



BAUHAUS

1919-1928

Cover of the exhibition catalog "Bauhaus 1919-1928", New York, The Museum of Modern Art:
Distributed by New York Graphic Society, 1938.

***Memento mori* or eternal Modernism? The Bauhaus at MoMA, 1938**

BY BARRY BERGDOLL

On the occasion of the exhibition which I co-curated at New York's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) with Leah Dickerman in 2009 for the 90th anniversary of the founding of the Bauhaus (and the 80th anniversary of the founding of the museum), I delved into the museum's archives to shed light on the political context as well as the complex logistics of the museum's earlier Bauhaus exhibition staged in 1938. The museum's 1938 book that accompanied that important episode in the early reception of the Bauhaus in America remained the standard work on the school and its art philosophy in the English-speaking world until the publication of the English translation of Hans Maria Wingler's monumental *Bauhaus* in 1969. This essay, addressing the exhibition staged in New York and the misconceptions about the Bauhaus it set in motion for many years, is based on a lecture I gave at the exhibition symposium; a version of that text was published for the first time in a book of essays published in honor of one of my professors at the University of Cambridge, Jean Michel Massing, in 2016.¹ This is a slightly modified version for the 100th anniversary of the Bauhaus, a decade later.

The Museum of Modern Art's founding director Alfred H. Barr, Jr. (1902–1981) wrote to Walter Gropius (1883–1969) on 15 September 1938, in the lead-up to the museum's planned exhibition on the now defunct school that Walter Gropius had founded at Weimar nineteen years earlier: "I regard the three days which I spent at the [Dessau] Bauhaus in 1927 as one of the important incidents in my own education".² Indeed, as has often been pointed out, the Bauhaus had had a profound influence on Alfred H. Barr's draft plans in 1929 for the structure of an unprecedented American museum of "the art of our time",³ with proposed departments of architecture, industrial art, photography, theater and film. It also influenced Alfred H. Barr's famous mapping of the evolution of modern art movements, cogently diagrammed on the famous cover of the 1936 *Cubism and Abstract Art* catalog. There, the Bauhaus was positioned as the synthesis of Expressionism, *De Stijl* and Neoplasticism, and the flow of Cubism into Suprematism and Constructivism. Remarkably, however, its only outlet into the decade of the 1930s and the future — to judge from the diagram — seems to have been into "Modern Architecture", which Alfred H. Barr's chart would have consolidated at the very place where French Purism, Dutch *De Stijl* and the German experimental school intersected to form into a coherent architectural movement at the center of his timeline. But, of course, by the time this chart was drawn up, the Bauhaus itself was no more, having lived a tumultuous history, forced to move and then closed by the rising force of National Socialism, and largely erased from the German art scene, it was, as a school, dead.

Within a year of the publication of Alfred H. Barr's diagram, plans were afoot at the young New York museum for staging a major Bauhaus exhibition, catalyzed by two interlinked events of 1937. The first was the escalation of the German artistic and intellectual *exodus*, changing the face of American art and architectural education with the arrival, notably, of Walter Gropius at Harvard. He was one of many *émigrés* from Adolf Hitler's Germany who made the eight-year-old MoMA an early port of call upon arrival in the new world. A single page alone of the Museum of Modern Art guest book for 1937 is revelatory, with its close juxtaposition of the signatures of László Moholy-Nagy (1895–1946), Marcel Breuer (1902–1981), Herbert Bayer (1900–1985) and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886–1969). Simultaneously the controversy on the other side of the Atlantic generated by the Nazi's *Entartete Kunst* (Degenerate Art) exhibition, staged in the newly completed *Haus der Kunst*, Munich, a design by Hitler's favored architect Paul Troost (1878–1934), was the clearest state celebration of the official dismantling of the Bauhaus project. The Museum of Modern Art's purpose-built home, designed the following year and opened on the museum's 10th birthday in 1939 (it had been a nomad for that first decade) would indeed pay homage to the building that Walter Gropius had designed to accommodate the Bauhaus in its second home city of Dessau, after it had been forced to leave Weimar in 1926. MoMA's new building was a veritable counter model to the neo-classical architecture of Hitler's museum or, for that matter, John Russell Pope's contemporary National Gallery of Art in Washington (1938–1941). By the time the Museum of

Modern Art, designed by Philip Goodwin (1885–1958) and Edward Durrell Stone (1902–1978), opened at 11 West 53rd Street in 1939, the Bauhaus was but a memory, having been definitively shut by the National Socialists in 1933 in its last, makeshift home in a disused Berlin factory.

Even before the idea of MoMA emerged, Alfred H. Barr had been focused, as a young art history professor, on the German design school. He recalled in an interview in 1967, that he had been eagerly anticipating his visit to the Dessau for some time before he was able to make the trip in 1927.⁴ Already in 1926 he had invited the young architectural historian Henry-Russell Hitchcock (1903–1987) to give a guest lecture about Walter Gropius at Wellesley College, the progressive women's college where Alfred H. Barr's lectures on modern and contemporary art were pioneering, since most considered contemporary practice outside the purview of the discipline of art history. As he recalled:

*The Bauhaus idea did have an important influence on me well before I went to Dessau. Gropius's ideal of bringing together the various visual arts influenced my course in Modern Art at Wellesley... It included architecture, industrial design, graphic arts, painting, sculpture, films, and photography. A few years later the Bauhaus also influenced my plan for the Museum of Modern Art... I had looked forward with great anticipation to the Bauhaus... among the ... things... I remember most vividly was the gentle charm of Klee, his interest in music, the sound of Frau Klee playing a Mozart sonata, his little collection of odds and ends of shells and minor curiosities, and his interest in children's drawings... Moholy-Nagy's sullen expression when I asked him whether he or Lissitzky first used photomontage; the students at work on their various exercises, particularly Formlebre; Lux Feininger's enthusiasm for the Bauhaus jazz band; and Gropius's unsmiling earnestness...*⁵

Alfred H. Barr was not alone. Philip Johnson (1906–2005) followed progress at the Bauhaus almost yearly on visits to Germany, writing in 1929, the year the New York museum was founded, that he had visited the Dessau school with a German friend, an interior architect, and had been shown around by Lyonel Feininger (1871–1956). Philip Johnson wrote to Alfred H. Barr:

*I told Kandinsky about your writing about abstract in art, and he thinks naturally he will be the hero of the book. Klee I found entrancing, the simplicity of a great man, without hide bound theories or illusions as to his greatness.*⁶

And he went on to speak at length in the same breath of figures who had left the Bauhaus and whom he met in Berlin:

Breuer, the young interior man whom you may have met ... is like Gropius, a utopian ... more interested in propaganda and education than in anything else, but ... if he had only invented that now famous chair of pipes, he would be something at his age of 26... Gropius was naturally most charming ... sees things in a big way, and [...] has the magnetism to draw people after him, never

*contented with a thing accomplished, always fighting for a new idea, now it is this business of ten story dwellings to save ground space and light. The Bauhaus suffers more and more without him...*⁷

Hannes Meyer (1889–1954), the director from 1928 to 1930, was not mentioned by name, nor is there any indication that Philip Johnson met the architect/director. And Hannes Meyer was not to be included in what is the first documented Bauhaus exhibition held in America, mounted in 1930 by the Harvard Society for Contemporary Art "Bauhaus Weimar Dessau". Nor was he included one year later in another small Bauhaus show at the Arts Club of Chicago. This omission set the stage for his exclusion again at MoMA in 1938 by Walter Gropius, Herbert Bayer and Marcel Breuer, all of whom had left the Bauhaus as Hannes Meyer took the reins in 1928. Meyer's leftist views in politics and his productivist vision of art education and art-making soon came to be seen as a critique of Walter Gropius's curriculum and *ethos*, even though it was Walter Gropius himself who had sought out Hannes Meyer in Basel to open the Bauhaus's long-delayed architecture department in 1927. Already during his directorship Walter Gropius had begun his efforts to minimize Meyer's reputation as a formative figure in the Bauhaus.

For the exhibition at Harvard University, his *alma mater*, Philip Johnson gave money, lent from his growing collection, and even wrote to Alfred H. Barr:

*Dear Alfred,
It comes to a pretty pass when the likes of us asks the likes of you for money. Yes — a subscription to our work at the present we are having a Bauhaus show. At the present we are terribly hard up.*⁸

The investment banking firm Goldman Sachs (Paul Sachs, son of the firm's founder, was the teacher of Johnson, Hitchcock, Alfred H. Barr and many others at Harvard) had chipped in, but not enough, he reported. Lincoln Kirstein (1907–1996), who curated the show, which ran for six weeks in December 1930–January 1931, was "writing 200 personal letters in long hand asking for ten dollars apiece".⁹ But with little success. The exhibition, as Nicholas Fox Weber later discovered, was afterwards shown at the John Becker Gallery on Madison Avenue.¹⁰ In summer 1930, Johnson again made the pilgrimage to Dessau, where Mies van der Rohe was now the new director after Hannes Meyer's recent ousting by the right-wing local government. On this return visit Johnson was accompanied by Hitchcock in preparation for "Modern Architecture: International Exhibition", the new museum's first foray into exhibiting architecture. Alfred H. Barr wanted to float this as a trial balloon to convince the reluctant trustees that the new museum could have something all but unprecedented: a Department of Architecture.¹¹ The model of the Dessau building that Walter Gropius and Herbert Bayer had had prepared for their installation of the German section of the Werkbund exhibition in Paris in 1930 was sent on to New York to feature prominently in the 1932 show and was to travel throughout the country.

01 Installation view of the exhibition, "Bauhaus: 1919-1928."; Photographer: Soichi Sunami; December 7, 1938-January 30, 1939; Gelatin silver print, 7 x 9 1/2" (17.7 x 24.1 cm) Photographic Archive. © The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.



02 Installation view of the exhibition, "Bauhaus: 1919-1928."; Photographer: Soichi Sunami; December 7, 1938-January 30, 1939; Gelatin silver print, 7 x 9 1/2" (17.7 x 24.1 cm) Photographic Archive. © The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.



03 Installation view of the exhibition, "Bauhaus: 1919-1928."; Photographer: Soichi Sunami; December 7, 1938-January 30, 1939; Gelatin silver print, 7 x 9 1/2" (17.7 x 24.1 cm) Photographic Archive. © The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.



04 Installation view of the exhibition, "Bauhaus: 1919-1928."; December 7, 1938-January 30, 1939; Gelatin silver print; 2 1/2 x 2 1/2" (6.3 x 6.3 cm); Photographic Archive. © The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.

In autumn 1931, Johnson again journeyed to Dessau, this time on an architecture tour with the young American architect John McAndrew (1904-1978). John McAndrew would become an influential teacher of art history at Vassar College and a curator in the Department of Architecture at MoMA, where he would assume the departmental directorship in 1937.¹²

"Today naturally I am reminded of you", Johnson wrote in 1931 to Alfred H. Barr,

...We were really thrilled at the sight of the Bauhaus. It is a magnificent building; I regard it as the most beautiful building we have seen, of the larger than house variety. Perhaps the Hook [J. J. P. Oud's housing at Hoek van Holland which he had earlier called "the Parthenon of Modern Europe"] has what Hitchcock would call more lyric beauty, but the Bauhaus has beauty of plan, and great strength of design. It has a majesty and simplicity which are unequalled.¹³

They were led through probably by Howard Dearstyne, an American student:

He is in the second half of the program, that is working on chairs and things. The system impressed me as being a very good one indeed for such a school. This American did not seem to know it but he was getting, as John tells me, a much better architectural education than in any architectural school in our country.¹⁴

Later in the day Johnson bought a few Paul Klees at the painter's one-day show in a Dessau gallery.

During the 1930s, even after the Bauhaus was closed by Mies van der Rohe to pre-empt a definitive closing by the National Socialists who had already raided the school, MoMA remained intimately linked to the defunct school through its former masters and students. Mies had emerged not only as Johnson's hero in his many visits to Berlin and to Dessau, but also as Alfred H. Barr's preferred choice for architect of the new building that the museum hoped to

build in midtown Manhattan to declare its adherence to the principles of European modernist architecture. Many involved with MoMA were also personally involved in aiding the emigration of *Bauhäusler*, as the former masters and pupils continued to refer to themselves. Just weeks after the closing of the school in Berlin in May 1933, Eddie Warburg (1908-1992), another of the so-called “Harvard apostles” who had advocated modernism (and who through his family banking money was a major funder of their efforts), began a campaign to bring Josef Albers (1888-1976) to the United States. He told Alfred H. Barr, then on sabbatical leave to treat the nervous exhaustion caused by the first four years at MoMA, “I cannot help but feel that getting Albers into this country would be a great feather in the cap of the Museum of Modern Art... With Albers over here we have the nucleus for an American Bauhaus!”¹⁵

Philip Johnson, like Alfred H. Barr, was again in Germany when *The Bauhaus Staircase* (1932) was purchased from Oscar Schlemmer’s abruptly shut one-man show in Stuttgart. Alfred H. Barr recalled:

I missed the opening but got in afterwards by official permission as a foreigner. I was so enraged that I cabled Philip Johnson to buy the most important picture in the show just to spite the sons of bitches. Philip replied by buying the two biggest with Bauhaus subjects.¹⁶

In January 1934, as the national tour of the “Modern Architecture” show came to a close, Philip Johnson wrote to Walter Gropius (on the letterhead, incidentally, of his next great venture, the “Machine Art” show which gave birth to the museum’s Department of Industrial Design):

I will be delighted to return your model of Bauhaus [sic] which has caused such great interest all over the country. I am enclosing a few excerpts of how it was received in the various cities. The whole Bauhaus idea has become much better known because of this exhibition and of course your name as well... I am awfully sorry that you are having such a difficult time in Germany and I sincerely hope we will be able to have you come over here to give some lectures if you still think you would be able to give them in English.¹⁷

The model returned to Germany somewhat the worse for wear – “it was the worst built of any of the models we received from Europe”,¹⁸ Johnson noted. After Walter Gropius had it restored, he packed it up for travel again in 1937 to Massachusetts as part of the first shipment of his household goods. “As soon as they have come, I shall be in touch...” Walter Gropius wrote to Alfred H. Barr, “I should be pleased to have that model permanently in the Museum of Modern Art”.¹⁹ So the model that featured in the window of the museum’s temporary quarters in Rockefeller Center in 1938 was to join a growing collection of models out of which Alfred H. Barr hoped to create a permanent gallery of modern architecture in three dimensions.²⁰ This project was not to be; in fact the model spent much of its time in storage, or travelling to schools along with other MoMA models. By the mid-1950s Walter Gropius requested its

transfer to Harvard’s Busch-Reisinger Museum, which he felt to be a better guardian of the Bauhaus flame than the Museum of Modern Art whose focus had turned increasingly towards home matters – and to cultivating Latin America²¹ – during the war and the immediate post-war period. Later he managed again to have it transferred to the newly formed Bauhaus archive in West Germany, first established in Darmstadt in 1960 and then moved to West Berlin in a purpose-built Walter Gropius building in 1979, where it is still one of the prize exhibits. Ironically, it was too fragile to make a return trip to the United States for the 2009 exhibition *Bauhaus 1919-1933 Workshops for Modernity*.²²

In summer 1937, as the Degenerate Art show began to make headlines in Europe, discussions began in New York – and in Walter Gropius’s rented vacation house at Buzzards Bay, Cape Cod where Moholy-Nagy, Marcel Breuer, and Xanti Schawinsky (1904-1979) gathered – of mounting a large-scale Bauhaus show at MoMA. McAndrew, who would officially join the museum in October as Curator of Architecture – and curator of the show – was already involved. Planned for winter 1937 (thus overlapping with the closure of Degenerate Art’s Munich leg and the beginning of its tour around Germany and Austria), on Walter Gropius’s advice the American show was postponed to autumn 1938. It was delayed again, before opening in New York on 6 December 1938. But from the beginning the idea was clear: “Our purpose would be to illustrate, largely by means of objects produced at the school, the principles of education for which the Bauhaus stood”.²³

Strategizing for the exhibition went into high gear in September and was to be led on multiple fronts. In New York McAndrew and his assistant Janet Heinrich began a massive letter writing campaign to former *Bauhäusler*, seeking both potential loans and leads on the whereabouts of the Bauhaus diaspora. In Berlin Herbert Bayer, recently returned from a trip to the US, was charged with assembling materials and tracking down *Bauhäusler* in Europe, the team having learnt that virtually nothing worthy of exhibition remained in Dessau itself. Responses began pouring in, but many were discouraging. For instance, Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944) regretted not being able to lend, since his own work was in storage. However, he recommended his former pupil Max Bill (1908-1994) in Zurich to join the effort from his neutral Swiss base. Soon correspondence began to bifurcate with letters sent within Germany referring to a show on “industrial art” and sometimes closing with approved sign-offs such as “with German greetings”. The latter were however written entirely in lower case Bauhaus style rather than in the neo-traditional orthography of the Nazis.²⁴ Letters sent to possible lenders in the rest of Europe and in North America explicitly trumpet a Bauhaus exhibition, but the wording became ever more circumspect. Max Bill addressed a letter to MoMA, suggesting helpfully: “At the moment it is not well advised to carry on correspondence with Bayer about the exhibition since he is Austrian and since the Annexation of Austria has become a ‘Reichsdeutscher’ and thus carefulness is requested”.²⁵

By November the dragnet has been joined by former Bauhaus student Hajo Rose (1910–1989), in exile in Amsterdam, who helped arrange shipments, and by Hungarian architect Farkas Molnar (1897–1945), a former assistant in Walter Gropius's Dessau architecture office, who gathered material including his own architectural drawings in Budapest. In writing to former Bauhaus students in America such as the Chicago architect Bertrand Goldberg (1913–1997), the advertising designer Edwin Fischer (then working with Breuer on designs for a house outside New Hope, Pa.) and the American architect Howard Dearstyne, now at work in Wallace K. Harrison's office where the design and supervision of Rockefeller Center was coming to a close, McAndrew laid out the basics:

*The show is going to be fairly large, filling all the space in this year's temporary quarters in the basement of Rockefeller Center. Gropius is supervising the whole show and authorizing it as a semi-official demonstration of what the Bauhaus was, and what it accomplished. Breuer, who has just gone to Harvard to teach under Gropius will also help. Bayer is in Germany right now hunting up material... We are planning a fairly elaborate installation scheme, for the main idea of the show is to show what the Bauhaus was, rather than to be just an accumulation of objects produced there; to show this, all sorts of ingenuities of installation will be necessary. Bayer will see the catalog through too.*²⁶

The highly political atmosphere was evident in Walter Gropius sending Alfred H. Barr a newspaper clipping about a second degenerate art show in Dessau: "As the Museum at Dessau had very good pictures from the Bauhaus, it came to my mind that it might be worth your while to negotiate with these people about buying some of the pictures".²⁷ Nothing seems to have come of this provocative suggestion.

Throughout 1938 the hunt continued in Europe, while reconstruction of lost works got underway in America. Albers at Black Mountain College, North Carolina and Moholy-Nagy in Chicago were working with students to produce reproductions of works from the Preliminary Course. Bayer, Bill and Hajo Rose between them tracked down Hirschfeld Mack (1893–1965) and Otti Berger (1898–1944) to London (later Otti Berger would return to her native Croatia, only to die in a concentration camp).²⁸ Both agreed to lend fabrics, postcards and Bauhaus books. Mariana Brandt (1893–1983) in Chemnitz lent materials, which would be purchased or returned to her twenty years later in 1957, when she was relocated in the German Democratic Republic. This formed part of the museum's ongoing efforts to return materials to lenders even two decades after the show. The most poignant case was Oskar Schlemmer (1888–1943). Herbert Bayer explained the project to him:

...an exhibition of industrial art, which is more or less a historical representation of precedents and also effects... What I would like from you is everything that you consider important: theoretical, instruction, theater performances, life and events, parties, commercial graphics, etc. I am thinking also to reserve

*a part of the exhibition for "freien kunst" (as painting and sculpture and the non-utilitarian arts were called at the Bauhaus) especially for a selection of works that were carried out in Weimar and Dessau, including I hope yours....*²⁹

Oskar Schlemmer replied:

*My situation in Germany is scarcely tenable, and anything that can extend my work over the borders is to be embraced. I am indeed already well known in the MoMA and represented there with my "Bauhaustreppe". I can't imagine that this picture won't be in the exhibition... I am especially interested in theater; I want to turn entirely to that in the future, after painting has now been condemned to death.*³⁰

By August 1938 his tone was more desperate: "Please take as many of my things over there as you can, especially the Ballets".³¹ He wanted to give three footlockers of costumes, and suggested displaying them in a harsh red light to make something dramatic, a "phantasmagoria". It would be fun, so he hinted, to be able to work with them in film, and maybe having the costumes in America could lead to further performances.

In the end much of the material would come from the émigrés: Alexander Dörner (1893–1957), now at the Rhode Island School of Design, lent textiles (and wrote an important text for the catalog). From Black Mountain College, Schawinsky sent theater pieces, while Anni and Joseph Albers provided not only textiles but some of their household furniture, including a "steel arm chair" by Marcel Breuer. Walter Gropius of course lent many pieces. Marcel Breuer, the last to make shipments, sent in late November 1938 an aluminum armchair and one of his bent plywood tables. Both were produced not only after he left the Bauhaus but after he left Germany. The boundaries of the Bauhaus were clearly slipping, and the show was becoming perhaps less historical documentation than a new beginning, an embassy for the Bauhaus "idea" in America.

Soon it became evident that the full scope of the fourteen years of the school's existence could not be covered, or at least so it seemed since there is no indication that the gaps in available loans clustered chronologically. Walter Gropius wrote to Alfred H. Barr:

*We are very anxious to put together all the material in an historic way, giving the actual facts, dates, etc; but in spite of all my endeavors, I couldn't manage to get my successors at the Bauhaus to cooperate... In the case of Mies, it is chiefly the difficulties in Germany which seem to hold him back... When I first saw him, months ago, ...he was still considering collaborating; but some weeks ago he definitively refused (in a letter) to take part in it.*³²

In fact, by 1938 Mies van der Rohe too had moved to America; but no attempt seems to have been made to see what he might have brought with him to Chicago, where he was taking over the directorship of the architecture school of the Armour Institute of Technology (today the

Illinois Institute of Technology, IIT). No mention was made of why it was impossible to include Hannes Meyer's years. The battle for the ownership of the Bauhaus was already well underway, as I have written in the 2009 catalog, with competing presentations of it in 1930 by Walter Gropius in Paris, Hannes Meyer in a traveling exhibition and Mies in Dessau.³³ Walter Gropius proposed the title "Nine years Bauhaus 1919–1928", to which Alfred H. Barr replied:

*I am not unhappy about stopping the exhibition at 1928. The Bauhaus after you left did much excellent work but it seems to me that all the fundamental ideas were incorporated while you were still director and that we can do a more clean-cut and conclusive exhibition by concentrating upon the years of your tenure.*³⁴

Karen Koehler first underscored the exclusion of Hannes Meyer, who was already ignored in the presentation of the Bauhaus in Paris in 1930.³⁵ No attempt seems to have been made to get in touch with Hannes Meyer in Geneva where he was living in 1937–1938, having been expelled the previous year like all other foreigners from the Soviet Union. Mies van der Rohe, we have seen, decided in the end against participating, although he seems to have been at first considering it. Early drafts of a checklist include architectural drawings by his students, including Dearstyne, and Mies van der Rohe's own furniture designs. Others also opted out. Albers warned McAndrew from the outset that the museum would have difficulties: "many Bauhaus members will not dare to lend their material for political reasons".³⁶ Architect Fritz Schliefer (1903–1977) in Altona responded that he had been a teacher since 1933 in the Landeskunstschule there and that his work was being published, so he could not see any point in participating: "for someone who has chosen to stay behind, you can imagine that it is not an easy matter...".³⁷ William Wagenfeld (1900–1990), on the other hand, explained that he did not want to exhibit his work in America for fear he might be copied.

More interesting though are both the maintenance of old rivalries and jealousies and new ones produced by the division of Bauhaus émigrés between Chicago and Boston. Herbert Bayer had assured Schlemmer that the show would have nothing to do with Moholy-Nagy's New Bauhaus in Chicago, although in fact the third section of the exhibition ultimately included that successor institution prominently. The reaction of architect Bertrand Goldberg is perhaps most revealing. Already in September 1937 he wrote:

I wish to stress my unwillingness to see the proposed exhibition, however, even under the expert guidance which the museum gives such things. There has been too much talk and action about Bauhaus here with too easy understanding of a principle dependent not upon a philosophy but upon actual work. I think in the last days of Johnson's Decline and Fall he realized this very thing, not that he did anything to stop it ... I think that exhibits such as you propose further the cause of philosophizing and emasculating Bauhaus, and promote the creation of a new temporary Bauhaus style in this country. This is a great danger and will cause Bauhaus to take its place with Modern, Functionalist,

*Internationalist, and the reminder of the ma-Holies.*³⁸ He was followed by photographer Walter Peterhans (1897–1960), who had just responded to the invitation to join Mies's faculty in Chicago:

*My own personal work and my teaching activities, in conjunction with that of my colleagues under the direction of Mies van der Rohe, were consistently kept away from the work of the original Bauhaus. I, therefore, believe particularly in consideration of my future activities in the United States, that it would create a false impression if my works were exhibited under a name whose goal can only be identified to a limited degree with my ideas.*³⁹

The show quickly began to take the form of a chronological leapfrogging. While the final five years of the Bauhaus, 1928–1933, were excluded, recent and contemporary work from the United States was gaining new prominence. As early as November 1937 Albers, the earliest of the émigrés involved, sought to steer things towards the new world:

*I have come to the conclusion that this show should be more one of principle than an historical collection with results by now out of date. I think that the Bauhaus is still living and after having been denied abroad we are apparently getting a new group of the Bauhaus movement in the United States. Therefore we could ask the American students of the Bauhaus how their work done here has been influenced by their studies at the Bauhaus, and maybe we should also besides their results, show some result of the Bauhaus teachers who have been working for years in this country... I think therefore that Black Mountain College should have a place in the exhibition, showing its way of studying art problems.*⁴⁰

An amplified third section was to be devoted not only to Black Mountain College, but to the mysterious and short-lived Laboratory School of Design in New York — asked at the last minute — 24 hours, so they claimed — and doubtless as a consequence were unhappy with their display. And then of course there was Harvard. The New York display included recent architectural commissions of Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer, the Hagerty House in Cohasset and Walter Gropius's own house in Lincoln, soon to become something of the Bauhaus embassy in exile. All of this is documented in the catalog, beautifully designed by Herbert Bayer under Walter Gropius's supervision. It deserves its own historiographical investigation.

Herbert Bayer returned to New York only on 22 August 1938 and rapidly began working on the installation of the show now titled "Bauhaus 1919–1928". Walter Gropius appeared very rarely in the galleries in the underground concourse of building 5 at Rockefeller Center, near 49th street. On 20 October 1938 he told Herbert Bayer: "I have a terribly regretful feeling about leaving you there to work without any help, but it is absolutely impossible for me to be with you to help to build up the exhibition".⁴¹ The installation photography is particularly rich and allows interesting comparisons of continuities and developments from Bayer's earlier counterpart at the Grand Palais, Paris in 1930,

also under Gropius and Breuer's supervision. In New York the installation was more rough and ready but an element of surrealist humor entered in as well. Bayer not only incorporated elements from surrealist painting in the graphic designs on the floor, but pointing hands and other popular techniques which he admired in American popular theater. The inspiration came about in his frequent strolls in New York's theater district of Times Square and along Broadway, and he unabashedly allowed a place for this in his handling of a Rockefeller Center storefront. For New York an exhibition was equally a show, with arrows pointing in directions, and footpaths suggested by patterns of direction on the floor. Much of the material was photographic documentation, of architecture, of performances, of life at the Bauhaus and, most importantly, of student work, since the aim was to expand the Bauhaus conquest of American art and architecture education.

The show was divided into six sections: "The Preliminary Course", "The Workshops", "Typography", "Architecture", "Painting" and "Work from Schools influenced by the Bauhaus". Visitors entered the shop front in the lower concourse – treated frankly as an advertisement in which Bauhaus and MoMA were emphatically linked. Wall labels were red, while the overall palette was creamy white, black and grey, with accents of deep blue and red. Cords, thin support posts and walls that didn't reach the ground added a sense of transparency and spaciousness. From Moholy-Nagy's Space Light Prop in the vestibule to the peep-show effects at the back of the show, Bauhaus theatricality met Broadway techniques as Xanti Schawinsky (1904–1979) and Oskar Schlemmer (1888–1949) — in *abstentia* — hoped to find new fields of operation.

The run was short — 6 December 1938 to 30 January 1939 — but the attendance was large — the largest ever in the temporary Rockefeller Center quarters with an average of 402 visitors a day. And the press coverage was enormous. Politics were not admitted into the gallery, but they could not have been far from anyone's mind. Leading American architectural historian and sociologist Lewis Mumford (1895–1990) noted:

Dr Gropius, the father of the German objective architecture which attained international renown, is now chairman of the department of architecture at Harvard University. At a preview of the exhibition yesterday he was reluctant to discuss the political vicissitudes of his movement except to observe that the same architectural and aesthetic phenomenon is condemned in Russia as "western bourgeois" and in Germany as "Bolshevik", while it is acclaimed in Italy as "real Fascist style".⁴²

But the reviews were for the most part skeptical to negative, and Walter Gropius and Alfred H. Barr wondered if the best response was to change aspects of the show or to respond. Walter Gropius wrote:

We are indeed somewhat disappointed at the rather low level of understanding among the present critics... but we are also surprised at the critics' lack of familiarity with abstract painting,

after having been so well prepared by you and your museum.⁴³

In turn, Alfred H. Barr noted: "We had a very hostile review... by Henry McBride of the *New York Sun*. Henry McBride is lazy and irresponsible. His taste is always strictly limited to Paris". Alfred H. Barr warned:

We must expect a certain amount of hostile criticism from four main sources: 1) Pro-Nazi, anti-modern sources, 2) Pro-French anti-German sources, 3) American anti-foreign sources, and 4) People who feel that the Bauhaus is too old fashioned to be worth the trouble.

He noted further that the issue of anti-Semitism was not an exclusively German affair:

As we could have guessed, we have had already heard reports that the exhibition is considered "Jewish". Many Americans are so ignorant of European names that they conclude that, because the Nazi Government has been against the Bauhaus, the names Gropius, Bayer, Moholy-Nagy etc. are probably Jewish Communists.⁴⁴

Marcel Bayer's display seems to have created more confusion than clarity. James Johnson Sweeney (1900–1986), a great supporter of the Bauhaus as a historian and critic (and later an influential curator and museum director), noted in the *New Republic* that the Bauhaus produced "some of the finest industrial designs of the present century" but that

the Museum of Modern Art can scarcely be said to do justice to the ideas behind the Bauhaus and the influence it has exerted... [A] greater critical frankness and more stringent selection would have been less confusing... a more modest descriptive tone throughout the display might have made it clearer to the average viewer.⁴⁵

But Lewis Mumford, a major contributor to earlier shows at the museum, hailed the exhibition in the *New Yorker* as "The most exciting thing on the horizon", and added:

We all have a lot still to learn from it; indeed it will probably take our schools of architecture another half-generation to catch up with it fully... If Gropius, Moholy-Nagy and Breuer, who are now teaching in America, can reestablish the spirit of the Bauhaus here, they will be doing a good job. For this combination of imagination and logic is what our architects mainly lack; they tend to substitute memory for the first and precedent for the second.⁴⁶

Plans were drawn up for two traveling versions, to the delight of Walter Gropius who esteemed the show a coup for his future plans but to the chagrin of Marcel Breuer who was eager to see the return of his living room furniture for his new house in Lincoln. A large exhibition with most of the loans went to the art museums in Springfield, Mass, Milwaukee, Cleveland and Cincinnati, where it finally closed on 5 April 1940, on the eve of the American debate over entering the European theater of the war. A small exhibition, "The Bauhaus: How it Worked", traveled to school galleries including the Addison Gallery of American Art

and Philips Academy in Andover Mass, and the University of Minnesota, Florida State University in Tallahassee, Louisiana State University, Harvard, the University of Washington, Mills College in Oakland, California, and finally to Williams College, ending in June 1940.

By then even the protagonists were having doubts and disputes. When Walter Gropius tried to get more money for Marcel Bayer for his work on the catalog, Alfred H. Barr sent a sharp rebuke: “The catalog also was by far the most expensive we have ever published on any exhibition – the cost far out of proportion to its interest, especially as it is both diffuse and confusing in character”.⁴⁷ Janet Heinrich in the Department of Architecture was even more direct:

when I consider the conspicuous position which Mr. Bayer occupies in the catalog – he gave to himself more illustrations than to any other individual – and when I consider the extraordinary confusion and delays involved in getting the catalog ready, causing incidentally the virtual nervous breakdown of our chief of publications, I must tell you that whatever debt the Museum may owe Mr. Bayer has in our opinion been fully paid.

To soften the blow Alfred H. Barr had ended his letter:

While we are speaking frankly about the Bauhaus exhibition I want to assure you that, although it was one of the most expensive, difficult, exasperating and in some ways unrewarding exhibitions we have ever had, we do not in the least regret having had it. At the same I think we should learn from it as much as we can.

Alfred H. Barr felt that the critics might not have been entirely wrong: “... the fact is that in the Bauhaus exhibition a good many works were mediocre or worse, so that the critics were naturally not impressed”.⁴⁸ Gropius’s suggestion that Americans were not ready to appreciate the Bauhaus rubbed the wrong way as the country’s entry into the war seemed near.

But these are tensions buried in the archive. The book would remain in print for years, reprinted on several occasions, and Alfred H. Barr’s preface would be read by thousands who had no notion of the display or the events of 1938–1939. Indeed, it is that preface which set the tone for decades of Bauhaus reception in American art history and for the Bauhaus project in America. “Are this book then, and the exhibition which supplements it, merely a belated wreath laid upon the tomb of brave events, important in their day but now of primarily historical interest? Emphatically, no!” Alfred H. Barr answered his own rhetorical question thus, and asserted: “The Bauhaus is not dead; it lives and grows through the men who made it, both teachers and students, through their designs, their books, their methods, their principles, their philosophies of art and education”.⁴⁹

Notes

- 1 Mark Stocker and Philip Lindley (Eds.), *Tributes to Jean Michel Massing: Towards a Global Art History*, Turnhout, Harvey Miller Publishers, 2016, 15–32.

- 2 From Alfred H. Barr to Walter Gropius, September 15, 1938, “The Bauhaus 1919–1928”, Registrar Exhibition Files, Exh. 82, The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Earlier considerations of this exhibition include Margret Kentgens-Craig, *The Bauhaus and America: First Contacts, 1919–1936*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2001; and Karen Koehler, “The Bauhaus, 1919–1928: Gropius in Exile and the Museum of Modern Art, N.Y., 1938”, in Richard A. Etlin (Ed.), *Art, Culture, and Media Under the Third Reich*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2002.
- 3 This was Alfred H. Barr’s motto for the Museum and the title of the tenth anniversary exhibition which inaugurated the new building at 11 West 53rd Street in 1939. See also Harriet S. Bee, Michelle Elligot (Eds.) *Art in Our Time: A Chronicle of the Museum of Modern Art*, New York, MoMA, 2004.
- 4 Sybil Gordon Kantor, *Alfred Barr, Jr. and the Intellectual Origins of the Museum of Modern Art*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2003, 155, No. 37.
- 5 Sybil Gordon Kantor, *Alfred Barr, Jr. and the Intellectual Origins of the Museum of Modern Art*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2003, 159, No. 41, quoting Barr to Jane Fiske McCullough, Feb. 6, 1967, Registrar Exhibition Files, Exh. 82, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
- 6 From Philip Johnson to Alfred H. Barr, undated letter, c. 1929, “The Bauhaus 1919–1928”, Registrar Exhibition Files, Exh. 82, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Unsigned letter on Harvard Society for Contemporary Art letterhead, probably from Philip Johnson to Alfred H. Barr, Dec. 16, 1930, “The Bauhaus 1919–1928”, Registrar Exhibition Files, Exh. 82, The Museum of Modern Art, New York. See also Nicholas Fox Weber, *Patron Saints: Five Rebels Who Opened America to a New Art 1928–1943*, New York, Knopf, 1992, 118.
- 9 Ibid. Since this article was written the bibliography on Kirstein has expanded, see Samantha Friedman and Jodi Hauptman (Eds.), *Lincoln Kirstein’s Modern*. New York, The Museum of Modern Art, 2019.
- 10 Nicholas Fox Weber, *Patron Saints: Five Rebels Who Opened America to a New Art 1928–1943*, New York, Knopf, 1992, 118.
- 11 On the show see Terence Riley, *The International Style: Exhibition 15 and the Museum of Modern Art*, New York, Rizzoli, 1992, and Barry Bergdoll and Delfim Sardo, *Modern Architects, Uma Introdução; An Introduction*, Lisbon, Babel, 2010. Since this essay was first published that introduction has been reprinted in David Hanks, (Ed.) *Partners in Design: Alfred Barr, Jr. and Philip Johnson*, New York, Monacelli Press, 2015.
- 12 This was at a time when the small circle of the young museum was in shock after Philip Johnson had thrown his financial support and energies to Father Charles Edward Conklin in Louisiana instead of to the nascent Department of Architecture, where he had footed much of the bill. Since this essay was first published a study of John McAndrew has appeared: Mardges Bacon, *John McAndrew’s Modernist Vision: From the Vassar College Art Library to the Museum of Modern Art in New York*. New York, Princeton Architectural Press, 2018.
- 13 From Philip Johnson to Alfred H. Barr, Oct. 16, 1931, “The Bauhaus 1919–1928”, Registrar Exhibition Files, Exh. 82, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
- 14 Ibid. On Johnson and Politics see Franz Schulze’s *Philip Johnson: Life and Work*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1996, soon to be superseded by an announced new biography by Mark Lamster. On McAndrew see Keith Eggner, “Nationalism, Internationalism and the Naturalisation of Modern Architecture in the United States, 1925–1940”, in *National Identities*, Vol. 8, No. 3, September 2006, 243–258. See also Howard Dearstyne, *Inside the Bauhaus*, New York, Rizzoli, 1986.
- 15 From Eddie Warburg to Alfred H. Barr, letter, no date, “The Bauhaus 1919–1928”, Registrar Exhibition Files, Exh. 82, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
- 16 Alfred Barr quoted in Margaret Scolari Barr, “Our Campaigns”. *The New Criterion* 5, No. 11 (August 1987), 44. See also Andreas Huyssen, “Oskar Schlemmer Bauhaus Stairway. 1932”, in Barry Bergdoll and Leah Dickerman, *Bauhaus 1919–1933, Workshops for Modernity*, New York, MoMA, 2009, 318–21.
- 17 From Philip Johnson to Walter Gropius, January 29, 1934, “The Bauhaus 1919–1928”, Registrar Exhibition Files, Exh. 82, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
- 18 Ibid.

- 19 From Walter Gropius to Alfred H. Barr, April 20, 1937, "The Bauhaus 1919-1928", Registrar Exhibition Files, Exh. 82, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
- 20 Barry Bergdoll, "The Paradoxical Origins of MoMA's Model Collection", in Mari Lending and Mari Hvattum (Eds.), *Modelling Time: The Permanent Collection 1925-2014*, Oslo, Torpedo Press, 2014, 159-161.
- 21 See Barry Bergdoll, "Good Neighbors: MoMA and Latin America, 1933-1955", in Thodoris Arrhenius, Mari Lending, Wallis Miller, Jeremie Michael McGowan (Eds.), *Place and Displacement: Exhibiting Architecture*, Zurich, Lars Müller Publishers, 2014, 113-128.
- 22 See Michael Siebenbrodt, Jeff Wall, Klaus Weber, *Bauhaus: A Conceptual Model*, Berlin, Hatje Kantz, 2009.
- 23 James M. Heinrich on behalf of John McAndrew to William Muschenheim, September 17, 1937, Registrar Exhibition Files, Exh. 82, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
- 24 See correspondence in "The Bauhaus 1919-1928", Registrar Exhibition Files, Exh. 82, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
- 25 From Max Bill to MoMA, March 21, 1938, "The Bauhaus 1919-1928", Registrar Exhibition Files, Exh. 82, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
- 26 From John McAndrew to Charles Ross, a former student, Oct. 13, 1937, "The Bauhaus 1919-1928", Registrar Exhibition Files, Exh. 82, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
- 27 From Walter Gropius to Alfred H. Barr, Dec. 15, 1937, "The Bauhaus 1919-1928", Registrar Exhibition Files, Exh. 82, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
- 28 See Tai Smith, "Weaving Work at the Bauhaus: The Gender and Engendering of a Medium", Ph.D. dissertation, University of Rochester, 2006, forthcoming as *Bauhaus Weaving Theory: From Feminine Craft to Mode of Design* (forthcoming from University of Minnesota Press).
- 29 From Herbert Bayer to Oskar Schlemmer, Oct. 28, 1937, "The Bauhaus 1919-1928", Registrar Exhibition Files, Exh. 82, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
- 30 From Oskar Schlemmer to Herbert Bayer, Oct. 23 1937, "The Bauhaus 1919-1928", Registrar Exhibition Files, Exh. 82, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
- 31 From Oskar Schlemmer to Herbert Beyer, Aug. 11, 1938, "The Bauhaus 1919-1928", Registrar Exhibition Files, Exh. 82, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
- 32 From Walter Gropius to Alfred H. Barr, Sept. 8, 1938, "The Bauhaus 1919-1928", Registrar Exhibition Files, Exh. 82, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
- 33 Barry Bergdoll, "Bauhaus Multiplied: Paradoxes of Architecture and Design in and After the Bauhaus", in Barry Bergdoll and Leah Dickerman (Eds.), *Bauhaus 1919-1933: Workshops for Modernity*, New York, Museum of Modern Art, 2009, 59-60.
- 34 From Alfred H. Barr to Walter Gropius, Sept. 15, 1938, "The Bauhaus 1919-1928", Registrar Exhibition Files, Exh. 82, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
- 35 Karen Koehler, "The Bauhaus 1919-1928: Gropius in Exile and the Museum of Modern Art, 1938", in Richard Etlin (Ed.), *Art, Culture and Media under the Third Reich*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002, 287-315.
- 36 From Josef Albers to Janet Heinrich, November 19, 1937, "The Bauhaus 1919-1928", Registrar Exhibition Files, Exh. 82, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
- 37 From Fritz Schleifer to Herbert Beyer, Nov. 4, 1937, "The Bauhaus 1919-1928", Registrar Exhibition Files, Exh. 82, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
- 38 From Bertrand Goldberg to Janet Heinrich, Sept. 25, 1937, "The Bauhaus 1919-1928", Registrar Exhibition Files, Exh. 82, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
- 39 From Walter Peterhans to Janet Heinrich, Mar. 2, 1938, "The Bauhaus 1919-1928", Registrar Exhibition Files, Exh. 82, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
- 40 From Josef Albers to Janet Heinrich, Nov. 19, 1937, "The Bauhaus 1919-1928", Registrar Exhibition Files, Exh. 82, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
- 41 From Walter Gropius to Herbert Bayer, Oct. 20, 1938, "The Bauhaus 1919-1928", Registrar Exhibition Files, Exh. 82, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
- 42 Article in the *New York Post*, quoted by Karen Koehler in "The Bauhaus, 1919-1928: Gropius in Exile and the Museum of Modern Art, N.Y., 1938", in Richard A. Etlin (Ed.), *Art, Culture, and Media Under the Third Reich*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2002, 300, No. 45.
- 43 From Walter Gropius to Alfred H. Barr, Dec. 15, 1938, "The Bauhaus 1919-1928", Registrar Exhibition Files, Exh. 82, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
- 44 From Alfred H. Barr to Walter Gropius, Dec. 10, 1938, "The Bauhaus 1919-1928", Registrar Exhibition Files, Exh. 82, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
- 45 Cf. Alfred Barr, Jr., "Notes on the Reception of the Bauhaus Exhibition", Registrar Exhibition Files, Exh. 82, The Museum of Modern Art, New York; James Johnson Sweeney, "The Bauhaus – 1919-1928", *The New Republic*, January 11, 1959.
- 46 Lewis Mumford, "Bauhaus — Two Restaurants and a Theatre", *The New Yorker*, 31 Dec 1938.
- 47 From Alfred H. Barr to Walter Gropius, Mar. 3, 1939, "The Bauhaus 1919-1928", Registrar Exhibition Files, Exh. 82, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
- 48 Cf. Karen Koehler, "The Bauhaus, 1919-1928: Gropius in Exile and the Museum of Modern Art, N.Y., 1938", in Richard A. Etlin (Ed.), *Art, Culture, and Media Under the Third Reich*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002, 307-09, No. 67; Alfred Barr to Walter Gropius, March 3, 1939, WGA, Harvard.
- 49 Alfred H. Barr, preface to *Bauhaus 1919-1928* by Herbert Bayer (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1938), 7.

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