

The Bauhaus: Evolution of an Idea

I grew up with and at the Bauhaus. I was nine years old when my father was invited to join the founding staff in 1919, which necessitated our family's removal from Berlin to Weimar. In my memory, the moving was attended by cheery circumstances. In the first spring since the cessation of hostilities a great upsurge of hope was evident everywhere. I liked the town and surroundings of Weimar, and best of all was the Bauhaus atmosphere itself. A boy does not trouble his head about the origin and history of things, and I accepted the interesting people and their works, and the attention they paid to me and my works, as something which might have been there always, but which was certainly very agreeable and delightfully different from the musty disciplines of the Gymnasium. The Bauhaus population was fond of gaiety and given to playing and the celebrating of feasts; a paper lantern serenade under our windows on my father's birthday remains an unforgettable experience.

In the following years, as was inevitable, other preoccupations intruded upon the Arcadian felicity of the beginning, and when, seven years later, I became a student at the Bauhaus myself (the youngest ever admitted), I could probably have dimly remembered the childish participation but was engrossed in so new and different a situation that it seemed like a new world altogether.

Thirty-three years have gone by since that time; and the more I ponder now what has always seemed so familiar, the more material for wonder I find opening to me. These findings are of a dual, intertwining nature. I am impressed with the effect and forming power the school has had on my own development, but especially with the uniqueness, the scope, the bold novelty of inception, of a community into which I had wandered, when young, as unquestionably as I might have strolled casually into some ancient church; something that "had always been there." I discover that it had not always been there and

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that soon it was not to be there any more at all. I must attempt to separate the strands of personal recollection and gradual enlightenment as to the social meaning of what is known as "The Bauhaus," an organization born out of the collaboration of many minds. At the beginning of it all, with his strong spirit of devotion, stands the vision and the genius of Walter Gropius.

Never was the truth of the prophet being derided at home more applicable than in his case. His prophesy begins, as is proper, with a word. The name of his creation was to be: "The Bauhaus, *Hochschule für Gestaltung*." The word "Gestaltung" embodies the philosophy he envisaged.

If the term "Bauhaus" was a new adaptation of the medieval concept of the "Bauhütte," the headquarters of the cathedral builders, the term "Gestaltung" is old, meaningful and so nearly untranslatable that it has found its way into English usage. Beyond the significance of shaping, forming, thinking through, it has the flavor underlining the totality of such fashioning, whether of an artefact or of an idea. It forbids the nebulous and the diffuse. In its fullest philosophical meaning it expresses the Platonic *eidolon*, the *Urbild*, the pre-existing form. The feeling for the close neighborhood of pure thought and concrete substance is essentially German. In the sense and nonsense of the poetry of Christian Morgenstern, I should not dare to decide which is uppermost. A quatrain of his, antedating the founding of the Bauhaus, speaks of the dilemma of *nous* and *physis*, and although I wish to state that no conscious parallel can be proven, it remains a curiously felicitous anticipation:

Wenn ich sitze möcht' ich nicht
sitzen wie mein Sitzfleisch möchte,
sondern wie mein Sitzgeist sich,
sässe er, den Sitz sich flöchte.

While still in army service, Gropius had been invited to plan for a reorganization and possible fusion of two schools in Weimar, the Academy of Fine Arts and the Arts and Crafts School, both under the auspices of the Grand Duke of Saxe-Weimar. Given full powers and funds to start with, Gropius was able to issue his first invitations to three artists in 1919: Johannes Itten, Lyonel Feininger and Gerhard Marcks. Paul Klee and Oskar Schlemmer accepted calls in 1921, Kandinsky in 1922, and Moholy-Nagy in 1923. Of the seven artists, six were painters, one a sculptor; only one of them, Johannes Itten, had definite ideas about art education and had taught previously. These

men were to be "Masters of Form," each presiding, jointly with a technical "Master of Craft" over one of the workshops: Carpentry (furniture), Metal, Weaving, Ceramics, Color Design (wall painting), Stone Cutting, Printing and Book-binding, Glass. The Stage class assumed importance only gradually. In the program of studies drawn up at the opening of the school and reported by Gropius under the title "Idea and Structure of the Bauhaus" (*Idee und Aufbau des Staatlichen Bauhauses*) a well-designed curriculum was stipulated, in which the mainstay of instruction was to be built around the apprentice-journeyman-master relationship of the German Artisans' Guilds. A theory of design was to evolve out of a return to the crafts, both practice and theory to be informed by the common spirit of architecture. This was the scaffolding around which life and instruction at the Bauhaus was to unfold.

If, in our time, the term "revolutionary" is perhaps a little too readily applied to the latest detergent or an extra fin clapped onto the latest car model, it does rightly belong to the Bauhaus idea; not, as has often been thought, because chairs, pots, lamps, etc. designed at the Bauhaus looked very different from other lamps, pots, and chairs, but because of the pedagogical thought. Where in pre-revolutionary Germany (or elsewhere) had there been a school in which the masters carefully inquired of the students what, and how, they ought to be taught? One cannot repeat often enough that, if a design following a particular bent developed later, there had been, at the outset, no preconceived idea of what it should look like. Even the industrial angle, the designing of new types of goods for mass production, so characteristic of later, was not "taught" at first. If it was in the back of Gropius' mind, it was not in the students'. This change came, as the form masters thought, prematurely and because of undue outside pressure from the legislature, which wanted to be able to show "results" to their constituents. The really revolutionary concept is to be found in the method of teaching rather than in the anticipated results. Gropius' steadfast ideal was the "collective work of art—Architecture" (*der Bau*), and means to realize this had to be found. The way as he saw it, was the grouping of a staff of strongly formed individuals into a nucleus of "influence." "Form," once achieved in one field, for example in painting, must be applicable to other fields. The painter or sculptor, without giving up his art, must bring his formal findings to bear on the student's problems of design; he must teach, not painting, but "form." Not a little to ask. Yet it came about.

But it could never have happened, had not the students of the early years been what they were, "goal-directed" as we would say today, through privation, suffering, indignation at the failure of a system; hungry for a spiritual rebirth. They came to the Bauhaus ready for the experiment. An authoritarian epoch had come abruptly to a close with the flight of the Kaiser. Out of political, economic, moral chaos, the intellectual avant-garde, only yesterday a derided minority, was called upon to help to regenerate society. The incomparable shock action of the Bauhaus idea came from the unity of purpose of a group of people fortifying themselves against a wilderness. There was nothing of the ivory tower in this isolation. It was the necessary defence of the pioneer in his stockade: he meant to establish himself in the land. Everybody was poor—the inflation saw to that; but the early Bauhaus community represented the religious attitude of the poor in spirit. If the standard of living was low (things came to such a pass that tuition fees had to be waived altogether), the sights were set high. The "Bauhäusler" of 1920 was a lean-jawed, wide-eyed apparition, in extraordinary garments, running to bare legs and sandals, long locks on male heads and bobbed hair on women, causing unending scandal to the citizens. But beneath the eccentric appearance there was devotion to an idea, a burning desire for spiritual things, a willingness to pass through the most harassing errors on the quest—a horde of seekers from a page of Dostoevsky. Enthusiasm alternated with profound dejection. They were indefatigable arguers; obstructionist and full of complaints one day, the next they would set to work in a concerted effort without rest, if the cause required it. Distrustful of leadership and touchy even about "influence," they could show self-discipline and loyalty towards their director and masters when threatened from the outside.

Lyonel Feininger reported some of his early impressions of prospective students as follows:

May 1919. The students I have seen up to now look very self-confident. Almost all have been in the army, it is a new type, a new generation. They are not as timid and harmless as the old professors here imagine.

(The "old professors" were the pre-war faculty of the academy, who withdrew from the Bauhaus shortly afterwards.)

May 1919. How often I am struck these days with the fact

that these young people are not babies . . . that they accept nothing without a quite merciless scrutiny. . . . Expressionism for them is the symbol of their generation and of their longings.

June 1919. These consultations with students are amongst the affairs uppermost in my mind. I often ponder on the way of establishing a working relationship with students. I think I have it now: leading and helping them along, talking freely to them and exchanging thoughts and ideas. I feel strong and rich, I am convinced that I can contribute to their development without forcing them into something foreign to their nature. The trust they place in me is very wonderful.

The form masters were free to accept pupils for their own instruction, but the official plan did not incorporate painting classes as such. Lyonel Feininger was in charge of the printing workshop.

Gropius' attitude towards the beaux arts is expressed in the document referred to above ("Idee und Aufbau"): "The fundamental pedagogic mistake of the Academy arose from its preoccupation with the idea of individual genius, and its discounting the value of commendable achievement on a less exalted level." This is beautifully clear, both in its rejection of a former approach, and in its adoption of the new attitude of the Bauhaus. Like many other ideological statements, it is not free from paradox. The noble, republican distrust of the academic hierarchy of yesterday came from a man whose very soul was that of the gentleman, aristocratic *malgré lui*. And, in order to build up a school in which achievement was to be valued on a "less exalted level" he invited famous painters who might well attempt to found a new academy under his nose. This danger was averted, not without frequent clashes and even an occasional crash: sessions of the Meister-Rat (council of masters) were apt to be fiery affairs.

To return to Lyonel Feininger for a moment: the quotations speak of the inner searches of an artist about to face a very new situation. While this was also true for the other appointees, with the exception of Itten, who needed no coaxing, they were by temperament more inclined to enter into the spirit of collaborating on a common curriculum than my father, who adhered to the idea of the "artist in residence" and relied upon influence rather than class-room teaching. He thus chose to stay with the Bauhaus after the transfer to Dessau,

as an un-salaried and non-teaching member of the community. The trend of teaching, however, grew steadily in the opposite direction, toward classes and lectures. But in considering these differences of approach I seem to see the best illustration of the visionary power of Gropius' plan, which was based on his expectations of results coming from the total personality of his collaborators rather than from their opinions. In this light it is interesting to note that the most "trained" and experienced educator on the staff, Itten, was the least able to submit to the collective plan and left the Bauhaus early. Itten's rôle is well characterized in a December 1921 letter by Oskar Schlemmer:

Thus, it seems, a separate movement has been formed and the Bauhaus is divided into two camps, teachers included. Itten has managed to have his course declared compulsory for all students, the only course in the curriculum thus favored. He has the support of students in the essential workshops, and altogether evinces the admirable desire to stamp the entire Bauhaus with his seal.

The situation amounts to a duel between Itten and Gropius, and we, the other masters, have been asked to arbitrate. This dichotomy seems to me a major principle in contemporary Germany. On the one side the irruption of Oriental doctrines, India Cult, Mazdaznan, the back-to-nature movement, Wandervogel (youth movement), retreat into primitive settlements, vegetarianism, Tolstoyism, reaction against the war—on the other hand: Americanism, miracles of technology, invention, Metropolis. Gropius and Itten are almost perfect types of the two extremes, and I have to find myself once again, happy-unhappy, halfway between the two. I would say "yes" to both, or, at the least, would like to see the two principles interpenetrating. Or should it be true that progress (broadening) and self-realization (deepening) are truly incompatible and mutually exclusive, whence impossibility of following both at the same time? ¹

Itten and Schlemmer sympathized in one field not otherwise popular at the Bauhaus: the study of masterworks of painting for educational purposes. Schlemmer would have liked to do this (later, in Dessau, he gave a course in Figure Drawing in which Dürer was used); Itten did it. Because it paints a vivid picture of both personalities, I quote

¹ *Briefe und Tagebücher* (Munich, 1958). Translations from the German are my own.

from another letter by Schlemmer, written about the time he was considering whether to accept the invitation to join the Bauhaus:

Itten . . . teaches "analysis." He shows lantern slides, after seeing which the students have to draw what seems essential to them: movement, main compositional lines, curve . . . then he showed the weeping Mary Magdalen of the Grünewald Altar; the students laboriously attempt to extract the essentials out of this difficult material. Itten sees these essays and thunders: If they had any artistic sensibility they would have known that this, the most august rendering of sorrow, symbolizing the weeping of the world, cannot be drawn—they would simply sit and dissolve in tears!—Which said, he vanishes, slamming the door behind him.

It is characteristic of Schlemmer, of whom a more personal portrait will be drawn later, that human relations figured largely in his correspondence. His account of a man representing an absolute pedagogic opposite in attitude to Itten, but based on a similar authoritarian point of view, will aid in understanding the degree of experimentation carried on before the educational scheme crystallized:

Particularly inclined to the attack here is van Doesburg, who preaches so radical a form of architecture that any painted art not merely reflecting its glory simply does not exist for him. He is a most eloquent fighter for his ideas and perfectly fascinates the students, especially those who want to create architecture and are clamoring for that ideological center which they feel the Bauhaus owes them but does not offer. And indeed what goes on here gives him almost the right (from his point of view) to condemn what the masters are trying to achieve. (March 1922)

Theo van Doesburg was not a staff member, but lectured at the Bauhaus, having been attracted to Weimar by the new venture, and surely contributed something toward clarification by way of provoking one crisis after another. Lyonel Feininger also noticed something disturbing in van Doesburg. He reports (Sept. 1922) on a conversation with Kandinsky about student affairs:

We are speculating how many or how few of the students are really conscious of a goal they would wish to reach, and are strong enough to stay on their course. For a majority the unsentimental and perfectly ungenial van Doesburg seems to

fill a definite need, a dogma, something ready-made to cling to; something quite contrary to our exploring endeavors which, in the long run, would further the students more. Why is there this voluntary submission to the tyranny of a van Doesburg, and on the other hand this mulish non-compliance with all requests or even suggestions, put forth by the Bauhaus?

The ruthlessness of Itten and van Doesburg is much less incomprehensible in our own time than it was 37 years ago. Then, as now, it was easier to be a disciple than a seeker. But the Bauhaus idea did not desire some to be leaders and others to be led. Whoever could not contribute to the collective, student or master, was invited to leave. Gropius did not flinch at any storm, because he expected things to be turbulent. In no other way could his plan materialize. I revert again to Schlemmer (May, 1922) to illustrate student-teacher relations:

I followed my impulse in creating a teaching attitude halfway between formal lecture and sociable debate; the divergent tendencies seemed to need to be harmonized somehow. I felt that a synthesis was wanted to counter-balance so much analyzing. Inevitably this leads to a consideration of first principles. To me it seems valuable and essential, to clarify one's basic approach. But I am confronted with the question: Can this be done by way of debate and discussion?—Is not action much better?—Let actions speak and give us direction.

I believe that our time is in sore need of an ethical point of view, instead of an esthetic one. We at the Bauhaus are under the special obligation to realize this.

This may be read as expressive of the frame of mind with which Schlemmer had begun to solve the problem of teaching. The next extract (of October 1923) shows the effect of a year and a half of experience:

I insisted on not postponing any longer our project of a puppet show. We have begun a production, freely edited, of a tale from the Arabian Nights. I had wanted to do a Thuringian folk tale, "The Smith of Apolda." We could have played this to the rustics and got paid in produce. The students did not want to do it, because it was so boring, so moralizing etc.—but especially because it came from the "master." They want to do it their way; only so can they be involved and interested, and I really feel that it will come

off, too.—First rule: The students must be able to feel that they have originated it.

Half a year later (February 1924) there is more bitterness:

Nothing is more disliked by Gropius and by the students, than ideas coming from the Masters, that is to say, anything which comes out directly instead of remaining in a state of theoretical neutrality. The students insist on doing everything themselves, or at least they must be able to keep up the illusion that it is all their invention. This is why they love a master who knows how to remain neutral but from whom they can take much in a practical sense. They have whomever [*sic*] does what they wanted to do themselves.

The period from 1922 to 1924 was crucial for the Bauhaus. The big Bauhaus exhibition of 1923 was decided upon in 1922. This had been the result of outside pressure, to which Gropius added the weight of his own persuasion against the inclination both of masters and students, who felt that this demand for public demonstration was premature and apt to endanger the educational growth. Gropius was able to convince the staff that without this concession the days of the school were numbered. The exhibition, today a landmark in the history of modern art, showed conclusively the validity of the aims of the institution. Although it marks the beginning of the end of the Weimar period, it established without doubt that the Bauhaus was of interest not only to the nation, but to Europe. The effect of the demonstration was overwhelmingly favorable everywhere except among the local reactionaries. The invitation of the city of Dessau for the Bauhaus to move there was a direct result.

Not surprisingly we find that during this period of intense effort the ideological picture began to clarify. The era of pure experimentation had come to an end. Profitable production, to be achieved only through collaboration with industry, was declared to be essential henceforth. This turn was distinctly unpalatable to a portion of the Bauhaus population, although the majority of masters and students accepted it, partly as inevitable and partly as wholly desirable. The ways are beginning to part: if henceforth the workshops were to concentrate on type design for industrial production, and an architecture class requiring mathematics, physics, and appropriate courses in statics, graphics, etc. was to replace the private “Baubüro,” on the other hand the “artists” obtained more recognition of their aims. Regular courses

were instituted by Klee and Kandinsky; these became obligatory for all students in Dessau. Beyond this, free painting under the tutelage of these two masters was made available. If in this way gains were registered for both wings of opinion at the school, it is only just to point out that the very forming of these wings constituted a weakening of the initial structure, in which unity was sought through exploration of the interrelatedness of all the disciplines, when all problems of design were formal, and where the eventual creation of a chair for instance (in the Morgensternian sense alluded to earlier) could be the result of processes not differing in their nature from the creation of a painting or a piece of sculpture.

With this loss of the pristine joy and innocence of discovery the Bauhaus entered its mature age. A great deal of substance had been acquired. Although the move to Dessau in 1925 saw various departures in other directions, five students rose to master rank, all destined to make significant contributions: Josef Albers, Herbert Bayer, Marcel Breuer, Hinnerk Scheper, Joost Schmidt. Of the original three masters, only Feininger went on to Dessau, as resident artist; the teaching staff was thus completely renewed. The workshops also underwent changes. Stone-cutting, ceramics, glass workshops were discontinued; the former block-printing and bookbinding shop evolved into a typographical printshop with elements of advertising art taught jointly with the craft, first under Herbert Bayer and later under Joost Schmidt. The stage, a somewhat poorly defined undertaking in the beginning, was to become a regular workshop furnished with an experimental theatre and put under the guidance of Oskar Schlemmer.

The invitation to Dessau, and the erection of the magnificent complex of buildings for Bauhaus use were due to the forward-looking and liberal city council under the progressive leadership of the mayor, Dr. Fritz Hesse. The Bauhaus, after seeing its fulfillment in Dessau in a seven-year period—under the direction of Gropius (1925-1928), Hannes Meyer (1928-1930) and Mies van der Rohe (1930-1932)—succumbed together with other institutions to the Nazi régime. Toward the end it had been under attack from left- as well as right-wing extremists.

The outlook in December 1926, when the building was formally inaugurated, was certainly bright. The school had a right to feel that it had proven itself. The population of the State of Anhalt was industrial and liberal, instead of agricultural and backward. The halls and ghosts of the Grand-Ducal academy had been left behind. The

harassing era of inflation had ended two years earlier, and stabilization of the German currency had brought a period of optimism and bright business outlook.

From this period on I am able to speak of "teaching at the Bauhaus" from personal experience. All masters conformed to the idea in appealing to self-discipline on the part of the students, and in refraining from imposing tasks and assignments. Ideas were emitted, and if a student chose to work with the idea, well and good; if not, no more was said about it. There were no "grades," no tests nor examinations. Performance in the workshops was reviewed periodically by the form and technical masters, and warnings were issued to doubtful cases; continual failure to produce might result in exclusion from the school. No doubt it was possible to attend a good many classes without learning anything. But this was, at the Bauhaus as well as at a more traditional school, the loss of the student, and, no degrees being given, it is certain that the Bauhaus graduated fewer incompetents than any other institution I can think of. This is largely due to the high motivation of the great majority of applicants for admission. Only in the last few years was there a decline in the standards for acceptance. Participation in party politics was first permitted under the directorship of Hannes Meyer and its corroding effect hastened the process of dissolution begun when Gropius relinquished his post.

The most characteristic of all Bauhaus courses was the Vorkurs of Josef Albers. The idea of a probationary experimental semester, at the end of which admission to a workshop and the school proper could be granted or refused, was carried over from the Weimar years, when it had existed under Itten and Georg Muche. The concept of the course itself, however, was so drastically changed by Albers that nothing but the name remained. The emphasis was on possibilities of construction in a variety of materials, principally wood, paper, metal. The properties of the materials were to be experienced through dividing and combining them, with a minimum of tools and with as little waste as possible. In fastening pieces together, the resources of each respective material were to be exploited to the full; for example, metal can be bent, but wood cannot without a considerable apparatus; metal needs to be cut, but paper can be torn, etc. Expendable materials of ordinary daily life were favored; I remember a most impressive structure composed of nothing but used safety razor blades (which are slotted and punched by the manufacturer) and burnt-up wooden matches. The most marvellous aspect of this kind of work is that it was not "taught"

in any strict sense of the word at all. Very much in the spirit we have seen in Schlemmer's discourse, ideas were broached in a general way, some kind of hidden talent of invention was appealed to, and the resulting response was astonishing. But one felt a tremendous conviction emanating from Albers, a great joy in what he was doing, also a certain humility with which even quite wretched works were discussed with the purpose of inducing deeper insight in the student. One of my first impressions of the Vorkurs is Albers introducing a stapler, not so common then as now, and demonstrating its various possibilities with great inward satisfaction, including a statement of the American origin of the machine. I also remember his leading us through a cardboard box factory, a depressing place to me (I confess), and pointing out manufacturing particulars, both good and bad (i. e. capable of improvement), with the kind of religious concentration one would expect from a lecturer in the Louvre. The criteria for evaluation of the works were structural invention and static and tensile strength. Aesthetic values were not sought, and were condemned as a point of departure. The absence of any "purpose" in these exercises strengthened the "functional" feeling: another paradox! The function was, to be as much wood, metal, paper, as possible, to be paper to the top of one's bent, so to speak. These things are nowadays almost common property, but they weren't thirty-three years ago. Moreover, they were not done to be an end in themselves, but in order to find out what workshop would be best suited to the student's abilities.

I am evoking early memories of my own encounter with an artist whose post-Bauhaus work is probably better known in this country than that of any other Bauhaus master—through his teaching at Black Mountain College and, since 1950, at Yale, as well as through his exhibitions. I have heard Albers called anti-intellectual, but I think that his preoccupation with what he calls "ordinary sense" conceals a deeper meaning. He does not so much glorify the "lowbrow" as reproach the highbrow with his one-sidedness. He wants to put his students in touch with unknown parts of themselves; his aim is really psychological even though his doctrine is, or affects to be, quite matter-of-fact and practical. To the patient persuasion of his early teaching method he has added in later years the feature of shocking his audience into recognition of the pre-existence of formal relations. He sees no reason to give up control over the artifact; he distinguishes between "the work of art" and "the ability to paint." He has said of himself: "I believe that thought is as useful in art as anywhere else, and that a clear head does not bar access to feeling (aux sentiments purs)."

One may say that the function of Albers' teaching was to seek to create the highest degree of "useful uselessness": something which was a true symbol (and therefore valid), an instrument of understanding, something needful to painter as well as to educator, architect and designer. And in conjunction with the necessary reverence for precision in geometrical exploration, I would underscore the important factor of the *play* with simple geometrical form. Its meaning can become portentously symbolic if it makes us re-examine such forbidding philosophies as nineteenth century utilitarianism, which sought to outlaw play (cf. Dickens' *Hard Times*). In our own time the need for play has been discovered to have an almost, or perhaps quite, deadly earnestness about it, by no means confined to the young, although perhaps best understood when playing with them. One is here confronted with an archetype. Play is in its nature symbolic, and the symbol is generative of consciousness. Direction is not excluded: we direct children but the mature learn easily how to direct their own play; and if they are talented (this sort of experience presupposes some talent if it is to extend into adult dimensions) they learn to recognize the signs of proximity to the hidden treasure of comprehension (that is, an addition to consciousness). When the sign is beheld, work replaces play. The treasure must not only be raised, but spent wisely. One without the other remains infantile. Paul Klee in his highly specialized language is saying the same thing, and his art draws its vitality from the same, the only, source: man's fugitive chemistry rooted in the cosmos, the immortal soul in the born and dying body with its senses.

At the termination of the probationary semester, the work done by each student was exhibited, a choice of a workshop was made, and the council of form masters under the chairmanship of Gropius passed on the merit of the performance and of the selection of the future field of studies. I squeaked through with a warning from the masters to pay more attention to the program of studies, and was admitted to the stage workshop.

My choice was the outcome of seeing with breathless excitement, admiration, and wonder an evening's performance of the stage class in the Bauhaus theatre. At an early age I had occupied myself intensely with the making of masks in various materials, I hardly could say why, yet sensing dimly that in this form of creation a meaning lay hidden for me. On the Bauhaus stage, these intuitions seemed to acquire body and life. I had beheld the "Dance of Gestures" and

the “Dance of Forms,” executed by dancers in metallic masks and costumed in padded, sculptural suits. The stage, with jet-black backdrop and wings, contained magically spotlighted, geometrical furniture: a cube, a white sphere, steps; the actors paced, strode, slunk, trotted, dashed, stopped short, turned slowly and majestically; arms with colored gloves were extended in a beckoning gesture; the copper and gold and silver heads (the masks were full round, covering the entire head, and, apart from the color of the metal foil they were covered with, were identical in shape and design) were laid together, flew apart; the silence was broken by a whirring sound, ending in a small thump; a crescendo of buzzing noises culminated in a crash followed by portentous and dismayed silence. Another phase of the dance had all the formal and contained violence of a chorus of cats, down to the meowling and bass growls, which were marvellously accentuated by the resonant mask-heads. Pace and gesture, figure and prop, color and sound, all had the quality of elementary form, demonstrating anew the problem of the theatre of Schlemmer’s concept: man in space. What we had seen had the significance of expounding the stage elements (*Die Bühnenelemente*), a project developed more fully in the work of the following years. The stage elements were assembled, re-grouped, amplified, and gradually grew into something like a “play,” we never found out whether comedy or tragedy, because its career was stopped by changes befalling the stage class. The interesting feature about it was that, with a set of formal elements agreed upon and, on this common basis, added to fairly freely by members of the class, “play” with meaningful form was expected eventually to yield meaning, sense or message; that gestures and sounds would become speech and plot. Who knows? This was, essentially, a dancers’ theatre and as such, sufficient unto itself as Oskar Schlemmer’s genius had created it; but it was also a “class,” a locale of learning, and this rather magnificent undertaking was Schlemmer’s tool of instruction.

Periodically sketches and productions were performed to a Bauhaus or public audience. The composition of the troupe is difficult to characterize in few words; the Bauhaus stage did not train pupils in ballet or choreography, but it attracted persons who had ideas and interest in this field and gave them an opportunity to lend their talents to the work. Some of the best dancers were volunteers working their way through the school in some other workshop (Kaminsky, Lou Scheper, Werner Siedhoff). For a full-scale performance, Schlemmer could muster an impressive number of participants (in the late ’20’s the

Bauhaus stage gave performances by invitation in several major theatres throughout the country), while the work of the numerically small stage class proper consisted in the design, making and taking care of, masks, costumes, equipment, and, in the form of a council with Schlemmer presiding, the planning, guiding, coordinating of further choreographic developments, sketches and inventions.

As has perhaps been felt in the letter extracts I have quoted, Schlemmer's teaching methods were stamped by great self-denial. To me, as an enthusiastic and very young admirer, it often seemed incomprehensible that a man with so much to give should yield so meekly to a not always enlightened majority. I wanted him to assert himself. It took many years to realize that this way was closed to him, and that the secret lay in his personal psychology—that in this respect he could not choose. Conviction was smouldering within, one felt, but could not be voiced. I vividly remember his exclamation in times of mental stress: "Janein!"—and only action, demonstration, a physical manifestation could bring relief. Then indeed it was a treat to watch the precision, aplomb, the power and the delicacy of action. His language, too, although unable to assume command, was an expressive tool. His was the most personal vocabulary I have ever known. His invention of metaphors was inexhaustible; he loved unaccustomed juxtapositions, paradoxical alliterations, baroque hyperbole. The satirical wit of his writings is quite untranslatable.

Of the other masters with whom I was acquainted, I can report but little that would contribute to the picture of teaching at the Bauhaus I am trying to give. If, of Paul Klee and of Wassily Kandinsky, I retain indeed an immense respect and warm personal affection for their personalities, and of Moholy-Nagy a memory of infectious enthusiasm and delight in experimentation, I miss, on the other hand, that element of response in me which seems to me so characteristic for the intellectual climate of the Bauhaus, that degree of interaction of teacher and pupil. In a contribution to a *Festschrift* for Schlemmer's 70th birthday ² I said that I learned from Schlemmer not so much stagecraft as teaching, and this I would extend to my contact with Albers. I must have been one of the worst students ever to pass through his course, as far as the immediate outcome of the contact is concerned. But I find that he has made a lasting imprint upon my awareness through his insistence on basic elements of design. He and Schlemmer induced independent action on the part of the student through an

² Privately published in September 1958 by Frau Tut Schlemmer in Stuttgart.



Fig. 1. Masks of the Bauhaus Stage Class (*photo T. Lux Feininger 1927, lent by the Busch-Reisinger Museum*)

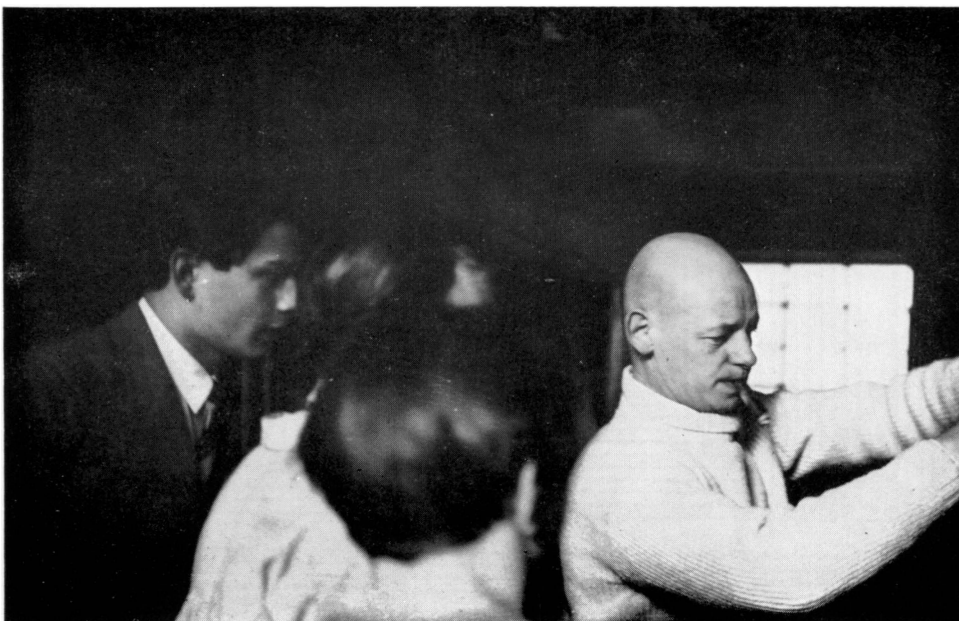


Fig. 2. Oskar Schlemmer demonstrating in the Bauhaus stage workshop (*photo T. Lux Feininger, 1928, lent by the Busch-Reisinger Museum*)

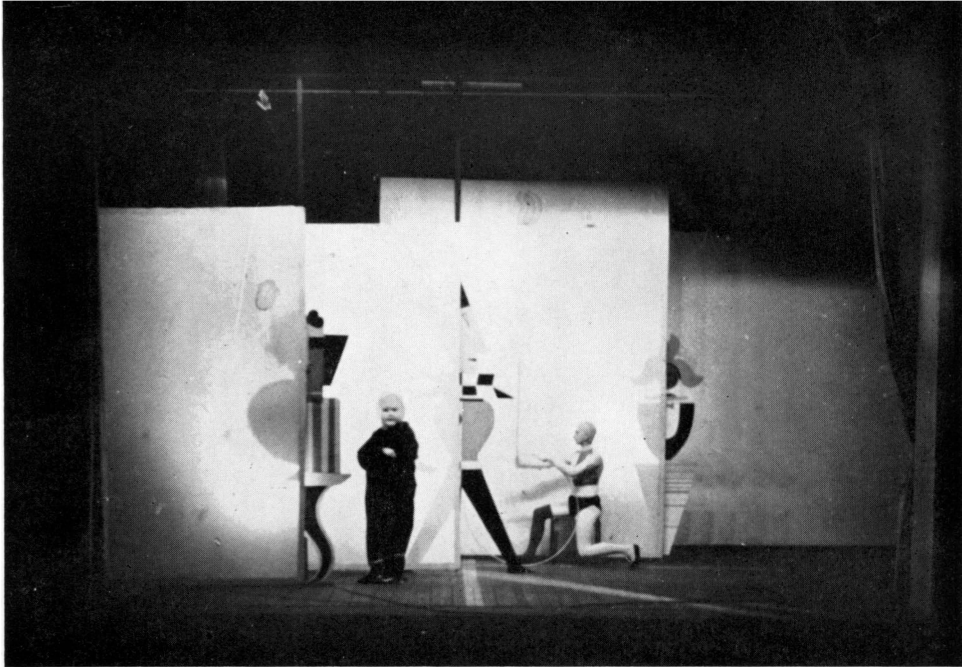


Fig. 3. Oskar Schlemmer's "Figural Cabinet " on the Bauhaus stage (*photo T. Lux Feininger, 1927-28, lent by the Busch-Reisinger Museum*)

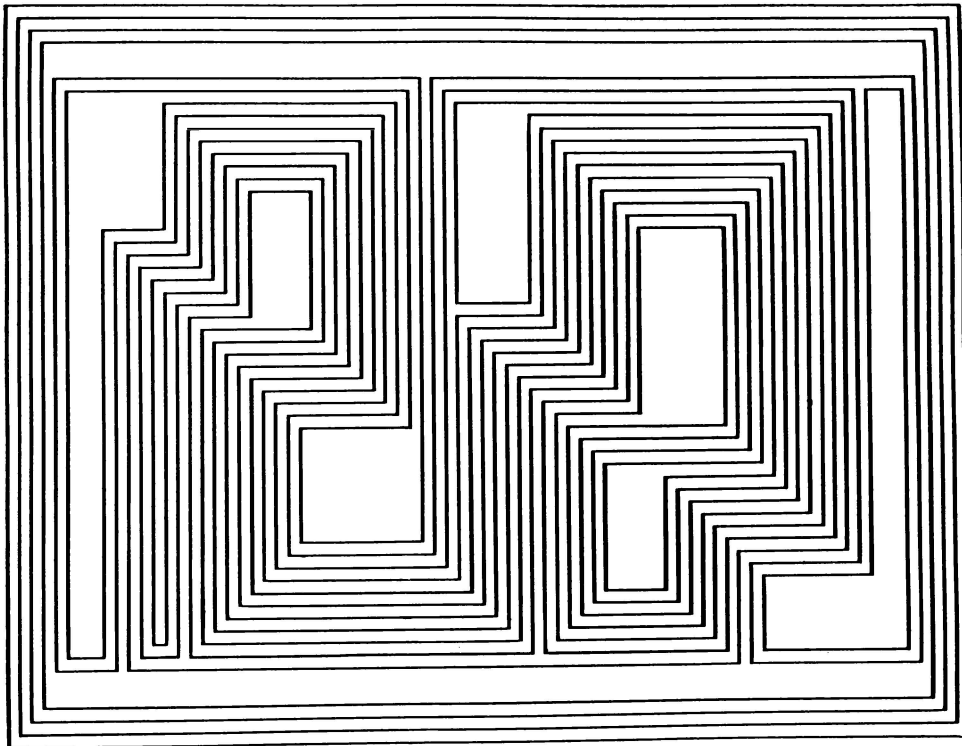
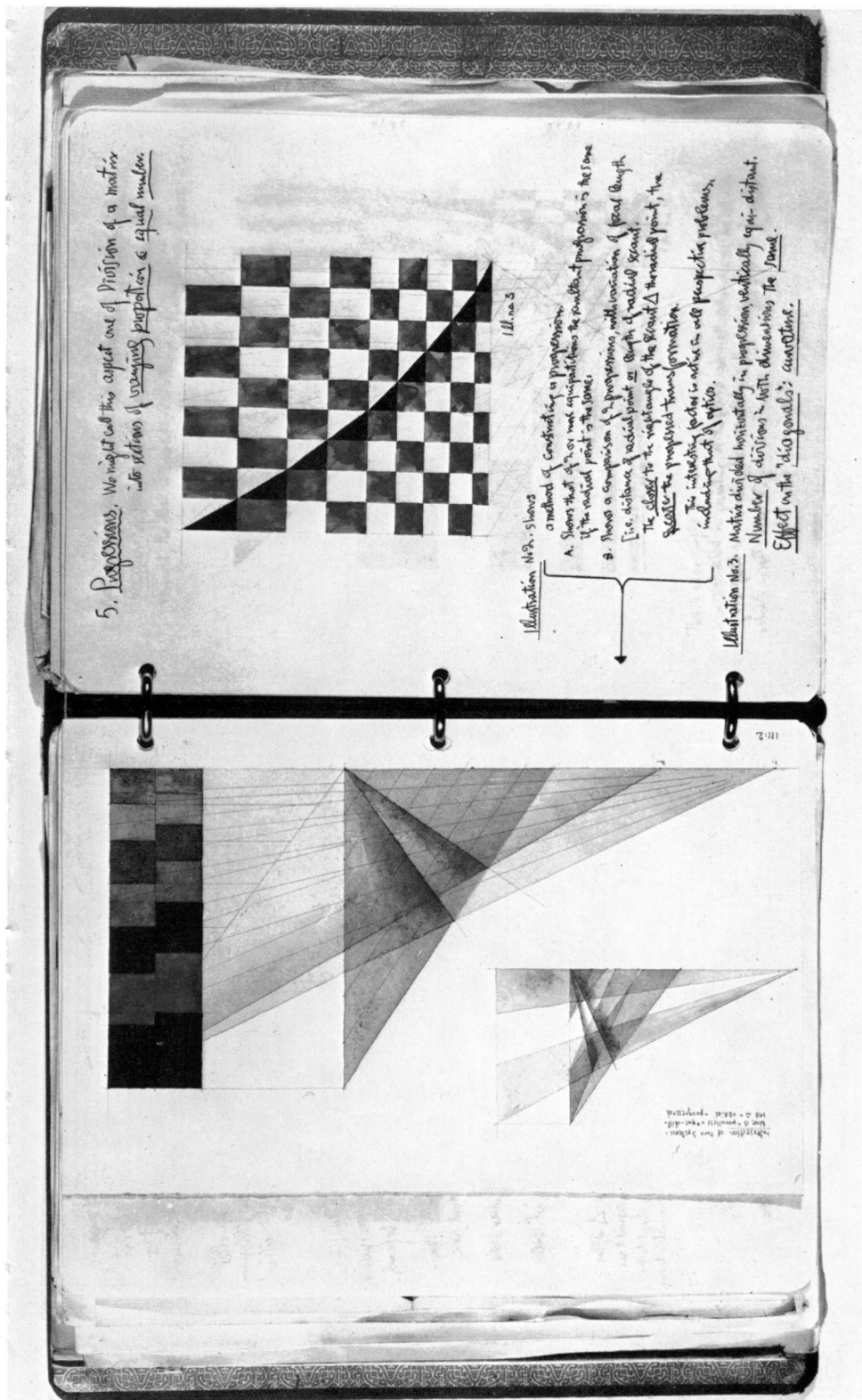
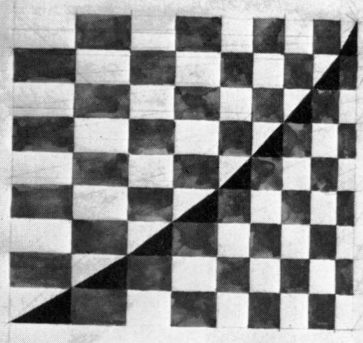


Fig. 4. Josef Albers, *Prefatio*, from *Graphic Tectonic* (reprinted from *Architectural Design*, June 1956)



5. PROJECTIONS. We might call this aspect one of PROJECTION of a matrix into sections of varying proportion as equal angles.



ILL. no. 3

Illustration No. 2. Shows a method of construction of perspective.

- A. Shows that if a or not equal to the radius of projection is the same if the radius point is the same.
- B. Shows a comparison of perspective, with variation of focal length [i.e. distance of radius point or center of radius point]. The closer to the radius point the closer to the perspective transformation.

The interesting factor is not in all perspective problems, including that of optics.

Illustration No. 3.

Matrix divided horizontally in perspective vertically again. distant. Number of divisions in both dimensions the same. Effect on the diagonals: curvature.

Illustration of two spheres. One is a sphere, the other is a sphere.

Fig. 5. T. Lux Feininger, Pages from Notes for my course FA 16 B, Fogg Museum, 1959

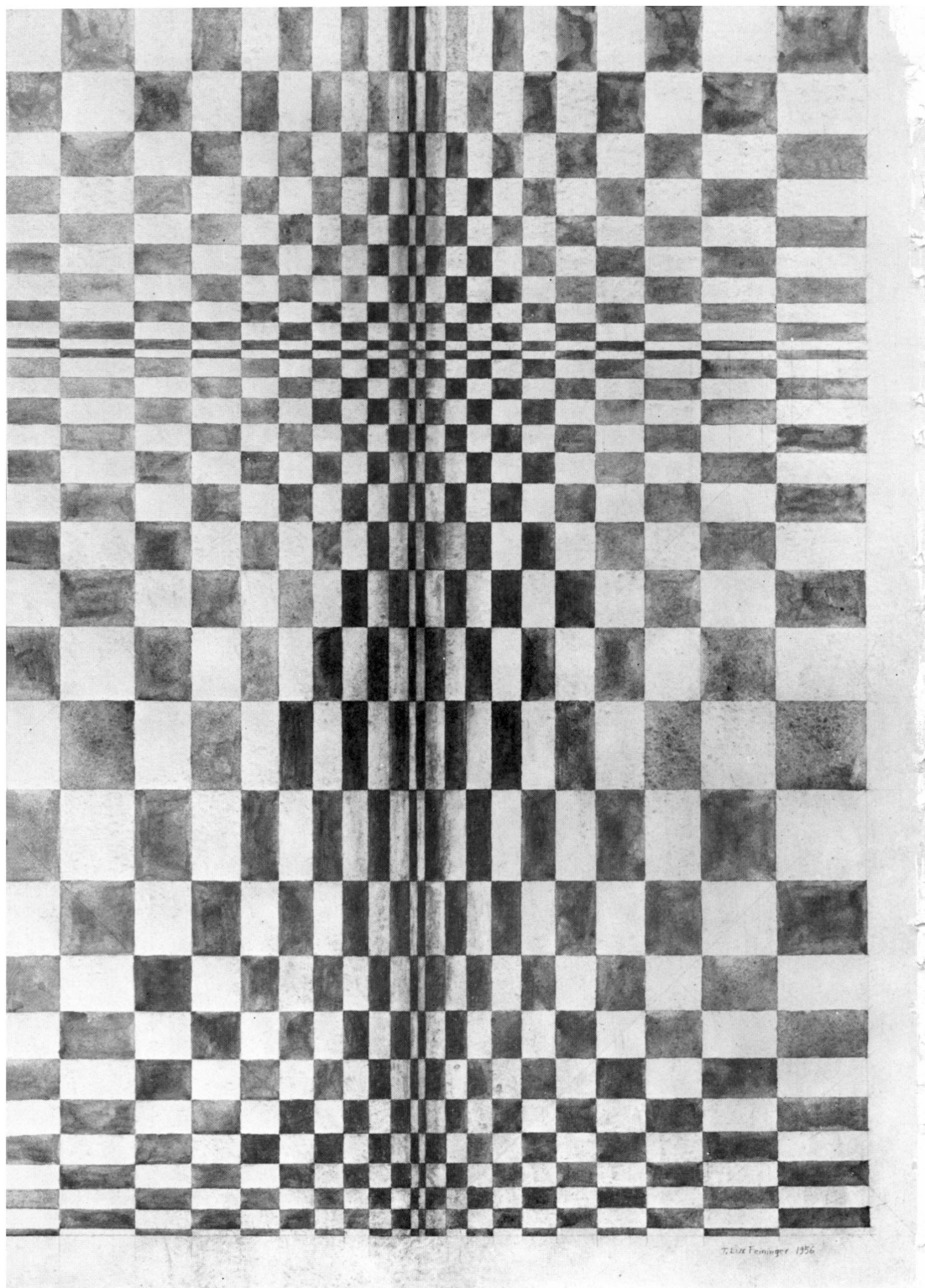


Fig. 6. T. Lux Feininger, Geometrical Watercolor, "Tawny progression 1956"

appeal to inherent and collective faculties: the urge to play. And Schlemmer's dancer, in his costume and mask, in his relations to architectural space, remains an experience as fertile formally as Albers' prime geometrical shapes. Through their personal intercourse with the symbol, both men have expanded the frontiers of consciousness—the ultimate purpose of all teaching.

When, nine years ago, I was to become a teacher myself, I had in common with the early Bauhaus members the fact that I had been a soldier in a war. All else was diametrically opposed: I was *not* famished, there had been *no* revolution, the war I had "fought" in was won, not lost. And where the Bauhaus student of 1919 embraced freedom for the first time in his life, the students at my first college were so steeped in all kinds of freedom that they did not know what to do with it. The one word that caught my attention during the first interviews was the stated need for discipline. And in essence I find that it is still so now, the need for order in a chaos not social but spiritual. In the art of our time we are in the midst of a fantastic revolution. Art, as the last resort of the manifestation of "useless" values, in the face of an all-devouring and hideous materialism *not* alleviated by "65% of the population participating in some form of church activity," has become impenetrably mysterious, inward, romantic, menacing—perhaps psychotic. The last attempts to extract objective meaning from its embodiments are hopelessly obscured by the fact that it has become a highly marketable commodity.

Shortly after writing these lines, the valuable essay on "Art after 1945" by Werner Haftmann⁸ came into my hands. Mr. Haftmann refers, by way of a quotation from Cocteau, to this same element of unheard-of freedom, but unlike others who have given it thought, he finds a positive value in the troubling phenomenon: "The creative meaning of Freedom consists in direction." This is striking: one is free, not to cease being, but to accept the new and heavy burden of seeking the meaning oneself. No one to turn to! Previously had not Nietzsche made a similar discovery? And how had the German Romantics fared? We breathe the same air, but the insistence and the peril have grown. I shall try to give a subjective sketch of the frame of mind in which I approach my teaching problems of 1960.

We hear so much about the relative sameness and non-existence of time, that I would remind people that youth and middle age are *not*

⁸ "Kunst nach 1945," *Documenta II* (Internationale Ausstellung, Kassel), Köln, 1959.

the same. How do I mean this? For example: in 1914 one of the founders of the new freedom, Franz Marc, went to war. He was ending his painting life (killed in action, 1916) in a spirit of religious faith in the coming of "Science" as the redeemer of suffering mankind. Apart from his sketches made at the Western Front, the last view we have of him is the vision reported by his commanding officer, Major Schilling: "—in the night, in a village under heavy artillery fire . . . I encountered Franz Marc, almost superhumanly erect on his bay mare, leading his column with astonishing imperturbability."⁴ 1914 and 1960 are different mainly in this, that in '14 I was young and now I am not, and what I know of myself, I know of others; and I also know it of "art," for the "New Art" is not much older than the forty-odd years that have elapsed since this vision. The modern world was younger then, despite the theory of relativity. And the young world of today, if it is to be assayed by middle-aged me, has to be treated, despite its to me, at times, unprepossessing aspects, with care and loving respect, lest I do it (and myself) a grievous wrong. This, chiefly, I try to keep in mind, as I go about my teaching obligations. This, too, was kept in mind by the founders of the Bauhaus when they inquired of their students what and how they ought to be taught. If, in surveying heroes of modern art, I see Franz Marc as gigantic (as Major Schilling did in a physical sense), it is not possible for me to overlook his bay mare. He would have been invisible in a contemporary command car or half-track. The unscientific horse on which he appeared for the last time is connected with his heroism, and this by way of the symbol. I have caught myself looking back with longing to just such a horse-mounted end for myself. But the end is not yet. The heaviest obligation of the new freedom consists in continuing to seek in our own time for a symbol comparable in meaning to that which neither I nor you must envy our fathers.

Since I teach painting, not philosophy, the truth which I believe capable of saving us is embodied in geometrical form. In my method of instruction I proceed from the surface to the depths; beginning with the raw material of painting—color, pigments—we progress toward perceptions of the relations of color and shapes in nature. Trying, at this impressionistic stage of development, to arrange color-shapes in a pictorial sense (still-life) we discover the function of light, at first as a modelling agent of optical shapes. If light (and shade) can express the surface aspects of objects, color becomes superfluous. If, on the other

⁴ Alois Schardt, *Franz Marc* (Berlin, 1936).

hand, color is wanted in painting because of its pure, that is to say emotive and spiritual, qualities, which by themselves have nothing to do with terms of light and shade, the concept of the picture must necessarily penetrate beyond surface aspects of objects. Already the inner being of the student is engaged at this phase, and he eagerly asks for new shapes to give to the awakening inventiveness. Here freedom ought to step in and just here it is where it becomes so weighty a burden: "Do we have to do what we want to do?" How hard it is to abandon the question for the meaning of things! How brutally hard, to digest that Mephistophelian truth:

Wie würde dich die Einsicht kränken
wer kann was Dummes, wer was Kluges denken,
das nicht die Vorwelt schon gedacht?

If I had encountered, and suffered from, this atrocious stage of growth myself, I recognized a little afterwards that what had happened to me was fairly typical of our time. It was then that the significance of my Bauhaus studies revealed itself to me: constructible precision of form necessarily led back to the ultimate ground from which all imagination springs (let us call it "geometrical" for lack of a better word); so long as we remember that "measuring the earth" was, in the infancy of mankind, a differently venturesome proceeding from what it would be today. Geometrical relations then became for me the carriers of new color ideas—for a while. This experience of renovation I try to make accessible to students. It is not necessary to underline constantly the symbolic meaning of such relations. The symbol is effective despite our initial (and perhaps perpetual) lack of consciousness. All that is necessary is to have experienced it oneself. I conclude with another, and last, discovery of parallel formulation: in a poem by Josef Albers, I found the lines:

Thus art is not an object
but experience.