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**ART STYLE**

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**BAUHAUS SPECIAL**

To what extent is Bauhaus even possible nowadays?



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László Moholy-Nagy, Photogram, 1926.  
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**Art Style | Art & Culture International Magazine** is an online, quarterly magazine that aims to bundle cultural diversity. All values of cultures are shown in their varieties of art. Beyond the importance of the medium, form, and context in which art takes its characteristics, we also consider the significance of socio-cultural and market influence. Thus, there are different forms of visual expression and perception through the media and environment. The images relate to the cultural changes and their time-space significance—the spirit of the time. Hence, it is not only about the image itself and its description but rather its effects on culture, in which reciprocity is involved. For example, a variety of visual narratives—like movies, TV shows, videos, performances, media, digital arts, visual technologies and video game as part of the video's story, communications design, and also, drawing, painting, photography, dance, theater, literature, sculpture, architecture and design—are discussed in their visual significance as well as in synchronization with music in daily interactions. Moreover, this magazine handles images and sounds concerning the meaning in culture due to the influence of ideologies, trends, or functions for informational purposes as forms of communication beyond the significance of art and its issues related to the socio-cultural and political context. However, the significance of art and all kinds of aesthetic experiences represent a transformation for our nature as human beings. In general, questions concerning the meaning of art are frequently linked to the process of perception and imagination. This process can be understood as an aesthetic experience in art, media, and fields such as motion pictures, music, and many other creative works and events that contribute to one's knowledge, opinions, or skills. Accordingly, examining the digital technologies, motion picture, sound recording, broadcasting industries, and its social impact, Art Style Magazine focuses on the myriad meanings of art to become aware of their effects on culture as well as their communication dynamics.

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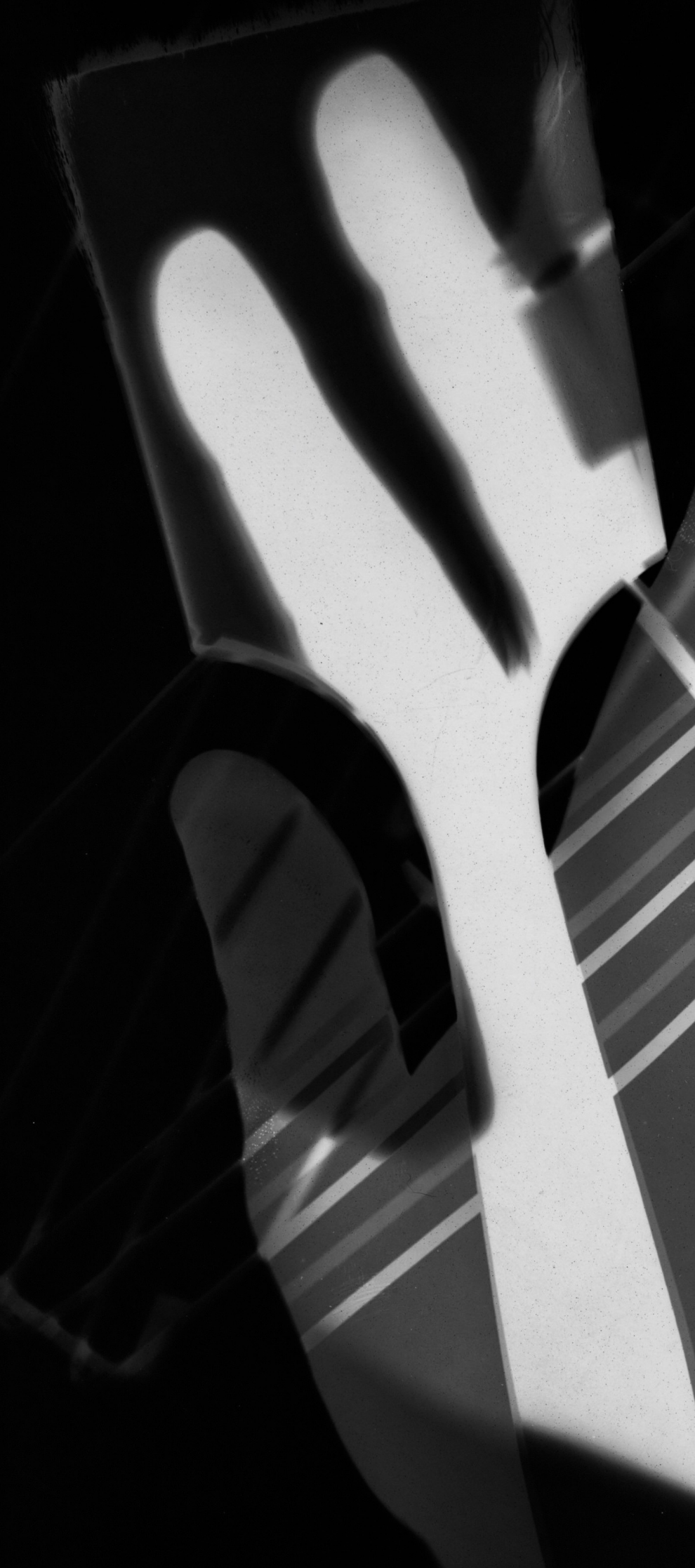
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# BAUHAUS SPECIAL

## To what extent is Bauhaus even possible nowadays?

### Editor's Note

Dear readers,

Although Bauhaus is relevant throughout history, this German school of art remains an open issue in art, architecture, design, and communication, addressing the following question: To what extent is Bauhaus even possible nowadays? Thus, this was our question for the Art Style Magazine's Bauhaus Special Edition.

Therefore, in an attempt to showcase some of the most important issues so our readers can attain a broad notion of this German school's legacy, our Editorial Team has been working diligently and participated in several significant events, talks, round tables, and exhibitions. The opening festival and construction of the Bauhaus Museum in Weimar, for example, offered a great view of the importance of the Bauhaus. Above all, in the sense of arts and crafts in connection with industry, this school outlined a relationship of teaching design from product development, consumption to the changes of living together.

Recently, the so-called "Fishfilet scandal" – an attempt to prevent a live event by a German rock band – was an important facet in the discussion that the Bauhaus still plays a significant role in the political scene. As artists and politicians said, the ban on concerts means a "terrifying history" for Bauhaus-Dessau. A month ago, we heard news from a round table, and artistic interventions under the title "How political is the Bauhaus?". These talks had taken place in the Haus der Kulturen der Welt (House of World Cultures) in Berlin on January 19, 2019. It was part of the opening festival of Bauhaus's centenary and supported by the Senate Department for Culture and Europe. Among many exciting themes are highlights such as Educational Theory, Education of Society, Housing Question, Urban Development, Emancipation, Internationalization, and the Political Role of Cultural Institutions.

Another essential Bauhaus theme is the role of women. Therefore, as far as I can understand, at the beginning of the 20th century, Bauhaus school was one of the first art schools in Europe to accept women. An effort against the conservatives, it was a vanguard attitude! Just compare with the art academies in the same period! The effects are obviously of great importance in addressing the participation of women as professional in modern society and still in development. So, happily, today, women have greater involvement in many other areas in practice and theory in the art world due to the Bauhaus initiative.

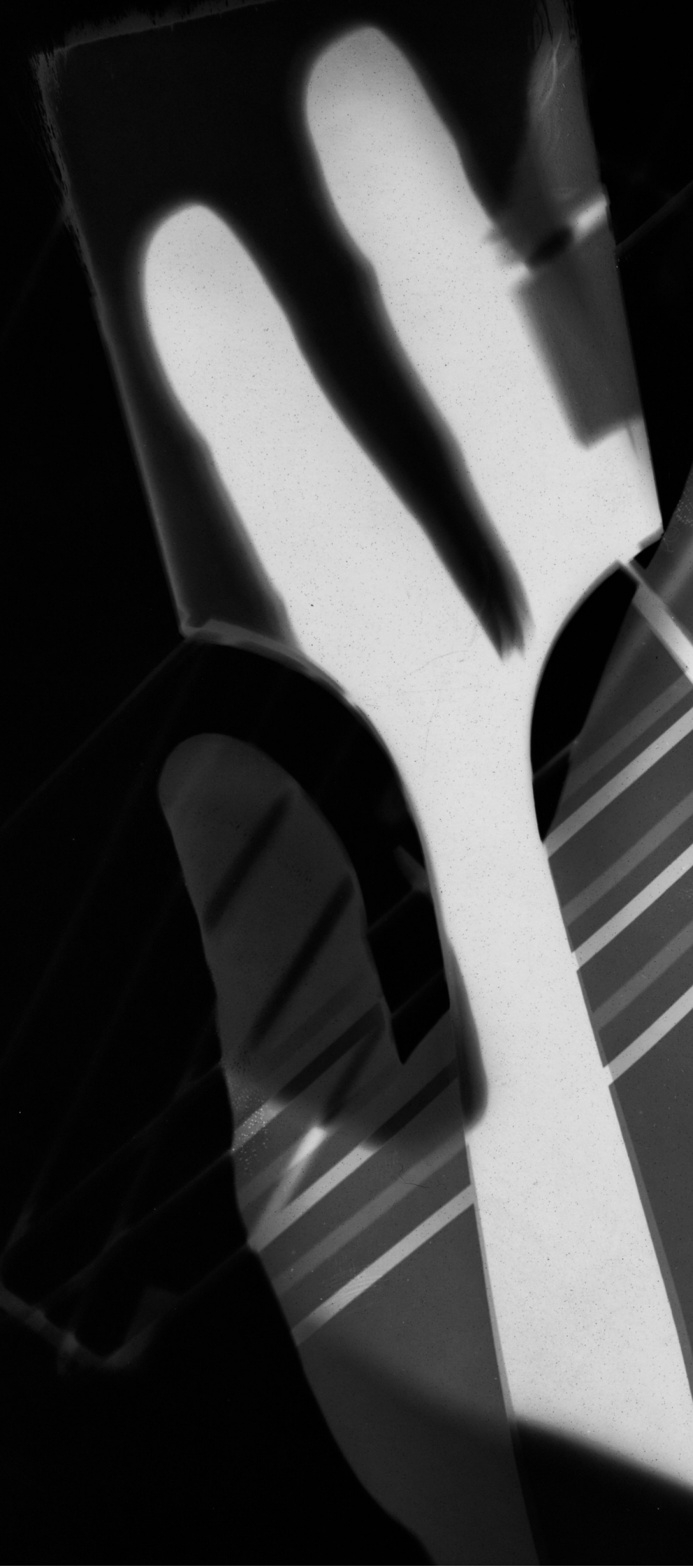
In this way, the essays published in Art Style Magazine's Bauhaus Special Edition are acutely aware of the real significance of the Bauhaus in this period between 1919 and 1933 and about its legacy worldwide.



For a detailed discussion on what this model of art school offers for our generation and social discourse today, this special issue opens with an interesting essay by Jörg U. Lensing, founder and Artistic Director of the THEATER DER KLÄNGE, Düsseldorf, and Professor for Sound Design at the Dortmund University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Germany. Professor Lensing addresses concerns and highlights potentially positive aspects of Bauhaus and his work on the Mechanical Ballet by Kurt Schmidt, the Mechanical Eccentricity by László Moholy-Nagy, and both The Triadic Ballet and The Lacquer Ballet by Oskar Schlemmer. It is followed by Martina Sauer's essay, "The Better Form: Josef Albers's Idealistic Concept of Art Reveals its Socio-Cultural Function." Martina Sauer, as a scientific associate at Bauhaus-University Weimar and museum educator at Museum Frieder Burda, Baden-Baden, Germany, highlights that arts are both techniques and functions for the bad or the good, analyzing Josef Albers's artistic research. Beyond the socio-political aspects during Bauhaus's existence, the essay "Politics and the Staatliches Bauhaus: Function versus the Curve of the Time" by Charlotte Thibault and Waldenyr Caldas deal with the international repercussion of Bauhaus representations, analyzing the architecture of Walter Gropius and Oscar Niemeyer. Then, still discussing the aesthetic-social aspects, the Editorial Team intends to investigate the Bauhaus, society, and industry. Also, seeking an accurate answer to our main question, Bürdek's interview is enlightening. Bernhard E. Bürdek is Professor at the Academy of Art and Design in Offenbach, Germany, and has studied at the Ulm Design School, and author of Design: The History, Theory, and Practice of Product Design. Finally, I attempt to outline the differences and similarities between art and design and show the technical aspects of both, as well as the Bauhaus's legacy of unifying fine and applied arts into the visual arts, well known today. For instance, I highly recommend the exhibition "bauhaus | documenta. Vision and Brand." The event is due to take place to commemorate the centenary of Bauhaus as an "opportunity to view both cultural brands parallel and become a mirror of the role and function that art and culture play in society" (documenta 2019). At last, Victor Aquino focuses on representations of the air and aesthetic analysis of the content, form, and function.

To summarize, most importantly, I think, what this "German" art school possesses in its way is a multicultural influence as an inheritance to build a better world. As stated by professor Lensing, "One can work on a concept for new humankind in a better, more peaceful society," and the ideals of the "golden twenties" should be alive. All this brings together the full values of living under the ideal of democracy in the present. Also, it is essential to think about what we still experience in the field of art: "to create the possibility [...] for the new" (Gropius 1919). Enjoy your reading!

Christiane Wagner  
Editor-in-Chief



## Historical Bauhaus Stage Productions Actualized for Our Time

Jörg U. Lensing

Translated by Don MacDonald (Düsseldorf)

“One should be as impartial as possible; one should approach things as if the world had just been created; one should not reflect upon something to death, one should let it unfold – cautiously indeed, but freely. One should be simple, not needy (simplicity is a big word); one should rather be primitive than ornate or pompous; one should not be sentimental, but one should have spirit instead. Thus, all and nothing has been said!”

Oskar Schlemmer

### Thus, All Has Been Said

There are only a few words in Oskar Schlemmer’s diary, words that nonetheless essentially say everything about the Bauhaus in the twenties, and everything that was important to the contributor and thinker Oskar Schlemmer regarding his “Bühnenspekulationen” (stage experiments). Lothar Schreyer – Expressionist and typical representative of the esoteric Itten school of thought of the early Bauhaus – separated from the Bauhaus in 1923, just as Johannes Itten did. His mystic, occultist approach to an Expressionist “Sturmbühne” ended with the succession of Oskar Schlemmer, who did bring his figurines (for the 1919 premiere of “The Triadic Ballet” in Stuttgart) with him in 1920 to Weimar, but could only first publically present them to colleagues and students within the framework of the “Bauhaus Week” in 1923 in Weimar. That same year he took over the direction of the stage workshop, not officially part of the studies at the Bauhaus – today one might regard it as a theatre workgroup. The advantage of this was that students with completely different directions of study could voluntarily attend this “class” and, with respect to developing performances, were free to experiment, build, try

out and compile. Oskar Schlemmer – himself not a trained performing artist – was able to instruct the students by drawing on his experience dealing with material and colours, the expertise of his brother Carl Schlemmer, who worked in the theatre as costume designer for armament costumes etc., as well as the experience in the development work of “The Triadic Ballet”.

In 1916, the professional Stuttgart dance couple Alfred Burger and Elsa Hötzel commissioned figurines for “The Triadic Ballet” by Oskar Schlemmer, to present a German counter-project to the then famous “Ballets Russes”. In the course of development of the partially unwieldy and rigid figurines in a family project with Oskar, Carl and Tut Schlemmer, it turned out, however, that Oskar Schlemmer could best dance his own figurines and also choreographically instruct on how best to dance them. As a result, he also suggested musical compositions, danced with and even choreographed for the trio of Hötzel, Burger and Schope. Thus, he used the name Walter Schope, since at that point in time, the “serious, visual artist” Oskar Schlemmer did not want to realise his “humorous side” under his own name, he wanted to use a pseudonym!

At the Bauhaus, however, he did use his name when teaching painting, sculpture and directing the stage class. So, it was therefore only logical that he also used his name from 1925 onwards at the Dessau Bauhaus when he appeared as a clown, as a figure and as a *compère*. He was so shameless on the occasion of one celebration that he publically parodied his colleagues and Walter Gropius on stage...

The Bauhaus itself was conceived from the idea to want to train new people for a new world – people that would not repeat the mistakes of fallen feudalism. Especially the generation of Gropius, Itten and Schlemmer, which had participated in the First World War as soldiers and officers, came back to their country after the traumas of the war with the firm intention: “Never again war!”

In order to make war and belligerency in a strongly militarily defined Germany impossible, one had to raise a new generation of young people which were internationally networked, not just nationally; a new generation which preferred to play rather than to fight, and which knew how to appreciate peace with all of the possibilities freedom has to offer. Since all representational forms of this self-portrayal were rejected by the militarism of the Wilhelminian era, it resulted in the rejection of any ornamental, adorning or decorative design or art. Which also explains the strict rejection of framed pictures (panel painting), figures on bases and ornamental facades (stucco, et cetera).

On the one hand, the human being was understood as being “inspired by the incomprehensible and infinite cosmos”, while on the other hand as being “a body whose intellectual capacity translates the inapprehensible in size and scale”<sup>1</sup>. Oskar Schlemmer – a friend of Johannes Itten and a valued long-standing employee of Walter Gropius – agreed with this view. In another spot in his diary he writes:

“That is why we create  
the abstract formal and coloured  
the static, dynamic and tectonic  
the mechanical, automatic and electrical  
the gymnastic, acrobatic and equilibristic  
the funny, grotesque and burlesque  
the serious, pathetic and monumental  
the political, philosophical and metaphysical theatre”

Under his guidance, his students – who in 1923 had already developed a complete programme with several numbers under the title “Das mechanische Kabarett” (The Mechanical Cabaret) for the Bauhaus Week – were for the most part in their mid-twenties, had experienced the war at most from afar as children or adolescents, had never been on the front but may have suffered some consequences of the “Great War”: inflation, hunger, shortage of supplies, unemployment, sometimes anarchic circumstances.

In spite of that – or especially because of it – they followed the pacifists Gropius, Itten and Schlemmer in their development of a new kind of peace and progress-oriented humankind. For the students Kurt Schmidt, Georg Teltcher and Friedrich Wilhelm Bogler, one of the things which arose from playing with forms in motion and colours was a “mechanical ballet”.

Oskar Schlemmer went further than simply directing the stage class he established – he pushed Gropius into constructing an experimental stage in the new Dessau Bauhaus, which Gropius delivered as a hybrid form between theatre, lecture hall and conference hall. Right up until he left the Bauhaus in 1928, Schlemmer also became the master of ceremonies of all Bauhaus celebrations; he not only automatically included himself as planner, supervisor and provider of themes and ideas, he also performed at all celebrations in alternating roles including musical clown and, in each case, also heavily celebrated into the early morning hours. Also here: “Primus inter pares” – first among equals, or as Gropius liked to see it: a close fellowship of masters with their apprentices!

## Thus, Nothing Has Been Said?

What does this model offer our generation and social discourses of today? For a start, the sketches and reports as well as the texts continue to inspire. One can hardly escape the enthusiasm of the texts and reports, one senses a painful emptiness in the face of today's visionlessness and individual inner conflict of present-day society. One longs for community, for the affirmation of a vision, for the optimism that through one's own actions, one can work on a concept for a new humankind in a better, more peaceful society. And isn't it more reasonable and more satisfactory to work on optimistic, hopeful utopias rather than to design dystopias, to succumb to defeatism or even nihilism? At the moment in Germany, the current celebrations of "100 Years of Bauhaus" are also undergoing a strong dismantling regarding the "good image" of the Bauhaus of the twenties: "Women were discriminated against, Gropius was pretentious, after 12 years of existence the Bauhaus itself was a grand failure" etc. Who does this iconoclasm serve? Must the last positivist utopia of the "golden twenties" also be destroyed, only because we find ourselves once again in times of a despairing humankind?

The THEATER DER KLÄNGE, which I founded and still run today in Düsseldorf, did not do this and will not do this. On the contrary: In the foundation year of 1987, we seized the opportunity and took on both "The Mechanical Ballet" of 1923 by Kurt Schmidt's troop as well as the never-before realised sketch of "Mechanical Eccentricity" by the Bauhaus master Laszlo Moholy-Nagy.



Figure 1. Oskar Schlemmer, *Die Bühne im Bauhaus*. Bd. 4, München 1925.

## The Mechanical Ballet

In 1987, the only representation of "The Mechanical Ballet" (fig. 2) was two retouched black and white photos in the book (fig. 1) "Die Bühne im Bauhaus"<sup>2</sup>, as well as a printed colour representation of the 4-colour figurines in the form of a colour tempera sketch in the exhibition catalogue of the exhibition "50 years of Bauhaus".<sup>3</sup> In addition, there was a piece by Kurt Schmidt in the afore-mentioned book in which hardly any attention was paid, however, to the choreography and the music used. My wish to make and further develop a new adaptation of this ballet had to therefore come from these 3 pictures. After all, we were talking about "head-high" figurines and the tempera sketch displayed the colours which these figurines may have had.

The coloured forms were transferred in cardboard form to jointed dolls and stuck to the bodies of the dolls in the same way one would also imagine attaching to the human body. Using the tempera sketch and the two photos, one could not clearly recognize exactly how the parts were worn on which parts of the body. So, one had to just try it. The figurines so "dressed", now "three-dimensional", were photographed and these photographs were brought along to the visit with Kurt Schmidt in Gera, 1987. It was reassuring to see how Kurt Schmidt immediately used a felt-tipped pen and with decisive strokes corrected the proportions on the photos and said: "The figurines have to be tall and slim, not thick and stocky." The then 86-year-old no longer had any memories of the choreography. Likewise, regarding the music. How long had the whole thing lasted? "Hmm, about 15 minutes – or longer – because there were always parts falling down and we had to close the curtain in order to reattach them. And then the whole thing would start all over again."<sup>4</sup>

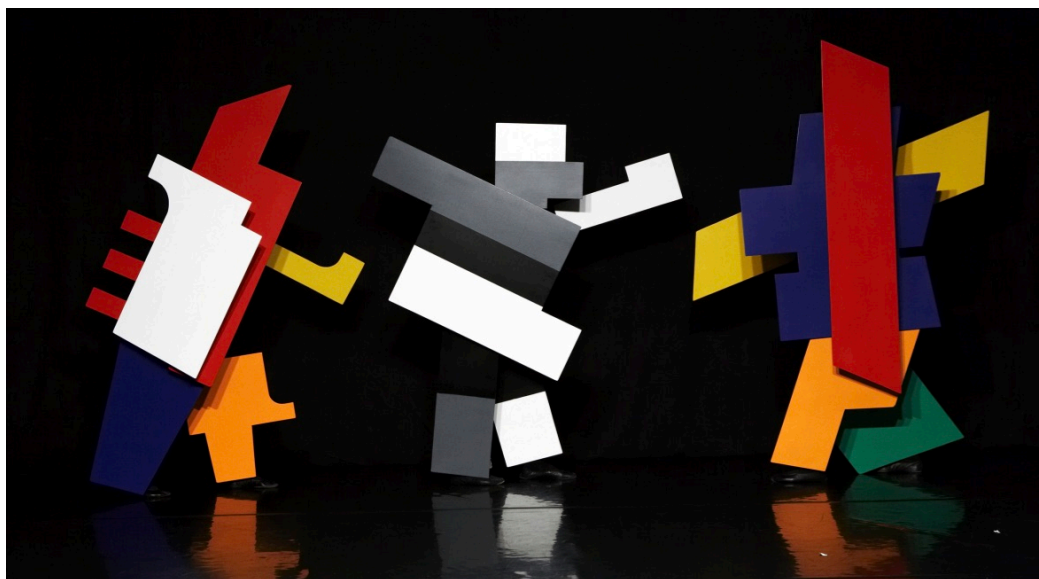


Figure 2. THEATER DER KLÄNGE's new adaptation of "The Mechanical Ballet" by Kurt Schmidt.  
Dancers: Laura Wissing, Darwin Diaz, Jacqueline Fischer. Photo by Oliver Eltinger, 2009.  
THEATER DER KLÄNGE's Production, Düsseldorf, 1987.

Transferring the slimmer forms “head-high” to plywood was one thing. The other thing was to now develop the ideal attachment points and a fastening system so that dancers of different heights could wear these figurines as well. The whole thing dances, but everything’s still *wooden* – in the truest sense of the word; however, one can immediately see when a figurine is standing and moving correctly and when the effect collapses immediately upon itself. Which music? We need a *répétiteur* as musician/composer who can improvise directly together with the dancers.

Every ensemble member is allowed to try any figurine that is painted in colour. Every idea is allowed on condition that the figurine parts are “correctly” allocated, so that the windmill, mechanical being, locomotive and also “the black-white-grey dancer” and “the small one” appear correctly as figurines. The “small one” can be danced only when squatting. Hanno Spelsberg as pianist/composer is the correct choice here and improvises – just like the dancers – back and forth between classical excerpts, jazz borrowings and freely atonal music. Some of our dancers have no idea where to start with this form of total masking of one’s own body. For this form of theatre, one needs a type of actor completely free of vanity. The figurines take everything from the actors that actually made them want to become actors: their face, their voice, their body. The figurines seem to degrade the actors into moving muscular skeletons of abstract surfaces which are vaguely reminiscent of people but have the shortcoming of no mimicry, no expressive eyes, no mouth. Envisioned by Heinrich von Kleist and Edward Gordon Craig, the “Übermarionette” (superpuppet) becomes reality with these more two- than three-dimensional figurines of “The Mechanical Ballet.”

But the “puppeteer” does not stand over, behind or under the figurine, he IS the embodiment of the figurine. In addition to that, according to our dancer Jacqueline Fischer,<sup>5</sup> who later became choreographer for our productions of “The Triadic Ballet” and “The Lacquer Ballet”, dancers usually use coordinated, symmetrical, organic movements as a basis when improvising. The two dimensionalities of the figurines only allows for forward and backward physical movements, also sometimes with straightened arms or legs, as the individual parts of the figurine partially make knees and arm joints superfluous. In the case of the “dancer figurine”, the dancer wears the supposed upper body of the figurine strapped to that dancer’s bent right arm. Being strapped onto body parts and extremities, these surfaces furthermore isolate their own movements from each other and attain “logical” motions only as a result of successive movement sequences. This contradicts almost every existing type of dance training.



The dancers cannot see themselves in the figurines, a mirror-check is not possible. They are dependent on the direct feedback from the choreographer observing them and at most can also check themselves during subsequent watching of videos. Nevertheless, the dancers do have possibilities regarding physical means of expression. The basic rules of body language apply here: speed of movements, poses, a bent or upright walk, stride, run, dance. Bows, pronounced gestures, from soft or hard contact to kicks, and dismissive recoils and cautious approaches. Our version of "The Mechanical Ballet" (fig. 2) presents a complete catalogue of such forms of body language. Our adaptation in 1987 was a 40-minute ballet in five acts; from the first tender colour-form recognitions in the wings to figures which seemed at first mechanical then became more fluid and organic as the ballet progressed, concluding in the fifth act with all figurines uniting to almost a *ballet d'action* interrelating with each other. During the applause, a final, short staged moment of revealing the figurine parts which had been worn. Kurt Schmidt's mere 15-minute "The Mechanical Ballet" in the twenties enjoyed only four performances in Jena, Weimar and Berlin. Our continuing adaptation is still touring even today and has been seen and heard in almost 200 performances in more than 60 cities worldwide. Shortly before his death in 1989, Kurt Schmidt, then sitting in a wheelchair, was able to attend our adaptation, a performance at the Stadttheater Gera. After we informed the public who was sitting there in the back of the hall, everyone turned around and gave him a standing ovation!

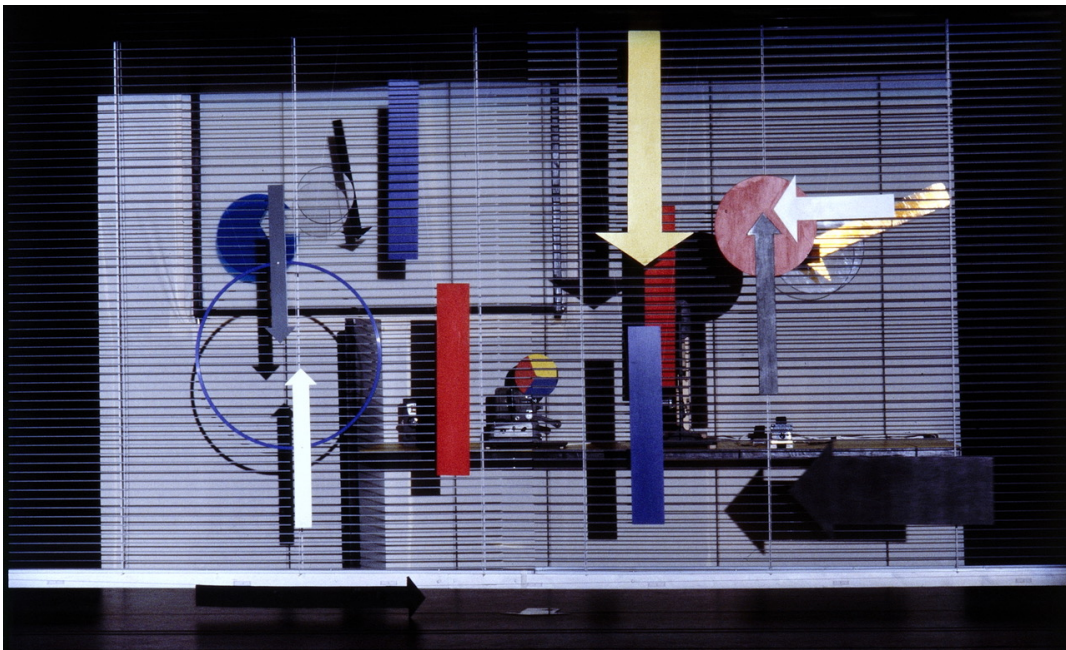


Figure 3. THEATER DER KLÄNGE's production of "The Mechanical Eccentricity" (1987) <sup>6</sup> based on the (up until 1987) Moholy-Nagy's unrealised sketch. Photo by Sascha Hardt.

## The Mechanical Eccentricity

Directly after finishing one's studies, one feels free of all boundaries and takes on every type of challenge – even right up to the excessive self-overestimation of one's own abilities. As a newly formed ensemble, not only did we want to breathe new life into a dance piece with "The Mechanical Ballet" – which had previously been regarded as undanceable. No, a second part had to be developed to fill an evening programme, one based on the (up until 1987) unrealised sketch "Mechanical Eccentricity" (fig. 4-5), which the Bauhaus master László Moholy-Nagy had published in the book "Die Bühne im Bauhaus" in the twenties.

The intended actor in the piece is what Moholy-Nagy called a "Menschmechanik" (human being mechanism); a sketch of a dancer lying on the floor. Otherwise the instructions for action consists of such keywords as "falling arrows, lamellae opening, circles rotating, electro-apparatuses" as well as "movie on a screen turned backwards" or "Clownerie". The graphic sketch in the same book can be read from top to bottom like a musical score and sets the stage design as well as 4 layers of action in the form of "form and movement on the main stage", "form and movement on a second foldable stage that can be lifted up to become the screen" and "coloured light" as well as "sound/music". If one takes the score and the keyword catalogue as seriously as one does graphic notated scores by contemporary composers, a concrete enactment can be developed.

Of course, the graphic *crescendi* and fragmented notes are only tonal hints and material – the same as the sketches of the actual objects and materials. There is just as little staging instruction regarding the "clownery" in the original as any choreography for the "Menschmechanik". In Jürgen Steger<sup>7</sup> we found a stage designer that was able to both design and make actual objects from the Moholy sketches inside of a scaffolding cage and to equip them with cords, pulleys and tackle blocks in such a way that they could be moved from the sides so that the players were invisible to the public. Our ensemble of musicians and dancers became puppeteers for this piece. But instead of puppets, it was the objects that were moved – brought to dance through oscillations and in part electro-mechanically driven. I did an electronical interpretation of Moholy's "Ton-Kolonne" in 1987 which culminated in a 33-minute audio tape composition. After approximately 20 minutes of pure "Aktionskonzentration" (concentrated action), a clown emerges in the midst of it all and "ousts" from the stage all objects still present, in order to make place for a "Menschmechanik" performed by a dancer.



Figure 4. Screenshots from the THEATER DER KLÄNGE video: "The Mechanical Eccentricity" (1987)<sup>8</sup> based on the (up until 1987) Moholy-Nagy's unrealised sketch. "Menschmechanik": Rainer Behr.

Since in 1987 we did not think ourselves capable of being able to interpret such a piece choreographically, Malou Airaudó<sup>9</sup> developed an approximately 5-minute long choreography for one of our dancers. Our visiting performance with "Die mechanische Bauhausbühne" (The Mechanical Bauhaus Stage) at the German National Theatre Weimar in June 1989 is interesting in this context. We heard a marvellous reaction – otherwise never before had with this piece – in this sold-out 700-seat theatre for the two performances on the 28th and 29th of June 1989. Shortly before the clown appears on the stage, one sees a total of three wheels moving in a floating fashion on nylon threads. One of these 3 wheels drives on the stage floor, 1–2m away from the front edge of it. To make this possible, Jürgen Steger built a small electrically driven "carriage" on the back of this "wheel-object"; it got its power from two low-voltage contact wires placed on the floor. After the wheels were ousted from the stage by the clown, the stage was clear and the "Menschmechanik" dancer enters the stage from the rear. The solo dance develops from movements which at first seem mechanical, then become increasingly more fluid, thus obviously freeing itself from the solidification, and becomes organic. That had been the explicit intention for the development of this choreography, as we wanted the dancing human at the end of this piece to appear as the crowning glory of the "Aktionskonzentration" and not – as Moholy had intended – in order to show how little this "dance" can keep pace with an "Aktionskonzentration" with electro-mechanical means on a "modern stage." After the dancer frees himself as it were from the "Menschmechanik" in a virtuous dance, he sinks onto the floor and caresses it, gets up and then very slowly approaches the audience. While he walks, changes in lighting turn him into a shadow figure in front of the still illuminated stage, which also slowly becomes darker, thus explaining the final effect of the piece. In this closing image of the human being walking towards the public, the dancer has to walk across the two electric wires on the floor. Exactly at this moment, the GDR audience was completely silent, captivated, and softly began to applaud as the dancer crossed the wires and moved on to the forestage.

## TRIAS – The Triadic Ballet

Already in 1988 we wanted to directly continue with “The Triadic Ballet” but had to wait until 2014, for the rights of Oskar Schlemmer’s works to become public domain. In the meantime, activity with Schlemmer was only possible with interpretations of his texts. In “Figur und Klang im Raum” (Figure and Sound in Space 1993), as well as when later continuing in our productions “HOEReographien” (HEAReographics 2005) and “SUITE intermediale” (2010) we worked from the texts of Oskar Schlemmer’s “Mensch und Kunstfigur” (Man and Art Figure) and “Figur und Raum” (Figure and Space) in order to develop our own forms (fig. 5-6) of the continuation of this stage philosophy.

“The human being is the focus of the stage action.” This basic principle determined the appearance of music and scenography of moving images in the progression of our work. The stage was empty save for a projection area and sensors installed in the stage in the form of cameras and microphones. If the stage remained empty, this experimental spatial setup remained dead and thus also mute. If a human being entered this special space, which was also the allocated observed stage for the audience, this space livened up with sound and image.



Figure 5. TRIAS – “The Triadic Ballet” by Oskar Schlemmer.  
Dancers: Blue (Darwin Diaz), Yellow (Elisa Marschall), Red (Phaedra Pisimisi).  
Photo by Kai Pohler. THEATER DER KLÄNGE’s Production, Düsseldorf, 2015.



Figure 6. "Figur und Klang im Raum" (Figure and Sound in Space) by J.U. Lensing.  
Trio: Yellow (Kerstin Hörner), Red (Jacqueline Fischer), Blue (Heiko Seidel).  
Photo by Sascha Hardt. THEATER DER KLÄNGE's Production, Düsseldorf, 1993.

The images in this case were obviously increasingly transformed real-time representations of the people moving on the stage. The sound to be heard was obviously created directly by the movement of the dancers and modulated. We were able to refine this form, the light-space modulation, through the motion of the dancers – so much so that we could definitively bring together figurine dance and its resulting light-space modulation in “The Lacquer Ballet” (2018/19).

Even in 2014, when the Bavarian State Ballet came before us with a revival of “The Triadic Ballet” (the Berlin 1977 version by Gerhard Bohner with the music of Hans-Joachim Hespos), this was all the more reason to finally risk our own interpretation. The “state” Berlin/Munich adaptation breathes the spirit of the classical ballet, combined with a concept of modern dance and “Avant-Garde music” as was typical for the seventies. Seeing this version in 2014 again, a double anachronism was revealed: One sees and hears the seventies interpretation of a ballet idea from the twenties. It is risky to offer an independent alternative of this “state-supported” commission being performed by a state ballet. One readily forgets that the Bauhaus ensemble in the twenties – but also independent dancers Schlemmer sometimes worked with at the Bauhaus – were by no means academically trained nor were state ballet dancers. On the contrary: It was Bauhaus art students or interested guest dancers and the professional Stuttgart dancer pair of Burger and Hötzel from which Schlemmer got the order for the development of the figurines; as initiating artists, they were so dependent on fees and credit that already after the premiere of “The Triadic Ballet”, a quarrel ensued which resulted in the dancer pair immediately confiscating the figurines that they had danced. Schlemmer then reproduced these in a second version for later shows, which explains the partially different appearances of the very same figurine on various photos.

And especially Schlemmer’s Rhenish roots played an important role in his struggle with his personal definition as an artist. In one of his diary entries,<sup>10</sup> Schlemmer spoke of having two souls living in his breast: the one consisted of a melancholic side, which he explained came from his Swabian mother and that drove him over and over into secluded work in his studio, and the other a joyous, expressive side which he explained came from his Rhenish father, a man who was also active as a dialect and song poet. Especially the “stage hog” Oskar Schlemmer – a planner of celebrations, a stage class director, a dancer in “The Triadic Ballet” and completely open as a musical clown on the Bauhaus stage – can only be explained if one knows how suddenly businessmen, doctors, priests and even teachers shamelessly (but also humorously) can turn themselves into carnival orators, clowns, fools and laughing stocks during the celebrated days of the Rhenish Carnival. Being a native Rhinelander, this is a side not foreign to me, although I

myself would if at all possible refrain from acting as a clown in front of my university colleagues and students... It requires safe surroundings or being within the framework of carnival festivities and the confidence that one would not be considered a joke beyond this stage performance, for example when teaching. Both were obviously present with Schlemmer and in the Bauhaus of the twenties.



Figure 7. "The Cello-Clown" (Kai Bettermann) by Oskar Schlemmer.  
Photo by Kai Pohler. THEATER DER KLÄNGE, 2015.

Our approach to "The Triadic Ballet" was first of all the graphic sketch that was printed multiple times in different colour versions. The research on the figurines that were actually realised was more difficult. The first address was Stuttgart, where the original figurines are exhibited; however, museum visitors can only view them from a distance. So, one can only see very little of the detail with which they were manufactured, what material mix they have, and especially what systems they are equipped with on the inside for wearing. Furthermore, it is the rigid figurines that are usually exhibited in Stuttgart, not the light and more flexible ones.

The historical photos reveal a surprising discrepancy regarding the supposed rigidity of the figurines. This is further reinforced in the TV version by the Bayrische Rundfunk from 1969/70, as almost all of the moving figurines in this film are masked and have broken movements. Both versions – the TV version by Margarete Hasting and the stage version by Gerhard Bohner – stress this perception of “The Triadic Ballet”. The historical photos – and also, by the way, a preserved “comical” film sequence with Oskar Schlemmer as a dancer from the twenties – show something different. There is a dancer wearing a rigid sweeping skirt, an almost transparent silk upper top (no bra), tights and pointe shoes, similar to the dancer pair of Burger and Hötzel as the two figurines “Zylindermann” (cylinder man) and “Glockenpuppe” (bell puppet). The trunk of the man and the hips of the woman are restricted in movement by the rigid projecting forms; the rest of the body is, however, in light quilted costumes, and so is therefore much more flexible indeed. Likewise, the powerful cylindrical skirt at the beginning of the first act as well as for the white dancer, and also for the figurines for the “Turks”, one of which Schlemmer himself danced – whilst making music with cymbals. Only rudimentary sources can be found for the music as well. A table with composer names for every scene, sometimes complete with references to the form of musical pieces – never as to precise pieces. If one knows that Schlemmer himself was able to play piano and could access some musicians amongst the students, one gets an idea as to why he stayed open concerning music selection. Small ensembles, when necessary only piano with musical notation that was not highly difficult and thus could be played at any time.

If “The Triadic Ballet” can be associated with contemporary composers of the twenties, then at most with Paul Hindemith, who in this regard worked on some notation from “The Triadic Ballet” in a version for the mechanical organ, composed especially for the Donaueschingen Festival. Schlemmer was just as enthusiastic about this possibility of working with a contemporary composer as he was disappointed about the resulting music – because he found it often seemed too undancelike. It was for this reason that we chose the development of new music in 2014 for our version of “The Triadic Ballet”, just as for “The Mechanical Ballet”, again a trio ensemble. This time in the form of piano, cello and drums – in 1987 we had decided on piano, trombone and drums for “The Mechanical Ballet” ensemble. Thomas Wansing, who had been our pianist for “The Mechanical Ballet” since the early nineties, was a pianist/composer that was able to work with Schlemmer’s composer notes, was knowledgeable in the jazz and ballet music of the twenties, knew rhythm composition techniques and was a master at directly improvising on the piano.



As a practising ballet *répétiteur*, he was also perfect for our rehearsal work and little by little, he composed new ideas from initial improvisational ideas – again spontaneously from improvisation suggestions by the dancers. Contemporary dance is also partially acrobatic, very much incorporating the floor as a body surface, and it does not stop at press lifts, it uses lifts in the form of contact improvisation, which can sometimes appear weightless. All of these qualities are extremely difficult to realise in rigid, unwieldy costumes. And exactly that was the challenge for our dancers – who were more contemporary than classically-trained – and the choreographer Jacqueline Fischer. How does one outsmart the figurines, how does one make them do things one hardly believes possible, how are acrobatics possible in spite of the bulkiness, how do the lifts work, how does one use the partially postulated genderlessness of some of the figurines to play on the androgyny? And – how does one perform with the breakable expectation that these figurines, for all intents and purposes, have the grace of a puppet, robot or mechanism?



Figure 8. "The Triadic Ballet" by Oskar Schlemmer.

Dancers: Danilo Cardoso and Phaedra Pisimisi.

Photo by Kai Pohler. THEATER DER KLÄNGE's Production, Düsseldorf, 2017.

Schlemmer closed his "The Triadic Ballet" with the figure of the so-called "Der Abstrakte" (the abstract figure), after he presented the cheerful-burlesque yellow, the festive pink and the sublime-heroic black act<sup>11</sup>. Both seventies interpretations did not negate the figure "Der Abstrakte" but constructed it as the climax of their interpretations.

In our version, we noted that our performance of the escape from the figurines, the dancing against the puppet-like rigidity, and the music – which also increasingly released itself from the dance – had to lead to a different consequence. Three of our four interpreters of our version, stuck in alternating figurines for over 80 minutes, show up at the end in conic figurines reduced to the primary colours blue, red and yellow and, in the course of this final dance, they free themselves from even these last surrounding wrappers of colour and form to emerge, as it were, naked. Here they give their faces, their mimics, their bodies back to the audience after 80 minutes of pupation. As "naked" bodies, they repeat different instances of movement and lifts from our "The Triadic Ballet", casting a very different effect without the enveloping figurines, however. At the end, while Schlemmer's, Hasting's, and Bohner's "Der Abstrakte" strides, twists while hopping, waves and swings a club, our dancers rid themselves of every extension and deformation from their bodies and are actually abstract in their physicality – but also graceful in their beauty. A conciliatory moment felt by the audiences of the 21st century and pointed out in the reviews.

In 2014/15, for lack of money, we were still having to work with figurines that only partially achieved the quality of the originals. Support from the NRW fund "bauhaus100 im Westen" in 2017/18 facilitated a further qualitative new construction of the figurines for our production "TRIAS – The Triadic Ballet", this time strongly orientated at the realised originals. We performed this renewed figurine version in 2017 within the framework of the double programme "bauhaus ballette" (bauhaus ballets) in Düsseldorf. This version resulted in the Bauhaus Dessau Foundation ordering 8 replicas of these figurines from us as exhibition figurines for their new Bauhaus Museum in Dessau.

## The Lacquer Ballet

This ballet is the wallflower of Schlemmer's stage works: Not realised in the Bauhaus, danced by 6 ladies of a company sports group, created in 1941 during the "artistic exile" within the *Farbwerke Herberts* in Wuppertal and, according to tradition, just more than 4 minutes long: A striding dance to a sarabande by G. F. Händel. After interpretations from Gerhard Bohner, Cesc Gelabert and Debra McCall, should one on the occasion of "100 Years of Bauhaus" once again re-examine Schlemmer's "Bauhaus Dances"? Or is the Wuppertal "The Lacquer Ballet" in specific worth looking at? Wuppertal is closer to us than Dessau, and when one finds out that Schlemmer had experimented, practiced material research, taught young people and created pictures for them (completely atypical for him) in the Wuppertal colour laboratory, then this engagement with the then new synthetic lacquer becomes interesting to us. Even more interesting is the fact that Kurt Herberts had engaged Karl (Cara) Schlemmer – the brother – for some weeks in Wuppertal, so that he could make the figurines together with Oskar. Cara – who had already together with Tut Schlemmer (and also Oskar) built the figurines for "The Triadic Ballet"! As always there were graphic sketches in colour and some black & white photos, as well as sparse references to choreography and music.

Reviving a barely 4-minute dance is no justification for an evening-filling programme. Dealing with material experimentation in forms and colours is. And then there was a note in his diaries that became our guiding principle for our creation: "I believe that a painter with few colours and some corresponding forms would have to be able to demonstrate his most personal work – unequivocal, one-of-a-kind, unique. I would like an effervescent painting, born of colour, of shadow and light, of structures and laws which contain the secret and realise again and again the inner story."<sup>12</sup>

Through our engagement with electronic interaction possibilities of video and music, we were able to use the "Schlemmerian" colours and forms as "paintbrush and colour palette" for light paintings to be generated in real time on a canvas/screen. This takes place in our "The Lacquer Ballet", literally: A white canvas positioned on a painter's easel serves as a projection screen for the colour and form painting, projected by a video beamer, but "painted" by dancers – filmed live – with their intensely coloured and clearly shaped figurines in motion. Since the electronic music can sometimes be modulated by actions in the stage area, this is also a live-interaction-action painting in which the borders of genres

between dance, music, video and art performance become fluid. Furthermore, contemporary dance is no stranger to the investigative, playful handling of materials, forms and colours; it will here become an essential component of the most different dance-action scenes with focus on the exploration of the material, out of which only gradually figurines are then formed. Reports about Schlemmer's lacquer experiments in the *Herberts-Farblabor* inspired the dancers and the choreographer to transfers in scenic and dance realisations. The first complete figurine, the "Segelmädchen" (sail girl), one not realised by Schlemmer, appears with us only after approx. half of the time the piece has been running. It takes a further 10 minutes for the second figurine, the "Fächerfigurine" (fan figurine) and then a third, "Scheibenfigurine" (disc figurine), to join, thus forming the first figurine duet. Schmidt's concept of "The Mechanical Ballet" gradually presents the 5 figurines that, however, are also to be seen quickly in duo and trio constellations, before becoming a quintet in the final fifth act.

The order of the in total 18 figurines in "The Triadic Ballet" – as soloists, duets and trios in the two interpretations from the sixties and seventies – follows Schlemmer's graphic plan in 3 acts and 12 scenes. In our version there are only 17 figurines, plus the 3 reduced in the final scene, in the aforementioned 12 scenes in 3 acts. But even this change for the final scene, as well as our addition of the two musical clowns, points out the possibility of an extension. The programme in "The Lacquer Ballet" is as follows: The 5 acts are identified by caesuras which one of our interpreters fills with 4 texts from Schlemmer's "Briefe und Tagebücher" (letters and diaries) with small playful actions. It is only through the set design of the canvas/screen on the easel that the public is both in the theatre as well as in the imaginary artist studio. Schlemmer speaks to the audience, paints and experiments with colours and forms, consciously allowing them to run and mix, paints that over again and shapes his figurines from small balls, beer coasters, spheres. In reality, he and his brother had just a month available to them in 1941 in which to condense over 25 year of professional experience as a painter, sculptor, thespian, dancer, compere, clown and author.

This artist, whose texts show to be a thoughtful and melancholic human being, while in other phases a carefree, sometimes naive, saucy, shameless bigshot, seems so very different than his successors and present-day estate administrators. He is the type of artist that is so often invoked in politics and science: childlike nature, uncomfortable, incorrect, solely committed to his own work, a thorn in society's side – even though it doesn't really hurt, it only itches. The price for this invocation incarnate, which Schlemmer had to pay in his day.

Banned from teaching, exhibiting – earning a living as house-painter and also as a camouflage painter... Oskar Schlemmer earned his requiem and we have attempted to compose it as showing a kindred spirit. Our trademark and at the same time our shortcoming as an ensemble difficult to classify into genres, is our strength here: If you stand between all chairs, you have the ability to move freely since no one has committed you to sit down on one chair only!



Figure 9. "The Lacquer Ballet" by Oskar Schlemmer.  
Dancer: Tuan Ly. Photo by Oliver Eltinger.  
THEATER DER KLÄNGE's Production, Düsseldorf, 2019.

## Author Biography

Jörg U. Lensing, composer and director.  
Artistic Director at the THEATER DER KLÄNGE (D) & Professor for  
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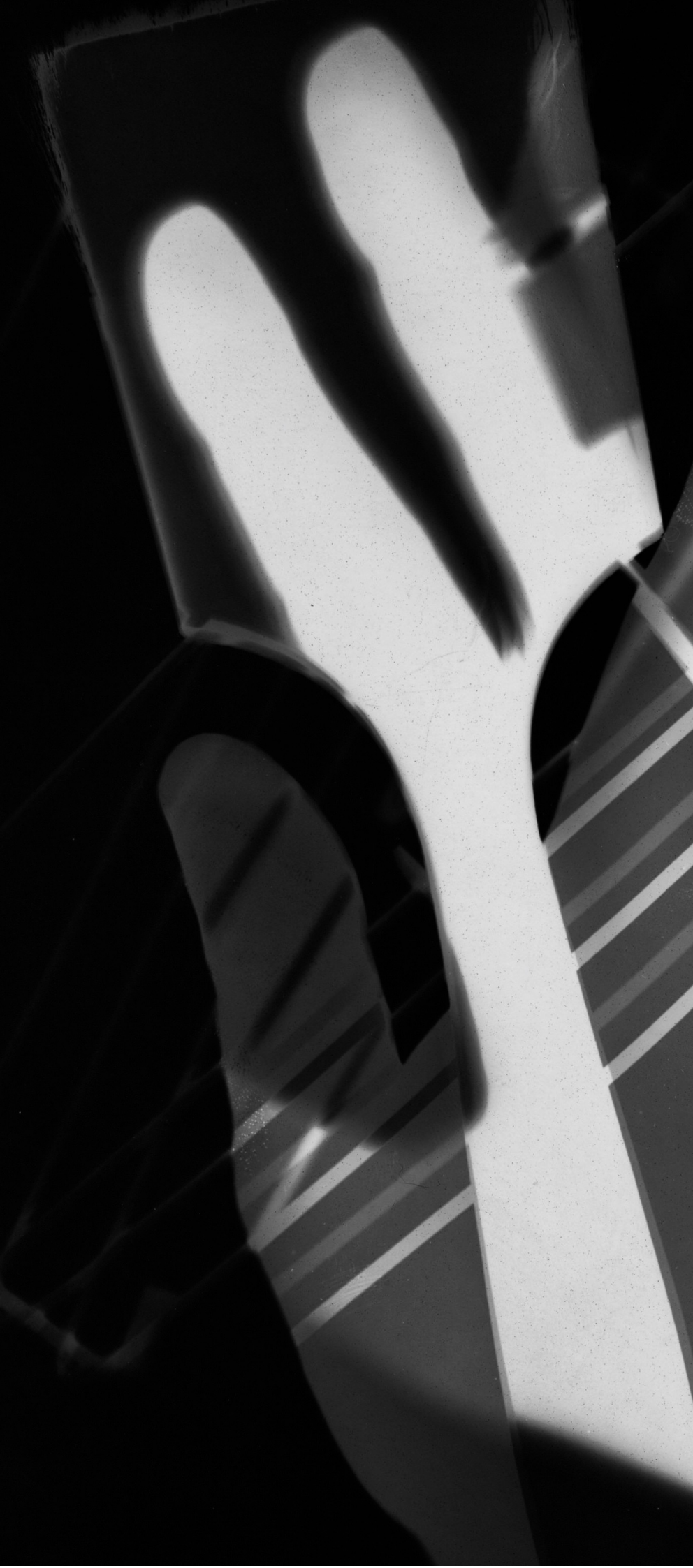
**Prof. J. U. Lensing** (\*1960) studied composition at the Folkwang University of the Arts in Essen from 1981–1987. During this time he founded the series of concerts "Neue Töne" and the ensemble "KUNST-STOFF". First music theatre composition "Ich will zu Dir – Ach komm doch" for two dancers. In 1986 he won the "Hochschulpreis" at the Folkwang University of the Arts. 1987: exams in composition. From 1987–1989 he studied (post-graduate) "New Music-Theatre" with Mauricio Kagel at the University of Music and Dance in Cologne. In 1987 he founded the THEATER DER KLÄNGE in Düsseldorf. Since 1987 he has continued to work as a director, choreographer and composer for theatre music for until now 27 productions of this theatre; several compositions of incidental music for theatres and movies. Since 1990: film compositions and sound design for nearly all the films of German film director Lutz Dammbeck. 1992: guest lecturer in drama direction at the Bauhaus Dessau. Since 1996: Professor for "Sound Design" at the Dortmund University of Applied Sciences and Arts. [www.theater-der-klaenge.de](http://www.theater-der-klaenge.de)

## Notes

1. Walter Gropius in his speech "Art and Technology – A New Unity".
2. Facsimile reprint of the edition from 1925 (Verlag Florian Kupferberg, 1965).
3. Württembergischer Kunstverein, 05 May – 28 July 1968.
4. As recalled by the author, 1987.
5. Jacqueline Fischer is founding member of the THEATER DER KLÄNGE. She worked from 1987 to 2003 as a dancer and actress in numerous productions, and works as a choreographer since 2003. In addition to other Theater der Klänge pieces and her own works, she has choreographed "TRIAS – The Triadic Ballet", "The Lacquer Ballet", "HOREographien" "CODA" and "SUITE intermediale".
6. THEATER DER KLÄNGE: „Die mechanische Exzentrik“ (The Mechanical Eccentricity)  
See the video at <https://theaterderklaenge.de/project/die-mechanische-bauhausbuehne/>
7. Jürgen Steger was our first stage designer at the THEATER DER KLÄNGE in the years 1987 to 1993 and created the sets for "Die mechanische Bauhausbühne", "Die barocke Maskenbühne", "Die Küche", "November 1918\*1989" and "Figur und Klang im Raum". See the video at <https://theaterderklaenge.de/project/die-mechanische-bauhausbuehne/>
8. THEATER DER KLÄNGE: „Die mechanische Exzentrik“ (The Mechanical Eccentricity)  
See the video at <https://theaterderklaenge.de/project/die-mechanische-bauhausbuehne/>
9. Malou Airaudou was a dancer for many years in the core ensemble of the Tanztheater Wuppertal – Pina Bausch. In 1987 she also temporarily worked as a dance university lecturer for the dance department at the Folkwang University of the Arts in Essen, where she later became professor and then head of the dance department. The solo choreography on behalf of the THEATER DER KLÄNGE was her premiere attempt as a choreographer after her long career as a dancer.
10. Oskar Schlemmer, *Briefe und Tagebücher* (München: Verlag Langen/Müller 1958).
11. From Thomas Betzwieser, "Zwischen Skizze und Derivat. Annäherung an Hindemiths Musik zu Oskar Schlemmers Triadischem Ballett (1926)", in *Hindemith-Jahrbuch* 37, 2009, pp. 48–82, here p. 50.
12. Oskar Schlemmer, *Briefe und Tagebücher* (München: Verlag Langen/Müller 1958).



"The Lacquer Ballet" by Oskar Schlemmer. Dancer: Cheng Cheng Hu.  
Photo by Thomas von der Heiden. THEATER DER KLÄNGE's Production, Düsseldorf, 2019.





# 'The Better Form'

## Josef Albers's Idealistic Concept of Art Reveals its Socio-Cultural Function

Martina Sauer

### Abstract

With the aim of teaching and practicing art for the good or moreover the better, Josef Albers proves to be an idealist. At the same time, he confirms with this conviction that art can also arouse the opposite. This conviction is already evident in the grammatical form of the term, which proves that art is functional or a technique for socio-cultural applications, whether good or bad. In the presentation of the political and philosophical background of this idea as well as in the analysis of Josef Albers's 'artistic research' on the artistic means as cultural techniques, this assumption is to be proved by the essay.

### Political backgrounds to the 'better form' as opposed to 'the worse form'

It was Max Bill who, in the 1950s, invented the well-known term 'The Good Form' at the Bauhaus successor institution, the Ulm School of Design in Germany. From 1969 to 1992, the official design award of the Federal Republic of Germany was listed under this name. With this idea, Bill joined originally Josef Albers, whom he had already invited before the completion of the new building for first preparatory design courses in 1953/54 and again in 1955. For Bill, however, not only the idealistic ideals of Albers were important, but his affiliation with the Bauhaus, where from 1923 until its closing in 1933 he was the teacher of the preparatory course, the so-called *Vorkurs*. Also, Albers introduced the Bauhaus concept later from 1933 to 1949 as Artistic Director of the famous Reform College at Black Mountain, and finally from 1950 (until 1961) with the appointment as the founding director of the Department of Design also at Yale University in the USA. All this made Albers the ideal candidate for reform design education in Germany.



Figure 1. Inge Aicher-Scholl, Josef Albers and Otl Aicher on the terrace of the Ulm School of Design in summer of 1955.  
© René Spitz/Foto Hans G. Conrad.

The importance for Albers himself to focus on the 'better form' lied in his belief as well as in that of Bill's and the other two founders of the Design School Inge-Aicher-Scholl and Otl Aicher to pass on this idea to design students, so that they later take on a valuable and responsible job in society (fig. 1). Already shortly after his emigration to the USA in 1933 Albers expressed this conviction. It formed the conceptual basis about teaching at Black Mountain Reform College, to which he and his wife Anni Albers were called. That is why he wrote in the second edition of the university's own journal, the Bulletin of 1934:

to understand the meaning of form is the indispensable preliminary condition for culture. Culture is the ability to select or to distinguish the better, that is [...] the more meaningful form, the better appearance, the better behavior. Therefore, culture is a concern with quality.<sup>1</sup>

It is obvious that this basic consideration for 'the better form' was coming up after the tyranny of the National Socialists in Germany. It came into focus because the regime did not only drive away from the Bauhaus from Weimar (1919-1925) and Dessau (1925-1932) but stormed it at its last station in Berlin in 1933 with Police and SA-troops, and thus closed it forever; just as Josef and Anni Albers personally experienced it. Against this background, the concept of founding a sort of New Bauhaus at Ulm was driven by the idea to contribute to a new democratic education that had been massively repressed by the National Socialist regime. However, another personal reason related to the previous one was important especially for Inge Aicher-Scholl, but not only for her. It concerned the fate of their siblings Hans and Sophie Scholl. As members of the resistance movement *Weißer Rose* (White Rose), the two students were executed in 1943 for the dropping of leaflets at the University in Munich.

Exemplarily, this gruesome event expresses a fate that continues to move Germany and is discussed in class at schools until today. Insofar, it was not only the suppression of the Bauhaus but as well the persecution of dissenters be it students or artists in the sense of a modern iconoclasm<sup>2</sup> as 'entartet' or degenerate, which elicited the will of doing something constructive to change the situation after World War II in Germany. This change of situation seemed all the more necessary because these actions of the National Socialist regime make clear that she was well aware of the influence not only of responsible thinking and acting personalities but also of the arts on life. Her own style of propaganda speaks of it. This far-reaching assumption can be underlined by Adolf Hitler's own artistic experience, who was intensively concerned with painting from 1903 to 1914 and always convinced of his faculties as an artist.<sup>3</sup> His sense for (ab)using artistic strategies for propaganda purposes speaks in favor of their influence on life. Seeing this, the historian Saul Friedländer said, that we have to accept aesthetic categories as "certain basic elements of the aesthetic-emotional temptation of the Hitler regime."<sup>4</sup>

## Philosophical backgrounds to 'the better form' opposed to the 'worse form'

Against this political background, it becomes apparent, that with the emphasis on 'the better form' Albers set itself apart from 'the worse form' of National Socialism. Thus, behind the idea of design as 'the better form' were accordingly idealistic goals, which stand in one line with a philosophy that is important for European Humanities that started in Antiquity by Plato and is followed by the philosopher of the Enlightenment Immanuel Kant. This tradition is convinced of the true, the good and the beautiful as necessary guiding ideas of society.<sup>5</sup> Thus, Kant warned against abusing the arts as "machines of persuasion" ("*Maschinen der Überredung*").<sup>6</sup> With this concern, he stands in one line with Plato, who, like Kant, advocated that the arts should not be tied to the needs and purposes of man, but to the truth and the good, which ultimately can only be attributed to the divine. As a "true rhetorical speech" and as a "symbol of the moral good" ("*Symbol des Sittlich-Guten*") the arts were eventually rehabilitated by both, Plato, as Ernesto Grassi showed it, and Kant.<sup>7</sup> Ultimately in line with this concept, Albers finally said in 1958: "Concluding: I dare to forecast. It will be seen again that beauty is more than outside surface make-up – that beauty is virtue."<sup>8</sup>

It is noteworthy that the approaches of these philosophers already show that there is a long tradition that knows very well that the arts are functional and therefore techniques. This knowledge is astonishing because in Europe today there is a firm conviction that the arts are good at the core and thus deeply connected to the beautiful. According to this approach, which is based on aesthetic feelings, they cannot influence life, as the philosopher, Sabine Döring has shown.<sup>9</sup> Contrary to this, both the mentioned philosophical tradition and Albers deny this. Instead, they assume that the arts affect society. The starting point for this is that they evaluated the excitement of aesthetic feelings differently. Plato spoke of the possibility of art to arouse a "musically enthusiastic" ("*musischen enthousiasmos*") for something. That is why he rejected her. So, he assumed that the arts unconsciously could elicit feelings for something. But this possibility should not be used by humans but reserved for the divine.<sup>10</sup> Kant as well said, it is the ability of art to raise an agreeable "aesthetic feeling" instead of a "reflective aesthetic

judgment" ("*ästhetisch reflektiertes Urteil*"), which is critical. That is the reason why it can be abused for evil instead of good.<sup>11</sup> When Albers spoke of 'the better form', he saw the same possibilities. That is because talking about 'the better form' only makes sense if there is a 'worse form'. Against this background, however, Albers did not focus on the aesthetic feelings but their artistic premises. That is the artistic order of form and color. In his opinion, it is ultimately the composition which is responsible for arousing aesthetic feelings, be it for the good or the bad. The design of forms according to the theme is a technique and can thus be used for both higher ideas and fascist ideology. That ultimately means that form is functional. Albers, therefore, focused on the analysis of artistic means and their way of influencing people. That explains very well, why it was so important for him to search for 'the better form'. For the effects of the artistic means challenge the viewer in a particular way, as Stephan Schmidt-Wulfen emphasized after Saul Friedländer:

... because there is a conflict between rational knowledge and visual experience that can only be solved in two ways. Either through the sense of responsibility of each individual who has to answer for his seduction. Or by the cancellation of the moral offer that these images make him, in which the painter and his art are condemned. <sup>12</sup>

Of course, Albers also acknowledged these conclusions. However, he saw his task not in the enlightenment of the beholder, but in teaching the designer. In the light of what Friedländer already saw, he was more concerned with providing design students with the basics of a 'better form' so that they can take on valuable and responsible work in society. That was due to his belief that design methods are techniques. They are suitable for socio-cultural applications. Ultimately, it depends on what the designers use it for, good or bad. The purposes for which the artistic techniques are intended ultimately depend on society, or more precisely on the individual designer, who should know that. Thus, Albers says in 1935: "To say it essentially: Everything has form, and every form has meaning. The ability to select this quality is culture."<sup>13</sup>

Artistic Research: Experimenting with material,  
form and color as functional prerequisites of images  
to the realization of 'the better form'

It is consistent, that Albers's idea of 'the better form' determined not only his thinking and teaching but his artistic work too. Thus, the over 2000 variations of the Homages to the Square since 1950 can be understood as offers, to connect us with their perfect, harmoniously coordinated color spaces and to dissolve ourselves in them. In doing so every time our feelings are addressed in different but always harmonic ways. That is because colors and forms affect us. Due to Albers's ideal, it is evident, and they should affect us for the better (fig. 2-3).

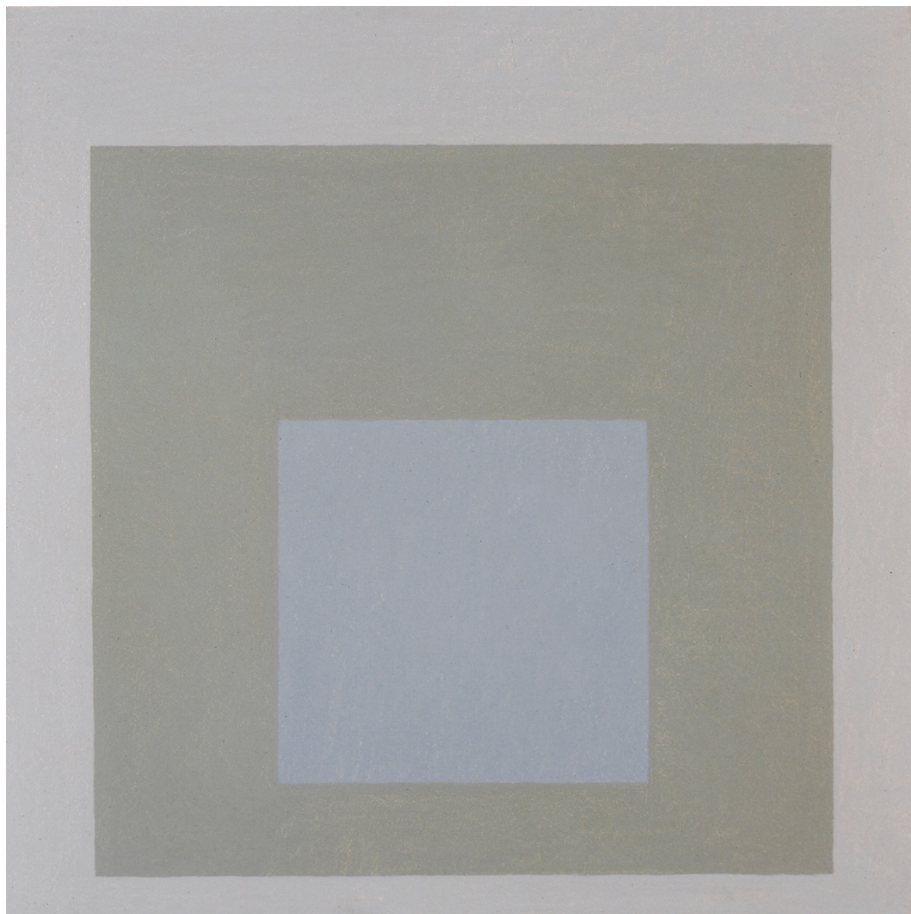


Figure 2. Josef Albers, Homage to the Square, White Nimbus, 1964. Oil on masonite, 122 x 122 cm.  
Josef Albers Museum Quadrat Bottrop © Anni & Josef Albers Foundation

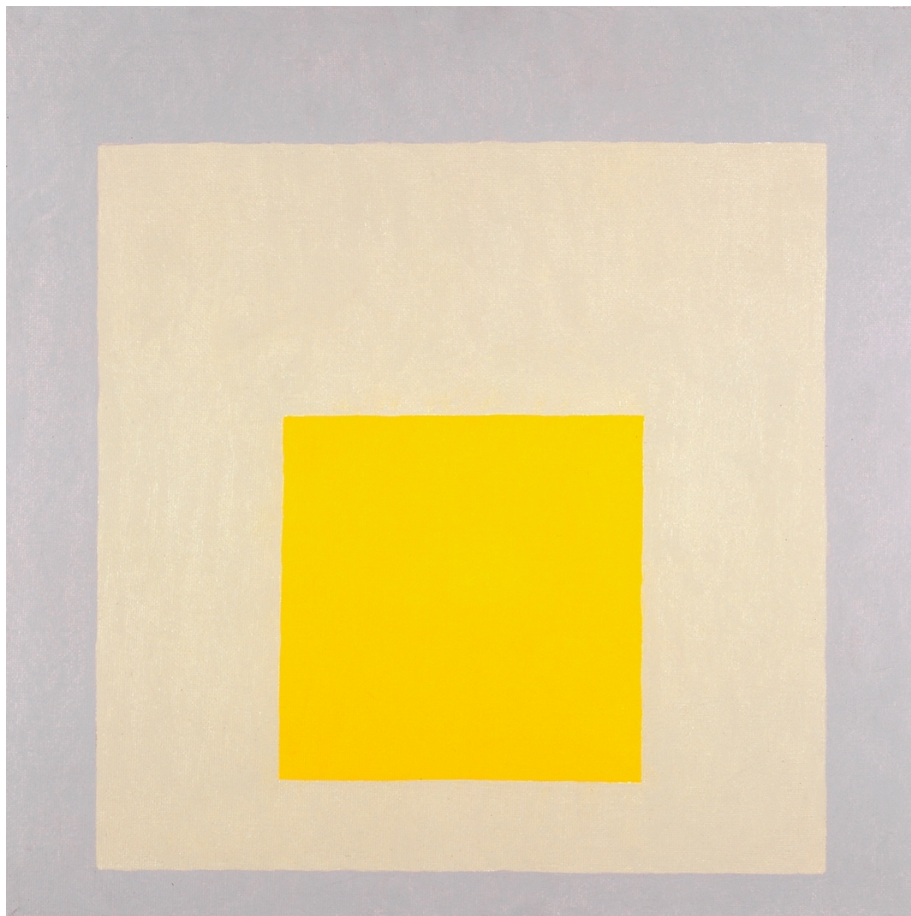


Figure 3. Josef Albers, Homage to the Square, Reticence, 1965. Oil on masonite, 80,7 x 80,7 cm.  
Josef Albers Museum Quadrat Bottrop © Anni & Josef Albers Foundation.

Looking back, Albers began experimenting with these effects of colors and forms with his own work from 1932, at his last year at Bauhaus in Berlin. It had been many so-called Treble Clef with which he experimented at first. When we look at them, each one has the same shape, but remarkably the form of the treble clef changes respectively with the chosen colors. These changes in color effect that sometimes the form seems to belong to the ground whereas in others it becomes a different and thus new figure (fig. 4-5).



Figure 4. Josef Albers, Treble Clef "G7", 1935. Gouache on paper, 36,5 x 20,5 cm.  
Josef Albers Museum Quadrat Bottrop © Anni & Josef Albers Foundation





Figure 5. Josef Albers, Treble Clef "G4", 1935. Gouache on paper, 36,5 x 20,5 cm.  
Josef Albers Museum Quadrat Bottrop © Josef & Anni Albers Foundation.

Therefore, an old assumption by Albers's colleague at Bauhaus Wassily Kandinsky, with whom Albers associated a lifelong friendship, seems to be correct: Through the composition of color and form, "the inner qualities" ("*die inneren Eigenschaften*") of the artistic means come to sound in the beholder as a lively interplay, that the artist can trigger:

The color is the key. The eye is the hammer. The soul is the piano with many strings. The artist is the hand that purposefully vibrates the human soul with this or that key. So, it is clear that the color harmony must rest only on the appropriate touch of the human soul. This basis should be called the principle of inner necessity.<sup>14</sup>

This understanding of art by Kandinsky and moreover of the Bauhaus was described by the former already in 1911 in *About the Spiritual in Art*. His second book about linear principles *Point and Line to Plane* appeared in 1926 at the Bauhaus in Dessau. This concept about the constructing and the effects of artistic means of color and form became fundamental for Albers. Far-reaching for his own approach and art theoretical research he brought this concept together with its material prerequisites. Both – the material presuppositions of material, color and form and their arousing effects that base on artistic constructing methods – were, therefore, the subject of his courses.<sup>15</sup>

In the Bauhaus period from 1923 until 1932, the courses were still limited to the investigation of the material conditions. Later, in the Black Mountain College from 1933 to 1949 and at Yale University from 1950 to 1961 he integrated the study of the color conditions. Also, this expanded concept became an integral part of his writings. In 1934, he already presented the university community his own concept of art and instruction in his first essay *Concerning Art Instruction* in the *Bulletin of the Black Mountain College*. So, that was long before his well-known book about *Interaction of Color* appeared in 1963, which was translated in numerous languages. In this early essay, the essential points of his concept were already becoming evident. He already distinguished in this essay between 'material' and 'matière', which he later summarized in an easier understandable pair of terms in 'factual fact' and 'actual fact' of artistic means. So, he wrote:

*Matière* studies are concerned with the appearance, the surface (epidermis) of material. Here we distinguish structure, facture, texture. We classify the appearances according to optical and tactile perception. We represent them by drawing and other means. In a combination of exercises, we examine the relationship of different surface qualities. Just as the color reacts to and influences color in contrast or affinity so one 'matière' influences another. Material studies are concerned with the capacity of materials. We examine firmness, looseness, elasticity; extensibility, and compressibility; folding and bending in short technical properties. These studies in connection with the mathematical inherence of form result in construction exercises. With these we try to develop an understanding and feeling for space, volume, dimension; for balance, static and dynamic; for positive and active, for negative and passive forms. We stress the economy of form, that is the ratio of effort to effect.<sup>16</sup>

Only in 1946/47, in his second Sabbath year, when he traveled with his wife Anni through the southwestern territories of the USA and Mexico did he find time and leisure to discuss with his own work these questions concerning the relationship of the 'factual fact' and the 'actual fact.' The simple mud huts of the Mexicans, the so-called adobes rekindled his interest in solving this problem. His observation that the always same rectangle geometry of the buildings seems to change when painted in different colors caught his eyes at first. There, the same effects he early recognized in Berlin become obvious.

The factual situation is another than the appearance of it. Driven by the idea to compare the results, he started to structure his working processes very clearly. In contrast to his first attempts with the Treble Clef, this time he started more systematically than before with the so-called Variants or Adobes (fig. 6-7). There is only one suitable expression for the systematic way working he has introduced, which is currently being discussed in art and design colleges: Albers practiced artistic research.

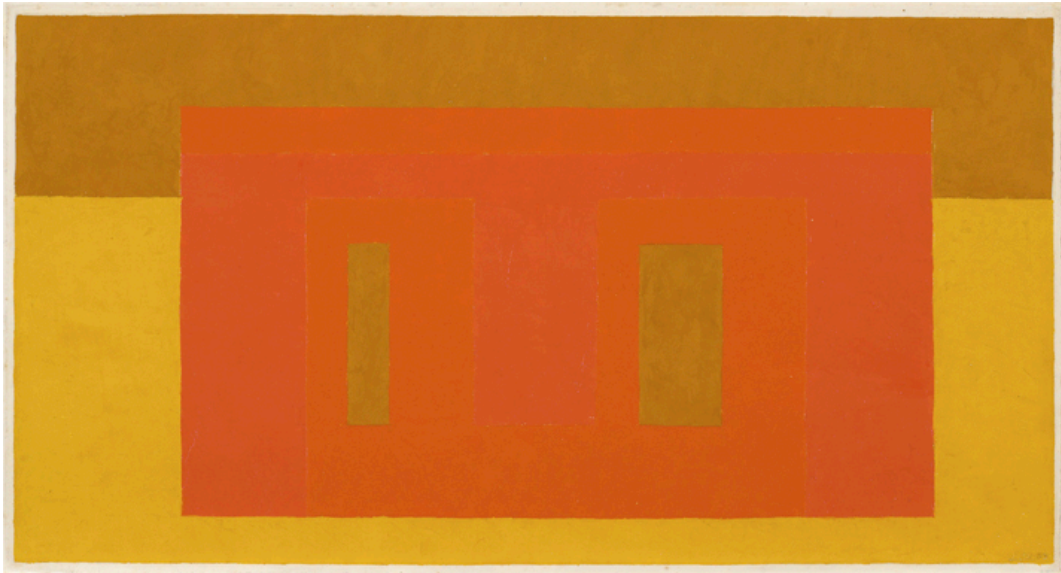


Figure 6. Josef Albers, Variant/Adobe, Southern Climate, 1948-53. Oil on masonite, 31,1 x 57,2 cm.  
Josef Albers Museum Quadrat Bottrop © Anni & Josef Albers Foundation

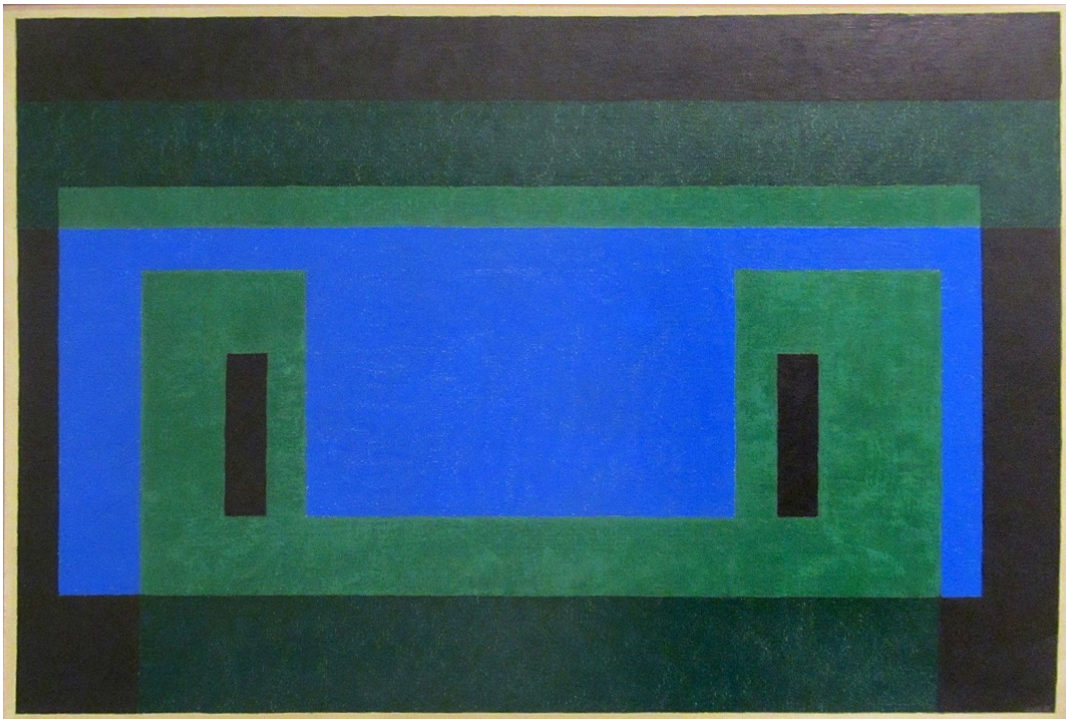


Figure 7. Josef Albers, Blue Front, 1948.  
Photo by Rob Corder. February 21, 2019. Licensed under CC BY-NC 2.0.

Given this interest, he began to plan his painting boards in advance on graph papers. He calculated the dimensions of the buildings as rectangle shapes with two windows or entrances. Then he transferred the plan proportionately on masonite boards. He then pressed the colors directly from the tube onto the board but chose different ones for each variant. Therefore, each of the so-called Variants or Adobe series is based on the same area ratio, but with different colors. The results made it clear for him: each variant affects us differently.

The 'factual fact' of systematic construction does not match the 'actual fact' of the color effect. Each image has the same surface system but is still different. That is due to the color rules which do not have to be confused with the color system of Newton. They do not depend on physical, but anthropological conditions and thus on the psychological effects of seeing. Albers systematically discussed its effects with his work.<sup>17</sup> As an example, the system of complementary or simultaneous color contrasts shall be introduced. Depending on the intensity and the brightness of the red color, it creates its complement of green in the eye of the beholder and vice versa. The same effect can be observed in both blue and orange as well as in yellow and purple. Depending on this rule, for example, a neon red creates a bright neon green. Based on the material prerequisites of the chosen form and color, their effects affect the viewer. Furthermore, it influences the picture's theme; the process of perception gives it a special meaning.

A few years later, starting in 1950, when he went from Black Mountain College to Yale University, he had some time to work independently. He used it to start a new series; this is the well-known group of Homages to the Square, which until his death in 1976 was most important for him. It can be seen as the culmination of this experimental approach to culturally relevant aspects of his work. So, he became a famous artist at the age of 62. This series has been exhibited over six years in both North and South America as well as Europe including Germany. In New York's MoMA in 1971, he was the first living artist to have a solo exhibition. At this time, he was present in print and television media and was invited as a visiting professor to numerous universities. In total, he received 14 honorary doctorates. Behind this background, Ulrike Growe of the Josef Albers Museum in his birthplace in Bottrop in West Germany once concluded in an interview, that nobody at that time could avoid Albers when he was interested in color.<sup>18</sup> As can be seen in one of these Homages to the Square, called Festive of 1951, a blue inner square is surrounded by a lighter blue and finally an orange square (fig. 8). Compared to the blue square, the brighter blue frame calms the expression of the first through the complementary contrast of the orange. Their powers seem to be balanced in that they all radiate bright and clear. Also, this is mediated by the relatively small format of 52 to 52 centimeter. However, in a larger format, the complementary color effects would almost overwhelm us because of their extensive presence.

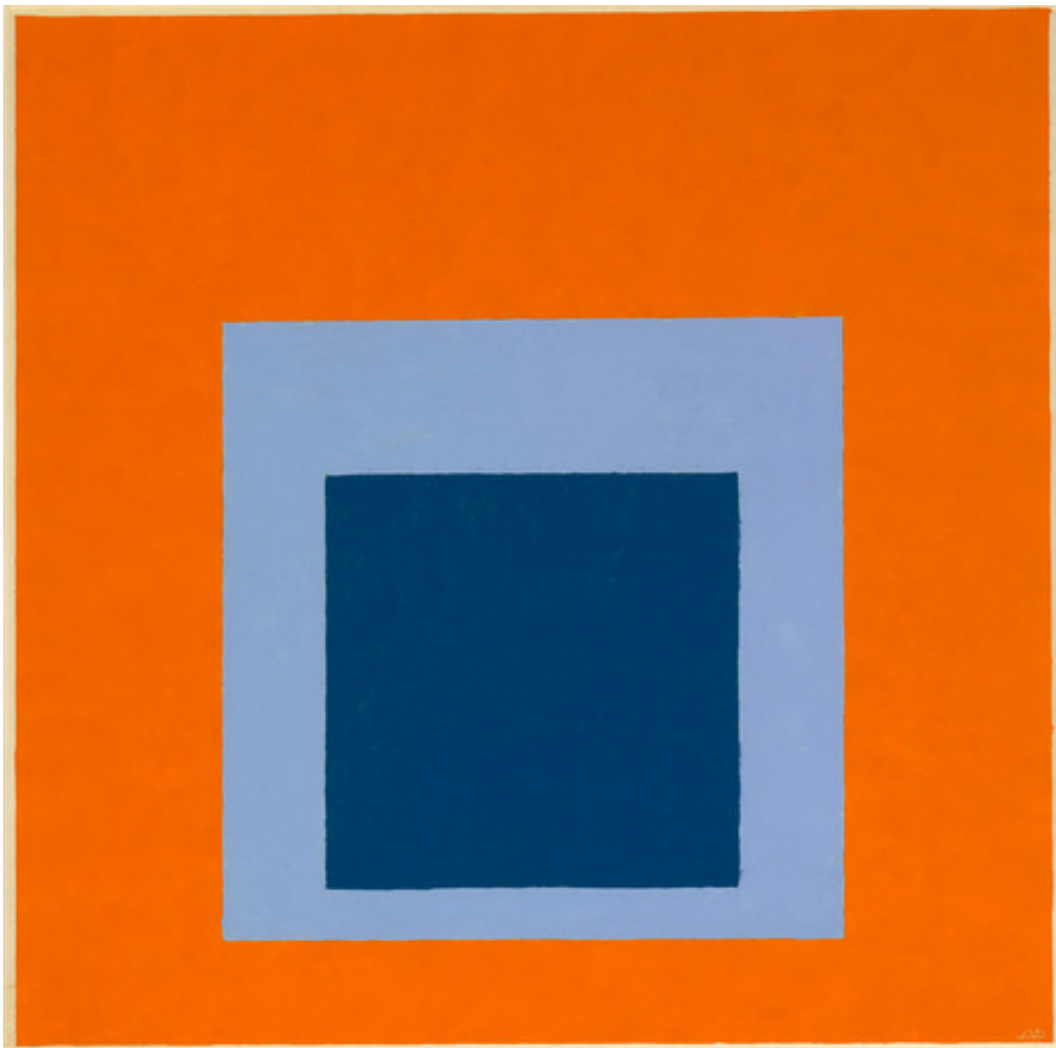


Figure 8. Josef Albers. Homage to the Square, Festive, 1951.

Oil on masonite, 52 x 52 cm, framed 77,4 x 72,4 cm.

Yale University Art Gallery © Josef & Anni Albers Foundation.

So, it is the proportional, mathematical balance between forms and colors in line with the plate format which balances our impressions and feelings. This balance is also mirrored by the fixed proportions so that the distance of the inner square to the outer edge is three times and laterally twice compared to the lower edge. When you try to describe the effects of the harmonic forms on us, "festive" seems to be a very well-chosen title. The effect of this work is impressive. It changes our sense of our being-in-the-world. Therefore, it can have a lasting impact on us. Eva Díaz summarized this as follows:

This type of experimentation –Albers’s ethics of perception– served as an important impetus to perceptual and possibly cognitive change; indeed, he believed it “can lead to illusions, to new relationships, to different measurements, to other systems.” His is perhaps the most concise description of the importance of explorations of form in transforming understandings of the word.<sup>19</sup>

## Final Words

In summary, it is remarkable that Josef Albers was the one – perhaps the first – who in 1932, at the age of 44, tried to use artistic research to prove that the arts are techniques and thus functional. The starting point of this idea, which is the subject of this essay, is his understanding of ‘the better form’. It should become obvious that it depends on socio-political decisions whether the artistic means are used for the evil or the good, be it for fascist purposes or a ‘better culture’. Against the background of teaching at the Bauhaus and his own experiences with fascism it is evident for Albers to focus only on ‘the better form’. In this context, however, it is astonishing that the concept of ‘the better form’ encounters resistance from European art theory in contrast to the American one. The French art-historian Isabelle Decobecq saw the reasons for this in Europe in her “[...] die-hard fantasy of universalism, that of the antique paideia, which still pervades a large part of our teaching institutions [...].”<sup>20</sup> That means if Albers’s assumption is correct and the artistic means work in a way so that designers can use them for the bad or the good, then Europeans must abandon the desirable but unrealistic universal ideal of art. Therefore, they have to leave the idealistic concept of art, which is according to them not functional, but fundamentally only beautiful and thus good.



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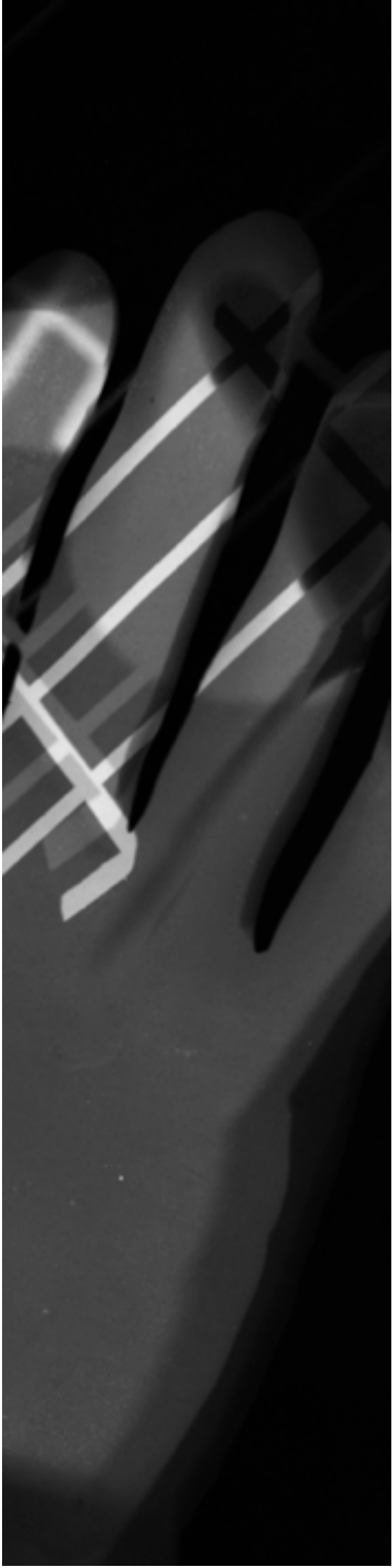
## Notes

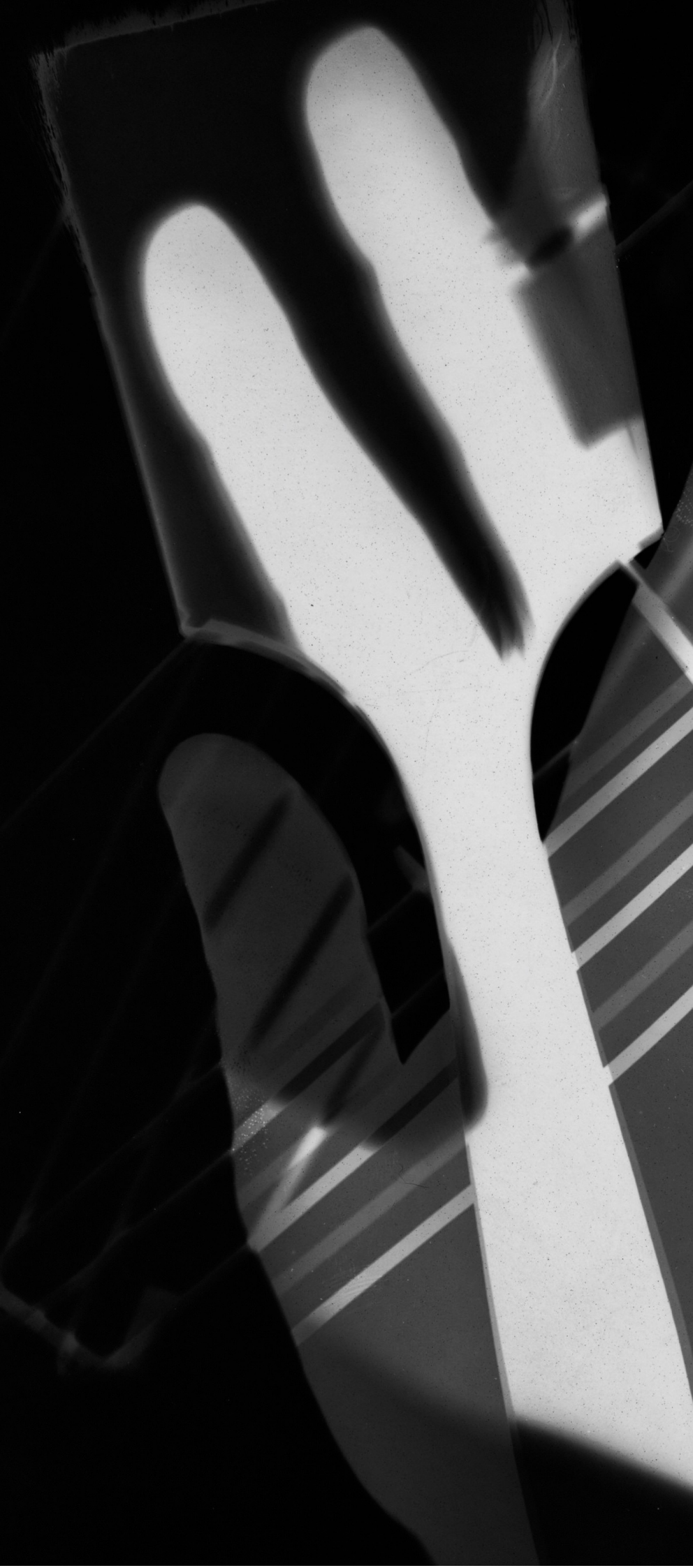
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1. Cf. Albers, concerning *Art Instruction*, 1, see as well: Albers, *Art as Experience*.
  2. On the influence of the arts or "iconic form processes" triggering a picture storm by late medieval sculptures on the eve of the Reformation: cf. Bredekamp, *Die Prägnanz der Form*, 131-132. See as well concerning this idea: Belting, *Bild-Anthropologie*, 12-13.
  3. Cf. Schwarz, *Geniewahn*.
  4. Cf. Friedländer, *Kitsch und Tod*, 7-17, 14; moreover cf. Sauer, *Faszination – Schrecken*, 107-119.
  5. Cf. Sauer, *Faszination – Schrecken*, 46-81, in detail to Plato and Kant, 202-211, 226-233 and 237-240.
  6. Cf. Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, § 53, 268, see as well 266-273 and § 59, 308-310.
  7. Concerning Plato: cf. Grassi, *Macht des Bildes*, 147-168, 166.
  8. Cf. Albers, *Dimensions of Design*.
  9. Cf. for that: Döring, *Ästhetischer Wert und emotionale Erfahrung*, 53-73.
  10. Grassi, *Macht des Bildes*, 147
  11. Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, 310-313.
  12. Cf. Schmidt-Wulffen, 42-50, see 46-47 (translation M.S.), cf. as well: Friedländer, *Kitsch und Tod*, 7-17.
  13. Albers, *Art as Experience*.
  14. Kandinsky, *Über das Geistige in der Kunst*, 64 (italics in the original, translation M.S).
  15. Cf. Horowitz, *Albers as a Teacher*, 72-252.
  16. Albers, concerning *Art Construction*. Cf. for 'factual fact' and 'actual fact' Albers's analysis in *Interaction of Color*, 112-120, see 117-118.
  17. Cf., in addition, his theoretical analysis, which is also based on the discussion with students in Albers, *Interaction of Color*.
  18. Cf. Sauer, *Josef Albers*, 9.
  19. Cf. Díaz, *The Ethics of Perception*, 260-285, see 282.
  20. Cf. Decobecq, *I don't know*, 251, and see as well concerning Albers, Sauer, *Josef Albers*, 9-13 and 115-117.

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## Politics and the Staatliches Bauhaus Function versus the Curve of the Time

Waldenyr Caldas

### Abstract

This essay intends to show the political situation of Germany during the period of Bauhaus's existence. First, we would like to contextualize the political-ideological situation that outlined society in Germany and the world. In this way, we describe the essential characteristics of the Bauhaus projects and the meaning of the environment of that time in Germany and, in other words, in other countries. Beyond the socio-political aspects during Bauhaus's existence, we address the international repercussion of its representations, analyzing the architecture of Walter Gropius, Oscar Niemeyer, and Le Corbusier. These three architects are references to what we can understand – the Bauhaus legacy. Even if each of them has a style and different works, we consider in our essay the similarities that justify a relationship between the three. So, for the three to have their distinct and innovative achievements, one thing is sure – in the differences and similarities, we can identify the initial influence of the Bauhaus. In general, the direct relationship with the technical details of the architectural project is not addressed, but rather the aesthetic and cultural ones.



Figure 1. Weimar, Bauhaus – Kunstgewerbeschule  
Van-de-Velde Bau with Wartburg 353, DDR May 1990<sup>1</sup>  
ORWO UP15 Slide film. By Sludge Gulper. CC BY-SA CC BY-SA 2.0

## Troubled Times

The history of the “Staatliches Bauhaus,”<sup>2</sup> the Bauhaus school, is so vibrant that it becomes aware of everything that happened with it, whether on the professional plane, with the artistic creation of its members, the social legacy left by it, or even in its political relations with the German state. After reflecting on what we should write, we chose to deal with its political trajectory as we see fit, not less rich than the other two options. We started this work noting that the Bauhaus school was born in a historical and political moment very turbulent (1919) and, more than that, just one year after the end of World War I in 1918.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps it was the best time for its creation – that is what we see here. Germany and other European countries were, at that point in history, reorganizing their respective debt-stricken economies after the deaths of thousands of soldiers and civilians who had nothing to do with the foolishness of the governors. But the deplorable historical fact is that they found motives for accomplishing that tragedy.

Some countries were devastated by the war, in the case of Germany, but others, a little less. As if this misfortune were not enough, the tragic and sinister ideology of Nazism arose in 1920, officially founded and represented by the National Socialist Party of German Workers (*Deutsche Nationalsozialistische Arbeiterpartei*). For the Bauhaus school, the political and economic crisis was terrible. For the Nazis, it was a great chance to present themselves to the German people as redeemers of the homeland. This political party took the opportunity from the troubles of the First War and gained great notoriety, not only with German society but also in the political framework of the German state. It is no coincidence that the Bauhaus school closed its doors and ended its professional activities in 1933, just as Adolf Hitler took the country's top position of power. He did not like the ideological principles that guided Bauhaus. Whenever he could, he showed apparent dislike for the avant-garde character of its projects. Yes, the weapons of this school were not guns, rifles, machine guns, or bayonets. They were other instruments: pens and ink, squares and rulers, compasses, paintbrushes, abundant creativity, ideas, and the talent of its members. For these reasons, the Bauhaus school had minimal chances of survival.

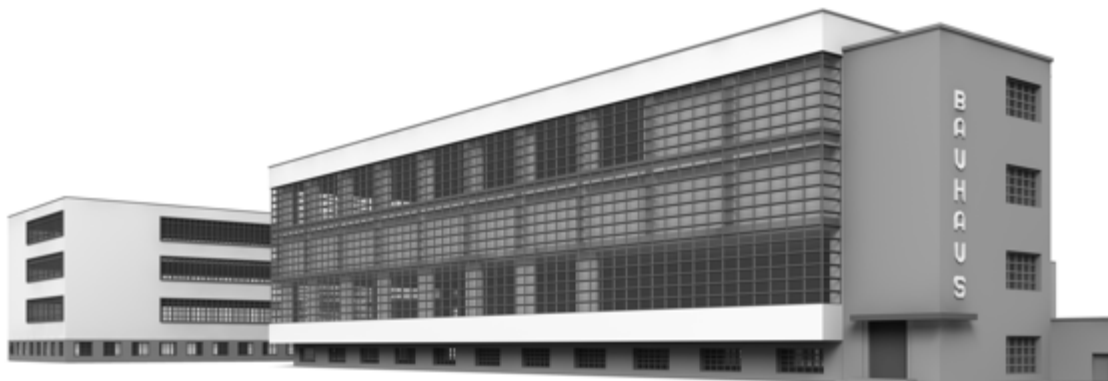


Figure 2. Bauhaus Dessau. Designed by Walter Gropius.  
Photo: Design 3D by Peggy und Marco Lachmann-Anke.



Figure 3. Bauhaus Dessau. Designed by Walter Gropius.  
Photo by Christiane Wagner

From 1919 to 1933, the lifetime of the Weimar Republic, the German state lived through intense and constant conflicts in the face of the consequences of the First World War. The economy since that time, which had always been a source of pride for the German people, was torn by war and political events and did not resist; it collapsed, and unemployment in Germany reached 44% of the population. It was a tragedy. It should be noted that Germany was only one of the strong-economy countries degrading at the time. It was a worldwide phenomenon – it could not be otherwise – which became known as the “1929 Crisis” or the “Great Depression.”<sup>4</sup> Economic liberalism to serve the interests of rich countries, overproduction, and financial speculation led international capitalism in the 1920s to a severe economic recession — the largest ever on the world stage.<sup>5</sup> With the socio-political and economic situation in a state of desolation, one would expect that not only the Bauhaus school, but other segments of German art, culture, and economy would disappear or suffer irreparable losses.





Figure 4. Bauhaus Dessau. Designed by Walter Gropius.  
Photo by Christiane Wagner

As we saw earlier, the aims of Walter Gropius, founder of this school and his colleagues, were not in line with the ideology of the *Deutsche Nationalsozialistische Arbeiterpartei*. Well, the Staatliches Bauhaus, as this school was called, was founded at a historically improper time – just after the First World War. In this sense, of course, everything would make the work of Walter Gropius and his colleagues even more difficult. The socialist ideal of multipliable architecture, at that time, was in danger of collapsing as a project of democratization of constructions accessible to the more modest segments of German society. The Bauhaus was initially subsidized by the Weimar Republic, formed by the "Weimar coalition," which included the Social Democrats, Centre, and Democrats. Meanwhile, the Depression in German was reflected by the dramatic rise of the Communist and, more especially, Nazi vote. One alternative for the Bauhaus was to move to Dessau as early as 1925, with support from the city's politicians, most of whom identified with the center-left political ideology.



Figure 5. The Masters' Houses, Dessau.  
Designed by Walter Gropius in 1925 to house the Bauhaus professors.

However, once again, political-ideological issues would force the Bauhaus leaders to look for another location to settle. Elections to the Reichstag were held (July 31, 1932) and resulted in a Nazi triumph, giving them 230 seats in the Reichstag. On January 30, 1933, the coalition assumed office, and Hitler became the chancellor of Germany. The activities of the Bauhaus in Dessau were closed, and the school tried to reinstall in Berlin. But with the changes from one city to another, nothing resolved. The political persecution against the vanguard ideas from many members of the Bauhaus prevented resolution. In 1933, it was no longer possible for the Bauhaus to continue its activities.



Figure 6. The Masters' Houses, Dessau.  
Designed by Walter Gropius in 1925 to house the Bauhaus professors.

Experts have recognized this German school as the first in the world to create design studies. It is worth noting that the repressive truculence of the Nazi government at that time was not confined to the Bauhaus alone. No one – no one at all, citizens or institutions – could oppose that political regime. Otherwise, they would be killed. These historical facts are recorded, and today, they are already in the public domain. There is no way to question them. The political orientation of the government to its people was to support Nazism. Those who did not do it would be considered an enemy of the state and subject to face trial for treason. There was no alternative. The history of the German people at that time, unfortunately, is full of records of brute force from the Nazi government to its citizens. At this point in the German socio-political context, the Bauhaus would not have had the slightest chance of surviving.

Their gypsy wanderings as if they were nomadic did nothing to advance their school and would not do any good. In a brief time, from 1933, the entire German state would be controlled by the Nazi. Like all institutions interested in rights and justice, the Bauhaus school wanted the citizen as an integral element of the State, his/her full well-being in society, and his/her important civil rights. But that was not what was seen. A feeling of insecurity, of uneasiness, and an extremely unpleasant presence of not knowing what could happen the next day prevailed.

The presence of artists, architects, and students from Russia in a way further aggravated the repression of the Bauhaus. The crude, misleading, and untruthful German government understood that the presence of these Russian citizens meant a political-ideological option for communism by Walter Gropius and his colleagues. Now, time has shown that there was no political ideology behind what that school was doing. It was in itself a socialist proposal based precisely on the concept of social housing in the 1920s, and with the just purpose of social justice. The German writer Wilhelm Frick, appointed by Adolf Hitler to occupy the Ministry of Interior portfolio, was one of the most radical opponents to the modernist tendencies developed by the Bauhaus artists. He never gave up working behind the scenes of Nazi politics to end the its project.



Figure 7. Bauhaus Architecture. Cologne Nowadays. Germany.  
Photo Klaus Hausmann.

## Bauhaus–International Style

However, all the political-ideological actions that led to the closing of this school in 1933 failed to prevent the export of the ideas of its professionals. Western Europe, the United States, Mexico, Brazil, and Israel – to name a few – were influenced by these German professionals, especially in architecture, but not only. In Israel, for example, in the city of Tel Aviv, the most significant number of buildings that have received the “Bauhaus–International Style” seal is concentrated. In 2003, UNESCO declared the “White City,” a region of Tel Aviv, a world heritage site. It is in this part of the city that the vast majority of the buildings constructed in the “Bauhaus–International Style” are located.



Figure 8. White City Tel Aviv. Photo Uwe Weihe. January 31, 2016. Licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0.

In Brazil, Oscar Niemeyer is considered the architect closest to his colleagues at the Bauhaus. Proximity does seem to be an adequate word to register the professional relationships of the Brazilian architect Niemeyer with Bauhaus. However, we have not adequately identified it. Also, the differences in concepts between both architects Oscar Niemeyer and Walter Gropius, and by extension to the Bauhaus ideal, came when they met at congresses or any event of architects to talk about their profession. In these meetings, they were not always friendly with each other and held different ideals regarding the architecture's aim. Viviane Vilela (2018), in her essay for the Magazin Humboldt entitled *Oscar Niemeyer and the Bauhaus - more similarities than disagreements, (Oscar Niemeyer und das Bauhaus: mehr Ähnlichkeiten als Unterschiede)* highlights a hard dialog already well known by scholars of this subject between Niemeyer and Walter Gropius, on the occasion of a meeting between them in Rio de Janeiro. The quote was slightly long but very illuminating in understanding the convergences and divergences between both architects and, by extension, between the modernist architecture of Niemeyer and the works of Gropius at the Bauhaus. The author shares the following:

Niemeyer invited Gropius to visit his house Casa das Canoas (House of Canoas) in São Conrado, Rio de Janeiro. This house is considered one of the most significant examples of modern Brazilian architecture; the work was designed by Niemeyer in 1951 to serve as his residence. Its construction in curves adapts to the unevenness of the terrain and makes the vegetation practically penetrate its rooms. However, after the visit, Gropius would have commented with the host, saying 'your house is wonderful, but it is not multiplying.' It was enough to provoke Niemeyer's anger: 'the house was made respecting the forms and the nature of the land, which in principle would prevent it from being multiplied,' he replied.<sup>6</sup>



Figure 9. Niemeyer's House - Casa das Canoas. Photo by René García. CC BY-NC 2.

The author mentioned something interesting, even though it has alleviated the differences between the proposed "multipliable construction" of Walter Gropius and the modernist architecture of Oscar Niemeyer. Indeed, the differences are a bit more pronounced. Some motifs are perceptible, even visually, when we compare these two proposals. In his work, Walter Gropius explores the objectivity of the straight line, allied to the rationality of the geometric forms. All these elements present an aesthetically pleasing work to see, and it meets its initial proposal, namely the "multipliable construction" of cubiform aspect.

For the time when the Bauhaus school existed, it is undeniable that there was a transformative advance, especially about its architectural form. From that moment on, the impression we have is that all previous architecture has aged more rapidly than had already occurred within a normal process of aesthetic transformation of the building. By this time, the concept of multipliable constructions was the starting point of the transformation engendered by Walter Gropius in architecture.

And here it should be noted that teachers and masters of the Bauhaus School had regular contact with the Soviet school Wchutemas. It was founded on the initiative of Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov (1920) and later transformed into a university. They exchanged opinions, information, and knowledge acquired from research. This exchange was undoubtedly of great value to both schools, but it would be short-lived with the rise of Nazism. The goal, as desired by its founder, was preparing artists with the highest qualifications for the industry and builders and managers for professional technical education. The German school even shared its pedagogical origins with this institution. In other words, the Bauhaus received essential contributions from the Russian school Wchutemas, and vice versa.



Figure 10. Bauhaus Architecture. Cologne Nowadays. Germany. Photo Klaus Hausmann.

On the other hand, the work of Oscar Niemeyer has no opposing views, but it was quite different from those designed by Walter Gropius. As noted above, the Bauhaus school worked largely with the pragmatism of geometric and cubic lines, which is quite different from the Brazilian architect's style. In Oscar Niemeyer, as Professor Rodrigo Queiroz stated, "the abstraction is lyrical: the domes of the National Congress, the Cathedral of Brasília, as opposed to the constructive abstraction of the Bauhaus." A structural difference already stands out. Under these conditions, to have at its base vastly different architectural designs and also several goals, understand that we should not compare the work of these two architects, at least as they are presented visually.



Figure 11. National Congress of Brazil, by Oscar Niemeyer, 1958.  
Photo: Eduardo Aigner.

We must always celebrate the legacy they have left us. Their works are examples that architecture can be functional and pragmatic – Gropius – but can also harmonize straight lines with elegant curves – Niemeyer – as if accompanied by the rhythm of musical composition and lightness. Today, the work of both is an essential reference in the history of architecture. As well as Gropius, Oscar Niemeyer, if we think about his work, became an architect from all over the world, not just Brazil. To illustrate, here are some of his works frequently visited and performed at different times in his professional career.





Figure 12. Museum Oscar Niemeyer. Rio de Janeiro. Designed by Oscar Niemeyer.  
Photo 1 by Jessica Fonseca Matos. Photo 2 by Cristina Tamar.

## Final Considerations

Moreover, what is even concrete is that the differences between the Bauhaus School of Walter Gropius, with his conception of "multipliable construction," and the modernist architecture of Oscar Niemeyer. They crossed time, and today, they have mandatory attendance in the history of architecture and university curricula. Gropius's remark when visiting Niemeyer's House of Canoes (Casa das Canoas) and annoying him (his house is wonderful, but it is not multiplying), as much as the hard response of his fellow host, should be credited only to the carelessness of both at that moment. So much so that there were no consequences of this event and over time has become irrelevant.

But even more emphatic was Charles-Edouard Jeanneret-Gris, whose pseudonym was no less than Le Corbusier. He had significant importance and positive influence on the concepts that Oscar Niemeyer and Lucio Costa acquired concerning modern architecture. To even do justice to the Swiss-born Swiss architect, naturalized French, the foundations of the modernist movement in architecture are in his book entitled *Towards a new architecture* (1931).<sup>7</sup> Even before the incident between Walter Gropius and Niemeyer, Le Corbusier had already demonstrated no sympathy for the work of German architects from the Bauhaus school.

For him, the concept of "multiplying construction" was a kind of déjà-vu in architecture, and, as such, it represented nothing, much less novelty. After learning about the episode between Niemeyer and Gropius about Casa das Canoas architecture, he did not restrain himself and decided to express himself with these words: "it is active mediocrity, they do not know anything, they want to create rules. Then everyone has to follow. I am the only one to sculpt the Bauhaus, and they are afraid to say that it is a bullshit." The resonance of Le Corbusier's harsh words among the members of the Bauhaus school was rather discreet – almost null. Probably in respect to the figure of a great architect who was already at that time and, by extension, the magnitude of his work.

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Figure 13. The United Nations Secretariat Building. New York, 1947.  
Designed by Oscar Niemeyer. Photo by Jörg Peter.

## Notes

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1. "The art school building was designed by Henry van de Velde and built 1905-1906. It has just been restored over two years to its original state in the University (since 1996) and has been reopened on 5th Feb 2010. In April 2010 it became the faculty of Gestaltung. In 1919-1925 after Van de Velde left Weimar the Bauhaus (an amalgamation of both Van de Velde's schools) Werkstattgebäude was situated here. In DDR times, it became the Hochschule für Architektur und Bauwesen Weimar - HAB - until 1994."

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Weimar,\\_Bauhaus\\_-\\_Kunstgewerbeschule\\_Van-de-Velde\\_Bau\\_with\\_Wartburg\\_353,\\_DDR\\_May\\_1990\\_ORWO\\_UP15\\_Slide\\_film\\_\(4606651925\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Weimar,_Bauhaus_-_Kunstgewerbeschule_Van-de-Velde_Bau_with_Wartburg_353,_DDR_May_1990_ORWO_UP15_Slide_film_(4606651925).jpg)

2. "The Bauhaus was only active for 14 years: as the "State Bauhaus" (*Staatliches Bauhaus*) in Weimar, as a "school of design" (*Hochschule für Gestaltung*) in Dessau and as a private education institute in Berlin. It evolved out of the arts and crafts movement and art school reforms. Its ideas had an impact well beyond the school itself, its locations and its time." In: The Bauhaus in all its facets (May 3, 2019). <https://www.bauhaus100.com/the-bauhaus/>

3. After Germany was defeated in World War I, the German Empire was replaced by the Weimar Republic—the democratic regime of Germany from 1919 to the assumption of power by Adolf Hitler in 1933. Weimar Republic, the government of Germany from 1919 to 1933, so called because the assembly that adopted its constitution met at Weimar from February 6 to August 11, 1919.

4. "A significant economic collapse characterized by mass unemployment and limited business activity that lasted from 1929 to 1940 in the US and a similar period in many other countries."

In: The U.S. Political System | Boundless Sociology (May 4, 2019).

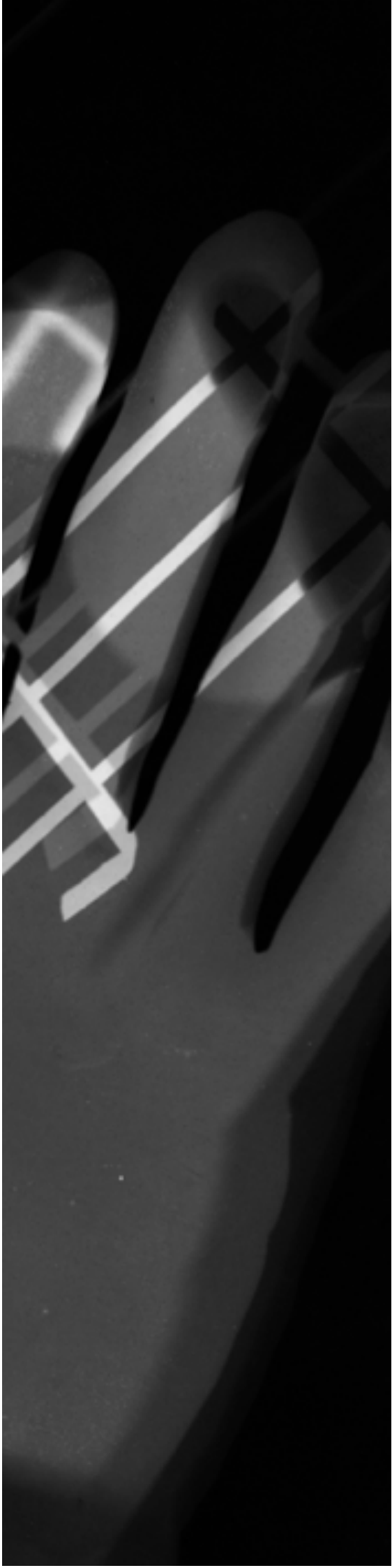
<https://courses.lumenlearning.com/boundless-sociology/chapter/the-u-s-political-system/>

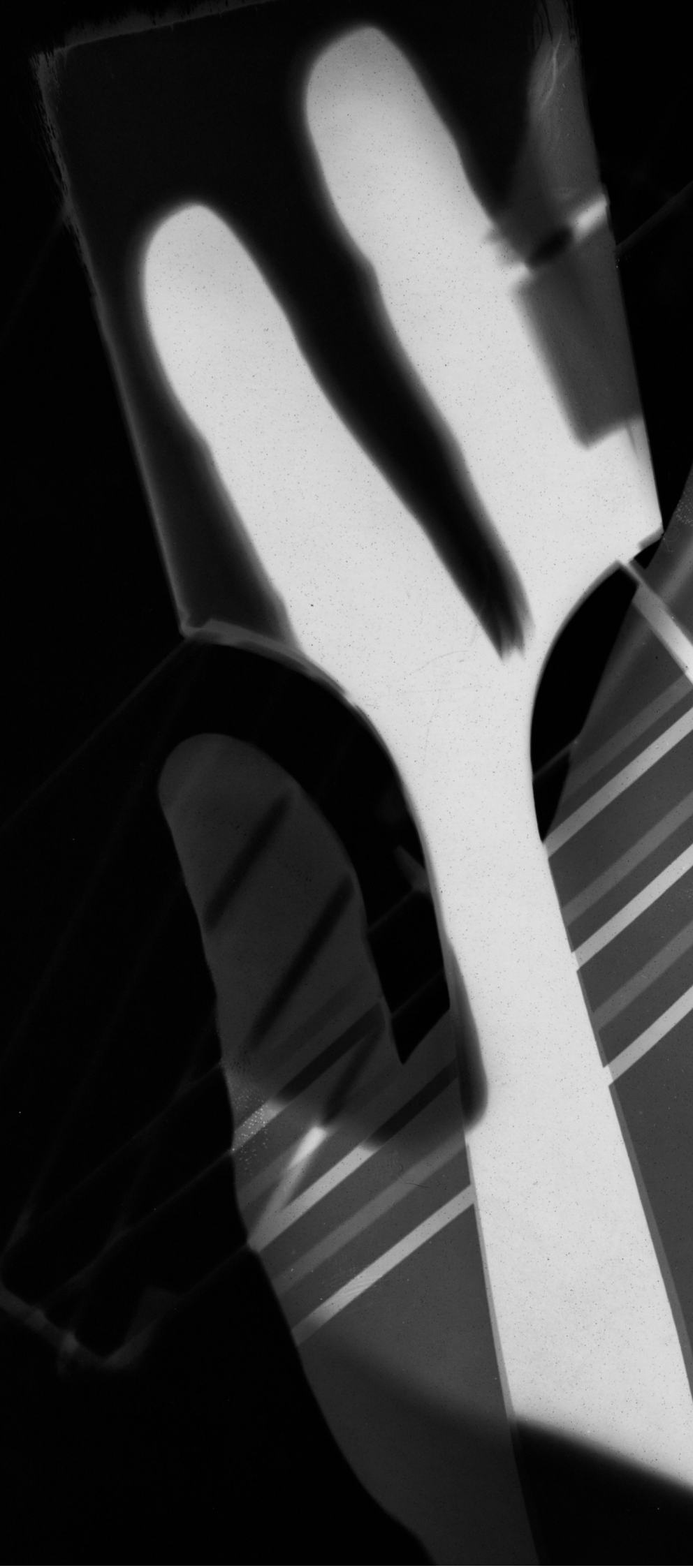
5. "With the crash on the New York Stock Exchange in October 1929 and the beginning of the Great Depression, German unemployment figures shot up. Foreign trade was drastically curtailed, wages fell, and the number of bankruptcies increased daily. The Depression had immediate political repercussions, undermining the foundations of the republic and producing a notable increase in support for the extremist parties both on the left and on the right. Within two years the Nazis shot up to the first and the Communists to the third place among the German parties. In 1933 Hitler told a Munich audience, "We are the result of the distress for which the others are responsible." The Depression was the indispensable condition for the Nazis' rise to power." In: The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Weimar Republic" Encyclopædia Britannica, inc. (March 05, 2019) <https://www.britannica.com/place/Weimar-Republic>

6. Viviane Vilela. *Oscar Niemeyer und das Bauhaus: mehr Ähnlichkeiten als Unterschiede*. Magazin Humboldt (October 20, 2018)

<https://www.goethe.de/ins/br/de/kul/fok/bau/21385377.html>

7. Le Corbusier, *Towards a new architecture* (London: J. Rodker, 1931).





# Aesthetic and Social Values of Bauhaus

Christiane Wagner

## Abstract

This essay intends to analyze the Bauhaus school, whose existence extends formally from 1919–1933 in Germany. In its origins, all events indicated that it would be revolutionary and innovative. Today, however, Bauhaus as an educational institution in the arts field shares opinions regarding the work done during its existence. In this case, it would not be possible to reach a unanimous consent, precisely in its history, brief but significant, complex, polysemic, and full of meandering as a legacy. And in that sense, the school collaborated significantly to the history of design and architecture, including projects that would come later, especially in their participants dedication to accomplishing novelty in the face of social demands. However, some scholars criticized the members of this school. These scholars understood that there had been a kind of commodification of their own projects—that is, they had surrendered to the seduction of capital and accepted that their creations were for production on an industrial scale, a cultural industry. However, regardless of the intentions of each member of the Bauhaus individually, this school had its meaning in its time. Thus, in one way or another, it was a reference for contemporary artists, designers, and architects who have known the worth of these examples, whether good or bad, left by the members of the school that appeared 100 years ago and left its mark in history. That is a central discussion in this essay. As the discussion is almost always in divergence and argumentation, the best ideas and analyses flow through the pipeline for debate.

## Introduction

After the revolution in Russia, October 1917, aesthetic-social theories emerged with the constructivists to meet the expectations of a significant portion of the population sympathetic to socialist ideals. They adopted as basic principles the production of materials that had greater functionality and technique, thus featuring a more technical purpose than a style. These principles were the reference for this practice, a kind of Russian Bauhaus—the *Wchutemas*, School of Art and Technique (Bürdek 2006). It should be noted that, even for a political-ideological issue, this school would have to prioritize technical functionality to be consistent with the new regime that would arise in the creation of the Russian Soviet Socialist Republic.

In the early 1919s, a movement was established with the concept of “machine aesthetics” of the new industrial age—De Stijl—that followed the “technical aesthetics” of the Russian constructivists conceptually. With this movement, the rationalization of the design was conceptualized with an aesthetic of reduction that was marked in the Bauhaus, in Weimar. This period was the birth of the Bauhaus, founded by Walter Gropius, an art school focused on the interests of industrial development and social needs, paying attention to the functional and technical aspects. Then, in the passage from 1919 to 1920, from the housing culture and with the social principle of consolidating art to the people, Bauhaus influenced the way of life. The basis of an aesthetic and social theory of Bauhaus was characterized by the relationship between art, technology, and industry, exerting influence—especially with the advent of design—from the early 20th century.

The courses taught were aimed at inventing, constructing, repairing, and deconstructing and were empirically developed using an inductive approach in configurations, which consisted of letting students research, experiment, and prove their creations. The cognitive capacity was, therefore, indirectly stimulated. It was at this time that the theory of configuration (*Gestaltungslehre*) arose. Bauhaus left Weimar<sup>1</sup> (1925) and built another headquarters in Dessau<sup>2</sup> between 1925–1932 and in Berlin<sup>3</sup>, 1932–1933, on the initiative of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. Thus, from 1919–1933, Bauhaus's experiences were to establish an aesthetic of products. Of particular note are the series of chairs by Marcel Breuer - a student since 1920 at the Bauhaus - in a metal tube, characterizing the industrial production



of functional mass production furniture. Even today, these chairs are pieces of the high output and stand out for the aesthetics of this school. However, the best-known product is the Wassily chair, named after Wassily Kandinsky. Its symbolic value raised its market value. Today it can no longer be considered a popular product. It is generally considered a piece of design, as much a work of art. In its time, the chair was popular; however, currently, attracted by the image of modern times and due to its symbolic value to Bauhaus, it is expensive, a status good and symbol for the elite. If, on the one hand, social stratification determines quality and taste for consumption, it also conditions material value to the symbolic. And these values may, over time, be reciprocally inverted. Everything depends on the imagined construction added to the product.

One can see in its historical trajectory that the Arts and Crafts and Jugendstil movements, De Stijl, and—after the Bauhaus school was waxed—The International Style in proposing innovative ideas, reveal a worldwide tendency of the creation and functional realization of the culture of mass, although in an embryonic form but already sufficiently perceptible. From the American perspective, it was a pragmatic form of social development. According to Hauffe (2008), the organization of the elements aims at the relationship between art, industry, and its aesthetic-social aspects. These professionals have gained prominence and over time become a reference in their respective areas, although they are not exceptions.

The influence of this school, however, was aimed at meeting the interests of the population with products of quality and functionality. However, in a way conscious of social needs, this development of functionality was guided in its practice by architects, artists, and theorists who knew the daily necessities and the work behind the questions of mass consumption. In 1928, Hannes Meyer was one of the leading scholars advocating for the social engagement of architects and designers, showing that the critical function of design is configuration (*Gestaltung*) with balance, technique, materials, and industrial production conditions meeting social needs. Thus, in short, the essential thing was to condition social projects to the needs of the population. However, over time and for a politically ideological issue, two fronts were marked by the design culture after World War II: one focused on Communism and the other on Capitalism.

## The Industrial Design

The origin of the name design comes from the Italian *disegno*, a concept that was used from the Renaissance with the purpose of designing, drawing, and representing ideas. In England, the concept of design began to be employed in the 16th century, as planning for something with an object of art. Throughout design history, many definitions have been given to it: what it would start with, then what function it would have, what domain it was in, and what its main points were. Today, however, is still no different. In the German language, until 1945, the word design was not used; there was instead *Produktgestaltung* (composition of the product) or *Industrielle Formgebung* (conception of industrial form).

The literature on design opens a significant space for researchers interested in its aesthetic effects (Hauffe 2008). At the same time, due to its broad reach, some of its specialties—without prejudice to others—have been prioritized in academic research. Product design, graphic design, and fashion design, for example, have gained strength and professional prestige. Indeed, the growing demand for these professionals operating in the sectors of economic production has stimulated this status of the designer. In the same way that a work of art consecrated in fine arts, for example, always has a multiplicity of its meaning, the work of the designer in the visual arts also has it, now.

In Moscow, 1962, the Vnite was founded—an institute of research for technical aesthetics throughout the Soviet Union—which coordinated research and production in design through ten regional units (Bürdek, 2006). We defined a line of design for technical and social aesthetics with bionic designs, uniting nature and technique in harmonic configurations, encouraging rational design. This line of research and projects had the primary purpose of production and work as important factors contributing to the development of ergonomics. These factors contributed to the design functionality designed by the Russians with a technical aesthetic. This aesthetic also manifested itself in other former socialist countries, such as the former German Democratic Republic (GDR). These were not consumer goods but met the labor needs of the working population (fig. 1). The humanist goals of design should manifest themselves in individual interests following the purposes of production of society. Karl Clauss Dietel and Lutz Rudolph were the leading designers of the GDR.<sup>4</sup> Their projects, as a formal proposal, must meet the political and ideological ideals of the country, considering that through these projects, the user behaved compatibly with the political system of that country.



Figure 1. Typewriter Robotron Cella 1987. Designed by Karl Claus Dietel.  
Photo by Uwe Rohwedder. September 2017. Licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0.

In the 1960s and 1970s—as did the Russians, Socialist Germans, and Bauhaus school—social themes influenced the design of the market economy in the face of the influences of the political-ideological movements of that period. In this case, the development of industry, whether in the consumer or communist society, has an important aspect. Unlike other artistic manifestations, the “art” of the designer began to have a restricted relationship between object and user, an interaction, a dialog between the two. This “reciprocal appropriation” between designer and objectivity is what differentiates the work of creation. But what we have previously called “reciprocal appropriation” is only one of the distinguishing features inherent in the process of creation. Apart from this aspect, other segments of design have multiple productive activities. Here, one should register the product design, fashion, and graphics, besides, of course, the work of the architect and the artist, precisely because of the close relationship that has always existed and exists between these activities. They have always aimed at innovation.

With the movement of the Italian *Bel Design*, the characteristics of technical and formal innovation appear as a line—*Italian Line*—that stands out to the principles of the capitalist market. However, in the 1960s, the Italian countercurrent stood out, questioning society, seeking freedom, and rejecting repression. Then, it was with a concept design that the Italians expected a “revolutionary transformation” of society, enabling new and significant social projects. They would find a way, according to the revolutionaries, to contribute to the political transformation of the state.

## Design and the cultural industry

But from what we have seen so far, a question becomes indispensable, mainly because we must also think of the binomial innovation/consumption. So, can the speed of this technological modernization one day be able to contemplate society independently of its social classes and make technology and consumption democratic? This question not only regards what the experts should do, but also the readers themselves. Democratizing access to the most sophisticated—and therefore, expensive—technologies interests us all. Whether a designer, lawyer, teacher, professional liberal or not, all workers, indistinctly, need technological innovations. For us, the answer to that question is not the most optimistic, but of course, we would like it to be.

What we truly see is the false democratization of consumption. Both the social classes more affluent and their strata, as other social groups, can consume in different ways (cash or credit) the same products and, in some cases, with the same design, functionality, and quality. How this happens, at least in these cases, the ideas of *kitsch* regarding Abraham Moles and of “simulacrum” in Jean Baudrillard disappear. It is easy to understand the reasoning. A product technologically surpassed and, among other things, with consecrated design, is often despised by the very class—the bourgeoisie—that transfer the product utilities for use by the urban middle classes. The macroeconomic theory, in which an increase in the index of industrial production is associated with the participation of financial capital that approximates social classes and democratizes consumption, must be subject to revaluations.

One question, again, is indispensable: does it really democratize? It should be noted that such consumption does not co-occur between the bourgeoisie and the economically subaltern classes. In spite of the technological speed that “ages” the product (and perhaps for this reason), the alternative to consuming the “garbage of luxury”—that is, what the bourgeoisie no longer wants, even discarding given technological obsolescence, physical form, and functionality. And we must still think of the following: although bourgeoisie and subaltern classes are part of the same universe of consumption (mass society), there are significant differences that must be observed. The former lives in a world in which all things (mainly technological innovations) come to be used immediately. The second, however, must wait. It will probably happen; however, it will not occur for some time. In this case, it will only take place with the technological obsolescence of the product and physical form—that is, the design has lost its charm and no longer seduces the consumer with higher purchasing power.

The importance of functionality that emerged with Bauhaus later influenced globalized production from the United States. However, we are referring to projects that are capable of dealing not only with the aspirations of the individual in society but also with the demand for a standard and mass industry. This situation led architecture and design to the ultimate consequences for obsolete object status and pollution today, favoring the goods and consumption market after World War II. Contemporaneously, for example, the design of Jonathan Ive produced in 1998 for Apple no longer has the same impact. And it could not be different. In mass society, with a few exceptions, innovation has a transient life. In a short time, the new product can turn into yet another disposable gadget.

Finally, the designer and his/her work, it seems, has much to do with this dynamic consumption. His/her work of elaborating forms of product presentation undoubtedly helps to seduce the consumer. It is the logic of the cultural industry, recorded Theodor Adorno in 1947, the game of seduction between the aesthetic form of the product function and the consumer. In any case, this professional's work meets the logic of capital, as well as so many other ways of producing wealth with the workforce. From this conception, as we have already noted at the beginning of this essay, Bauhaus when founded had nothing to do with it. Bauhaus's purposes were evident, as stated before.

For the better insight of this essay, we remind the reader that in capitalist society, any and all work must generate wealth for the state, for society, and, of course, for those who have done the work. This sequence cannot be interrupted, under penalty of generating serious social problems and major economic crises, as the historian Leo Huberman recorded with great pertinence in his book, *Man's Worldly Goods - The Story of the Wealth of Nations* (2009). The artist, among many other professionals, is no exception; it is a general rule, and as such, his/her creative work must generate wealth, which is absolutely legitimate and necessary. Artists who are presently recognized as talented and consecrated have worked in the Bauhaus Institute to functionally and aesthetically innovate the shape of objects in their works, thereby giving new contours to the relationship between art and industry—and more than that, still showing perfect compatibility between production and mass consumption, something innovative for that time when mass culture ideologized and worked for the insatiable consumption of capital was not yet talked about. Here, it is worth remembering the affirmation of the American poet Ezra Pound<sup>5</sup> in *ABC of Reading* (1934) when he said, “the artist is the antenna of the race”. Beside Pound affirmation Marshall McLuhan wrote in his Introduction to the Second Edition of *Understanding Media*:

The power of the arts to anticipate future social and technological developments, by a generation and more, has long been recognized. In this century Ezra Pound called the artist ‘the antennae of the race’. Art as radar acts as ‘an early alarm system,” as it were, enabling us to discover social and psychic targets in lots of time to prepare to cope with them. This concept of the arts as prophetic, contrasts with the popular idea of them as mere self-expression. If an art is an ‘early warning system,’ to use the phrase from World War II, when radar was new, art has the utmost relevance not only to media study but to the development of media controls.

When radar was new it was found necessary to eliminate the balloon system for city protection that had preceded radar. The balloons got in the way of the electric feedback of the new radar information. Such may well prove to be the case with our existing school curriculum, to say nothing of the generality of the arts. We can afford to use only those portions of them that enhance the perception of our technologies, and their psychic and social consequences. Art as a radar environment takes on the function of indispensable perceptual training rather than the role of a privileged diet for the elite.<sup>6</sup>

Of course, it makes perfect sense. As it is known, this was, in fact, one of the wishes of Walter Gropius, the founder of this school. However, the political and ideological use of mass culture masterfully analyzed by the philosophers Adorno and Horkheimer on the Cultural Industry has nothing to do with the work of Bauhaus artists. What they wanted, however, was the popularization of art, in an attempt to democratize the consumption of products that, until then, only the elites of society could buy. Moreover, it is essential to realize that these artists did not adapt their work to final production on an industrial scale for mass consumption in benefit of capital. Adorno, however, had the merit, a little later, of perceiving the political and ideological use that German market was making of mass culture, at that time already notoriously living under the aegis of Nazi-fascism that permeated the European continent. It was an instrument of further co-optation of the population, using all the communication means available at that time. The Bauhaus artists, of course, had nothing to do with it. They had no political plan to subvert the established order. Their work had no political-ideological content that could counteract the current political system—regardless of individual ideologies and beliefs, even against.

If this school was based on the heterogeneity of its members, then the desire for the democratization of art was unanimous. So much so that at one point in Bauhaus's trajectory, its founder was keenly engaged in negotiating with German industrialists the production and commercialization of works of the school on an industrial scale. These artists, of course, had their political and ideological preferences, but given the heterogeneity of the group, there was no unity of thought in matters of ideology and politics, which weakened any major manifestation in this regard.

The criticism of Bauhaus for having objected to the marketing of its products shows the fact that its products have later become objects of the consumer society is legitimate and understandable. More than that, it was a matter of survival. No institution in capitalism can survive without adapting to it. Even nonprofit institutions must adapt to the rules of the capital market. In these terms, therefore, it is good to note that, with some possible exceptions, the Bauhaus artists had their political and ideological choices, and they were not uninformed, puerile, or naive. They knew what they wanted. Like all people, they needed to survive with the production of their work. They were talented artists, some less politicized but with a keen civic conscience, who wanted to see the usefulness of their creation, of their products, circulating among the population. When Walter Gropius designed the Adler automobile to reconcile the exterior aerodynamic lines and curves of the

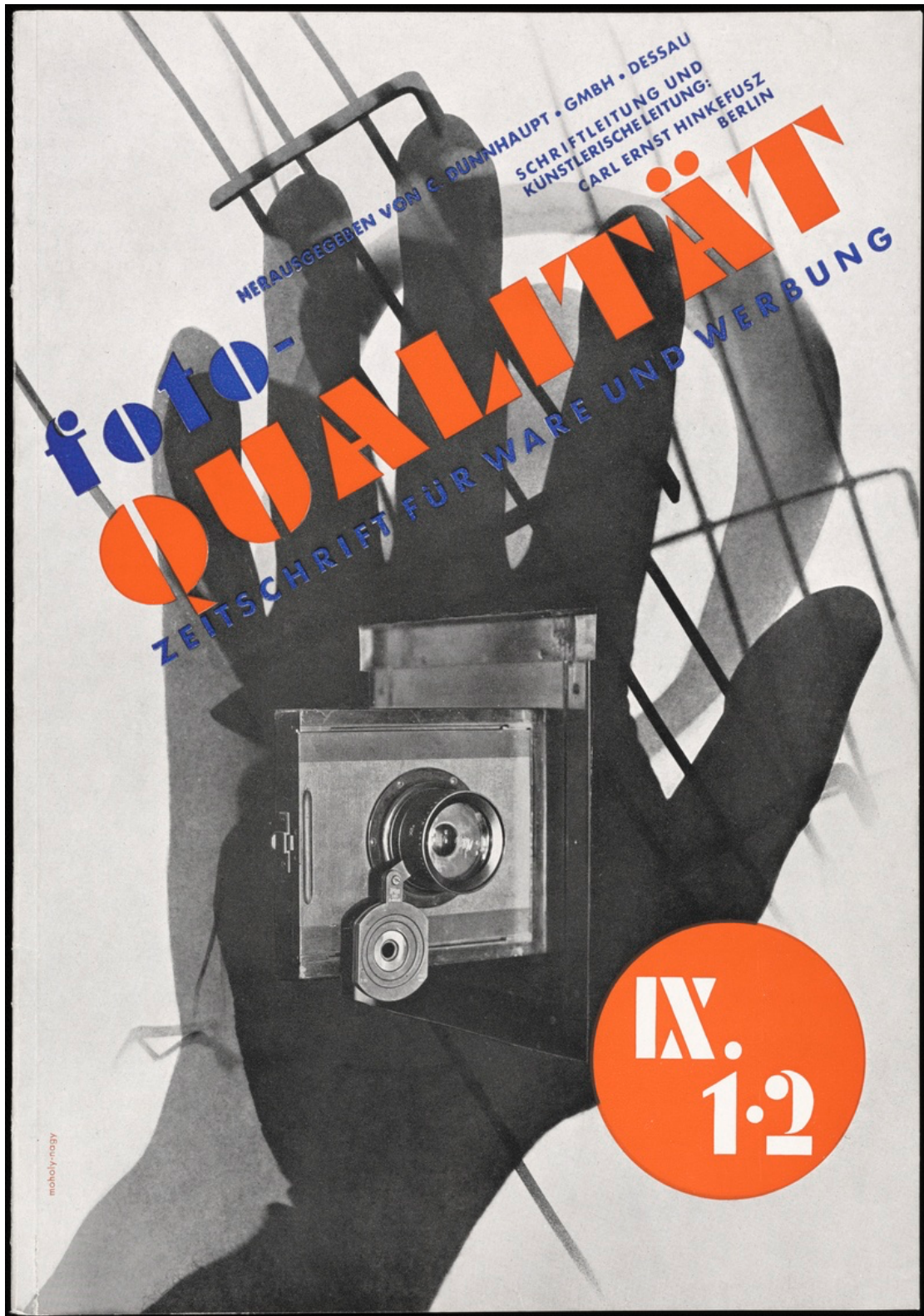
vehicle with the complexity of its technical functions, he was looking to give the car more functionality, but also looked forward to the financial reward that his work could bring him. Thus, it is clear that political and ideological issues would be of the same background. Something similar would happen with the photographer László Moholy-Nagy, alerting the Bauhaus artists to the growing importance of the media from that moment on. See the following images of covers designed by Moholy-Nagy. He suggested to his colleagues at the Bauhaus that they think of artworks involving photography, as imagery work was gaining more space as a vehicle of communication in modern society. László Moholy-Nagy was not just defending his interests, he was also showing the Bauhaus artists the emergence of photography as a new communication tool increasingly solicited in messages and reports of the time (fig. 2).



Figure 2. Magazine covers for *Der Sturm*, by László Moholy-Nagy.  
 Exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum, New York.  
 Photo by Edwardh Blake, June 11, 2016. Linsenced under CC BY 2.0

Finally, the Bauhaus was dissolved after 1933. Even then, it still had or still has its theoretical and practical principles alive in a fragmented way. This sequence is still being discussed as a normal process of an event with a beginning, middle, and end, but it undoubtedly left its legacy to art history and art institutions. It has not disappeared over time; it remains. However, despite the diversity of thought within this school, and perhaps for that reason, its members—in their own way—left significant contributions to the arts and its followers.





László Moholy-Nagy, Cover for Foto-Qualität (Photo-Quality) Magazine, 1931.  
The Moholy-Nagy Foundation

## Notes

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1. "The cradle of the Bauhaus is located in Thuringia: in Weimar in 1919, this was where everything started that was later to revolutionize architecture, design and art all over the world. The foundation stone for the Bauhaus was already laid in 1902 by Henry van de Velde when he established the Kunstgewerbliches Seminar (College of Applied Arts) in Weimar, which in 1908 became the Grand-Ducal Saxon College of Applied Arts. In 1919, Walter Gropius combined the institution with the former Grand-Ducal College of Art to form the Weimar State Bauhaus. Until 1925, it continued to work in the building designed by van de Velde for the College of Applied Arts. Walter Gropius's Director's Office, designed in 1923 and reconstructed in 1999, is located in the College of Art building opposite, also designed by van de Velde, along with reliefs and mural paintings by Herbert Bayer and Joost Schmidt. Today, the building houses the Bauhaus University of Weimar, and along with the other Bauhaus sites in Weimar and Dessau it has been on the UNESCO World Heritage list since 1996," Thuringia: Birthplace of the Bauhaus <https://www.bauhaus100.com/the-centenary/thuringia/>

2. "Between 1925 and 1932, the Bauhaus in Dessau enjoyed its heyday as a school of design. The liberal atmosphere and sense of a new era dawning in the city of Dessau at the time provided the Bauhaus members with many opportunities for personal development and expression – as a college based on *Reformpädagogik* (an educational theory favoring the promotion of creativity), as a production site for serially manufactured product design, and as a focus for experimentation in a new approach to the theatre and stage – as well as for architecture and for the shared life of an artists' colony," Bauhaus Dessau Foundation <https://www.bauhaus100.com/the-centenary/the-bauhaus-association-2019/bauhaus-dessau-foundation/>

3. "Many members of the Bauhaus and the modernist movement had close links to Berlin, the capital of the avant-garde. From 1932 until it was closed in 1933 under the pressure of the National Socialists Berlin was also the third and last city in which the Bauhaus was located. Bauhaus master Johannes Itten also founded his own art college in Berlin in 1926, with Georg Muche and Lucia Moholy, among others, teaching there. Designer and architect Marcel Breuer and graphic artist Herbert Bayer also had offices in the capital after their time at the Bauhaus," Berlin: Bauhaus in the Metropolis <https://www.bauhaus100.com/the-centenary/berlin/>

4. "Claus Dietel und Lutz Rudolph – Gestaltung ist Kultur," Sammlung Industrielle Gestaltung Berlin, October 24, 2002 to March 9, 2003.

5. Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading* (New York: New Directions, 1934), 73.

6. Marshall McLuhan in Gordon, W.T. *Understanding Media Critical Edition*. (Corte Madera, CA: Gingko Press, 2003), 16. <https://mcluhangalaxy.wordpress.com/2014/04/26/artists-as-the-antennae-of-the-race/>

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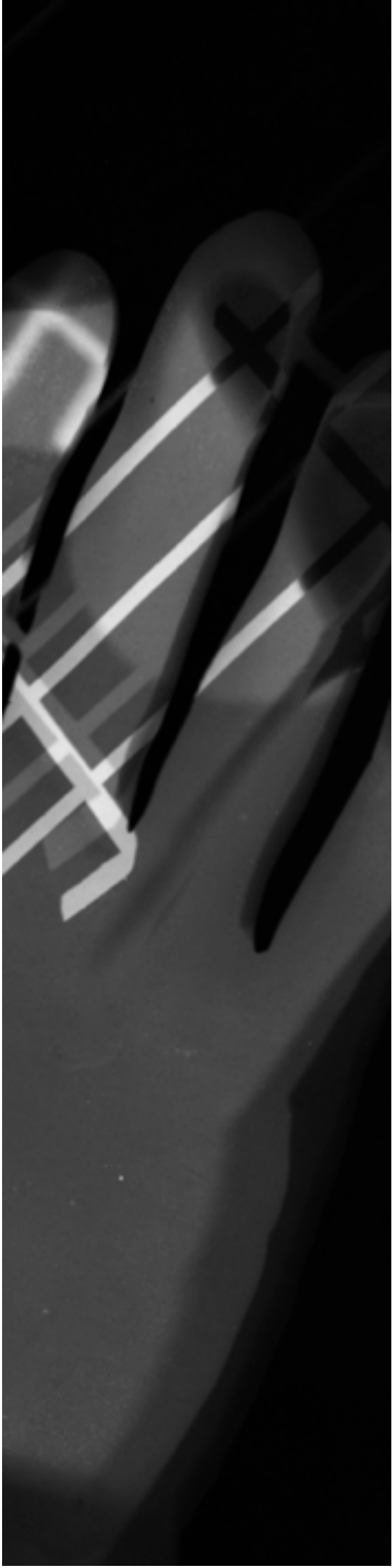
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# **BAUHAUS SPECIAL**

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**To what extent is Bauhaus even possible nowadays?**

## To what extent is Bauhaus even possible nowadays?

An interview by Christiane Wagner  
for the Art Style Magazine's Bauhaus Special Edition,  
with the author Bernhard E. Bürdek of the book  
*Design: History, Theory, and Practice of Product Design*.

### Introduction

This above work is an essential reference for understanding the development and importance of Design. It has been translated into many languages and reached many different cultures worldwide, recently being released in Spanish by Editorial Experimenta, Madrid. The book, which has already become a classic of Design literature, introduces the history of Product Design in the socio-cultural context of the development of industry and technology. Further, it addresses the fundamentals of Design theory and methodology, the aesthetics and communicative function of products, corporate design and services, design management, strategic design, interface/interaction design, and human design.

The literature on Design opens up an essential space for researchers interested in aesthetic effects. At the same time, some aspects of Design have been considered a priority in scientific research. Bürdek, in the above-mentioned work, makes particularly explicit remarks in discussing the various definitions and descriptions of Design by postmodern authors. Bürdek suggests that:

instead of a new definition or description of design, we have to talk about certain problems that design must always solve. For example, technological change, prioritization of handling and easy use of products (hardware or software), making the context of production, consumption and reuse, service promotion and communication, but also when it is necessary, to exercise power to avoid products when it comes to nonsense.

Both Product Design and Graphic Design, for example, have enjoyed recognition and even prestige. Indeed, there has been a growing demand for professionals who operate in the economic production sector, with a comparable situation for the designer. The professional needs to express the characteristics of each product through its configuration; it is necessary to make visible the function of the product, as well as to allow a clear reading on the part of the user. Further, we know that Design must extend beyond the product itself, and be answerable to the environment and the issues of energy-saving and reuse – that is to say, to respect the principles of sustainable development and ergonomic design.

Beyond these introductory points,  
various questions of potential interest for readers  
of the Art Style Magazine's Bauhaus Special Edition  
are now posed to the author:

Christiane Wagner

To what extent is Bauhaus even possible nowadays?

Bernhard E. Bürdek

Bauhaus is a historical phenomenon, which started in 1919 in Weimar and was stopped in 1933 by the fascist regime in Berlin. This year, more than 100 events have been dedicated to the Bauhaus phenomenon in Germany ([www.bauhaus100.de](http://www.bauhaus100.de)). Two new museums have been built: one at Weimar, the place where the Bauhaus was founded; and another at Dessau, which was the most productive area for the Bauhaus. Founded after the First World War, the Bauhaus tried to combine art and technology (*Kunst und Technik*) in a new unity, called "Design". It was very successful in architecture, where new forms of living were developed; many of these buildings symbolised progressive living and are still in use. The Bauhaus did not concentrate on new products alone but on new forms of living (*Lebensgestaltung*, which is very different from today's Lifestyle Design). The Bauhaus was primarily a social phenomenon and not a Design or art phenomenon. The attitude of the students and teachers was the most important aspect of the Bauhaus.

When the Bauhaus moved from Weimar to Dessau, this was an important step. Dessau was a highly industrialized city in Eastern Germany and the Bauhaus made a lot of contacts with the industries there. With this step began more or less what we call today "Industrial Design". The projects of the students were orientated to the industrial reality of the time. No longer was the single product important, but the design, for serial production in the local Dessau industries. A similar situation occurred at the Hochschule für Gestaltung in Ulm. The people there concentrated on the function of products or buildings, and also on their meaning. This became very important at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when Design became a global tool.

I can't see any similar phenomenon today. Especially in Design, many of the young people are concentrating on individual products, produced very often by themselves or by people skilled in small-scale crafts. This is a strong European tendency, but not a match for the high technology of mass production in Asian countries. Sebastian Herkner is a good example. He is one of the more successful designers, and an alumnus of the Offenbach Design School ([www.sebastianherkner.com](http://www.sebastianherkner.com)). He works for many small and medium-sized companies to help them create a new identity.

Another aspect is that Design still suffers in terms of relevant disciplinary knowledge. Over the last few years, many authors have tried to upgrade Design as a universal tool for saving the world – which is a real nonsense. In my dissertation at the University of Applied Art in Vienna/Austria (2012), I demonstrated that Design is on its way to becoming a discipline. Fundamental knowledge is provided by Product Semantics (Klaus Krippendorff) and by Product Language (Offenbach Design School). Design can't save the world, as many people think, but it can play an important role in the development of new products, especially in the digital world. And this is not only a theoretical concept, but one orientated to the practice of Design. Thomas Ingenlath, Chief Design Officer for Volvo Cars and CEO of Polestar, and who was a student at the Offenbach Design School, recently said in an interview (Design Report 2/2019): "With the theory of product language we have really learnt to verbalize Design".

CW

However, the significance of Art – devoted to architecture or Art and Crafts – always has a multiplicity of meaning in the configuration of projects, in the same way as the work of the designer. How do you explain the difference between Art and Design?

Bernhard E. Bürdek

This is very simple: Art is dedicated to individuals, Design is dedicated to the use and meaning of products for people. Important products are today consumer products, capital goods, transportation systems, interface/interaction designs, medical products and so on. They are playing an important role in current global industrialization.

The idea of Walter Gropius – the founder and first director of the Bauhaus in Weimar – was to find a new synthesis of art and technology, but this is obsolete today. Even politicians are claiming that they want to “Gestalten”; this is really a much better term than Design. “Gestalten” means to change conditions, reality and social patterns – and also societies.

In Frankfurt am Main (Germany), there was a strong line in Architecture and Design: the “Neue Frankfurt” was based on Bauhaus attitudes. People say, the Bauhaus was the laboratory for buildings and products, the “New Frankfurt” was the place where actual realization took place.

CW

What should we expect from a good design?

Bernhard E. Bürdek

Sorry, this term is also obsolete. After the Second World War, the Swiss architect Max Bill (who was a student at the Bauhaus) coined the term “Good Design”, and there have been many exhibitions dedicated to this subject. The “Gute Form” was a paradigm in the 1950s and 1960s. It helped companies give special value to their products. Today, in the era of globalization, this term is no longer relevant.

CW

What designates Art and Design  
in the configuration of the image nowadays?

Bernhard E. Bürdek

Again: Art and Design have nothing in common. Remember history: the Hochschule für Gestaltung in Ulm (The Ulm Design School) began in 1955. Walter Gropius, the former director of the Bauhaus, came to Ulm to give an inauguration speech, and he gave them the right to use the name “Hochschule für Gestaltung”, which was the subtitle of the Bauhaus. All of the teachers came from Art, but they didn’t continue this line. They were interested in Design as a cultural factor in society. Especially in Germany, many companies have followed this line: for instance, Braun became the “Model for German Design”. Bulthap, Dornbracht, Erco, Hansgrohe, Interlübke, Lamy, Loewe, Mono, Moorman, Tecta, Wilkhan and many others present the German model: high technology and excellent design.



CW

## What is the relationship of Design with politics, society, and economics?

Bernhard E. Bürdek

This is a very complex question. Economic questions go along with social questions, and vice versa. And as I mentioned: Design has nothing in common with Art. When you are looking at the Asian countries, then you can see that they are bringing together high technologies and excellent design. For them, Design is a very important tool for developing the economy and the nation. In China, for instance, there are more than 150 Design schools today, but I can't discuss the quality of them. Korea puts a lot of energy into Design (industry, schools, exhibitions etc.) – and they are very successful.

Some more remarks. Design today is linked with technology, the economy, society, ecology, and of course, aesthetics. Technology is the most important of these, because that's where the new concepts are developed – for instance, in transportation design, medical design, and in capital goods etc. Designers are not the inventors of these technologies, but they do transform them into products. Designers are the interpreters of new technologies into user-friendly products, which visualize the social values of their users. The car industry is the best example of this approach. Many people are using SUVs – not to go outside of the city, but to take the kids to school. They are safe in these cars, and the drivers are communicating their social status.

CW

## Is Design an activity that can transform the individual and society?

Bernhard E. Bürdek

This, again, is a complex question – like the one before. There are no studies which can answer this question. But looking to the global markets, they are dominated by Asian Design, and this transforms individual values and the cultural standards of society. The German social scientist Andreas Reckwitz made a brilliant analysis of western societies: the change of values in all categories is very obvious. Sandra Groll, one of my doctorate students at the Offenbach Design School, is just finishing her dissertation about "Lebenswelten", which is something totally different from lifestyle. Especially in Europe, we are seeing a serious change in society and this is influencing product development and product design.

There is no way back to the 70s and 80s. New political, technological, and social movements (for example, in the digital medias) are changing society. There is a lot of stress in society; nothing is stable, and movements are rising and falling. What role is Design playing today? This is an open and virulent question.

CW

It is expected of the designer that they innovate, create new models for an object, and ensure these are both functional and beautiful. Either way, one thing is given the culture of consumption, the new product, including its shape, its style, aesthetics, design, materials and, of course, the market value and system in which the product is situated immediately after its release – quickly approaches obsolescence.

How do you explain this?

Does this happen because of its usefulness changing or because of the emergence of new products and possible technological innovations, the creation of new designs, or just aesthetic modifications which transform it into a "new product" several times over?

Bernhard E. Bürdek

I wouldn't use the term of "beautiful" for products. Flowers might be beautiful. The semantic term (Klaus Krippendorff) and the concept of product language have shown, that product development and Product Design are complex subjects. But again: Art and Design have nothing in common. It would be very helpful to do some research on these questions.

On the other hand, Design is becoming more and more about lifestyle. In the 1960s, some Italian companies recovered the heritage of Bauhaus furniture. They made copies – at low prices – and medical practices and even hairdressing salons bought these items of furniture to illustrate their up-to-date status. This was the beginning of Lifestyle Design in Europe.

In Salzburg (Austria), they have been celebrating Design this year – a festival of Design. Many shops and galleries have been presenting new lifestyle products – for example, lamps and furniture – reflecting Interior Design, Fashion Design, and Graphic Design. This is a three-day event where anybody can go along, to speak and interact with the designers or buy their wonderful products in the galleries and shops. Such events are the bottom line of Design today: it's pure commerce.

This example shows how the world of Design is divided up today: on the one hand, there are all these lifestyle events, exhibitions, fairs etc. – which I have just described as the bottom line of Design.

On the other hand, there are all these new high-tech companies, like Apple, Amazon, Microsoft, Google etc., etc., which represent today's avantgarde. Today, Silicon Valley has its own technology: they are not asking what people really need (for example, as they did in the Bauhaus days), but are developing new digital technologies and are offering these to the world regardless.

In 1963, Tomas Maldonado published an article in "Ulm" (the magazine of the Ulm Design School; No. 8/9), in which he asked, "Is the Bauhaus Relevant Today?". He wrote that the Bauhaus, "tried to lay open a humanistic perspective of technical civilization, i.e. to regard the human environment as a `concrete field of design activity`".

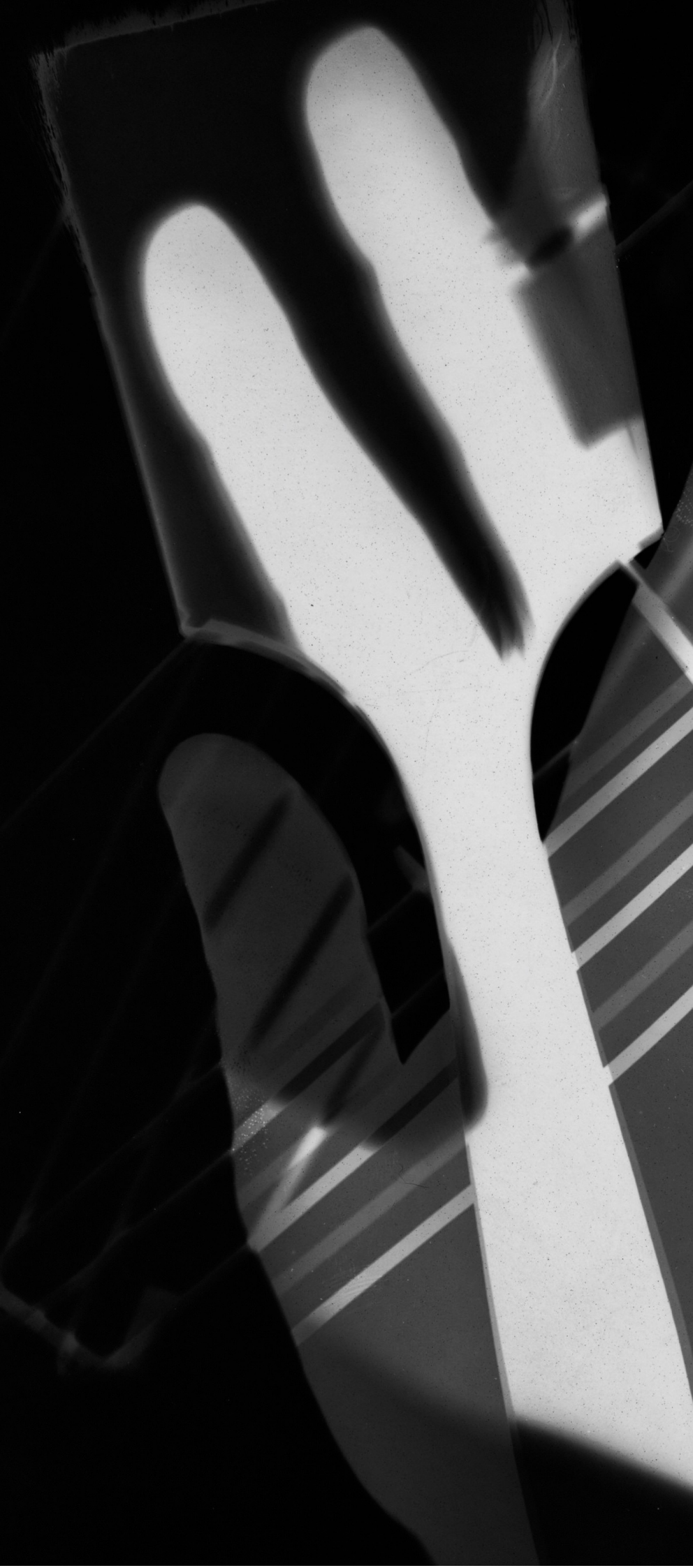
Today – more than 50 years later – it has to be said that the Bauhaus was the avantgarde of yesterday. The world has completely changed in the 100 years since the Bauhaus. Today, the Bauhaus of the 1920s is a myth.

CW

Professor Bürdek, thank you very much for agreeing to this interview, which will give the readership of Art Style Magazine a sharply observed portrait of Design in the present day.

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# Visual Arts and Empirical Aesthetics

## Designing the Technical Aspects of Art

Christiane Wagner

### Abstract

At this time—the Bauhaus centenary celebration—there are many discussions about this school’s legacy. The main discussions covered in this essay address the reunification of fine and applied arts, focusing on technical aspects that make it possible. This essay is organized in a moment (1919–2019) when the arts have achieved importance in industrial and economic development, as well as for pleasure and function. The configuration (*Gestaltung*) holds a balance between aesthetic and technical purposes—that conditions to the social needs. In this approach, the old notions of the arts were considered irreversible, as they gradually lose meaning in the new reality of practices and the creative activities of everyday urban life by humans and non-humans through design, contributing to the development of human perception, cognition, and empirical aesthetics. Consequently, the new demands of arts in society are analyzed as they relate to the very structure of science and technology. Mainly, this essay presents the fundamentals of knowledge for understanding design as art—and vice versa—based on technical aspects. The theme of art and technology is discussed as an essential faculty that enables humanity to materialize things—that is, the technical ability—which had significance for both intellectual and empirical activities in the origins of Western knowledge. Following this reasoning, this essay aims to approach art and design by recognizing that today, such creative processes—either subjective or objective—are technical, and these effects are part of an empirical aesthetics in continuous evolution. Equally essential is an understanding of the similarities between art and design. Therefore, as part of the cultural and social context, it is necessary to consider the specialization of fields of knowledge. It is thus shown that neither art nor design is merely disciplines or specializations in the field of humanities. However, above all, both are part of scientific progress and equally indispensable to the creative ability of the human mind.

## The Theme of Art and Technology

Philosophy and science, religion or myth—all represent forms of thought that are used to seek meaning in the world from its origins—in the Western world, from the mythical or symbolic form to rationality as a means of understanding—defining the ways of thinking, each with its history and meaning since ancient Greece. However, at some point in the history of humankind, the origin of thought is the same as the principle of the organization of ideas about the world and its existence. Humanity has been guided by rational or logical thought, which is concerned with science and philosophy, and by symbolic, artistic, or mythical thought, which is concerned with art or religion. Two aspects are essential for transformations in the world: technique—contained within it is the notion of art—and science. Such transformations are consequences of human achievements in search of conquest and the domination of nature. Over time, with discoveries, beliefs, will, techniques, and inventions among so many more of their capabilities, humans have developed their intelligence, forming civilizations and cultures.

According to a synthesis by Ursula Meyer (2006), we can consider the technical aspect, from a philosophical perspective as the medium that allows humanity the capacity for imagination and representation. Individuals are conditioned to employ pragmatic forms to achieve their goals. Hence, in this approach, the origin of the term technology should be analyzed. This definition would have had an original technical meaning in ancient Greece. At the time, the term *technè* contained, as a whole, a broader definition than it does today. In ancient Greece, it was not only used for machines or for the production of objects. *Technè*, formerly, did not differentiate between activities such as those of manual, creative, and artistic work or military strategies. Thus, the use of *technè* expressed as much meaning for technical actions as for mental ones, such as rhetoric, poetry, and arithmetic. Today, the concept of the “technical” generates the idea of a procedure of technological knowledge—involving or concerned with applied and industrial sciences. As a phenomenon, technology is also the subject of philosophy and study by sociology and the arts. Additionally, among several definitions of the concept of the technical, the definition in English—technology—is known as the science of production and its processes. In Latin, the word *technologia* included arts education, systems, and the methods of Artes Liberales (the seven liberal arts: grammar, astronomy, music, rhetoric, dialectic, arithmetic, and geometry). These were the most important disciplines in Antiquity and the Middle Ages.

Its meaning later changed during the Age of Enlightenment; technology was understood as the science of knowledge, which is today's accepted meaning. Technique has been the major ally of knowledge and science in various fields of human activity throughout history, and it is the main purpose of the analysis of changes in society. The development of mechanization and industrialization, on the one hand, and the progress of science on the other has led to a complete transformation of the universe. Moreover, technique is also an object for philosophy, the subject of study for sociology, and embedded in subareas of study. In turn, unable to be contained in its evolution, technological innovation by itself will always be improved or modified by humans. Then, it will become valueless and give rise to the other innovations, so that whenever it is, an infinite and indefinite purpose to be achieved. Thus, the solutions to many artistic projects seek, through creativity and empirical aesthetics, a future time or redemption of the past to justify the development and importance to society.

Consequently, only by its result would it be perceived as possible adequacy or even a technical adjustment to a new logic of the present moment. Let us understand that the meaning or definition of time is quite significant. Therefore, if we seek an explanation of time in terms of physics or the natural sciences for this analysis, we understand that time is: the result of change; the transition from one situation to another; and originating in entropy.<sup>1</sup> As for the history and evolution of art, due to the techniques that made new forms possible, it is perceived that its "contents"—in the Hegelian sense—remain much longer and, even without change, over time compared human achievements, of course, by their technical development. It is an evolution that underwent ruptures of values, successions of solutions, transforming many habits and behaviors, but still resembling the origins—often the first intrinsic realizations of human nature—in its instincts.

For example, we can see this effect by comparing the Venus of Willendorf<sup>2</sup> to mobile phones. In this comparison was a necessity for human locomotion. The nomads in the Paleolithic period sculpted women models in palm-sized dimensions, which facilitated the transport of the object; for the paleolithic man—the nomad—Venus of Willendorf had a meaning, as well as many other little women models. Today, if we compare the same conditions, replacing the paleolithic nomad with the contemporary individual and his/her need for mobility and the Venus of Willendorf with the mobile phone, we realize that both individuals are conditioned to hold their important objects to attend to the values and objectives proper to a context and epoch.

Despite the evolution of technique and the specific functions of each of these objects, we perceive similarities in human behavior according to human instincts and constant needs. Art always depends on technique, so art and technique would be, by appearances and in their formal characteristics, responsible—regardless of content—for new modes of representation and trends. Throughout history, even if we could perceive the quality of a drawing or the classic paintings in terms of mastery of technique and the principles of imitation, we can also confirm that ruptures in the artistic universe also used the technique as a primary means of shaping and changing values established since antiquity.

In principle, for a reflection on art, we consider the period that revolutionized the meaning of art history—the Renaissance. This period is important for understanding the beginning of the sense of the autonomy of the artist and art. However, the autonomy of art only finds a space within the rupture of academic canons, with modern times and vanguards. Nevertheless, during the 16th century, the first art academies in Europe were emerging, and the canons of the academies of fine arts were being established. The primary reference was the Royal Academies of Art in France and England.

It was when the aesthetic discipline arose in the 18th century that art became not only the object of study of philosophers, but also of artists and the public who attended the first salons of painting and sculpture. They knew about the canons of the artistic universe through the notions, concepts, and categories that were offered and according to which artistic achievements were oriented. The reflection of aesthetics is sensibility (perception): intuition, imagination, sensuality, and passion, which can also offer access to knowledge as a cognitive faculty, thereby enabling the harmony between sensitivity and reason. But even so, reason prevails, being primordial for the mastery of the senses (perception) for a pure reason, in the Kantian sense. It also becomes necessary for an aesthetic reflection, separated from the sense of reason, which is associated with technical and scientific progress.

Even if sensitivity is always in opposition to rationality, it is considered the domain of the linearity of history by technological evolution. In my article, *Poïésis: entre la raison et la sensibilité. Les nouveaux médiums de l'art (Poïésis: between reason and sensitivity. The new mediums of art)*, published by the French Journal for Media Research (2017), I dealt with the participation of the artist in his/her sensible representations regarding approaching of reason through new mediums of art. The value of the arts as an expression of human autonomy in the history of art was of significant importance in modernity. However, it is in the Renaissance—precisely in the period of the Cinquecento, the 16th century—that human experience and



reason positioned itself in the world. This position involved a long process, from the low Middle Ages to the Trecento, the 14th century, when the human next to the divine world—in the Platonic conception (Neoplatonism)—first acquires greater dominion of the human spirit. Later, by approaching a priori knowledge of the general structure of the sensible world in the conception of Aristotle, artists and artisans turned to the characteristics of the human values of the Renaissance. This process was decisive for the recognition of aesthetic autonomy in its modern sense in the 18th and early 19th centuries. However, not only during the Renaissance but also in the Middle Ages, the relationship between the works of the Greek philosophers of the fifth and sixth centuries BC, Plato and Aristotle, was a reference for philosophical reflections and science.

Moreover, it was necessary to wait for the Cinquecento in Western culture so that the concept of artistic creation could be conceived and accepted. It was a remarkable phenomenon because reflection on the idea of artistic creation and acceptance of human actions as creators of works and values was revealed in contradiction to religious philosophy. Let us remember that, until then, the power of creation belonged to an instance of divine dominion only, not to humans. Art remained a means by which all the senses were found; the human was still a creature, and God remained the Creator. However, the values of the Middle Ages coexisted with the contradictory and antagonistic aspects of human activity in the Renaissance, according to works of strong Neoplatonic influence and others focused on Aristotelian questions. Be they intellectual or material, these aspects were represented throughout the transformation, between the 14th and 16th centuries, divided by the art historians in Trecento, Quattrocento, and Cinquecento. However, for aesthetic reflection, a chronology of the theories or doctrines of art is not essential. There is no sense of evolution in aesthetics. The arts that are an indispensable part, and the focus of aesthetic reflections, can be analyzed and evaluated timelessly. Even today, one can apply a term—for example, "Platonic aesthetics"—to the doctrine of beauty, which is linked closely to Plato's theory of ideas regarding the considerations, in terms of which he describes the essence of beauty and the definition of the concept of imitation.

At the beginning of the Renaissance, the power of creation was sought without confrontation with its divine conception. This power of creation as a notion that knowledge does not arise from anything, but from the knowledge acquired by science, arose with Leon Battista Alberti (1404–1472), a painter and sculptor, musician and architect, who developed perspective as a norm in the Renaissance in agreement with the painters of the Quattrocento.

Alberti insisted on mathematics and showed the need for geometry. Both pre-Socratic knowledge, whether from the Pythagorean school or Tales, and reference to the works of Plato and Aristotle enabled humanism to triumph over reason and sensibility in the Renaissance. Humanism became the measure of the creative act for an artist, the interpreter of nature, according to the formula of Leonardo Da Vinci.<sup>3</sup> The Vitruvian Man (*L'Uomo Vitruviano*) is a work from 1490 that was based on an older work of architecture by the famous Vitruvius. It mentions the perfect divine proportions; therefore, this man would be the human ideal. The whole work has dimensions based on the number 'phi' (1.618) that the Greeks spread.

However, during this period, there was still some time before the artist could express his/her subjectivity, if we refer to a human as a subject in the modern conception. In the Cinquecento, the talented artist was able to be recognized as a genius, even though he/she was considered by religion as being endowed with a divine gift; he/she performed his/her art through *mimesis* of the encounter with beautiful nature. With this subject of genius, the object of discussions between intellectual artists, humanists, and theologians, it was questioned who would be a creator. The convincing answer came from Da Vinci in claiming to be the artist. The artist teaches us to see the world: "the painter does not paint what he sees, he paints what he thinks, and because he paints what he thinks he also sees what he thinks." This statement resembles a well-known German saying that arose from Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), in which he reflects on the balance between reason and feeling: "thoughts without content are empty, visions without concepts are blind" ("*Gedanken ohne Inhalt sind leer, Anschauungen ohne Begriffe sind blind*"). Thus, from the Renaissance to modern day, an issue still exists in the arts: Where does the force that leads to creation, in the sense of innovation, come from? Is it from reason or from feeling? In the Renaissance, the binomial reason and sensitivity were not in question.

Beauty as rational convenience in what concerns harmony, that is, scientific knowledge, is analytical knowledge. It means that the imagination, intuition, and emotion could be considered creative faculties or able to idealize beauty, according to Kant and Hegel. Thus, between reason and sensibility, imitation was the aesthetic principle. As an artistic motif, the object of the arts was nature, the human, and God. Mathematics, geometry, and arithmetic in the Quattrocento were the means of applying this aesthetic principle. Leonardo and Alberti were painters and sculptors who favored applied arts as the status of liberal arts, rather than thinking of them as mechanical arts any longer, as the leading theory of this period by Giorgio Vasari<sup>4</sup> shows us in *The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters*,

*Sculptors, and Architects*. However, it was not until the end of the 15th century that the transition from a traditional mode of production to a capitalist mode of production arose. This change decisively influenced the artist. The progressive detachment of the painters and sculptors of corporations and the feudal system was significant. However, this detachment occurred without copying nature, but rather interpreting it in the sense of *mimesis*, a principle of Aristotle's conception, based on the work of *Poetics*, which remained in force until the early avant-garde of the 19th century. In short, many factors have influenced this quest for the autonomy for art. The most important were the recognition of the artist as creator and the relationship between reason and sensibility in the intellectual artists, which allowed them to ascend to beauty as a feeling of freedom.

## Creation and Technological Extensions

In aesthetics, the *poiétique* (in French) is the object of study of all that one would like to produce through technological extension, even the most advanced. It always tries to verify the use and traces of the creation of achievements, which is often obscure compared to the production, the configurations, and the elaborations—in short, to the mechanical and artistic works.

Paul Valéry coined the word *poiétique* in 1937 based on the traditional poetic feeling—not only in the development of the poem but in the ability of a force by means of which everything is concentrated within the being and expresses itself in the world. In this sense, referring to *poiésis* (the Greek word for the production of works of art) is ontological and involves metaphysics. We first consider the reflection of artistic creation, then the means leading to conception. In this production space, artists and artisans are technicians and experts in the manufacture of objects. These objects are not necessarily useful or even objectifying forms of action, such as poetry or tragedy, requiring *catharsis* and mimetic syntheses—fictions from which urban life takes its pleasure.

In contemporary art, many artworks give great importance to the objects of our new environments, where physical and digital objects co-exist and interact in real time. For example, consider the historical works of digital and interactive art, the *Poietic Generator* by Olivier Auber, from 1986.<sup>5</sup> At this stage, the aesthetic experience through technology platforms available from design, as well as new platforms developed by empirical aesthetics, have been deeply researched. Recently, it was highlighted by the Research Group Moving Image Science in Kiel

and Münster, Germany. This research group has been studying modern media theory, including technology and the media configuration concerning “multimodality and intermediality.” Also, it includes “phenomenological and semiotic approaches, art history, aesthetics, presence research, game studies, theories of perception and psychology and other research areas related to the moving image.” One significant work is *Image Transformation: The Hyperaisthesis of Digital Images*: “that multimodal image media technologies are enhancing the processes of sensory media perception” by Lars Christian. Grabbe (2019).<sup>6</sup>

Now, if we compare the technology of ancient times with that of the present day, we find that all our senses have been adapted to another technology; perception has also changed. However, in the measuring of evolution and technical progress, the individual has always sought means of achievement through imitation in the arts, where poetic *mimesis* is the predominant technique. To discern what is represented or not, we must understand the ability to evaluate the degree of image production in art and technology. The project development process, the design, and configuration of the relationship between the object and the product, the environment, and the user are the primary means of technological innovation. It is in this way that we can remember some of the accomplishments of the members of Bauhaus and, afterwards, by other designers.

There are good quotes on exploration methodologies for design projects. They relate more to the aesthetic and technical design; Bernhard Bürdek’s work (2015) is a reference. What matters is the logic of technological innovation and creativity as a social representation when configured with the user in mind—for example, new software, a toy, or some other object of the production line or recently released. The first is the new design of great social importance. It determines not only the difference between the models and the design itself but, above all, the difference in social class. The subtleties of style, the redefinition of the functions versus current technologies, which fit a concept of innovation—all this and other elements involve the work of the designer.

Design is also a game of power that necessarily encompasses the difference between social classes. At that moment, the creative designer’s repertoire is confronted with its professional survival, and it is the internal logic of capitalism—the profit motive. Apart from questions of political and ideological background, as part of the capitalist system, even unconditionally, there is the probability that this professional, by his/her creative power, conceives of serial objects without the redundancy of its characters, its aesthetics, and even the quality to be differentiated. Therefore, the strength of the stratification of consumption and the

internal logic of exchange relationships weighs. Similarly, there is the weight of purchasing power that distinguishes classes in terms of the balance of consumption. Aesthetic innovation and the renewal process directly involve creation but also the significant turnover of consumption. Technological innovations and the desire for new objects encourage consumers to integrate further into the logic of mass society, in search of the visibility of others. Thus, the production and mass reproduction industry require a certain audacity of the creator in his/her creative process.

All social discourse is in a zone of deterrence articulated by the ideologies of visibility, transparency, versatility, and consensus to expose objects in a relationship that transforms cultural goods into consumer goods. Art for the object or the object for art is revealed in spaces without any aesthetic sense. However, something is expected, which can be a new look or any other sense of innovation, with new representations of the old ways.

## Knowledge and the Art of Design

There are many similarities in the process of creation. In the development and methods of each art and field of knowledge, the following can be distinguished: while artists seek to express their ideas, opinions, and thoughts through their creativity, in general, the subjective aspects of artists are expressed in their works of art and are consequently interpreted by people. These interpretations vary according to the context, culture, knowledge, and experience of the viewer. Meanwhile, the designer seeks the functionality of his/her creation objectively so that there is homogeneous receptivity in his/her understanding. In this way, the message aims to be understood by all and to establish communication. It is the function of the design. However, would not art also be produced with objectives similar to those of design? Does art not provide communication? Understanding by means of communication establishes, above all, a relationship between sender and receiver. In this way, I think art also provides an interface to establish a communication process.

On the one hand, there are many examples in the universe of art that exhibit the same characteristics as designs. However, would it not be too naive to think that the artist produces only according to inspiration to express his/her ideas, even without rules? And fine arts, with its canons? Indeed, there are rules and also purposes. This question is, of course, related to our ambitions in a market society and in many culturally particular segments. Therefore, regardless of whether the creator is an artist or designer, his/her achievements depend on receptivity, which is to be both understood and interpreted in a way that can meet the purpose of its creator. In general, to establish an exchange of values, seeking almost always the reward and the profit, whether projecting solutions or questioning, both find the same goal of resolving the problems of our society.

Other characteristics relate to the fact that the design is focused on industrial production, marketing, and reproduction. However, since the market system has been developed, when has art ceased to have these same concerns? However, regardless of ideologies, what prevails is progress and the will to create new techniques, resources, and methods, the novelty as a solution for many situations that are still unanswered. However, if the rules are not good enough, break them and make them better! Hence, instead of discussing whether design is art, or the values of each feature in isolation, why not be open to new experiences for the sake of creativity and knowledge?

Art and design have their differences, but nothing prevents design from being art—and vice versa. In the visual arts, this idea results in both being part of the same work without distinction. On the one hand, a creation can include the emotional aspects or opinions of its creator, as interpreted by different people, as well as having the meaning of its message assimilated, motivating the viewer in its purpose. On the other hand, specifically in a promotional proposal, the message should be clear and focused on its effects—the art of design. Conversely, if the artist only expresses his/her feelings about something in the world—whether it is a matter of questioning his/her existence or culture, politics, economics, and the like—then there remains a potential for the work interpretation to be exposed as art—designing the art, if it is received and interpreted as such by the public. However, in my essay in the previous edition of Art Style Magazine (March 2019)—*What Matters in Contemporary Art?*—I clarify that the main question according to Goodman (1978) is not whether it is art, but another: *When is art?*

This question appeared in Goodman's book, *Ways of Worldmaking* (1978).<sup>7</sup> However, both questions generally lead to aesthetic judgment, not only to the meaning of the concept of beauty but to evaluating whether it is design or art, whether it is art or non-art, and whether it is good design or not. However, what governs aesthetic judgment is criticism, in the sense of evaluating, analyzing, and describing at the limit of our understanding, through certain categories of quantity, quality, relation, possibility, and existence, the necessity of forming an opinion. The central question is whether there is a measure for beauty and, considering that a particular image of beauty is similar to all and that we are accustomed to certain appearances, we could also, despite the individual aesthetic experience, question whether everyone has the same taste. Based on these aspects, design can be evaluated by the formation of an objective—not subjective—opinion, only in its functional elements based on the criteria that give its aim purpose. Meanwhile, with art, the interpretation based on the taste remains. It is not about the ability to judge some preference but to enable the formation of correct and appropriate judgments.

Of course, subjective aspects must be considered. For example, the art critic says that Rembrandt's painting is beautiful. No universal concept is attained, for that is a thoroughly personal characteristic of the art critic. It is not a judgment, but his or her preference. However, had the art critic said that Rembrandt's painting is known to be beautiful, he/she implicitly supposes that everyone recognizes Rembrandt's painting is a beautiful painting. Thus, we attain an *a priori* reflection of the action of the subject, for it is the critic who makes a judgment regarding the beauty of painting. Beauty is not contained in the object (painting), it is the art critic who qualifies it as a beautiful painting. In this sense, it is the subject who determines the purpose of things. Aesthetic judgment (taste) is reflexive and can be universal. However, it is not taste connected with sense, on the basis of which a preference is freely expressed or not according to the condition of whether or not there is pleasure, for this condition will always be subjective. It is taste associated with a reflection that can determine aesthetic judgment. An aesthetic common sense is assumed in each person, to the effect that one or certain people have the same sense of what they feel. Thus, the one who expresses his/her taste gains the acceptance of others, the consent of their personal purpose, and their agreement. In this way, it is considered that feeling is universally communicable without the mediation of concepts. The search for satisfaction with beauty as its purpose, which is the feeling of pleasure for something, allowing the other people's joy to be identical is behind this phenomenon.

At the same time, if beauty satisfies more than one person, the moment in which one feels the same means that the communication of that satisfaction, which feels or represents the feeling of beauty to another person, may result in a universal sense. This concept also applies, of course, to taste for the ugly—that is, of the non-compliant. Nothing more than a process of communication, which the hypothesis of common sense prevails, is required for a relation of the emission and reception of aesthetic values.

In short, relating art and design can be simple or complex, yet there are two things they have in common that are universal: beauty and its reverse. Thus, from the beginning of the development of Western thought, of the importance of perfecting some fields that employ specializations, we can still consider the critiques of Immanuel Kant as being current. Hence, regarding Kant's (1790) clarification of esthetic judgment, taste is not a judgment about beautiful things, but rather concerns the relationship between the representation of things and our faculties, through understanding and imagination. No rules and no goal mean that taste is a subjective feeling. It is possible only as a hypothesis of universal communication according to those who have aesthetic common sense.



## Science and Technology in Kandinsky's Work

One of the most important members of the Bauhaus, laying the new foundation for the arts, was Wassily Kandinsky. In the early 1920s, he joined the Bauhaus masters, and during that time, his teaching and research came to be characterized by abstract compositions comprised of geometric shapes, configurations with an emphasis on form and color. The initial aesthetic experience of this phase was limited to just one form, the circle, in an array of colors and compositions in the space of the screen, as can be seen (fig.1) in the work *Several Circles* (1926).



Figure 1. Wassily Kandinsky, *Several Circles*, 1926 [Geometric abstraction].  
The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Photo by Maia Valenzuela.  
September 20, 2009. Licensed under CC BY 2.0.

Kandinsky, in his lessons on analytical design, called for a rational interaction of aesthetic design principles. The primary method focused on perception and configuration. Kandinsky's teachings were a core subject in the Bauhaus design course, with experimental compositions and the theory of color at both the beginning and the end of a semester linking art, architecture, and technology.

The cultural and scientific context at the beginning of the 20th century was responding not only to technical progress but to the evolution of science. At that time, Kandinsky's abstract art offered a new form of painting; importantly, too, society as a whole was being transformed, with the leading thinkers of the humanities reflecting on art in this period. Science and technology are clearly present in Kandinsky's work, which maintains a continuous dialog on the relationship between art and the contemporary progress of science and technology—especially the most concurrent, and much discussed, discoveries in quantum physics and even theories of teleportation.

These were essential themes in the last "documenta (13)"—international contemporary art exhibition—in Kassel, Germany, in 2012. A theme of particular importance in Kandinsky is the presence of spirituality within a painting and an artistic accomplishment. In the early 20th century, when Albert Einstein's new theories revolutionized the world, Kandinsky's abstractionism—the immediate perception conveyed in composition—revealed the "interior" of the artist and their relationship with the universe in a concrete way. Thus, it characterized metaphysical expression, which remains current today.

## Empirical Aesthetics: Visual Arts and Science

### Selected Artworks from László Moholy-Nagy to Paul Friedlander in Focus

The Bauhaus leaves its legacy. In addition to all of Kandinsky's importance in this regard, it highlighted the empirical studies of László Moholy-Nagy on photography and an aesthetic experience that outlined the concepts of the New Vision and New Objectivity. Moholy-Nagy explored photography in all its technical possibilities for mastering light in frames using ordinary, everyday objects. Although the technique was not new, the innovative aspect was the use of such a technique for formal results through light in abstract compositions (figs. 2-3).



Figure 2. László Moholy-Nagy, Fotogramm, 1923- 1925. The Moholy-Nagy Foundation. United States of America. Public Domain Dedication (CC0)

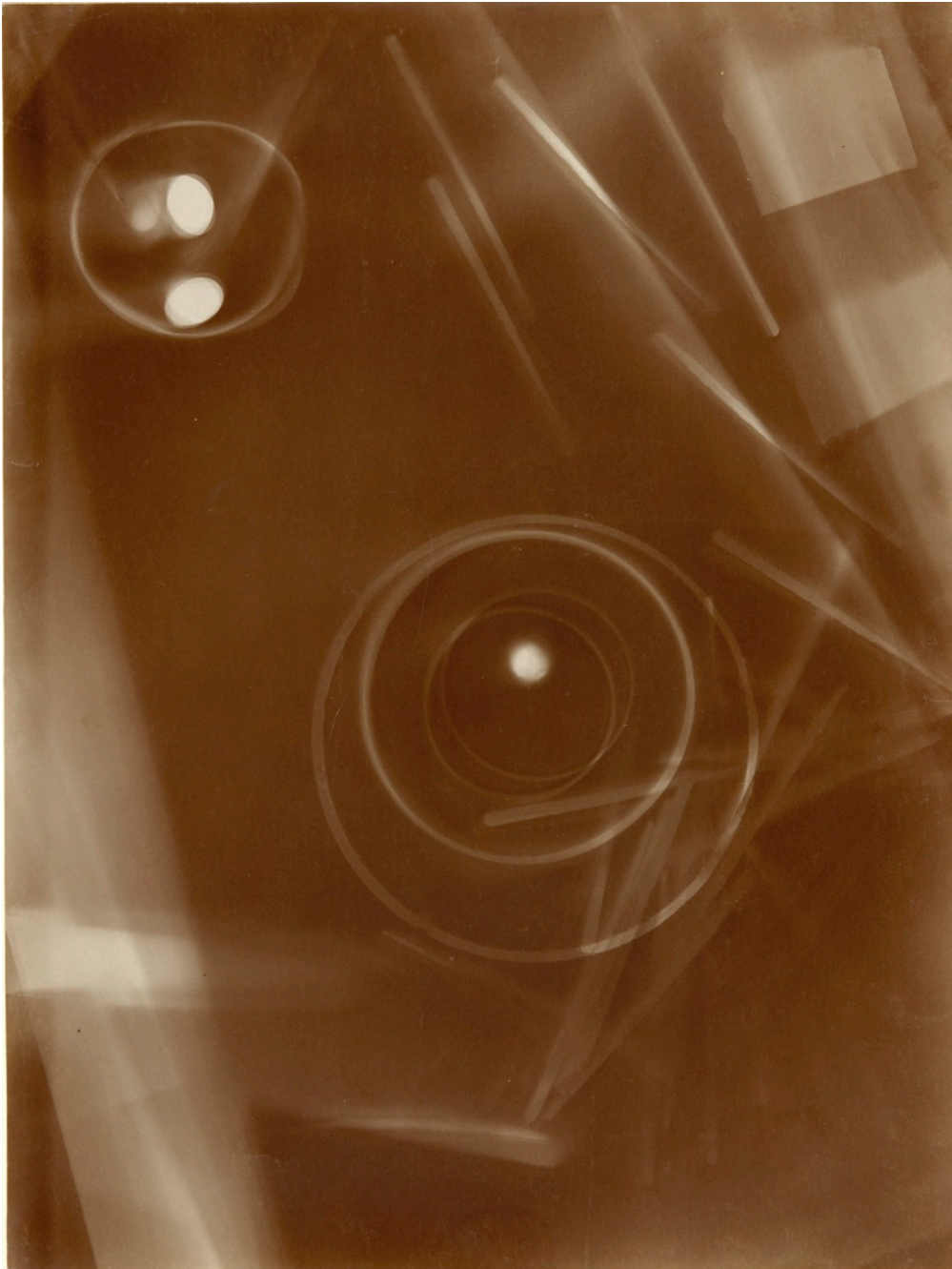


Figure 3. László Moholy-Nagy, Fotogramm, 1923-1925. The Moholy-Nagy Foundation. United States of America. Public Domain Dedication (CC0)

László Moholy-Nagy influenced avant-garde artists in the 20th century to explore the optical properties of light as a technique. Contemporaneously, the most significant artist is Paul Friedlander, with his "kinetic light sculptures."<sup>8</sup> Friedlander has researched various technologies to achieve shape and volume in light as a plastic material. As can be seen in the image of Paul Friedlander's exhibits in Art Futura in Barcelona 2002 (fig. 4).



Figure 4. Paul Friedlander's exhibits. Art Futura, Barcelona 2002.  
Photo by Ernest Adams. Licensed under CC BY 2.0.

"The exhibition's first point of departure could only be that of the relationships between art and science. The intellectual tradition that has worked since the mid-20th century to forge a new culture combining the empirical and the humanistic finds its natural continuation in practices in which the boundaries between aesthetic exploration and scientific investigation disappear. This is true of the work of Paul Friedlander" (Science as an Aesthetic Horizon 2012).<sup>9</sup>

Without a doubt, the evolution of knowledge through new theoretical and empirical studies eliminates the boundaries between art and science. Currently, the most interesting study in this regard is on empirical aesthetics, which explores projects that focus on art and science in new media, virtual reality, interactive design, and digital animation. Empirical aesthetics is a study that uses scientific methods to investigate aesthetic experience, pleasure, and beauty in visual arts, music, and literature by employing objective measures, an inverse sense to the deductive, the reflexive focused on subjectivity, and taste as previously discussed, concerning Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790): "Kant developed a coherent and static description of judgments on the beautiful, while modern empiricists conduct experiments to construct a dynamic explanation of aesthetic experiences" (Hayn-Leichsenring and Chatterjee 2018). However, the Kantian thoughts—still current—on judgments of the beautiful related to contemporary studies in empirical aesthetics leads us to question the differences. That could not be answered in this essay. A possible orientation and response to some of these questions can be found in the article entitled *Colliding Terminological Systems—Immanuel Kant and Contemporary Empirical Aesthetics* by Gregor U. Hayn-Leichsenring and Anjan Chatterjee (2018).

## Final Considerations

In principle, we see the importance of a global vision guided by artistic achievements, that the starting point is the meaning of the creations through which the connection with applied arts and fine arts was created—especially when thinking about the legacy of the Bauhaus and its methods and practices. However, considering theory and practice, the objective is the critical application and understanding of reflections on aesthetics and art theory in relation to art and design in their technical essence. In this sense, it is a process in which it is possible to understand the influence of artistic and cultural creation in its representative aspects and the meaning of empirical aesthetics. Of course, of the most considerable significance is the direction of the arts and artists in search of the autonomy of each artwork. Thus, the arts have become free for formal innovations, creating their own rules, transgressing imitation without the interference of one art on the other. This is the reason for the dissolution of the fine arts, the radical separation of the arts.

Before the 20th century, architecture, sculpture, drawing, painting, poetry, and music were oriented to and compared to one another by theories that had beauty as their object, which was always related to a refined judgment—good taste—that differentiated masterpieces from popular art and applied arts under the values of fine arts. Undoubtedly, since the Renaissance, the techniques for the realization of the main formats, such as painting and sculpture, have been developed and improved based on the conditions determined by the academies of fine arts in Europe. This, in a way, conditioned artistic achievement in a very objective way through its materials, rules of composition, and even content. Nevertheless, with the rupture of the academic canons, the greater autonomy of the artists, and the emergence of the modernist movements, successively, the arts were modified in terms of their formal aspects and criteria of accomplishment. Acquiring more freedom, artists presented new styles and new techniques. These transformations have involved a large and complex definition of what art should be. This change has occurred mainly by means of the constant new forms that characterize their own artistic and manifest movements, in a period in which ideologies almost always defined the content and purpose of artistic creations, bringing art closer to social and political reality.

However, the diversity of opinions and perspectives that modern people and artists have transferred to art mean that personal values have become a significant feature of modern art. All this transformation without the old criteria that guided artistic creation has made the definition of what should be art ambiguous. On the one hand, this ambiguity applies to the fine arts. However, with the end of World War II and the emergence of a new setting for the arts, a new world for new forms and trends emerged: North America. The reference for the arts, which had focused on Paris and London, was transferred to New York. Moreover, today, the cultural reflex influencing the European tradition and, above all, the Royal Academies no longer seems to have the same importance. If this is the case, it is a natural process of the transformation of humans and their creations. In short, the visual arts today encompass both fine art and new formats. In ancient times, the decorative and applied arts were seen as inferior in relation to the fine arts. Today, new disciplines such as design have acquired greater prominence and an essential significance for the development of a globalized society. However, it must be understood that the definition of art is limited to every age and culture. With this, there is no longer space for either the old concepts or the prejudices. Where there is still social stratification, there is also a strong democratic ideal and the freedom to break from the elitist imperatives that stimulate inequality.

With the development and evolution of knowledge, the need for new disciplines, classifications, and subclassifications of knowledge conditioned the artistic activities in their specific areas, according to the orientation of their more extensive areas of expertise. This can even be understood as greater autonomy for the evolution of each artistic specificity. In the case of design, as well as communication, they are found to be subareas of applied social sciences. In a general way, the visual arts have come to encompass a synthesis or general proposition summarizing the main concepts in the arts and human sciences. Above all, this definition legitimates a fundamental knowledge for reflection. For this, discussion based on art and design encompasses the limits of knowledge of the distinction between the real and the imagined, as an issue susceptible to abstractions as it is guided by the process of creation and technological evolution, cultural transformation, and economic and social development. Under these conditions, the arts and their respective formats and innovative ideas attain a new status in actuality concerning the empirical aesthetics and the technological evolution. This theme was discussed at the 10th Congress of the German Society of Aesthetics and the European Society for Aesthetics Conference in 2017 and will be discussed at the 21st International Congress of Aesthetics in July 2019.

## Author Biography

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## Notes

1. "Setting aside the guidance of consciousness, we discover a signpost for time in the physical world itself. The signpost is a rather peculiar one, and I would not venture to say that the discovery of the signpost amounts to the same thing as the discovery of an objective 'going on of time' in the universe. But at any rate it provides a unique criterion for discriminating between past and future, whereas there is no corresponding absolute distinction between right and left. The signpost depends on a certain measurable physical quantity called entropy. Take an isolated system and measure its entropy at two instants  $t_1$  and  $t_2$ : the rule is that the instant which corresponds to the greater entropy is the later. We can thus find out by purely physical measurements whether  $t_1$  is before or after  $t_2$  without trusting to the intuitive perception of the direction of progress of time in our consciousness," [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-010-1727-5\\_70](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-010-1727-5_70)

Eddington A.S. "The Arrow of Time, Entropy and the Expansion of the Universe," in Čapek M, ed. *The Concepts of Space and Time*. Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science, vol 22. (Dordrecht: Springer, 1976).

2. "Venus of Willendorf, also called Woman of Willendorf or Nude Woman, Upper Paleolithic female figurine found in 1908 at Willendorf, Austria, that is perhaps the most familiar of some 40 small portable human figures (mostly female) that had been found intact or nearly so by the early 21st century. (Roughly 80 more exist as fragments or partial figures.) The statuette—made of oolitic limestone tinted with red ochre pigment—is dated to circa 28,000–25,000 BCE. At 4 3/8 inches (11.1 cm) high, it was easily transportable by hand. Both its size (portability) and the material from which it was made (not found in Willendorf) are indicators that the artifact was made elsewhere and carried to Willendorf," in Kathleen Kuiper. (2016). Venus of Willendorf. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Venus-of-Willendorf>

3. Lionardo Da Vinci, *Disegni che illustrano l'opera del Trattato della Pittura di Lionardo Da Vinci*, Tratti Fedelmente dagli originali del Codice Vaticano, (Roma. MDCCCXVII). [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tratado\\_de\\_pintura\\_-\\_leonardo.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tratado_de_pintura_-_leonardo.jpg)

4. *The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*. Revised and extended by the same, along with their portraits, and with the addition of the "Lives" of Living Artists and those who died between the years 1550 and 1567, translated by Julia Conaway (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

5. Poietic Generator. Contemplative social network experiment. <http://poietic-generator.net>

6. The Research Group Moving Image Science Kiel and Münster publish yearly *The Yearbook of Moving Image Studies* (YoMIS), which reflects and discusses the academic, intellectual, and artistic dimensions of the moving image with an international perspective. The publications include contributions from 'disciplines like media and film studies, image science, (film) philosophy, perception studies, art history, game studies, neuroaesthetics, phenomenology, semiotics and other research areas related to the moving image in general. YoMIS is a premium publication planned and managed by the founders and administration board of Prof. Dr. Lars C. Grabbe, Prof. Dr. Patrick Rupert-Kruse and Prof. Dr. Norbert M. Schmitz.' <https://www.movingimagescience.com>

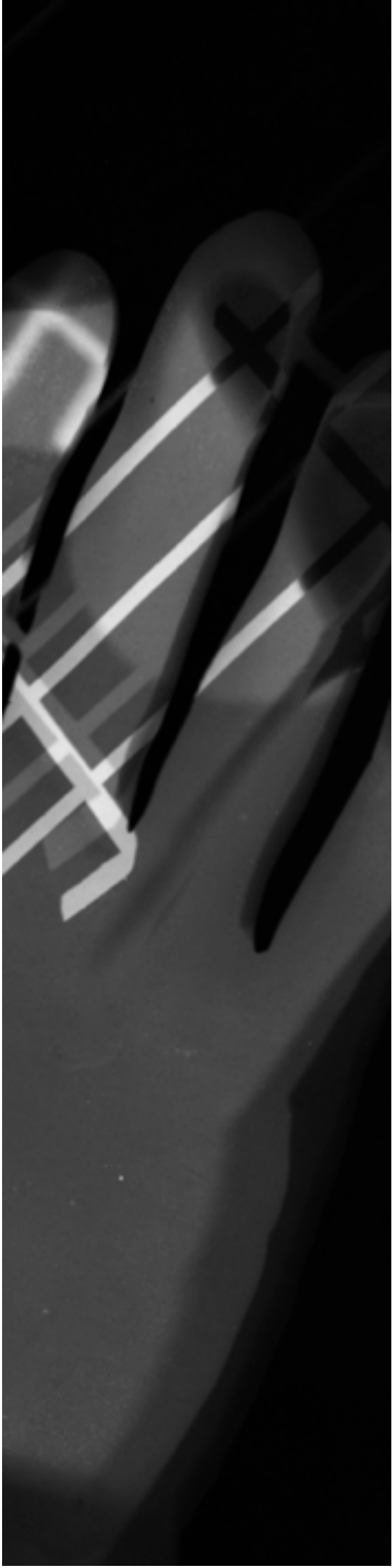
7. Author's definition: "the aesthetic properties of a picture include not only those found by looking at it but also those that determine how it is to be looked at" (1976, 111–112). In short, Goodman did not differentiate science from art, as in the empirical observation of aesthetic experience. Art and science would be a symbolic system and a means of constructing the world—Ways of Worldmaking (1978). However, since Baumgarten, aesthetics has strictly existed in another dimension, not the dimension of logical knowledge, because it instead belongs to the dimension of sensibilities and emotions. However, for Baumgarten, art is a medium, the principle of knowledge, not just the medium of representation, while Goodman defines an aesthetic based no longer on an essence with tradition in Western Europe. Goodman's philosophical orientation with an Anglo-American art of thought defines analytical aesthetics to include an understanding of works of art as a form of communication, a message medium.

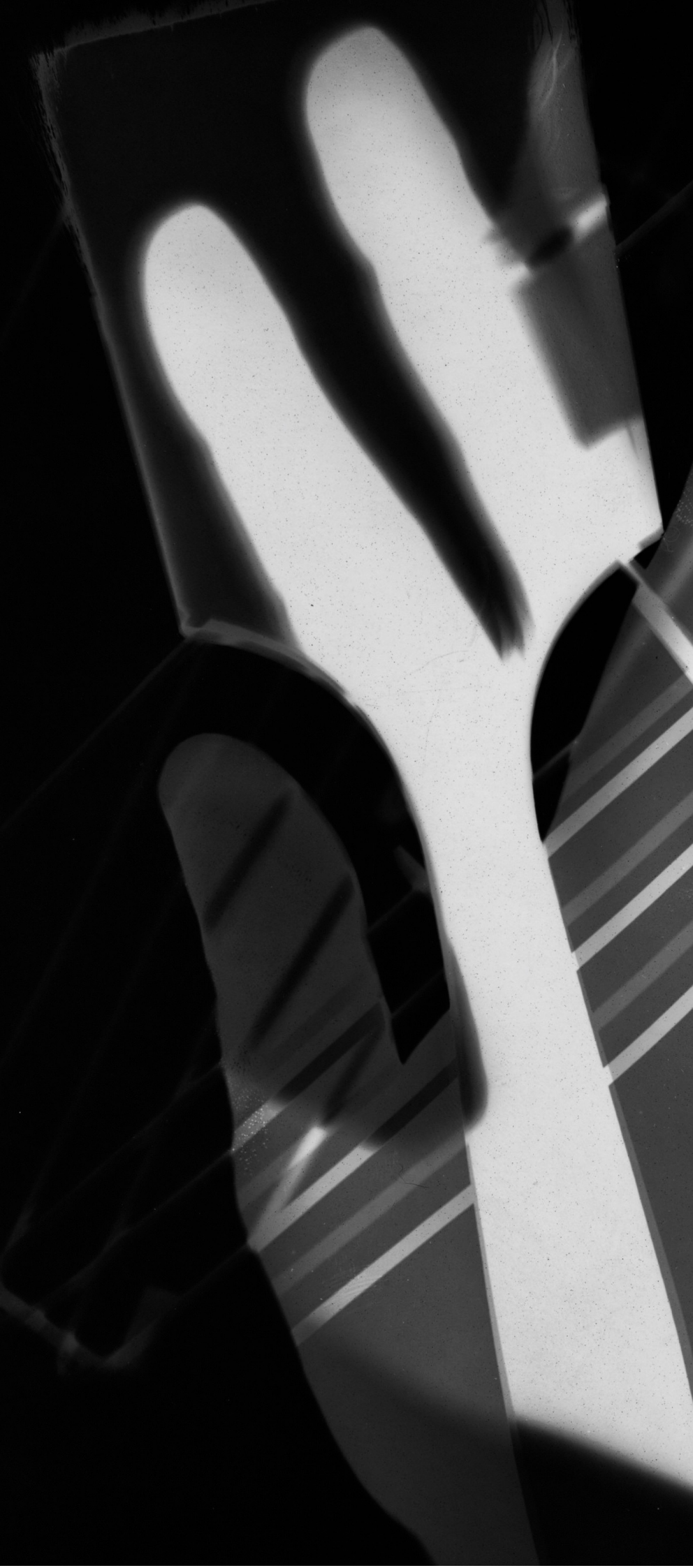
8. Science as an aesthetic horizon, <https://www.artfutura.org/v3/en/souls-machines-exhibition/>

9. Science as an Aesthetic Horizon, <https://www.artfutura.org/v3/en/souls-machines-exhibition/>

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## Content, Form and Function in Aesthetic Representations of the Air

Victor Aquino

### Abstract

There are three inseparable components of aesthetics that promptly refer to appreciation, taste, and the impact that result from our perception. In addition, and above all, there is also the period of time we remain interested in something before it loses its importance or falls into total oblivion. These three components are content, form, and function. However, they do not depend on the materiality of the object, since it may be a concrete object, a musical composition, an idea, etc. Content is the set of meanings and representations of something being represented. Form is the materialization of that which can be identified by its purpose, form and utility, since it was created to represent something. Function is the practical use of that which has form, meaning, and utility, since it was created to represent something.

When I refer to aesthetics of air, e.g., associating all the representations that comprise the space "we do not see", but know exists, I am referring to all sorts of representations, be they related to facts, elements, things or events that are either related to it or would not make any sense without it, despite the fact that they are unlike the ethereal and apparently invisible form of air. Their sense results from the description of a scenario, circumstance, motif or remarkable event that were transformed into an eventual representation that projects air into forms or ideas, including it in that respective representation.

## Introduction

In the early years of my teaching career at the University of Sao Paulo in the mid-1970s, I was still a very busy advertiser in the Brazilian market. I had started by performing very simple tasks. I worked for years between Porto Alegre and Sao Paulo. I dealt with almost everything in advertising, from rather simple and common products and services to more sophisticated ones and it has always struck me how some items, often trivial ones, enjoyed a longer period of appreciation than others, whose importance was at times much greater.

In advertising, there is great concern for an event commonly called "recall". Apparently, this event is not related to aesthetics in any way. However, how the audience perceives and remembers a campaign or part of it, i.e., its brand, product, service or even its simple idea, usually depends on a sensitive aspect of the receivers. In other words, it depends on the millions of people who remember a given campaign, advertisement, brand, idea, etc.

It is rather interesting to notice what exactly these millions of people will remember from what they saw. It may often be everything, regardless of the fact that they acquire or not what is advertised. And, they will probably keep remembering it after the ad or product have lost their meaning. A "recall" is not always a finished process that refers to everything seen and acquired. Sometimes, it's just a jingle, a small ploy that caught everyone's attention who watched the ad and quite frequently, a circumstance that is entirely unrelated to the ad or product. Almost always, the appeal of remembrance is associated with something that is not directly part of the ad, such as a political moment or external characters that are associated to what was advertised. I was working in advertising and starting an academic career, which allowed me to compare practice and theory. On the one hand, readings of classic texts on aesthetics, on the other hand, the daily experience which showed me that, despite the fact that many concepts I had studied were making sense, some ideas that derived from them still required further development and better explanations.

At such a stage in life, i.e., the beginning of a teaching career, it is interesting to note that the academic sense of countless topics is far removed from reality. I am not saying, in any way, that scholars outside the professional market propose topics in a halfway or somehow incomplete manner. That's not the point. I'm talking about topics of daily business. Generally speaking, as these carry countless subjective senses, they are often no longer perceived and also go unnoticed even by those who deal with them. Especially on this matter, advertising provides a wide range of examples

## The Use and Interpretation of the Traditional Senses of Aesthetics

I imagine that to discuss aesthetics and aesthetic representation in this article, as might be expected, it won't be necessary to mention either the origins of the term aesthetics or everything that was added to it after its creation by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten.<sup>1</sup> Raymond Bayer also produced important literature containing concepts, analyzes, interpretations and ideas about aesthetics according to the views of renowned authors up to his time.<sup>2</sup> He reviewed the thinking of important philosophers who, mainly until the eighteenth century, filtered and presented the meanings of aesthetics for the study of art anew. Personally, I feel that there is no point in resuming these discussions, especially as to avoid commenting on the translation of Bayer's work into Portuguese.<sup>3</sup> It would be rather unpleasant for me to speak of how I came across it, about the acquisition of the rights to the original work for the Portuguese language and other minutiae that quite intrigued me, but which are of no further importance here.

For this and other reasons, I feel that there is no need to resume these discussions, as they have been worn by the use and interpretation of the traditional senses of aesthetics. Just as it is no longer necessary to discuss (at least here) the usurpations of the term, the deceits by both traditional and modern thinkers who deny the esteem, quality and importance of the creation of the neologism by Baumgarten in 1750. Especially regarding the appropriation of the term, the authors' failure to refer it to its creator and, years later, when they eventually recognized that creation, they would blatantly disqualify its creator. This is trivial today, but I feel that my personal opinion regarding that case needs to be noted.

What matters today is to understand how this concept took on a life of its own. First, it became an area of study of "old philosophy" in an attempt to explain art. Then, as language, pretending to justify ways of saying and representing. Later, as an intricate and confusing tangle that contains both the senses of beauty and everything that goes into creating beauty, including medicine, makeup and hairdressing salons. The very way of interpreting the meaning of the word aesthetics changed and the term has now become a synonym for beauty.<sup>4</sup> Today, there are hundreds of titles in every country and in every language that tell the same. Instead of debating whether or not to use the term in makeup, medicine, fashion, architecture or publicity, I'd like to recall a single account involving late Brazilian plastic surgeon, Ivo Pitanguí. In my opinion, he tried to justify the appropriation of the term aesthetics in plastic surgery. The comment, made after

our meeting at the office of famous late architect Oscar Niemeyer, led to another discussion that took place in that same office, weeks later. We did not arrive at any conclusion, by the way. Just as this paper is not about the concept of aesthetics, it is neither about publicity, beauty, aesthetic treatment, medicine, nor a study on art. It discusses some aspects that are related to the concept or to the different senses the term assumes at one time or another, rather than to the consequences of aesthetic perception itself. Therefore, there is no need to revise the concept and definition of the term aesthetics, nor to review all the authors who have dealt with this subject, given the widespread use and senses the term aesthetics has assumed in the last decades.

Issues that lead to the perception and appreciation of anything, as well as those that discuss the durability of interest in something that has been seen, whether one liked it or not, are still matters of some academic interest, but remain restricted to that, because there are things that take more time to be forgotten, while others fall more quickly into oblivion. Thus, there is a need to discuss what aesthetic perennality means, just as what aesthetic decay is in the view of any creation, artistic or otherwise, in a certain period of time, as we perceive, e.g., that something created or expressed in a given period of time may be superseded by something else, due to its fashionability, liking or a prevailing trend in taste, e.g., when a creation, especially in fashion, becomes more popular, liked, demanded, imitated or owned, unlike any other one that is quickly forgotten.

Or, like those models that nobody wants to use, own, copy or refer to, even if they are still recent. Both these cases are examples of aesthetic perennality and decay, even if the perennial is just as ephemeral as fleeting, of extremely short duration. Thus, it is essential to understand how that happens, ensuring shorter or longer perennality, and what causes esthetic decay. When I published "Aesthetics, as the way for watching art and things"<sup>5</sup>, I insisted on using examples related to fashion to illustrate that circumstance in which I discuss the accelerated decay of taste or preference that suggests a trend of taste. However, that's past, because not everything works like fashion, even when it comes to a collection of old clothes. At the time, I received an e-mail from a German university professor heavily criticizing my book. However, ideas by scholars about aesthetics contain aesthetic content as well. I don't mind at all writing about a topic on which some scholarly readers may differ in opinion. It is precisely for that reason that I speak of the entanglement of ideas, increasingly distant from the origin of the term aesthetics or of its original purpose. It is also for that reason that I have taken a path that led me to the reflection I propose in this paper: the representations of air. Air, this idea of empty



spaces that cannot be seen, is more present in photographs, paintings and illustrations than one may imagine. However, what I refer to as “air” here, or part of that seemingly empty area that is part of an indivisible whole, is rarely mentioned. This area, apparently empty, without which one cannot perceive all that is seen, is almost never included in an analysis of a work, whatever its nature may be. When I published “*Significados da paisagem*”<sup>6</sup> (meanings of landscape) on the life and work of Brazilian photographer Francisco de Sales Marques Corrêa, I had the opportunity to recall one of his most lucid comments about what you see and what you don’t, in a photo. He stated that “not everything that is seen in a landscape will be visible in its picture and much of that which had not been seen before, will appear in the finished picture”. He was mainly referring to empty spaces that are usually located above the photographed objects.

### The imaginary of space

The description of these spaces may represent many different things, such as a photographic mistake, i.e., what is commonly called “excess of sky” in a picture, or everything that gets framed beyond the reach of a camera or still, that which is intentionally represented to express something. Imaginary creatures, e.g., angels, represent a space we don’t know anything about, such as heaven as an immaterial space that, strictly speaking, is not perceived, but rather imagined. A blue sky either full of stars or without any stars, a sky with or without clouds, represented either by a renowned artist or by a young child, performs the same function, i.e., it shows the imaginary of space, either with what we know it contains or with that which we imagine it contains.

All these questions refer to an incalculable bibliographic collection. To discuss them anew, to write about them again necessarily means to revise topics that have been described, discussed and thought about by a wide range of authors. It also feels like re-heating leftovers and contains an “academic” feature, i.e., copying, imitating, repeating or saying the same in other words. Not to mention that mere references to aesthetic issues or allegedly aesthetic ones, art, art history, or art criticism have become “dangerous.” I remember a small book I read at university for an introductory seminar on aesthetics and art history whose author, discussing the spiritual meaning of visual representation,<sup>7</sup> states that without proper training, no one is authorized to devote himself to aesthetic studies. And, quoting the author’s arrogant opinion, “that no one is authorized to speak on the subject

without the required training". Whatever he meant by that, extolling the function of art critics and historians, I remain unfazed by all that, as yesterday so today. Somehow, "reheating food" seems a very appropriate metaphor, especially when it is understood as a current practice found in certain academic circles. So far, I haven't mentioned any specific work on purpose, since it's not about any of them in particular. It is rather about the meaning of what is represented. For many years, ever since I started to work at the University of São Paulo as both a professor and a researcher, studying and writing on "Aesthetics in Advertising", I have been insisting on that topic.

Although this is not an article on advertising, it serves well to exemplify the process of saturation, decay, decrepitude or of forgetting things, which could also be called aesthetic fading. A thing that doesn't represent anything or nothing beyond what it has become. In advertising, a butter package transformed into an old pot to hold utilities, e.g., is just an old item which was given a new function. But could that only happen to a package, whose product launch had its own narrative, highlighting the product's conditions and qualities? Of course not. This may happen in any situation, to anything, despite promotional campaigns, and not just to something that was turned into junk, or almost junk, or into some other kind of object of no importance. It can happen to a piece of clothing, jewelry, a bag, shoes, a car and even to something that was created as art, then completely lost its original "status" and eventually became nothing, referred to by nobody.

When I write 'anything', I mean anything. Whether it is an object of art or otherwise, an architectural structure, a garden, an object of utility, a car, or a piece of clothing, or anything that "has already passed a significant point of appreciation".<sup>8</sup> I have written about that question a few times. After publishing one of my works that discusses ideas about what I refer to as "aesthetic presumption",<sup>9</sup> I had to face a dreadful horde of angry academics at the university where I work, as I had written that "aesthetics is a kind of scale of measure that allows us to find out to what extent a perceived object actually is of aesthetic importance, upwards or downwards". As I understand it, this is due to the fact that everything which is created and produced, or which exists as a perceived object, natural or otherwise, attracts our interest for a certain period of time only. Interest, preference, appreciation, desire to own, or the opposite of all that takes place within a given period of time. After that, it either loses that condition or the way things were seen before changes.

It is essential to understand how I came to that conclusion. First, because everything that is created, voluntarily or involuntarily, has either a concrete or an abstract form, an objective or subjective one that allows us to perceive that creation. In the same way, everything that was created, voluntarily or involuntarily, has a function, either a visual one, an audible one, a tactile one, or a useful purpose. That also applies to objects, even to the simplest ones. From a pack of butter, or any other product, to a car, a piece of furniture, clothes, an apartment. The point is to understand how long, from the initial perception, our interest in these things lasts. Or, in what way our initial interest changes, turning into total neglect, oblivion or simply disinterest for something that has lost its importance and relevance.

As I understand it, between the initial perception, interest and liking for something new that arouses interest, and the disinterest or disregard that follows, there is a time interval during which our interest for that thing remains unchanged. If we consider, e.g., a piece of advertising, our interest in it will depend on media interaction and market actions to sustain it. On the other hand, if we take an architectural project, e.g., one signed by Calatrava or Niemeyer, the euphoria aroused by the bold and unusual forms will begin to cool after a longer period of time, which may be caused by the launch of a different bold project by other celebrity architects. That applies to everything else. State-of-the-art remedies are sold in sophisticated packaging that, after some time, represents nothing else than the stories that originated them. Fashion collections lose their meaning. Car design changes completely from one model to the next one, etc.

To better understand the idea of our failing interest in a piece of creation, important or otherwise, I suggest the following metaphor: a kettle on a stove whose water begins to boil to prepare tea. The kettle has a shape and function of its own. Like anything else that has a specific form and function allowing us to identify it, it has content as well. In the present metaphor, boiling water represents the amount of interest in the kettle. Thus, content includes the lifespan of our interest and the importance we give to things. Without having to resort to another idea by some other author who repeats what most other authors have already written about aesthetics, this part of my article discusses an issue that, in my view, is not an aesthetic inference, but depends mainly on aesthetics to be explained. The question I am referring to is the length of time of interest in something new, something renewing, something historically important that practically "revolutionizes" traditional views.

In this sense, one may ask why, e.g., the impact of something new, conceived at the beginning of the 20th century, such as the Bauhaus, changed over the years and has been reduced to a mere "important academic reference" in the 21st century. As I understand it, there are three inseparable components of aesthetics that promptly refer to appreciation, taste, and the impact that result from our perception. In addition, and above all, there is also the period of time we remain interested in something before it loses its importance or falls into total oblivion. These three components are content, form, and function. However, they do not depend on the materiality of the object, since it may be a concrete object, a musical composition, an idea, etc.

Content is the set of meanings and representations of something being represented. Form is the materialization of that which can be identified by its purpose, form and utility, since it was created to represent something. Function is the practical use of that which has form, meaning, and utility, since it was created to represent something. When I refer to aesthetics of air, e.g., associating all the representations that comprise the space "we do not see", but know exists, I am referring to all sorts of representations, be they related to facts, elements, things or events that are either related to it or would not make any sense without it, despite the fact that they are unlike the ethereal and apparently invisible form of air. Their sense results from the description of a scenario, circumstance, motif or remarkable event that were transformed into an eventual representation that projects air into forms or ideas, including it in that respective representation.

When I began to elaborate these ideas, I remembered the epic of the conquest of space and names came up, such as the dog Laika or the Soviet cosmonauts Yuri Gagarin and Valentina Tereshkova, as well as American astronauts John Glenn, Neil Armstrong, Michael Collins and Edwin Aldrin Jr. and I asked myself "who still remembers those names?" Hard to say. The fact is that remembering much, remembering little, not remembering or not knowing who they are, even if we lack exact figures, results in an intriguing reality. What is intriguing is the condition of that remarkable event, i.e., the conquest of space, had been, of what it represented historically and of the almost emotional involvement of the crowds that watched every flight, the media buzz and, over time, the decrease in interest for that historical moment. One could state that this is not related to aesthetics at all, but would be mistaken as to the consequences of the appeal of these remarkable events, either in their totality or in their single condition.

To elaborate on that thought and provide another example of the aesthetics of air, I would like to state the case of the first editions of a work of fiction called "Five weeks in a balloon",<sup>10</sup> whose covers depicted a dirigible balloon. The imaginary adventure in Africa, the novelty of an explorer from that continent, the unusual circumstances of the adventure, together with the cover picture and illustrations by Édouard Riou and Henri Montaut, created the atmosphere of an emblematic setting that would last for more than a century. Today, rare are those who know the work and its author. However, to enlarge on that topic, aiming to reflect on content, form and function of what is expressed in what I refer to as the aesthetics of air, I would like to propose a definitive example by comparing two historical events of actual importance for world aviation. Events that are similar, close and part of the history of international aviation, but also important for the history of Brazil. I'll mention first the flight of the aircraft "14-Bis", built and piloted by Alberto Santos Dumont at the "Champs de Bagatelle" in Paris, in 1906. Next, the transatlantic flight of the aircraft "Jahu", commissioned and piloted by João Ribeiro de Barros in the company of three other crew members from Cape Verde, on the African coast, to the island of Fernando de Noronha, on the Brazilian coast, in 1927. It is also important to note the number of works on Santos-Dumont, in addition to a text by himself that has been translated into many languages<sup>11</sup> and the countless books that are published every year and shed light on the saga of the flight that would make history.<sup>12</sup> What is actually noteworthy is how these works are concerned with the "utility" of the airplane as a means of transportation and an aspect related to popular "enthusiasm" aroused by these inventions. I mention these two events mainly because almost everything we see, hear, read and even think, remember or imagine every day, produces some kind of sensation. This sensation, to a greater or lesser extent, is related to what is meant by aesthetics. Sensation which, in everyone's time, was mistakenly held for the said popular "enthusiasm" for novelties. Thus, a current or ancient reading, a historical fact, any piece of publicity, a political fact, everything is associated with the possibility of causing the aforementioned sensation. This is the reason why I recall here two aeronautical events that are not only related to the history of aviation, but also to the feats of air transportation of the early twentieth century.

Everyone knows the story of Albert Santos Dumont. For decades, at least in Brazil, brushing aside the discussions on aeronautical patents or on the invention of the artifact, it was complained that Santos Dumont was not considered, in the United States, as the "true" inventor of the airplane. An innocuous argument and an almost anecdotal complaint.

The truth is that we wasted a lot of time with this nonsense and, in the second decade of that century, another event would go unnoticed and completely lose its importance as a historical fact, falling into complete oblivion. However, given the proportions, perhaps this second fact is even greater and more important than Santos Dumont's flight at the "Champs de Bagatelle" in Paris in 1905.

Why? Well, simply because after the true social "commotion" that took hold of crowds of people waiting to see the arrival of the second flight in 1927, the following great aeronautical events, whose news ran the world over the next two decades, preceding the beginning of World War II, are as important as that second flight. Charles Lindbergh crosses the Atlantic between the United States and England and causes almost as much commotion as the flight that took place a few weeks before, although in Brazil. This was mainly brought about by actual cinematographic spectacles that took place in projection rooms around the world.

Understanding the phenomenon of the importance of the event, its aesthetic impact, the involvement of the audience and, above all, its fall into oblivion, requires knowing the full story of a fact that testifies to the heroism, audacity, creativity and courage of its protagonist. João Ribeiro de Barros was born in 1900. He was the son of wealthy coffee growers in the city of Jahu, a city in the interior of the State of São Paulo. He learned to fly at the Campinas Airclub, where he obtained, as it was called at the time, a "brevet" issued by the French Airclub. These were different times. Before that, he had studied aircraft mechanics in the United States from 1919 to 1921, where he met German count Ferdinand von Zeppelin, from whom he recorded excerpts of thought-provoking dialogues on aircraft weight, sustainability and speed. A passage from these curious notes mentions the count's opinion on airplane design which was first of all observed from the ground as the plane hovers and flies in the air, which is the reason why it must be beautiful.

As is known, Zeppelin built dozens of dirigible balloons for the U.S. navy and army until 1910. The inventor was concerned with the aesthetic harmony of the lines of his airships, which today are actually still pleasant to look at in engravings. It might be his vision that would guide João Ribeiro de Barros later in life. The young Brazilian decided to cross the Atlantic Ocean between Europe and South America and embarked on a ship to Italy in 1926. The route had already been flown by other pioneering aeronauts. In 1922, e.g., two aviators from the Portuguese navy, Sacadura Cabral and Gago Coutinho, crossed the Atlantic Ocean between Europe and Brazil. However, they used three different aircraft to complete a route of approximately five thousand miles.

In Genoa, João Ribeiro de Barros bought a seaplane, Savoia-Marchetti S.55, which had been partially destroyed in a bad landing. The restored aircraft, which he named "Jahu" in honor of his place of birth, was equipped with wings and an engine that had been developed for the long route he planned to fly. He performed numerous tests in the region where the plane had been made. It consisted of two large floats under the suspended wings, above which a double engine was mounted with two propellers, one in front and the other one in the back. Today, the seaplane may seem somewhat bizarre given its catamaran-like appearance. How bizarre those first airplanes were, including Santos Dumont's "14 Bis". The young pilot formed a crew with three friends, faced sabotage in Europe, had a political disagreement with the president of Brazil at that time, overcame all difficulties and, at last, on the morning of April 28, 1927, took off with his companions from Praia, the capital of Cape Verde, on Africa's west coast. The plane was flying at a height of only 12 meters, at a speed of 190 kilometers per hour. Twelve hours and 30 minutes after their departure, they landed on the coast of the island of Fernando Noronha in northeastern Brazil. Their landing was witnessed by Angelo Tosi, commander of an Italian freighter, sailing in close course. The commander said at the time that 250 liters of fuel were still left in the seaplane tank. The next morning, they took off for Natal, state of Rio Grande do Norte. The following day, they arrived in Recife, then in Salvador, then in Rio de Janeiro and finally in the city of Santos, state of São Paulo. The trip ended as they landed on the waters of the Guarapiranga dam in the city of São Paulo. Documents of that time, news articles, insipient pictures and even some film documentaries, from their arrival in Natal on, tell that crowds of people would rush frantically to the places on the coast where the seaplane landed to welcome it.

YouTube contains a wide range of pictures and stories of that epic ocean crossing, which is why I decided not to include any additional references and pictures about it. However, I'd like to show two emblematic pictures of Brazilian aviation from which I conclude on the idea that led me to write about content, form and function in relation to what I call "aesthetics of air". I first refer to the picture of the plane "14 Bis" by Santos Dumont and then to the picture of the seaplane "Jahu" commanded by João Ribeiro de Barros.

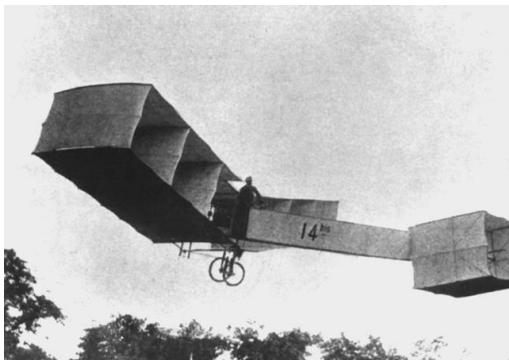


Figure 1. "14 Bis" (1906)



Figure 2. "Jahu" (1927)

The analysis of that historic feat, which took place a few days before Charles Lindbergh made his historic flight between the United States and England, have lost their importance. However, from the point of view of aesthetic interest, a question remains: if there are important historical events with an aesthetic expression that is acknowledged by the enthusiasm of crowds of people that followed the first flights, why are some of them forgotten and others not?

The airplane "14 Bis", 21 years older than "Jahu", is still remembered, as shows a wide range of books, films and other publications. In one of the latest titles on the event,<sup>13</sup> its authors decided to take into account the "lightness of the lines" of Santos-Dumont's invention.

In addition, there have been numerous exhibitions, including those on art and design. However, there is little information on João Ribeiro de Barros' epic flight, which was a true feat, and those who study aviation or aeronautical engineering show little 'enthusiasm' or interest in it, including in the historical fact that the crossing was performed without the help of public funds.

A large collection of art books on aviation (mostly on older airplanes) also serves as a reference that it is in this ethereal space, in the dimensions of air and the "empty spaces" that these airplanes aesthetically express "design that flies", an object that is not only physically supported by the air with the help of motors, but also justifies the air as a setting of ephemeral art that only lasts as long as it is perceived. On the one hand, this is very positive, because it justifies human ingenuity in exploring creativity, inventiveness and originality in the expression - by 'machines' - of something that causes multiple sensations in the public that sees or watches these inventions.<sup>14</sup>

Similarly, contemporary literature on aviation adds data, facts and situations that encourage us to keep the idea alive by which this field of observation, centered above all on the 'aesthetics of air' will be preserved, such as the case, e.g., of a near-documentary about women aviators<sup>15</sup> that shows examples of the increasing participation of women that began in the 1920s. The "Jahu" was forgotten until the early 2000s, when the president of a Brazilian airline that run a Brazilian aviation museum at that time decided to have the airplane restored. Today, it is installed at the Wings of a Dream Museum, which is closed to the public.



The airplane may have been forgotten due to the aspect of its aesthetic 'content' which, over time, has lost its importance due to lack of historical interest, lack of a narrative opportunity of the historical feat and the overwhelming and sustained attention the media still gives to the story of the "14 Bis", promoting it as a 'wronged invention', etc.

If "form" and "function" can perfectly be found in any design, they depend on its respective "content", which needs to be solid, consistent and complete. In other words, to be perennial, design may not be "emptied" of that consistency and completeness. Or, so as not to be forgotten, the invention in question, just as any design, although justified in "form" and "function", must preserve its content. That content is its historical importance, the consistency of its importance and the full interest of the public, which contribute to the fact that it is remembered. The "Jahu" by João Ribeiro de Barros, despite its extraordinary feat that would ensure it a place in history, was forgotten by the public and lost its aesthetic "content" to Santos Dumont's "14 Bis". That's how it has been and will be.



Figure 3. Last landing of the "Jahu" in São Paulo



Figure 4. The restored "Jahu" at the museum

## Author Biography

Victor Aquino (Victor Aquino Gomes Correa), 71 y. o., is a former Brazilian advertiser. Doctor of Science, he pursued an academic career at the Art and Communication School of the University of Sao Paulo, whose Dean he was from 1997 to 2001. Still active, he is currently a professor of "Aesthetics in Advertising", but teaches other topics as well, such as "The Adventure of Aesthetics of Advertising" and "Advertising as a Literary Genre". From 1989 to 1990, he completed a postdoctoral research at the old "Laboratoire d'Esthétique et Sciences de l'Art" at the Université Paris I under the supervision of late professor François Molnar. In 1998, he was a visiting professor of the PhD program in "Audiovisual Communication" at the Autonomous University of Barcelona. Author of more than one hundred books that can be read for free at [www.victoraquino.net](http://www.victoraquino.net) Victor Aquino is also a private pilot.

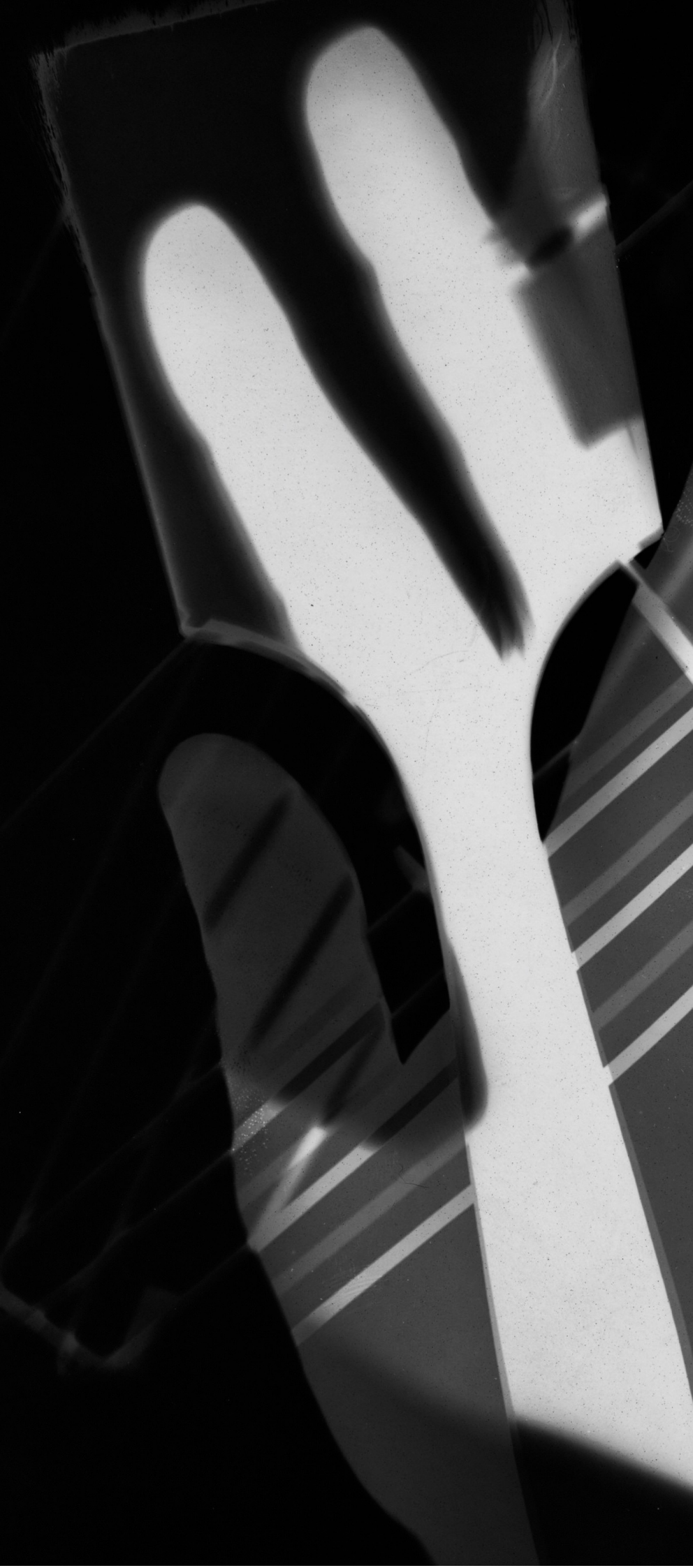
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