

Question 5: From the series of Thinking Making research strand lectures, choose a theme, movement, or selection of artists or designers that relate to your practice or interests, and construct a 2,500-word essay. Critically assess primary themes, key writers, and relevant practitioners.

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The Bauhaus movement recently celebrated its 100th anniversary and I still consider it as one of the most diverse and successful avant-garde movements, with its roots firmly established in the modern world. Its influences were many, including the English arts and crafts movement. William Morris who combined workshops and artisan guilds with a community lifestyle, which was very much reflected in the Bauhaus school. Art Nouveau and its German equivalent Jugendstil, the rise of private handicraft workshops and the reformed arts and crafts schools all added their influence. Nationalism and Germany's worldwide industrial reputation was gathering momentum. The German Work Federation, the "Wandervogel" movement, Russian Constructivism, the "emancipation" of women and the encouragement of intellectualism, WW1 (1914 -1918) and the Russian Revolution (1917), all played their part in creating the right climate for change and were the political and cultural backdrop of the movement (Droste, M., 2019).

The Bauhaus school "Staatliches Bauhaus in Weimar" was founded by Walter Gropius (April 1919) after amalgamating Weimar School of Arts and Crafts and Academy of Fine Art. Gropius came to the forefront as a successful architect in 1912 with the Fagus factory, (first building to use a curtain wall glass façade).



Fig. 1

Fagus Factory Walter Gropius 1911

To understand the school's name, its literal meaning, *bau* (building) and *haus* (house) "The House of Construction" made sense. Gropius also wrote about his affinity to the gothic era and masons guild lodges "Bauhütten" which also supported the name. In the Bauhaus Manifesto (April 1919), influenced by the writings of various artists and architects of the time, Gropius' vision was that the school would "together create the new building of the future, which will be everything in one form: architecture and sculpture and painting" (Droste, M., 2019).

Academic qualifications were not mandatory on enrolment, so that any talented person, no matter their educational background, gender or nationality, could apply to the school. Between 150 and 200 students registered, with around 25% being female students. The core principles in the original manifesto were strengthened over the 14 years of the school, so much so that its influence has survived into the modern world. Gropius' goal was to have no "class distinctions which raise an arrogant barrier between craftsman and artist" and that "architects, sculptors, painters: must all turn to the crafts!". This also resonated with current

reform in Germany, especially from the German Work Federation, which Gropius was a member until 1933 (Google Arts & Culture. 2020).

The cornerstone principle of “form follows function” was taught in the preliminary programme. “Simple but elegant geometric shapes” were designed solely based on “the intended function or purpose of the object, art or building”. The Masters and students focused on linear and geometrical forms. By purposely bypassing the curved and decorative designs, minimalism quickly became standard and part of its ethos. The teaching programme included the importance of “Gesamtkunstwerk” (collection of art) giving the artist both knowledge and skills to work and understand multiple art forms (Google Arts & Culture. 2020).

Bauhaus encouraged the use of materials to show “even the most brutal and rough materials were openly and honestly shown”. This in turn resonated with their ideology of “the economic way of thinking”.

The emphasis on technology, ensured that the workshops were full of prototypes for mass production. They understood the importance and possibilities of technological advancements. “Simplicity and effectiveness” very much ran through all their work, with no need for adornment to make things more beautiful. “Less is more” was coined by the Director Ludwig van der Rohe which still runs true in modern society (Google Arts & Culture. 2020).



Fig. 2

Herbert Bayer typeface

Despite the school being operational for just 14 years (1919-1933), the constant development drove the new ideas, keeping them both modern and relevant then, as they are now today. Bauhaus brought new forms of art such as graphic design and an expansion into modern interior design. The creation of the San Serif and Bauhaus fonts brought with it a keen interest with typography. Herbert Bayer, one of the main influential graphic designers of the time, felt that ‘typeface was the clearest form of communication and artistic expression’ (Google Arts & Culture. 2020).



Fig. 3

Oskar Schlemmer's "Triadic Ballet" from 1922

For balance with the stoic and minimalist life, the Bauhaus also entertained themselves and were often encouraged to explore the arts in all its forms. It was often an opportunity to showcase the choreography and costume designs, again as another art form. Oskar Schlemmer's "Triadic Ballet" often started small affairs, culminating into an artistic chorographical feat.

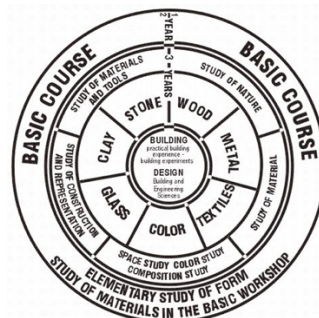


Fig. 4

Vorkurs wheel

The core approach to the curriculum was the "vorkurs" wheel. The focus was core design with an emphasis of form, colour and material, running through the whole basic programme. "Formlehre" art form, and the "werklehre", the more practical workshops encapsulated the inner circles with the centre courses specialising in building, architectural design, engineering and construction. Throughout all programmes, personal craft and workmanship was emphasised and collective learning "to foster not only individual creativity but also a sense of community and shared purpose" (Google Arts & Culture. 2020).

Gropius attracted the best and most talented to the faculty, "The Council of Masters" were formed, with masters and teachers as staff, and students as Apprentices, to then Journeymen and finally to Young Masters. Johannes Itten and Lyonel Feininger who were renowned Expressionist painters, together with Gerhard Marcks a celebrated Sculptor, were the first of the Masters. Ittens' influence was extremely important to the school's early years and his design of the "vorkurs" and colour wheel were instrumental to the Bauhaus, as well as to modern art (Droste, M., 2019).

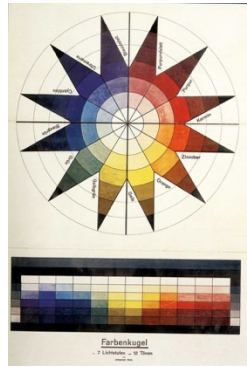


Fig. 5
Itten's colour wheel

The early years at Weimar was seen as the Expressionist Bauhaus, mainly due to the philosophical ethos and the influences of the expressionist painters of the time. However, by 1923, both Itten and Gropius clashed with their approaches to the school and Itten left the school. László Moholy-Nagy took up the role and updated the training wheel to include technology, and the social function of art. To balance Moholy-Nagy's constructivism, others were also appointed, including the famous expressionist painters Wassily Kandinsky and Paul Klee. Georg Muche and Oskar Schlemmer were also appointed at this period of the Bauhaus. (Tate. 2020).



Fig. 6
Gelatine Silver print

Moholy-Nagy worked in almost all the mediums, working through each workshop in succession before embarking on his passion of photography, art and written essays and training journals. It was with his experimentation with light and photography that brought him international accolade. His work with photograms in particular, influenced and inspired the developmental world of art (Droste, M., 2019).



Fig. 7
Josef Albers

Josef Albers (1888-1976) began as an apprentice, but by 1923, he became a master, teaching the preliminary course till its closure in 1933. He was also a Master of the glass painting, carpentry, drawing and lettering workshops. His most famous work began after 1949, with a series of prints and paintings “Homage to the Square”, however his work on the nest of tables in 1928, demonstrates in every aspect, the principles of the Bauhaus (My Modern Met. 2020)

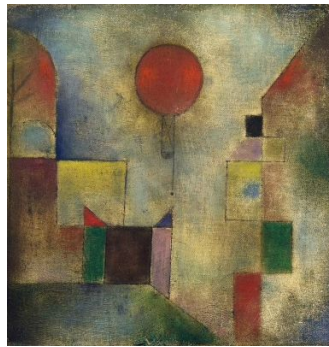


Fig. 8
Paul Klee

Paul Klee (1879-1940), a Swiss-born artist was a natural draughtsman whose Theory of colour and “Writings on Form and Design Theory” have been held as one of the most important publications for modern art. Klee’s canvas of the “Red Balloon” in 1922, demonstrated the delicate graded colours and dimensional layered blocks of the three main shapes of the Bauhaus (My Modern Met. 2020).



Fig. 9
Wassily Kandinsky

Already an established painter Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944), from 1922 until its closure, taught at the Bauhaus. Kandinsky quickly became indispensable as the Director of the wall painting workshop. His lessons became so popular, not only due to him being a successful painter, but also because of his work on analytical drawings and the elements of abstract form. Kandinsky's 1925 Yellow-Blue-Red painting gives emphasis on function and shows the balance in the composition of colour, flat planes and shapes which was core to the principles of the Bauhaus (My Modern Met. 2020)



Fig. 10

Marcel Breuer's Wassily chair

The Wassily chair, created by Marcel Breuer (1902-1981) is seen as possibly the most iconic of its time and the design of the chair is still seen in modern society. Breuer took inspiration from the tubular pipes for plumbing and learnt the ways in which they were formed. However it was the shape of the bike and the combination of these, together with leatherwork, which led to a chair which was instantly appealing, classic and ready for mass factory production. (Droste, M., 2019).

While the Bauhaus manifesto allowed women to join, the idea of them having the same status and opportunities as their male counterparts, was sadly not the case. Rather than being given the full workshop range and the encouragement to try all different mediums, they were shoe-horned into the stereotypical workshops for textiles and weaving. Gropius himself genuinely thought that it was only men who could think three dimensionally and that the fair sex would only be able to manage two! It wasn't only whilst the school was operating, but it continued after and well into the mid to late century. There was an active resistance to acknowledge just how essential their work had been to the Bauhaus and its movement (Gotthardt, A., 2020).



Fig. 11
Anni Albers

Anni Albers (1899 -1994) joined the Bauhaus in 1922 and like many of the women, joined the weaving workshop. Despite not working within the art workshops, she was inspired by Paul Klee's paintings. Through her tapestry weaving, she developed a unique design which earned her the accolade being the first female textile artist with her own exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, in 1949 (Gotthardt, A., 2020).



Fig. 12
Marianne Brandt

Marianne Brandt's (1893-1983) broke the mould when her work has so impressed Moholy-Nagy, she was offered a place in the metal workshop in 1924. At no time had any other woman been given this opportunity. Even her first design, the silver tea infuser and strainer was an absolute success. She was certainly one of the main women pioneers to trail a blaze for the movement and for equality (Droste, M., 2019).



Fig. 13
Brandt

Brandt became Head of the Metalwork Department in 1928 and being such a prolific designer, designed the most successful and best-selling table lamp of its time, the Kandem.



Fig. 14
Gertrud Arndt

The success of Gertrud Arndt (1903-2000) was initially within the Weaving workshop, but unlike most women, she decided to take it upon herself to learn other art forms at the Bauhaus. As most of the workshops were closed to women, Arndt decided to learn photography, without taking any instruction other than to develop her own skills by photographing buildings and the area around the Bauhaus school. Arndt was best known for her photography and her self-portraits called “Mask Portraits.” (Gotthardt, A., 2020).



Fig. 15
Gunta Stölzl

Gunta Stölzl (1896-1983) began her life at the Bauhaus, at the very beginning in 1919. She was allowed to experiment within some of the textiles and workshops, she began honing her skills within weaving. Her determination and exquisite designs, together with her comprehensive knowledge and development in the art of weaving, saw her become the Head of the Department in 1926 (Gotthardt, A., 2020).



Fig. 16
Institute of Design

Due to the political unrest and threats, the Bauhaus School moved from Weimar, to the German industrial town of Dessau in 1925. Gropius took this chance to design the Bauhaus school building and make it one of the most iconic buildings of its time (Google Arts & Culture. 2020).

The Dessau Bauhaus, “Institute of Design” brought with it the most productive years of the Bauhaus and became a landmark of modern as well as functionalist architecture. A Department of architecture was finally opened and substantial advancement in the printing and advertising workshops (Metmuseum. 2020).

By 1928 Gropius, after political battles with critics and the rising wave of German nationalism, he stood down, giving way to the Swiss architect Hannes Meyer. Meyer, being a communist, incorporated his socialist ideals into the student organisations and curriculum. Despite the continued growth of the school, Meyer was dismissed within 2 years due to his ideals. In 1932 the Bauhaus school was again closed for its “communist activists” and relocated to Berlin for the last year.

It was Ludwig Mies van der Rohe who was appointed as the Director of the Bauhaus in Berlin. He was also known for functionalist architecture and like Gropius, was associated with the International Style architecture in the subsequent years. Mies van der Rohe, tried to take the politics out of the curriculum but by the time the Nazis had won nationally it was too late. Rather than be forced to close, the school closed of its own volition. Many of the art and furniture was completely destroyed in these turbulent years by the Nazis and their sympathisers. Anyone associated with the Bauhaus were seen as “degenerate” (History. 2017)

In the following decades, the Bauhaus influence would go as far as the faculty members went. Due to the political climate and the rise in Fascism, many were forced to flee. Many went to America and continued with their work and teachings; Gropius went to Harvard University, Mies van der Rohe to Illinois Institute of Technology, Josef and Anni Albers to Black Mountain College and László Moholy-Nagy to the Institute of Design in Chicago. Palestine welcomed many German Jewish Architects from the Bauhaus, with many staying in the GDR. There was a brief revival of the Bauhaus principles in the form of the *für Gestaltung* in Ulm in 1953, which was run by a former student Max Bill., but again, short lived (History. 2017).

Despite the short life of the Bauhaus School, it had an incredible impact worldwide and right up to modern day. It explains that modernist architecture, which is known as “the International Style” began at Bauhaus. The new art forms which were formulated in the workshops, like graphic design, would in itself expand its influence into other mediums. These included the inroads into advertising and newspapers and magazines. This in turn followed into web design. If it were not for the pioneers of the Bauhaus, these mediums would not have developed into what they are today (Google Arts & Culture. 2020).

The diverse range of ideas and principles of the Bauhaus school are still continuing to influence modern day. Teaching methods, contemporary design to architecture, working and production methods as well as our lifestyles have all been touched by the movement. Due to the vast array of talent, it generated, together with the political unrest of the time, the movement also reached far and wide geographically. No other school has found such respect and universal recognition as the Bauhaus (Google Arts & Culture. 2020). These core values remain as relevant today as they were in the Bauhaus. “The best thing that can happen to a school is that its ideas are carried forward” – Walter Gropius (Google Arts & Culture. 2020).

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Figures

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