⁴ adopted differential admission in order to prevent equal numbers at the school: "selection should be more rigorous right from the start, particularly in the case of the female sex, already over-represented in terms of numbers."

Women at the Bauhaus also faced obstacles when they tried to enter traditionally male areas of work. Marianne Brandt wrote²⁵

At first I was not accepted with pleasure — there was no place for a woman in a metal workshop, they felt. They admitted this to me later on and meanwhile expressed their displeasure by giving me all sorts of dull, dreary work. How many little hemispheres did I most patiently hammer out of brittle new silver, thinking that was the way it had to be and all beginnings are hard. Later things settled down, and we got along well together.

Nevertheless female students were grateful for the opportunity to participate at all. Kathe Brachmann wrote in the Bauhaus student magazine *Der Austausch* in 1919²⁶:

So we women, too, came to this school because we, every one of us, found work to do here, which we durst not neglect! May no one begrudge us this work! Thanks to those who already accord it to us!

Magdalena Droste is the only Bauhaus historian who has specifically referred (albeit briefly) to the experience of its women students. She³⁰ noted Gropius' reluctance to conduct any "unnecessary experiments" (a euphemism for equal access) and his recommendations that women should be sent directly from the *Introductory course* to the weaving workshop, with pottery and bookbinding as other possible alternatives. She also clearly associated the fear of "feminization" at the Bauhaus³¹ with the threat to the status of architecture:

much of the art then being produced by women was dismissed by men as "feminine" or "handicrafts." The men were afraid of too strong an "arty-crafty" tendency and saw the goal of the Bauhaus — architecture — endangered.

She added that "no women were to be admitted to study architecture" at the Bauhaus. Indeed, the building department had no female students at all.

Indeed, as noted in the prologue, Gropius in his first lecture to the school³² made it clear that the experiences of male students made them better artists than female students:

... the awakening of the whole man through trauma, lack, terror, hard life experiences or love lead to authentic artistic expression. Dearest ladies, I do not underestimate the human achievement of those who remained at home during the war, but I believe that the lived experience of death to be all-powerful.

This was direct recognition that suffering and in particular war trauma was for Gropius the driving force of artistic creativity, and that the creation of the new social identity through such experience was therefore an exclusively masculine right and privilege. This was the legitimization of "Lack" as a purely masculine pleasure. The importance of Gropius' statement lay in its recognition that Lack is not an essential female condition but that its cultural value is historically constructed by men. In a patriarchal order which (according to feminist Lacanian psychoanalytic theory) associates Lack with femininity and weakness, male students can only adopt the representation of Lack if it carries high cultural status through association with integrity ("the awakening of the *whole* man") and essentialism ("authentic artistic expression").

CONCLUSION

Through fantasy we learn "how to desire."³³

— Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 1989

The Bauhaus responded to the trauma of war by reconstructing

personal identity through quasi-military ritual and a bodily iconography symbolically promising sexual liberation but literally reinforcing the traditional superiority of men over women. Women may have cut their hair, but as students they were trapped within the sexual division of labor. The dominant belief system of the Bauhaus remained patriarchal. It privileged the male through excluding women's experiences and participation in classes. Safely representing masculine Lack as universal, stable, powerful and gender-neutral (rather than as differentiated, volatile, weak and feminine), the Bauhaus belief system removed the threat to masculine stability beyond criticism and transformation. Gender difference at the Bauhaus was ultimately sublimated into a neutralized indifference.

Yet today there are lessons to be learnt from the Bauhaus. Fantasies of masculinity briefly said "no to power" and masculinity acknowledged its own weakness, alterity and fluidity. The Bauhaus briefly replaced traditional Oedipal mastery with ritualized spectacles of self-punishment, gender confusion and corporate submission. This in turn affected the boundaries of professional activity. Fantasies of masculinity said "no to power" and imagined new gender and disciplinary identities. These were partly introduced in reality in the Gropius and Meyer years, and their introduction was possible because they had been partly tested in fantasy. The return to an overtly neutral and covertly patriarchal identity was necessary in the regional political context of Weimar and the national political context of the rise of National Socialism. Bauhaus experiments in identity more or less parallel the cultural experiments of the Weimar Republic and show that design education can be neither heroic nor autonomous.

There are important lessons to be learnt from the Bauhaus. Identity formation through fantasy remains a crucial but unacknowledged part of architectural education. The role of fantasy in the creation of professional identity, particularly in realms unique to architecture and the design disciplines — the image-space of the design studio and the image-time of publication — is, despite emerging analyses, still largely overlooked. Perhaps because it holds such powerful utopian potential, fantasy plays little conscious part in a revision of human relationships in the education process. The production of identity therefore remains a covert business.

I believe that fear and repression of the multiple, non-patriarchal identities so crucial to the creative process underpins the continuing gender imbalances within the architectural profession. The profession is sexist precisely because it is so frightened of its own femininity. Despite the clearly contradictory reality of rapid change in architectural practice, the profession conceals the dependence of creativity and flexibility on fantasy. Instead the profession elevates to supreme importance the Law-of-the-Father of the licensing exam promising but never actually fulfilling the security of a universally accepted, gender-neutral and privileged profession.

Using bodies, images, objects, books and buildings, the Bauhaus briefly and partially enacted an alternative gender and disciplinary vision. This, then, is the positive and unfulfilled legacy of the Bauhaus as dream-house.

NOTES

- ¹ Gropius first lecture to the Bauhaus, 1919, Bauhaus Archive, Berlin, File 18.
Kaja Silverman, *Mule Subjectivity at the Margins* (London: Routledge, 1992).
- ³ Xanti Schawinski, "Metamorphosis Bauhaus," in Eckhard Neumann, *Bauhaus and Bauhaus People* (New York: Van Nostrand & Reinhold, and London: Chapman Hall, 1993), p. 158.
- ⁴ Bruno Taut, *Modern Architecture* (London: The Studio Limited, 1929), pp. 92-93.
- ⁵ Walter Gropius, "Ja! Stimmen des Arbeitsrates für Kunst," 1919, Bauhaus Archive, Berlin, File 69.

- ⁶ Walter Gropius, "Ja! Stimmen des Arbeitsrates für Kunst," 1919, Bauhaus Archive, Berlin, File 69.
- ⁷ Magdalena Droste, *Bauhaus 1919—1933* (Cologne: Benedikt Taschen, 1993), p. 2.
- ⁸ T. Lux Feininger, "Development of an Idea," in Eckhard Neumann, *Bauhaus and Bauhaus People* (New York: Van Nostrand & Reinhold, and London: Chapman Hall, 1993), p. 186.
- ⁹ Bayer, H., Gropius, W. & Gropius, I., *Bauhaus 1919-1928* (London: Secker and Warburg 1975), p. 18.
- ¹⁰ Tut Schlemmer, "Of the Living Bauhaus and the Stage," in Eckhard Neumann, *Bauhaus and Bauhaus People* (New York: Van Nostrand & Reinhold, and London: Chapman Hall, 1993), p. 165.
- ¹¹ Lothar Schreyer, "Hope For a New World," in Eckhard Neumann, *Bauhaus and Bauhaus People* (New York: Van Nostrand & Reinhold, and London: Chapman Hall, 1993), p. 74.
- ¹² Paul Citroen, "Mazdaznan at the Bauhaus," in Eckhard Neumann, *Bauhaus and Bauhaus People* (New York: Van Nostrand & Reinhold, and London: Chapman Hall, 1993), p. 49.
- ¹³ Paul Citroen, "Mazdaznan at the Bauhaus," in Eckhard Neumann, *Bauhaus and Bauhaus People* (New York: Van Nostrand & Reinhold, and London: Chapman Hall, 1993), p. 51-52.
- ¹⁴ Felix Klee, "My Memories of the Bauhaus at Weimar," in Eckhard Neumann, *Bauhaus and Bauhaus People* (New York: Van Nostrand & Reinhold, and London: Chapman Hall, 1993), p. 44.
- ¹⁵ Eckhard Neumann, *Bauhaus and Bauhaus People* (New York: Van Nostrand & Reinhold, and London: Chapman Hall, 1993), p. 43.
- ¹⁶ Oskar Schlemmer, "Stage Workshop," Bayer, H., Gropius, W. & Gropius, I., *Bauhaus 1919-1928*, (London: Secker and Warburg, 1975), p. 162.
- ¹⁷ Lothar Schreyer, "Hope For a New World," in Eckhard Neumann, *Bauhaus and Bauhaus People* (New York: Van Nostrand & Reinhold, and London: Chapman Hall, 1993), p. 74.
- ¹⁸ Barbara Miller Lane, *Architecture and Politics in Germany, 1918-1945*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 82.
- ¹⁹ Tut Schlemmer, "Of the Living Bauhaus and the Stage," in Eckhard Neumann, *Bauhaus and Bauhaus People*, (New York: Van Nostrand & Reinhold, and London: Chapman Hall, 1993), p. 164.
- ²⁰ *Weimarerische Zeitung*, 13 June 1924.
- ²¹ *Weimarerische Zeitung*, 13 June 1924.
- ²² Barbara Miller Lane, *Architecture and Politics in Germany, 1918-1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 81.
- ²³ Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 8.
- ²⁴ Paul Citroen, "Mazdaznan at the Bauhaus," in Eckhard Neumann, *Bauhaus and Bauhaus People* (New York: Van Nostrand & Reinhold, and London: Chapman Hall, 1993), p. 47.
- ²⁵ Karl-Georg Bitterberg, (ed.), *Catalogue to Bauhaus Exhibition*, (Visual Arts Board, Australian Council for the Arts, 1975).
- ²⁶ Magdalena Droste, *Bauhaus 1919—1933* (Cologne: Benedikt Taschen, 1993), p. 38.
- ²⁷ Walter Gropius, Minutes of the meeting of the Council of Masters, September 1920, Bauhaus Archive, Berlin, file Meisterrat.
- ²⁸ Marianne Brandt, "Letter to the Younger Generation," in Eckhard Neumann, *Bauhaus and Bauhaus People*, (New York: Van Nostrand & Reinhold, and London: Chapman Hall, 1993), p. 106
- ²⁹ Howard Dearstyne, *Inside the Bauhaus*, in David Spaeth, (ed.) (New York: Rizzoli, 1986), p. 49.
- ³⁰ Magdalena Droste, *Bauhaus 1919—1933* (Cologne: Benedikt Taschen, 1993), p. 40.
- ³¹ Magdalena Droste, *Bauhaus 1919—1933* (Cologne: Benedikt Taschen, 1993), p. 40.
- ³² Gropius first lecture to the Bauhaus, 1919, Bauhaus Archive, Berlin, File 18.

³³ Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), p. 118 (Note: I have translated texts from the Bauhaus Archive Berlin quoted above).

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