

Translations of Material to Technology in Bauhaus Architecture

Abstract

The influence of the German Bauhaus's *Vorkurs* (preliminary course) on schools of architecture and design in the 20th century has become so familiar that many come to think of it as a point of mythic origin. Yet, despite its renown, the application for many of the *Vorkurs* exercises in the education of architects remains unclear. Originally conceived by Walter Gropius as an alternative to a normative Beaux Arts study of exemplars in antiquity, the Bauhaus promoted the education of artists and architects through exercises that explored the compositional possibilities of different material effect and affects. After the departure of *Vorkurs* director Johannes Itten in 1922, the appointment of the Hungarian artist, László Moholy-Nagy as his replacement was predicated on Gropius' reorientation of the Bauhaus towards "Art and Technology – a New Unity" during its 1923 *Bauhaus Ausstellung* (Bauhaus Exhibition). Inspired by the Austrian born botanist and nature philosopher Raoul Francé's concept of 'bio-technique,' Moholy-Nagy intended that students would extend a study of materials in the *Vorkurs* exercises to the creative imagination of "*technische Form*" (technical form) in different media. To demonstrate this new approach to design education in practice, Moholy-Nagy published two books, *Von Material zur Architektur* in 1929 (The New Vision in 1932) and *Vision in Motion* in 1947. Despite these examples, it remains unclear what role the *Vorkurs* material studies were intended to play in the imagination of architecture in particular. This paper explores the historical and theoretical implications of Moholy-Nagy's pedagogical approach towards design education in the creative translation of the Bauhaus' *Vorkurs* material studies to new art and technological solutions for architecture.

Keywords

Architecture; Bauhaus; Architectural Pedagogy; Haptic; Technology.