

The Bauhaus: Influence and Change in Design

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History of Graphic Design

April 19, 2017

The Bauhaus was a design school which possessed many unique ideals that were ahead of their time. These ideas were based on simple design principles, and finding the most effective solutions. *“The aim of the Bauhaus was to find a new and powerful working correlation of all the processes of artistic creation to culminate finally in a new cultural equilibrium of our visual environment”* Walter Gropius. The working motive of the Bauhaus design school was to construct a blend of art and modern technology. The Bauhaus Movement was a very prominent time within the design world. The school had a diverse curriculum, constant values, concepts, and styles, and a lasting legacy that has continued to impact designers today.

The start and life of the school brought struggles and triumphs. The Bauhaus design school had begun under founder Walter Gropius in 1919 in Weimar, Germany (Meggs). There was incredible tension between the government in Weimar, and the Bauhaus. The school had radical ideals that the government refused to tolerate. Gropius made the decision to move the school to a smaller city in 1924. The Bauhaus was then settled in Dessau, Germany, where the school’s ideals became most prominent and influential. In 1928 Gropius resigned to found an architectural school. The school continued on through alternate leadership for a few years, before the Nazi Party took control over the Dessau area and canceled the Bauhaus’ contract in 1932. The school was officially closed on August 10th, 1933, however it was not the end of the Bauhaus’s legacy.

The Bauhaus had a notable beginning, influential teachers, and curriculum that set it apart from other design schools. The name Bauhaus means “house of building”, and its goal was to replace the Victorian-Era design with something that would better suit the machine era (Smock, William). The teachers at the Bauhaus were also practicing artists and designers. They had a

wide variety of expertise, ranging from painting, to theater, to textile designers, making the system very well-rounded. Prominent painters were Josef Albers, Wassily Kandinsky, and Oskar Schlemmer who also worked in theater and sculpture. Paul Klee was also a pronounced figure in the artistic realm of the Bauhaus, along with Herbert Bayer a graphic designer who introduced new typefaces to the Bauhaus, and Laszlo Moholy-Nagy who was a graphic designer who advocated for the integration of technology and industry into the fine arts. There was a need to and fix the function of design, which was where the Bauhaus emerged, reducing the clutter on buildings and symbolic treatment to design, and replacing it with a very modernist take. Gropius abolished the distinction between pure and applied art. He took charge, merging all arts and crafts under one unified roof. The faculty of the Bauhaus were referred to “Masters of Form” who were the artists, and “Masters of Technique” who were the craftsmen. They taught side-by-side in workshops that were devoted to particular materials like wood, metal, and glass. In addition to working at the drafting tables, students had to learn a trade. And before choosing a craft, they had to learn the principles of design, which are how all of the elements work with one another.

The Bauhaus also introduced a distinct curriculum. Students came from diverse educational and social backgrounds (Griffith, Alexandra). The preliminary course at the Bauhaus immersed students into the study of materials, color theory, and prepared them for more specialized studies. The professors were visual artists, and were notably Paul Klee, Wassily Kandinsky, and Josef Albers. The second part of their course were specialized workshops in the realms of metalworking, weaving, pottery, woodwork, typography, and wall painting. Gropius made sure it was instilled that art was meant to serve the people and not the wealthy

connoisseurs. The academy was meant to improve on German industrial design through the principles of abstract design and use of raw materials (Lupton, Ellen). The Bauhaus was not meant to represent a single philosophy, but rather respond to aesthetic and cultural issues, where it worked to harmonize the relationship between humans and nature (Chen, Wenwen). Gropius believed that art had lost its purpose in society, which gave him the motivation to create the Bauhaus (Bauhaus Movement). It was Walter Gropius's ideals, and curriculum along with the expertise of his faculty, that made the school so influential.

The Bauhaus design school had distinct values that made it such an influential movement. The school embraced a diverse range of visual arts (Gropius, Walter). It aimed to combine theoretical and practical teachings. Students and teachers worked in a community together on a wide spectrum of subjects ranging from architecture to painting, and sculpture, to industrial design and stage work. The teacher's approach would never be imposed on any student, and if any student attempted to imitate their professor's work, it was suppressed. The Bauhaus had unique ideals that were able to distinguish it from other schools. Being true to materials was one that was thoroughly enforced (Smock, William). This meant that plastic should not be disguised as wood, so that the beauty could be brought out from the item itself, and to be true to the form so that the finished product did not seem fake. They taught to find the most sensible way to build, and to solve structural problems. It was taught that "less is more" so that finished pieces were economical and visually efficient. They stressed rejecting symbolism, and took a more modernist approach. Modern design had an approach that took on more clarity and order, which included clean, straightforward, and uncluttered design where the most simple and minimalist solution is believed to be the best looking. Often, they used stripped down typefaces, and a

rectangular grid layout for their designs. The Bauhaus also emphasized streamlining the process to be more functional, and used the study of ergonomics to gauge the function of what the students created. All objects were given the same consideration, where a small object and a large object were created with the simplest geometric shape, in the effort to strive for cleanliness, and for clarity (Heller, Steven). They valued the raw materials and believed they should not be concealed. For example, not a screw would be hidden on a cabinet, and no embellishments would be added in order to bring forth the naturalistic beauty of the raw material that the cabinet was created with. Aesthetics were secondary to utility. Even colors served a specific purpose in all designs. The fundamental teachings and values of the Bauhaus were what made it so prestigious.

The concepts and styles of the Bauhaus were what gave it such a reputable name. Modern design was one thing the Bauhaus stressed consistently. It was taught excessively that form follows function. In conjunction with that, designs and works had to be clean and honest, and use the bare minimum to achieve the maximum result. Gestalt principles were also largely taught, and optical illusion were widely used. Geometry and mass production were simplified, and objective learning was seen as more important than subjective learning. The Bauhaus believed in humanizing industrial design and making it more relatable.

The humanization of design was a concept that the Bauhaus largely followed. Through this idea, they were accepting the machine to exploit their creativity (Bartram, Alan). The language of the Bauhaus was later considered as an advertising language. Not all typography needed to be reader-friendly as long as it caught people's attention, which was a priority. The space should be dynamic, with an aggressive heading, and there should be images integrated

with varied text. Other important advertising rules included refraining from the use of capital letters, not using an indication such as indents or line spaces for paragraphs, applying large numerals, and setting the type vertically, or at an angle. Laszlo Moholy-Nagy taught and utilized the style of “typophoto” or integrating type and image in designs (Lupton, Ellen). He also taught forms of expression and existence. Herbert Bayer attempted to reform the alphabet by eradicating capital letters. He also used monumental typography to promote, and believed in bringing realism to advertising. Not only that, but Bayer also considered using photography in a dramatic way, usually large scale, with avant-garde lettering to be extremely dramatic. Overall, the concepts and styles of the Bauhaus were very straightforward, and clear-cut.

The legacy of the Bauhaus school has lasted into the present day, and has had influence on many aspects of current design. Modernism was an appeal to reason, and the Bauhaus believed that good design was what put technology to work (Smock, William). And rather than treating things as a cluster of symbols, they should be treated as machines. Legible symbols from the 1970’s and screen icons from the 1980’s are products of Bauhaus ideology, showing that the beliefs of the school continued on well after the school was closed. Along with the ideals of the Bauhaus, many key figures who taught there continued on after the school was shut down. They emigrated to the United States during World War II where they influenced even more people with their teaching and philosophies. Walter Gropius continued on to teach at Harvard. Josef Albers educated students, as well as his wife, Anni, at Black Mountain College, and later taught at Yale. Laszlo Moholy-Nagy created a new Bauhaus in Chicago in 1937. The Bauhaus was very influential in the time that it was a school, but the movement and ideals that came from it lasted well into the future.

The Bauhaus was a design school known for its outlandish ideals that brought forth many important people and works. Overall it was extremely important in many ways. Not only did it have a well rounded curriculum, it also had important values, concepts, and styles that continued into a lasting legacy that is still highly regarded today.

Works Cited

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