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Programs and manifestoes

on 20th-century architecture

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Walter Gropius: Principles of Bauhaus production [Dessau] (excerpt)

In September 1922 Feininger asked in Weimar: 'Why and how this voluntary submission to the tyranny of van Doesburg and the complete recalcitrance towards all measures originating from the Bauhaus?' He meant by this the effects of the 'rival courses' given by van Doesburg in Weimar. 'If Doesburg were a teacher at the Bauhaus he would be . . . rather useful to the whole enterprise.' The fascination of De Stijl ideas not only captured the students, but also influenced the Bauhaus teachers. As early as 1923 (in a letter of 5 October) Feininger noted how Gropius's attitude to handicrafts and industrial products was changing. In 1925, with the transfer to Dessau, this process was complete.

The Bauhaus wants to serve in the development of present-day housing, from the simplest household appliances to the finished dwelling.

In the conviction that household appliances and furnishings must be rationally related to each other, the Bauhaus is seeking – by systematic practical and theoretical research in the formal, technical and economic fields – to derive the design of an object from its natural functions and relationships.

Modern man, who no longer dresses in historical garments but wears modern clothes, also needs a modern home appropriate to him and his time, equipped with all the modern devices of daily use.

An object is defined by its nature. In order, then, to design it to function correctly – a container, a chair, or a house – one must first of all study its nature; for it must serve its purpose perfectly, that is, it must fulfil its function usefully, be durable, economical and 'beautiful'. This research into the nature of objects leads to the conclusion that by resolute consideration of modern production methods, constructions, and materials, forms will evolve that are often unusual and surprising, since they deviate from the conventional (consider, for example, the changes in the design of heating and lighting fixtures).

It is only through constant contact with newly evolving techniques, with the discovery of new materials and with new ways of putting things together, that the creative individual can learn to bring the design of objects into a living relationship with tradition and from that point to develop a new attitude toward design, which is:

a resolute affirmation of the living environment of machines and vehicles;
the organic design of things based on their own present-day laws, without romantic gloss and wasteful frivolity;
the limitation to characteristic, primary forms and colours, readily accessible to everyone;
simplicity in multiplicity, economical utilization of space, material, time, and money.

The creation of standard types for all practical commodities of everyday use is a social necessity.

On the whole, the necessities of life are the same for the majority of people. The home and its furnishings are mass consumer goods, and their design is more a matter of reason than a matter of passion. The machine – capable of producing standardized products – is an effective device, which, by means of mechanical aids – steam and electricity – can free the individual from working manually for the satisfaction of his daily needs and can provide him with mass-produced products that are cheaper and better than those manufactured by hand. There is no danger that standardization will force a choice upon the individual, since, due to natural competition, the number of available types of each object will always be ample to provide the individual with a choice of design that suits him best.

The Bauhaus workshops are essentially laboratories in which prototypes of products suitable for mass production and typical of our time are carefully developed and constantly improved.

In these laboratories the Bauhaus wants to train a new kind of collaborator for industry and the crafts, who has an equal command of both technology and form.

To reach the objective of creating a set of standard prototypes which meet all the demands of economy, technology and form, requires the selection of the best, most versatile, and most thoroughly educated men who are well grounded in workshop experience and who are imbued with an exact knowledge of the design elements of form and mechanics and their underlying laws.

The Bauhaus represents the opinion that the contrast between industry and the crafts is much less marked by the difference in the tools they use than by the division of labour in industry and the unity of the work in the crafts. But the two are constantly getting closer to each other. The crafts of the past have changed, and future crafts will be merged in a new productive unity in which they will carry out the experimental work for industrial production. Speculative experiments in laboratory workshops will yield models and prototypes for productive implementation in factories.

The prototypes that have been completed in the Bauhaus workshops are being reproduced by outside firms with whom the workshops are closely related.

The production of the Bauhaus thus does not represent any kind of competition for either industry or crafts but rather provides them with impetus for their development. The Bauhaus does this by bringing creatively talented people with ample practical experience into the actual course of production, to take over the preparatory work for production, from industry and the crafts.

The products reproduced from prototypes that have been developed by the Bauhaus can be offered at a reasonable price only by utilization of all the modern, economical methods of standardization (mass production by industry) and by large-scale sales. The dangers of a decline in the quality of the product by comparison to the prototype, in regard to quality of material

and workmanship, as a result of mechanical reproduction will be countered by all available means. The Bauhaus fights against the cheap substitute, inferior workmanship and the dilettantism of the handicrafts, for a new standard of quality work.