



North Facade of Price Gilbert Library
source: bnm. Price Gilbert and Corsland Tower Library Renewal. Atlanta

bauhaus to Brutalism

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Price Gilbert library complex of Georgia Institute of Technology stands out as a unique piece of architecture on the campus. The Price Gilbert Library (west wing), an international style building designed by Bush-Brown, Gailey and Heffernan Architects in the 1950s, is joined together with an addition of a brutalist tower in 1968, resulting in a truly exceptional sight of architecture, and also one which is influenced by the Bauhaus school building in Dessau, designed by Walter Gropius and completed in 1926. In this essay, I will compare the Georgia Tech Library with the Bauhaus Building in term of hierarchy, site organization, and color.

Georgia Tech's library started as class rooms within the school's administration buildings, however, the growing volumes quickly raised the need of a dedicated library building. In 1906, the school proposed the construction of the Carnegie building, a neo-classical hall designed by Morgan and Dillon Architects. However, by the 1940s, it was clear that the Carnegie Library could not

provide enough space for its growing student population; thus, a new library building was once again a priority for the university.

The Price Gilbert Memorial Library was completed in 1953 as a centralized library for the university, which would house all the departmental libraries. Upon completion, the international style library, along with the Hinman Research building and the School of Architecture, stood in strong contrast to the collegiate gothic style buildings that surrounded them. The design process for the Price Gilbert Library began in 1945, just when the World War II ended and International architecture was very prominent in the United States by that time. The Library is characterized with the remark of the "clearest statement yet made of new principles of library design."¹ The expansive reading room design was somewhat a departure from the trend of library design at the time.² However, P.M. Heffernan's library went on to become a symbol of functionalist library design in the United States at the time.

The original architecture of the Price Gilbert library undergone several modifications when the Crosland Tower, a graduate addition to the Price Gilbert Library, was completed in 1968. The original design consisted a main entrance on the western side of the south elevation, which is replaced by the rotunda in use now. The east façade from second to fourth floor was connected to the

tower and minor changes was done to the interior layout of partitions.

Hierarchy and Dynamic Architecture

The elimination of hierarchy and symmetry in modern architecture and art was an important mission to the Bauhaus.³ When applied to architecture, this principle is brilliantly illustrated with the Bauhaus Building in Dessau. From an aerial view, the building exists as a three branch pin wheel; together with the unique form of the site, one cannot identify a front façade or a main entrance. (Figure-1) Indeed, this was a central theme to the design: the disappearance of symmetry in the structure of a building creates an equilibrium that can shift with the movement of the observer.⁴ To gain the complete comprehension of the building, one must move around it since there is no clue in any part of the building that the viewer can use to draw speculation of its entirety. The original Price Gilbert Library shares some similarity with the Bauhaus building in term of the elimination of hierarchy and the creation of a dynamic architecture. The north and south elevation have different compositions of the façade. The north elevation features a full glass wall that let in natural light



Figure 1
The Bauhaus Dessau building as viewed from the southern perspective
source: Bauhaus Dessau Foundation, www.bauhaus-dessau.de/en/architecture/bauhaus-building.html



Figure 2
South Facade of Price Gilbert Library



Figure 3
Original South Entrance to the ground floor
source: Georgia Tech Archives Digital Portal

to illuminate the reading rooms, from which the influence of the Bauhaus building could be seen. Moving to the south elevation, the façade becomes more opaque and heavier; floor to ceiling windows and brick-lined wall alternates on this elevation to create a repeating pattern. (Figure-2) Unfortunately, the repeating pattern also creates a symmetrical façade, which is a departure from one of the central principles of Bauhaus.

The east and west elevations of the original Price Gilbert Library are fully brick-lined walls without any windows so to avoid glares during daytime.⁵ There is also an

entrance to the ground floor on the west elevation; and just like the south façade of the Bauhaus, P.M. Hefner placed the name of the library on this façade. The combination of the ground floor entrance and the letters added weight to the west façade which would otherwise be overshadowed by the north and south elevation; these elements prevented the west elevation from becoming a “side” elevation. (Figure 2 & 3) Note that the entrance on the south elevation does not stand out, which helps to maintain balance between the three sides of the building. Therefore, when one approach the building from the north, west, or the south side, one will gain different experiences of the building. Only when he/she walks around the building and see all four facades, will one gain a complete comprehension of the architectural expression. In this way, the architecture breaks away from the restrains of hierarchy and achieve a limited dynamic equilibrium.

Comparing the two buildings, the ingenuity of the Bauhaus building lies in the relation between its functions, volume, and façade. The Bauhaus Building looks like the accumulation of several independent buildings⁶

yet these seemingly independent parts act in concert with each other to create the overall asymmetrical and dynamic composition of the building. The Price Gilbert library complex falls short in organizing the entire site to attain a non-hierarchical state. The Crosland tower, which is a graduate unit focused on independent research works, does not serve to reinforce the lightness nor the free-flowing character of the building. Instead, the size and the heaviness of the Crosland tower along with the shape of the new rotunda entrance create hierarchy within the architecture. These elements, especially the rotunda, naturally attracts more attention from the users and diminish the characteristics of the original façade. Nonetheless, this is not to discredit the architectural expression of the building. Recognizing that the Crosland tower is the product of another architectural movement, it certainly achieved its goal of making a rebuttal to the international style; it is only that the addition of the tower raises the question of delight within the Vitruvian triad, and from my opinion, the complex as it stands today clearly has not succeed in this.

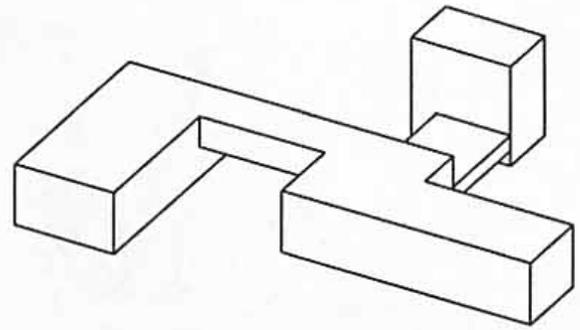


Figure 4, Highlighting the West Facade of the Bauhaus Dessau building. Source: Tadashi Okochi © Pen Magazine, 2010, Stiftung Bauhaus Dessau

Site Organization and Unity

At a first glance, the site organization of the Price Gilbert library complex at Georgia Tech is similar to that of the Bauhaus Building: both buildings are separated into two distinct parts by a road, and both buildings contain the element of a tower-like structure. Furthermore, given that the Price Gilbert library is a Bauhaus inspired international style building, the use of a multistory bridge which connects the east and west wing of the library complex could only provoke me to draw more connections between the Bauhaus building and the library. However, while it is very possible that the architects of the Georgia Tech library drew inspirations from the Bauhaus building by Gropius, there are many differences in the execution of the design, which determined the fate of the two buildings – one became a world heritage site, while the other have been criticized by the users and is now undergoing extensive renovations.

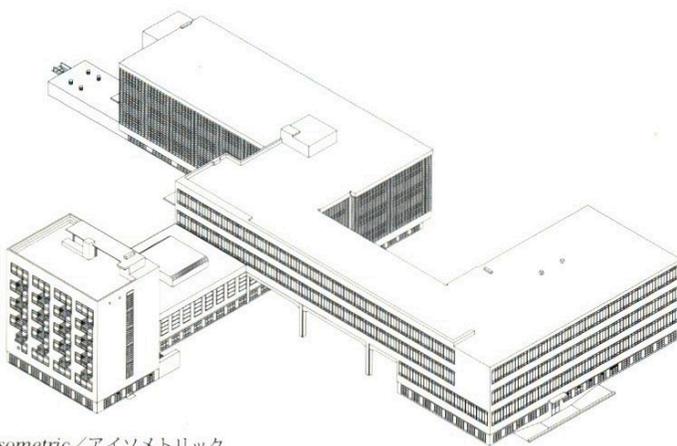
When Walter Gropius drawn up the design of the Bauhaus building in 1925, it had to include the "Technische Lehranstalt" (technical school), which was to be administratively independent of the Bauhaus.⁷ Thus, Gropius had the obligation to dedicate enough space for the activities of the technical school⁸ and show the independent nature in the architecture while also keeping the building as one structure.⁹ The site of planning contains two roads forming a T-intersection, and the building was to be constructed on the northeastern side of the major



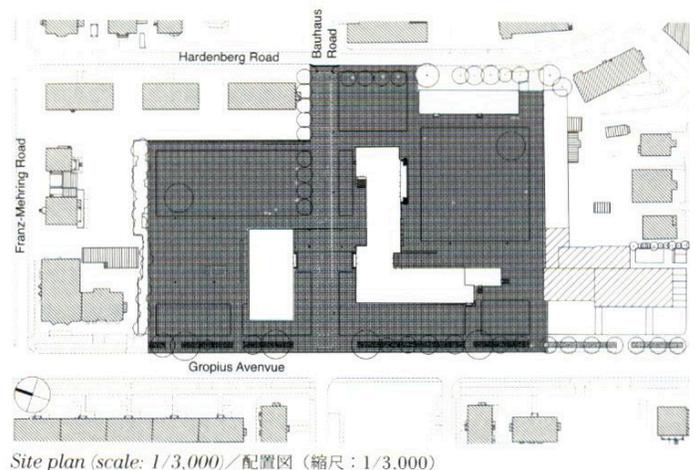
MASSING DIAGRAM

Figure 5
Massing Diagram of the Bauhaus
source: USC, www-bcf.usc.edu/~kcoleman/Precedents/ALL%20PDFs/Gropius_Bauhaus.pdf

road called Gropiusallee. The solution to this came to be simple yet effective: the technical school section was placed across the minor road, separated from the Bauhaus section of the building. The entrance to the two sections of the building are on the either side of the road, opposite and facing each other. A bridge on the first and second floor, which contained the administrative department, joins the two sections together. The architect cleverly extended the façade of the technical school onto the bridge, which creates continuity and reinforce the integrity of the entire building.



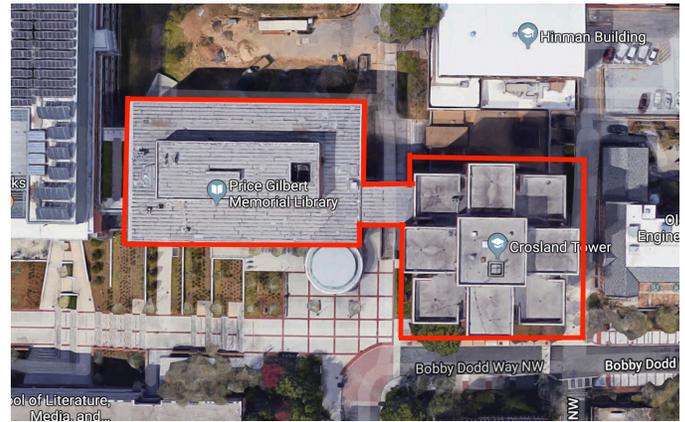
Isometric / アイソメトリック



Site plan (scale: 1/3,000) / 配置図 (縮尺: 1/3,000)

Figure 6
Isometric view and Site Plan
source: page 58, Walter Gropius, Bauhaus Building in Dessau; A+U: architecture and Urbanism, 2010

While also having a bridge onto which the façade of the west building extends, the Price Gilbert Library does not appear as a continuous and harmonious structure. Although we need to recognize that the east tower addition is the product of a different movement, I think that it is still not exempt from the need to be aesthetically logical. It is also ironic that the Bauhaus building which houses many different functions under one roof and contains spaces that differed in “volume, height, and spatial disposition”¹⁰ communicates coherence in its architectural expression whereas the architecture of the Price Gilbert complex, with only two primary function: a place for study and storing collections, only evoke the feeling of congestion. (Figure-8)



It is very clear that the architects of the Price Gilbert library wanted the Crosland Tower addition of the

Figure 7 (Top right)
Map of Price Gilbert Library complex highlighting the site organization
source: Google Maps, 2018

Figure 8 (Middle)
North Elevation of the Bridge Between Price Gilbert Library(Right) and Crosland Tower(Left).
source: Georgia Tech Archives Digital Portal



Figure 9 (Bottom)
One of the early concepts of an Academic Center, which includes a library on the left and classrooms in the right wing.
Note the similarity with the Bauhaus building in site planning.
source: Historic Structure Report of Price Gilbert Library





library together with the original building to integrate into one functional unit¹¹; they may have wanted even more connection between the two structures than Gropius did with his Bauhaus building for the brutalist Crosland Tower was a direct response to the international style Price Gilbert library. However, the physical connection between the two buildings were not executed well that the contrast between the two completely dominates, resulting in a confusing and incoherent architectural expression. Despite these are two buildings of very opposite styles, they can still be organized well to communicate, just like the National Gallery of Art and the East addition to it. In the case of the library complex, the mere size of the Crosland Tower draws the attention of the viewer and creates a hierarchy within the architecture. The currently ongoing renovation of the Crosland Tower provides us with another possibility of creating connections within architecture. The renovation of the Crosland tower replaces the north and south brick-lined façade with glass panels while the east and west façade are kept as original. The bridge that links the east and west building is also redesigned to be completely covered by glass, and the 2nd floor level bridge features an open air section. Although the renovation significantly diminished the brutalist characteristic of the tower, it creates more connection between the east and west wing and makes the architecture work in concert with rather than against each other.

Transparency, Lightness, and Colour

In Dessau, Walter Gropius had further developed his architectonic ideas that he had tried out for the design of the Fagus-Werke prior to WWI¹². The fascination with lightness and transparency is tangible in the Bauhaus Building. The most noticeable part of the building is undoubtedly the glass curtain wall of the workshop wing. The curtain wall is off set from the floors which render the façade more independent of the load-bearing structure and create the impression of lightness to the architecture. (Figure 1 & 4) In addition, the use of a glass façade design is based on the functional need of the workshop:

Figure 10 (Left)
Staircase in the Bauhaus Dessau Building
Note the use of color and the play of geometry
source: UTS Interior Architecture

the offset façade blurs the division between the interior space and the exterior, it also let in large amount of natural light into the open workshop. The influence of the Bauhaus is clearly seen in the Price Gilbert Library with its north elevation also featuring a curtain wall. The facades of the building also came out of functional necessities: the south side of the building is where the stacks are located, thus less transparent façade on the south elevation allows in less direct sunlight and protects the stacks from a potentially more volatile environment. In the north side sits the reading room, therefore, the full glass façade lets in more natural light and also serves to minimize the separation between the indoor and outdoor environment. The glass façade of the library is divided into upper and lower section; each section holds a mezzanine that is also offset from the north façade, creating double height atria above the reading room, combined with the natural light exposure, the room is given a feel of airiness.

Moving on to the interior, the color design is a fundamental part of the Bauhaus building¹³. While the exterior wall of the building is painted solely shades of white and grey, there is a complex color palate in use throughout the architecture of the Bauhaus building; in addition, the use of different materials and surfaces “emphasize the spatial impact of the color.”¹⁴ The use of bright color in

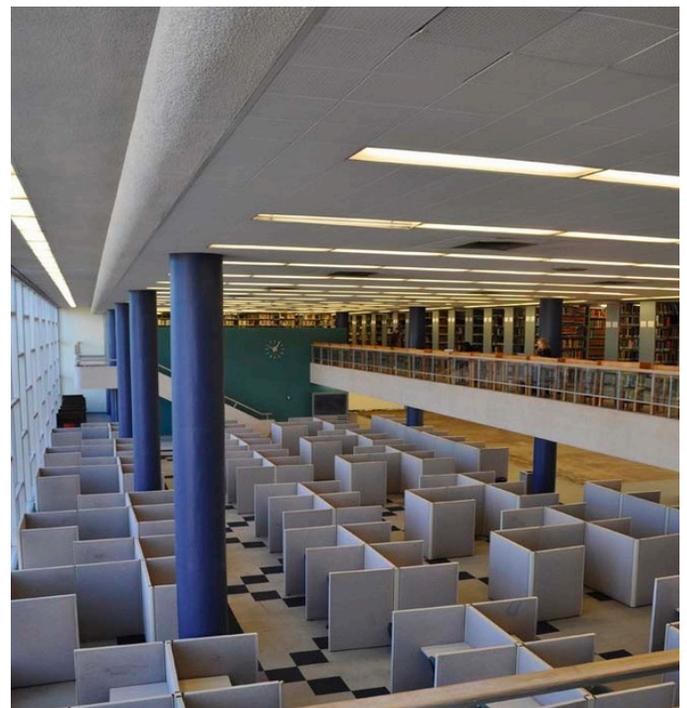


Figure 11
1st Floor Reading Room in Price Robert Library.
Many surfaces have been repainted to softer shades.
source: Georgia Tech Archives Digital Portal

places like staircases corridors and entrances creates a strong contrast to the plain finishes; they serve as visual cues in this “white modernist” building and enrich the otherwise reduced formal architectural language.

In the Price Gilbert Library, one of the most eye-catching elements would probably be the use of a variety of shades and finishes on the structure and partitions. In the dedication pamphlet of the library, it notes: “The supporting columns of slate gray... ..rise against a galaxy of wall colors [that includes at least 11 different shades].”¹⁵ The colors at the Price Gilbert Library have important functional applications; while they provide a “refreshing change of pace”¹⁶ at every corner, the use of a variety of tones also generates environments which has different visual and physiological effects. Thus, while the use of color may be influenced by the principles of the Bauhaus, they arise from a more functional pursuit. From my perspective comparing with the Bauhaus building in Dessau, the extensive use of colors and different materials does not serve to strengthen the architectural expression of the building. Coloration in the Bauhaus building provides visual stimulation in places where it creates not only contrasts but also balance and harmony. Though they certainly stand out, they also reinforce the architectural language of “white modernism.” In the Price

Gilbert Library, it has become a different story: the use of such abundant colors has created a distortion from the architecture itself; too much emphasis is being placed on the scientific effect of colors that the coloration does not substantiate a comprehensive and formal language. As stated in the dedication article, the project was a masterpiece in the application of modern scientific principles in architecture; however, this brings back the debate between the craftsman and the architects. In this case, the craftsman was the engineers who designed, according to strict science, the color and light application within the building. The result as seen from today’s lens is that these elements have created confusion and dwarfed the expression of architecture, while the Bauhaus building, whose color is not as functional, have served to reinforce the characteristic of its architecture.

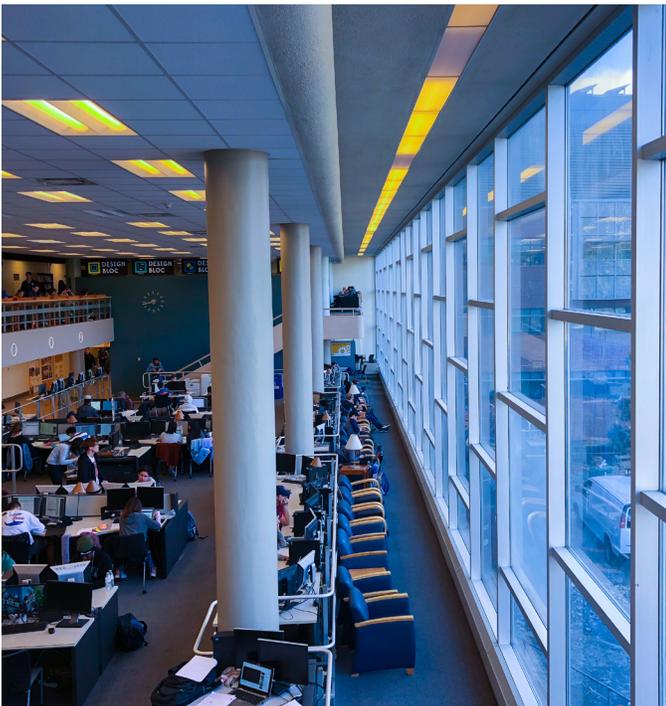


Figure 12
The Reading Room as Seen Today
Note the columns are painted beige



Figure 13
Corridor in the North Wing the Bauhaus Building
source: Bauhaus Dessau Foundation. 1998. The Dessau Bauhaus Building 1926-1999.

Figure 14 (Right)
Staircase in the Bauhaus building
source: Bauhaus Dessau Foundation, bauhaus-dessau.de/en/architecture/bauhaus-building



Bauhaus + 90

The Bauhaus was a prelude to the International Style that would come to its prominence after WWI and really start to spread across the globe around the 1950s¹⁷; it has since become one of the ultimate symbols of classical “White Modernism.” The influence of Bauhaus is also distinctive from architects of the same period such as Le Corbusier and Frank Lloyd Wright: the influence of Bauhaus was not confined to art and architecture; Bauhaus blurred the distinction between art and industry. The Bauhaus Building is something more than exemplary; it has become the synonym to modernism and avant-garde. The influence of this building to all modern architecture that came after it is significant. As to the Price Gilbert Library complex in particular, the traces of the Bauhaus ideal can be observed in the architects’ play of color and lightness, hierarchy, and unity. The complex was completed in the 1960s when brutalism was gaining momentum as a response to International style and the design of the library reflects these critical responses; however, they also make the library unique. In addition, the library also incorporated vernacular elements such as the brick-lined façade which answer to the existing buildings around it. All factors considered, the library complex certainly makes a statement in the local built environment.

Endnotes

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