



Three texts on the Bauhaus

Jan Despo

Short summary of some
of the key “ramifications”
of the work at the Bauhaus

Excursus on the
work and personality
of Walter Gropius

Interview with Jan Despo

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Ioannis Despotopoulos”:
Benaki Museum/Modern
Greek Architecture Archives,
Anthony Antoniadis, «Ελευθερος
Τύπος» publishing house

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Loukas Bartatilas

This book was published in
conjunction with the exhibition
*From Building to Community:
Ioannis Despotopoulos and
the Bauhaus*, which runs from
10 October to 7 November 2019
at the Athens Conservatoire.

A project of the Goethe-Institut
funded by the German Federal
Foreign Office, in cooperation
with the Benaki Museum.

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ISBN: 978-960-9761-05-5
ISBN: 978-960-476-250-7

Goethe-Institut Athen
Benaki Museum

Image sources:

pp. 76 and 83: *Δελτίο Συλλόγου
Αρχιτεκτόνων* 5, section B,
October–December 1992, pp. 27
and 30 respectively

p. 86: Ioannis Despotopoulos,
“Συγκλίσεις, αποσυνθετικές
τάσεις στην σύγχρονη αρχιτεκτονική
(μεταμοντέρνα, μεταπαραδοσιακή,
νεομοντέρνα)”, in the anthology
*Η αξιοποίηση της αρχιτεκτονικής
και της πολεοδομίας στην ανάπτυξη
του τόπου*, Θ' Πανελλήνιο
Αρχιτεκτονικό Συνέδριο, ΣΑΔΑΣ:
[Athens:TEE 1988], p. 453

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I consider myself fortunate to have come to know 'his workplace', as the professor's personality was still present and quite visible there even several years past his death. The atmosphere was remarkable and moving. His studio unfolded in two levels—a ground floor and basement. His own office, as that of his co-workers, was located on the ground floor, while the basement contained additional drawing boards and the cabinets where his drawings were kept—a repository of invaluable material. The walls were lined with wooden filing cabinets full of his projects, over one hundred in total: works in Greece and abroad, among them hospitals, sanatoriums, schools, cultural centres, and urban planning studies.

The final model—the 'presentation' model—of the Athens Conservatoire 'stood prominently' in front of his tidy desk.

What was remarkable was the meticulousness and precision with which he stored all the different materials he used from time to time. Indicative were the drawers full of empty film canisters and boxes with untold numbers of pencils, sharpened to a fine point in both ends, resembling tiny sculptures. His handwriting was also impressive—idiosyncratic, unique, as if conceived to lend expression to his thoughts, capturing and rendering them visible, transforming words and sentences into artistic commentaries.

The greater part of the archive of his projects, which is held in the Benaki Museum's Modern Greek Architecture Archives, has been inventoried. However, part of the 'supporting' material remains unrecorded. Could this remaining part still reveal a treasure, who knows...

THE BAUHAUS AND GREECE: A CHRONOLOGY

BY LOUKAS BARTATILAS

PRIOR TO THE BAUHAUS

1902–1915

The Belgian architect Henry van de Velde arrives in Weimar as an advisor to Grand Duke Wilhelm Ernst von Sachsen-Weimar-Eisenach, who founds the Arts and Crafts Institute in 1905 and the Grand Ducal Saxon School of Arts and Crafts in 1908, both in Weimar. Van de Velde is made director of both institutions, and he designs and constructs their buildings. During this time he also founds the workshops for bookbinding, ceramics, enamelling, metalworking, embroidery, and textile and carpet weaving. As a result of World War I and the enactment of a new German law that is a harbinger of nationalism, Van de Velde finds himself forced, as a non-German, to give up his directorships and leave the country. He suggests Walter Gropius and two other candidates as potential successors.

1928” exhibition together with Ise and Walter Gropius at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

A military dictatorship is established in Greece in 1936, which leads to a break in the nation's broad-based spirit of reform.

1940–1949

Greece's involvement in World War II begins with its repulsion of an Italian offensive on the Albanian border. From 1941 to 1944, Greece is occupied by the Nazis, a time marked by the devastating effects of widespread starvation and the rise of a tough resistance movement. After the withdrawal of German troops and as a result of geopolitical turmoil in the wake of the war, Greece is the only country in the Balkans as well as the wider Eastern European region to remain in the Western sphere of influence. The subsequent civil war between armed communist forces and the conservative government's troops ends in defeat for the communists in 1949. Over the coming decades, the country will suffer from the social, political, and economic consequences of the civil war.

Gropius, now a professor at Harvard, founds the architectural firm The Architects Collaborative (TAC) in 1946.

1954

Hannes Meyer, who had left the Bauhaus and emigrated to the Soviet Union and, later, to Mexico, dies in Switzerland.

1959–1961

Gropius and the TAC design and build the US embassy in Athens.



The Bauhaus building in Weimar, today Bauhaus-Universität Weimar, 2019.

IOANNIS DESPOTOPOULOS AND HIS THREE TEXTS ON THE BAUHAUS

BY LOUKAS BARTATILAS

DESPOTOPOULOS'S THREE TEXTS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CONTEMPORARY INTERPRETATION OF THE WORK OF THE BAUHAUS

The year 2019 marks the centenary of the Bauhaus's foundation. To commemorate this anniversary, numerous events have been held all over the world. In Greece it was celebrated by the academic community and cultural institutions with two major events. The first was the international congress entitled "Bauhaus and Greece: The Idea of Synthesis in Art and Architecture".¹ The second is

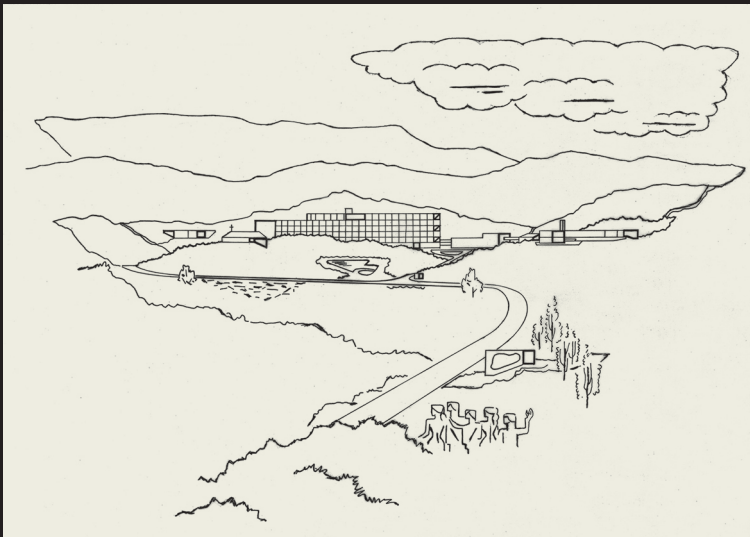
1. The conference *Bauhaus and Greece: The Idea of Synthesis in Art and Architecture* took place from 30 May to 1 June 2019 in Athens. It was organized by Andreas Giakoumakatos (Athens School of Fine Arts) and Sokratis Georgiadis (State Academy of Fine Arts Stuttgart).

the exhibition presented in the Athens Conservatoire entitled "From Building to Community: Ioannis Despotopoulos and the Bauhaus".² The present publication is part of this exhibition, which it supplements with three extraordinary texts on the Bauhaus by Ioannis Despotopoulos.

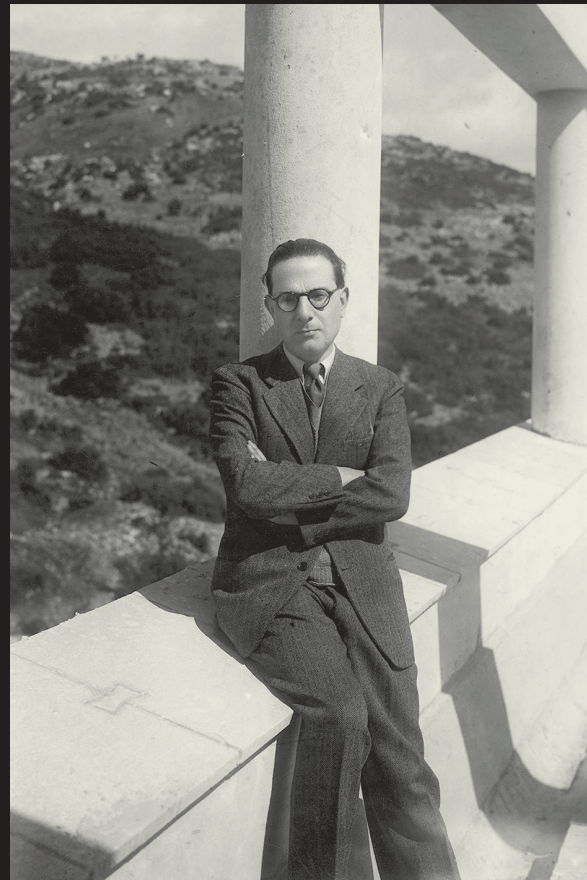
The decision to publish this book was not simply a response to the Bauhaus centenary. While this is certainly the perfect occasion to present Despotopoulos's writings on the Bauhaus to a broader audience, the importance of these texts extends beyond the events commemorating the hundredth anniversary. A distinct departure from the architect's other extensive writings, they represent not only a key source facilitating a better understanding of Despotopoulos's works but also a new way of looking at the Bauhaus in the context of the international reception and interpretation of the famous school's activities.

In other words, the texts create a clear outline of the interpretation of Despotopoulos's work, from which we can deduce the ideological background and initial reception that subsequently led him to create his prolific architectural, didactic, and theoretical works. The texts thus serve to supplement our—relatively limited—knowledge of him, as the academic world has only recently begun to show interest in this figure, manifested in a series

2. The exhibition was a project of the Goethe-Institut funded by the German Federal Foreign Office, in cooperation with the Benaki Museum and the Athens Conservatoire. Curated by the author; it ran from 10 October to 7 November 2019 in the multipurpose hall of the Athens Conservatoire.

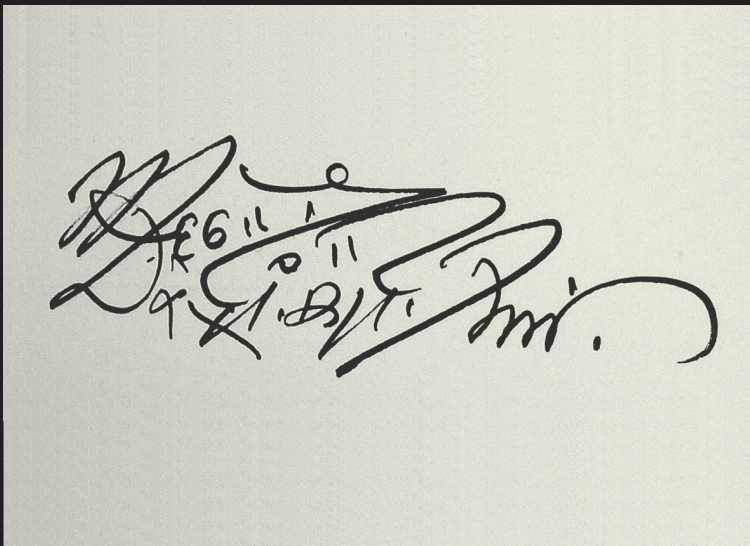


Perspective drawing of the hospital in Tripoli, by Ioannis
Despotopoulos, 1938



Ioannis Despotopoulos, date unknown

ΠΑΡΑΛΕΙΠΟΝΤΑΙ ΕΝΔΙΑΜΕΣΕΣ ΣΕΛΙΔΕΣ
IN-BETWEEN PAGES ARE OMITTED



Ioannis Despotopoulos's signature, 1941

SHORT SUMMARY OF SOME OF THE KEY “RAMIFICATIONS” OF THE WORK AT THE BAUHAUS

BY IOANNIS DESPOTOPOULOS

ON THE CURRENT EXHIBITION IN THE PINAKOTHEK

It was Mr Papastamos's outstanding idea to bring the Bauhaus exhibition to Athens.

In terms of its contents and its significance, the exhibition is unique. It is a continual, living pulse.

It is the starting point for unique impressions and countless thoughts that trace an arc from the recent past to the present and on to the future. The written and spoken texts are well conceived and insightful in terms of the messages they contain.

There is very little that remains to be said about the exhibition. But there is much to say about the energies prevalent at the time that helped create and support the Bauhaus. As chance would have it, I myself was able to participate in this movement for many years and experienced the first years after the war as fruitful in many ways and yet so fatal for Europe's destiny.



pic. 3 The Greek-Roman amphitheatre of Caesarea with a common stage.

ization of complex works at the Bauhaus, perhaps its most important achievement was the creation of a new way of seeing and perceiving reality, a new way of understanding and thinking.

At the Bauhaus, the production of ideas, designs, and forms was a holistic, extremely constructive, and creative process. The new way of “thinking” that arose from enabled the correct perception of a multi-perspectival reality, as well as the dialectical ability to adapt to the resulting possibilities. This also applied beyond national borders, which is why the works created within this transnational movement took on a local sense of social and cultural character.

Reginald Isaacs, a professor at Harvard, had come to Europe years earlier in order to gain new insights into life and work at the Bauhaus for his book. I provided him with information that was more detailed than that which I have described above, and for which he was most grateful.

The new approach to understanding and thinking completely changed our perception of the cultures of the past and the meaning ascribed to them, particularly in terms of art history, and especially with regard to the new sense of history as taught in German schools and universities at that time.

We saw a different past dialectically materialize “in action” in the present.

Finally we could say that the Bauhaus in Europe was a source of living ideas and messages for this new world, one that was undergoing historical transformations and which for the last half century had been coalescing and condensing into the present dark reality.

Athens, 7 December 1982

for how to transform Berlin into an organic city¹.

At this congress, new urban planning concepts and principles were developed and published in the renowned “Athens Charter”, which would set out the guiding principles of modern urban planning for the coming decades.

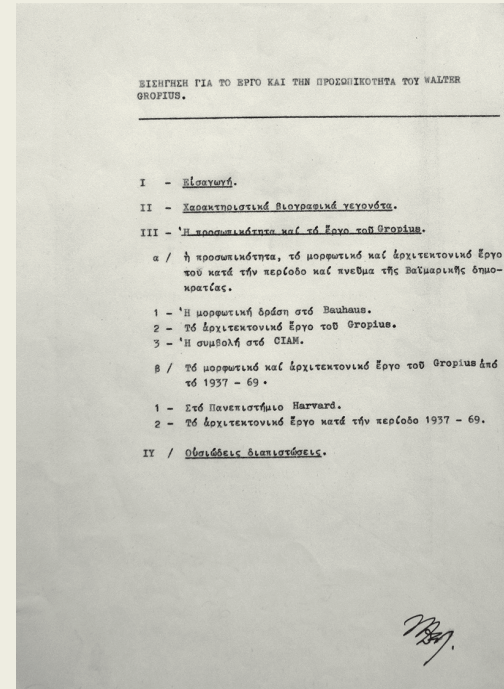
b. GROPIUS’S TEACHING AND ARCHITECTURAL WORK FROM 1937 TO 1969

1. At Harvard University

The educational work performed by Walter Gropius, Martin Wagner, Moholy-Nagy, and Marcel Breuer at Harvard University played a crucial part in helping young architects develop new ideas and gave wider exposure to architecture in the United States. This development set the precedent for the work of Mies van der Rohe and other groundbreaking architects in the country.

Thanks to Josep Lluís Sert, Reginald R. Isaacs, and other architects, these creative principles were consistently applied thereafter.

1. Note of editing: Despotopoulos uses the term “organic city” in the Greek text. His choice of this term is a reference to the title of the 4th CIAM in Athens, “Functional City”. For more on this conscious translation of the 1933 CIAM title into Greek, see Lina Dima, “Η «οργανική πόλις» του 4ου CIAM και ο Ιωάννης Δεσποτόπουλος”, in Andreas Giakourmakatos [ed.], *Ελληνική Αρχιτεκτονική στο 20ό και 21ο αιώνα* (Athens: Gutenberg, 2016), 73–85.



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“Usually an oeuvre is defined as something objective, that which is created. And yet the process, the significance, and the manner in which it is made are extremely important elements in constituting an oeuvre.

Out of this understanding and the dialectical exchange that informed the development and realization of complex works at the Bauhaus, perhaps its most important achievement was the creation of a new way of seeing and perceiving reality, a new way of understanding and thinking.”

Jan Despo

A project of the Goethe-Institut funded
by the German Federal Foreign Office.
In cooperation with the Benaki Museum.



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