

BLACK MOUNTAIN COLLEGE: AN IRRESISTIBLE AGENDA

Keywords

Resistance
Education
Community
Autonomy
Essay

Sometimes it is not necessary to know where you are going, and just know where you don't want to go. This possibility of not having a clear objective – more than that of resisting conventions or well-known paths – has been little explored in architecture history. This text shows us one of those strange cases, the Black Mountain College, an architecture school that, after too much resistance, ended almost in oblivion, without much descent.

Resistance is a polysemic word whose meanings dispute morality and science, psychoanalysis and politics, mechanics and electricity, philosophy and architecture. They are invoked by the ascetic and the researcher, the insubordinate and the engineer, each in their own environment. The dove flies in the air, not in a vacuum, says Kant (2005), because air opposes its flight, as tangible reality opposes pure thought. Action and reaction, power and resistance are, respectively, forces and capacities that make

sense in their reciprocity. Not in vain the Latin etymology of the term, *resistere*, is composed of the prefix *re* (“back to the origin, again”) and the verb *sistere* (“to stop, stand, take position”), that is, literally, to resist is to stop, to stand in front of something.

The first *Dictionary of the Spanish Language* (1739) emphasizes the edifying dimension that connects resistance with the exercise of dignity. There is a heroic quality in it: to not give in to external circumstances, beginning by the body itself of the person who puts it into practice. On the other hand, the face and the cross of the Latin word *virtus*, which is the physical impetus and the moral virtue, are subsumed in the concept of resistance: “To oppose [the aforementioned Dictionary says] the action or violence of something and defend oneself against it.” Opposition and defense are, therefore, the two poles of resistance. Between the active – or activist – resistance to being brought down, which is instantaneous, and a passive, resilient and long-term one, there could be another of a collaborative root, mid-term, consisting in letting oneself be carried away so as not to be knocked down. How these extremes are or can be touched, and the possibilities that open up between them were once dealt with by Black Mountain College (BMC).

Created in 1933, the same year that the Bauhaus closed in Berlin, the center and its educational project would dissolve in 1957, after 24 years of activity which continued that of its German predecessor. Its pedagogical proposals are incomparable in historical terms, but, at the same time, susceptible of comparison. Among the various professional and personal itineraries that sewn both episodes together are, as is known, those of Josef and Anni Albers, whose friendship with Walter Gropius motivated the long shadow of the Bauhaus founder to be projected to the BMC, supporting through Harvard many of its initiatives.¹ Other illustrious architects of the Bauhaus – and of its kaleidoscopic American formulations – would participate in that trajectories transfer that defined the new college’s *locus*, resulting in the concomitances between the two schools. What for some are incentives to nostalgia, for others are reflection stimuli. Celebrated for its contingent,² ephemeral and voluntarily fragile activity, for its eagerness to search, and for the instituting capacity of its practices – today understood as critical externalities to the instrumental apparatus and legitimization of the inheriting models of Beaux-Arts and polytechnic teachings – the BMC offers itself, precisely because it was never an architecture school, as an irresistible outside of the workshop culture and its emphasis on design as axes of the architect’s education (Cuff, 1991). And, although its first decade of life coincides with an environment of unusual pedagogical renewal in the American architecture schools (Ockman, 2012), which thus reacted to the moment’s socioeconomic and technological challenges – among others, Columbia and Harvard with Joseph Hudnut³ (Moran, 2009), the University of Southern

1 Grupo de estudiantes del *Work Program* partiendo del Robert E. Lee Hall para trabajar en las obras del nuevo campus de Lake Eden, 1940-41. / *Group of Work Program students heading off from the Robert E. Lee Hall to work on the new Lake Eden campus construction site, 1940-41.*
Fuente / Source: Western Regional Archives, State Archives of North Carolina (WRA/SANC).



2 Lee Hall, actualmente denominado Eureka Hall, fue la primera sede del BMC (1933-1941). El edificio forma parte del complejo del Blue Ridge Assembly, Black Mountain, Carolina del Norte. / *Lee Hall, currently named Eureka Hall, was the BMC's first headquarters (1933-1941). The building is part of the Blue Ridge Assembly complex, Black Mountain, North Carolina.*

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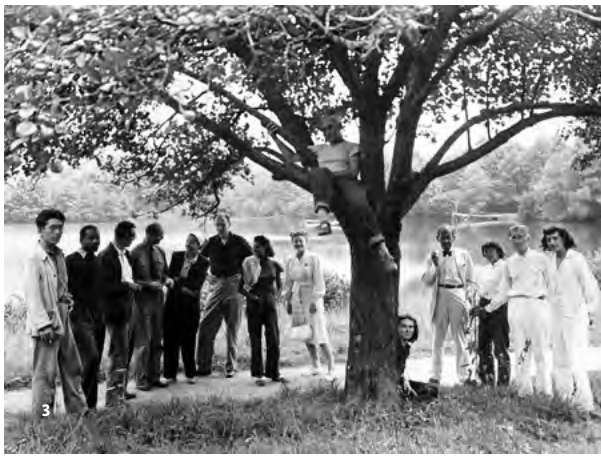
California with Arthur C. Weatherhead (Howell-Ardilla, 2010) or the MIT with William Wurster (Dutta, 2013) – the BMC unfolded its transgressive agenda without the institutional umbrella provided by these universities (authentic scientific, intellectual and moral references of the country), approaching, in its experience of coexistence, more to the spirit of a self-sufficient reformist community (also with a long tradition in North America) than to any of the previous ones. This is why its pedagogies and dissident ways of life are as inspiring as its vulnerability and resilience in the face of continuous threats, from normalization, political and cultural, to the vigilance to which it was subjected during the ideological paroxysm of McCarthyism.

“Democracy in Action”

Under this suggestive title, an article by John Evarts was published in the July 1941 issue of *California Arts and Architecture* in which he presented the BMC as an attractive community educational project in the Blue Ridge Mountains, North Carolina. Written eight years after its foundation, the report emphasized the pioneering character of the center and its proposal based on democracy, freedom, and autonomy for its students. The text was illustrated with images from its Work Program, where the collective of teachers and students put into practice the oldest and most recognizable understanding of architecture: the construction work (of the campus buildings). The chronicle of Evarts, a music teacher very committed to the project and its funding, was clearly promotional: he was looking for followers. It was not by chance either that the magazine stated that just a year before John Entenza had acquired – and was still pursuing, just like the BMC – alliances to sustain his notoriety. The entry of the BMC into the editorial and artistic circuits of North American modernity, its participation in exhibitions such as the ones MoMA dedicated to its most famous members,⁴ or the open days to attract potential investors, were part of a communication strategy showing the College as the country's most advanced independent arts education institution.

Cultural prestige and a revolutionary aura had characterized the BMC since its inception when, led by John Andrew Rice and accompanied by the tutelary figure of Ted Dreier, a group of professors expelled from Rollins College for their atypical teaching methods agreed to move to Asheville to continue their activity, free of any doctrinal restriction. With this aspiration, they founded a new liberal arts center destined to promote several events from theater, dance, performance, music, poetry, and parties, to architecture (Gilsanz-Díaz, 2017). Undoubtedly, fame preceded many of its teachers, who were related to the fields of arts and architecture, and science and humanities.⁵

Contemplated from the posthumous condition of our neoliberal present, in which it seems that everything ends (Garcés, 2017), the BMC's images and stories excite the imagination discovering a stimulating learning scenario where everything was to be done. Words like freedom (Lane, 1990; Rumaker, 2003), community (Duberman, 2009), art (Harris, 2002; Katz, 2002), experimentation (Díaz, 2015; Blume et al, 2015) or modernity (Molesworth and



Erickson, 2015) are some of the attributes most frequently used to explain its pedagogical adventure and its political convictions as an example of instruction, creation, and coexistence linked to an idyllic academic and natural environment, prefiguring, to some extent, a cosmopolitan atmosphere (Stengers, 2014) of heterogeneous realities oriented to the composition of a common world. This multiplicity of singularities, aligned in the construction of a new institutionality, beyond distinguishing between the public and the private, would have emerged at the margin of both spaces, as Manuel Borja-Villel (2011:1) well explains, stating that the common is not a mere expansion of the individual, but something that is never completed: “The common only develops through the other and by the other, in the common headquarters, in being shared, to use Blanchot’s terms.”

Dissidence and Activism: Experimentation as a Political Field

Faced with the apparently untouchable modern paradigm of artistic and architectural teaching that was the Bauhaus – which shares certain parallels with the BMC in its methodologies, workshops, and participants (Schawinsky, 1971; Ellert, 1972; Kentgens-Craig, 1999; Horowitz and Danilowitz, 2006) – it should be remembered that after several confrontations not exempt from treason or violence, the institution led by Gropius soon got rid of its contradictions to end up embracing, as Miguel Mesa (2019:68) points out, “rationalism, functionalism, objectivity and technical pragmatism and getting rid of any trace of idealism that Johannes Itten had defended in the *Vorkurs* since its foundation.” In contrast and resisting its own conflicts, the BMC never divested itself of its first principles: experimenting through oneself to form subjectivities capable of recomposing other common presents. This was reflected, for example, in its structure of self-government and assembly management, or in the fact that, by being the property of the teaching staff, the school assumed all the risks of its program first-hand, even in its final moments. If the Bauhaus is a heroic myth, the BMC is a legend of antiheroes whose impossible resistance would mark the institution for posterity. If the Bauhaus owed its success to its closure, the BMC intended to be, from the beginning,

3 Cuerpo docente en el verano de 1946. / *Teaching staff during the summer of 1946.* Izquierda a derecha / *From left to right:* Leo Amino, Jacob Lawrence, Leo Lionni, Ted Dreier, Nora Lionni, Beaumont Newhall, Gwendolyn Lawrence, Ise Gropius, Jean Varda (en el árbol), Nancy Newhall (sentada), Walter Gropius, Mary “Molly” Gregory, Josef Albers, Anni Albers. Fuente / *Source:* Western Regional Archives, State Archives of North Carolina (WRA/SANC).

4 Grupo de estudiantes junto a Jean Varda en el caballo de Troya que realizaron ese mismo verano. / *Group of students with Jean Varda in the Troy horse they built that same summer.* Fuente / *Source:* Western Regional Archives, State Archives of North Carolina (WRA/SANC).

5 Escena de *The Danse Macabre: A Sociological Study* dirigido por Xanti Schawinsky, 1938. / *Scene from The Danse Macabre: A Sociological Study directed by Xanti Schawinsky, 1938.* Fuente / Source: Western Regional Archives, State Archives of North Carolina (WRA/SANC).

6 La vida en BMC, baile un sábado por la noche en el *Dining Hall*, Lake Eden Campus, c. 1945. / *Life in the BMC, Saturday night dance in the Dining Hall, Lake Eden Campus, c. 1945.* Fuente / Source: Western Regional Archives, State Archives of North Carolina (WRA/SANC).



what it could not be and, therefore, the enthusiasm of its contemporary readings is due, in large part, to its impossibility. “It could not be,” could work perhaps as a good epitaph to label its inscription in the pantheon of modern myths.

Activism was another of its cover letters. For example, in promoting solidarity action to raise funds in support of the Republican side in the Spanish civil war.⁶ Assuming the ideological commitment and all its uncertainties to its ultimate consequences, so as not to empty its proposal of political capacity – that is, its conscious decision not to remove the conflict and the precariousness of its activities – destabilized the BMC’s agenda, but made it more relevant and also more exciting. Their resistance to uniformity was manifested not only in the radicality of their pedagogies, but especially in their alterity: inclusion and openness to women – despite the little recognition that historiography has given them (Gilsanz-Díaz y Blanco, 2018) – other sexual orientations, nationalities,⁷ political exiles,⁸ races,⁹ and social classes reflect their foundation in personal freedom against any axis of oppression, such as the implacable laws of racial segregation of the time.

The dissent of the BMC regarding regulated academic modes and programs, its situation “outside the mainstream architectural institutions” (Moran, 2012:387), the controversial profile of some of its teachers, such as the anthropologist Paul Radin, the poet Charles Olson or Buckminster Fuller, suspicions of embezzlement of state aid for veterans to study in it, and the isolation of its geographical enclave led the FBI to view the college as a philo-Communist institution during the Second Red Scare (1947-57), and a threat to national security, keeping it under close surveillance and even infiltrating an agent.¹⁰

Manage Precariousness

The BMC organization was based on a self-managed structure not strictly democratic but with a democratic spirit (Bojesen, 2012), whose operation required an absolute commitment to the cause. This implied that teachers, men and women, moved with their families to the college. This condition generated a continuous flow of visitors who temporarily joined the center to teach their courses. But, by being a transit place, the institution was certainly unstable, both for teachers and students.





Insecurity assumed from imagination and chance – de-dramatizing failure – as open ways of approaching the experiential and experimental (Gilsanz-Díaz, 2017). This is the case, among others, of Josef Albers' drawing, *matière* or color lessons; Xanti Schawinsky's theater laboratory Stage Studies; Lawrence Kocher's architecture workshops; Charles Olson's explorations of poetry, theater, and dance; the well-known – previously demonstrated – tests with Buckminster Fuller's geodesic domes; the compositions and happenings of John Cage, or the choreographies of Merce Cunningham. Two-way learning and self-exploration exercises, inside and outside the classroom, as an expression of their freedom or, rather, of different notions of it (Scott, 2019), often opposing each other and causing disputes.

The image projected by the BMC was undoubtedly irresistible. Both for the charismatic personalities of its teaching staff and for the magnetism of an educational program based on the emancipatory potential of criticism and personal inquiry: that is, in processes before results, questions before answers, search before investigation – the Search versus Research by Josef Albers, as Weaver (2018) recalls.

However, this desire to (re) think themselves building (themselves) collectively was articulated against a background of evident precariousness. The contractual conditions of the staff barely guaranteed financial remuneration, so the teaching staff had to travel to expand their payroll, contacting potential donors who would provide other means of financing; students also had to mobilize to ensure their subsistence, which included persuading potential new students. With insufficient tuition income, the BMC needed other resources to organize summer seminars, buy books, working tools, musical instruments, construction materials, and even seeds to cultivate the land available on the Lake Eden campus and farm. Because the student numbers went down during the war, the search for new members became even more pressing, so that, from Josef Albers to the last newcomer, everyone contributed to promoting the college, publicizing their talent and environment of freedom as the center's main values. With this objective they frequently traveled to New York to publicize their latest work and, thus, arouse the interest of MoMA and its cultural orbits. But, despite this search for mutual recognition as a form of

7-8 Construcción del *Studies Building* proyectado por Lawrence Kocher y materializado en hormigón armado, piedra local y revestido con chapa de acero galvanizado, 1940-41. / *Studies Building construction designed by Lawrence Kocher and materialized in precast concrete, local stones, and coated with galvanized steel.* Fuente / Source: Western Regional Archives, State Archives of North Carolina (WRA/SANC).



9 Lawrence Kocher y Ted Dreier replanteando el *Studies Building* de Kocher, c. 1940. / *Lawrence and Ted Dreier doing revisions on Kocher's Studies Building, c. 1940.* Fuente / Source: Western Regional Archives, State Archives of North Carolina (WRA/SANC).

10 Estudiantes trabajando en las obras del *Studies Building* en Lake Eden Campus, 1940-41. / *Students working on the Studies Building's construction in Lake Eden Campus, 1940-41.* Fuente / Source: Western Regional Archives, State Archives of North Carolina (WRA/SANC).



validating its agenda, the BMC never stopped operating on the margins of what was instituted.

In its resilient struggle to maintain its independence, the Work Program, in operation from 1936 until the dismantling of the BMC, became one of its main educational actions. It was also a way to temporarily attract students from other schools over the summer and, with it, extra income. The program – advised and supported by Walter Gropius during the twelve years that the Albers¹¹ were at the BMC – promoted one of their founding experiences: learning by doing based on the theories of John Dewey. It consisted of a real-scale didactic construction workshop, proposed as a communal action, a training supplement mainly for the architecture student, although open to any profile with a combination of manual dexterity and physical effort. Under the condition of self-sufficiency and the imperative to build their own facilities, they intervened, to varying degrees, on a total of 34 buildings. Possibly the most unique for its scale and use was the *Studies Building*, which embodied one of the BMC's central aspects: common life and individual learning.

However, although advertised as a voluntary activity, the Work Program perverted the meaning and reach of collaboration by going beyond the limits of the educational experience. This happened in a sense that endures in our days, both professionally and academically, where young architects, students, and researchers put their talent and dedication at the service of a market that profits from the vocation in exchange for symbolic payments and opportunities always postponed, as Remedios Zafra denounces. Also, the celebration of precariousness disguised with enthusiasm (Zafra, 2017), which was endorsed by the publications of the center itself, has its counterpart in the testimonies of physically exhausted students who confessed were forced to work as “slaves.”¹² Similarly, the constant difficulties and disagreements in the task organization reflect the complex and ambitious nature of the Work Program for this college, which, it should be emphasized, was not an architecture school but was built to guarantee its survival and never clarified its status, nor the accreditation of their titles.¹³

The architecture teaching was very irregular, like almost everything that took place there. However, whether due to Walter Gropius' ubiquitous influence,

the dedication of Lawrence Kocher,¹⁴ or the desire to create a place that would express its particular avant-garde, the BMC decidedly opted for modern architecture despite its material and economic limitations. Gropius remotely managed its presence in the BMC's curriculum. On the one hand, proposing teachers to collaborate or deliver courses on time, such as Marcel Breuer, Charles Burchard, Serge Chermayeff, Norman Fletcher, Anatole Kopp, Bernard Rudofsky, Josep Lluís Sert, Catherine Bauer or William Wurster, proper names that reveal how interwoven the college's agenda was with those of other central schools in North America. And, on the other hand, advising its students to participate in the Work Program, or urging them, as it happened with Harry Seidler, to recruit students to complete their training at Harvard, an institution for which the BMC did not imply any competition, and acted rather as a quarry.

Claim the story(s), resist the myth

In the framework of the common experiences arising from the divergence between its members' sensibilities and interests, the energy of the BMC turned to ephemeral action as a way of being in the world (Nieto, 2012). This was present from its creation to its agonizing closure with Charles Olson, the last rector who endured with a small group of students in conditions of extreme deprivation, without electricity and, in the end, selling their works of art to buy food.

Aside from the romanticism inherent in any Numantine resistance, one of the questions that its legend raises is to what extent the BMC was a center where to train students – many grateful to have been part of their project – or, rather, if it was a professional opportunity for the personalities who passed through it and who irrupted (and often interrupted) the college's cultural and artistic life with their own agendas, complicating the possibility of authentic teachings. The interdisciplinary and hybrid profile of its professors, its methodologies and content were its great ideal: inclusion and flexibility so that every student could find their place, although, at the same time, it could disperse them, or, even, dislocate them on the testing ground, which was the BMC, which could not assure teaching results. Probably, the myth of flexibility

11 Clase de dibujo de Josef Albers, c. 1939-40. / *Josef Albers' drawing class, c. 1939-40.* Izquierda a derecha / *From left to right:* Lisa Jalowetz, Bela Martin, Fred Stone, Betty Brett, Albers (arrodillado), Robert de Niro, Martha McMillan, Eunice Shifris. Fuente / *Source:* Western Regional Archives, State Archives of North Carolina (WRA/SANC).

12 Lawrence Kocher y sus estudiantes en la terraza del *Studies Building*, c. 1942. / *Lawrence Kocher and his students in the Studies Building's terrace, c. 1942.* Fuente / *Source:* Western Regional Archives, State Archives of North Carolina (WRA/SANC).



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13 Estado actual del *Studies Building*. / *Current status of the Studies Building*.
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14 Detalle de uno de los frescos pintados por Jean Charlot durante su visita al *Studies Building* en el verano de 1944. / *Detail of one of the frescoes painted by Jean Charlot during his visit to the Studies Building in the summer of 1944*.
© Gilsanz, Gutiérrez, Parra, 2016

was already too exciting in the BMC, even though, as Oliver Wainwright (2019) argues, it has rarely been successful. A great part of that faculty were artists, many exiled, who were trying to carve out a path for themselves on the American scene and, for them, the BMC represented a space where they could experience creative processes and earn a future, embraced by the prestige that the institution manufactured for its visitors. If those who passed through contributed more than what they received, it would also be a question that can be extrapolated to the contemporary university and its demandable commitment to society.

The BMC functioned as a large network of personal relationships in which some recommended others to teach classes and obtain funding. In fact, their number of graduates was very low, around 15%, and a large part of the students only attended one or two years and then went to another university to graduate. Furthermore, it is striking that, unlike the disciples of the Bauhaus masters, the names of the BMC graduates have hardly become more relevant later, with few exceptions.¹⁵

The most recognizable remains of the BMC are found in published and oral stories, in the art pieces that have survived, in recent monographic exhibitions and in the enormous quantity of graphic, photographic and archival material, a whole microcosm preserved with intellectual and dissemination effort made by the Western Regional Archives and the BMC Museum and Arts Center in the city of Asheville. Despite Olson's assumed ending, in which the BMC would dissolve and disperse its members across the United States as a replica of the Bauhaus diaspora, and despite certain unsuccessful attempts to replicate the experience or at least to get closer to it,¹⁶ what remains of the BMC are, fundamentally, idealized narrations that evoke its program as a seminal and sentimental episode of the American avant-garde. The study of this legacy, however, allows us to vindicate all the pedagogical and transformative potential of architectural history and theory in order to revisit it, infusing "timely knowledge with untimeliness" (Ockman, 2017).

Its material imprint is the self-built campus, although the standing buildings barely preserve its vestiges; neither the Blue Ridge Assembly, which was its first headquarters, owned by the YMCA, nor the Lake Eden

complex. Ironically, its resistance to regulations and conservatism seems today, more than ever, a losing battle. The campus that once symbolized the quintessence of progressivism and inclusion is now a segregated summer camp just for Christian boys – not girls – that has transformed its facilities into a place of recreation and play with a completely divergent political vision (Stutzin, 2015). From the urgency of our current crises – “every generation rewrites the history of its own present” (Ockman, 2017) – this decline and its identification with the Promethean myth of the loser only add to its legend. Despite the fascination that this may arouse, it is really unknown to what extent its architects conceived the BMC as an ephemeral project, if it began with an ‘in progress’ label, or if it simply could not resist any longer. Surely, it also confirms the difficulty of reinventing forms of coexistence that can absorb differences and that, beyond disappointment or any reenchantment, as Latour says, it is never easy to inherit the modern tradition (Latour and Gagliardi, 2008).

In conclusion

Like the avant-garde that preceded it, Black Mountain College appealed to the ideal that education is seduction. Unlike the Bauhaus, its utopia – fleetingly crystallized in a corner of the Appalachians – was the desire to save architecture from the expert knowledge that other contemporary institutions promulgated, betting – we would read again in a Latourian key – that it could be explored from another knowledge and other conditions, therefore, being activated by political sparks. But any utopia, as not-place, disorients. In the BMC, artistic manifestations of various kinds, including architecture, were carried out without knowing very well where they were going, thus opposing scientism and the pragmatism of other innovative curricula.

In reality, when thinking about it in another way, it resisted the present, producing new forms of subjectivation

15 Instalaciones de Camp Rockmont, Lake Eden, antiguo campus del BMC (1941-1957), con el edificio del *Studies Building* al fondo entre los árboles. Vista desde el *Dining Hall*. / Camp Rockmont facilities, Lake Eden, former BMC campus (1941-1957), with the *Studies Building* in the background, among the trees. Seen from the *Dining Hall*. © Gilsanz, Gutiérrez, Parra, 2016



(Deleuze, 2004) with which to look to the future. Indeed, resistance, as a form of democracy, accredits the conscience of those who, not knowing what they want, however, are clear about what they are defending. *Défendu* means forbidden in French. And those who forbid themselves and their group the normal course of events, are also resistant. “We are lacking resistance to the present,” Deleuze and Guattari (1994:108) also said, because those who resist, try not to cave to the present time (Esquirol, 2019) and those who manage it politically by imposing restrictions and protocols that stabilize their negativity.

But if the BMC’s agenda was irresistible, its vocation did not resist what it proclaimed. Its radical contingency, instead of the rationality of any strategy (Pérez Soto, 2008), did not allow us to expect any continuity in the results, its creative proposals being mere contingent actions, and not so much the product of new attempts. The dislocated experiences of the BMC testify that resisting is, above all, cultivating the opportunity of other worlds, opening the possibility of its future: by frontally opposing the hegemonic, the resistance opens flanks to the alternative. Its members found a first opportunity to resist any hint of uniformity of architecture studies in the liberal arts: arts and crafts as a preamble to the study and exercise of what drew them together but did not summarize them. Although the BMC was not an architecture school, perhaps it could have become a preliminary architecture school. That is to say, to have become an extensive *Vorkurs*, because, before training architects, it would have built bridges between the layman and the architect (Cuff, 1991), training its students to become so. Perhaps, because it did not want to be what it could become, it succumbed by resisting its own cause: not teaching how to make architecture, but overflowing it through imagination, criticism, and experimentation, as its founding principles reflected (Reynolds, 1998). In short, it was an instituting pedagogical project that performatively questioned categories, knowledge, and validation instruments with unprecedented radicality and extreme fragility. And its ambition, if you can call it that, of not certificating architects led to its exhaustion.

Contrary to the Bauhaus, whose closure served, like the outbreak of a supernova, for its teachers to spread their modern certainties around the world with different fortunes, from the BMC no new stars emerged (Albright, 2017-2018), but a way of teaching that invites you to consider opportunities to be on the margins, to “give (us) something to think about.” This, as indicated by Marina Garcés (2013:92), would be the challenge of any critical educational commitment today. Facing the acquisition of competencies and skills for the market, the great challenge is to “give ourselves the space and time to think,” which implies “learning to be affected” and, for this – as in the BMC – it takes courage to cultivate “the affective relationship with others,” there is also where education, as a form of resistance to established structures, reveals itself as a field of experimentation.

Finally and precisely thanks to this intimacy with others, it was not so much its political agenda, but the

personal agendas of the members of the BMC, their family circles, their professional interactions and their networks of contacts that made the militancy of this project resist in the indeterminacy during the more than two decades that elapse, exactly, between the start of the New Deal and the launch of Sputnik. Thanks to its ability to mobilize affections and its ability to negotiate its own reputation, the BMC was able to deploy an educational proposal as brave as it is vulnerable, as encouraging as it is contingent, opposing, day by day, internal, economic, socio-political and cultural tensions that shaped the North American identity in those crucial years of the 20th century. Maybe it wasn't that pretty while it lasted. **ARQ**

Notas / Notes

- 1 Walter Gropius was a member of the Advisory Council of Black Mountain College between 1939 and 1949. This expert council, without legal responsibilities, brought together figures from various areas of knowledge, among others, John Dewey, Carl Jung and Max Lerner, who, in addition to overseeing the school's educational programs and finances, acted as its spokespersons in the United States.
- 2 'Contingent' derives from the Latin prefix *con* ("in association") and from the verb *tangere* ("to touch," "to reach") from which touch, contiguous, contagion or occur also come. This lexical family allows us to better understand the idea of "architecture as an event" in the BMC (Gilsanz-Díaz, 2017), that is, what can happen randomly or not, at anytime and anywhere, due to the contact between bodies and objects, which is exciting thanks to the discovery itself. As Sara Ahmed (2004:18) explains, emotions shape (impress, imprint) and spread between individuals and their association with objects and with other bodies, individual or collective, "is contingent (implies contact)."
- 3 In cases like that of Joseph Hudnut, this pedagogical renewal even preceded the arrival of European teachers. In fact, his curricular innovations in the early 1930s, both at Columbia and later at Harvard, were important *per se* and "not merely efforts to establish Bauhaus practices in the country," as Moran underlines (2009:89), while also pointing out that it was his own reform aspirations that, encouraged by Lawrence Kocher, would have led Hudnut to hire Gropius.
- 4 The Bauhaus anthology exhibition organized by MoMA in 1938 included works by the Albers, Lyonel Feininger, and Xanti Schawinsky. Subsequently, MoMA would dedicate several retrospectives to BMC members, culminating in the 1949 Anni Albers solo exhibition. Since the early 1940s, Elizabeth Mock's presence in its Architecture Department and the closeness of her sister Catherine Bauer Wurster, also linked to Harvard and MIT, consolidated the BMC's relations with the MoMA that Katherine Dreier, through her nephew Ted (Dreier), had already facilitated during the previous decade.
- 5 Among them, Robert Rauschenberg, Willem and Elaine de Kooning, Merce Cunningham, John Cage, Buckminster Fuller, Robert Creeley, or the mathematician Max Dehn, to name just a few.
- 6 Leaflet found in Ted Dreier's file. Western Regional Archives, North Carolina State Archives, Asheville, North Carolina (hereinafter WRA/SANC), Private Collections, Theodore and Barbara Dreier, BMC Project Collection 1925-1988, series. BMC Oversize materials: Scrapbook 1937-1938, P.C. 1956.78 Oversize.
- 7 Among Latin American teachers, the Cuban writer and historian Herminio Portell Vilá, taught history classes (1935-38 and 1941) and Lea, his wife, of Spanish, while the Guatemalan artist Carlos Mérida was a teacher in 1940. For his part, the Cuban writer José Yglesias was a student and student representative in 1946.
- 8 The BMC faculty was nourished by a constellation of exiled Europeans from the Bauhaus, such as the Albers, Xanti Schawinsky, and Stefan

- Wolpe, as well as other recurring visitors such as Walter Gropius, Marcel Breuer or Lyonel Feininger. Among the exiled Spaniards, the brothers Francisco and Fernando León were BMC students with scholarships through the mediation of Fernando de los Ríos, who was also a member of their Advisory Council (1943-1949). See correspondence from Joseph Phyllis in WRA/SANC, BMC Research Project 1933-10973, V Donated Material, Box 7, and also the *BMC Bulletin* for the 1939-40 academic year, WRA/SANC, BMC Project Collection, Box 10 and the *BMC Bulletin Newsletter* no. 15, 1941.
- 9 The admission of the students Alma Stone Williams (1944) and Sylvesta Martin (1945), as well as teachers Carol Brice (1945 and 1947), Roland Hayes (1945), Percy H. Baker, (1945), Jacob Lawrence (1946) and Gwendolyn Knight (1946), was an authentic exercise of resistance, not without debate, which corroborates the openness to diversity defended and practiced by the BMC. For example, in 1947, 5 African American students were enrolled out of a total of 100, with 6 teachers of that race joining, all of whom were awarded scholarships and paid, respectively, by the Julius Rosenwald Foundation.
 - 10 The FBI reports were released in August 2015, available at: <http://www.documentcloud.org/documents/2191031-bmcfbfile.html>
 - 11 The correspondence preserved in the WRA/SANC provides numerous samples of the professional and personal relationship between Gropius and the Albers, to whom the German architect entrusted the education of his daughter Ati, who graduated in 1946 from the BMC.
 - 12 This is literally how it is stated in a June 4, 1942 letter to Ted Dreier, which was signed simply as Eve, a professor at the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee, an educational center that would soon play an important role in the fight for civil rights.
 - 13 Its official recognition was managed through other universities that acted as advocates, such as Antioch College in Ohio. This is reflected in the letter of May 26, 1942, addressed to the then rector Robert Wunch on behalf of W. B. Alexander, dean of Antioch College. See WRA/SANC, BMC II General Files 1933-1956, Promotional Portfolio 1943-44, 25.
 - 14 Lawrence Kocher, editor of *Architectural Record* between 1927 and 1938, was linked to the BMC from his first visit to the center that same year, being a member of its teaching staff between 1940 and 1943 and actively facilitating the access of his colleagues to editorial circles with similar modern ideas.
 - 15 Although some students carried out teaching tasks, replicating the role-exchange model of professor-student, and even gained recognition in local circles, such as Franz Kline, Ruth Asawa or Claude Stoller, their relationship with the BMC was uneven and not all of them were formed entirely there.
 - 16 For example, in 1980, the College of Arts at the State University of New York was renamed BMC II. The BMC is also considered a precursor to other American centers, including Marlboro College (Vermont, 1946), New College (Florida, 1960), University of California Santa Cruz (1965), Prescott College (Arizona, 1966), Evergreen State College (Washington, 1967), etc. Likewise, the collaborative spirit of the Work Program can be reflected in numerous subsequent experiences, from the Open City of Ritoque and the Universidad de Talca, to Hooke Park, the current test campus of the Architectural Association.

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