YUKI HIGASHINO –

bauhaus imaginista at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt

Case 1: In 1924, László Moholy-Nagy exhibited his *Telephone Pictures* at Galerie Der Sturm in Berlin. [1] This series, fabricated at a local enamel factory in Weimar, where he moved to teach at the Bauhaus, is today regarded as an icon of modernism, and documentation of the work from the exhibition is well known. Much less known is the fact that the exhibition was not a Moholy-Nagy solo show. He shared the gallery with Hugo Scheiber (a Hungarian modernist) and a presentation of ancient Peruvian textiles, which were all the rage at the Bauhaus at the time. [2] These fabrics were particularly influential for Anni Albers, who considered them an essential reference for both her practice and her later teaching at Black Mountain College, arguably the most influential reincarnation of the Bauhaus.

Case 2: Japanese architect Iwao Yamawaki and his wife Michiko arrived in Dessau to enroll at the Bauhaus in 1930. Young (32 and 20, respectively), curious about all things Western and modern, and fabulously wealthy (thanks to Michiko's father), they embodied Japan's short-lived liberal period between the two World Wars and were eager to absorb the avant-garde the Bauhaus represented. One can only imagine, then, their astonishment that at the Bauhaus, and indeed within European modernism in general, people were endlessly fascinated by traditional Japanese culture. The famous Bauhaus *Vorkurs* (preliminary course) even included training in brush-and-ink painting. [3] Upon their return to Japan following the closure of the Dessau school in 1932, the Yamawakis moved into an apartment in Tokyo that Iwao designed in an exemplary modernist style and furnished with Bauhaus products. While classical modernism's affinity with Japanese architecture is familiar today, one can only speculate how notable that encounter that must have been for impressionable young Japanese designers at the time. When Michiko (whose father was a tea ceremony master) published her memoir toward the end of her life, she titled it "Bauhaus and Tea Ceremony"—claiming that the Bauhaus and the Japanese art of tea had affinities in their insistence on simple functionality and on the inherent properties of materials. [4]

Both of these cases are minor anecdotes in the history of the Bauhaus. Yet, they capture the radically international nature of the school and the sometimes improbable connections it fostered. Curated by Marion von Osten and Grant

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[1] Cf. The Moholy-Nagy Foundation website, link.

[2] Partly due to their accessibility. At the time, Museum für Völkerkunde in Berlin had the largest collection of Andean textiles in Europe. See Virginia Gardner Troy, "The Andean Textile Paradigm at the Bauhaus," in *bauhaus imaginista*, ed. Marion von Osten and Grant Watson (London: Thames & Hudson, 2019), 128–131.

[3] This was a legacy of oriental culture-obsessed Johannes Itten, who established the *Vorkurs* but was no longer teaching at the Bauhaus at the time the Yamawakis arrived. Itten was, however, running a private art school in nearby Berlin, where he sometimes invited Japanese painters to teach classical ink wash techniques.

[4] See Helena apková, "The Bauhaus and the Tea Ceremony," *bauhaus imaginista*, link.

Watson, bauhaus imaginista at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW) is a wildly ambitious and intensely researched exhibition packed with surprising cross-cultural associations and revelations. While the exhibition and all its adjacent projects were organized to coincide with the centenary of the Bauhaus, it becomes evident almost immediately that a dutiful celebration of the Bauhaus was the last thing the curators had in mind. [5] The greatest hits of the Bauhaus are conspicuously absent. No metalware by Marianne Brandt, no Wassily chair by Marcel Breuer, no paintings by Kandinsky or Moholy-Nagy, no model of Walter Gropius's Dessau building. (There are numerous other Bauhaus shows being held in Germany and beyond this year, the Bauhaus's centenary, with more celebratory and simplifying stances.)

[5] In addition to the exhibition in Berlin, *bauhaus imaginista* is a truly grand project that includes several exhibitions, events, and conferences at institutions around the world. There is also a substantial catalogue and website that publishes many more texts and research. However, this review is focused on the exhibition at HKW, which is the culmination of the project.

Instead, the curators chose to situate the Bauhaus in a complex web of cultural and political developments in the early to mid-twentieth century, charting how its principles were translated, interpreted, transformed, and put into practice in various corners of the world. One could say that the exhibition is less about the historical facts of the school than the *concept* of the Bauhaus and its malleability. "We understand the global circulation of Bauhaus ideas not in terms of impact," write the curators, "but rather through its participation in international networks prior to 1933 and how this was mirrored in the school's afterlife." [6]

[6] Marion von Osten and Grant Watson, "Introduction," in *bauhaus imaginista Exhibition Guide* (Berlin: Haus der Kulturen der Welt, 2019), 8.

The exhibition presents the Bauhaus philosophy under different political circumstances. The visitor encounters a Socialist Bauhaus, a colonial/post-colonial Bauhaus, a capitalist Bauhaus, a nationalist Bauhaus, and so on. For the curators, though, it was the field of education where the social impact of the school was most strongly felt—its radical pedagogy determining the development of art and design education throughout the world. The very first sentence of their exhibition introduction makes the premise plain:

> TODAY, IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY, THE QUESTION REMAINS OF HOW TO REIMAGINE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE ARTS AND SOCIETY. THE NEED TO RADICALIZE ART EDUCATION AS PART OF THIS QUESTION RAN THROUGH THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, AND WHEN THINKING ABOUT THE HISTORICAL BAUHAUS AN EXAMPLE OF RADICAL PEDAGOGY IMMEDIATELY APPEARS. [7]

[7] von Osten and Watson, "Introduction," 7.

The exhibition is divided into four "chapters," each of them with a devoted gallery space: "Corresponding With," "Learning From," "Moving Away," and "Still Undead." Each chapter departs from a singular artifact produced at the Bauhaus, which is claimed to embody the central concept of the corresponding chapter.

Though the exhibition grants relative theoretical, historical, and spatial independence to each chapter, inevitably resulting in noticeably distinct characters and narratives (some more successful than others), each chapter shares the central thesis of the show—namely, the significance of the Bauhaus in modern cultural education and its reverberation through different societies. In order to fully grasp the exhibition as a totality, one must analyze each chapter individually. What results is a plurality that suggests that it is not only *bauhaus imaginista* but the Bauhaus itself that requires a multiplicity of readings.

1. Corresponding With

The first chapter establishes the show's international scope from the get-go. Though its ostensible starting point is Gropius's 1919 Bauhaus Manifesto, it, in fact, treats two other contemporaneous schools with equal importance. One is the Kala Bhavan art school founded by poet Rabindranath Tagore at the utopian community of Santiniketan in India in 1919; the other Seikatsu Kosei Kenkyusho (Research Institute for Life Design) established by architect/writer Renshichiro Kawakita in Tokyo in 1931, which later became the Shin Kenchiku Kogei Gakuin (School of New Architecture and Design) in 1932.

Kala Bhavan was influenced by Indian nationalism's reappraisal of traditional handcraft, British Arts and Crafts, and a romantic Pan-Asianism advocated by Japanese philosopher Kakuzo Okakura, a close friend of Tagore. [8] The school privileged the small-scale production of handcrafted, early-modernist furniture and nurtured forms of communalism through mural painting, dance, theater, and music—in many ways reminiscent of the early Expressionist phase and spirit of the Bauhaus. Indeed, the similarity between its eclectic and practice-based teaching—drawn from Indian craft, ancient Buddhist cave paintings, Javanese batik fabric dying, and Far Eastern brush-and-ink painting, among others—and the Bauhaus *Vorkurs* is unmistakable. While it is not entirely surprising, it is still astonishing that the school organized (through Austrian art historian Stella Kramrisch, who taught at Kala Bhavan and corresponded with Itten) a presentation of Bauhaus products in Calcutta in 1922.

[8] Kakuzo Okakura, incidentally, wrote *The Book of Tea* in 1906 that was widely read among the Western intellectuals, including presumably those at the Bauhaus. See apková, "The Bauhaus and the Tea Ceremony," link.

On the other hand, the ethos of Seikatsu Kosei Kenkyusho was distinctly constructivist and focused on modernism's ability to transform the physical realities of society and industry. The school resembled the industry-focused later years of the Bauhaus—perhaps unsurprisingly as its teaching staff included several Bauhaus graduates such as the Yamawakis and Takehiko Mizutani. At the time of its founding, Kawakita had never left Japan and therefore learned about modernism entirely through hearsay and printed matter, which possibly explains the apparent centrality of publication in his work. The exhibition includes a 1934 book by Kawakita and Katsuo Takei called *Kosei Kyoiku Taikei* (Handbook for Design Education) that outlined how to adapt the teaching of modernist design to a Japanese context, as well as the journal *Kenchikiu Kogei: I SEE ALL* (Architecture and Craft) published between 1931 and 1936. With a distinct graphic identity and texts translated from German, Russian, and other European modernists, the magazine is one of the highlights of the exhibition—illustrating both how modernist visual language was being disseminated and how it was translated into each local context (in this case, adapted to Japanese lettering).

The space allocated to this chapter is substantial but not enormous—something of an exhibition within the exhibition, separated from the rest of the show, which is installed in the HKW's foyer and main exhibition hall. The section on Seikatsu Kosei Kenkyusho containing printed matter and archival photographs is the first thing one sees, on the left, upon entering the gallery. It is followed by a presentation of Bauhaus material on the wall facing viewers as they enter the room, mostly consisting of student works produced during the famed *Vorkurs*. Photographs and collages by Iwao Yamawaki from his Bauhaus years bridge the two sections. To the right is the narrative on Kala Bhavan with

student work; drawings by artist Nandalal Bose, who headed the school from 1922 to 1951; and examples of their furniture and handcraft. The selection of artifacts in the room––teaching guides, publications, models, furniture, archival photographs, and drawings—clearly articulates the exhibition's emphasis on the role of these influential institutions as places of teaching rather than as producers of iconic design.

Expertly curated and concisely presented, it is a triumph, and the exhibition's materials are matched in brilliance by the artist Luca Frei, who designed the display of this room. [9] Frei's unrivaled ability to transform historical materials into his own unique spatial language suffused the room with light-hearted refinement and wit reminiscent of the cheerful (as opposed to heroic) modernists such as the Eameses or Charlotte Perriand, giving the first chapter's installation both visual coherence and intellectual clarity with a mural and a large sculpture that acts as the centerpiece of the section.

[9] The rest of the exhibition was designed by Kooperative für Darstellungspolitik.

The sculpture, titled *Model for a Pedagogical Vehicle* (2018), is a movable metal display structure with paper models and archival photographs mounted on hanging panels. The photographs document *Seikatsu Kosei Tenrankai* (Exhibition of Life Design), organized by Kawakita in Tokyo in 1931 to introduce Bauhaus-inspired pedagogy and design language to a Japanese audience. Surrounding the structure are floor cushions based on a diagram displayed on the ceiling of *Seikatsu Kosei Tenrankai*, which one can see in the photographs. The display structure itself was also drawn from another, later instance of the Japanese avant-garde: the set design for one of the performances of Jikken Kobo, an ensemble of experimental artists, composers, performers, and writers active in the 1950s. The mural, meanwhile, covering the three walls used for display, consists of grids and geometric motifs drawn with black or gray lines, the width of which are the same with that of the metal square tube used for the sculpture. The grid simultaneously refers to the scales of the room's lighting and the lines of the notebooks displayed in the vitrines; it connects the historical artifacts with the material reality of the exhibition context; and it draws its geometric shape objects shown on the walls, connecting both contents (framed artworks, texts, display shelves) and contexts (Japan, Germany, India). Furthermore, the motif of line is a recurring and unifying visual theme that creates a sense of resonance between the curatorial ambition and the visitor's experience through the artist's astonishing visual and conceptual economy—highlighting the sense of connective possibility that *bauhaus imaginista* draws out of its historical investigations.

2. Learning From

The second and third chapters exchange the clarity and precision of the first chapter's singular artistic vision for heterogeneity, overarching scope, and the encyclopedic determination of curious art historians—a shift not only of content but aesthetic character. These chapters reflect the desire of the curators to experiment with the exhibition format, and one can easily lose oneself in the wealth of the materials included in them—they are, without a doubt, an art historical tour de force.

"Learning From" departs from Paul Klee's 1927 drawing of a North African carpet, which signals the importance of non-Western artifacts in

the research conducted at the Bauhaus. Focusing on the Bauhaus's strong fascination toward non-Western applied art, the display follows the spread of modernist ideas across the globe and how they were received and modified in diverse, often colonial contexts. The key theme is again education, and it presents many forms of modernist-inspired teaching and training around the world. This section of the exhibition can be broadly divided into two categories: the work that people from the Bauhaus did in different corners of the world after they left Germany, and the initiatives of local cultural figures that were informed by the Bauhaus.

Many of the stories of the Bauhaus's migrations—Anni and Josef Albers's Black Mountain College, or even figures Marguerite Wildenhain, a Bauhaus-trained potter who greatly influenced postwar American ceramics through her incorporation of Native American and Latin American techniques—have been excavated in scholarship that sheds light on the Bauhaus's American progeny. Perhaps lesser known, though, is how designers and artists in former, or yet-to-be independent, colonies used the Bauhaus to establish their own pedagogical system, appropriating modernism for their own purposes—and reversing what was typically understood to be a one-way cultural transfer in which Western artists appropriated non-Western artifacts, often without an adequate knowledge of their cultural contexts. Non-Western modernists, who were fluent in the culture and language of the West, in stark contrast to the cultural and linguistic ignorance of their Western counterparts, refashioned modernism and integrated it into their own contexts.

For instance, Lina Bo Bardi, together with her husband Petro Maria Bardi and architect Jacob Ruchti, established the first design school in Brazil, the Instituto de Arte Contemporânea (Institute of Contemporary Art), in 1951 within Sao Paulo Museum of Art. Though short-lived (lasting only for two years), it played a significant role in bringing modernism to Brazil and "claimed a Bauhaus pedigree," the curators write, including "a preliminary course, research in design specialisms, and the aim to establish links to industry as well as to maintain connection to an international avant-garde." [10] Bo Bardi later moved to Salvador and opened Museu de Arte Moderna da Bahia, which also acted as a school—bringing together design students and local craftspeople to investigate how popular culture and indigenous craft could be incorporated into design to create a uniquely Brazilian version of modernism. Likewise, the curators include the École des Beaux-Arts de Casablanca in newly independent Morocco, spearheaded by artist Farid Belkahia, who became its director in 1962 and radically transformed its curriculum from one rooted in the French academic tradition to one that examined Moroccan craft and architecture and even included craft training at hippie communes.

[10] von Osten and Watson, "Learning From," in *bauhaus imaginista Exhibition Guide*, 60.

Yet these "transcultural encounters" are not intended to serve a neat art historical narrative. The intention of the curators seems to be to demonstrate, on the one hand, how the abstract visual language of non-Western cultures was crucial to the development of the aesthetic of modernity and how the Bauhaus legitimized this shift, and on the other hand, how this trend in turn helped non-Western communities assert the significance of their own cultures and styles in the still undefined arena of modernism. Curiously, what this section demonstrates is not so much the impact of the Bauhaus aesthetic—in terms of their design or artistic languages, Bo Bardi and Belkahia seem to have

little connection with the Bauhaus. Rather, it shows that it was its methodology of propagation, its techniques for introducing and spreading radical change in culture through pedagogy, which was the true impact of the Bauhaus in these contexts.

3. Moving Away

The starting point of the third chapter, "Moving Away," is Marcel Breuer's 1926 collage *ein bauhaus-film. fünf jähre lang* (a bauhaus film: five years long)—published in the first issue of journal Bauhaus—which shows the rapid development of Breuer, and implicitly of the Bauhaus at large, through the evolution of chair design starting from the African chair of 1921 to the fully "industrial" Wassily chair of 1925. Breuer's "filmstrip" suggests the need for design to keep up with the breakneck speed of progress and concludes its sequence of chairs with a scenario where technology has reduced design to the point that the chair itself becomes invisible. This piece implies the belief in liner progress, both aesthetic and technological. From this, the curators appear to have deduced a tendency toward top-down changes achieved through political power and somewhat fatalistic understanding of technology, developing a section that examines the relationship between Bauhaus-influenced schools, modernism at large, and the power of state and industry—a stark contrast to the handmade and largely grassroots spirit of the second chapter. This chapter could easily be called "Moving Toward Power."

The institutions presented here include the Hochschule für Gestaltung (HfG) Ulm, run by the former Bauhaus student Max Bill; the National Institute of Design in Ahmedabad (NID); and the Industrial Design Centre in Mumbai (IDC). Both schools in India, founded respectively in 1961 and 1969, were conceived as part of the country's modernization project driven by Jawaharlal Nehru, which sought to bring modern design and production to India. The two schools were in close contact with HfG Ulm, sharing the aspiration to transform not only aesthetic preferences but society as a whole. Some of Ulm's staff, such as designer Hans Gugelot, taught in India while Indian students, including Sudhakar Nadkarni who went on to teach at both NID and IDC, studied in Ulm. These exchanges were actively supported by the Ford Foundation, which established its first office outside the US in New Delhi, indicating the high value that both the Indian government and the international community placed on the modernization of design in India. [11] The exhibition includes several examples of design and publications from all three schools, but the Indian artifacts are particularly fascinating in their attempt at reconciling a passion for modernity with the particular conditions of India, producing designs geared toward tackling the Indian climate or using local materials such as bamboo—devices that today can be seen as clichés of regionalism but which in the 1960s, put forward by the first generation of the locally trained modern designers (instead of Western designers merely sprinkling their works with "Asian" elements), played an important role in demonstrating the adaptability of modern design to the Indian nation-building project as well as the possibility of local production.

[11] Suchitra Balasubrahmanyan, "Designing Life in India," in *bauhaus imaginista*, 212–223.

One question that goes unaddressed is whether there was any connection between this postwar push toward Indian modernization and the

modernism of Kala Bhavan that was prominently featured in "Corresponding With." Did anyone who studied at Kala Bhavan go on to teach at either of these two new schools? Did its pedagogical philosophy in anyway influence the later development of Indian modernism? If not, what does that mean for the first chapter's thesis that presented Kala Bhavan as a pivotal project? Answers to, or at even speculations on, questions like these might have strengthened the links between historical moments.

This section also tells the story of several of Hannes Meyer's students, who in 1930/31 followed Meyer to the Soviet Union after his dismissal as the second director of the Bauhaus for his communist sympathies. They threw themselves into the modernization projects of Russia with utopian zeal until the Stalinist purge. Meyer returned to his native Switzerland in 1936 and then went to Mexico in 1938. Some of his students perished in the Gulag while others managed to leave Russia and went on to work as architects. Konrad Püschel, for instance, became a professor in Weimar after the war and worked in North Korea in the 1950s as the head of the East German delegation to help post–Korean War reconstruction. They may or may not have been exceptional designers—adding names to the canon of modernism is not this exhibition's intention—but their lives explicitly demonstrate the links between politics and architecture, with designers often becoming tools, sometimes enthusiastic ones, through which state power expresses its ideologies.

Two designs for university campuses included in this section, one built and the other unbuilt, point more to subsequent developments in architecture than their debt to the Bauhaus. The first was a commission for a university outside of Shanghai, in the late 1940s, won by The Architects Collaborative, founded by Gropius (the design team included a young I. M. Pei, a student of Gropius's at Harvard who impressed his teacher by incorporating elements of classical Chinese architecture into the modernist structure of his thesis project). [12] The ensuing design suggests that Pei was instrumental in its development, with its features, layout, and details evoking Chinese gardens and architecture, while the skeleton construction of the buildings is clearly Miesian. [13] The second was the commission received by Israeli architect (and former student of Hannes Meyer) Arieh Sharon, in 1960, for the University of Ife (today Obafemi Awolowo University) in Western Nigeria. This project, built over the course of ten years and documented by Zvi Efrat in his film *Scenes from the Most Beautiful Campus in Africa*, came to be Sharon's magnum opus, synthesizing a modernist architectural language with that of local Yoruba architecture to achieve a radical open structure derived from the local building typology, both for climate control and for free-flowing spaces. These two projects function as bridges between the Bauhaus and later propositions in architecture, notably critical regionalism, postmodernism, or the architectures of decolonization. They also convincingly demonstrate how the world-traveling impacts of the Bauhaus (and the architectural currents it drew on) transformed in local contexts to meet specific demands, even becoming the official style for certain educational institutions in a changing context of the post–World War II world. These projects elegantly conclude a study of the Bauhaus in three movements, from its founding vision (chapter 1) and local initiatives (chapter 2) to its entanglement in large-scale, state-sponsored projects (chapter 3).

[12] Eduard Kögel, "Modern Vernacular–Walter Gropius and Chinese Architecture," bauhaus imaginista, link.

[13] Though abandoned by 1949 due to the political situation in China, the project was evidently important for Pei as he used many elements of this project in his design for the Tunghai campus in Taiwan in 1955. Eduard Kögel, "Useful Tradition? Walter Gropius Meets China (Or I. M. Pei)," in *bauhaus imaginista*, 206–211.

4. Still Undead

The fourth section, regrettably, does not live up to the high standard set by the preceding three. Titled "Still Undead," its professed aim is to explore the echo of the Bauhaus in contemporary culture (a subject so broad that it ensures superficiality). Its point of departure is Bauhaus student Kurt Schwerdtfeger's *Reflektorische Farblichtspiele* (Reflecting color-light plays), an experimental device for a light show that debuted at a Bauhaus party in 1922—which, according to the curators, demonstrates the Bauhaus's relationship with technology, party, and performance. From there, we get "Bauhaus and fashion" (Bauhaus parties were notoriously themed and filled with outrageous costumes), "Bauhaus and gender identity," "Bauhaus and experimental film," "Bauhaus and pop culture," and "Bauhaus and psychedelia"—the list goes on (each one of these demands an exhibition on its own). To prove that the Bauhaus influenced pop culture, the curators enlisted *Autobahn* by Kraftwerk; Australian performance artist Leigh Bowery is juxtaposed with Oskar Schlemmer and his performances at the Bauhaus because, hey, they both made crazy costumes; and artist Brion Gysin's Dreamachine is included presumably because it is also a light show. There is no question that all of these people were somewhat influenced by the Bauhaus. But come to think of it, who isn't? Their connection to the Bauhaus is certainly not what makes them interesting. There are others, too, whose relationship to the institution within the context of this show is so tenuous that it's simply confusing. What does Nam June Paik have to do with the Bauhaus?

While the first three chapters of the exhibition displayed an astonishing and almost clinical depth of scholarship on the educational transmutations of the Bauhaus and the Bauhaus-minded individuals and institutions who carried and transformed its pedagogy to respond to local conditions, the final fourth chapter seems to treat the term "Bauhaus" more as a catchall term that signals modernity, incorporating many things that happened to look modern. This, however, is demonstrably untrue. While the Bauhaus was indeed heterogeneous, it certainly did not contain all the myriad strands of modernism, and making the school's influence appear so universal actually dilutes its significance. "Still Undead" does present several educational projects: it discusses the New Bauhaus that Moholy-Nagy founded in Chicago and the emergence of MIT's Center for Advanced Visual Studies, both of which investigated how technology can be integrated into art and design. It shows pictures of a costume ball at Black Mountain College taken by Josef Albers and skims how art education in the 1970s at British Polytechnics was influenced by the Bauhaus. Each of these cases warrants examination, but the attempt to cover them in all their impossibly broad historical scope, from the 1920s to the 1980s, inevitably results in none of them being explored particularly productively. [14]

[14] Interestingly, however, chapter 4 of the substantial exhibition catalogue does not feel either out of place or superficial. It is, in fact, informative and convincing, with well-researched and well-argued contributions. It shows that it can potentially be turned into a strong exhibition and also, conversely, verify the universal principle that a good idea plus good research does not equal a good exhibition.

Like any other significant historical event, the story of the Bauhaus is constantly challenged and retold—and each version of the institution reflects the ideological circumstances of the person doing the telling. This show is no exception. It is apparent that for the curators of this exhibition, Johannes Itten and Hannes Meyer are the central figures in *their* Bauhaus. The interest in Itten is easier to detect and understand. He is frequently mentioned and was crucial to many

examples discussed in the earlier part of the show—and moreover, the Vorkurs that Itten developed, and that became the founding principle of modern art and design education, is constantly revisited. Indeed, the *Vorkurs* is one thread that runs through the whole exhibition. Even the art instruction at British Polytechnics, the example most historically removed from the Bauhaus, was said to be based on the *Vorkurs*. As the emphasis of *bauhaus imaginista* is on socially transformative chain reactions rather than singular pieces of art and design, Itten, who was a mediocre artist but revolutionary educator, is a convenient figure. The cross-disciplinary and tactile nature of his experimental teaching method lends itself to a narrative of changing cultural education, paving the way for today's post-medium art making.

The significance of Meyer for the exhibition is subtler. Assessments of the Bauhaus's legacy often become debates about which director to celebrate the most, and after spending some time in the show, one notices that Gropius is strangely absent from it. Yes, the show starts with his 1919 manifesto. But after that, he is only occasionally mentioned and only as accessory to someone else's achievement (for instance that of I. M. Pei). The catalogue does not include a single design by Gropius among its illustrations, nor does his post-Bauhaus career get much mention. Mies is ignored entirely. But Meyer and his students are frequently evoked. When a viewer walks down the HKW's rather theatrical stairs to enter the main exhibition hall, one of the first things they see is a prominent display of Meyer's drawings on their right, for an unpublished book he was preparing in Mexico City, where he was working as the head of its Urban City Planning Office (his designs likewise remained unbuilt). The next room includes books published by la Estampa Mexicana, a publishing house Meyer ran in Mexico, designed by the Bauhaus-trained graphic designer (and Meyer's partner) Lena Bergner. Several beautiful drawings by Bergner are also included in the first and the second chapters. Moreover, the fates of Meyer's students who followed him to the Soviet Union are studied at length; Sharon, who designed the University of Ife, was his student and later assistant before moving to Palestine; and Lotte Stam-Beese, whose story is explored in a film by Wendelien van Oldenborgh, was the first woman to study architecture in the Bauhaus under Meyer (and also his lover).

That Gropius's accustomed centrality in the history of Bauhaus is downplayed, and Meyer reevaluated, is a part of the exhibition's aim toward reassessing the Bauhaus with a political consciousness—an aim that is evident in the free and substantive handbook accompanying the exhibition (a catalogue of works with short explanations of the exhibited items and a map of the exhibition). The handbook goes beyond mere facts—it is a noticeably political document that wages frequent critique, especially of the colonialist or sexist assumptions of the time. It encourages the viewers to be critical when learning about the Bauhaus and its reverberations. Thus, the politically active Socialist Meyer (who, unlike, Gropius allowed women to study architecture) and his followers serve as a springboard that allows the curators to convincingly argue for the emancipatory potential of the Bauhaus—notably in their correlation of the Bauhaus-style pedagogy with indigenous craft, the creative freedoms the *Vorkurs* nurtures, and the anti-colonial struggle for political freedom and cultural self-awareness.

Whether the Bauhaus really did offer such political agency is a different question. In all likelihood, this politicized character is burdened by its share of projection (if not misreading). As Beatriz Colomina and Mark Wigley point out:

> DESPITE THE COUNTER EFFORTS DURING HANNES MEYER'S SHORT TENURE AS DIRECTOR (1928-30), A HUGE PART OF THE VIRAL SUCCESS OF BAUHAUS DESIGN OVER THE PAST HUNDRED YEARS WAS ITS SUCCESSFUL ATTEMPT TO SEEMINGLY DEPOLITICIZE THE DESIGNED OBJECT, ALLOWING ALMOST ANY PERSONAL OR COLLECTIVE IDEOLOGY TO BE SUPPORTED BY THE VISUAL AND TACTILE AESTHETIC OF SMOOTH SURFACES AND SIMPLE GEOMETRY. THE DEEP LEGACY OF THE BAUHAUS IS SIMULTANEOUSLY AESTHETIC AND ECONOMIC. THE BAUHAUS OBJECT SERVES NO PARTICULAR LIFESTYLE OTHER THAN THE GLOBAL MARKETPLACE ITSELF. [15]

[15] Beatriz Colomina and Mark Wigley, "Designing Life," in *bauhaus imaginista*, 185.

The fact that Bauhaus principles (or, perhaps, the Bauhaus as privileged emblem of such modernist pedagogy) could be embraced by almost anyone in any context—whether in postcolonial and culturally conscious Morocco, the thoroughly apolitical design education of Japan, elite American universities, or the national modernization project of India, points to the absence of any inherently political character.

This, of course, does not mean that the thesis of this exhibition is wrong, nor would its rightness or wrongness necessarily be the relevant question. More important is the fact that the curators assembled a show with a clearly defined position and a unique reading of the Bauhaus history instead of assuming the mantle of telling the "historical truth." Such a show can only be understood as one interpretation, and the curators stated their position with confidence, backed up by rigorous research. The exhibition is bold, energetic, and highly intelligent if occasionally uneven—perhaps a given, since the Bauhaus itself was heterogeneous and contradictory with many competing positions coexisting within its structure. *bauhaus imaginista* smartly raises the question of whether one can turn such heterogeneity into a strength or not, and in doing so, von Osten and Watson have made a welcome contribution to the ongoing arguments over what modernism might mean.