bauhaus mädels

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TASCHEN

introduction

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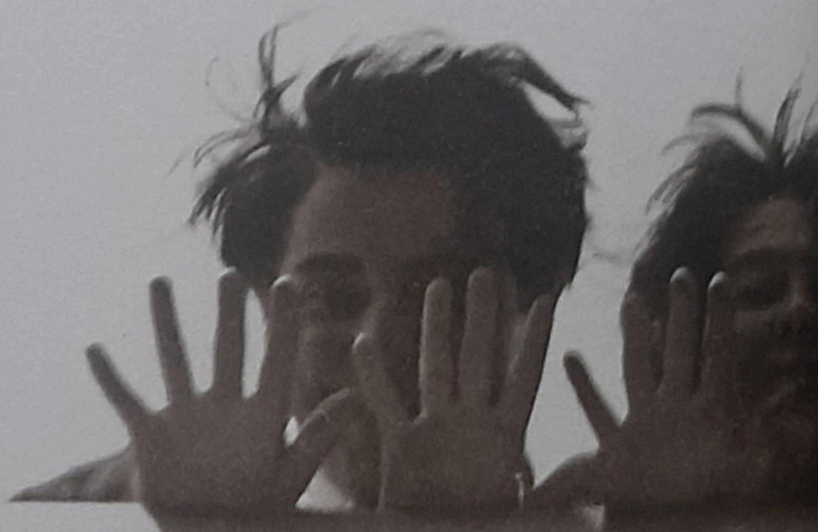


"The type of the Bauhaus gal.
The star among actresses.
She knows what she wants
and will also make a success of it."[1]

The German Reich at the start of January 1930: On a dry and mild night, millions are outside watching the New Year's fireworks and hoping for a better future. The repercussions of the recent New York stock market crash were already being felt: At the end of 1929, the number of Germans registered as unemployed stood at almost two million. Internal political conflicts were escalating. Just a few days into January 1930, SA *Sturmführer* Horst Wessel was shot in his Berlin apartment, and Wilhelm Frick, the National Socialist German Workers' Party politician, was sworn in as the first Nazi minister in the Thuringian cabinet. It was in such eventful times, therefore, that readers of the national conservative magazine *Die Woche* opened the first issue of the new year – and were greeted, to their surprise, by a cheerful blonde wearing a jaunty expression and a fashionable, short haircut.

"Mädchen wollen etwas lernen" (Girls want to learn something) runs the title of a three-page illustrated feature, and in the caption to the lead photograph, a new type of contemporary woman is proclaimed: The "Bauhausmädel" or "Bauhaus gal". A series of photos show "Bauhaus gals" at their activities: Painting and drawing, trying on theatre costumes, playing a ball game, solving geometry problems and playing the trombone. The students are not identified by name. Today we know that the photo at the top of the article shows Karla Grosch,[2] the Bauhaus sports teacher, while another picture shows, for example, the later architect Wera Meyer-Waldeck[3] on a landing in the Dessau Bauhaus stairwell, which the editor incorrectly describes in the caption as a drawing board (*Zeichentisch*).[4]

These empathetic and simultaneously provocative glimpses into the female side of the Bauhaus are credited to one "Lutz Feininger". The photographer was, in actual fact, 19-year-old T. Lux Feininger, the youngest son of Lyonel Feininger – one of the original Bauhaus masters – and the tireless photographic chronicler of life at the Bauhaus.[5] T. Lux Feininger obtained the commission for *Die Woche* via Dephot, a photographic agency for whom he had already worked for some time. The original scope of the shoot is unknown, but as Feininger later recalled, it was one of his few genuine commissions; usually he simply submitted a selection of pictures that the agency then offered to the illustrated press.[6] But Feininger evidently delivered his pictures without the accompanying text that photographers often supplied at that time, for the article that appears in *Die Woche*, at least, makes almost no reference to the Bauhaus in Dessau.

Unlike the pictures, the text was published anonymously. It is today no longer possible to clarify beyond doubt whether it sprang from the pen of a man or a woman.[7] The fact that no name was given supports the argument for a female author: Since contributions from women were disparaged by some readers in this epoch, it was common practice not to credit them. This practice, while we may not endorse it today, nevertheless served its purpose back then. If nothing else, it allowed viewpoints held by women to be represented in the public debate – viewpoints such as "Girls want to learn something", a piece about generational change and the "distance […] between the woman of today and the woman of yesterday, between the girl of then and the girl of now".[8]

Page 6 **Anonymous:** Bauhaus student in a mask from the Triadic Ballet, c. 1927

Gertrud Arndt: Otti Berger on an Atelierhaus balcony, Dessau, 1932

The discussion only turns specifically to the "Bauhaus gal" in the article's final paragraph, in which the young woman who studies and is educated is held up as the ideal of a new present. Casting off the bluestocking image of earlier decades, this modern type of female student "cultivates rather than neglects all the freshness and gentleness of femininity". In this context, the term "Bauhausmädel" has acquired – thus the anonymous writer – a "slogan-like meaning in the good sense"; it is considered a label for "a very particular kind of girl, whose talent seeks activation in the fine and applied arts". Overall, the article makes the case for young women socially and financially who are able to enter the workplace and earn their own livelihood, and who are thus no longer dependent on the goodwill of their husbands. In this respect, the "Bauhausmädel" as a modern role model stands for a fundamentally emancipatory attitude and, in its own day, was undoubtedly a term meant in a positive and appreciative sense. In this respect it is not to be confused with "Fräulein" (Miss), the commonly used form of address at this period, which was being emphatically rejected as a pejorative collective name by women's rights activists even at the turn of 1929/30.[9]

"Whoever wishes to find the woman of today must seek her in real life: In art, in science, in practical work, indeed, even in society."[10]

Even if the term "Bauhaus gal" – and more specifically, the German "Bauhausmädel" – appears on the surface to contain a grain of contempt from today's perspective, the case was entirely different in its own day. As has been shown elsewhere in a whole series of examples, chiefly from the areas of typography, design, the applied arts and architecture, the Bauhaus had acquired "brand" status over the course of the 1920s.[11] The Bauhaus name came to stand for the modern idiom of New Objectivity and for an often hazy avant-garde ethos.[12] It is in this sense that the neologism "Bauhausmädel" is to be understood: As an instantly recognizable label identifying the type of the self-confident modern woman within the young post-war generation, and granting her a certain form of recognition by a middle-class public and its media.[13]

The public had indeed already proclaimed in Article 109 of the 1919 Weimar Constitution that men and women were officially to be granted the same civil rights and duties. But this principle was never implemented in real life through corresponding legal reforms, so gender equality remained an illusion. The fact that in 1925, around 40 per cent of Germany's female population was nonetheless in paid employment merely marked the continuation of a trend in evidence since the turn of the century, and this was due both to the decimation of the male population during the First World War and the inflation-related evaporation of family savings that had made additional incomes necessary.[14]

The changing status of women was assisted, however, by the more flexible morals of the epoch and an altogether more liberal cultural and social climate, which led to the appreciable advance of the so-called "new woman" in a number of countries.[15] Various aspects of social revolution in the context of the women's movement converge in the figure of the "new woman", who enduringly shattered traditional gender roles – which translated into marked changes to the image of women during the Weimar Republic.[16] This "new" female type expressed a "New Objectivity habitus",[17] which – divorced from its original emancipatory contexts – "anchored itself as a typecast image in the public consciousness".[18] From today's vantage point, we can identify three key factors characterizing the new type: The above-mentioned female pursuit of employment, the re-definition of gender roles in mutual interaction and fashions such as the strikingly short haircut (the *Bubikopf*, or bob).[19]

Anonymous: Walter Gropius's Bauhaus building in Dessau. View of the Bauhaus building from the southwest, workshop wing, 1925/26

In concrete terms this condensed itself into the image of the "new woman" as a sexually self-determined being who takes charge of her life with self-confidence, and who not only advances into spheres formerly dominated by men but also practises sport, rides a motorbike or drives a car and smokes. Thus we can also undoubtedly consider Bauhaus members such as Marianne Brandt as representatives of the "new woman".[20] On the other hand, in as early as 1929, the Jewish advocate for women's rights Elsa Herrmann pointed out that "evidence of the bluntest rejection of the assimilation of the woman of our day to the man" could be also seen "in the plunging neckline, bare legs and the lavish use of powder and lipstick".[21] The "new woman" paid attention to her outer appearance even more than her forerunners – something that underlines the performative aspect of this concept.[22] Hairstyle and clothing (short skirts) possessed a particular symbolism in their dual function as maker and marker of the "new woman".[23]

This symbolism was spread primarily through general-interest media such as the illustrated press, whose pages were thereby regularly filled with pictures from the world of film and with portraits of the stars of the screen:[24] "The visual representation of the Weimar Republic is female."[25] On the basis of the visual codes employed by representations of women in the illustrated mass press of the 1920s and 1930s in Germany and Spain, and which also played an important role in the iconography of the film, Gozalbez Canto has correspondingly identified various prototypes of mass-media images of women.[26] They include the fun-loving, sporty, dance-crazy, pleasure-seeking, consumerist, American-style *Girl* (the flapper); the *Garçonne*, a masculinized, androgynous creature often attributed with a lesbian orientation;[27] the *Diva*, an enigmatic, erotically appealing female type and sensual seductress; and the shy, naïve, almost fragile *Child-woman*, who arouses men's protective instincts. The *Professional Woman*, lastly, stood for the achievement of career plans on an equal footing with men and, by embodying a

changed role model, appeared to be associated most closely with the original goals of the emancipation of women.[28] Overall, however, the phenomenon described above was only partly the result of actual social developments; rather, it was essentially constructed by media reporting of the day[29] – just as *Die Woche* lent a visual shape to the type of the "Bauhaus gal".

But who were these women at the Bauhaus? A single label can hardly be placed on more than 400 individuals and their stories. If we examine the cases of four women who attended the Bauhaus as students, it is evident that their biographies exhibit some commonalities as a result of their socialization at the art school. Yet, what these examples illustrate even more clearly perhaps are the many different paths that crossed for a limited time at the Bauhaus.

The Vienna-born Friedl Dicker, for instance, followed the freshly appointed Bauhaus master Johannes Itten to Weimar in 1919. Inspired by Paul Klee's lectures, she focused in particular on the relationship between the nature of art and childlike imagination. She made marionettes and became involved in Bauhaus theatre productions. In 1921, her long-term partner Franz Singer married the singer Emmy Heim. He nevertheless maintained a relationship with Dicker, who became pregnant by him several times, but terminated these pregnancies for Singer's sake. In their "Werkstätten Bildender Kunst" (Workshops for Visual Art) Dicker and Singer produced toys, jewellery, textiles and graphic designs. In 1925, the pair returned to Vienna, where they set up their own architectural office, chiefly designing practical furnishings. Dicker later turned her attention to teaching art and at the same time became an active member of the Communist Party for which she designed propaganda materials. After a term of imprisonment, she fled to Prague, where she married her cousin Pavel Brandeis and continued to be active in the left-wing underground. Friedl Dicker-Brandeis, as she now called herself, was Jewish and could have emigrated to Palestine since she had a visa, but she chose to remain in Europe with her husband. After her deportation to Theresienstadt, she looked after children in a girl's home, and later accompanied Pavel Brandeis on his rail transport to Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp, where she was murdered the day after her arrival.[30]

Anonymous: Students on the parapet of the canteen terrace, Dessau Bauhaus, 1931/32

Ricarda Schwerin, née Meltzer, who was a confirmed atheist, arrived at the Bauhaus in 1930 to study photography at the age of just 18. After a few semesters she was obliged to take a break for health reasons and was subsequently refused readmission: Like Dicker, a Communist sympathiser, she was banned from the Bauhaus and had to abandon her studies and leave without a diploma. She then moved to Frankfurt am Main with fellow Bauhaus student Heinz Schwerin. In 1935, the couple were married in Hungary where they were living in exile and later that same year, they emigrated to Palestine. Here they produced wooden toys with some success in their own workshop. In 1948, Heinz Schwerin died while serving in what was the forerunner of the Israeli Army. Ricarda Schwerin founded a private nursery for refugee children and subsequently worked for 20 years as a photographer in the Jerusalem studio of the German emigrant Alfred Bernheim, who became her partner. She died in Jerusalem at the age of 87.[31]

Margaret Camilla Leiteritz came from a Dresden-based family of artists and originally trained as a librarian before giving up her job in order to study, as of 1928, at the Bauhaus. She took a range of courses that primarily reflected her interest in painting, and obtained her diploma in 1931. She became famous when her entries were chosen among the winners in a competition for wallpaper designs open to all Bauhaus students. Although she proceeded to work on the development of the first Bauhaus wallpapers, and also completed an internship as a stage designer in Kassel, she subsequently resumed her career in librarianship at the Museum of Applied Arts in Dresden. After the Second World War, she moved to West Germany, where she worked until the end of her life, unmarried and childless, as a painter and librarian. In 1968, her artistic work was included in the 50th-anniversary Bauhaus exhibition in Stuttgart.[32]

By contrast, Margaretha Reichardt enjoyed modest celebrity status all her life. The same age as Leiteritz, she visited the 1923 Bauhaus exhibition on a class trip from neighbouring Erfurt and two years later became a student at the school in its new Dessau premises. She completed her training in 1931 with a diploma from the weaving workshop. In this latter she played a key role in developing *Eisengarn* (literally iron yarn), used in the upholstery of tubular steel furniture. As the result of an intrigue surrounding Gunta Stölzl, head of the weaving workshop, and her partner Walter Peterhans, the Council of Masters expelled Reichardt. After a stay in Holland, she returned to Germany in 1933. Here she set up a hand-weaving workshop in Erfurt, which she ran with the photographer Hans Wagner, her husband from 1936 to 1952. She was a member first of the Reich Chamber of Culture and later of the GDR Association of Fine Artists. Within this framework she received numerous awards for her work. Reichardt continued to teach students right up to the 1980s on original Bauhaus looms, which she had acquired when the textile workshop in Dessau was dissolved.[33]

> ***"No distinction between fair and strong sex.***
> ***Absolute equality, but also the same obligations.***
> ***No concessions to ladies; all craftspeople in our work.***
> ***I shall vehemently oppose any exclusive preoccupation***
> ***with nice little drawing room pieces as a pastime."***[34]

It was Shakespeare who said that "All that glitters is not gold". In the same way, the "Bauhaus gal" is a glittering term that only thinly veils what may be seen from today's perspective as the entirely problematic gender relations at the Bauhaus, in particular with regard to the balance of power between masters and students.

The Bauhaus has long been recognized as one of the most progressive art schools of the interwar period, not least due to the enormous concentration of artists delivering the curriculum. Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Oskar Schlemmer, Lyonel Feininger, László Moholy-Nagy and Gerhard Marcks were among those on the teaching staff and who contributed toward providing the students with an all-round education. The ultimate aim was "building" as an activity and "the building" as a complete structure. Architecture – undoubtedly owing to the interests of the director – was consequently considered the supreme discipline. But it was also possible to obtain journeyman's licences and diplomas in various workshops. Other authors have already discussed the philosophy of the Bauhaus, which oscillated between handicraft and industrial production, esotericism and functionalism, and applied art and free artistic expression.[35] All of these commentators agree that the institution and its achievements have exercised an enduring influence on Germany's cultural development and on Western industrial nations to this day.

Despite its progressive approach, female students at the Bauhaus had to put up with numerous disadvantages in comparison to their male counterparts. As Anja Baumhoff shows in detail in her landmark study *The Gendered World of the Bauhaus* (2001),[36] there existed various rules within the establishment that substantially limited women's opportunities for advancement and training. It is true that the inaugural programme proclaimed unequivocally, in the section on "Admission", that "Any person of good repute, without regard to age or sex, whose previous education is deemed adequate by the Council of Masters, will be admitted, as far as space permits" – a wording that reappears almost identically in Paragraph 3 of the first draft of the Bauhaus statutes, drawn up that same month, and in the officially authorized version published in 1921.[37] As the above quotation from his original notes makes clear, founding director Walter Gropius laid great emphasis on this aspect in his inaugural address to the students on 6 May 1919, insisting that students would enjoy identical rights and obligations and that no special concessions would be made for "ladies". These declarations of intent resulted in uncritical assessments of gender relations being reiterated with little variation for a long time at the Bauhaus.[38]

In reality, an analysis of the documents relating to the Weimar Bauhaus preserved in the Thuringian State Archives reveals power structures that were clearly male-dominated. Gropius's ideology followed traditions of medieval masons' lodges, which were based on a high degree of self-discipline[39] and demanded that individuals subordinated themselves entirely to the collective. In combination with the orientation towards guild and craftsmen systems, this resulted in a structural disadvantaging of female students since they were not expected to study in those fields traditionally pursued by men.[40] Baumhoff identifies a hidden agenda on the part of Gropius and the Council of Masters, to reduce the high number of female students – since this was thought to have the potential to harm the school's reputation – and to keep them away from more prestigious workshops. In one case, the director supposedly even stopped a female student from participating in the building of a house because he feared that the hostile local media would whip it up into a moral scandal.[41]

In 1920, therefore, a special women's class was introduced and it was soon amalgamated with the textile workshop. Although this female domain suited the intentions of the Bauhaus masters to reduce the proportion of women in the other workshops,[42] according to Gunta Stölzl, later head of the weaving workshop, the female students initiated it themselves. In 1931, she wrote in an article in the journal *Bauhaus*:

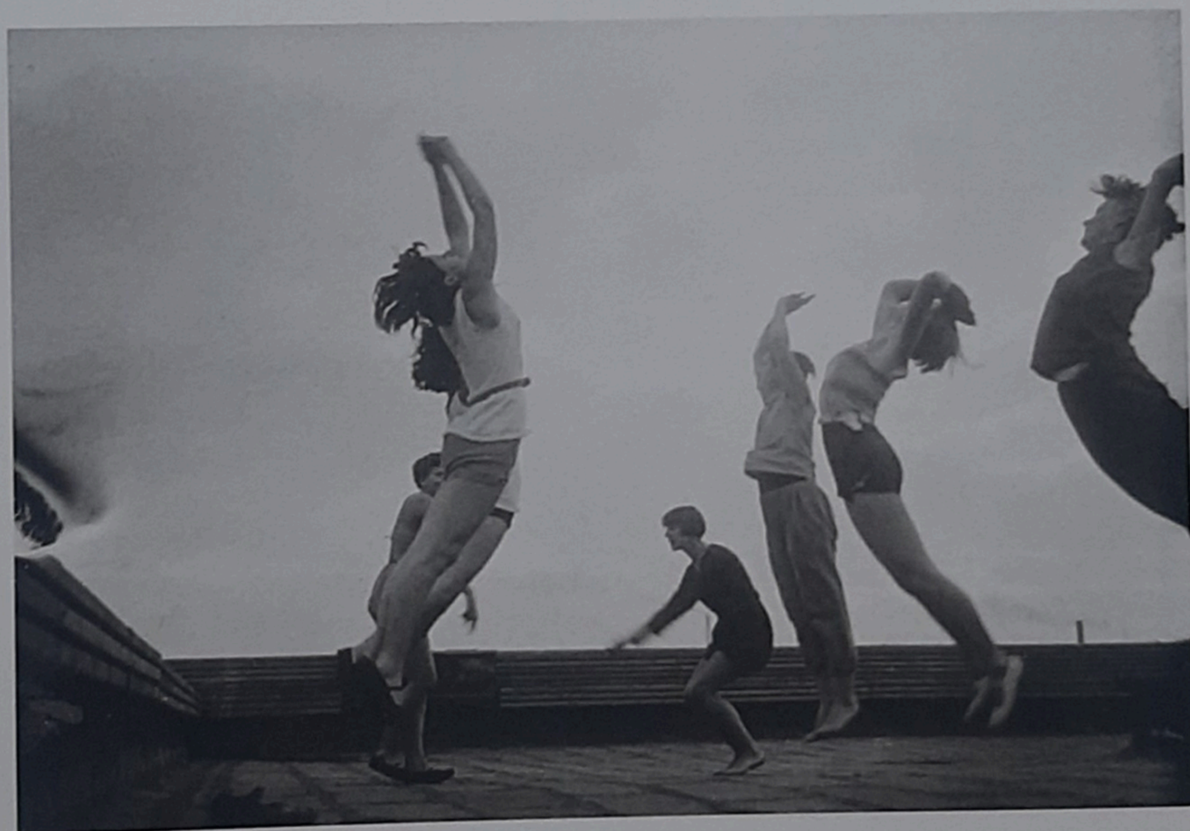
"Bauhaus gals in the early days tried their hand in every workshop: Carpentry, mural painting, metal workshop, pottery, book-binding. It soon emerged that, for some, the heavy plane, the hard metal, the painting of walls were not the activities that corresponded to their

mental and physical powers. The soul thereby remained hungry! It had to be craft! [...] We founded a women's class. [...] We searched with the new generation of Bauhaus painters through the swirling chaos of artistic values, full of enthusiasm for our activities, full of hope for our independent path."[43]

Working at the looms was subsequently considered first and foremost "the woman's area of work".[44] It kept female students away from the physically harder labour in the classic male professions, but at the same time, also from honing their artistic skills to perfection, which in Gropius's view was to be reserved for just a few gifted individuals.[45] This was compounded by the fact that the weaving course at the Bauhaus did not lead to a professional qualification since the Weimar Chamber of Trade did not have a weaving department, and so it could not hold journeyman examinations in this particular area.[46]

The Bauhaus thus confirms indications that the world of early modernism around 1900 offered a better environment for women artists than the later Weimar Republic.[47] On the basis of a whole series of case studies, Baumhoff ultimately comes to the conclusion that the Bauhaus was not progressive as a teaching institution with regard to gender relations because it upheld the conventional social values of its day, among other things via hierarchical internal structures rooted in "a web of paternalism, authority, power and gender differences".[48]

A systematic analysis of the data, that can only be compiled with difficulty, on the un-transparent group of female students at the Bauhaus[49] confirms the concentration of women within certain areas: Of the 462 who may be considered, in the broadest sense, as female students at the Bauhaus, 128 pursued their artistic training in the weaving workshop – over three times more than the next largest group of 36 female students who took the building theory course. On the other hand, if 27.7 per cent of female students thus attended the textile class dominated by women (as opposed to a total of just 13 men), this therefore means that almost three-quarters of the women were studying in other areas.



T. Lux Feininger: Physical education at the Dessau Bauhaus: Women's gymnastics on the roof of the Atelierhaus, 1930

To form a clearer picture, however, we need to look more closely at those women whom we would describe as "serious" students, that is to say those who spent three or more semesters at the Bauhaus. This group, whose members completed more than just the compulsory preliminary course (the famous *Vorkurs*) and would later shape the image of Bauhaus students, comprises 181 women, of whom 38 are also documented as obtaining a diploma; 84 of these female students (46.4 per cent) belonged to the weaving workshop. Almost half of all serious students thus trained in this workshop. This proportion increases to two thirds within the group of female students who obtained a diploma (26 out of 38 female students/68.4 per cent).

The picture is, however, not as clear-cut as it might appear at first sight. As Baumhoff herself points out, some women matched themselves successfully to the required male-oriented profile while others gratefully opted for the sheltered sphere of the female-dominated textile workshop, where they were unexposed to permanent competition with their male counterparts.[50] At the same time, the weaving workshop at the Bauhaus was a byword for the institute's modernist approach: Its textiles not only played a major role in interior design and provided photographers working in the vein of New Objectivity with striking material motifs but – thanks to the commercial appeal of their designs – the textiles also contributed significantly to the success of Bauhaus products in the Weimar Republic.[51] In other words, to reduce the weaving workshop as a means of primarily accommodating female students somewhere would be to disregard the innovative power of its textile production and hence also the achievements of the students concerned.

Moreover, although the number ratios at first sight seem clear, they cannot conceal the fact that, despite everything, there was a substantial proportion of women at the Bauhaus who oriented themselves to departments other than weaving. Twenty-six of the female students who spent three semesters and longer at the Bauhaus (and who thus represent the second largest group after the weavers) attended the building theory course and thus pursued the discipline ranked most highly at the Bauhaus (even though formal architectural training was only introduced in 1927). Female students were also represented in larger numbers in the printing workshop (20), the drawing class (18) and the mural-painting workshop (17) – and even the free painting class had 16 female participants. These numbers, when expressed as a percentage of the class total, are in each case lower than the overall proportion of female students at the Bauhaus (with the notable exception of the photography class: 14 female students/49 per cent). From today's perspective, female students thus appear underrepresented in the majority of classes and are almost entirely absent in certain "hard" workshops, such as stone sculpture (1). This does not mean, however, that these paths were fundamentally closed to female students; among the 181 serious female students, a full 170 are documented as having taken a workshop other than weaving for at least one semester, and in many cases for longer.

The discrepancy between the entirely justified criticism of the gender balance at the Bauhaus, which from today's perspective is by no means satisfactory (let alone equitable), and the decidedly less clear picture painted by the available data, can perhaps be explained by the periods under investigation. Baumhoff refers with her documents and analyses primarily to the Weimar Bauhaus up to 1925, not least because the volume of available information here is much greater. This is because the Bauhaus, as a state institution, had an obligation to keep records of its bureaucratic processes. Her observations only occasionally pertain to the Dessau Bauhaus where, for example, workshop access became easier, as Baumhoff concedes,[52] and whose epoch also saw a marked liberalization in the role of women in society.

Anonymous: Otti Berger (front) and Lis Beyer in a rowing boat on the Elbe, c. 1927

Indisputably, however, the opportunities to rise up through the ranks at the Bauhaus remained confined to men. Of the only six students ever given the chance to join the teaching body as young masters, five were men and just one a woman: Gunta Stölzl, who was placed in charge of the weaving workshop.[53] But her example[54] also illustrates the somewhat more conservative nature of the ambitions held by female members of the Bauhaus: For Stölzl, fulfilment lay, above all, in marriage and motherhood, and not primarily in the self-realization as an artist which, for the Bauhaus masters, seemed necessary to reach ultimate completeness.[55]

"Become the woman you are!"[56]

This advice, addressed to Lou Andreas-Salomé, an author and champion of female self-determination in the years around 1900, would probably have struck a chord with many female members of the Bauhaus. Although, as Baumhoff aptly concludes, there prevailed a sort of tolerance of female students at the Bauhaus that lay somewhere between the two poles of equal treatment and exclusion; for their part, the Bauhaus women saw themselves as emancipated and on a par with their male counterparts: "Many women nevertheless regarded the Bauhaus in a positive light, as being un-bourgeois and bohemian in essence [...] The revolt against outdated lifestyles [...] appealed to male and female students alike."[57] For even if they used different means, female modernist artists were fighting against the same patriarchal social order and the same laws of the fathers as the sons who were their colleagues.[58] Male and female students alike appreciated the atmosphere of change and the opportunity to express themselves in entirely new forms, as the Bauhaus potter and weaver Else Mögelin recalled.[59]

Anonymous: Bauhaus students seen from above (Lotte Rothschild, Mathilde Reindl and others), c. 1930

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Anonymous: Bauhaus students seen from above (Lotte Rothschild, Mathilde Reindl and others), c. 1930

Irena Blühová: Herbert Schürmann, Stella Steyn, Karl Klode, Fritz Tschaschnig and Irene Hoffmann sitting on the Bauhaus balustrade, c. 1930

The fact that the Bauhaus was understood right from the start not just as a place of learning but also as a community is clearly documented in the very first programme of 1919, which talks about the "encouragement of friendly relations between masters and students outside work" and the "establishment of a cheerful ceremonial at these gatherings".[60] The flourishing culture of festivals and celebrations in daily Bauhaus life is well documented[61] as are the thoroughly liberal morals prevailing at the co-educational institute, as was occasionally reported in the local press.[62] The Bauhaus was also successful as a marriage market: One quarter of all female students – and indeed one third of those who studied for three semesters and more or obtained a diploma – met their future husband at the Bauhaus.[63] Against this backdrop, the Bauhaus represented a life-changing choice for its female students; and entry into what was the most modern art school of the day went hand in hand with breaking many social conventions. Similar to the women pejoratively known as the "Malweiber von Paris",[64] who had outraged the society a generation earlier by going to Paris to train as artists (German academies did not usually accept women), the female students of the Bauhaus represented an expression of emancipation, by the very fact of leaving the parental home and embarking on an independent life – often against the wishes of their families, who saw the Bauhaus either as a breeding-ground for socialism or as an immoral community of bohemians.

Contemporaries perceived the Bauhaus as a learning and living environment that offered relatively broad development opportunities and intellectual and artistic inspiration, and which was also characterized significantly by a spirit of independence and an uncomplicated relationship between the sexes. The Bauhaus and its members presented themselves to the outside

world as a sworn fellowship – a united group whose ideas the female students were also in solidarity with and were determined to be part of at all costs.[65] The Hungarian Etel Mittag-Fodor, a student in the advertising and photography class at the Dessau Bauhaus, speaks therefore of the "great loyalty among the students in general" and at the same time of "the suspicion with which we were regarded by the mostly philistine townspeople."[66]

Werner David Feist, assistant to the head of the photography class Walter Peterhans, describes in his memoirs, for example, the rebellion by middle-class youth against the conventions of their parents. His views on his female co-students at the Dessau Bauhaus, on the other hand, are less flattering and unacceptably generalizing: Alongside "talented and highly motivated women, there were others who considered being there more a matter of vogue. The Bauhaus, being considered as eccentric, had snob appeal for a few. There was, for instance, a mature lady of great worldly charm, Grit Kallin, for whom attendance at the Bauhaus and meeting its famous stars probably meant an additional shade of sophistication. [...] There were several young girls from well-to-do families."[67] It may be misleading, therefore, to speak in blanket terms of "the" women at the Bauhaus: Like their male colleagues, they differed in terms of their background, their political leanings and their personal ambitions. And hence the "type of the Bauhaus gal", too, describes just one type of woman at the Bauhaus.

"The new woman is therefore no artificially conjured phenomenon, consciously conceived in opposition to an existing system; rather, she is organically bound up with the economic and cultural development of the last few decades."[68]

The social upheavals of the Weimar Republic, which gave rise to the myth of the Golden Twenties, encompassed all areas of cultural life – from literature, theatre and film to entertainment venues and sports centres.[69] Although this phenomenon flourished primarily in Germany's metropolises and in the capital of Berlin in particular, and was little felt in the province of Saxony-Anhalt, for example, the unbridled lifestyle reigning in cabarets and nightclubs seemed omnipresent in the media.[70] At the same time, in the context of the back-to-nature *Lebensreform* movement, a discourse developed on sexual promiscuity, which was seen as a characteristic of the "new woman".[71] Were it not for this broader social climate, the permissive lifestyle at the Bauhaus could not have existed – a lifestyle whose reception contributed in turn to the public perception of the Weimar school, as the above-mentioned article on the "Bauhausmädels" in *Die Woche* testifies.

With its portrait of a thoroughly emancipated woman, to whom none of the superficiality of American-influenced "girl culture" is attached,[72] this article nevertheless counters the stereotypes propagated by the illustrated popular press that promoted images of the "new woman" in its feature articles, portraits of celebrities and not least, adverts.[73] The "Bauhaus gal" was a "new woman" in the best sense, namely, *not* reduced to outward appearances and short-lived pleasures, but intellectually demanding and artistically creative, curious, positive and taking her destiny into her own hands. Yet, these very characteristics caused a split in the way she was perceived by others, since "it was difficult" – not just at the Bauhaus – "to appear to be an attractive 'feminine' woman while possessing the powerful, daring personality that seemed to characterize a painter".[74]

This superficial contradiction, according to which an appealing appearance would be detrimental to a woman's recognition as a serious artist, did not escape female contemporaries of the day. The Berlin journalist Gabriele Tergit described, in particularly trenchant fashion, the

understandable desire by those who were "industrious" to belong to those who were "pretty": "The new girl, the young woman of today, has grown up in uncertain times; in times in which the most basic necessities were called into question. She knows what life is like and she is prepared to work every day; every day, should her husband or her father's income fall, to leave the apartment and to work in order to support him [...] But she needs and wants to look nice. There is nothing coquettish nowadays about looking pretty, about wearing 'make-up,' as the Americans say [...]; it's not done to find a rich husband as in earlier years. Instead, silk stockings and crimped hair have become weapons in life's battle.

Things are always easier for pretty and well-groomed girls. The pretty girl sells more; the boss prefers to dictate to the pretty girl; people prefer to be taught by or order a hat from a pretty girl. It's awful, but that's the way it is. Nowadays though, if you're not pretty, you can become so. And when [a girl] feels she looks pretty, her self-confidence is boosted and she is better equipped to bear the weight of life."[75]

The attractive looks of many a female Bauhaus student certainly caught the eye, as Werner David Feist recalled: "By far the most striking beauty in this semester was Ivana Tomljenović, who also hardly matched her stunning and refined appearance by the achievements of her mind and hands."[76]

"Even at the reformist-oriented Bauhaus, glamour was not scorned."[77]

The visual narrative of the following section is focused on photographic (self-) portraits of female Bauhaus members, reflecting the above observation that "glamour was not scorned" at

Erich Consemüller: Ruth Hollós (right) and Katt Both in Nida (Lithuania), undated

the Bauhaus. The cover of the Communist *AIZ*, an illustrated magazine aimed at working female voters, uses visual confrontation (a stylistic device typical of the *AIZ*) to spotlight the two opposite poles of women's lifestyles during this epoch: The careworn, child-rearing, proletarian woman, and the glamorous film diva. Even if many female Bauhaus students, on account of their own background and political stance, may have sympathized more closely with the penniless female worker, they (or the photographer) often obeyed the entirely human desire to portray themselves (or their subject) in photos to the best possible advantage.[78] It is no coincidence that the caption beneath the photograph introducing the article in *Die Woche* refers to the "Bauhaus gal" as "the star among actresses". The glamour and portrait photography of the film industry[79] is copied here, publicized via countless illustrated magazines and likewise in the posters for films, the audiences of which also included women at the Bauhaus[80]. Nevertheless, most of the portraits of "Bauhaus gals" assembled here differ clearly from the carefully composed, atmospherically lit and technically flawless photographs taken in the famous studios on Berlin's Kurfürstendamm: The Bauhaus women in these often spontaneous snapshots are not – contrary to the reading in *Die Woche* – objectified as media icons (as in the case of film actresses) or in their role as models for the leading fashion houses of the day.[81]

The portraits in the following pages illustrate the "type of the Bauhaus gal" in its many different facets. The selection concentrates – for reasons of historical correctness – on pictures dating from the period corresponding with the existence of the Bauhaus as an institution (even if the photographs themselves were not necessarily taken at or inside the Bauhaus). The modernity of this type of woman in her own day emerges clearly from these motifs, which have not lost their fresh and lively appearance and need not fear the gaze of today's viewer. It may initially seem odd that the two classic criteria one might expect to see applied to this selection play, in fact, almost no role. Missing firstly are the well-known experimental photos produced at the Bauhaus, since the sole deciding factor in the present context is the motif – and not the photographer. For the visual narrative of the "Bauhaus gal", preference has been given to the hitherto, little-known portrait photographs from archives around the world. In the majority of cases, therefore, we are not looking at works that might be classed as artistic photographs, but as utilitarian artefacts, whether as stock images – familiar in the illustrated press and common in journalism, advertising and fashion, or as personal souvenirs. For as has already been stated quite categorically elsewhere, "although photography of the avant-garde revolutionized visual forms of design and perception, it did not question traditional modes of gender representation […] Instead, avant-garde photography only reinforced the object status of the female body through its new creative means, which emphasized the cropped view and material properties."[82] But despite the liberal moral attitudes at the Bauhaus, there are almost no nudes among these photographs, even though nude images were widely reproduced in the magazines of these years and were broadly tolerated.[83]

In this selection, secondly, the questions of which works these "Bauhaus gals" produced, whether they later achieved success as artists, architects, graphic designers or craftswomen, or how they themselves viewed their time at the Bauhaus are intended to remain secondary. This should by no means be interpreted as an expression of disregard for our protagonists – a look at these remarkable women, who are regularly the focus of exhibitions and publications, reveals the creativity and the outstanding quality of many of their works.[84] The perspective adopted here, however, is neither biographical nor work-oriented; rather, it focuses on visual types that convey the positive attitude to life developed and embodied by a generation of young, adventurous and innovative women from different countries, who always fluctuated between staging and authenticity. This perspective shows the "Bauhaus gal" as a variety of the "new woman" of the 1920s, one who became a role model for her own generation and represented

Photo of Karla Grosch (right) published two months after her death in *Das Leben*, vol. 10, no. 12, June 1933

the Bauhaus (among other things) in its social significance as a place of artistic and personal development opportunities for young women. This reputation preceded the Bauhaus and probably inspired young women around the world to apply to the famous art school.

The "Bauhaus gal" naturally does not stand typologically for all women at the Bauhaus or working in its sphere. And as already stated at the beginning: From today's standpoint, the German term from which this book takes its title – *Bauhausmädels* – may at first sight appear derogatory and unworthy of these young women, many of whom later became professional artists and architects. But this is a retrospective, 21st-century viewpoint: First of all, it summarily understands "Mädel" (girl or maiden) as a belittling term, possibly even tinged with sexism in the sense of complementary gender differentiation,[85] and secondly, it is coloured by the word's career under the Nazi regime. Through names and organizations such as the *Bund deutscher Mädel* (League of German Girls), with its *Jungmädel* (Young Girls) section, "Mädel" acquired a negative connotation[86] that led to its inclusion in the first 1957 edition of *Aus dem Wörterbuch des Unmenschen* (From the Dictionary of a Monster).[87] However, since many female Bauhaus members suffered repressive measures and persecution after 1933, went into exile or were even deported, such a viewpoint seems too simplistic.[88]

Linguistics experts stress that, in particular, when it comes to terms that were in use before they were usurped by the Nazis, it is crucial to situate them in their respective context.[89] In the case of "Mädel", this context is the historical language of the 1920s, which the article "Junge Mädchen wollen etwas lernen" reflects and in which "Bauhausmädel" is used as the appreciative, affirming and reinforcing term for a positive facet of youth culture. "She knows what she wants and will also make a success of it." Intended almost as a compliment, even back then, the term "Bauhausmädel" – here always written in quotation marks as a historical citation – expresses a silent admiration for these young women, who courageously stepped off well-trodden social paths and walked away from their usual destinies as housewives, shop

girls and shorthand typists to embrace a different, creative future. With her novel *Blaupause* (Blueprint), Theresia Enzensberger recently created a literary monument to exactly this brave new departure, in which the character Luise Schilling (fictional, but inspired by real Bauhaus biographies), the daughter of an industrialist, goes against bourgeois conventions and decides to study at the "oh so disreputable" Bauhaus: "[My father] had always been sceptical about my enthusiasm for architecture and would rather be damned than tell me about a university where you can learn something other than how to become a good housewife. I secretly sent off my application. When the acceptance letter arrived, it took some persuasion and the complicity of my mother for him to let me come."[90] Later, while getting ready for her first Lantern Festival, Luise is also struck by the ambivalence in the appearance of a "Bauhausmädel": "After putting on my make-up, I take a long look at myself in the mirror. The person looking back at me seems like a stranger, but also pretty and girlish."[91] And in the present homage, too, the intention is at no point to demean grown women with a historically introduced term, for in their own day the female students at the Bauhaus were, indeed, still "Bauhaus gals".

Epilogue 1

In May 1933, Karla Grosch, the dynamic cover girl for the "Bauhausmädel" article, suffered a cardiac arrest while swimming at the beach in Tel Aviv, where she had emigrated after the Fascists seized power. The following month, almost as if in an unintentional visual obituary, the magazine *Das Leben* (Life!) reproduced a photograph of her making an athletic leap as part of a double-page montage[92] – albeit without any reference to the recently deceased "Bauhausmädel".

Epilogue 2

In December 1937, the popular magazine *Fürs Haus* showed young women at their studies under the heading "Mädels von der Fotoschule" (Girls from the photography school). The series of photographs was taken in the photography class given at Berlin's Lette Verein, an association founded in 1866 with the aim of teaching women skills that would enable them to earn their own livelihood.[93] In the tightly controlled media of Nazi Germany, too, the subject of girls getting a practical training had evidently lost none of its topicality.

Anonymous: Margot Loewe on the roof, undated

Pages 26/27 **T. Lux Feininger:** Physical education at the Dessau Bauhaus: Women's gymnastics on the roof of the Atelierhaus, 1930