

Bauhausov
***Gestaltung* kao nova filozofija**
života



Bauhaus *Gestaltung* as a New
Philosophy of Life

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SAŽETAK

Teza je ovog teksta da su unutar Bauhauusa modernističke paradigme umjetničkog stvaranja, umjetničkog djela i estetskog doživljaja bile ponovno osmišljene kroz ideju *Gestaltunga* života. Ovaj je koncept podrazumijevao teorijske temelje i praktičnu realizaciju obrazovanja novog čovjeka koji će svojim sveobuhvatnim stvaralaštvom *oblikovati* (*gestalten*) ne samo umjetnost i kulturu nego i život u cjelini, kao dinamični organizam koji se sastoji od dva elementa—čovjeka i prostora u kojem čovjek postoji. Bauhausova arhitektura i dizajn predmeta za svakodnevnu upotrebu prakticirani su kao *oblikovanje* životnog prostora u poslijeratnom svijetu industrijske proizvodnje, dok su komponente lijepih umjetnosti razvijane u cilju poboljšanja čovjekovih čulnih sposobnosti i perceptivnog odnosa prema okruženju.

Značenje termina *Gestalt*, kako je bio aktualiziran u okvirima Bauhauusa, vodi do Goetheove upotrebe ovog pojma, s obzirom na važnost koju je Goetheova teorija boje imala za mnoge članove Bauhauusa, posebno za Ittena, Kandinskog, Kleea i Schlemmera. U okvirima geštalt-psihologije i Bauhauusa razvijane su dvije različite implikacije Goetheove originalne geštaltističke ideje. Specifičnost koncepta *Gestaltung* odnosi se na činjenicu da su članovi Bauhauusa geštaltističku zamisao invertirali od teorije percepcije u poetički i produktivni koncept oblikovanja. U praktičnom smislu *Gestaltung* kao proces oblikovanja forme zahtijevao je uviđanje temeljnih relacija, dinamika i tenzija kao osnove svake pojavnosti i njihovo predstavljanje univerzalnim vizualnim jezikom geometrijske apstrakcije. U ovom procesu, *Gestalt* kao čin percipiranja bio je preduvjet za sljedeću fazu *Gestaltunga*—kreaciju.

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ABSTRACT

The thesis of this text is that the modernist paradigms of art—work of art, creation, and aesthetic experience—were re-interpreted by the Bauhaus idea of the *Gestaltung* of life. This unique conceptual foundation implied the theoretical and practical education meant to form (*gestalten*) not only art and culture, but also life as a whole, as a dynamic organism consisting of two elements—the individual and the space of the individual existence. Bauhaus architecture and design of objects for everyday use were practiced as the *Gestaltung* of living space in a postwar world of industrial production. The practices of fine arts were developed to improve the human sensory potential and perceptive relations to space. Gestalt psychologists and the Bauhaus worked out the implications of two different meanings of Goethe's original idea of the Gestalt. The Preliminary Course (*Vorkurs*) as well as the reflected-light compositions (*Reflektorische Farbenlichtspiele*), and the artistic solutions of László Moholy-Nagy and Oskar Schlemmer are considered as the concrete educational and artistic achievements of the Bauhaus *Gestaltung*.

KEYWORDS

Bauhaus, *Gestaltung*, life, *Vorkurs*, reflected color-light compositions (*Reflektorische Farbenlichtspiele*), Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack, László Moholy-Nagy, Oskar Schlemmer

Uvodni tečaj (*Vorkurs*), kao ključni segment obrazovnog programa Bauhausa, reflektirajuća kolorističko-svjetlosna igra (*Reflektorische Farbenlichtspiele*) te teorijsko-poetička rješenja Lászla Moholy-Nagya i Oskara Schlemmera, razmatrani su kroz primjere konkretnih ostvarenja *Gestaltunga* kao idejne osnove cjelokupnog rada Bauhausa. Kompozicije reflektirajuće svjetlosti, kao novi umjetnički žanr, objedinile su dva temeljna aspekta djelovanja Bauhausa: kritiku autonomije umjetničkih disciplina, u ovom slučaju slikarstva, kao i stav da je čovjek biće koje, inherentno prirodnim zakonima funkcioniranja ljudskog tijela, svim čulima istodobno opaža svijet. Ideja usklađivanja čula u opažanju svijeta i razvijanja percepcije primjenom alata tehnike i industrije odredila je zamisao *teatra totalnosti* Lászla Moholy-Nagya. Iako nije dao praktičan doprinos scenskoj radionici Bauhausa, ovaj je umjetnik u tekstu *Teatar, cirkus, varijete* teorijski razradio *Gestaltung* kao temeljni koncept Bauhausa, koji je u području kazališne umjetnosti trebao biti realiziran kao dinamični organizam složenih elemenata, objedinjujući principe racionalnog i intuitivnog.

Rad Moholy-Nagya i Oskara Schlemmera ukazuje na to da su se principi Bauhausova *Gestaltunga* u poetičkom smislu najtransparentnije iskazivali kao *Bühnengestaltung*—u vezi s teatrom kao umjetničkim područjem u kojem su na najcjelovitiji način mogla biti rješavana pitanja artikulacije čovjeka i elemenata njegova okruženja. Mnogo više nego u poetici bilo kojeg drugog člana Bauhausa, u radu Oskara Schlemmera koncept *Gestaltunga* praktično je razrađivan na način *Gestaltunga* postojanja čovjeka u prostoru/svijetu i primjene osnovnih elemenata scene u materijaliziranju ove koncepcije. Schlemmerov specifični *Gestaltung* realiziran je postavljenjem dvaju elemenata u međuodnos: biološki utemeljenog tijela i konvencionalnih koncepata prostora i vremena simbolički i univerzalno izraženih matematikom i geometrijom. Schlemmer je razradio i proširio Goetheov *gestaltistički* koncept uvodeći tjelesnost kao bitnu dimenziju, odnosno smatrajući da čovjek nije onaj koji se samo posredstvom oka suočava sa svijetom, već oblikuje svoj odnos s okruženjem kroz cjelokupnu tjelesnu artikulaciju u prostoru. Svijet više nije bio promatran na način vizualnog doživljaja i „samo” gledanja, već kao tjelesno, trodimenzionalno iskustvo, koje je podjednako visceralno i tjelesno, a to znači oblikovano i unutrašnjim tjelesnim događajem, ali i artikulacijama tjelesnog izraza prema svijetu.

U okviru Bauhausa medijski i estetski diferencirane umjetnosti našle su se sveukupnom procesu izmještanja svojeg smisla, od autonomne umjetnosti bezinteresnoga estetskog uživanja ka društveno funkcionaliziranom umjetničkom oblikovanju kao polju za istraživanje potencijala umjetnosti u cilju poboljšavanja kvaliteta čovjekova života. Modificirano konceptom *Gestaltunga* života, estetsko više nije bilo razumijevano kao čulno uživanje u ljepoti idealiziranoga umjetničkog objekta. Naprotiv, estetski potencijali umjetničkog rada bili su instrumentalizirani u poboljšanju senzibilitnosti i perceptivnih odlika čovjeka kao središnje paradigme Bauhausa.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI

Bauhaus, *Gestaltung*, uvodni tečaj (*Vorkurs*), reflektirajuća kolorističko-svjetlosna igra (*Reflektorische Farbenlichtspiele*), Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack, László Moholy-Nagy, Oskar Schlemmer



Staatliches Bauhaus in Weimar 1919–1923, 1923, frontpage. Design: Herbert Bayer. Photo: Tobias Adam / *Staatliches Bauhaus in Weimar 1919–1923, 1923.*, naslovnica. Oblikovanje: Herbert Bayer. Foto: Tobias Adam.

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Scholarly approach to the Bauhaus predominantly focuses on individual artist poetics, architecture, design, visual art, and the reform of artistic education. Almost absent are those interpretative points that pose a question of how this institution changed the typical paradigms of modernist art—creation, work of art, and aesthetic experience. The thesis of this text is that these paradigms were reinterpreted by the Bauhaus idea of the *Gestaltung* of life. This unique conceptual foundation implied the theoretical and practical education meant to form (*gestalten*) not only art and culture, but also life as a whole, as a dynamic organism consisting of two elements—the individual and the space of the individual existence.

The concept of the *Gestaltung* of life could be understood as a new philosophy of life in the context of establishing relations between an individual and modern living space in the time after the First World War. This philosophy determined the entire diverse heritage of the Bauhaus, and required that in meeting with it the components of fine arts—traditionally identified with the area of aesthetic experience, with the domain of intuition, sensibility, and the human ‘inner’ relation to the world—it would undergo a transformation and be applied as a polygon for numerous practical realizations of the idea of the *Gestaltung* of life. All individual *Gestalts* of the Bauhaus were created with the aim to improve the quality of life, and were harmonized within architecture as a unifying field of a human being and a space of human existence. The goal was not only to shape the living space through the design of all its components, but also to adjust people to the conditions of the world through the development of intensive perceptive sensibility to space. While the existing literature research focuses on the direct relations between Gestalt psychology and some Bauhaus members, we claim here that the Gestalt psychologists and the Bauhaus worked out the implications of two different meanings of Goethe’s original Gestalt idea.¹ The Preliminary Course (*Vorkurs*), as well as the reflected-light compositions (*Reflektorische Farbenlichtspiele*), and the artistic solutions of László Moholy-Nagy and Oskar Schlemmer are considered as the concrete educational and artistic achievements of the *Gestaltung* of life.

GESTALTUNG OF LIFE AND THE BAUHAUS EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

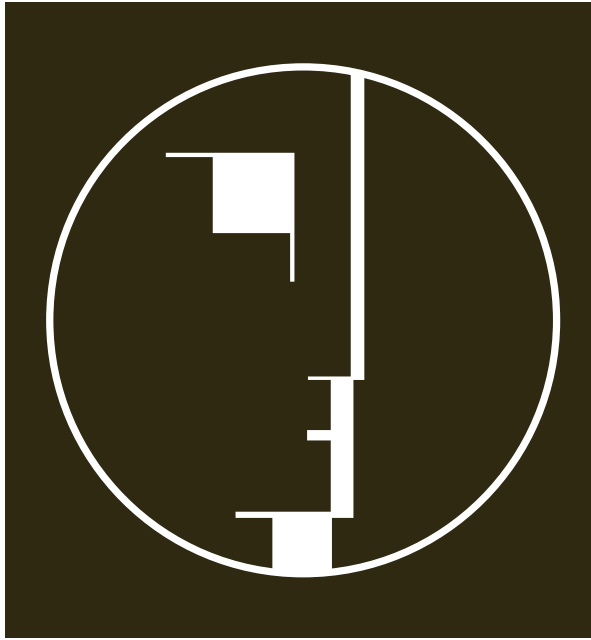
After the experience of the First World War, it was clear that a radical reform of life was inevitable and that some new educational values were needed to tackle the social collapse. *art*—as a practice of creating unique objects and aesthetic area, *craft*—as a practice of shaping the everyday utility objects, and *industry*—as a practice that made the object created by shaping massively available—were of equal importance for the realization of the Bauhaus idea of the *Gestaltung* of life. That is why the specific Bauhaus educational program implemented three radically new postulates: 1) a shift from autonomous artistic interests towards the integration of creative work into the structure of modern society and the realization of a new social consciousness; 2) integration of all forms of

¹ In the development of this claim, of particular importance were the latest insights about relations of Gestalt theory and the Bauhaus made by Roy Behrens and published as: Roy R. Behrens, “Art, Design and Gestalt Theory,” *Leonardo* 31, 4 (1998): 299–303 and “Gestalt theory and Bauhaus—A Correspondence Between Roy Behrens, Brenda Danilowitz, William S. Huff, Lothar Spillmann, Gerhard Stemberger and Michael Wertheimer in summer of 2011. Introduction and Summary by Geert-Jan Boudewijnse,” *Gestalt Theory*, 34, 1 (2012): 81–98.

human creation—cooperation between craftsmen and artists under the auspices of architecture—in overcoming the gap between artistic creation, craft and industrial production; 3) transdisciplinary pedagogy, or rather craft training as the basis of artistic education, with the imputation of functionality and economy into the area of artistic creation. The outcome of the specific Bauhaus educational program was the ability of individuals to achieve a balance between aesthetic needs and the practical demands of the industrial society. This educational program was supposed to enable individuals to participate in the formation of different segments of living space as parts of the *Gestaltung* of life, taking into account all the elements that made up the conditions of an individual's existence in the modern, postwar world.

The Preliminary Course (*Vorkurs*)—initially designed by Johannes Itten—was the key segment and the most important innovation of Bauhaus' educational program. Itten's methodology in the Preliminary Course was a path for individual research and analysis of the nature of artistic creativity. His holistic translation of color and form into their material definition in unity with space contributed to his pedagogy becoming the basis for the development of various interdisciplinary creative solutions, and being incorporated into the poetics of almost all Bauhaus members. He also established the pedagogical base on which László Moholy-Nagy and Josef Albers elaborated their variants of the preliminary course to harmonize artistic creation with technological conditions.

Within the Preliminary Course, a person was understood as a dynamic unity of physical and psychological layers. Itten's pedagogical methodology included a complex of intuitive detection of visual phenomena via the physical and psychological relations between material and subject. This complex was an indispensable basis for practically acting—*shaping* the material. The attention was paid to careful observation of nature and material characteristics, to reception development and training for the abstract presentation of nature and human movement in space. The Preliminary Course classes began with basic gymnastic exercises, followed by harmonization exercises as research of the internal balance between mind and body.² The exercises then led to the drawing of so-called rhythmic forms, that is, the study of basic geometric forms and the contrast and tension of colors within these forms. The perception of relations between colors and shapes had not only an optical, but also an emotional value. Itten believed that the optical and emotional reaction to these relations, combined with body movements, enabled the student to 'live' and 'feel' colors and forms in space. "Geometric forms and colors of the spectrum are the simplest but also the most sensitive and thus the most powerful and most delicate means for presenting expressive examples of the form."³ With regard to the Preliminary Course, Itten also stated: "My goal is to awaken in people the sense for the essence of things."⁴ Instead of finding a new style in the field of visual arts, there was an effort to determine the elementary components of visual expression that would have universal comprehensibility and applicability.



Signet of the Staatliche Bauhaus, designed by Oskar Schlemmer and used from 1922 / Pečat Visoke državne škole Bauhaus prema dizajnu Oskara Schlemmera; u uporabi od 1922.

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The educational goal of the Preliminary Course was that each individual—whether they are future artists, designers, or architects—would learn how to solve design problems from the very foundation: from the elementary technological peculiarity of the material they work with, the functionality of specific form, and the capability of a human being to observe fundamental space relations. In this way, during the process of design, the artist, designer or architect always proceeded not from some unique aesthetic model, but from concrete technical conditions, material functions, and the natural, psychological laws of human beings. “[It] was not merely a craft philosophy; craftsmanship was a ‘preparation for architecture’. Nor was it simply a ‘functional’ philosophy limited to the practical or to industry; it was explicitly an aesthetic philosophy resting on psychological investigations.”⁵

What connected the Bauhaus and the area of psychological research that fundamentally determined its educational and creative practice was the concept of *Gestaltung*. In a literal translation, the word *Gestalt* means a *form* or, in a narrow sense, a *creative form*, while *Gestaltung* denotes *designing* or *creating* a form. The complex connotations determined the meaning of these terms in the cultural deposits that had settled in Germany since Goethe, who introduced the Gestalt concept to 19th German thought.⁶ The first decades of the 20th century were the renaissance of Gestalt theory in Germany, thanks to its elaboration in the field of psychology with Max Wertheimer, Wolfgang Köhler, and Kurt Koffka—as the leading Gestalt psychologists of the 1920s.

The basis of Gestalt in the field of psychology was the idea of spontaneous, self-organizing activity of a human organism in perception—the totality, such as it exists. Still, its value is not equal to the sum of its constituting elements, because the observation of the whole tends to take the best possible form, represented by simple, symmetrical and consistent forms. However, the historical roots of *Gestaltung* within the Bauhaus were double.

On one side, we could trace them back to Goethe’s influence. Having in mind the importance of Goethe’s theory of color for many Bauhaus artists—especially Itten, Kandinsky, Klee, and Schlemmer—the implications of the meaning of the term *Gestalt* as it was actualized by the Bauhaus masters lead to Goethe’s theoretical use of this term. Goethe’s Gestalt theory concerned the establishment of the ideal-type theory (*Urbild*), “according to which all complex structures, plants or animals are transformations from a single fundamental organ. [...] He accounted for similarities among the members of a species by formal laws of (self-) organization, ultimately derived from an ideal type he called an *Urbild* [...]. In Goethe’s morphology, the term ‘Gestalt’ referred to the self-actualizing wholeness of organic forms.”⁷ His theory took into account the dynamism and variability of life, identifying among this dynamism universalities and constants. Goethe’s ideal morphological types were both real and immaterial.

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Besides Itten, the practice of harmonization was led by the only music teacher in Bauhaus, vocal singer and composer Gertrud Grunow. More about that: Nikolić, *Bauhaus—primjenjena estetike muzike, teatra i plesa [Bauhaus—Applied Aesthetics of Music, Theatre, and Dance]*, 59–76.

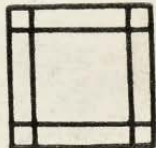
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Wick, *Teaching at the Bauhaus*, 119.

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Ibid., 119.

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Gay, *Weimar Culture*, 99.

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Cf. Ash, *Gestalt Psychology in German Culture 1890–1967*, 85.

7
Ibid., 85.



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BAUHAUSBÜCHER
KANDINSKY
PUNKT UND LINIE ZU FLÄCHE

Wassily Kandinsky, *Punkt und Linie zu Fläche: Beitrag zur Analyse der malerischen Elemente*, 1926, frontpage / Vasilij Kandinski, *Punkt und Linie zu Fläche: Beitrag zur Analyse der malerischen Elemente*, 1926., naslovnica.

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On the other side, there is evident historical parallelism between the Bauhaus *Gestaltung* and the development of Gestalt psychology. It could be said that the newly founded school of Gestalt psychology was of significance for Bauhaus members since there was evidence that Klee, Kandinsky, and Albers knew about Wertheimer's work.⁸ Following this line of reasoning, there are some conclusions about parallelisms between Kandinsky's theory of art and Wertheimer's Gestalt theory. It is even suggested that Kandinsky "may be considered as a predecessor of the Gestalt approach to perception"⁹ since the *Point and Line to Plane* manuscript—that he later used for Bauhaus lectures—was written in 1911, and Wertheimer's first article on Gestalt phenomena was published in 1912.¹⁰ However, the proof that there was some official connection between the Bauhaus and Gestalt psychologists was not evident until 1930, when student council asked for lectures on Gestalt psychology.¹¹ Furthermore, we could debate the existence of intermingled influence of the Bauhaus *Gestaltung* and Gestalt psychology from the late 1920s onward. Immediately after visiting the Bauhaus Dessau in 1927, the young Rudolf Arnheim published an article with impressions about "utility" and "clarity" of building design and placement of objects in Bauhaus rooms: "One can now comprehend a building, which contains a thousand different objects, as an organized whole. [...] In a Bauhaus room the placement of every object determines itself almost by inherent law. [...] Even the colors are used for a purpose; they serve to subdivide and to provide orientation [...]. Soon we shall learn to understand even theoretically that here we are not dealing with matters of subjective taste, but that this kind of feel is a very definite psychological phenomenon of general validity. It makes different people come to rather similar results."¹²

It is possible to think about Goethe as a common reference for dealing with the idea of Gestalt in the artistic sense—within the Bauhaus—and in the scientific sense—within the school of Gestalt psychology. Also, recent scholarly debates have identified Friedrich Froebel's innovations in kindergarten teaching as another possible influence on both the Bauhaus and the Gestalt psychologist.¹³ Itten's idea of universal visual language consisting of basic geometry, pure colors, and abstract shapes was already theoretically elaborated in the writings of the Swiss pedagogue Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi and his German student Friedrich Föebel. It was the idea of reducing the complexity of the visual world through the formulation of a visual language of simple forms that come with the 'innocent eye' observation.¹⁴ In fact, Itten "was a Froebel-trained elementary school teacher."¹⁵ Therefore, it could be said that it was precisely Froebel's kindergarten teaching innovations that represent a common theoretical ground shared by Itten's pedagogical methodology, the Bauhaus *Gestaltung of life*, and Gestalt psychology from the 1920s.

However, it is important to stress that the Bauhaus members didn't have an intention to deal with the Gestalt theory in the scientific sense of Gestalt psychology. Instead, they developed a specific *poietic* understanding of *Gestaltung* as a composite

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Cf. Behrens, "Art, Design, and Gestalt Theory," 300.

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Campen "Early Abstract Art and Experimental Gestalt Psychology," 134.

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Ibid., 135.

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Cf. "Gestalt theory and Bauhaus—A Correspondence," 87.

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Arnheim, "The Bauhaus in Dessau," 60–61.

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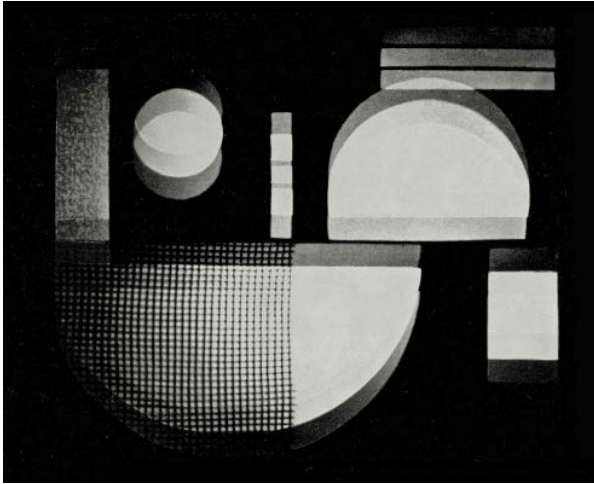
This thesis has been suggested by Roy Behrens in 1998 (Behrens, "Art, Design, and Gestalt Theory," 300) and again in 2012 ("Gestalt theory and Bauhaus—A Correspondence", 96).

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Cf. Lupton and Miller, ed., *The ABC's of ΔOΠ. The Bauhaus and Design Theory*, 6.

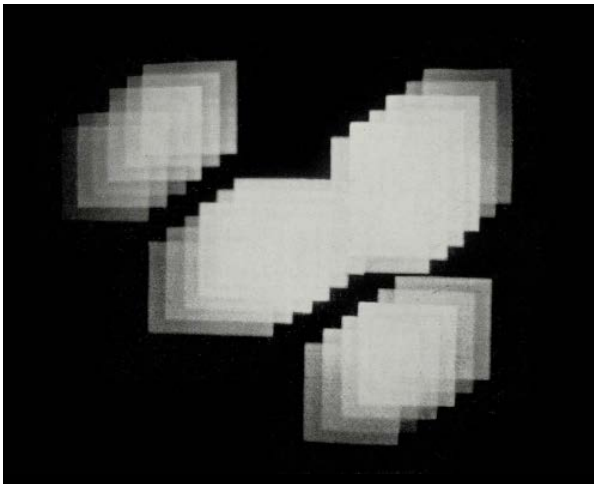
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Behrens, "Art, Design, and Gestalt Theory," 300.



Reflektorisches Farbenlichtspiel. Author/Autor: Kurt Schwerdtfeger.
Photo/Foto: Fotoatelier Hüttich & Oemler, Weimar, 1922–1923.

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Reflektorisches Farbenlichtspiel. Author/Autor: Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack. Photo/Foto: Eckner, Weimar.

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perceptual and creative phenomenon, as both acts of *reception* and *creation*, or as a kind of philosophical framework for resolving and unifying the mutually incompatible elements in the designing process—the material and immaterial, rationality and nature, geometric and metaphysics, mechanic and organic, intuition and technique, art and craftsmanship, physical and psychological, and emotional and rational. The specificity of the *Gestaltung* of life was related to the fact that Bauhaus members inverted the idea of Gestalt from the psychological *theory of perception* into the poetic and productive concept of *Gestaltung* as an active and consciousness activity, or *designing process*. Theodor Lux Feininger words represent an indicative illustration of this shift: “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.”¹⁶ In other words, the Bauhaus *Gestaltung* meant the projection of Gestalt as a theory of perception onto the conscious *process of creation* or, as Klee wrote: “the paths of form rather than the form itself [...] *Gestaltung* in its broader sense clearly contains the idea of the underlying mobility, and is therefore preferable.”¹⁷ In a practical sense, as the *process of creating a form*, Bauhaus *Gestaltung* meant the observing of the fundamental relations, dynamics, and tensions that exist as the basis of the world of audio-visible phenomena. As such, these fundamental relations should be spotted and then recreated through simple and consistent forms, or through the universal visual language of geometric abstraction. In this process, the Gestalt as a way of perceiving the space was a precondition for the next phase of the *Gestaltung* of life—creation.

GESTALTUNG AND THE SPECIFIC ARTISTIC SOLUTIONS WITHIN THE BAUHAUS

The understanding that painting, sculpture, everyday object design, and spatial planning are integral segments of the *Gestaltung* of life enabled the development of a poietics that integrated work into different disciplines, as well as the cases of new media arts. One such example were reflected-light compositions (*Reflektorische Farbenlichtspiele*). This field of art was developed by two Bauhaus students, Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack and Kurt Schwerdtfeger, as the leaders of the group for the performance of reflected-light compositions that were first presented on the occasion of the *Bauhaus week* in 1923.

As a new artistic genre, reflected-light compositions united the two fundamental aspects of the Bauhaus: a critique of the autonomy of artistic disciplines, and the view that simultaneous, multi-sensory experience of the world is inherent for the natural laws of the functioning of human body. In the text “Reflected-Light Compositions. Nature – Aims – Criticism”, Hirschfeld-Mack emphasized the question of the relationship between traditional artistic media, disciplinary divisions of

art, and a human being as a member of the modern community. “The painter of today, unlike the painter of the Gothic period, stands with his work in almost complete isolation from his fellow man. He is no longer inspired by his community [...]. But the question is raised whether painting as a whole is still necessary as an essential factor of expression for all people? Is painting still the strong means of cohesion and expression which is used to be for all people, or has it been replaced by a new means of expression for pictorial representation—by reflected-light compositions?”¹⁸

The production of reflected-light compositions consisted of templates in different colors that were placed in front of the projector and moved back and forth, creating a kinetic abstraction of colors on a white canvas combined with music. Technological achievements and sounds were used as a means of opening up the painting to synesthetic artistic practice through the stratification of color in dimensions of space and time. Hirschfeld-Mack considered reflected-light compositions as a demonstration of the inextricable visual-sound aesthetic experience: “with the reflected-light compositions we believe we have come closer to a new ‘genre’ of art which, with its powerful physical and psychological effects, is capable of evoking pure and profound tensions from the experience of color and music.”¹⁹ Reflected-light compositions pointed to the treatment of traditional fine arts as a sort of ‘laboratories’ for researching the complex relationships between perceiving audible and visual in the constitution of human life.

From the theoretical and practical teaching on the use of color given by Itten, Kandinsky, and Klee, and especially under the influence of Kandinsky, Hirschfeld-Mack developed his own color seminar in the winter semester of 1922/1923, which was presented in the first Bauhaus monograph as the Kandinsky course with Hirschfeld-Mack color charts.²⁰ Based on empirical research, Hirschfeld-Mack established the connection between the three primary colors—red, yellow, and blue—and primary shapes—circle, triangle, and square. Namely, during an experiment in visual perception that was conducted through a questionnaire in the wall painting workshop under Kandinsky’s leadership, most respondents linked a square with the color red, triangle with the yellow, and circle with the blue. This connection of primary colors and shapes was later raised to the level of a general principle through the Kandinsky course, and had an almost stylistic formative effect on the creative production of Bauhaus workshops.²¹ It could be said that, with the 1923 color seminar, the tendency towards developing a universally applicable visual language underwent its systematization.

After Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack’s reflected-light compositions, the work of László Moholy-Nagy can be seen as a continuation in the development of new media art that used light as the primary material for creation. Namely, Moholy-Nagy’s artistic evolution ranged from a preoccupation with ‘painting by the pigment’ to a preoccupation with ‘painting by light’, following the progressive arc of a technologically-mediated dematerialization of traditional artistic media. His theoretical and artistic

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Feininger, “The Bauhaus: Evolution of an Idea,” 261.

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Klee, “The concept of artistic creation,” 17.

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Hirschfeld-Mack, “Reflected-Light Compositions. Nature—Aims—Criticism,” 82. This English translation of Hirschfeld-Mack theoretical text presents a valuable primary source for researching his ideas. The other theoretical explanation of the reflected-light compositions technique written by the artist himself and with illustrations can be found in one of the Bauhaus books, published in 1925 (Hirschfeld-Mack, “Reflected Colour Displays”, in: László Moholy-Nagy, ed., *Painting, Photography, Film*, 80–85). Scholarly works about Hirschfeld-Mack are not so numerous. Until now, only one monographic publication about his work has been published in the form of the catalogue, in German (Andras Hapkemeyer und Peter Stasny, *Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack: Bauhäusler und Visionär*, Ostfildern: H. Cantz, 2000). Useful research of his work in the field of reflected-light compositions has been done and presented recently as a part of Ph.D. thesis by Amy Melissa Venator in 2017—“The Spotlight, the Reflector, the Electric Sign: Light Art and Technology in 1920s Germany” (Rice University, Texas).

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Hirschfeld-Mack, “Reflected-Light Compositions. Nature—Aims—Criticism,” 83.

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Kandinsky, “Farbkurs und Seminar,” 26–28.

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Cf. Siebenbrodt & Schöbe, *Bauhaus 1919–1933. Weimar–Dessau–Berlin*, 41.

goal was to contribute to a change in the perception of the world by exploring the interstices or, more precisely, the ‘cracks’ between various artistic media. The task of the artist was not to create individual, autonomous works of art, but to transform the human perception. In order to reconfigure the human perception, the artist must mobilize everything that science and industry had to offer, and use technology as a catalyst for that process.

This intention of reconfiguring human perception also determined the idea of the theater of totality, presented by László Moholy-Nagy in the text *Theater, Zirkus, Varieté*.²² After a retrospective review of historical theater formations and current theatrical solutions, Moholy-Nagy elaborated on the utopian plan for a future theater that was supposed to be the representation of the *Gestaltung*. *Gestaltung* and *equilibrium* are the key terms of Moholy-Nagy’s language in this text. The theater of the future, or a theater of totality, was based on the *Teathergestaltung* principle²³ and included all the traditional components of the scene—sound, light, color, music, movement, space, and forms. But, “while during the Middle Ages (and even today) the center of gravity in theater production lay in the representation of the various *types* [...], it is the task of the FUTURE ACTOR to discover and activate that which is COMMON to all men. [...] The contemporary painting exhibits a multiplicity of color and surface interrelationships, which gain their effect, on the one hand, from their conscious and logical statement of problems, and on the other, from the unanalyzable intangibles of creative intuition. In the same way, the Theater of Totality with its multifarious complexities of light, space, plane, form, motion, sound, man—and with all the possibilities for varying and combining these elements—must be an ORGANISM. [...] There will arise an enhanced control over all formative media, unified in a harmonious effect and built into an organism of perfect equilibrium.”²⁴

Moholy-Nagy did not make a practical contribution to the theater workshop. However, he significantly contributed to the theoretical elaboration of the *Gestaltung* as related to the theater of totality that had to be realized as a dynamic organism of theater elements that combined the principles of rational and intuitive in design in equal measure.

The Bauhaus work of Oskar Schlemmer further attests that the principles of the Bauhaus *Gestaltung* in the artistic sense found their greatest realization in *Bühnengestaltung*.²⁵ The theater represented an artistic area in which the articulations of an individual and the elements of the living space could be dealt with in the most comprehensive manner. The idea of the *Gestaltung* in the field of artistic creation was most completely realized in Oskar Schlemmer’s stage workshop, with the imperative to resolve the problem of physical articulations of man in space. Schlemmer understood his stage work as a process of discovering the basic meaning of the stage through stage design. More than in the poetics of any other Bauhaus member, the concept of *Gestaltung* was practically elaborated in his work with the application

of the basic elements of the stage for questioning the problem of human existence in space. Schlemmer's *Gestaltung* was realized by the incorporation of two elements: the biological body and the conventional concepts of space and time, symbolically and universally presented by mathematics and geometry. "Schlemmer not only read Goethe but also the work of Carl Gustav Carus [...] and later still the work of Ludwig Klages, both of whom developed their vitalist ideas from Goethe's theory of the 'Urpflanze'."²⁶ The studies of both Carus and Klages were noted in the bibliography of Schlemmer's psychology lectures for the course "Man", making six of the thirteen recommended books for this course area.²⁷ Therefore, some authors argue that, in relation to certain aspects of his work, Schlemmer can be placed in a dialogue not only with the past—Goethe, Schiller, Carus—but also with contemporary tendencies in the development of Henry Bergson and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological philosophy.²⁸ The Gestalt principle, with the idea of *Urbild* or the pre-existing forms originally formulated by Goethe, played an important role in German phenomenological thought of the early decades of the 20th century. But, in the case of Schlemmer's poietics, the Gestalt idea went beyond the boundaries of phenomenological reduction by introducing the element of a comprehensive body articulation in experiencing the world.

In fact, Schlemmer elaborated and expanded Goethe's concept of Gestalt with a view that humans face the world not only visually, but by forming relations with the environment through the articulation of the entire body within space. While Goethe wrote that the eye, above all, is the organ through which we deal with the world,²⁹ the balance between the dynamic relations of the Gestalt elements in Bauhaus's practices was regulated by the biological and physiological concept of *equilibrium* that was placed not in the sight of the eye, but in the ear. The world was observed as a physical, three-dimensional experience, which was equally visceral and physical, shaped by both the internal body event and the articulations of the physical expression towards the world. Thus, Schlemmer's Bauhaus stage was no longer a place of the representation of content, but of designing space by the body.

Presenting the relations between space and body movements in many of his drawings and diagrams, Schlemmer emphasized the stage event as a Gestalt of geometrically defined space and the metaphysical aspect, the bearer of which is the human body in motion. "Space and body mathematics, the planimetric and the stereometric relationships of space together with the metaphysics inherent in the human body shall unite into a numerical, mystical synthesis... space!"³⁰ Therefore, Schlemmer considered that one of the functions of theater was "to serve the metaphysical needs of man by constructing a world of illusion and by creating the transcendental on the basis of the rational."³¹ According to him, an abstraction of human form paradoxically represented an artistic image of a man in a higher sense because it represented a metaphor, a universal symbol of human form (*menschlichen Gestalt*). Schlemmer's diagrams reflected the concept of man as Gestalt, or the dynamic combination of mechanical

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Moholy-Nagy, "Theater, Circus, Variety", 49–70.

23

Cf. *Ibid.*, 50.

24

Ibid., 58, 60, 70.

25

Ibid., 50.

26

Trimingham, *The Theatre of the Bauhaus*, 35.

27

Kuchling, ed., *Oskar Schlemmer Man. Teaching notes from the Bauhaus*, 144.

28

Cf. Trimingham, *The Theatre of the Bauhaus*, 5.

29

Cf. Hoffmann, "Play and Earnest: Goethe and the Art of his Day," 19.

30

Schlemmer, "Abstraction in Dance and Costume (1928)," 472.

31

Schlemmer, "Theater (Bühne)," 81.





Costumes for the Oskar Schlemmer's Triadic Ballet ("Figurines"). Staatsgalerie Stuttgart © José Luiz Bernardes Ribeiro ↑
/ Kostimi za Trijadni balet Oskara Schlemmera („Figurine“). Staatsgalerie Stuttgart © José Luiz Bernardes Ribeiro

and organic components and forces, in which the heart—with the concentric circles moving from and towards him—was understood as the biological driver of the dynamism of the human body. The idea of the human body as a dynamic Gestalt reflected Schlemmer's continued interest in the concept of *Gestaltung*—the shaping of space through the movement of the body. In the reverse process of this dynamism, the Gestalt of space also shaped the body, i.e., spatial organizations predicted and conditioned the bodily movement. It was an example of anthropomorphism of space, and an expression of metaphysics by physical means. Similarly, Kandinsky held a view that in a composition that deviates from representational elements, the body could be omitted and replaced by an abstract form in such a way that the dynamic relations that determine it continue to exist. Schlemmer's abstraction, however, did not remove the figure, but 'figuralized' the spatial organization.

CONCLUSION

If we return to the initial question about the status of paradigms of modernist art—creation, work of art, aesthetic experience—it is clear that they went through an all-encompassing aspiration for change. It involved not only the application of new means of artistic expression and design, but also an effort to transform life itself and the relation of humans with a community. When it came to the aesthetic experience, it was about moving the *aesthetic* from the space of the autonomy of art to the area of multiple sensory experiences of the world. Therefore, different disciplines of art found themselves in the overall process of relocating meaning, from the autonomous art of uninteresting aesthetic enjoyment to socially-functionalized artistic design that opened up a field for exploring the potential of art in the function of improving the quality of everyday human life. Modified by the concept of the *Gestaltung* of life, aesthetic experience was no longer understood in the sense of enjoyment of a beautiful, idealized artistic object. Instead, aesthetic potentials of creative work were instrumentalized to improve the sensibility and perceptive skills of a human being as the central paradigm of the Bauhaus. Within this interpretation, the *aesthetic* referred to the meaning given by Schiller, associating it not only with the uninteresting enjoyment in the beauty of the autonomous art, but also with the politics of life. "The aesthetic [...] is the articulation between art, the individual and the community", bringing together, as Schiller claimed in the Fifteenth Letter of his *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* "the art of the beautiful (*der ästhetische Kunst*) with art of living (*Lebenskunst*)."³² More precisely, in the case of the Bauhaus *Gestaltung* of life, the aesthetic was no longer conceptualized as a sensory experience of art, but as an improved sensory experience of the world by means of art. The considered poetics of the Bauhaus artists/teachers were harmonized and 'united' with the aim to transform the way we used to perceive and shape the world around us.

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