Weimar Thought
A Contested Legacy

Edited by Peter E. Gordon and John P. McCormick

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS (2013)
Princeton and Oxford
Contents

Introduction: Weimar Thought: Continuity and Crisis 1
Peter E. Gordon and John P. McCormick

Part I: Law, Politics, Society

1 Weimar Sociology 15
   David Kettler and Colin Loader

2 Weimar Psychology: Holistic Visions and Trained Intuition 35
   Mitchell G. Ash

3 Legal Theory and the Weimar Crisis of Law and Social Change 55
   John P. McCormick

4 The Legacy of Max Weber in Weimar Political and Social Theory 73
   Dana Villa

Part II: Philosophy, Theology, Science

5 Kulturphilosophie in Weimar Modernism 101
   John Michael Krois

6 Weimar Philosophy and the Fate of Neo-Kantianism 115
   Frederick Beiser

7 Weimar Philosophy and the Crisis of Historical Thinking 133
   Charles Bambach

8 Weimar Theology: From Historicism to Crisis 150
   Peter E. Gordon

9 Method, Moment, and Crisis in Weimar Science 179
   Cathryn Carson

Part III: Aesthetics, Literature, Film

10 Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer, and Weimar Criticism 203
   Michael Jennings
11 Writers and Politics in the Weimar Republic  220
   Karin Gunnemann

12 Aesthetic Fundamentalism in Weimar Poetry: Stefan George and his Circle, 1918–1933  240
   Martin A. Ruehl

13 Weimar Film Theory  273
   Sabine Hake

14 The Politics of Art and Architecture at the Bauhaus, 1919–1933  291
   John V. Macluika

15 Aby Warburg and the Secularization of the Image  316
   Michael P. Steinberg

Part IV: Themes of an Epoch

16 Eastern Wisdom in an Era of Western Despair: Orientalism in 1920s Central Europe  341
   Susanne Marchand

17 Weimar Femininity: Within and Beyond the Law  361
   Tracie Matysik

18 The Weimar Left: Theory and Practice  377
   Martin Jay

19 The Aftermath: Reflections on the Culture and Ideology of National Socialism  394
   Anson Rabinbach

   Weimar Thought: A Chronology  407
   Contributors  417
   Index  423
The Politics of Art and Architecture at the Bauhaus, 1919–1933

John V. Maciuika

Introduction: The Kaleidoscope of Weimar Art

The birth of social democracy out of the ashes of a defeated, delegitimized Wilhelmine Empire galvanized the German art world as never before. Artists at Walter Gropius’s experimental Bauhaus school and in such diverse avant-garde art movements as Expressionism, Cubism, Dada, and Constructivism reflected a broad consensus that the pre-war empire had proved an absolute failure. The Kaiser, the government, the aristocracy, the military, big business, and the bourgeoisie were all seen as complicit in a corrupt system unable to cope with the many challenges of industrial modernity.

Like a shifting kaleidoscope, artistic production during the Weimar era dazzled with unexpected forms, ever-shifting conceptual variety, and ideological diversity. At one extreme Richard Huelsenbeck, the leader of a new, politically radical "anti-art" movement known as Berlin Dada, denounced all artistic conventions, and indeed all nationalist and materialist values associated with the collapsed Wilhelmine Empire. Huelsenbeck and fellow Dada artists like Hannah Höch and George Grosz wanted to awaken people to the fact that "Art, regarded from a serious point of view, was "a large-scale swindle." This was especially true in Germany, where

the most absurd idolatry of all sorts of divinities is beaten into the child,
in order that the grown man and taxpayer should fall on his knees when,
in the interest of the state or some smaller gang of thieves, he receives the
order to worship some 'great spirit.' . . . Art should altogether get a sound
thrashing, and Dada stands for the thrashing with all the vehemence of its
limited nature."

The aggressive politics of Berlin’s "Club Dada" distinguished it from the
movement’s counterparts in Zurich, Paris, or New York. Signature early artworks such as Hannah Höch’s visually riotous anti-Establishment collage, Cut with a Dada Kitchen Knife through the Last Beer-Belly Weimar Cultural Epoch of 1919–20, for example, featured an orgy of superimposed mass media clippings: here a contemplative Albert Einstein partially obscured by wheels in one eye and a locomotive and giant grasshopper emerging from his head, there an uncanny
visage of Kaiser Wilhelm with his mustache replaced by an upside-down, miniature human figure (Figure 14.1). These images floated among jostling crowds, buildings, and dozens of other faces of famous and unknown figures suspended at every angle. Appearing throughout were cut out letters and phrases such as “the great Dada,” “the anti-Dada,” and “invest your money in Dada.”

Höch’s collage was just one notorious expression of Dada revulsion at the modern era’s destructive tendencies. An unsettling techno-humanoid sculpture by George Grosz and John Heartfield, entitled Der wildgewordene Spießer Heartfield (The Middle-Class Philistine Heartfield Gone Wild [Electro-Mechanical Tatlin Sculpture]) of 1920, similarly aimed to detonate false consciousness, to shock viewers into greater awareness of capitalism, industrialism, and militarism run amok. Their work featured an uncanny one-legged mannequin with an illuminated Osram lightbulb in place of a head, a revolver in place of a shoulder.

and arm, and a knife, fork, and embroidered Prussian Order of the Black Eagle on its chest, among other objects. "The highest art," explained Huelsenbeck and his colleague Raoul Hausmann in their "Dada Manifesto," "will be that which in its conscious content presents the thousandfold problems of the day, the art which has been visibly shattered by the explosions of last week, which is forever trying to collect its limbs after yesterday's crash." Heartfield's mutilated mannequin, still somehow holding a weapon and decorated with a medal of honor and a lightbulb head, starkly illuminated the human toll exacted by capitalism, imperial dynastic leadership, and blind patriotism. Supported by such art, Berlin Dada's political program sought "the international revolutionary union of all creative and intellectual men and women on the basis of radical Communism."

Berlin Dada's revolutionary fires dimmed amid internal partisan bickering and the group's ambivalent relationship to its political mission in 1923–24. Not all radical artists, moreover, proved as extreme. Käthe Kollwitz, a talented graphic artist and sculptor, emerged from the war to become the first woman to earn the title of professor in the Prussian Academy of Fine Arts in 1919. The horrible experience of the war and the loss of her younger son Peter, killed in the trenches in 1914, strengthened Kollwitz's commitment to left-wing causes. Her stirring graphic "cycles" depicted injustices against workers, while emotionally powerful sculptural works dramatized the war-induced human suffering of mothers, sons, and families.

Kurt Schwitters, an artist whose application to join Berlin Dada Huelsenbeck was rejected in 1918, became an influential Weimar innovator in his own right. Cobbling together such "junk" (Schwitters's term) as wood, metal, string, coins, and the fragment "MERZ" cut from a sign for the "KOMMERZ UND PRIVATBANK," Schwitters fashioned a poetic collage, or "MERZ-picture," from the fragmentary remains of post-war material culture. "I named all my pictures the MERZbilder as a species," Schwitters explained, "because I could not define them with the older conceptions like Expressionism, Futurism, or whatever. . . . Later I expanded the title MERZ, first to include my poetry, and finally to all my relevant activities. Now I call myself MERZ." In the shifting kaleidoscope of Weimar art, a word like "commerce" (KOMMERZ) divided to form a "MERZ picture." A further turn of the conceptual wheel, and "MERZ" subsumed all of Schwitters's literary and artistic output—and, finally, even the name of the artist himself.

New Art for a New Nation

From the Berlin Dadaists' point of view, Schwitters's work was insufficiently radical and too "bourgeois"—too forgiving, that is, toward a culture that framed, displayed, sold, and circulated artworks in a capitalist economy. To the young architect and Bauhaus founder Walter Gropius, who had fought in and survived the war, the German Empire and bourgeois culture certainly deserved plenty of blame. However, like Schwitters and contrary to Berlin Dada, the architect believed art still had a powerful role to play in reviving German culture within
existing socioeconomic structures. Gropius’s article, “The Free People’s State,” published in 1919 in the *German Revolutionary Almanac*, condemned the pre-war regime while reengaging long-standing pre-war debates about which Germans were the rightful “bearers of culture.” Gropius stated:

Capitalism and power politics have made our generation creatively sluggish, and our vital art is mired in a broad bourgeois philistinism. The intellectual bourgeois of the old Empire—tired and unimaginative, mentally slow, arrogant and incorrectly trained—has proven his incapacity to be the bearer of German culture. His benumbed world is now toppled, its spirit is overthrown, and is in the midst of being recast in a new mold.  

Weimar artists and fellow soldier-survivors like George Grosz would give visual expression to such “broad bourgeois philistinism” in an array of startling paintings, drawings, and caricatures. Gropius, for his part, was reacting to biows he had suffered as a junior member of Germany’s premier pre-war design association, the Deutscher Werkbund. In the *German Revolutionary Almanac* Gropius inveighed against an older generation of architects, artists, and designers who in his view had collaborated with government and big industry in a kind of unholy imperial alliance—one whose policies had catapulted the nation into war and ultimate defeat in the First World War. As early as 1911, August Bebel, a founder and pillar of the Social Democratic Party, had denounced runaway militarism in the Reichstag and proclaimed the “twilight of the bourgeois world” (*Götterdämmerung der bürgerlichen Welt*). Following the November 1918 revolution, new social forms, and even socialism itself, seemed much closer to becoming reality. Speaking to Bauhaus artists and students shortly after he opened his new school in April 1919, Gropius observed:

> We find ourselves in a colossal catastrophe of world history, in a transformation of the whole of life . . . Before the war we put the cart before the horse and wanted to drag art backward into the public sphere by means of organization. We designed artistic ashtrays and beer mugs, and in that way hoped to work up to the great building . . . That was an incredible presumption upon which we were shipwrecked, and now things will be reversed. No large spiritual organizations, but small, secret, self-contained societies, lodges . . .

To Gropius and many other young artists and architects, it seemed that real opportunities for post-war progress in society lay in reviving the crafts, fine arts, and architecture by combining them in one school, the “unified arts school” (*Einheitskunstschule*), a type of institution that had been a frequent topic of discussion and debate in Germany both before and during the war.  

New artistic developments, however, proved threatening to members of the Wilhelmine old guard such as Wilhelm von Bode, who was still active as the venerable director of Berlin’s museums in the Prussian Ministry of Culture. Von Bode had initially approved, in principle, of unified art schools that would combine the fine and applied arts. He had likewise approved the Belgian artist
Henry van de Velde's nomination of Walter Gropius to succeed him as director of the Weimar school of applied arts. Von Bode drew the line, however, at the promotion of such movements as Expressionism and Cubism, whose radicalism he considered a threat to the established German social and cultural order. Gropius's Bauhaus, he believed, ranged too far into experimental territory.

Debates over the future of the arts and artistic education thus assumed special importance from Weimar Germany's very beginning. On the political Right, cultural rebirth often meant reconnecting with perceived German "traditions," without the low regard for the Wilhelmine Empire and the critique of the socio-political structures so criticized by Communists, Social Democrats, and other Left progressives. On the Left, post-war reconstruction offered an opportunity for fresh beginnings in both art and social organization. In short, since the arts had long been understood as partly constitutive of society, and since Germany was rebuilding along modern, democratic lines, the types of art encouraged by the state signaled the type of modern society post-war Germans were setting out to create.

Yet any truly radical break with the past—even after a cataclysm of the magnitude of the First World War—proved extremely difficult to realize. Dadaists, for example, championed collage and montage as the "new medium," although Cubists such as Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque had pioneered modernist collages before the war. The Expressionists, who initially dominated such newly formed artists' groups as the "Art Soviet" (Arbeitsrat für Kunst, or Workers' Council for Art) and the closely aligned November Group, likewise had roots extending back to the early years of the twentieth century.

The idea that a particular social class could serve as a model for societal and cultural leadership had a pre-war origin as well. Where post-war Social Democrats would promote the working class, older reform-minded architects such as Hermann Muthesius, the influential vice president of the Deutscher Werkbund design association and, by 1914, a veritable mortal enemy of the young Gropius, had championed the educated middle class (Bildungsbürgertum) as Germany's true "bearers of culture" before the war. Muthesius's famous 1903 polemic, an essay that campaigned to replace imitative "style-architecture" with an authentic middle-class "building art," had declared:

As the bearer of new ideas, the new spiritual aristocracy arises, which this time stems from the best of the middle class rather than the hereditary aristocratic elements, and this especially clearly signals the new and enlarged goal of the movement: the creation of a contemporary middle-class art. . . . The goal remains sincerity, straightforwardness (Sachlichkeit), and a purity of artistic sensibility, qualities that avoid all secondary considerations and superficialities. . . . If from the labyrinth of the arts of the last hundred years we are ever again to succeed to artistic conditions that bear even a remote similarity to the great epochs of the history of art, then architecture must assume leadership in the community of the arts.10

Whereas Muthesius's pre-war Deutscher Werkbund based the modernization of German design culture and the "spiritualization of German work" (Durchgei-
stigung der deutschen Arbeit) on the example of the hard-working middle class, after the war Gropius and the Workers' Council for Art turned to the working class and its social democratic leadership for fresh inspiration.³¹

Progressive artists and architects wasted no time in articulating visions for a new society to supplant the defunct Wilhelmine Empire. By Christmas of 1918, the youthful and idealistic architect Bruno Taut had published "A Program for Architecture," later condensed into an influential Worker's Council prospectus.³² Taut advocated "a complete revolution in the spiritual realm" and a policy of melting down the old regime's public monuments. Gropius, who replaced Taut as director of the Workers' Council in early 1919, would soon adapt his predecessor's language for his own "Bauhaus Program." Taut, meanwhile, proposed designs for elaborate crystalline mountain-top settlements of colored glass along with grandiose "earth-crust architecture" for Germany's dawning socialist society, presenting them in such illustrated books as Alpine Architecture (1919), The Dissolution of Cities (1920), and The City Crown (1920).³³

Visionary utopias proliferated in the wake of war, but like the word "utopia" itself—which of course means "no place" in the original Greek—Taut's Alpine projects remained unbuilt "paper architecture." His aspirational colored glass constructions made for exciting viewing at post-war Workers' Council exhibitions in Berlin like the "Exhibition for Unknown Architects" of April 1919 and "New Architecture" of May 1920. Yet however much sympathetic art lovers admired the florid crystalline and biomorphic forms by Taut, Wenzel Hablik, Hermann Finsterlin, and the brothers Hans and Wassili Luckhardt, precious little could be built in the fiscal wasteland of the immediate post-war moment. Their works gave powerful visual expression to the sentiments captured in the 1919 Worker's Council prospectus all the same:

We know that the feeling of brotherhood that arises out of this kind of communal work—an architecture which, thanks to the many hands contributing to it, will burst into magnificent bloom—is capable of producing in the soul of man that which we all of us long for: the true spirit of socialism. . . . Man, in going about his business, is transformed.³⁴

Post-war paper architecture, manifestoes, exhibitions, and the letters exchanged among architects in such groups Taut's "Crystal Chain" helped feed this idealistic spirit of the new. The architects Hans Poelzig and Erich Mendelsohn scored two early built successes in the Expressionist mode with the realization of Poelzig's Great Theater (Grosses Schauspielhaus) completed in 1918–19 in Berlin, and Mendelsohn's Einstein Tower, an observatory completed between 1918 and 1921 in Potsdam. The cavernous performance hall of Poelzig's Great Theater overwhelmed visitors with its vast, domed space hung with 1200 wired-plaster stalactites. Recalling Islamic muqarnas decoration at the wondrous Alhambra palace in Granada, Spain, the concentric rings of stalactites could be lit in various ways to produce a panoply of colorful and "cosmic" effects. Though some criticized it as overdecorative and others complained of its lack of functional purpose, Poelzig defended his building for its Expressionist exuberance: "It is
ard-working middle class, Art turned to the working aspiration. In articulating visions for a
spire. By Christmas of 1918, published "A Program for
worker’s Council prospectus," a policy of
Taut, who replaced Taut could soon adapt his prede-
avor, meanwhile, proposed
ments of colored glass along
n’s dawning socialist soci-
mix Architecture (1919). The

; but like the word "utopia"
ginal Greek—Taut’s Alpine
motional colored glass
Workers’ Council exhibi-
architects" of April 1919 and
sympathetic art lovers ad-
y Taut, Wenzel Hablik, Her-
li Luckhardt, precious little
post-war moment. Their
ments captured in the 1919
urises out of this kind of
the many hands con-
—capable of producing
true spirit of social-
formed.

bitions, and the letters ex-
ystal Chain" helped feed this
zig and Erich Mendelsohn
mode with the realization
completed in 1918–19 in Ber-
ory completed between 1918
all of Poelzig’s Great Theater
ning with 1200 wired-plaster
at the wondrous Alhambra
calactites could be lit in vari-
sm effects. Though some
formed as a lack of functional
essionist exuberance: "It is

Figure 14.2. Erich Mendelsohn, Einstein Tower Observatory, Potsdam, 1918–21. Source:
Gustav Adolf Platz, Die Baukunst der Neuesten Zeit (Berlin: Propyläen Verlag, 1927), 390.

still better," he declared, "to do violence to the purpose and create a true work of
art than to let the purpose, i.e., cold reason, get the better of you."

Erich Mendelsohn, by contrast, designed the curvaceous, concrete-covered brick masses of his Einstein Tower to fulfill every necessary practical purpose for the telescope, the laboratory, and the scientists’ accommodations within. His highly sculptural Expressionist tower with its projecting appendages appeared crouched like a modern sphinx atop a hill overlooking Potsdam (Figure 14.2). Mendelsohn’s balance of practicality and Expressionist form seemed a fulfillment of the dictum expressed by the radical Dutch architect J.J.P. Oud in his 1921 article, “On Future Building Art and Its Architectonic Possibilities,” in which Oud insisted that “A feeling for life must guide art, not the tradition of form.”

The Bauhaus as a Bastion of Social and Artistic Idealism

Ambitious architects of the generation of Taut and Mendelsohn, most of them
in their 30s in the immediate post-war era, sensed unprecedented opportunities
to express this new “feeling for life” in architectural form. No one, in fact, bet-
ter embodied or articulated this feeling than Walter Gropius. Descended from
an established Berlin family that included such successful architects as his great
uncle, Martin Gropius, of the nineteenth-century “Schinkel School,” Walter Gro-
pius experienced a meteoric rise to prominence through a combination of ambi-
tion, charisma, and organizational ability. By early 1919, at the age of only thirty-five, Gropius not only directed the Workers’ Council for Art, he also established Weimar Germany’s earliest and most progressive art school of the new type, the “Unified Art School,” in the Weimar Bauhaus.35 His early Bauhaus colleague, the American-born German painter Lyonel Feininger, wrote: “He works till three in the morning, hardly sleeps, and when he looks at you, his eyes are like stars. I’m sorry for anyone who can’t gather strength from him.”36

Although he would later conceal his considerable debts to pioneering prewar schools of applied arts and design, Gropius put his own stamp on the idea of the unified art school.37 As in the Workers’ Council and the November Group, organizational leadership in the Bauhaus fell to architects, although artists far outnumbered them in all three organizations. Long accustomed to translating lofty artistic aspirations into the earthbound materials of concrete, bricks, and mortar, architects had the practical foresight to organize the applied arts and fine arts under the architectural banner.

Borrowing from the writings of fellow Workers’ Council members Otto Barning and Bruno Taut, Gropius’s Bauhaus Program maintained the applied arts and fine arts as independent entities within a larger unified whole. The school’s lengthy official title, “The State Bauhaus in Weimar (Combined former Grand Ducal Academy of Art and former Grand Ducal School of Applied Arts),” expressed this separation.38 Approving the school’s new name on 12 April 1919, the Thuringian government opened the school with modest beginnings and no official fanfare.39 Weimar, home to such Enlightenment figures as the German literary greats Goethe and Schiller, was now also home to Germany’s most experimental art school. Whereas in bigger cities like Berlin artists and educators had grown accustomed to radical artistic ideas, in the much quieter town of Weimar such innovations hardly met with universal enthusiasm. Many residents, proud of their town’s palaces, gardens, and canonical literary heroes, wished to preserve Weimar as a unique center of traditional Germanness.

Setting its sights on the higher purpose of rebuilding German society, Gropius’s Bauhaus Program refined the spirit and language of the Workers’ Council for Art prospectus. In a four-page curriculum and mission statement, Gropius idealized the medieval German past, a time when builders’ lodges and artisans’ guilds collaborated with artists, sculptors, and architects to erect such communal structures as the Gothic cathedral. Even the name “Bauhaus” fortified the modern school’s mythical ties to medieval lodges by evoking the ancient German word “Bauhütte,” a medieval guild of craftsmen and building-trades workers.

Extolling craft as the “ancient source” of all artistic activity (exactly as Mutheusius had done in 1903), the Bauhaus Program promoted egalitarian unity in the collaborative process of forging new, collective works of art and architecture.40 With the crafts as their unifying base, the arts would experience a revival analogous to the social democratic ideal of workers reviving German society from below. As Gropius observed in his essay for the German Revolutionary Almanac, “New, intellectually undeveloped levels of our people are rising from the depths. They are our chief hope.”41 Like Berlin Dada, Dutch Neoplasticism, or the ex-
periments of Constructivist art schools in Moscow, the Workers' Council for Art and the early Bauhaus tended to regard the upper-class and bourgeois worlds with suspicion: in their push for industrial concentration, military expansion, and capitalist development, leading Wilhelmine members of these classes had propelled Germany into the disastrous world war. The working classes, represented at least symbolically at the Bauhaus by craftsmen and, over time, by industrial designers, offered inspiration for the development of a socially relevant new art. This art would in turn support a new and authentic social order, one that required new aesthetic principles as well as novel forms.

Students enrolling at the Bauhaus therefore began their studies by taking a bracing, six-month introductory course (Vorkurs) designed to unburden them of art historical baggage and unleash individual creative potential. The next level of study involved mastering an individual craft of their choice, with the aid of practical instructional workshops in woodworking, ceramics, book binding, weaving, metalworking, and sculpture. Only upon successful completion of this stage, lasting from one to three years, would students be allowed to contribute toward the "ultimate" artistic goal, the fully realized building, which stood like a bull’s eye at the center of the Bauhaus curriculum diagram (Figure 14.3). As Gropius explained in his 1923 publication, "Theory and Organization of the Bauhaus," the aim was "a center for experimentation which will try to assemble the achievements of economic, technical and formal research and to apply them to problems of domestic architecture in an effort to combine the greatest possible standardization with the greatest possible variation of form." When the faculty expanded in the early 1920s, leading artists like Paul Klee, Wassily Kandinsky, and Oskar Schlemmer taught courses in painting, art theory, typogra-

![Figure 14.3. Bauhaus Curriculum Diagram, 1923. The typical student progresses from the outer to the innermost ring over several years of study. Source: Herbert Bayer, Walter Gropius, Iso Gropius, eds., Bauhaus 1919–1928 (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1938), 23.](image)
phy, and set design, while over time the school collectively explored a variety of performance-based media, including music and experimental theater. Architecture, considered by Gropius to be the "mother of all the arts" after John Ruskin's dictum of half a century earlier, did not become an official Bauhaus department until the school relocated with new energy and funding in Dessau in 1927.

Rather than representing any particular philosophy, style, or precisely defined approach to design, the Bauhaus was always "an idea," as the school's third and final director, the architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, famously characterized it. That is, the school was always the idealistic, collective product of its influential faculty and individualistic students, whose experimental inclinations were given direction and focus by the school's three successive directors. Thus Gropius, the director from 1919 to 1928, presided over the Bauhaus's initial (and, thanks to hostile conservatives in the legislature, chronically underfunded) crafts and Expressionist phases in the early 1920s. By 1923, he adopted a Constructivist-influenced school slogan, "Art and Technology: A New Unity," which became the title of the Bauhaus's first major design exhibition in the summer of 1923. In developments discussed further below, the Swiss architect Hannes Meyer assumed the directorship between the years 1928 and 1930 and reoriented the school to a scientific Marxist program of simple, affordable, practical furnishings and architecture. Mies van der Rohe, in turn, realized his "idea" for the school as director between 1930 and the school's closure in 1933: he abandoned Meyer's Marxism and focused students instead on the systematic and rigorous practice of architecture.

While a synthesis of the crafts, fine arts, and architecture quickly emerged as Walter Gropius's modern Bauhaus ideal, in reality early antecedents for this principle could be found as far back as the ancient Greek Parthenon and, as the Bauhaus Program noted, in the medieval cathedral. But in the post-war desire for collective German rebirth, it became easier to imbue ancient notions with fresh significance and renewed possibility. Had not the quintessential modern poet, the bohemian Charles Baudelaire, memorably defined modernity as a particular blending of new and old? In his classic essay of 1863, "The Painter of Modern Life," Baudelaire wrote: "By 'modernity' I mean the ephemeral, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is eternal and immutable."  

As if drawing on Baudelaire's timeless formula, Gropius's Bauhaus Program exuded confidence in modernity's endless capacity for renewal from the bedrock of tradition. Its opening lines read: "The ultimate goal of all artistic activity is the building. To decorate it was once the noblest task of the visual arts, they were indissoluble components of the great art of building." Adapting architect Otto Bartning's revival of the nomenclature of medieval society, the Bauhaus Program replaced such academic titles as "student" and "professor" with the medieval "apprentice," "journeyman," and "master." These idealistic designations set the school apart from the art academies and applied arts schools of recent decades. Embellishing the very Workers' Council prospectus quoted earlier in this chapter while eliminating its direct references to socialism, Gropius concluded the Bauhaus mission statement on a high note, proclaiming: "Let us col-
lectively desire, conceive, and create the new building of the future, which will be everything in one structure: architecture and sculpture and painting, which, out of the millions of hands of crafts workers, will one day rise towards heaven like the crystal symbol of the new and coming faith."

Gropius’s rich imagery invoked at once the medieval, communally constructed German cathedral and a “new faith” in the architecture of Expressionists like Taut, Poelzig, and Mendelsohn. The multivalent 

Bauhaus Program further connected the crafts “base” of medieval society to the new social order, a social democratic majority analogous to “the millions of hands of crafts workers,” whose constructions would rise toward heaven. As its earliest promotional document, the 

Bauhaus Program gained international attention, attracting idealistic young students and faculty—or “apprentices” and “masters”—from across German-speaking Central Europe.

Gropius invited Lyonel Feininger, the first artist he hired as a Bauhaus master, to design a visually compelling cover for the Bauhaus Program. Feininger rendered the “crystal symbol of the new and coming faith” in the form of a dramatic Cubist-Expressionist woodcut, entitled “Cathedral” (Figure 14.4). Like other Expressionists before him, Feininger consciously employed an artistic medium

developed in the Middle Ages, the wood-cut, to infuse his modern imagery with a kind of primitivist power. His "Cathedral" presents the front elevation of a building comprising three gabled portals, three levels of flying buttresses, and three towers, all topped by three stars emitting bright rays of light. This vertically organized set of triads is highly suggestive of the Holy Trinity, a cornerstone of Christian doctrine frequently symbolized in the interior "triforium" and clover-leaf "trefoil" ornaments of actual medieval cathedrals. At the same time, the triangle of stars radiating light above the building seems to suggest the applied and fine arts organized under the leadership of architecture, here given a notably cosmological significance.

Feininger's Cubist-Expressionist rendering struck a precise visual balance between the image of a Gothic cathedral and a more modern, updated "crystal symbol." Experts in Gothic architecture such as Steven Murray have observed that "triple towers in the western frontispiece of a Gothic cathedral"—like those shown in Feininger's wood-cut—"never occur in reality . . . there is [also] no precedent for the lateral portals having their own roof structure projecting out beyond the body of the building [and] no precedent for flyers [flying buttresses—J.M.] against towers."28 Feininger, who had a life-long fascination with churches and was known to paint up to two-dozen versions of individual church buildings that captured his interest, seems to have given a modern, Expressionist twist to familiar Gothic architectural forms to better suit the Bauhaus Program's blend of tradition and modernity.

However, and like the Bauhaus school itself, Feininger's jagged, Cubist-Expressionist lines and pulsating emanations of light, structure, and shadow expressed an aesthetic that could easily offend conservative artists wedded to stricter academic traditions. Amid the divisive politics of post-war Germany, many conservatives saw avant-garde art not as the dawning of a promising new age, but as fundamentally threatening to an established social order. Precisely that which inspired youthful avant-garde seekers of new aesthetic truths, in other words, was prone to offend those who remained suspicious of experimentation in virtually all its forms.

Although Feininger seldom taught on a regular schedule—especially after his popularity brought financial independence in the mid-1920s—he was one of very few Bauhaus masters who remained with the school for the full duration of its turbulent fourteen-year existence. He was beloved by students and fellow masters alike for his openness, geniality, and fresh artistic vision. For no one viewing Gropius's and Feininger's collaboration on the Bauhaus Program could mistake the school for anything other than a state-sponsored campaign to place the crafts, fine arts, and architecture on a fresh footing. Appealing to Germans' sense of their culture's historical achievements in the Middle Ages, and deftly skipping over any debts the school owed to Wilhelmine precedents, the Bauhaus became a veritable poster child for social democratic efforts to rebuild a war-torn country and refashion German society. The question was whether the school could present new aesthetic forms in the crafts, fine arts, and architecture in ways that Germans of all political persuasions could embrace.
Bauhaus Battles for Survival

By modeling the Bauhaus as a small community or “lodge” of masters and apprentices, Gropius put behind him his bitter pre-war experiences in the troubled national design organization, the Deutscher Werkbund. Between 1912 and 1914 the Werkbund had succumbed to a takeover by the national government and its leading architectural representative, Hermann Muthesius. The latter only surrendered his national leadership position when the failing war effort eliminated prospects for any government-coordinated collaboration between artists and industry in the field of industrial and commercial design.²⁷ Now, in the wake of his own harrowing wartime experiences as a sergeant major in the German military, Gropius tapped into the idealized model of the medieval artists’ community to set his experimental school apart from major urban power centers. For its initial phase in 1919–20, the Bauhaus represented a parable of a harmonious German society in which practitioners of the crafts, fine arts, and architecture cooperated in a purer, less mediated, and realizable form of artistic production.

Yet promises of communal harmony proved elusive. If the founding of the progressive Weimar Bauhaus aroused the ire of the town’s cultural conservatives, the school also suffered early attacks from a less expected quarter: its own student body. During the first full semester of instruction in the fall of 1919, thirteen students—or some five percent of a total student body of 231—resigned en masse in protest over the Bauhaus Program and its curricular innovations. Bauhaus masters’ executive committee meeting minutes (unavailable to Western scholars until the end of the Cold War) help to reconstruct the students’ actions and motivations. According to meeting minutes from December 18 and 20, 1919, Walter Gropius and the director of the Weimar School of Building Trades, Paul Klopfers, attended a special assembly called by Weimar’s Free Association for City Affairs (freie Vereinigung für städtische Interessen) to discuss the Bauhaus and “the new art in Weimar” on December 12. There, the minutes record, the chair of the meeting, a Dr. Emil Kreubel, leveled attacks against the Bauhaus that Gropius and Klopfers “successfully parried.”³⁸ The architectural historian Barbara Miller Lane (who used German newspaper clippings to reconstruct parts of this meeting) recounts Kreubel’s comparison of Cubist and Expressionist painting to the artistic output of patients at a mental hospital. As Kreubel denounced the school for being a “Spartacist-bolshevist institution,” individual agitators in the audience added callouts of “Jewish art” and “foreigners.”³⁹ Perhaps most disturbingly, a Bauhaus student named Hans Gross then rose and “unfortunately made a speech to the gathering against the trends embodied by the State Bauhaus. This was all the more surprising,” the minutes continue, “because Gropius had coincidentally encountered Gross on the afternoon of the special assembly, and Gross had explained that he thoroughly approved of the goals of the State Bauhaus and was prepared to follow Gropius through thick and thin.”⁴⁰

Ensuing executive committee discussions make clear that among Bauhaus students, Gross had initiated the “circulation of an anti-Semitic petition on which his own name failed to appear.” He also delivered a “German nationalist party speech
which, prepared in longhand, was read at a public gathering of students on Friday, December 11. What emerges from heated executive committee discussions is that Gross denounced both the foreign and Jewish representation at the Bauhaus as "un-German," a tactic common enough among the xenophobic far right. Here Gross joined those right-wing Germans who consoled themselves for Germany's loss of the First World War not by viewing the Wilhelmine Empire as a collective failure to master the challenges of industrialization, urbanization, and modern social integration, as many on the left did. Rather, the right accused German Jews and left-wing "traitors" at home of undermining Germany's war effort, producing the "Dolchstosslegende": the legend that Jews and the left had "stabbed Germany in the back," thereby causing the German Empire to lose the war. In his speech at the meeting Gross had further claimed that Bauhaus assignments in the fall 1919 semester, which focused on the making of toys and other three-dimensional objects, were preparation for a ban on the venerated artistic tradition of easel painting. Gross's public assault and resignation from the school with a dozen other students made plain how closely arguments about modern art and cultural production were tied to political orientation, definitions of German identity, and conceptions of the future direction of German art and social development.

The masters' executive committee submitted an immediate, detailed written rebuttal—a carefully worded blend of defense and offense—to the Weimar Culture Ministry officials overseeing the school. The document refuted Gross's specious assertions and included an exact breakdown of the 231 students enrolled at the Bauhaus in 1919, by nation of origin: 210 Germans, fourteen Austrian Germans, two Bohemian Germans, three Baltic Germans, and two Hungarian Germans. The two elected student representatives were not foreigners, as Gross maintained, but were in fact Germans of Austrian extraction. The only traitorous and "un-German" behavior at the Bauhaus, the masters' rebuttal emphasized, was that of the student Hans Gross himself. Gross trafficked in deliberate untruths, deception, and false denunciations, and was a disgrace to the school and to other Bauhaus students who were "especially qualified, including some who participated in the war and achieved officers' rank."

The Bauhaus painters Lyonel Feininger and Johannes Itten thereafter signed a public statement affirming that they had every intention of continuing to practice and teach the art of easel painting in their studios and classrooms. A second statement, signed by all members of the Bauhaus masters' executive committee, forbade student participation in political activity "regardless of which side" or ideological persuasion, "on penalty of expulsion." Seeking to dampen sustained criticism in the local and national press, Gropius withdrew from the Workers' Council and the November Group after overseeing the former merge with the latter on December 17, 1919, in the midst of the Bauhaus controversy. Gropius thereafter maintained a safe distance from left-wing organizations and would, in fact, insist at every opportunity that the Bauhaus was "unpolitical."

Not a single one of his enemies listened. Despite Gropius's increasing propensity to argue in the 1920s that art should be regarded as occupying a realm separate from politics, and notwithstanding the resolute avoidance of any official
political involvement by himself or his school, the Bauhaus remained a right-wing target. For his part, Gropius promoted the school tirelessly in a blizzard of press articles. The frequency of his public lectures, moreover, led the architectural historian Winfried Nerdinger to characterize Gropius as a virtual "wandering preacher of the modern." 26

Throughout his years as Bauhaus director Gropius stood by his conviction that artistic vision and talent were of paramount importance in post-war Germany's cultural rebirth, regardless of a person's background or nationality. In the months after the Bauhaus controversy he resisted calls from Weimar conservatives and chauvinists to hire more Germans and follow German academic traditions more closely. It was unclear, after all, what could precisely be called "German" about the nation's academic art traditions: for centuries Germany's artistic education derived from practices in France, Holland, or Italy, and before that, Greece. Gropius unflinchingly hired leading artists from the European avant-garde: joining the German faculty were the Swiss painter Johannes Itten, originator of the famous six-month, pass-fail Bauhaus "Introductory Course" on elementary form and materials; a second avant-garde Swiss painter, Paul Klee, member of the pre-war, early Expressionist "Blue Rider" group; the Russian painter Wassily Kandinsky, a pioneer of painterly abstraction and synesthesia, and co-founder of the "Blue Rider" group in Munich; and the Hungarian painter and experimental media artist László Moholy-Nagy. Gropius hardly wrapped himself in the German flag in making hiring decisions; the artists he recruited reflect the Bauhaus director's unerring eye for the best German and international talent, a group of Bauhaus masters celebrated to this day as leading innovators of twentieth-century art. 27

Only the first phase of Bauhaus activity in 1919–20 saw such an intense focus on the crafts, and only in the early years did Expressionism prevail as a style. Although the introductory course and the requirement to master a craft remained, beginning in the early 1920s Gropius began to strengthen ties between the school's workshop-based instruction and practical applications in housing, domestic furnishings, and industry. Here the architect returned to themes about which he had written before the war, when, at age twenty-six, he had composed an essay on "The Industrialization of Housing Construction." At that time Gropius had also opened an architectural practice in Berlin with a top graduate of Peter Behrens's Düsseldorf School of Applied Arts, Adolf Meyer. Unquestionably disillusioned by big industry's and the Imperial Government's commercial policies in the run up to the war, Gropius initially coped with the shattered post-war economy by emphasizing the crafts and small-scale production. Nonetheless, he remained aware that once German economic conditions began to improve, the future of the Bauhaus would rest on a productive engagement with industry. Thus, even as early Bauhaus rhetoric focused on the crafts, Gropius also delivered matter-of-fact, business-like speeches to gatherings of industry as early as summer 1919, only months after the founding of the Bauhaus. 28

Keeping abreast of prevailing theories in international architecture and design, Gropius corresponded with leading architects such as Le Corbusier in
France and took valuable cues from the Russian Constructivist and Dutch de Stijl movements. Each in their own way, Constructivism and de Stijl sought a rapprochement between art and industry in the name of social progress. Following an international Constructivist conference in Düsseldorf in 1922, Gropius was determined to set the Bauhaus on a new course. Against the strenuous objections of the most popular Bauhaus teacher, the charismatic and mystical Johannes Itten, he introduced a Constructivist-style slogan, “Art and Technology: A New Unity,” for the Bauhaus’s first major exhibition in summer 1923.

Itten, after a prolonged struggle with Gropius, resigned from the school in disgust. His departure greatly disappointed a devoted group of students who, in close emulation of the example set by their favorite Bauhaus master, had shaved their heads, donned monks’ robes, adopted yoga and deep-breathing exercises, and practiced vegetarianism. Itten’s replacement, the Constructivist László Moholy-Nagy, was the perfect choice to signal the school’s new direction, skillfully guiding students through the Bauhaus Introductory Course, supervising the school’s metal workshop, and pioneering experiments in a variety of new media.

Quite apart from any troubled internal politics at the school, the unprecedented inflation of 1923–24 rocked the worlds of Weimar and Thuringia. Right-wing parties displaced a Thuringian coalition of socialists and communists in 1924, overshadowing celebrations that followed the first major Bauhaus exhibition in the summer of 1923. The victorious political right revived its old charges that the Bauhaus was a center of “cultural Bolshevism” and guilty of crimes against the “German” traditions of Weimar classical architecture and the literature of Goethe and Schiller. With a clear legislative majority, the right-wing parties closed the Weimar Bauhaus in 1924.

Forced to relocate the school, Gropius found a savior in Fritz Hesse, the liberal mayor of the mid-sized industrial city of Dessau. Hesse’s administration funded a sizable new Bauhaus school building designed by Gropius, and also arranged to finance several Gropius-designed houses nearby for the school director and the leading half-dozen Bauhaus masters and their families. Thanks to Mayor Hesse’s patronage, Gropius met executives from Dessau’s leading industry, the Junkers Aircraft company, who provided striking aerial photographs of Gropius’s sleek new school building (Figure 14.5). As national policies lowered Germany’s inflation and brought a measure of political and economic stability in the mid-1920s, Mayor Hesse also helped arrange opportunities for the Bauhaus to develop Torten, a workers’ housing estate, along modern industrial lines.

The increased opportunities at Dessau yielded rich results: the tubular steel furniture innovations of Marcel Breuer; the film, photography, and new media productions of László Moholy-Nagy and his students; the iconic weaving, collage, and metalwork accomplishments of Gunta Stölzl and Marianne Brandt; and the continued output of Gropius, Kandinsky, Klee, Josef Albers, and others. The Bauhaus encouraged social experimentation as well, with collaborative theater performances, musical evenings, and themed parties. Local conservatives, however, objected to Gropius’s liberal administration of the school and the students’ overt displays, which they criticized in the press. Ruth Cidor-Citroën,
Constructivist and Dutch de
decadance and de Stijl sought a
r of social progress. Following
Düsseldorf in 1922, Gropius
the Constructivist László
school's new direction, skil-
and deep-breathing exercises,
a new group of students who, in
a Bauhaus master, had shaved
ity in summer 1923.
resigned from the school in
students in action in a variety of medium.
at the school, the unique
Weimar and Thuringia. Right-
socialists and communists in
the first major Bauhaus exhibi-
tion right revived its old charges
Socialism and guilty of crimes
ical architecture and the litera-
tory, the right-wing par-
was a student in the 1920s weaving workshop, subsequently recalled with some wonder that "Everything that came before in art did not matter... everything was to be new." Another female student active in the photography workshop, Ethel Fodor-Mittag, said "There was also a sexual independence. My husband was my third relationship at the Bauhaus, and this was completely accepted. It was not accepted by people outside the school, however."41

In Dessau Gropius finally obtained the funding he needed to open a full-fledged department of architecture, and in 1927 he invited the Swiss architect Hannes Meyer to serve as its director. After the pressures of leading, promoting, and defending the school for nearly a decade, Gropius retired and in February 1928, turned the Bauhaus directorship over to Meyer. Gropius relocated to focus on his architectural practice in Berlin. Mayor Fritz Hesse would later recall: "To what a great extent the Bauhaus's enemies saw the embodiment of the school in the person of Gropius, dawned on me only after Hannes Meyer took over leadership. Not that the general animosity towards the school would change, but the atmosphere of a fight visibly eased, and the angry articles that had made Gropius's work so incessantly difficult, let up."42

The energetic architect Hannes Meyer, a self-confessed "scientific Marxist" whom Gropius would later accuse of having masked his political leanings, steered the school hard to the left. Meyer's Bauhaus eschewed luxury, and even came to resist the idea of aesthetics itself. Several of Meyer's formulae captured this new direction: "all things in this world are a product of the formula: (function times economy);" and "building is nothing but organization: social, technical, economic, psychological organization."43 Meyer's total commitment helped the school produce numerous affordable and well-designed chairs, lamps, and
industrial fixtures long acclaimed as modern “functionalist” classics, along with one of its most memorable architectural projects, the Trade Union School in Bernau, a suburb of Berlin. Meyer and his students also added a block of houses to the suburban Torten housing estate begun by Gropius outside of Dessau. Meyer’s housing did not suffer from the cracking and leaking that had afflicted Gropius’s prototypes, and added to an accumulating body of left-wing and left-leaning German and Central European domestic architectural accomplishments in the 1920s: for instance, those of Ernst May in Frankfurt, Bruno Taut in Berlin, the Deutscher Werkbund in Stuttgart, and, in neighboring Austria, an array of grand working class housing projects that amounted to a “Ringstrasse for the Proletariat” in social democratic “Red Vienna.”

Even as he began his tenure as Bauhaus director, however, Meyer’s Marxist sympathies embroiled him in political conflict. Dismissed from his post in 1930, Meyer and his partner, the architect Lotte Beese (who later married the Dutch communist architect Mart Stam), responded with a bitter open letter to Mayor Hesse, published in the Berlin journal Das Tagebuch in 1930 under the title, “My Expulsion from the Bauhaus.” Referring to Meyer in the third person, the couple vainly sought to drum up support for a reversal of his firing, asserting: “It is a crime to offer the stale fodder of yesteryear’s art theories as nourishment to young people who, as designers, will have the society of tomorrow all to themselves.” In contrast to the affordable design prototypes produced by the school for working-class consumers during Meyer’s directorship between 1928 and 1930, the letter continued, upon first arriving the architect had found a completely different, overly “artistic” atmosphere:

In 1927 Hannes Meyer found here a Bauhaus . . . where every teacup was seen as a constructivist problem . . . Inbred theories blocked the way to real-life design: the cube was king; its sides were yellow, red, white, gray, and black. The circle was blue, the triangle yellow, and the square red . . .

we sat and slept on colorful geometrical furniture, lived in the colorful sculpture of the houses on the floor of which the hidden psychological complexes of young girls lay woven into carpets. Art was strangling life everywhere. Thus emerged the ironic situation of Hannes Meyer: as director of the Bauhaus, he fought against the Bauhaus style.”

The Bauhaus of the early and mid-1920s did not just endure criticisms from the political Right, as the above passage makes clear. Marxists and others on the Left attacked the school for cleaving to outdated romantic conceptions of art and design that would inhibit the development of a truly social democratic art. Meyer insisted that he practiced a “politics of culture but never party politics” in the strict communist sense. Nevertheless, Meyer stood little chance of maintaining the “scientific” direction of the school as escalating political rows saw many German regions slide to the radical right in the late 1920s.

In August 1930 the city replaced Meyer with its third and final Bauhaus director, architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. The architect had established a reputation for uncommon rigor through his success at organizing the Deutscher Werk-
bund's popular exhibition, "The Dwelling," which consisted of a model housing development in Stuttgart, completed in 1927 by an international cast of progressive architects. Mies van der Rohe received additional accolades for his path-breaking German Pavilion for the International Exposition in Barcelona in 1929, an elegant modernist masterpiece so highly regarded that Barcelona authorities reconstructed it in 1986. Mies van der Rohe greatly intensified the school's focus on architecture, remained as apolitical as possible, and made the Bauhaus a center for Weimar Germany's "Neues Bauen," or New Building.

Soon, however, the Bauhaus again fell victim to the election results, this time the local Dessau elections of 1932. Although the victorious local branch of Adolf Hitler's National Socialist party did not actually tear down the Bauhaus building as it had vowed to do during its xenophobic election campaign, it succeeded in forcing the school to close by late summer of 1932. With Mayor Hesse's help, Mies van der Rohe negotiated an exit for the Dessau Bauhaus that included an agreement on the part of the city administration to continue paying faculty salaries through the end of the school's contract period. This financial arrangement allowed Mies van der Rohe to rent an old telephone factory building in Berlin-Steglitz and operate the Bauhaus there for one semester as a "private institute," before the Nazi party compelled the school to disband forever in the summer of 1933. As the former Bauhaus archivist Hans Wingler and others have noted, the Bauhaus, like the Weimar Republic itself, began its hopeful yet troubled existence in 1919 in the town of Weimar, and, like the Republic, met its end in Berlin in 1933.  

The Bauhaus Legacy

Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe, László Moholy-Nagy, Josef and Anni Albers, and Marcel Breuer would all eventually establish productive careers and lasting reputations in the United States. However, during the initial years of Hitler's Third Reich Gropius, Mies van der Rohe, and more than a dozen more Bauhaus masters and students actively sought architecture and planning positions in the new Nazi administration. Gropius and Mies, unsuccessful in their respective bids, covered their tracks and parlayed their failure to remain in Germany into extraordinarily influential positions in the U.S.: Gropius as chair of architecture at the Harvard Graduate School of Design from 1937 to 1952, and Mies van der Rohe as head of architecture at Chicago's Armour Institute/Illinois Institute of Technology from 1938 to 1958.

Yet the Bauhaus influenced American architecture and design culture well before the arrival of these Bauhaus masters in the late 1930s. Gropius's Bauhaus building of 1926 in Dessau, with its functionally differentiated asymmetrical plan, ribbon windows, and glass curtain wall, proved a sensation in what would come to be known as the "International Style" in an eponymous exhibition sponsored by the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York in 1932. Twenty-seven year-old Alfred H. Barr, MoMA's first director when it opened its doors in 1929,
was inspired to organize the new museum into separate departments of painting and sculpture, architecture and design, photography and film, and drawings and prints as a direct result of his four-day visit to the Dessau Bauhaus in 1927. As Barr recalled: "The multi-departmental plan [of the Museum] was . . . inspired by Rufus Morey's class in Medieval art . . . and equally important, the Bauhaus of Dessau. . . . I had looked forward with great anticipation to the Bauhaus and felt that it had lived up to my expectations." Already in the 1920s, Weimar institutions like the Bauhaus were helping to set international standards for a progressive sensibility in modern art, architecture, and design in far-away cities.

For several decades after the Second World War, surviving Bauhaus members sought to conceal any problematic political affiliations with National Socialism, representing themselves as members of a school that had remained opposed to the political right unto the very end. But the reality was much more complicated, as ongoing research on the school and its legacy has shown. Other new research also reveals the uneasy relationship at the 1920s Bauhaus between such "traditional" arts as painting and sculpture, on one hand, and the introduction, on the other, of such new media as photograms, photography, film, and moving mechanical sculpture imported to the school by the young constructivist László Moholy-Nagy in 1923. The painter Lyonel Feininger, more than two decades Moholy-Nagy's senior when the Hungarian arrived, had a relationship to photography that perhaps best epitomizes the uneasy tensions that prevailed at the time between older and newer art forms. Aged fifty-five in 1925, Feininger initially complained to his wife Julia about the new media being propagated so energetically by the young Moholy-Nagy: "Why attach the name of art to this mechanization of all visual things?" he asked derisively, perhaps betraying the limits of his artistic progressivism.

Yet when the Feininger and Moholy-Nagy families became neighbors in one of the two-family masters' houses designed by Gropius in Dessau in July 1926, the tone quickly shifted. Feininger grew to admire Moholy-Nagy's many-sided artistic talents and irrepressible personality, which made the Hungarian nearly universally popular among masters and students. Influenced as well by his three sons (two of whom, Andreas Feininger and Theodor Lux Feininger, would go on to become famous photographers in their own right), Lyonel Feininger took up the medium of photography and worked alongside his young sons in the family darkroom they constructed together in the basement of their Dessau home.

Julia Feininger, however, remained extremely sensitive to her husband's interest in photography—worried, as Theodor Lux would later explain, that her husband's involvement with this technical medium might somehow compromise or even endanger his considerable reputation as an easel painter. As a result, Lyonel Feininger's photographic work remained a solitary activity, often conducted at night under dramatic lighting conditions not dissimilar from those in some of his celebrated nocturnal paintings. Nor do Lyonel Feininger's photographs document the lively activities of the school, in the way one sees in the work of almost every other Bauhaus master and student who practiced photography.
Feininger’s photos appear in hardly any Bauhaus publications, even though by his own admission his engagement with the medium proved very fruitful for both his painting and the further development of his artistic eye. “Dessau has changed countenance for me,” Lyonel Feininger would write to Julia of his photography in 1928, and a few months later he gushed in another letter, “photography has taken the way I see to a new level.”

Out of respect for the sensitivities of his mother, Theodor Lux waited until after both his parents had passed away to donate nearly five hundred of his father’s photographs and eighteen thousand of his negatives and slides to Harvard University—the fruit of the Bauhaus painter’s productive engagement with photography over nearly three decades. At this point it is safe to say that Lyonel Feininger’s reputation has rested almost exclusively on his career as a graphic artist and painter, although photography greatly informed the artist’s work from the time he began shooting photographs with his sons in the mid-1920s. Even at one of Europe’s most progressive schools of art and design, pioneers such as Feininger appeared to maintain careful boundaries between what he was best known for producing as an artist, his oil paintings, and his newer work in photography. He did not risk allowing his experiments with “technical” media to be seen as somehow contaminating his easel paintings, as Theodor Lux’s recollection of his mother’s unease suggests.

Thus at many levels the experience of the Bauhaus can be said to be representative of a set of larger dialectics operating in Weimar Germany: between modernity and tradition; between younger and older generations; between new, technological media and the academic fine arts; and between progressive and conservative definitions of post-war German society. Precisely the experimental nature of much of Bauhaus aesthetics—its openness to alternative modes of thinking, seeing, making, and representing—were perceived as threatening to segments of German society that longed for idealized visions of a stable German past. Although by no means immune to internal conflicts and disagreements, the school’s aesthetic ideals found a corollary in definitions of the modern individual that encouraged tolerance, acceptance, and difference. These values would prove anathema to conservative Germans wedded to narrower conceptions of the individual’s role in society, or of the nation, or of even narrower theories concerning racial or supposedly “Aryan” prerequisites for being recognized as a “German.” German contemporaries perceived Bauhaus art and architecture not only as a reflection of a modern vision of aesthetics, but also as a powerful barometer of German social development. Therein lay the school’s considerable promise, but also, to some, its particular threat.

Notes


11. The title of the Deutscher Werkbund’s Yearbook for 1912 was The Spiritualization of German Production, while the explicit goal of the organization, as asserted by the architect Fritz Schumacher in his keynote address at the Werkbund’s founding meeting, was the “reconquest of a harmonious culture,” or the Wiedererobrung einer harmonischen Kultur. See Deutscher Werkbund Jahrbuch 1912, Die Durchgestaltung der Deutschen Arbeit: Wege und Ziele in Zusammenhang von Industrie/Handwerk und Kunst (Jena: Eugen Diederichs, 1912); and Fritz Schumacher, “Gründungsrede des Deutschen Werkbundes 1907 in München,” Die Form 7 (1912), 331.


19. Walter Gropius’s debts to such Wilhelmine schools as the Wilhelm von Debelsch School in Munich, Peter Behrens’s School of Applied Art in Düsseldorf, and Hans Poelzig’s School of Art and Applied Art in Breslau are taken up in John V. Maciukia, Before the Bauhaus: Architecture, Politics, and the German State, 1890–1920 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
20. Thus the original, official name of the Bauhaus was: Staatliches Bauhaus in Weimar (Vereinigte ehemalige Grossherzogliche Hochschule für bildende Kunst und ehemalige Grossherzogliche Kunstgewerbeschule). See Hans M. Winger, The Bauhaus, 30.
27. Walter Gropius, “Program of the Staattliches Bauhaus in Weimar,” here quoting from the translation by Charles W. Hausthausen as it appears in his catalog essay, “Walter Gropius and Lyonel Feininger: Bauhaus Manifesto, 1919,” in Bergdoll and Dickerman, Bauhaus 1919–1933, 64. The present author has made one minor adjustment to Hausthausen’s translation of aus Millionen Händen der Handwerker, which Hausthausen renders as “from the million hands of craftsmen.”
29. This history is detailed in John V. Maciukia, “The Deutscher Werkbund Grows a Global Network: Design Reform, Industrial Policy, and German Foreign Policy,


33. Meeting of 18 December 1919, in Meisterratsprotokolle, 57.

34. Meeting of 20 December 1919, in Meisterratsprotokolle, 61.

35. Meeting of 18 December 1919, in Meisterratsprotokolle, 58–59.


38. See the nuanced analysis of Gropius’s efforts to balance the crafts and industry in Marcel Francisco, Walter Gropius and the Creation of the Bauhaus in Weimar: The Ideals and Artistic Theories of Its Founding Years (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), 17–25. Gropius’s speech was entitled, “Baugeist oder Krämerum,” and was delivered to members of the leather and shoe industries in Leipzig.


40. See Miller Lane, Architecture and Politics in Germany, 76–86.


In the annals of cultural history, the Weimar Republic was an ideological crucible that bears comparison only with classical Athens and Renaissance Florence. In many respects, as a site of modernity, its achievements remain unsurpassed. *Weimar Thought* revisits this legacy in ways that are fresh, rich, thought provoking, and subtle. It is destined to become the standard work on the Weimar experience for years to come.

—*Richard Wolin*, author of *Heidegger's Children: Hannah Arendt, Karl Löwith, Hans Jonas, and Herbert Marcuse*

“This collection provides readers with a clear introduction to the riches of intellectual life in Weimar Germany and contextualizes many of the trends and innovations that took place there. Essential for anyone interested in the philosophical, theological, historical, political, legal, aesthetic, and scientific movements of Weimar Germany, this book will have a wide audience.”

—*Leora Batnitzky*, Princeton University

“The years of the short-lived Weimar Republic witnessed a remarkable burgeoning of intellectual and cultural activity. Incorporating recent theoretical and methodological currents, and more recent advances in empirical scholarship, this timely volume brings together outstanding scholars of the field and synthesizes this crucial moment in modern culture.”

—*Warren Breckman*, University of Pennsylvania

*PRINCETON*  
press.princeton.edu

**ISBN: 978-0-691-13510-4**