

Excerpt from *Blueprint* by Theresia Enzensberger
Translated from German by Lucy Jones
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I still do not know where the director's room is. The big clock in the foyer says it's shortly before five, and I wander through the corridors, hoping to spot a sign somewhere. The halls are empty; only muted voices and noises can be heard from the depths of the building. The other students are probably still in their workshops. When I reach the third floor via the large spiral staircase for the second time, I see a group in the corner of the corridor. To my disappointment, it is only Sidonie and the other frocks, to whom I can't possibly out myself as a newbie. Instead I walk past them as purposefully as possible, which they don't seem to notice, and then turn around the first corner. I have to stifle a jubilant cry when I finally discover the name "Walter Gropius" on a door at the end of the passageway.

After a somewhat surly "Come in," I enter a bright room with a huge desk in the middle, which is hidden under piles of paper. Gropius stands at the window with his back to me, holding the telephone receiver. The thick cable stretches tautly to the base. He is taller than I thought, and even though I cannot see his expression, I feel that he is used to being treated with the greatest respect. His telephone conversation seems endless. Perhaps I should simply come back later? Pretend that I never received the small envelope with the invitation from the director?

"Then please call me back when you find out. Yes, and a good day to you too!" His manner of speaking is controlled, but his voice is full of suppressed anger. Gropius slams the receiver roughly onto its spindly brass arms, then turns around and looks at

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me without seeing me. "Always these bureaucrats!" I try to express my complicity against these ominous bureaucrats with a nod, even though what he's saying is not addressed to me, of course.

Gropius appears to be briefly confused about my presence in his room before he collects himself. "Come in, sit down. What can I do for you?" Now it's my turn to be confused. He, after all, was the one who asked me to come here. Why do I have to introduce myself? On the other hand, perhaps the institutional mechanisms at the Bauhaus function in the usual bureaucratic manner: an invisible hand, consisting of protocol, regulation and dates, ultimately bringing people together who do not understand exactly how these things came about. I explain that I am new to the Bauhaus. I was told to introduce myself and bring my portfolio. Gropius' face brightens. "Ah, correct, a new student. Forgive me for not finding time for you until now. I usually look at portfolios immediately, so that you can start lessons straight away, but the last weeks have been very busy. Let's have a look," he says, reaching for the large box that I have been gripping tightly until now. During the unbearably long minutes he spends immersed in my work, I look out of the wide window into the summery courtyard.

I steal several furtive glances at his face: his high forehead and bushy eyebrows, which he frowns in concentration. Perhaps it is the telephone call he has just made, but there is a great seriousness in his gaze that emphasises his authority.

"It's unusual for students to join us in the middle of the semester," he says finally, returning my portfolio. "How did you hear about the Bauhaus?"

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Not a word about the architectural drawings that I made in the office of a family friend, in the evening when everyone had left. At the time I had felt so adult, like a real architect surrounded by sharpened pencils, giant rulers and mottled, transparent draughtsman's paper.

I explain that my father makes cast-iron purlins, which brings him into regular contact with the more modern Berlin architect offices, including that of Peter Behrens. There, close attention is being paid to the developments in Weimar. But had my father not carelessly left a pamphlet in our living-room, I would probably have never heard of the Bauhaus. He 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. The fact that there's a weaving workshop at the Bauhaus was probably decisive in his reluctant consent in the end.

Although I long for an ally, I don't mention any of this, and let Gropius believe for now that my family is behind my plans to study architecture. He stands up and says, "Your drawings have potential, but we are very keen to offer our students a holistic education. In the prep course and other workshops, you will certainly learn many things that will help you with your architectural

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work. If you have any questions, you can contact me at any time.” Although I am sure that he often uses these platitudes, the idea of him being my mentor fills me with pride.

Maria sits on my narrow bed, stuffing herself with the biscuits that Mrs Werner has brought up to my room. The tea, which my landlady has brewed from herbs picked in her garden, smells suspicious. Neither of us touch it, but the sweet wafers are a pleasant change to the vegetable porridge we’re given in the canteen. Maria rolls her eyes in delight, lets her long legs dangle and says while chewing, “I can’t believe that those silly frocks have even got their way at mealtimes! I couldn’t swallow a single mouthful at lunch today. Thank the Lord for old Wernerette and her obsession with baking!” Maria likes talking like this, with ironic pathos and many exclamation marks. She feels at home here, very much at home, I think, looking at the crumbs on my bed.

I can’t blame her for preferring my digs to her narrow attic, but sometimes I feel like she has moved into my house. Neither her greediness nor her dramatic leanings show in her lanky appearance. She has an almost gaunt face and large, rather watery eyes.

Although we both pretend not to care about them, the conversation always comes back to Johannes Itten’s cronies. Most of the time we make fun of them – of their brown hooded robes that resemble monk’s frocks; of their strange customs, gymnastics

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and diets; and of the songs that they sometimes start up without warning. I tell Maria about my meeting with Gropius and my desperate search for the director's room, which makes her laugh fondly at me. Then she says, "But seriously, what impertinence! A group of ten people now decides what the entire school eats!"

"I also hate the grub. But I heard that the budget's been cut, so perhaps the school just can't afford meat any more?"

Maria shakes her head. "I'm sure they're the ones behind it. And apparently, they don't even pay school fees!"

"What makes you think that?"

"There are people who say it's because they're Jews, and get favourable treatment."

I haven't given another thought to the school fees since I persuaded my father to let me study here.

How do you actually recognise who is Jewish in any case? My brother Otto constantly talks about the Jews, but I only know one family, who live two houses further down from us in Berlin. And you would only recognise the father because of his sidelocks and skullcap.

Maria says, "I think that's nonsense. Not all Itten's disciples are Jews, and most of them were already at his art school in Vienna. He's probably done a deal with Gropius. Still, it's not fair."

"That might be the case, but aren't we paying them too much attention? Maybe we should just ignore them," I say.

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“Ignore them! If only it were that simple, but those silly songbirds stand chirping on every corner. They could just be less cliquish! But they don’t even deign to talk to us. And Sidonie is the worst of all. The way she always puts on airs!”

I think Sidonie is incredibly beautiful, with her short red curls, only a few of which peek out from under her hood. But I keep that to myself.

During the breathing exercises that we do to start the prep course, I feel the perspiration slowly running down my spine. Normally I love the heat more than is normal for an average mid-European woman. I like it when the gusts of wind are so hot you’d think they came from a stove. I like it when it doesn’t even cool down at night and you have to throw off the bedsheets. But the large, curved windows of the workroom can only be partially opened, and the heat which has been standing over Weimar for days is now unbearable, even for me. But on the positive side, I can finally take part in classes, although I only officially start the prep course next semester. Sidonie and the others are in the front row. They breathe full of fervour, while the rest of the students only go through the motions. Johannes Itten is standing at the front giving directions in a stern voice. We are supposed to take a deep breath and noisily exhale through our wide open mouths. I seem to be the only one who has to fight back laughter. But I’m

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also the only one for whom all this is new. Now Itten gives the command to pick out one of the scraps of metal lying in a jumble on the floor.

“The goal is to understand the material. You can examine materials in many different ways. Today, we’re going to examine them from the perspective of drawing,” says Itten. He’s wearing a purple-violet robe which reaches down to the floor and looks much more expensive and elegant than the rough jackets of his followers. He really is a bit like a monk, perhaps also because his face shows no expression. His instructions sound like sharp commands, which reminds me a little of my father and yet still manages to intimidate me. I stare at my blank paper and the crooked metal lying on my table like a grotesque worm. I don’t think that Itten is simply asking us to draw the piece of metal. I glance inconspicuously around me. The others have long since started. Unfortunately, I cannot see how they are carrying out the task. Architectural drawings are different, since there are no uncertainties. There is a clear goal, a design and fixed standards.

I think back to the lonely nights in the studio. It took some begging at the time to get the key from my parents’ friend, but at least I was left in peace. Officially, I spent these hours with my friend Charlotte, whose parents are always travelling. Last year, I kept more hidden from my father and mother than ever before. Today, for the first time, I’m wearing my new carpenter’s trousers, which I went to quite some effort to obtain before my trip to Weimar, even hiding them under my bed. My father would

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have a heart attack if he could see me now. This gives me a feeling of great satisfaction. But unfortunately, the trousers weren't the best choice for this heat; they feel tight, and my bottom is stuck to the wooden chair.

Until a minute ago, Itten was sitting on his desk meditating with his eyes closed, his long, thin legs under his robe entwined in a complicated cross-legged position. Now he has stood up to take a look at the drawings. I haven't even started. So I hastily make a few strokes on the paper, which unfortunately only connect into a simple illustration of the metal piece. I can't come up with anything better.

Itten leans over my shoulder and looks at my sketch. He gives off a strange odour; a mixture of garlic, beeswax and sorrel. Beads of sweat have formed on his bald head. I would feel nauseous if I weren't so intimidated by his presence. One of the beads releases itself so slowly from its shiny surface that I still imagine I can prevent it falling onto the middle of my paper. The soft, thick drawing paper is absorbent, and small waves form around the puddle in the middle. The pencil line unravels in rivulets. "You'd better throw that away," says Itten; not because he has dripped sweat on my drawing, but because I clearly haven't fulfilled the task. I look at him, perplexed. "Hold the material in your hand. Exactly. And now close your eyes. How does it feel? Try to internalise that feeling to the extent that you can draw it." Then, he moves on to look at the next piece of work. I still find the whole thing strange, but try to engage in the exercise. After all, I don't want to fail. The metal is smooth and not cool, as I might have imagined: but nothing in this room has been cool in a long time. It also feels quite bulky. Here we go, then, I think. I pick up

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my pencil and begin to shade in. I don't get very far. The others have long since finished. Itten holds up a few successful drawings, lets the students describe what is special about them, and then gives us the next assignment: We are to go and look for interesting materials in IIm park. "We'll meet again in an hour." Everyone is relieved. No one would have endured it for much longer in this oven.