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BAUHAUS – THE SCHOOL THAT BECAME THE AVANT-GARDE

Abstract: The article presents the Bauhaus school as an idea that was not intended to start an independent movement, but to be one of the styles of modern art education. The school founded by Voltaire Gropius was based on the foundation of arts and crafts education which developed in the era of the Art Nouveau. The author shows the evolution of the Bauhaus, which existed barely fourteen years, but its myth spread to the entire 20th and now the 21st century. The article also touches on the difficult political context in which Bauhaus' was launched and developed. Every contemporary designer must know this German school and should be able to define his/her work in relation to its achievements, but at the same time s/he must remember that the gas chambers of the Nazi concentration camps were also built by the Bauhaus architects. It is a difficult legacy and a difficult avant-garde.

Keywords: Bauhaus, Auschwitz, the avant-garde, design, Art Nouveau Tadeusz Peiper, Walter Gropius.

Gropius' school

Tadeusz Peiper, a Polish poet, critic, and essayist visited the German Bauhaus School in 1927, during his stay in the then Weimar Republic, where he had gone to handle some artistic and pesonal affairs. He described the visit extensively on the pages of "Zwrotnica", a journal devoted to new art and literature:

> Bauhaus, the one in Dessau. [...] Three hours on a regular train from Berlin. We arrive at five o'clock in the evening. The legs on the stairs leading out of the station's tunnel are already an indication that this is a provincial area. It is not a Prussian province, however. [...] This is the territory of the Anhalt duchy. Small one- and two-story houses, similar to those in Krakow's Szewska Street or Elektoralna in Warsaw. Around the perimeter of the city chimneys sprout long and red flames. We are in one of the centers of the Central German coal mining region ... There is no time to waste. We need to call Gropius, Director of the Bauhaus. We go to a café. I start making phone calls. He is in! He is

> very happy, invites us to stay at his house for the night, comes to get us at the café in his directorial car. A noble face, wrapped in fatigue, tensed with truth.[1]

Peiper's writings, dressed in literary ornamentation, provide an observant description, juxtaposing the parochialism of the surroundings with the nonchalance and modernity associated with Walter Gropius, the modernist architect, the principal originator of a school that was initially known as the bauhaus, consistently spelled in lowercase. It was primarily a school of contemporary thinking about applied arts, originally established in 1919 in Weimar as a result of the merger of the Academy of Fine Arts with the School of Arts and Crafts. As an art school, it was intended to train excellent craftsmen, who would go on to work in the name of the principle specified in the program manifesto, namely that "art is not a profession" and "mastery of skill is essential for every artist." Gropius perceived the school as the embodiment of the German Romantic idea of Gesamtkunstwerk, the total work, understood as a perfect building. The founding manifesto was also based on an ideology that referred to the utopian vision of society without class divisions, rooted in the left-wing notion of the needs of modern communities. Gropius wrote:

> Let us create a new *guild of craftsmen*, without the class distinctions which rise an arrogant between craftsman and artist. Together, let us conceive and create a new building of the future, which will embrace architecture *and* sculpture *and* painting in one unity and which will one day rise toward heaven from the hands of a million workers, like the crystal symbol of the new faith.[2]

Scholars might find it intriguing that the manifesto was untitled; it was only decorated by Lyonel Feininger's lithography titled *The Cathedral*, therefore, text and image should be read as a mutually complementary semantic unity:

> The immediacy with which the image addresses the viewer is echoed in the immediacy of the text's appeal. Text and image – at least this seems to be the case – complement one another, all the more so since a few detail in the image can be interpreted as the faithful translation of particular phrases: for instance, the different parts of the building, which refer to the composite character of a building, or the stars, which could describe art's *Lichtmomente* (this term – literally light moments – means moments of inspiration). Together they establish the context for the proper understanding of the *Program of Staatliches Bauhaus* in Weimar.[3]

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1 T. Peiper, *W Bauhausie*, in: idem *Tędy. Nowe usta*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 1972, p. 164. The text was first printed in June 1927 in „Zwrotnica."

2 W. Gropius as cited in Gillian Naylor, *Bauhaus*, Littlehampton 1968, p. 9.

3 M. Bushart, It Began with a Misunderstanding. Feininger's Cathedral and the Bauhaus Manifesto, in: Bauhaus a conceptual model, Haitje Cantz Verlang, Berlin 2009, p. 31.

The complementarity of the text and the image of the cathedral was intentional. Gropius was a trained architect, and it is well known that sacred buildings, especially the ones from the Gothic era, are characterized by both artistry and aesthetic craftsmanship. Medieval engineering and artistic unity was a tradition that was to be revived by founding an art school for modern man. In the structure of the Bauhaus we find many more allusions to the certainly phantasmagorical vision of the medieval community of artisans and artists.

It should be pointed out that Gropius' school was not intended as yet another avant-garde trend, but was primarily meant to teach. Today, we consider it one of the movements within the scope of the avant-garde thinking about art in the twentieth century, focusing mainly on design. Years ago, Stefan Morawski distinguished the constitutive features of the phenomenon of the avant-garde, which consisted of: time constraints, occurrence in various socio-political contexts, which resulted in an emphasis on the issues of form or content. The scholar also pointed out that the avant-garde was associated with the civilizational progress of the bourgeoisie.[4] The story of the Bauhaus proves that the Polish aesthetician was correct in his assessment, as the school was only active for fourteen years and was affected by various social and political influences. Its accomplishments and great aesthetic success are unmistakably linked with the development of the middle class in the second half of the twentieth century.

At the 2009 exhibition *Bauhaus, a Conceptual Model*, Annemarie Jaeggi, Director of the Bauhaus-Archiv in Berlin suggested that Gropius had created a conceptual model of teaching which can be used to explain both the raison d'etre of the school and its function in the contemporary reception of avant-garde trends:

> Answers to these questions may be discovered – if one approaches the Bauhaus as a conceptual model. In this context, the term *model* should be understood in two different ways: first, in the broadest sense, as an ideal, prototype, and model, exemplar and image, measure and standard, guideline and reference object. Secondly, a model can also be a means for concretizing circumstances, relationships, and structures (whether verbal or visual), hence rendering them comprehensible. Underlying all models is capacity to function regulatively and provide definitions.[5]

Jaeggi also drew attention to an important detail concerning the name itself. Defining the school, Gropius did not use any of the available and popular formulas[6]

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4 Cf. P.J. Przybysz, A. Zajdler-Janiszewska, *Stefan Morawski – wstępny szkic do portretu* in: S. Morawski, *Wybór pism estetycznych*, Universitas, Kraków 2007.

5 A. Jaeggi, *Bauhaus: a Conceptual Model in: Bauhaus a conceptual model*, Haitje Cantz Verlang, Berlin 2009, p. 13.

6 Jaeggi cites the following example: in 1924 in Berlin, Bruno Paul founded the school: Vereinigte Staatsschulen für freie und angewandte Kunst (United State Schools for Free and Applied Art).

that would be relevant to any educational purpose. The name of the school was a reference to the medieval *Bauhütte*, meaning a thatched roof. Symbolically, it was meant to unify all artistic disciplines. Bauhaus was also supposed to be a byword that would become a brand used to easily identify all extra-institutional activities of the school, that is the Bauhaus Week, the Bauhaus Dance, the Bauhaus Festival, or the Bauhaus Books. Oskar Schlemmer, one of the school's charismatic teachers, even designed the Bauhaus signet ring for outstanding school personalities. "Small wonder, then, that as early as the late 1920s, the advertising and fashion industries appropriated the exceedingly efficacious label *Bauhaus style* for anything and everything that appeared modern and functional in the broadest sense – and in contradiction to the school's self-image, which to be sure saw itself as trendsetting, but by no means wanted to create a signature style."[7] It was the first school in the history of artistic education that built its brand from the very beginning. It is interesting to note that before the Bauhaus fully shaped the product, the economic and social market sanctioned the brand and even transferred it through the system of culture.

The fact that Gropius was accepting everyone regardless of age or nationality contributed to the popularization of the school. Moreover, the curriculum diverged considerably from the academic requirements. Academic titles were abandoned and the names of craftsmen's guilds re-established. Thus, there were no "professors" and "students," just "masters," "journeymen" and "apprentices." Education consisted of two basic segments: practical and theoretical. The former provided knowledge of materials and processes of production and the latter involved teaching how to produce perfect shapes of the designed objects. Instruction was divided into three thematic blocks: observation or study of nature; representation, including geometry, construction theory, design drawing and modeling; composition, including the theory of space and color. Over the course of the education process, the trainee attended three courses, the most famous of which was the first one, which lasted six months and "was intended to liberate the student from all conventional knowledge he had so far acquired and introduce him to the theory and practice of the craft."[8] After completing it, the would-be graduate went to workshops where the study lasted three full years and ended with an exam and the title of "journeyman". The third stage was the specialization: weaving, ceramics, carpentry and architecture. The students did not only learn valuable craftsmanship skills, but also carried out external orders for specific projects for which they received remuneration. Gropius developed a circular diagram in order to present his views, the center of which was the *bau*, or building, the main purpose of the education, understood both metaphorically and practically. Regardless of all efforts to create craft and creative workshops, the field that was the most important for the school was the architectural education.

7 A. Jaeggi, p. 14.
8 Ibid., p. 41.

In 1919, the curriculum attracted more than 200 pupils from Weimar, aged 17 to 40. Gropius accepted a total of 106 men and 101 women,

> which demonstrates the modern character of the Bauhaus as the first school to respect gender equality and promote women's emancipation. Thus, women enrolled there to study, hoping to break out as artists in a traditionally male dominated environment. In fact [however], (...) this *man of the future*, who was supposed to be shaped by the school, was male because in the organization of studies the issue of educating women was not entirely solved.[9]

The female students were mainly sent to the weaving workshop, sometimes to the bookbinding studio or pottery workshop. Until the end of the school's existence, the female enrollment rate was around 30% of the total intake.

The first students were recruited mostly from among the soldiers who had experienced the trauma of the First World War. Their financial situation was often borderline destitution. Understanding the struggles of his students, Gropius obtained permission from the Minister of Education of Weimar to temporarily abolish tuition fees. Gillian Naylor, the author of the monograph of the school, emphasized that the students, after the hard time of the war, needed a sense of community and a purpose in life. The school gave them both, as one of them recalled:

> "I was not financially secure, but I decided to enroll at the Bauhaus. It was after the war. The carefree and complete lives we lived in those years made us forget our poverty. Bauhaus members hailed from all social classes. Some still wore their uniforms, others were barefoot or in sandals, others with beards of artists or ascetics."[10]

Analyzing the Bauhaus phenomenon in the context of other artistic communities in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Małgorzata Leyko emphasized the uniqueness and distinctiveness of Gropius' school. The scholar referred to the concept of *Lebensreform*, which emerged in the German culture of the time as a general idea, referring to all types of reform measures, which challenged and opposed the progress of industrialization and urbanization of life. Significantly, the Bauhaus emerged after the defeat of Germany in the First World War. "In the universal atmosphere of the dissolution of the former socio-economic order and aggravating political struggles, the Bauhaus was to be an island of positive thinking, progressive artistic activity and all ideological influences. The Bauhaus *Lebensreform* program was primarily concerned with the

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9 M. Leyko, *Teatr w krainie utopii, słowo/obraz terytoria*, Gdańsk 2012, p. 241.
10 Ibid., p. 10.

radical modernization of everyday life, engendered by artists – designers and craftsmen."[11] That is why Gropius' curriculum consisted of more than just teaching specific subjects. Bauhaus was a school of life, a style of new student existence extending beyond the school's venue, as various public exhibitions, festivals and other events were held in Weimar and Dessau.

The introductory course was taught by Johannes Itten, who developed his own teaching methods. He was a painter, in his youth associated with the German Expressionist group *Der Blaue Reiter*, later also sympathizing with the Parisian Cubists. There were numerous anecdotes about his classes, which were considered extremely difficult because Itten focused on teaching colors and shapes by awakening the intuitive imagination of the students. Also famous was his eccentric character – he would arrive in the classroom wearing unconventional outfits. In addition, he kept a "catalog of original hairstyles" and once had a star shaved on the back of his head. He also followed a macrobiotic diet regimen and belonged to a mystical cult inspired by Zoroastrianism. Deyan Sudjic, a design historian, believes that the school was "a hothouse for squabbling exhibitionists, philanderers and egotists struggling for position."[12] The teachers allegedly had a habit of seducing their female students and constantly fought and bickered amongst themselves, while the students were notorious for their drunkenness and brawling.

Although it existed only briefly, the school fundamentally changed the image and the role of art. It created the aesthetics of simple forms, putting the principle of functionality first. In his examination of Gropius' activity, Sudjic believes that he had a clearly defined plan for what the design of the society of the machine era should look like. Appreciating the functional thinking inspired by the Bauhaus education, Leyko argues that the design of a comprehensive system of everyday objects covering a wide range of art, from buildings, furniture, fabrics or lighting to subjugating the modes of people's movement in the newly defined space

> was intended to liberate the user from fetishization of objects, and in consequence directly affect the way of life. Therefore, even though artistic design was meant to operate on a different scale, it was in principle developed from (...) the utopian belief in the possibility of making changes in the world through art, and thus faith in the precedence of art / artist over political interests and social processes.[13]

In order to achieve his goal, the director was ready to accept the diversity of political, social, and artistic views of his staff.[14]

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11 Ibid., p. 233-234.

12 D.Sudjic, *B is for Bauhaus, Y is for YouTube: Designing the Modern World from A to Z*, Rizzoli Ex Libris, New York 2015, p. 29.

13 M. Leyko, *Teatr w krainie utopii*, p. 234.

14 Sudjic believes that Gropius "put talent well ahead of adherence to any specific party line. and he was ready to make the most of the gifts of his ideological opponents," p. 29-30.

With all the artistic eclecticism that existed in the Bauhaus education system from the beginning, modern scholars are surprised by the lack of general education in the humanities in the school's curriculum. There was no literature, poetry or philosophy, not even aesthetics. Attention is also drawn by the relatively insignificant involvement of the students in the political and social situation of Germany, for example the failed Munich coup of Adolf Hitler and General Erich Ludendorff, which took place on the night of 8 November 1923. Although one may conclude that the attitude of focusing mainly on work in the craft workshops certainly helped the school to steer clear of many problems, especially in the early days, politics was nevertheless entangled in the story of the Bauhaus.[15] In the mid-1920s, the school turned out to be inconvenient for Weimar, especially when the right-wing party won the local elections. Gropius had to find another place. Frankfurt offered to take the school. In 1925, the director chose Dessau, a town near Berlin, which had an ambitious mayor and showed a willingness to finance the construction of the school building.

In 1928, forced to focus on his own work as an architect, Gropius stepped down as the head of the school, and Hannes Meyer, a Swiss architect with strong Marxist leanings, took over. During his tenure, the school changed its educational profile, and the new director departed from the utopian vision of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* towards more practical, even popular solutions, making the Bauhaus products accessible and common. The school, among other things, received a lucrative contract from the city of Dessau for the design of social housing. Bauhaus workshops produced a commercially successful wallpaper pattern. The growing Nazi party even planned to use it to decorate the main building of the National Socialists' HQ. Despite this financial success, Meyer soon faced a difficult choice, as a group of students wanted to organize a Communist Party base on campus. The director was asked by the Dessau authorities to regulate the situation and expel the students. Meyer refused. At that point, Gropius was asked to replace the school's director. In 1930, the founder of the Bauhaus entrusted this position to Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, an architect from Belgium. The latter, understanding the importance of the school, wanted to keep it functioning in spite of the increasingly unfavorable political circumstances. First, he expelled all of the communist students, and then he decided to transfer the school to Berlin. Unfortunately, his efforts did not bring the expected result, and when he came to work one day in 1932, van der Rohe found Gestapo officers on the premises. It was the end of the innovative educational institution.

The Nazis were not satisfied with closing down the school, they also wanted to demolish the building in Dessau, designed by Gropius in 1926. It consisted of three wings, which were designed to serve various purposes: to house the work-

15 Cf. D.R. Winkler, *Moralność i mit. Bauhaus – próba nowej oceny*, Polish transl. K. Szymaniak and Adam Puchejda in: *Wybór najważniejszych tekstów o dizajnie*. Widzieć-Wiedzieć, eds. Przemek Dębowski and Jacek Mrowczyk, Wydawnictwo Karakter, Kraków 2015, p. 437-447.

shops, administration, and a student dormitory. The structure was based on a reinforced concrete framework, finished with white plaster with light grey accents. The fascist press wrote in reference to the first brochure advertising the school with Gropius' manifesto and Feininger's lithography, of "the Bauhaus that was the cathedral of Marxism, a cathedral, however, which damned well looked like a synagogue."[16] Despite such radical and at the same time destructive (in the light of the ideology of that era) associations being employed in the propaganda rhetoric, the building actually remained intact. In the 1940s, it served as a school for Nazi officials, and later it was converted into an aircraft equipment factory. During the Communist era, it fell into disrepair. Currently, the building has been restored and in 1999 it was put on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

After Hitler came to power, Gropius, considering his Jewish origin, decided to emigrate via England to the United States. In the US, he also worked as an architect, designing such objects as the Pan Am (now MetLife) skyscraper in Manhattan, New York (1958–1963). From 1937, he lectured at Harvard University's Department of Architecture, where he served as Dean from 1938 to 1952.

The above-mentioned Deyan Sudjic concluded that every successive generation of artists needs to see their own Bauhaus exhibition. At the time when it was active, the school enjoyed enormous prestige. After the Gestapo closed the school, a myth was born that is constantly growing. At present, it is impossible to talk about contemporary design without referencing the Bauhaus achievements. The success of Gropius' school would certainly not have been so spectacular without the teachers who were invited to cooperate. The staff consisted of the most important representatives of the world avant-garde, including Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Lŕszló Moholy-Nagy, Kazimir Malevich and Oskar Schlemmer. Sometimes, they represented contradictory views, such as the Expressionism of the *Der Sturm* group, the strong accents of the Russian Constructivism, sympathizing with the Dutch group *De Stijl*, and the spiritual Suprematism. This produced unprecedented effects. The geometric forms of the utility items were developed on the basis of the broad knowledge of the human nature and its biological and spiritual conditioning. The aforementioned Peiper noted a correlation in Gropius' apartment between the objects and the research of human physiology; referring to the simple shape of the chair he was sitting on he called it comfortable, but having the appearance of "medical implements."[17]

Strzemiński and the project of modern artistic education

In Poland, the principles of Gropius' school met with criticism from Władysław Strzemiński, the avant-garde painter and art theorist who co-created the artistic

16 Quote from "Völkischer Beobachter" cited in: *Deyan Sudjic, B is for Bauhaus*, p. 33.
17 T. Peiper, *W Bauhausie*, p. 165.

groups Blok and Praesens. In 1932, he published an extensive article in the magazine *Droga*, entitled "Modern Art and Art Schools", discussing the educational methods that had developed in Europe since the Baroque. Against such a broad background, he analyzed the system introduced in the Bauhaus. The Polish avant-garde artist did not like it that the German school was mainly focused on utilitarian art and architecture. He believed that such an approach to teaching bound the artist to the productive nature of the object, which was subject to mass standardization in the process of manufacture. For Strzemiński, the outcome of such education was a distorted perception of the function of art, which should be based on continuous creation, and which involved a laborious creative process. For Strzemiński, Gropius' postulate of utility entailed simplification and even depriving art of its intellectual values. He wrote:

> The main drawback of the production schools' curriculum is the static treatment of art, the fact that art is viewed not as a process of becoming, but as a piece of the whole, artificial and unrelated to what caused it. Art is an infinite development. Each closed entity has a certain number of combinations. Once they are exhausted, depletion and degeneration of the system folows.[18]

Strzemiński's diagnosis ended with a pessimistic prophecy that the education initiated at the German school would soon lead to the depletion of the production capacity, due to the limited number of combinations of the commonly useful forms. The artists would also begin to feel the constraints imposed by the education system, which would have a destructive effect on the human creative potential. Ironically, when after the Second World War Strzemiński co-developed the curriculum of the State Higher School of the Arts in Łódź (today the Strzemiński Academy of Fine Arts), he referred to the idea of the Bauhaus. On the one hand, he wanted to create an academy to educate artists and attract creative personalities, but on the other hand, the school would train good craftsmen: apparel designers, shop window designers, and graphic designers working for the propagation of a new society. While Strzemiński did emphasize teaching composition and art history as the theory of artistic vision in his curriculum, it was equally important to study proper apparel design consistent with human anatomy. The word "utility", hated by the avant-garde in the 1930s, would become important to him when the school was established in the 1940s. It should be noted that, unlike the nineteenth-century model of an art academy, which clearly separated the aspect of mastering the skills from aesthetic qualities, thus introducing a distinction between a craftsman and an artist, the Bauhaus proposed a different understanding of the principles of creative education, as it emphasized the development of individual abilities.

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18 W. Strzemiński, *Sztuka nowoczesna a szkoły artystyczne*, in: idem *Pisma*, PAN, Warszawa 1975, pp. 159; the text was first published in the magazine *Droga*, 1932, no. 3 p. 258-278.

I believe that Karol Stryjeński was the closest to Gropius' thinking about modern artistic education when, in 1922, he became the principal of the State School of Wood Industry in Zakopane (today the Antoni Kenar School of Art). Stryjeński's students not only honed their professional skills; the principal also put great emphasis on individual artistic development. As a result, at the Exhibition of Decorative Arts in Paris in 1925 the school won three prizes: for woodcutting, for teaching methods and a gold diploma for sculpture. It was one of the most important Polish educational achievements in artistic education in the interwar period.

Now, almost a hundred years after the founding of the Bauhaus in Weimar, one can say that the idea of the school has neither grown old nor has been forgotten, contrary to what Strzemiński predicted. The everyday objects created by the students of the German school continue to be a source of inspiration for contemporary designers, which is most evident in the style represented by the Swedish brand IKEA.[19] The reason for this unceasing popularity is primarily the attitude of Gropius, who from the very beginning of the school's existence did not enclose it in a rigid framework of a single ideology. Although his stance today is criticized by scholars, it should be noted that it was the Bauhaus that laid the foundations of modern, avant-garde approach to design. Its popularization by large corporations only confirms Foster's assertion that avant-garde trends succeed only after some time, and that the beneficiaries of progressive thinking are only the subsequent generations of recipients.

Bauhaus – Art Nouveau – Constructivism

In his analysis of the development of avant-garde trends in the twentieth century, Stefan Morawski noted the lack of a clear delineation that would allow us to pinpoint the exact moment the avant-garde began. The esthetician believed that avant-garde thinking had its roots already in Romanticism, while the explosion of Art Nouveau was evidently a proto-avant-garde movement. At that time, "there was intense artistic confrontation aimed against the rules and norms of academism and dominating canons, coupled with questioning the social status quo and sympathy for certain radical ideologies (Marxism or anarchism) or even engaging on their side. These tendencies intensified during the fin de siĕcle era within Modernism, on which, in the subsequent phase, the avant-garde proper was formed."[20]

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19 IKEA is one of the companies of which it can be said that their ideas are derived from the Bauhaus. It offers a uniform style of interior arrangement. The Swedish design is based on simple forms, which are meant to be first and foremost useful.

20 S. Morawski, *Awangarda i neoawagarda (o dwu formacjach XX wieku)* in: S. Morawski, *Wybór pism estetycznych*, introduced selected and edited by P.J. Przybysz, A. Zeidler-Janiszewska, Universitas, Kraków 2007, p. 200.

The Bauhaus became a model example of the avant-garde rooted in Art Nouveau. Creating the school, Gropius consciously developed the ideas outlined two decades earlier at the Weimar School of Artistic Crafts, which until 1914 was headed by Henry van de Velde, a Belgian painter, architect, furniture designer, and author of complete interior designs. He was one of the most important artists of the Art Nouveau period, famous for his compositional accuracy with which he approached utilitarian art. Mieczysław Wallis,[21] author of the Polish monograph on the artistic movements at the turn of the twentieth century, cites an anecdote about Van de Velde. In 1895, the architect built the "Bloemenwerf" villa for his family in Uccle near Brussels. He designed not only the building, but also the interiors and even the dresses to be worn by his wife as well as the crockery for the particular rooms. The whole set was characterized by compositional consistency, color harmony, and coherence of all the employed patterns. Allegedly, the owner instructed the servants to always put red fruit on green platters. The Belgian artist was the first to design artfully planned objects on such a scale, and was therefore the forerunner of the broad concept of utilitarian art and design in the modern sense of the term.

It should be noted that Art Nouveau has been deliberately mentioned. This trend not only lacks one international name (in Polish it is known as *secesja*, for example), but it also has no uniformity of style. The art of the turn of the century is usually associated with soft floral lines as well as gold and elaborate ornamentation. This could not be further from the truth. *Jugendstil*, as it was called in the German culture, is also simple forms, geometric patterns, symmetrically structured spaces, use of reinforced concrete, façades with large windows, and, above all, the readiness to apply technical innovations in various fields. The artists of that period were not afraid to experiment and wanted to create art for modern society. Van de Velde, for example, designed a hairdressing facility in Berlin in 1900, in which he combined practical functionalism with fine ornamentation. Electric cables, gas pipes and water pipes were deliberately left exposed so that they could complement the meaning of the whole. Wallis points out that the Belgian artist was an indefatigable advocate of the new style, a theoretician, author of a series of lectures published as *Renaissance in Contemporary Artistic Crafts*, 1901, *Sermons for Artisans*, 1902 and *The New Style*, 1907. In his attempt to identify the exact beginning of the avant-garde, Morawski noted that in his activity Van de Velde combined the notion of artistry with an engineering skill, which in this context brings him closer to the contemporary concept of the "artist" in Gropius' view.

Developing his curriculum, Gropius drew on the experience of Van de Velde, but he made an important change. For the Art Nouveau artists, the priority was decoration and composition, even for the price of inconvenience, such as, for example, when the lady of the house had to move through the different rooms

21 Cf. M. Wallis, *Secesja,* Arkady, Warszawa 1967.

when changing her clothes. The Bauhaus founder rejected such ideas in favor of the new concepts of "functionalism" and "utility."

The Bauhaus was often mistakenly identified with Constructivism, probably due to the relatively large participation of Russian artists. Interestingly, in her analysis of the Russian theater of the revolution era Christine Hamon-Siréjols[22] also assumed that it derived its thinking from the eclectic art of the Art Nouveau period. According to the French researcher, it is evident that Modernism of the turn of the century was the first period in modern history that resolutely sought to break with academic thinking, creating a lifestyle and a vision of art that departed from the old standards, encumbered with a strong attachment to the academic interpretations of antiquity (such as Neo-Classicism). Constructivism, as well as Art Nouveau, was not afraid to exploit technology and use new materials, often paving the way for inventions. Setting the Bauhaus within eclectic currents explains the lack of homogeneous ideology visible when discussing the achievements of the school. By the very fact of inviting artists from vastly different avant-garde groups, Gropius embraced diversity. He also combined theoretical education with practice, and sometimes with experiment. This is probably why the Bauhaus art was not focused solely on interior styling, designing new things, refining existing objects, designing houses or factory space. Two years into the school's operation, the principal introduced theater classes into the curriculum, which fundamentally liquidated any potential pressure of the program of a production facility, as Strzemiński put it. Although the Bauhaus itself did not create any artistic group, it certainly belonged to the category of the avant-garde as understood by Morawski.[23] It was a school that was undoubtedly characterized by innovativeness of its core curriculum, making significant changes in the very approach to the creative process and artistic individualism as a creative attitude. Its avant-garde nature was also manifested in addressing various subjects, the purpose of which was to rebuild or rather build a new space for the modern man according to the Gropius' diagram.

Bauhaus – Nazi episodes

At the very end of this rather brief discussion of the Bauhaus school I should tackle the most difficult issue. Politics crept into the school not only in Dessau or Berlin. The aforementioned Gillian Naylor, design historian and author of the important monograph of the Bauhaus, ends her book with Van der Rohe being taken out of the school by the Nazis. She makes no mention of the fate of the students or the use of the university's achievements by the German regime in the 1940s. This aspect of the reception of Gropius' school is only now being discovered, disclosed and examined.

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22 Cf. Ch. Hamon-Siréjols, *Le constructivisme au théâtre*, CNRS, Paris 2004.

23 S. Morawski, *Paradoksy estetyczne najnowszej awangardy*, „Studia Socjologiczne" 1973, no 3.

At this point I would like to mention just two significant episodes concerning concentration camps. The first begins in 1937, when Franz Ehrlich, a former student of Gropius' school, expelled for his Communist views and then sentenced for them, was sent to Buchenwald. Two years later, he finished serving his sentence, but the Nazis offered him a job. The prisoner became an employee of the same concentration camp, located – ironically – near Weimar. The task of the young architect was to prepare the land for the expansion of the facility. The design was to include not only a dozen or so barracks for prisoners, but also a separate recreation area reserved for the guards (including, for example, a mini-zoo). Ehrlich was also the author of the inscription on the gate of the Buchenwald camp, which read: *Jedem das Seine* (To each what he deserves). He used the Bauhaus typography for that purpose, but the slogan serving the propaganda of extermination was designed in an unusual way. The inscription can be read only when leaving the camp, not when entering the area of oppression. One possible interpretation of the author's intention was that he wanted to communicate to the victims that time would come for revenge. Ehrlich was never sentenced for his work for the system of extermination because he tried to help the prisoners and protect them whenever possible.

The second episode is more drastic and ends with convictions for the complicity in crimes against humanity. Walter Dejaco and Fritz Ertl, also Dessau school graduates, were the authors of the architectural design of the buildings at Auschwitz intended as gas chambers.[24] Their spectacular drawing with perfectly laid out structures can now be seen in the camp grounds. The viewers may be surprised by the amount of care the architects took to render every detail so that the building would be utilized up to its maximum capacity. The change that they made in the connotations of the term "functionality," Gropius' favorite word, is appalling for modern audiences. For the head of the Bauhaus, the term was associated with the principle of "utility" and therefore "usefulness," i.e. activity intended to benefit humankind, not to destroy it. The two architects designed not only the gas chambers, but also the well-prepared facilities for the disposal of the corpses. They built a well-functioning death factory, where nothing could go wrong.

Deyan Sudjic noted the irony when writing of the reluctance of the Nazi propaganda towards the school at the beginning of the 1930s. He pointed out that shortly after the closure of the Berlin facility, many of the artists found work on the broad Fascist program of the country's expansion. "Hitler loved classical architecture, but the Luftwaffe's airbases looked like typical architectural products of the Bauhaus."[25] Ernst Sagebiel, also from Gropius' school, designed the building of the Ministry of Aviation headed by Herman Göring.

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24 Cf. Jean-Louis Cohen, *Auschwitz, miejsce wieloprzemysłowe*, „Autoportret" 2017, no 1 (56), p. 68-71.

25 D. Sudjic, *B jak Bauhaus*, p. 33.

At this point it is important to note the other side of the story; it must be remembered that the victims of the Fascist mass murders were also the teachers and other artists from the Bauhaus, including Otti Berger, who had a successful textile studio, Lotte Mentzel, or Friedl Dicker-Brandeis. The ambivalence of human attitudes, an integral part of the human nature, is sometimes greatly tested, especially when it is confronted with the historical machinery of the times in which an individual happens to be born. When attempting an assessment of the German school, it is important to bear in mind the remarkable contribution that the Bauhaus made to art. Sudjic commented unequivocally:

> For half a century, the products manufactured by every advanced industrial economy in the world looked the way that they did because of what had happened at the Bauhaus. Even America, with its addiction to a diet of market-driven built-in obsolescence, and the overripe sensuality of Elvis Presley seasoned by the Buick-and-Coke-bottle school of styling, could not escape its influence. Texture, typography, furniture, architecture and ceramics were all indelibly marked by the Bauhaus and its chilly neutrality. It was a movement that seemed to have the prestige of historical inevitability on its side.[26]

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BAUHAUS – SZKOŁA, KTÓRA STAŁA SIĘ AWANGARDĄ (streszczenie)

Artykuł prezentuje szkołę Bauhausu jako ideę, która w założeniu nie miała stać się samodzielnym nurtem awangardowym, a być jedynie jednym ze stylów nowoczesnego kształcenia artystycznego. Uczelnia założona przez Waltera Gropiusa oparta była na założeniach szkolnictwa rzemiślniczo-artystycznego, jakie wykształciło się w dobie secesji. Autorka pokazuje ewolucję Bauhausu, który istniał ledwie czternaście lat, ale jego mit rozpostarł się na cały wiek dwudziesty i dwudziesty pierwszy. Artykuł porusza również trudny problem polityczności, jaka wtargnęła do Bauhausu i jaką stosowano wobec Bauhausu. Każdy współczesny dizajner musi znać tę niemiecką szkołę i powinien umieć określić swoje dzieło wobec jej dokonań, ale jednocześnie musi pamiętać, że komory gazowe nazistowskich obozów koncenrtracyjnych też wybudowali architekci Bauhausu. Jest to trudne dziedzictwo i trudna awangarda.

Słowa kluczowe: Bauhaus, Auschwitz, secesja, dizajn, design, awangarda, Tadeusz Peiper, Walter Gropius.