Volume: Bauhaus Bodies

Deadline: May 15, 2016

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Call for Essays: Bauhaus Bodies

Coedited by Elizabeth Otto (State University of New York at Buffalo) and Patrick Rössler (Universität Erfurt)

The Bauhaus (1919-1933) is remembered on the one hand for its architecture, designs for mass production, and a commercialization of the avant-garde; on the other, it is associated with the fine art of painters like Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky. A closer look reveals that the Bauhaus was much more radical than either of these tendencies would suggest. While what remains are its objects (painting, sculpture, design, architecture, photography, and pedagogical materials), it was just as much the body—sexed and gendered—that was at the center of this experimental art school. Bauhaus Bodies will bring together new work by scholars to examine the multiple ways in which gender and sexuality fundamentally shaped life and work at this progressive art institution.
In the interwar Weimar Republic, Germany's first democracy, gender ideals and norms were shifting and hotly debated, and these debates were central to the Bauhaus. Walter Gropius conceptualized the school while serving as an officer on the front lines in World War I; when the Bauhaus opened in 1919, all of its students and teachers were, in various ways, survivors of that war and of the ongoing instability throughout Europe. The Weimar constitution enfranchised women for the first time, but it also left in place a number of laws that gravely restricted sexual freedoms through the criminalization of homosexuality, abortion, and even the distribution of information on contraception. Still, new frontiers were opening up in debates about gender and sex, as was powerfully manifested in institutions such as Magnus Hirschfeld's Institute for Sexual Science and the Berlin Psychoanalytic Institute. These tendencies were also clear at the Bauhaus, which regularly hosted speakers on topics including emerging understandings of sexuality, the unity of spirit and body, and the "social hygiene" reform movement. Metropolitan Berlin was also home to a thriving culture of gay, lesbian, and transgender (so-called "transvestite") clubs and political-action groups. The modern New Woman was a constant feature in films and the Illustrierten to be found in every café and home. Gender experimentation and anxieties permeated the Weimar Republic thoroughly, and they were fundamental to the Bauhaus's attempts to remake art and life.
We seek contributions that explore issues of gender and sexuality in relation to the Bauhaus and its artists. Essays may engage some of the following questions. What types of new masculinities and femininities are envisioned in the rich photographic archive of the Bauhaus's youthquake? How does abstract art or design produced at the Bauhaus project or challenge gender ideals? Given that female students were routinely streamed into the weaving workshop, how did Bauhaus artists negotiate traditionally gendered notions of medium? How are sexuality and gender significant for the work of the Bauhaus's best-known members, and how does broadening our view of

the Bauhaus to include more of the 1,200 students and teachers at the school over its fourteen years enable us to better understand its gender experimentation? Many Bauhaus members were converts to experimental religions and adherents of utopian ideals; how did these trouble or reaffirm traditional masculinities and femininities? Are other aspects of identity such as ethnicity, race, and class essential elements of work by Bauhaus members? How is the work of Bauhäusler illuminated by writings on masculinity and femininity by contemporaneous cultural theorists such as Walter Benjamin, Sigmund Freud, Magnus Hirschfeld, Siegfried Kracauer, or Joan Riviere? What do the lenses of more recent theories of gender and sexuality allow us to see retrospectively about the Bauhaus? With the Bauhaus's 1933 forced closure under National Socialism, did new ideas about gender and sexuality migrate around the world and into new institutions with the Bauhaus diaspora? How were they factors for Bauhäusler who stayed in Europe and became collaborators with, resistors to, or victims of the Nazi regime?

Proposals of up to 500 words accompanied by a one- to two-page CV should be submitted to the editors by May 15th, 2016: Dr. Elizabeth Otto (eotto@buffalo.edu) and Dr. Patrick Rössler (patrick-.roessler@uni-erfurt.de). Final essays (maximum of 7,000-8,000 words including footnotes) will be due Dec. 1, 2016. The language of the volume is English. Publication is timed to help shape discussions leading up to the 2019 centennial of the Bauhaus's founding.

Reference:

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<https://arthist.net/archive/12698>.