

# The Influence of Bauhaus "Minimalist" Style on Contemporary Art Production and Consumption

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**Abstract:** This article primarily discusses the challenges posed by new architecture to traditional architectural concepts from the late 19th century to the outbreak of World War I, as well as how Bauhaus, as a representative modernist architectural style, influenced modern architecture and art. The article highlights the theoretical debate between traditional craftsmanship and modernist design, especially the ideological conflict during the "Cologne Debate." It also examines the impact of Walter Gropius' idealism and Hannes Meyer's communist ideals on Bauhaus. The simplicity and practicality of the Bauhaus style are contrasted with the decorative richness of traditional European architectural styles. The article further explores the widespread adoption of minimalism in contemporary society, its influence on the landscape painting field, and its role in the commercial and artistic domains. Lastly, the article points out that minimalism, as an inevitable product of the high-speed technological era, aligns with people's pursuit of functionalism and visual consumption while shaping business output and replication models.

**Keywords:** Bauhaus, Minimalism, Art Production and Consumption.

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## 1. Introduction

From the late 19th century to the outbreak of World War I, new architects continuously challenged traditional architectural concepts, fostering the formation of modern design ideas. Among these developments, the famous "Cologne Debate" emerged as the last significant ideological clash between traditional craftsmanship theory and modernist design.

In this debate, Hermann Muthesius, a leading advocate of modernist design, argued that standardization was essential for creating widely accepted design products and enhancing their popularity and economic value. He believed that standardization was not merely a production method but a crucial condition for products to succeed in the global market and enter international trade.

Conversely, Henry Van de Velde, representing traditional craftsmanship thought, insisted that design should be a form of personal artistic expression, emphasizing the unique artistic value of creative works. He firmly opposed product standardization, arguing that it would stifle creativity and aesthetic appeal, reducing design to cold industrial production.

In this intense intellectual confrontation, Muthesius effectively refuted Van de Velde's perspective with strong logic and persuasive arguments, laying a solid theoretical foundation for the establishment of Germany's modern design education system. His advocacy not only sparked profound reflections on the relationship between industrial production and artistic creation within the design community but also directly influenced the founding and development of the Bauhaus, providing crucial theoretical support and practical precedents for subsequent modern design movements.

## 2. Traditional European Architectural Style

According to Nikolaus Pevsner, the designs of Walter Gropius and his Bauhaus contemporaries thoroughly overturned past conventions, embodying modernist characteristics. "Bauhaus," founded by Walter Gropius in

Weimar, Germany, became the most renowned modernist architectural style in Germany at the time, representing contemporary art and design trends. The history of Bauhaus was tumultuous, roughly divided into three stages: the Weimar period (1919–1925), characterized by Walter Gropius' idealism; the Dessau period (1925–1932), marked by Hannes Meyer's communist ideals; and the Berlin period (1932–1933), defined by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's pragmatism.

These phases illustrate how Bauhaus fundamentally diverged from traditional European architectural styles. This transformation went beyond structural forms, profoundly influencing design philosophy. Traditional European architecture often featured rich ornamentation and symbolism, while Bauhaus emphasized functionality and simplicity, merging art with utility. Its "less is more" design principle extended beyond architecture to furniture, industrial products, and graphic design, shaping modern design profoundly.

Architectural styles reflect the cultural characteristics of their times. Throughout Europe's long history, traditional architecture was closely tied to religious devotion, brimming with emotional expression. From the reverence for gods in ancient Greece to medieval religious piety and the humanistic spirit of the Renaissance, these values were deeply embedded in architectural design.

The famous Gothic-style Milan Cathedral in Italy serves as an example. Built to provide a place of worship for Christian believers, the cathedral's entrance faces west, symbolically oriented toward the east where Christ's tomb is located. Externally, its spire-topped structure combines simplicity with intricate ornamentation, symbolizing both solemnity and transcendence. The upward-reaching spires represent the pursuit of spiritual elevation and aspiration toward heaven. Its elaborate carvings and stone reliefs, depicting biblical stories and sacred figures, merge devotion with artistic craftsmanship.

The cathedral's floor plan further embodies Christian symbolism. The transverse extensions of the central hall resemble outstretched arms, forming a crucifix-like shape reminiscent of the standing figure of Christ. Inside, Gothic architectural features such as pointed arches, ribbed vaults, and flying buttresses create an expansive and towering

interior. Large windows occupy much of the wall space beyond the columns. When sunlight streams through the tall stained-glass windows, it produces a mystical, kaleidoscopic light that envelops worshippers in a heavenly and solemn atmosphere. The stained-glass panels not only adorn the interior but also convey religious narratives through vivid depictions of saints and biblical scenes.

Traditional European architecture encapsulates the emotions and cultural values of its time in every detail, no matter how seemingly insignificant. Its emphasis on intricate details and symbolic design stands in stark contrast to Bauhaus' functionalism and minimalist aesthetics, reflecting the cultural values and societal transformations underpinning architectural styles across different historical periods.

### 3. The Minimalist Architectural Style of Bauhaus

In stark contrast to traditional Western architectural styles, Bauhaus embraced a radically different artistic approach. Its design philosophy centered on "people" rather than "products." Unlike the Arts and Crafts movement, Bauhaus did not aim to resist machines but sought to establish close ties with industry. As a design school emphasizing functionality and the use of modern materials, Bauhaus extensively utilized reinforced concrete, glass, and steel. Its style was straightforward and practical, devoid of unnecessary ornamentation.

Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, the third director of Bauhaus, was a leading figure in utilitarian design. He famously proposed the design principle "Less is more," emphasizing the removal of all superfluous decorations to achieve purity in function and form. This design philosophy has profoundly influenced designers worldwide and reshaped modern lifestyles ever since its inception.

Despite its forward-thinking ideals, Bauhaus faced opposition from the political environment of its time. Due to its radical artistic and social reform agenda, Bauhaus was forced to close in 1933, ending its brief but impactful 14-year journey. However, its spirit of challenging traditions and embracing innovation has continued to inspire architects and designers globally in the following decades.

In contemporary society, traditional Western architectural styles have gradually been replaced by the minimalist Bauhaus aesthetic, which has significantly influenced daily life and design aesthetics. Its impact extends beyond architecture, permeating interior design, fashion, and industrial design. The "New Chinese" interior style exemplifies a fusion of traditional Chinese design with Bauhaus-inspired minimalism. This style retains the charm of traditional Chinese furniture while incorporating a modern sense of simplicity, creating a unique design trend.

Today, sleek and functional reinforced concrete skyscrapers have become symbols of modern urban civilization. Their streamlined appearance not only conveys a strong sense of modernity but also facilitates mass production, rapid construction, and efficient use, making them highly practical and economically valuable. Though Bauhaus originated in the early 20th century, its design philosophy has transcended time, shaping the architectural and design landscape of the modern world.

### 4. The Influence of Minimalism on Contemporary Aesthetics

Under the combined influence of technology and minimalism, human aesthetic preferences and experiences have undergone significant changes. Even traditional Chinese painting, with its deep cultural roots, has experienced contemporary transformations. Taking Chinese landscape painting as an example, brush-and-ink style was traditionally the core standard for aesthetic judgment. The history of Chinese landscape painting can be seen as a narrative of evolving brush-and-ink individuality.

However, as China integrated into the global economic cycle, the minimalist style represented by Bauhaus gradually permeated Chinese society. Skyscrapers constructed from steel, concrete, and glass have dominated the sensory environment, forming the shared visual landscape of contemporary society. When towering buildings and technologically altered natural landscapes define the urban experience, people's traditional aesthetic values begin to disintegrate and reform. Natural sceneries once untouched by technological influence are increasingly fading from view, reducing their capacity to inspire artistic creation and resonate with modern audiences on a sensory or spiritual level.

Amid the dual impact of minimalism's visual aesthetics and an oversaturated consumer culture, art that stimulates new visual excitement has become the "new favorite" of the public. The most direct way to refresh visual perceptions is by crafting unconventional aesthetic forms that appeal to human visual cognition. For Chinese landscape painting, its inherently flexible composition allows ample room for unconventional artistic expression. This flexibility has encouraged artists to focus on compositional individuality and constructivist aesthetics, making unique artistic structures a central value in contemporary Chinese landscape painting.

Looking back over the past century of landscape painting's development, the traditional style emphasizing scholarly refinement, meticulous brushwork, and expressive ink has gradually receded from public view. In its place has emerged a modern style of landscape painting characterized by calligraphic abstraction, dynamic rhythms, visual tension, and perceptual illusions. These works emphasize sensory impact and unique visual experiences.

Although the evolution of contemporary landscape painting is influenced by technology, society, and politics, minimalism has played a crucial role in expanding its aesthetic horizons. This influence has driven innovation in compositional individuality and visual experimentation. However, minimalism's impact on landscape painting is a double-edged sword. While it broadens aesthetic possibilities, it also risks pushing the art form toward visual consumerism. When landscape painters focus excessively on creating visually striking compositions to capture public attention, they may neglect deeper artistic and spiritual pursuits. This trend poses a challenge to preserving the spiritual essence of Chinese landscape painting—a cautionary point for contemporary artists to reflect upon in their creative endeavors.

### 5. Conclusion

From the perspective of today's social environment, the minimalist wave represented by Bauhaus is not only an inevitable result of the rapidly developing technological era but also a reflection of people's diverse spiritual and material

needs in modern society. In this age of rapid technological advancement and information overload, people face an accelerated pace of life and increasing psychological and visual stress. Minimalism, with its clean and straightforward style, alleviates these burdens by providing a refreshing and tranquil sensory experience.

As material wealth increases, hedonism has become widespread in contemporary society, with an unprecedented focus on material possessions and worldly pursuits. Minimalism is more than just an art and design style—it represents a life philosophy. It promotes the concept of “less is more,” achieving maximum functionality with minimal design elements. This philosophy aligns with modern society's pursuit of practicality and economic efficiency. By simplifying product and environmental design, production and maintenance costs can be significantly reduced, while consumers enjoy increased efficiency and convenience.

In a consumer-driven era, public preferences largely shape market trends and cultural production. Artists and designers must consider how to capture public attention and interest. Minimalism, with its clean lines and unadorned style, naturally attracts visual attention by resonating with human visual perception. Its ability to create unconventional visual experiences also plays a crucial role in fostering visual consumption.

From a commercial perspective, minimalism's design principles fit well with contemporary business models. In today's globalized and interconnected world, products and services must adapt to various markets and cultures. Minimalism's universality and adaptability make it an ideal choice for cross-cultural communication. Moreover, minimalist products, due to their simple designs, are easier to mass-produce and market, significantly reducing production and promotional costs, thereby generating greater economic returns and enhancing market competitiveness.

Thus, minimalism is not only an art and design style that meets the demands of the times but also an effective strategy

for addressing the complexities of modern society. By embracing simplicity, it responds to contemporary society's pursuit of efficiency, functionality, and aesthetics, becoming a cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural global phenomenon.

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