between black and brown constitute perhaps the single most important social and political question, does an all-black arts district help us to find the way forward?" (286–87). It is a question that Widener does not answer and a charge that he puts forward for future artistic collaboration and scholarship. Instead of answers, Widener offers fragments of possibilities. Taking into account the lessons of each case study in *Black Arts West*, Widener argues for an approach to the cultural field that conceives of cultural politics as material, collective, holistic, democratic, and imaginative (288–89). He concludes by paraphrasing the Spanish revolutionary Buenaventura Durruti: "We carry a new world in our art" (289). In this romantic, speculative, and hopeful assertion about the possibilities of art and politics, Widener locates the answer to Césaire's question of who and what *we* are.

Nicole R. Fleetwood is associate professor in the department of American studies at Rutgers University. She is the author of *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness* (University of Chicago Press, 2011).

Eva Díaz

We Are All Bauhauslers Today

Barry Bergdoll and Leah Dickerman, eds. *Bauhaus 1919–1933: Workshops for Modernity.* New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2009. 328 pp., 475 ills. $75

Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin, Museum für Gestaltung, Stiftung Bauhaus Dessau, and Klassik Stiftung Weimar. *Bauhaus: A Conceptual Model.* Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2009. 376 pp., 236 color ills., 66 b/w. $60

Philipp Oswalt, ed. *Bauhaus Conflicts, 1919–2009: Controversies and Counterparts.* Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2009. 304 pp., 31 b/w ills. $30 paper

Jeffrey Saletnik and Robin Schuldenfrei, eds. *Bauhaus Construct: Fashioning Identity, Discourse and Modernism.* London and New York: Routledge, 2009. 278 pp., 73 b/w ills. $165, $49.95 paper

Ulrike Müller. *Bauhaus Women: Art, Handicraft, Design.* Paris: Flammarion, 2009. 152 pp., ills. $39.95 paper

The year 2009 marked the ninetieth anniversary of the founding of the Bauhaus, commemorated by a flurry of exhibitions, conferences, and publications on the school and its aftereffects. The significant revisions this scholarship offers are triggering a fundamental reassessment of the legacy of the school, which until very recently was suffering from some serious public-relations problems, one could say. Call it the Tom Wolfe effect, but for years "Bauhaus" was pretty much synonymous with "bad modernism," and not merely in pop critique circles.

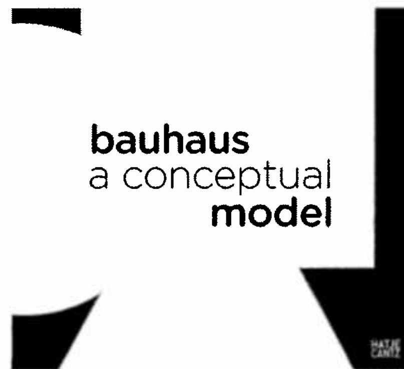
I remember how only a couple of years ago some scholars dismissed the Bauhaus as half-baked productivism, damned because the school emerged from the failed German Revolution and was therefore "compromised" by the manner in which it navigated, with modest success, the politics of the Weimar Republic and survived for fourteen (fraught) years until 1933. Those Bauhauslers never got the mass production thing going, instead fabricating expensive craft objects that merely looked as if they came off an assembly line. Key Bauhaus figures were maligned for the perceived unevenness of their careers; sure, some were talented teachers, but as artists they were portrayed as unoriginal or, in the case of an artist such as Vasily Kandinsky, as awkwardly unsuitable to a cohesive "Bauhaus narrative." Worse yet were the homegrown characters: Josef Albers was cast as "adhering to dogma" (an epithet that stuck; in this instance quoted from Clement Greenberg's dismissive review of an Albers exhibition in the United States), a Prussian pedant, forever harping on about form, material, and color, and whose *Homage to the Square* ultimately proved his lack of creativity in its monumental and obsessive repetition of concentric squares.[1] Johannes Itten: a kooky Zoroastrian vegetarian who required that students do yoga warm-ups before painting, he also had synesthetic delusions about smelling the color yellow or hearing dark blue. László Moholy-Nagy: he derived his work far too closely from Soviet Constructivism; at worst, he was a blatant El Lissitzky plagiarist. Hannes Meyer, the penultimate director of the Bauhaus: an undiplomatic and politically insensitive man bent on destroying the Bauhaus in a drive toward Communist uprising. Paul Klee and Kandinsky: two old guys lending prestige to a school whose ideology of design was, to all intents and purposes, trying its hardest to make their kind of moribund, easel-bound oil painting conclusively obsolete. Topping off the oddball crew, Walter Gropius: the autocratic architect who paradoxically refused to institute a formal architecture program at his school. This bundle of contradictions always made the Bauhaus a little too messy to deal with, even as its reputation for purity and austerity established it as a much less sexy 1920s topic, at least in the 1990s, than Georges Bataille slash Surrealism, for example. And Gropius's strenuous demands for political moderation rendered the Bauhaus far less politically radical (and less an elegiac exemplar of the failure of an art-politics praxis) than Constructivism in Russia.

This litany of stereotype—and I have encountered each of the above spoken or written in some form or another—seems unbelievably narrow-minded today; in large part this is a testament to both the depth and scope of the recent reevaluations. In particular, the recovery of a host of objects that

were literally lost or figuratively lost to time has brought an entire new set of images and artworks to the fore, and has expanded the conversation beyond the few lonely voices such as Éva Forgács's excellent 1991 history *The Bauhaus Idea and Bauhaus Politics*, Rainer Wick's important and well-researched

Teaching at the Bauhaus (1982), Frank Whitford's compendium of letters and primary sources in *The Bauhaus: Masters and Students by Themselves* (1992), and the essential brick of a book about the school put out in 1962, Hans Winger's *Bauhaus*. In terms of the stateside reception, Michael Hays's excellent study of Marxism and Bauhaus architects' conceptions of public housing design, *Modernism and the Posthumanist Subject: The Architecture of Hannes Meyer and Ludwig Hilberseimer* (MIT Press, 1995), was joined by Howard Singerman's *Art Subjects: Making Artists in the American University* (University of California Press, 1999), which, preceding the recent pedagogical turn in art circles, took seriously the centrality of Bauhaus design training in the development of American arts curriculum at midcentury and into the present. Anticipating the current wave of research, the Tate Modern's 2006 exhibition *Albers and Moholy-Nagy: From the Bauhaus to the New World* presented a fascinating study in contrasts of two of the Bauhaus's most influential leaders of the *Vorkurs*, the famed and much-emulated Preliminary Course all Bauhaus students were required to take before specializing in specific workshop study.

Of the recent scholarship, the Museum of Modern Art's *Bauhaus 1919–1933: Workshops for Modernity* exhibition and catalogue, building on the Martin-Gropius Bau exhibition and catalogue *Bauhaus: A Conceptual Model*, charges itself with troubling the narrative of earlier historicizations of the Bauhaus, in particular, MoMA's own 1938 catalogue for the exhibition *Bauhaus 1919–1928*. That earlier project, organized by Walter Gropius in collaboration with Herbert Bayer and Isa Gropius, had excised the contradictions of the 1919–23 period, the years before the



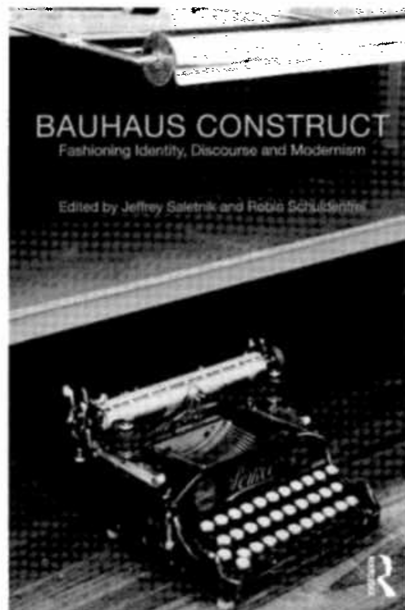
Dutch De Stijl artist Theo van Doesburg made camp in Weimar and proceeded to heckle Bauhaus faculty members for their outmoded and romantic "cathedral of art" ideology. He criticized the increasingly unpopular reliance on the subjective and emotional potential of color promulgated by Itten in the foundational Preliminary Course, which hastened the latter's resignation and triggered perhaps the most productive schism in Bauhaus ideology, one concerning the role of expression as opposed to design in art.

A brief prehistory of this break is necessary in order to understand its importance in subsequent considerations, at the Bauhaus and beyond, of terms such as gestalt, design, and perception. When the Bauhaus was founded in 1919, it was under Walter Gropius's vision of "a universally great, enduring, spiritual-religious idea" of the *gesamtkunstwerk*, the "cathedral of the future." Beginning in 1922, however, Gropius began to shift the school's mission from its original articulation toward a model of design production and utilitarianism. The engineer was favored over the guildsman, and work was to "lead more and more to the production of single prototypes (which will serve as guides to the craftsman and industry.)" Gropius criticized the "wild romanticism" of "individualized" expressionism, which some felt was a pointed attack on Itten.[2] Itten, feeling the threat, departed with several students, and in 1923 Albers and Moholy-Nagy replaced Itten as instructors of the Preliminary Course.

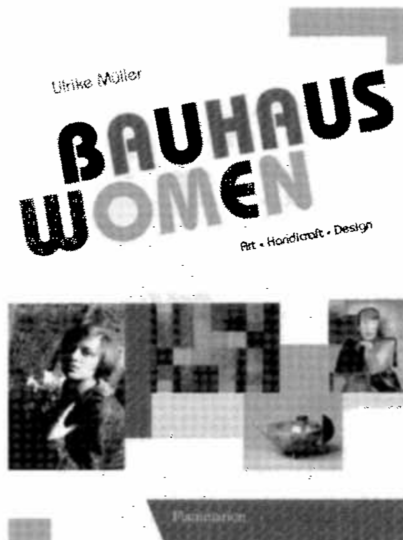
In addition to omitting the internecine quarrels that ended Itten's tenure, the 1938 MoMA exhibition also conveniently ignored the post-Gropius years, during which directors Hannes Meyer and later Ludwig Mies van der Rohe each took the school in radically different directions. Mies's career hasn't suffered for this excision, but Meyer's did, and *Workshops for Modernity* does little to resurrect his legacy—the small room at MoMA dedicated to his directorship was painted a dull battleship-en-route-to-the-gulag gray—although the catalogue dedicates a compelling section, authored by Detlef Mertins, to the Meyer-led cooperative team of Bauhaus students who executed the design of the German Trade Unions School in Bernau.

The Martin-Gropius-Bau and MoMA catalogues use the same format, asking each contributor—some seventy art historians, artists, designers, architects, and architectural historians in the former volume, and twenty in the latter—to focus on a single object. This mini-monographic format allows for new contextualizations of now-iconic works—particularly effective are the catalogue entries on Josef Hartwig's chess set and Marianne Brandt's teapot—but also allows the remarkable recovery of relatively unknown objects and reassessments of still other works that have not been commonly

associated with the Bauhaus. These are often shocking retrievals. The image of a mysterious woman in the iconic Breuer tubular steel chair, masked by one of the metal visors used in Oskar Schlemmer's theater workshops, is a study in the defamiliarization exercises commonly used in Bauhaus performances. The stylized design of Lothar Schreyer's 1920 *Death House for Woman*, a spectacular gold and primary-colored sarcophagus, is pitched somewhere between Art Nouveau kitsch and extreme kindergarten emblematization. The newly rediscovered Marcel Breuer–designed and Gunta Stoltz–upholstered 1921 "African chair" cum neo-Primitive throne, which turned up in Berlin in 2004, troubles all descriptions of Breuer as a tubular-steel modernist. Or consider Klee's morbidly deadpan troupe of hand puppets, which includes a diminutive, bug-eyed self-portrait of the artist clothed in tattered tweed.



Jeffrey Saletnik and Robin Schuldenfrei's compendium of essays, *Bauhaus Construct: Fashioning Identity, Discourse and Modernism*, similarly aims to present a new stake for contemporary audiences in rethinking Bauhaus objects as radically contesting sterile habits of art production and reception. In this vein, *Bauhaus Construct*'s contributors attempt, according to the editors' introduction, "To look afresh at the ways in which these objects were agents for change—and accordingly, themselves changeable" (3). Each essay—there are a dozen, originally delivered as papers at a conference at Harvard University in 2008—presents an in-depth case study of the problematics of a certain artwork or artifact, beginning with Karen Koehler's discussion of the school's neo-Primitivism, evident in the Gothic-inspired woodcut of the *Bauhaus Manifesto* designed by Lyonel Feininger, to T'ai Smith's fascinating story of how Bauhaus designers came to create a field of intellectual property to bolster their claims about understanding the essential nature of form.



Philipp Oswalt's *Bauhaus Conflicts, 1919–2009: Controversies and Counterparts*, in contrast, concerns itself with the tendentious political debates of the Weimar period that left the Bauhaus vulnerable to attacks from both Left and Right, and the contested legacy of the Bauhaus in subsequent progressive educational and artistic movements. The collection of fifteen essays features new research on the reception of the Bauhaus in the post–World War II period. For example, the imperative in Stalinist Russia toward "rigid anti-formalist" ornamentation, as described in Simone Hain's text, led to a schism in the Bauhaus revival *bauschule* in the Soviet-occupied zone in Germany that sadly parallels the censorious stance taken by Stalin authorities in the late 1920s against the Soviet school Vkhutemas, and against the former members of the by-then closed UNOVIS school. (Discussion of the frequently close relationship between the Bauhaus and Vkhutemas, an exchange initiated by the artist El Lissitzky's travels between the institutions, is sorely needed and finds hardly a mention in any of the recent texts.) *Bauhaus Conflicts* also elucidates, in a tantalizing essay by Jörn Etzold, the clash between the former Bauhaus student Max Bill, who founded one of a few "New Bauhauses"—the Hoschschule für Gestaltung in Ulm—in the name of what he called a "well-defined doctrine," and his interlocutor and gadfly Asger Jorn, who would soon found the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus. Their fascinating epistolary debate about the possibility of reinventing the Bauhaus in the postwar era hints at the twisted path by which the nascent Bauhaus-influenced movements, in this case the Situationist International, adopted and adapted the Bauhaus language of attention to the material constitution and perception of form, and reconsidered the determining effects of material forms on the experience of everyday life.

Of the many satellite monographs and thematic studies orbiting the larger Bauhaus exhibitions and publications, *Bauhaus Women* is notable for the amazing trove of testimonials and photographs Ulrike Müller has gathered: it sheds light on the pains and pleasures of the Bauhaus's uniquely large female student body and faculty population. Though technically the weaver Gunta Stölzl was the only female master appointed in the Bauhaus's fourteen-year history, her student Anni Albers provisionally headed the workshop after Stölzl's departure (the latter resigned when her interfaith marriage to a Jewish former Bauhaus student was protested by increasingly rabid anti-Semitic factions within and without the school); the interior designer Lilly Reich was appointed by Mies to the Bauhaus Master's Council in a controversial move that sadly tainted her credibility (they were having a romantic relationship); and Marianne Brandt was for a year and a half the acting metal workshop director, producing some of the Bauhaus's most enduring design objects as well as a compelling body of photomontages that she and Moholy-Nagy churned out in a giddy game of worm's eye/bird's eye perspective one-upsmanship.

In a macro sense, the spate of recent writing on the Bauhaus can't be explained merely by the conceit of a big nine-O anniversary. For years art and architectural historians have been looking for a way to rethink models for how form is taught to students and communicated in artworks, and to regroup after years of relativism in which the

criteria for evaluating the project of modernist innovation was deeply shaken. Above all, the Bauhaus was a program, or at least a series of competing programs, that offered students training in the observation of form and its creative rearticulation. It presented students with a persuasive sense of order and design as a means to think about form in an interdisciplinary fashion and to rework outmoded habits of production that lead to repetition and stagnation. The facile manner in which the Bauhaus was blamed for the evils of modernism, and often conflated with subsequent derisions of International Style architecture, has for too long eclipsed the diverse though contradictory influences of the school.

So along with the works, the pedagogy remains. The influence of the Bauhaus in the United States alone—at Black Mountain College (where Albers taught), at Harvard (Gropius) and Yale (Albers) universities, at the Institute of Design (Moholy-Nagy), and at the Illinois Institute for Technology (Mies)—is immense, but the rhetoric of experiment, the testing of its teachings, and the emphasis on process, not product, pushed the logic of variation toward a concern with the serialized mark that reaches far wider than those who directly experienced a Bauhaus training. The secondary reception of the Bauhaus in the mid-1960s has been relatively underanalyzed. The recovery by Minimalists of early twentieth-century formalisms foregrounded the mutability of perception at the level of color and proportion, and heightened concern about the contextualization of works by situating their seriality in relation to environments of display.[3] Albers's model of experimentation was revisited, by the artist-critic Donald Judd and particularly by the critic John Coplans, as a progenitor to serial practices as they shifted from explorations of sequentiality (works on consistent subjects, themes, or forms) to works based on systems.[4] Moholy-Nagy's concern with transparency and the ephemeralization of material into light also had a huge reception in the 1960s and 1970s, not merely in psychedelic light shows but in works by artists such as Robert Irwin and James Turrell.

Like many at the Bauhaus, artists today often employ a language of experimental testing and variation to understand how the visual appearance and material constitution of form represent the foundational elements of artistic practice. The notion of art as attentiveness to form, as a strategy of remaining aware of and possibly altering habits of perception, is a better "vision" of art that flags the ways in which the individual is sited in the larger field of social relations. Everything in the world has form, Bauhauslers claimed; training the eye in the composition of form is a precondition for understanding and possibly transforming the world. It seems crucial today to reconsider this idea of art as opening eyes wide to the phenomena of the world as a way to define which criteria are used to distinguish artistic practices from other types of visual or sensory experiences. Because of the potential of Bauhaus-era work and teachings to illuminate the fundamental (and often overlooked) elements of form, by demanding a close attention to viewers' own perceptual stimuli, it is incredibly generative for both artists and art historians today to become students of the Bauhaus once again.

1. Greenberg, "Review of Exhibitions of Adolph Gottlieb, Jackson Pollock, and Josef Albers" (1949), in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 2, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 286.
2. Gropius, quoted in Éva Forgács, *The Bauhaus Idea and Bauhaus Politics* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1991), 36, 74–75.
3. For example, speaking about an Albers work he owned, Donald Judd claimed, "The scheme of squares and the corresponding change of color provide changes in proportion, which is unusual in recent art, and which I am interested in in my own work." Judd, "Josef Albers" (1991), rep. *Josef Albers: Homage to Color*, exh. cat. (New York: Pace Wildenstein Gallery, 2003), 10.
4. See John Coplans, "Serial Imagery," *Artforum* 7, no. 2 (October 1968): 34–43. For a discussion of the import of this essay today, see Brian O'Doherty, "Critically Literate; Provocations: Writings by John Coplans," *Artforum*, February 1998, 11–12. For further reading on discussions of seriality in the 1960s, see Lawrence Alloway, "Systemic Painting," *Systemic Painting*, exh. cat. (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1966); and Mel Bochner, "Systemic," *Arts Magazine* 41, no. 1 (November 1966): 40; "Serial Art, Systems: Solipsism," *Arts Magazine* 41, no. 8 (Summer 1967): 39–43; and "The Serial Attitude," *Artforum* 6, no. 4 (December 1967): 73–77.

Eva Díaz is an assistant professor of contemporary art at Pratt Institute. She is currently revising her book on Black Mountain College, called *Chance and Design*, which focuses on rival methodologies of experimentation practiced by three key Black Mountain teachers in the late 1940s and early 1950s: Josef Albers, John Cage, and Buckminster Fuller. Her writing has appeared in magazines and journals such as *The Art Bulletin*, *Artforum*, *Art in America*, *Cabinet*, *Frieze*, and *Grey Room*.

Sheila Pepe
Craft Class

Elissa Auther. *String, Felt, Thread: The Hierarchy of Art and Craft in American Art.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009. 248 pp., 83 color ills. $29.95, paper

Glenn Adamson, ed. *The Craft Reader.* New York: Berg Publishers, 2009. 672 pp., 75 b/w ills. $39.95, paper

Glenn Adamson. *Thinking through Craft.* New York: Berg Publishers, 2007. 224 pp., 16 color ills., 44 b/w. $29.95, paper

By the time Rozsika Parker published *Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* in 1984, the following overtly feminist "stitched" works had already been made: Faith Wilding's *Womb Room*, 1972; Harmony Hammond's *Presence V*, also made in 1972; Faith Ringgold's *Zora and Fish*, 1975; and Judy Chicago's monumental *Dinner Party*, 1979—for which she employed extremely traditional fiber and ceramic craft techniques. Alongside these works and many others strategically soft and stitched, columns of political-art speech were woven into the discourse, most notably in the pages of the American magazine *Heresies* (issues number 3, *Lesbian Art and Artists*, 1977, and number 4, *Women's Traditional Arts—The Politics of Aesthetics*, 1978).

Parker's *Subversive Stitch* was the first and arguably the best-researched distinctly art-historical work addressing the social utility of the fiber crafts in a feminist context. Using precedents from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century, she successfully codified what her American sisters had been overtly accessing in a contemporary forum—the fact that the domestic crafts identified with women's work were at the very least undervalued as works of art, and were therefore appropriable for cultural and political use.

Parker took her interrogation one step further, however, through a close investigation of one traditional form in particular: embroidery. Within this narrow band, she traced the histories of various forms of stitching to demonstrate the employment of needlework in the "construction of femininity across classes."[1] In doing so, Parker iden-