

# Language Elements and Subject Integration

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## Abstract

**This paper develops understanding of the role of the „language of art“, as it was conceived in the classical artistic moderna and it thematises the "language of science", as it was discussed in the same time period. We investigate the classical modernistic Bauhausian conception of utilizing the art language in creating a „total artwork“, and show how this idea was intertwined with the discussions about the unity of sciences held in the Vienna Circle of Logical Empiricism. We focus on the notion of elements of language of art or science and show the differences in how it was conceived by individual artists and scientists. We refer to some cases of documented professional interactions of Bauhaus teachers with a few members of the Vienna Circle of Logical Empiricism to show how the discussions between them pathed the way to today’s research methods in the humanities and in pedagogical research and we point out the importance of this discussion for developing an influential educational approach to Arts Education. We also trace the impact of this approach on todays Visual Arts Educations state curriculum in the Czech Republic. Reflecting the above mentioned issues, we explain how integrating Visual Art’s Education with another subject through teaching its “language” can either**

**potentiate or dismiss the ability of students to develop their original understanding both in the field of the artistic or scientific original thinking. We explain why teachers should reflect on the conception and role of the language of art or science and its elements.**

## **Keywords**

**Language elements, Bauhaus, Vienna Circle of Logical Empiricism, Visual Arts education, Subject integration.**

In 2019 we will commemorate the centenary of the founding of the arts and design school Bauhaus. It was founded by Avant-guard artists with the ambition to reform artistic education. They claimed it was important to formulate a new role for art and artists in the rapidly changing world. This school have had an enormous impact on world architecture, art and design. It is generally accepted in the educational discourse that Bauhaus has brought in a new paradigm by refusing the old discourse of the Academy of Arts, stressing the ethos of artistic experimentation and individual creativity (Laven, 2006).

## **Elemental language and unification of an artwork in a Gesamtkunstwerk**

A hundred years after Hegel's Aesthetics has been first published, the first director of Bauhaus, architect Walter Gropius has asked artists, among them Paul Klee, Vasily Kandinsky, Johannes Itten, Oskar Schlemmer, to become teachers in a new-founded school. Its programme is framed with an image of a cathedral by Lyonel Feininger. Gropius states that "The ultimate, if distant, goal of the Bauhaus is the collective work of art – the Building – in which no barriers exist between the structural and the decorative arts (Harrison, Wood 2003: 311), a composition in which there will be no difference between the monumental and decorative art "Together let us

desire, conceive, and create the new structure of the future, which will embrace architecture and sculpture and painting in one unity and which will one day rise toward heaven from the hands of a million workers like the crystal symbol of a new faith.“ (Gropius, 1919) Hegel also uses the motive of a cathedral: “what the particular arts realise in individual works of art is, according to the Concept of art, only the universal forms of the self-unfolding Idea of beauty. It is as the external actualisation of this Idea that the wide Pantheon of art is rising. Its architect and builder is the self-comprehending spirit of beauty, but to complete it will need the history of the world in its development through thousands of years.” (Hegel 2010, vol. I, p. 90). As we can see above, both Hegel and Gropius mentions a magnificent building unifying individual arts. Though we do not have any evidence that Bauhaus teachers have read Hegel’s Aesthetics, we can use his text for framing some standpoints held in Bauhaus as some display a significant concord with it. Also, it seems obvious that some of them have read texts that reinterpret Hegel’s thoughts (such as R. Steiner or K. Marx). This inquiry will help us theorize parts of the Bauhaus tradition which has strongly reflected in Czech Visual Arts Education.

We have already mentioned the theme of unifying “the Building” in Bauhaus; let us now notice some general characteristics of architecture in the text of Aesthetics. It says that: „the spiritual meaning does not reside exclusively in the building . . . but in the fact that this meaning has already attained its existence in freedom outside architecture. This existence may be of two kinds, namely whenever another more far-reaching art and, in the strictly classical sphere, sculpture especially, gives shape to this meaning and presents it independently, or when man contains in himself and gives practical proof of this meaning in a living way in his immediate actual life.“ (Hegel 2010, vol. II, p. 661) The first scenario mentioned here says that architecture is supposed to incorporate other „far-reaching art,“ to formulate its purpose. We can identify a standpoint corresponding to this quote in diary notes of O. Schlemmer from the first stage of Bauhaus in Weimar: “The proper function of mural painting is to give appropriate form to some

important theme ... I emphatically do not want to paint up houses. I emphatically do not want to build houses, except for an ideal one derived from my own pictures in so far as they have expressly anticipated it” (Harrison and Wood, 2003, p. 307). Let us discuss in the way, how this “anticipation” was conceived at the beginning stage of Bauhaus. What is rather popular concerning theorising in Bauhaus, is the convention about the elements of artistic language - three geometrical shapes and three primary colours attributed to them. There are interesting records on how this attribution has been done and agreed on, but before that of course, the three elemental shapes must have been chosen and this choice is a point of interest for us. ... What ... dominates in architecture is the straight line, the right angle, the circle, similarity in pillars, windows, (Hegel 2010, vol. I, p. 248)... „a truly architectural style“ - we read in Aesthetics - “is void of the organic forms” (Hegel 2010, vol. II, p. 659). While architecture is driven by principles of inorganic and geometrical, and as the Bauhaus teachers have chosen a triangle, a square and a circle as the basic elements of the „languages of art“ they have chosen them from the field of architecture, so that the desired “Building” would be integrated through architectural vocabulary.

We have quoted above the argument that Hegel rises: the way for architecture, apart from unifying with other arts, is to make obvious its purpose, through concrete lives of people using it. While unifying architecture with other arts is typical for that part of Bauhaus tradition, which has - to various degrees in individual cases - accepted the architectonically conceived language elements, its later part, represented by Hannes Meyer, was a way directly and explicitly contradictory to it. If we consider the framework of Aesthetics, we can formulate some arguments supporting Meyer’s abandonment of the language elements as the principle of unification of an artwork. Clearly, overstating the importance of the elemental architectural aesthetics entangles some risks, bringing the author close to “manner”. The Aesthetics discusses the “manner” as employing of what is special accidental into an artwork: “For manner concerns the particular

and therefore accidental idiosyncrasies of the artist, and these, instead of the topic itself and its ideal representation, come out and assert themselves in the production of the work of art” (Hegel 2010, vol. I, p. 291). This can stand in a way of unifying “the Building”. Gropius seems to have come close to “manner”: his design of cabriolet for the Adler Company used the architectonic aesthetics of the language elements (a cube as a cabin) at a remarkable expense of aerodynamics of the car (Asendorf, 2013, p. 83). He has clearly overstated the universality of architectural elements, here specifically a cube, which he considered an ideal architectural space for living.

Style “manner” in the sense used by Aesthetics has probably been discussed in Bauhaus. Indirect evidence can be found in a piece of Kandinsky’s text which, says that all the elements must be subjected to composition, otherwise the external elements can dominate the inner ones, which will result in manner (Kandinský, 2000, p. 46). Meyer was altogether critical of integrating various arts in an architectural whole. He would refuse all aesthetical arguments. For Meyer, a building was a result of scientific knowledge and was fully calculable (Galison, 1990, p. 740). The background of Aesthetics is in our opinion highly relevant to this approach. Let us now again consider the above mentioned quotation suggesting two ways for architecture to attain a “spiritual meaning”: first, through incorporating another, a “more far-reaching” art, which we know, is not Meyer’s choice, and, secondly, through immediate “actual life of a man” (Hegel 2010, vol. II, p. 661). The second way is Meyer’s choice. The project of Assembly of Nations, as suggested by Meyer, was meant to make any “labyrinthine” lobbying impossible. Meyer advocated open glass spaces for “public negotiation of honest man” (Gartman, 2009, p. 90). It is not too much of an overstatement to say, that the ideal towards which Meyer was aiming was to make any immoral behaviour impossible through the virtue of a transparent architectural construction. Using the wording of Aesthetics, the “immediate actual life” of people operating in the building would then give this architecture a “spiritual meaning” without

its integrating any “far-reaching art”. This raises many critical questions. Also, the attempt to exclude “manner” from architecture can be matter of discussion, considering the distinctive design of Mayer’s architectural work.

After we have done this consideration on the language of art, let’s ask questions about reflections of these issues in education: Has a “manner” excessively occurred in Visual Arts Education in the second half of the past century? Have there been tendencies to overstate elemental aesthetics? Has it been mentioned and theorised as “manner”? Was there an excessive focus on the language elements in curricula? Did the transparent construction occur in school buildings? If so, what effects on the situation in schools can we describe?<sup>1</sup>

As mentioned above, we have considered the role of the elements in relation to creating and unifying “the Building”. In the following text, we will consider what role did the language elements have in educating Bauhaus students. We read that “The ignorant man is not free, because what confronts him is an alien world, something outside him and in the offing, on which he depends, without his having made this foreign world for himself and therefore without being at home in it by himself as in something his own. The impulse of curiosity, the pressure for knowledge, from the lowest level up to the highest rung of philosophical insight arises only from the struggle to cancel this situation of un-freedom and to make the world one’s own in one’s ideas and thought.” (Hegel 2010, vol. I, p. 98) Gropius argues for the importance of autonomous work which is important not only for the construction of the total artwork, but also the workers’ (craftsmen’s or artists’) knowing of theory which enables them to understand the piece which they are co-creating (Gropius, 1923, p. 312, 313). A part of this autonomy is the ability to consciously use the elements of expression, their composition and media. O. Schlemmer adds a focus on reflected experience which only, in his words, enables us to formulate the creative principles: “First, we must allow ourselves to be astonished by the marvel of proportion, by the

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<sup>1</sup>This issue is treated in detail in a text *Diskurs umění a vzdělávání* by Marie Fulková.

splendour of arithmetical ratios and numerical correspondences, and construct the principles we need from the results of such enquiries.“ (Harrison and Wood, 2003, p. 308).” The Aesthetics positions art as a specific kind of knowing: “. . . the artist has to create out of the abundance of life and not out of the abundance of abstract generalities, since, while the medium of philosophy’s production is thought, art’s is actual external configurations. Therefore the artist must live and become at home in this medium. He must have seen much, heard much, and retained much.” (Hegel, 2010, vol. I, p. 281). As for the education in the later stage of Bauhaus, Meyer believed authors of the new “Gesamtkunstwerks,” architects, should be universally educated scientists, not artists and he was considering himself a scientific Marxist. This was reflected in number of lectures on philosophy, sociology and Marx-Leninism during his directorate on Bauhaus (Kieren in Fiedler and Feierabend, 213, p. 213).

Our question is, if in Visual Arts Education, we do conceive the above mentioned experiencing of elements as a prerequisite for understanding them, if we share the approach that they are a necessary requisite in striving for autonomous work. Does it frequently happen in elementary education that experiencing the elements of colours and shapes is the very aim, the last thing the students are supposed to do with them?

## **The language of arts and the language of science**

We have thematised the elements of art language and now we will briefly proceed to their counterpart in sciences.

Discussing the language of art was not a void of wider context. While there was a discussion about “the language of art” at Bauhaus, an analogical issue was being discussed in the Viennese Circle of Logical Empiricism. There is a history of interactions between Bauhaus and the Viennese Circle concerning the specialised languages of scientific disciplines (Potochnik, 2006). During this process, some of the Bauhaus teachers were involved in a continual dia-

logue with several theoreticians of the Viennese Circle. This discourse, in our opinion, needs to be theorised for Art Education to obtain a deeper understanding of the elemental vocabulary in Bauhaus. It is interesting, that Otto Neurath (a member of the Viennese Circle), who was aesthetically impressed with Meyer's vision of transparent, glass architectonic construction, has never accepted analogical transparency for his own scientific work. Neurath coined a term "middle-sized objects" as neither elemental - highly abstract, nor exquisitely subjectively defined notions, which he suggested to use for, as he emphasized, the rather limited integration of discourse of particular sciences. This term was congenial with O. Schlemmer's thinking. Schlemmer opposed the extremes of the slavishly descriptive artistic production of Academies of Fine Arts and, on the other side, the pure artistic abstraction of some of his colleagues from Bauhaus. He asserted the priority of - as he called it - "middle ground". Both the authors have conceived the elemental in arts and sciences so as these would not be speculative and would respect that both art and research are cases of social practice. We can find a different conception in the work of another member of the Viennese Circle, R. Carnap. He speaks about an architectonically conceived system of science that has its „Grundelemente“. He talks about a scientific work as a "rigorous, systematically planned building." (Galison, 1990). It is interesting, that Carnap's "Logical Construction of the World" has been reflected by a frequentist of lectures at the Viennese Circle, N. Goodman whose text, obviously influenced by Carnap's thinking – we mean Goodman's "Languages of Art" - is an influential text of Arts Education of the past decades in the Czech Republic, also for Goodman's acknowledging of art's epistemological equality to science and philosophy in "worldmaking" (Goodman, 1968). This is in concord with above quoted paragraph from Aesthetics, emphasising that art is a mode of knowing.

The formulation of the "Grounded Theory," which has emerged at a seemingly unrelated place many decades after both the Viennese Circle and Bauhaus have ceased to exist, seems to be related to above mentioned discussions. Interestingly, there are some traceable personal



links between members of the Viennese Circle and the authors of the Grounded Theory (namely the link from Paul Lazarsfeld to Anselm Glaser and Barney Strauss). There also seems to be tangible parallels between the formulation of the Grounded Theory and principles of the creative process that have been formulated in Bauhaus. In Art Education's theory, the Grounded Theory has been used as a research method for decades and has thus indirectly influenced the current state of knowledge in it. The text of "The Discovery of Grounded Theory" by Glaser and Strauss (1965) uses the expression "grounding" as a metaphor drawn from grounding a house, and the whole formulation of the theory is strongly architectonic. It shows analogies with the Bauhaus conception of "Gesamtkunstwerk" as well as in the thinking of some members of the Viennese Circle (including both O. Neurath and R. Carnap). It is not possible to go into detail here; we treat the subject elsewhere (Kafková, 2012).

Let us now ask a question, if the artistic mode of knowing is used in subject integration in schools. When it comes to integration, how do we formulate the elements of individual scientific languages to make them suitable for being used in Arts Education? Could the elemental expressions from, for example natural sciences, be better understood through its conceiving also through Arts Education's practices?

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