

# BOOKS

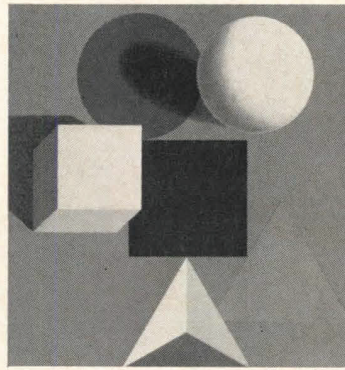
**HERBERT BAYER: VISUAL COMMUNICATION, ARCHITECTURE, PAINTING.** Published by Reinhold Book Division, New York, N. Y.; Studio Vista Ltd., London. 211 pp. 11 by 9 in. Illustrated. \$18.50.

**50 YEARS BAUHAUS.** Published for the exhibition by the Wuerttemberg Arts Association, Stuttgart. 370 pp. 8½ by 8½ in. Illustrated.

REVIEWED BY ROBIN BOYD

There is plenty of architectural precedent for it, but, even so, it is not an act of especially deep humility to produce a book enshrining one's life's works, major and minor, real and projected, interlaced with samples of the verbal pearls one has dropped along the way. However, within the genre, Herbert Bayer—ex-Bauhaus man and resident sage of Aspen, Colorado—has produced *Herbert Bayer* with consistent modesty. The book is a review of his works from Bauhaus days on, and a certain air of humble resignation is detectable even in a remark on the jacket flap: "The material for this book has been assembled by Herbert Bayer with the hope that it will have meaning for the younger generation."

What on earth does the younger generation make of the Bauhaus? This year a massive exhibition, marking the 50th anniversary of its founding by Gropius at Weimar in 1919, is touring the world with the support of the German Government. It is accompanied by a heavy paperback book called, like the exhibition, *50 years Bauhaus*. This is dedicated to Walter Gropius and is much more than a catalogue (jacket below).



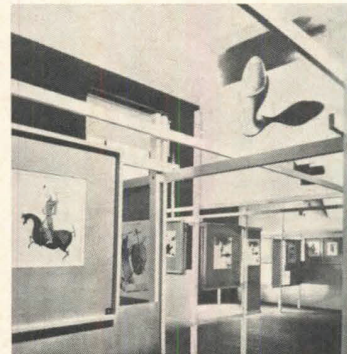
Mr. Boyd is an architect practicing in Melbourne, Australia, and a well-known critic. He is a member of the Forum's Board of Contributors.

The exhibition has already drawn thousands of visitors on the Continent and in England, including a high proportion of practicing architects who were not yet born when the first Bauhaus died and Gropius, and Bayer, and the others left Germany. Now, two generations later, the young architects and designers love it! But how can they? One of the basic Bauhaus ideals, of total design through teamwork, must sound like horse-and-buggy thinking if you are dreaming of plug-in megacities shaped by computer. The protest behind those white butterbox houses can have no meaning today. The idea of one man, like Bayer, working in so many fields—graphics, sculpture, architecture, painting (including house-painting at one time)—is out of sympathy with the modern necessity for the sharpest possible focus of individual talents.

Admittedly *50 years Bauhaus* brings the story up to date. In addition to a thorough collection of those familiar historical pictures—the Schlemmer theatrics, Mies' glazed skyscraper drawings, that line-up of the staff with all the stars in overcoats—the story extends to the brief unhappy adventure of the "New Bauhaus" in Chicago in 1937, to the latest Gropius and Breuer buildings, and, still spreading, carries into hard-edge painting, SOM skyscrapers (per John Rodgers), and to Japan (per Iwao Yamawaki).

However, these glimpses of today are not what draws the crowds. Most of the fascination is surely in the decorative side of the early Bauhaus, in the discovery of a style so old it is new again. Herbert Bayer's extraordinary prototype pop is something more Now than Art Nouveau!

Bayer's book is perfectly timed for this Bauhaus revival. It contains many of the pictures that are in Bayer's section of the exhibition. To the older generation it is a nostalgic journey, like flipping through a stack of old 78s in an attic. Here are visual hits of the 'twenties and 'thirties: Bauhaus exhibition posters with the hand symbol recurring like a



Works by Herbert Bayer (top to bottom): book jacket, 1938; traveling exhibit of advertising art, 1945 (with Stamo Papadaki); stairs at health center, Aspen Institute, 1955; "lonely metropolitan," photo-montage, 1932.

Paul Whiteman rhythm; multi-image photo-montages like a Benny Goodman orchestration. But is such flippancy fair? Could the Bauhaus revival be not a ghost but a real living influence as it was one generation ago, an inspiration to old and young? Bayer's life and art, like the Bauhaus, stand for a timeless quality which is as necessary now as ever, and still in as short supply as ever: the quality of the idea. The idea of a community of ideas attracted Bayer, when both he and this century were 21, to the Bauhaus at Weimar. The same prospect attracted him again in 1946 to Aspen, and though he is said to have watched that town sink into the careless ways of any resort, still the Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies, the design conferences, and the music retain, in an independent colony beside the town, something of the original Bauhaus idealism.

An idea—a sharp intellectual answer to a design problem represented in visual terms—illuminate all Bayer's most successful works, and it is often strong enough to break through the generation barrier. However, sometimes it is not, as, for instance, in the restaurant building at Aspen Meadows, social center of the colony. And this is a pity because that is a restaurant with ideas even in its cuisine. It deserved better than a diagonal pattern of cinder blocks projecting from the walls. However, *50 years Bauhaus* reminds us that, despite Gropius' architectural leadership, the Bauhaus did not enthrone architecture. Undoubtedly because of lack of opportunity for building 10 years ago, graphics dominated the curriculum. So Bayer is one of the most representative of Bauhaus men, treating architecture almost as a sideline.

At best his ideas are rational, definable, and as personal as can be in the Bauhaus manner. They relate to every field he touches, from painting to typography. The latter is one of his special interests and carries him fairly far out towards an "optofonetic alphabet". Throughout the book, he practises other theories for

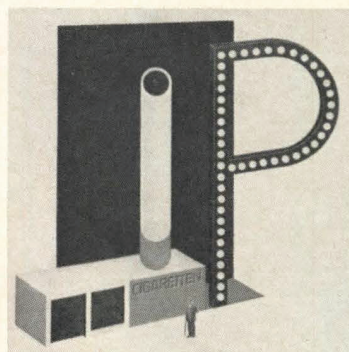
easier reading, including the elimination of hyphenated words and of all capital letters—even for the first person singular, which always looks unduly modest, I think. Since Herbert Bayer and *Herbert Bayer* make much of typographical reform, a gross inconsistency in the book should be mentioned. Bayer's rationalistic approach to typography led him early to one of his several genuine inventions. He revolted against the printer's esthetic convention of justifying the length of lines of type to give a trim straight right edge at the expense of even spacing between words. In 1926, he designed an historic Bauhaus advertisement which he claims to be "the first known application" of the "flush left, vignette right" method of typesetting, with equal spaces between all words. This style is of course still familiar in well-designed typography today.

Several times in *Herbert Bayer* the point is made that the whole text of the book is set in this style. In fact this is not so. Mr. Bayer must have endured awful difficulties with the typesetters who insisted on justifying most, but not all, of the shorter lines, adding more space between words to get a straight right edge, while at other times they unaccountably cut lines short when there was still plenty of room for the word which started the next line. The result of all this inconsistency is that the text of *Herbert Bayer* alternates unpredictably between sections with a ragged right edge and blocks of conventional solid type with the uneven word spacing which Bayer deplures. The worst of both worlds. (On the other hand, *50 years Bauhaus*, printed in Germany, is set in the same style and gets it right).

What makes one suspicious about the Bauhaus revival is that some of Bayer's visual ideas—like the op distortion of an Olivetti ad of 1953 (above right)—were so many years ahead of their time that they are still practically the height of fashion. They frequently anticipated pop by nearly fifty years. See Bayer's cigarette kiosk project of 1924 (right). See, hear, and inhale

his exhibition pavilion of the same year, which simultaneously projected film, flashing signs, sound from a loudspeaker horn and letters of smoke. It is easy enough to understand a revival evoked by such imagination calling loud and clear across a couple of generations and half a dozen intermediate fashions. But what of the Bauhaus principles, combining Rationalism, Functionalism and Humanism? Are they about to be restored as a sort of design conscience and guiding light for the 20th Century? I think not; not just now.

The Bayer book is more than a record of a highly intelligent designer. It is a timely reminder that the influence of Gropius through the Bauhaus, which was the most intellectual and least visual of all the major pioneers' influences, will almost certainly be the longest lasting. Not just because of that marriage between art and the machine—someone else would have performed that ceremony sooner or later—but because of the humanity at the foundation of the Bauhaus. It promised a world in which all intelligent art is made for popular enjoyment, which is different from one in which everything made for pop enjoyment is considered to be intelligent and art.



**STUDY IN NEW SYSTEMS OF URBAN TRANSPORTATION. Future Urban Transportation Systems: Final Report I: Descriptions, Evaluations, and Programs. Final Report II: Impacts on Urban Life and Form. Prepared for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development by the Stanford Research Institute, Menlo Park, Calif. 426 and 380 pp. 8½ by 11 in. Illustrated.**

**REVIEWED BY BRIAN RICHARDS**

In 1968 it is estimated that around 50 per cent of the population of urban America have only limited mobility, either because they do not have first claim to an automobile, cannot drive or find good public transport at reasonable cost. Many people are too young or old to drive, or too poor to own a car, yet 80 per cent of all American families own one. So much for the anachronisms of the Automobile Age.

For years it has been generally recognized that, while transportation is an essential part of the life-blood of the American city, there has largely been a failure to keep public transport running in any except the most densely populated corridors of movement. Work places have tended to spread over wide areas outside of the city core, easy to reach by car, tedious by public transport. A 16-mile bus trip across Los Angeles, for example, can take 1 hour 50 minutes and requires three transfers. Conditions of travel, other than by auto, are steadily worsening, and only gradually is it being accepted that a solution must lie closer to considerations of movement of *people* rather than just *vehicles*. A solution to this problem must involve the planning process first of all; the proper coordination and disposition of land uses with both public and private transportation. (Results of such planning can be seen to be beneficial in New Town development. At Columbia, for example, 24,000 of the 30,000 jobs and 40,000 of the 110,000 people will be within three minutes walk of a transit station.) In the existing cities

Mr. Richards is a British architect and author. His influential book, *New Movement in Cities*, has had worldwide distribution in several languages.

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