

Experimental Research on the Teaching of Preliminary Courses in Art Design: from Bauhaus Experiment to the Local Design Context in China

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Abstract—Bauhaus is a pioneering school in the transformation of modern art and design education in the 20th century. It is also the initiator of the implementation of preliminary courses in current China design schools. However, as an important pillar of Bauhaus overall teaching syllabus, preliminary courses fail to form a more accurate connection with the overall teaching philosophy and system in the process of learning from its basic course form. Therefore, the starting point of this paper is to explore the complete Bauhaus basic course teaching from Itten to Naggy, Albers and others, and to juxtapose it with the current local design education practice that is hotly discussed, so as to reflect on the current preliminary course teaching theory and practical path.

Keywords—preliminary course teaching; Itten; Albers; local design context

I. INTRODUCTION

Referring to the preliminary course of art design, our attention tends to focus on the Bauhaus college in Germany, which was founded in 1919. However, as a field of art and design education practice in the early 20th century, Bauhaus has continued to improve the initial curriculum education through the efforts of Itten, Naggy and Albers in its 14 years of reform and renewal. This course has gradually become the most experimental tension in the overall plan of Bauhaus, and this is also the phenomenon of "absence" in the current art design education in the Bauhaus model and the initial course teaching. In addition, the author also tries to through the Bauhaus preliminary courses experimental means in its historical context and change the situation to further extend the current Chinese design education for local context regression design of urgency, to find the idea may exist on the convergence between them, and from the Bauhaus experimental regression to local design thinking, and then thrown from the reflection of the history of art to design foundation course teaching new possible and imagination.

II. BAUHAUS EXPERIMENT: IMAGINATION AND VARIATION OF PRELIMINARY COURSE TEACHING

A. *The Ideal Prelude: the Preliminary Conception of the Preliminary Course Teaching Experiment*

"Freeing imagination and creativity is the number one issue. Once this problem is solved, the technical and practical requirements can be put forward, and finally the economic benefits can be considered... If the form is to be governed by new ideas, the powers and abilities of matter, spirit, feeling and knowledge must be integrated into one. This is the dominant idea of my teaching theme and method at Bauhaus."¹ This plan is closely related to the background of the times. Itten recalled: "When I was studying in Geneva in 1901, the teaching methods of various art schools were all old and old-fashioned. Professors set themselves up as role models for their students, and I was disappointed that the best students were the ones who copied the best."² So in 1919, after seeing the work of Itten and his students, Gropius invited him to teach at the Bauhaus in Weimar and accepted Itten's advice on the teaching of preliminary courses. Therefore, the preliminary course was presented as an experimental basis. After one year, it not only became a compulsory part of the Bauhaus curriculum, but also the experimental threshold for admission: only through the preliminary course could Bauhaus accept the next step of learning, namely workshop training. Therefore, the two elements of the preliminary course and workshop training were the basic pillars of Gropius's ideal Bauhaus.

This syllabus is more closely linked to the foundation of the curriculum, which is the central goal of Bauhaus' founding statement of 1919, "to build an art palace together". Itten's preliminary curriculum experiment not only released students' imagination and creativity, but also cleared away the remnants of the Beaux Art system before admission and entered Bauhaus teaching with a new attitude. Therefore, the preliminary curriculum also undertakes the prelude part of

¹ Jones Itten, *Form and Design — Basic Courses after Bauhaus and Bauhaus* [M], Shanghai: Shanghai Book Publishing House, 1991, P5.

² Jones Itten, *Form and Design — Basic Courses after Bauhaus and Bauhaus* [M], Shanghai: Shanghai Book Publishing House, 1991, P3.

the revolution of art education, which combines painting, sculpture, handicraft and applied art through the preliminary curriculum, reintegrates the divided disciplines, and finally moves towards the social ideal of "designing for a new life" with the construction of continuous activities. In 1922, Paul Klee further explained the connection between the preliminary curriculum and Bauhaus's overall concept in the sketch of the Bauhaus concept and structure ("Fig. 1"): the outermost circle of the circle represents the entrance of the school in the form of customs clearance. The preliminary course, which points to: "breaks the distinction and boundaries between existing artistic creations, removes the rights and levels that are inevitable in the language of creation, and liberates creativity."³ Even though in 1923, Itten left Bauhaus. However, the preliminary course still serves as the basic pillar of the ideal of the Bauhaus community. Naggy and Albers passed the adjusted preliminary course after Itten's departure, making it more accurate to express the connection with the overall teaching program, and even Naggy's "New Bauhaus" teaching structure in Chicago after the Second World War, the initial course is always at the base of the outermost ring. This shows that the exploration of the preliminary course teaching can even It is said that the collective creation of the Bauhaus is constantly emerging in the dialectical exploration of the initial course teaching in the overall teaching sense.

equally with the most basic elements: colors, graphics, and materials. In the exploration of teaching, Itten is good at generalizing the element training of this group into two methods: comparative theory and analytical theory.

Contrast and analysis is also an attitude that Itten takes in the face of traditional painting in the teaching process. It is not only limited to copying the traditional painting formula, but also tries to seek a new formula through the harmony of form. Therefore, the analysis of classic paintings of classical masters is an outstanding link in Itten's teaching system ("Fig. 2"). He believes that the hidden rhythmic lines in classic paintings can improve students' understanding of order and layout, as well as their sense of rhythm and texture. But he objected to what the student had learned as mere academic copying, as if a pianist, when first experiencing a piece of music by playing it, had tried not to play every note according to the composer's requirements, but to grasp the basic spirit of the work. Only after a great deal of careful and painstaking research can he hope to achieve the exact artistic treatment. This is the purpose of analyzing the classic painting. After students have deeply studied many problems in the form of expression, they can reproduce the emotions expressed in the painting through empathy like a pianist.

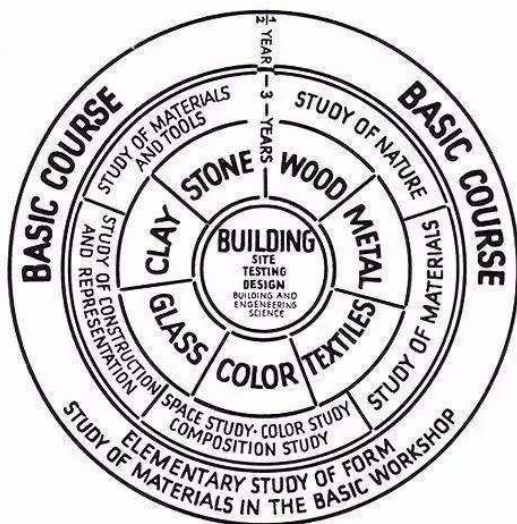


Fig. 1. Bauhaus syllabus (1923).

B. Criticism and Inheritance: Itten's Preliminary Teaching of Form

In Itten's preliminary curriculum, creating a "creative atmosphere" was his direction to reform art education, as he said; freeing imagination and creativity was the primary problem. He worked to eliminate the routines that students had previously learned and to break down the categories of creation, in which students with different experiences dealt

³ Zhou Shiyan, architecture? Or stage? — The change of the axis of the Bauhaus concept [J], New Art, 2013 (10)

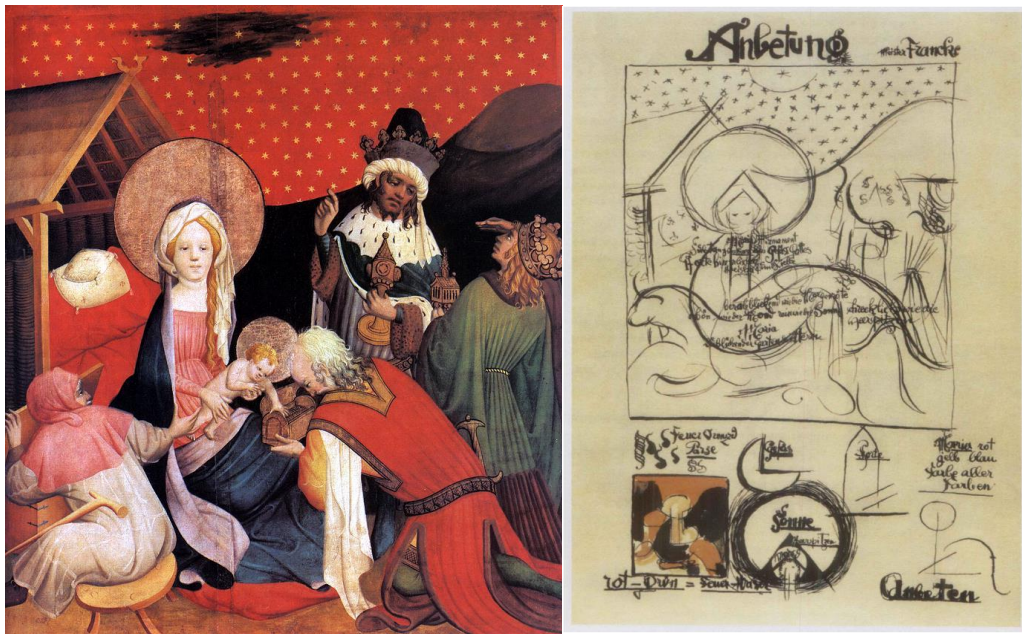


Fig. 2. Itten's analysis of frank's Three Wise Men. The sketch is a hand-drawn illustration of Itten's 1921 essay "an analysis of the old masters," depicting his attempt to reveal the overall design of the painting and the spiritual qualities it expresses. The text records his analysis of rhythm and color.

The ultimate purpose of analyzing classic famous paintings is to be able to skillfully use contrast theory to train sketch composition: light and shade contrast, learning materials and textures, theory of form and color, and discussion and demonstration of rhythm and expression form. Discovery and possibility of various examples comparison is always Itten perception exciting topic, because students brains makes them hard embodiment, this kind of comparison is: big, small, short, long, wide, narrow, black, white, much less, high, low, static, dynamic, such as ("Fig. 3"), these are the most convincing examples in contrast, Itten description to: "Just as there is life and beauty in the world between the north and south poles of our planet, the possibility of using chiaroscuro in art lies in the rich variety of shades of black and white, black and white being one to one complementary to each other, rather than the two poles of light and shade, and the same is true of all other contrasts."⁴ Therefore, the training from analysis, comparison to translation enables Itten to fully release his abundant creativity and stimulate the transference between the individual and the form in the process of leading students to explore themselves. We can also get a further insight from the summary of Itten's teaching by the historian of architecture Banham: "ideas adapted to materials or technology, rather than ideas adapted to social functions; It is releasing creativity, not acquiring methods; Intuition, not knowledge; and, most important, the dismantling of existing skills, not their expansion; It is to return the student to the original state of childhood."⁵

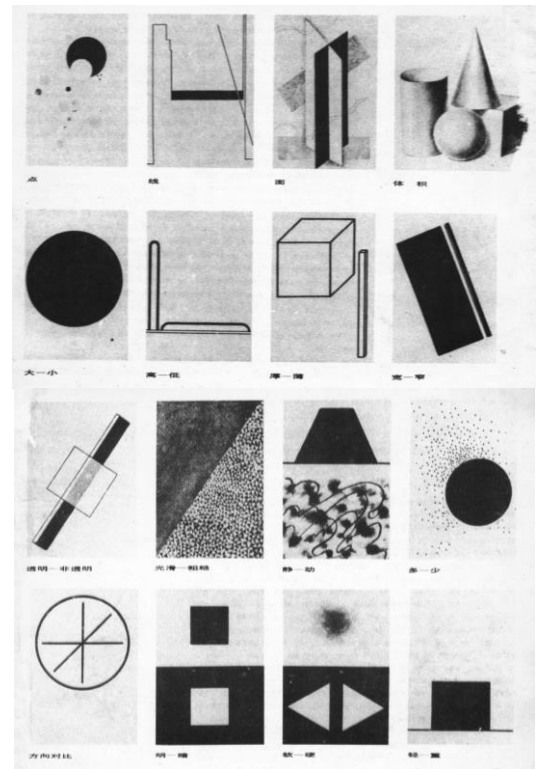


Fig. 3. Theoretical basis of Itten's composition (comparative training).

C. Transition from Texture to Material: the Evolution of Naggy and Albers

Itten excessively guided students to explore themselves and thus liberated their thinking. As a result, students could not immediately engage in workshop design practice in the next stage of the teaching plan due to excessive intuitive

⁴ Jones Itten, Form and Design — Basic Courses after Bauhaus and Bauhaus [M], Shanghai: Shanghai Book Publishing House, 1991, P10.

⁵ Reina Bennham, The theory and design of the first mechanical era [M], Jiangsu: Jiangsu Fine Arts Publishing House, 2001 (01), P357.

experience and unrealistic subjective ideas, which led to the economic and public opinion crisis in Bauhaus⁶. Gropius first saw Naggy's "nickel and plastic spiral" at Sturm in 1922. This work is like a machine in a space, which coincides with the shift of Gropius's focus from "the unity of arts and crafts" to "the unity of arts and crafts and industry", and Naggy is assigned to fill the vacancy left by Itten. And Joseph Albers as first and stay in the office of students graduating from the Bauhaus, he is in this new role and further showing him about the attention of the material and function research, the Bauhaus preliminary course has been extended from one semester to two semesters since the fall of 1923. Albers teaches 18 hours a week and Naggy teaches 8 hours a week ("Fig. 4").



Fig. 5. Albers and students in the evaluation process of the Bauhaus preliminary course (about 1928-1929).

STUNDENPLAN FÜR VORLEHRE
VORMITTAG

	MONTAG	DIENSTAG	MITWOCH	DONNERSTAG	FREITAG	SAMSTAG
8-9						
9-10		WERKARBEIT ALBERS				
10-11	GESTALTUNGS STUDIEN					GESTALTUNGS STUDIEN
11-12	MOHOLY REITHAUS	GESTALTUNGSLEHRE 1924 KLEE-AKTIV		REITHAUS	GESTALTUNGSLEHRE PARBY-KANDINSKY	MOHOLY REITHAUS
2-3			WERKZEICHNEN GROPIUS LANGE MEYER RAUBITZ			
3-4						
4-5	WISSENSCHAFTL. FACHER-PRÄT. PHYS.-AKTIV	ZEICHNEN KLEE RAUBITZ			ANALYTISCH ZEICHNEN- KANDINSKY	
5-6						VERSCHIEDENE VORTRÄGE
6-7						
7-8		ABENDAKT-KLEE DEKLARATORISCH FÜR VORKURS			ABENDAKT	
8-9						

IN DEN GELB UMRANDETEN UNTERRICHTSSTUNDEN KÖNNEN ALLE
GESELLEN UND LEHRUNGEN TEILNEHMEN.

Fig. 4. Bauhaus preliminary course teaching schedule (1923).

In the new preliminary curriculum, Naggy and Albers have deepened the importance of "putting the hand into the eye", which means that the experimental analysis of the material has been enhanced at a more explicit teaching level. In Albers class, for example, he encourages students to delve into the different characteristics of material surface, explore texture of collage, painting and other material (like Itten encouraged his students to graphic "comparative study"), but compared to Itten, he is more of an emphasis on analysis and operation in practice ("Fig. 5"), as his explanation for "preliminary course", Albers think so: "the material as the beginning of exploration. It's not just the surface material in the Itten course, material is a better word because texture is just part of it." Therefore, while strengthening the study of appearance texture, Albers asked the students of basic courses to explore the internal properties of materials and explore the possibility and limitation of structure. He encourage students to use various material course study, from paper, silk screen, corrugated paper to glass, plastic, sheet metal, matchbox, he further stressed: "when the students more instead of traditional form for technical and economic problems, they learned to static and dynamic observation at the same time, the learning space of imagination training is rare and necessary."

⁶ Frank Whitford, Lin Heyi, Bauhaus [M], Beijing: Sanlian Bookstore, 2001, P221.

III. BAUHAUS EXPERIMENT TO THE LOCAL DESIGN CONTEXT IN CHINA

A. Reflections on the Lineage: the Current Thinking of the Basic Course Teaching

The teaching concept of the preliminary course is gradually clarified by the constant exploration of Eaton and Naggy, Albers and others, and the painter, sculptor and artisans are trained by the preliminary course after entering the school. The weakening of the distinction between elegance and popular art is precisely the shift from the academic mechanism of elite art to the design of new life. However, when we examine the basic curriculum teaching of the current art and design colleges, it is still difficult to achieve the breakthrough from the "decorative painting" to the "construction" thinking in the teaching orientation of the preliminary curriculum that constitutes the core. In the teaching application of plane, color, and three-dimensional geometry, the decorative meaning of traditional painting is still strong. The Bauhaus and abstract painting in the 20th

century and even becomes the students' copy "of" point, line and plane training samples. Therefore, in the 14 years of teaching in Bauhaus, the constantly reformed and active preliminary courses are now again trapped in the shackles dominated by academic imitation.

Mr. Zhang Yi from the School of Architecture of Tsinghua University in China once said in the design lecture entitled "Bauhaus": "All design forms are trained. The reason why a designer is different from sculptors and painters is that for the painter, sometimes you have to paint a picture, and for the design person, you are going to discuss two seemingly opposite materials, the same characteristics in different characteristics and different environments."

This kind of thinking training is not absent with the change of syllabus in Bauhaus preliminary teaching. For example, Itten is good at training students to make more delicate sensory judgment in vision, especially the processing of light and shade and texture. In the class of light and shade contrast, he proposed a series of thoughts: the highlight on charcoal and the shadow on a white paper ("Fig. 6"), which is darker or whiter? The theme is the composition training of "human body" ("Fig. 7"). Which lines will you choose to depict it, which are hard and which are soft? With the same material ("Fig. 8"), how would you choose the shape to make it, and what shape can give full play to the characteristics of the material? Albers, on the other hand, moved from a two-dimensional visual analysis to a discussion of the plasticity of real materials. In his article *real formal teaching*, he stated: "I did not introduce any possibilities of materials presented by wires at the beginning, but tried to see what new things we could make with wires. Give it a new shape and combine match and matchbox to make a project. Then I introduced my research into paper, which at the time was considered a packaging material." This is also a better interpretation of the teaching meaning of Bauhaus outline from the outer circle to the middle occlusal zone in the concentric circle: the middle zone marks the integration relationship between various materials research and theoretical teaching in the occlusal form.

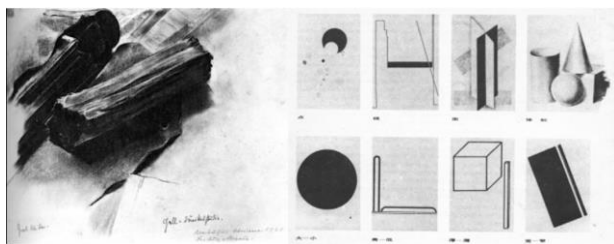


Fig. 6. Itten's student assignment and the theoretical basis of Itten's composition under his guidance (the left picture is the student assignment).

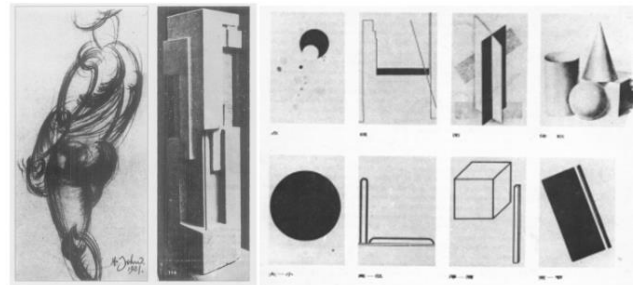


Fig. 7. The theoretical basis of Itten's student work and Itten's composition under Itten's guidance (the left picture is the student work).

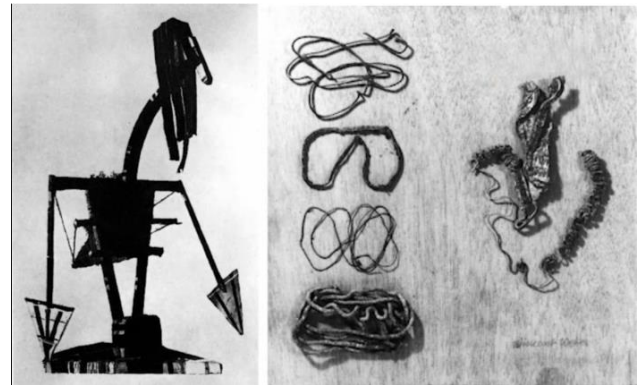


Fig. 8. Itten's student assignment — material research.

As for the results of the preliminary curriculum, industrial designer Otti Berger benefited from Naggy's material training and Klee's color training. In the fall of 1927, Berger created several sketches and color studies in class. She found that Klee's rules of color and form could easily be translated directly into fabric without losing functional design and technical precision. Fabric called *Carre* (1928-1929) still exudes the elegance of classic fabrics. Takehiko Mizutani is also a design educator who has a special influence on Chinese design education. It was he who first put forward the concept of "composition" in Japan, which influenced the early basic curriculum in China through Japan. During his study in Bauhaus, he created elegant and tension sculptures by eliminating the heavy static image of brass plates ("Fig. 9"). The same example is Marshall Brauer, a master of architecture who studied and stayed at Bauhaus. He found the universality of hollow steel pipe material on the bicycle handle and designed the prototype of all steel pipe chairs. The Siri chair ("Fig. 10"), and the name of the Vasily chair is exactly what Brauer thanked his preliminary course teacher Vasily Kandinsky. The fact that these different experiences and students in different fields deal with the same problems in the basic course teaching equally seems to confirm what Itten said: "The preliminary course has given me three major tasks: 1. Freeing the creativity of students; 2. Find out the most attractive materials for each student; 3. Teaching students the basic design principles. From this, I can know which students are 'shading', or 'rhythm', 'metal' or 'glass' ... By demonstrating the use of performance methods

in some way; I have successfully demonstrated the personal potential of the students."⁷



Fig. 9. Composition of Takehiko Mizutani.



Fig. 10. Vasily chair designed by Brauer.

Therefore, it can be seen that in the process of following the Bauhaus curriculum establishment, the teaching of the preliminary course of art design generally deviates from the exploration of the essence of the course. Essence and preliminary course teaching with the change of the Bauhaus expectations in continuously explore instead by the core principles of propulsion and behave more precise, Itten emphasize the spirit of creation, Naggy focusing on rational use of machine, Albers Bridges the dispute between Itten 's artistic will and Naggy's machine reason from the perspective of materials. Holding different ideas of faculty members gathered in foundation course, we have to say, it is because of the creation of diverse orientation continuously to develop and extend the value of the art design education based on dimension, makes the basic course teaching experiments and exploration has become the most influential in the Bauhaus 14 years of running a school curriculum, which is the current preliminary course teaching lacks is the source of vitality.

⁷ Jones Itten, *Form and Design — Basic Courses after Bauhaus and Bauhaus* [M], Shanghai: Shanghai Book Publishing House, 1991, P4-5.

B. *Inheritance and Balance: Reflections from Bauhaus Experiment to Local Design Context*

As for the establishment of Bauhaus preliminary courses, the relationship between basic teaching of art design and professional teaching is fundamentally straightened out, that is, the preliminary teaching content training is based on the understanding of the phenomena and basic rules generally presented by art design. However, nowadays, with the overall promotion of post-modern discourse, comprehensive reflection on modern practice has gradually emerged in many professional fields. It is conceivable that Bauhaus will also be subject to more intense debate and criticism⁸. The author believes that the shortcomings of the current Chinese art design preliminary course teaching are naturally copying the setting of the Bauhaus basic course. However, the original intention of teaching and its experimental spirit in adapting to the times are rarely involved. There is cognition of the meaning of the three major components in the field of design discipline. More students even regard it as a continuation of traditional painting techniques and neglect the design rigor, will, and creativity of design basic education. In addition, the experimental spirit of the preliminary curriculum teaching is difficult to continue in the current high design colleges.

Since the 1960s, the post-modern design practice promoted by Venturi and others to the comprehensive involvement of contemporary Western literary theory such as semiotics and structuralism in the field of design has completely disintegrated with the design discourse of modernism. To this end, the preservation and extension of "local culture" has also been regarded as a clear stand against the modernism in the field of design. The appeal of this cultural concept is gradually being consciously formed in the teaching of design institutions. At the beginning of the last century, Bauhaus was a symbol of modernist ideology through continuous efforts in design education practice. Professor Hang Jian from the China Academy of Art also believes: "The 7000-year-old 'Chinese traditional graphics' may be an important source of awakening Chinese native design to the world, and it will become a cultural identity of the 'World China' design. And can be accepted for a variety of world consumption methods."

However, Bauhaus's design education is based on the preliminary curriculum and workshop training as the mainstay of teaching, and then through the exploration of individual practice and teaching level to form a "collective Bauhaus" system. The continued influence and creativity of its foundation course is obvious. Therefore, returning to the current teaching thinking of the overall design level, the introduction of the local culture or traditional culture into the preliminary curriculum teaching also has its significance of exploration and experiment. In the preliminary course, Itten pays attention to and analyzes the classic Western paintings to train students in the training of graphic reproduction. In the art design discipline, the similar (Spatial) research on

⁸ Bauhaus Research Plan Outline: Design History? Art History? Going to the History of Thought! [J]. *Architecture and Culture*, 2011 (11): 26-27.

traditional art is beginning to take place. The art historian Professor Fang Wen's book *IMAGES OF THE MIND* analyzes the composition principles and viewing styles of traditional Chinese paintings in various ways in the form of graphic elements ("Fig. 11")⁹. Mr. Fang Wen believes that "regardless of the contours, motifs and techniques in painting, before they express ideology or philosophical concepts, they must have the problems of contours, styles and composition."¹⁰ Also in the research field is Mr. Wang Xin from the China Academy of Art. His book *WAYS OF SEEING AS PAINTINGS* has extensively explored the structural awareness and viewing methods of space creation in traditional Chinese landscape paintings, and with this perspective, the language of painting is developed¹¹. A way to transform contemporary gardens and architectural design is as shown in "Fig. 12". In addition, during the teaching process of the China Academy of Art, Wang Xin also actively guided students to reconstruct the rationality of experimental buildings from poetry, Zaju or traditional instruments ("Fig. 13"). However, such experiments and trials are still more contingent in the individual ivory spires, such as the design of the ground into the preliminary curriculum teaching, but it is difficult to form the consciousness within the discipline system. This is not only a process of rethinking the experiment of the basic course of the Bauhaus, but also the expectation of the teaching practice of the individual engaged in design education, and the reflection of cultural consciousness in the overall system of design education gestated under institutionalization.

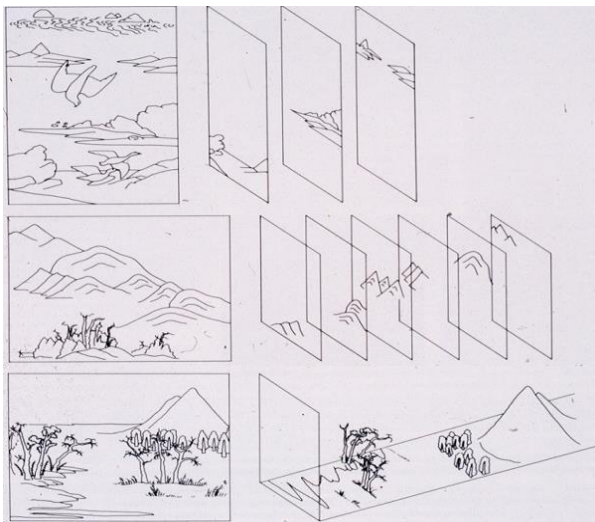


Fig. 11. The three important stages of the development of Chinese landscape painting.

⁹ Fang Wen, *Image of the mind :Chinese painting and calligraphy style and structure analysis* [M], Shanghai: Shanghai Painting and Calligraphy Publishing House, 2016.08 (01).

¹⁰ Hong Zaixin, *Selected Works of Overseas Chinese Painting (1950-1987)* [M], Shanghai: Shanghai People's Fine Arts Publishing House, 1992, P108.

¹¹ Wang Xin, *Ways of seeing as paintings* [M], Shanghai: Tongji University Press, 2015.12 (01), P195.

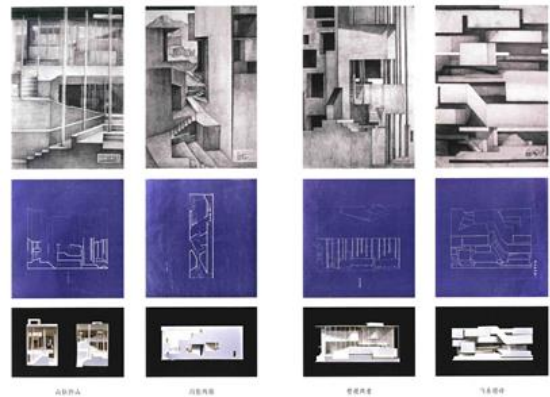


Fig. 12. Wang Xin's *WAYS OF SEEING AS PAINTINGS*.



Fig. 13. Wang Xin's teaching experiment at China Academy of Art.

Therefore, the preliminary course explored in this paper is by no means a fixed method, but a gesture of thought and a form of inquiry. The experiments of local design advocated by the author should not be limited to a certain scope. Instead, the practitioners of design education should also strive to establish and train students to be more delicate in the design of basic courses. The perception, regardless of the Western system or the Eastern culture, is not the dualistic speculation of the external world and the inner spiritual category, but more importantly, from the Bauhaus basic curriculum teaching experiment to the local design context reconstruction. What is needed is to inherit the experimental spirit that gives us the power to explore the unknown.

IV. CONCLUSION

This kind of discussion does not question the invalidity of the methods used in the design of the basic curriculum. In fact, different art design disciplines in the field of design have different basic educational exploration contexts, not just the narrow scope of the three major components. For example, the exploration of user experience in industrial design, or the understanding of field research in environmental design. A more in-depth and detailed discussion may be needed in the exploration of a specific subject-oriented basic education. However, this paper hopes to re-examine the tension that this course has truly shown in the Bauhaus plan through the study of Bauhaus's 14-year undergraduate course teaching, in order to rethink the

existence of the basic course of the past. However, the local design context is regarded as a more extensive commonality within the discipline of design in the criticism of modern practice, which is also the same as Itten's belief in composition. In fact, the juxtaposition of Bauhaus in the historical context and the common anxiety of the current regional culture are also to search for the anchor, foundation and purpose of the new road. At the same time, more emerging potentials can be identified by historical discourse. In other words, Bauhaus' experiment and exploration on basic curriculum education still remain an important topic to be discussed on issues and themes of contemporary design education in terms of philosophy and method.

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