

WINTER, J. 2022. Searching for the ethos of a lost art school. In Ingold, T. (ed.) *Knowing from the inside: cross-disciplinary experiments with matters of pedagogy*. London: Bloomsbury Academic [online], chapter 8, pages 165-188. Available from: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350217171.ch-008>

# Searching for the ethos of a lost art school.

WINTER, J.

2022

© Bloomsbury Academic. Chapter available for purchase from Bloomsbury Collections:  
<https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350217171.ch-008>

# Searching for the Ethos of a Lost Art School

Judith Winter

This search is motivated by an abiding belief in the possibilities of art schools. It is a response to many conversations over recent years around the future of art education and the significant role it has played in weaving the social fabric. I contend that the art school environment has been particularly potent in times of crisis and uncertainty. I hope to show how its ethos and pedagogic principles have been altered in the context of political, social and regulatory changes over the last century. Whilst I begin by lending my voice to all those who defend the philosophy of education more broadly, or who seek to reclaim the values of the civic university, my primary concern is to reignite some significant debates about the divergent philosophical traditions of both the democratic art school and the civic university, and to show why they matter for our collective futures.

The present Higher Education (HE) environment stands at some distance from my own student experiences first on the Foundation Course in Middlesbrough 1984–5 and then at Central Saint Martin's School of Art from 1985 to 1988, and from my formative teaching in the 1990s.<sup>1</sup> In 2016 I returned to teaching, following a career working in the arts as inaugural curator of fine art for Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art (MIMA) and Head of Arts for Dundee Contemporary Arts (DCA). My approach to teaching is based largely on formative experiences at Riverside Studios and Lisson Gallery, London, where I was influenced through exposure to many pioneering artists and curators working in the expanded field of art practice. Returning to the teaching environment threw a spotlight on the considerable changes that had taken place over recent decades. I continue to be driven by a core belief in the transformative potential of the art school environment but am also convinced of the need to turn away from current demands for the management of knowledge and to listen again to the pedagogic principles that were foundational to modern art school reform.

I commence with the story of one of the most iconic and multidisciplinary art and design schools of the twentieth century, namely the Bauhaus. Rather than treating the Bauhaus as a chapter in the history of art and design, I want to draw attention to the relevance of the ideas it promoted to our present struggles. They suggest ways to move beyond orthodox pedagogic principles which have tethered education to a very different economic model and regulatory regime. I will show how the art school environment, prior to its merger with the university, powerfully exemplified other ways of knowing, born of the immediate experiences of observing the world and of handling and forming materials. It could, I suggest, offer a reservoir of experimentation on which future generations can practically draw to challenge current social, aesthetic and educational norms along with the instrumentalization of knowledge on which they rest.

## The Bauhaus

The Bauhaus was founded in Weimar, Germany, in 1919, following the First World War, as a response to the failures of its revolutionary aftermath. Its timeline coincided with that of the Weimar Republic and of the artistic and intellectual circles that developed around it, all responding in their own ways to the complex and contradictory social changes of the era and their human impacts. Based on a recognition that the task of the next generation was to find a way to maintain a balance while responding to the upheavals of the age, it sought to create a learning environment that would enable a generation of artists and designers to take on the challenges of modernity, not simply through training in the arts but by preparing for creative citizenship in its broadest sense. The teaching faculty, assembled by its founding architect Walter Gropius, included some of the most experimental artists, designers and makers from across Europe.<sup>2</sup>

While their approaches were diverse and often contradictory, the staff were bound by a common purpose to reintegrate art and everyday life and to give renewed impetus to craftsmanship and cooperation in a technological age. This then laid the foundations for modern art education more broadly. The school's ethos was both utopian – born of social idealism – and pragmatic, rooted in the desire to build a better future without losing sight of the realities of everyday life. Indeed, it is no accident that all three directors of the Bauhaus were architects: Walter Gropius (1919–28), Hannes Meyer (1928–30) and Mies van der Rohe (1930–3). Most significantly, they were architects interested in ways of working that were relevant in a modern age, and in how the conditions of living

and working impact on the social environment. This had an important bearing on the way the school was conceived and in turn responded to its successive physical locations.

The name Bauhaus was clearly intended to convey much more to European sensibilities than a stylistic design movement. Both *bau* (building) and *haus* (house) were to be understood in their broad philosophical sense, to encapsulate the ideas of building character, practical skills and imaginative capacities, alongside a sense of belonging. The name also invokes the medieval notion of *Bauhütten*, referring to working communities of builders and stonemasons, united in a common spirit. Understood in these terms, the educational environment was concerned primarily with life philosophy, and with learning as a social process; this is also strongly ingrained in the association of the German word for education (*bildung*) with the neo-humanist tradition. *Bildung* is derived from *Bild* (image) in the senses not only of 'sign' and 'reproduction', but also of the way we form ideas. The notion of *bildung* was strongly reconnected to educational philosophy in Europe through the experimental approaches of the Swiss educational reformer Wilhelm Pestalozzi (1746–1827), who challenged the separation between intellect and practical skills, placing the emphasis on processes of formation and on the relationship between hand, eye and heart – or in other words, between practical, visual and affective aspects of life (Brühlmeier 2010).

Pestalozzi's ideas had a profound impact on the social and educational reformers who advocated the holistic growth, personhood and self-understanding of the individual, as a means to develop the senses of social responsibility and empathetic judgement. This became central to the Bauhaus ethos in the much-quoted motto: 'head, hand and heart'. Pestalozzi's thinking found its way into the pedagogic approaches of the art school and of those artist-educators whose belief in the value of education was grounded in his philosophical approach. It accords closely with the educational pragmatism we associate, in North America, with such figures as John Dewey, Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr. This is one reason why the Bauhaus émigrés found such strong support in the United States, in their advocacy of an education based on personal freedom and responsibility rather than externally imposed authority. For them, what mattered in education was not just our knowledge of the world, or the way we see it, but how we shape, form and handle our *relationships* with the world.

The leading pedagogic Masters of the Bauhaus – namely Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, László Moholy-Nagy and Josef Albers – were clearly not alone in their endeavours to overturn received hierarchies of knowledge. These ideas

were also being explored in different ways by many philosophers of the time, such as Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, who, in common with artists associated with the Bauhaus, were deeply interested in exploring phenomenal experience: consciousness, judgement, perception and emotion. Also resonating with the Bauhaus ethos was the philosophical anthropology of Helmuth Plessner, a contemporary of Heidegger likewise tutored by Husserl. For Plessner, whose key philosophical concepts focused on ways of knowing, human positionality, unrealis moods and authenticity, life expresses itself through its sentient forms. This was a theme he explored in a visiting lecture at the Bauhaus 'Concerning Mankind and Environment' (*über mensch u. umwelt*) as well as in an address to students at the Deutscher Werkbund entitled 'The Rebirth of Form in the Technological Age' (*Wiedergeburt der Form im technischen Zeitalter*).<sup>3</sup> The interests of philosophical anthropology in humanity and technology, anthropomorphism, the construction of identity, sensory experience, and the nature and limits of interpretation and communication, were also at the heart of the Bauhaus. Indeed, in its close relationship with philosophical anthropology, the Bauhaus offers a prime example of the correspondence of anthropology and art.

Besides these philosophical and anthropological convergences, the Bauhaus also found common ground with thinkers of the Frankfurt School of Social Research, particularly Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch and Siegfried Kraucauer, all of whom had been drawn together by the experience of enforced exile and the perceived failures of social and political revolution in Germany following the First World War. Together, these artist-educators and social visionaries set out to explore how technological changes brought about through mass communication (radio, printed matter, photography and film) affected the senses of self and aesthetic judgement. Many, forced into exile following the rise of the Nazi Party, found new teaching positions in other countries where they carried on their practices while adapting to their new environments. This is perhaps why our world altered so radically; not just through technological changes, but in the ways artists, architects and designers shaped and formed collective futures through practices of everyday life.

The Bauhaus was not, of course, the only example of its kind. There were others, including *Vkhutemas*, set up as a response to the October Revolution in Moscow. Then there was *Kala Bhavana* in Shantiniketan, India, founded, by Rabindranath Tagore, which fused the pedagogic theories of the British Arts and Crafts Movement with ancient forest traditions and, in common with the Bauhaus, challenged the traditional supremacy of fine art by redefining the

relationship between industry and craftsmanship. We might travel to *Seikatsu Kōsei Kenkyushō* ('Institute for Life Configurations'), Tokyo (1931–9), often described as the 'Japanese Bauhaus'. We can also follow the movements of artists and staff from the Bauhaus, whose corpus of pedagogic experiences became the basis of the curriculum at Black Mountain College (1933–57); or discover the foundations of ecological design in the pedagogy of Moholy-Nagy, who founded the New Bauhaus at the Chicago School of Design (1937–49). All shared a common purpose, to educate for *life* rather than to secure professional validation.<sup>4</sup>

## Remembering the Art School

Let me now scroll forward to the present day, and to my own search. Between 2013 and 2018 I set out to explore the relationship between art school pedagogy, anthropology and social reform, as part of the *Knowing From the Inside* (KFI) project led by Tim Ingold. The founding premise of KFI is that 'knowledge is not created through an encounter between minds furnished with concepts and theories, and a material world already populated with objects, but grows from the crucible of our practical and observational engagement with the world around us'.<sup>5</sup> Just like the Bauhaus, KFI was launched at a time of great ideological and economic crisis. All of us in the project were concerned with matters of knowing and with the issues facing many artist-educators working in HE today. Our core tenet was that education is not limited to a period of time and a specific place in which we magically transform into adults but is rather an enduring life process.

Paul Klee, in his *Creative Credo* of 1920, had described this process as *cosmogensis*.<sup>6</sup> In my own approach to the KFI project I wondered if we could reclaim the educational vision that Klee, along with the other Bauhaus Masters and their intellectual associates, had advocated almost a century ago. Like the Bauhaus, the KFI community was seeking correspondences between anthropology, art, architecture and design, with the potential to contribute to systemic change. The challenge was to imagine an education dedicated to building students' confidence and skills, to enable each to find their own voice, readying them to meet new challenges, to make informed and empathetic aesthetic, social, ethical judgements, and to imagine and bring about an alternative future. It called for a focus on how educational environments might respond to an epistemological crisis exacerbated by digital overload. Whose knowledge do we

trust? How do we navigate the accumulation of knowledge? How do we make judgements that are really our own? How do we ensure that different disciplines stay true to their principles, whilst also creating the conditions for new ideas to grow and develop?

This is where my research began, and it was what drew me to the KFI community. To develop these lines of inquiry, however, I needed to address one core challenge. How could I write with any critical authority about perceived changes to the philosophy of art schools or matters of knowing without returning to the foundations of teaching? I recall an incidental conversation which touched upon this return, with the artist-educator David Harding. Together with Sam Ainsley and colleagues, Harding was a co-founder of the environmental art course at Glasgow School of Art. Now retired, he directed me to a text he had written in 2004 entitled: *Who Took the (He)art out of the Art Schools?*<sup>7</sup> Our conversation was brief, but meaningful. While I agreed that the future of art schools does not lie in turning back the clock and that like all our institutions they are in need of serious reform, what stayed with me through that conversation was a deep sense that something very special had been jettisoned. Two questions arose from this that have continued to guide me in my search. First, what can we learn from the experiences of artist-educators who radically altered the ethos of art education? Second, how might this help us reimagine the future of the art school in an era of radical uncertainty?

Harding was longing for an art school in which teachers enjoyed greater autonomy and independence than they do today, where they belonged to an artist-led community and worked with and not for their students, where teaching was a calling rather than a profession, and where students were searching for ways to work together to shape and reform their futures. These were environments in which artists of all creeds, including architects, makers, designers, writers, dancers, musicians and poets, would meet, across generations, with other intellectuals, scientists and social visionaries, with the common purpose to create a different future that would give renewed meaning to life. As the artist-educator and Bauhaus Master Moholy-Nagy (1947b: 12) put it, in a prophetic statement, the task for future generations is to 'bring the intellectual and emotional, the social and technological components into balanced play; to learn to see and feel them in relationship'.

The Bauhaus, as Stephen Madoff (2009) reminds us, represented the last systemic shift in art education, which is why it is such a significant touchstone for the creative community today. Those who brought it to life were reclaiming art education and aesthetic experience for a newly emerging democracy, and

in doing so, they were challenging existing hierarchies of knowledge. The art school, then, was a rebuke to what was widely regarded as the stifling inertia of the Art Academy and its separation of art from the experience of everyday life. In the new art school the priorities would be radically altered: to finding beauty in mundane environments and everyday practices, and to connecting imaginative and intuitive capacities through the attunement of sensory perception and the craftlike combination of observational and practical skills.

Over recent years I have listened to many symposia and public events that voice a sense of longing for what has been lost – above all for the disruptive imagination of those artist-educators who helped us challenge convention and prejudice and, even more importantly, to connect the emergent generation of artists and designers with other social and educational reformers. Across the arts, there is a palpable need to reconnect artists, designers and social thinkers not only to their art school roots but also to the foundational beliefs and values that fuelled educational reform. It is true that the art school ethos Harding and others describe has not completely disappeared; it is still audible if we listen closely to those in the frontline who are actively involved in shaping the curriculum and the dynamics of teaching. Here, at the grassroots, art schools continue to create strong bonds across generations of students for whom education remains a life philosophy tethered to neither ideology nor religion.

This does not however show up in student surveys. For such surveys answer to the demands not of the art school but the contemporary university, in which education is no longer a life-enhancing process but a form of service provision. The shift from art school to university, as so often in our present times, was dictated by top-down policy decisions. The resulting changes did not address issues of social and educational reform; they were rather aimed at dealing with the crisis in employment brought about by deindustrialization. The implications are clear: meaningful change can only emerge from within the dynamics of organization, through collaboration. It cannot be imposed from above.

## What Is Education For?

In 1997 Ronald Dearing, chancellor of the University of Nottingham, was commissioned by the then Conservative government, with the support of the incoming Labour government, to report on the state of HE in the UK, and to make proposals for reform.<sup>8</sup> Its ninety-three recommendations were to fundamentally



change the landscape of HE across the country. The recommendations covered funding, expansion and the maintenance of academic standards. With its focus on the management of expanding institutions, the Dearing Report set out enhanced mechanisms of regulation and administration, data capture and quality assurance. It also linked HE policy to other economic agendas, along with wider attempts to create parity in education, such as the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (the PISA accord), which enshrined a commitment by governments to monitor the outcomes of educational systems in terms of student achievement, in accordance with common standards.

The Dearing Report defined the objectives of education in terms of the skills deemed relevant to adult life in a market-led society and economy. Its instrumentalization of knowledge, as a means to the ends of personal advancement and wealth creation, ran completely contrary to the educational philosophy of art schools, with their emphasis on human life experience. The shift in educational priorities signalled by the Report was reinforced by the recommendation to introduce tuition fees, backed by low-interest government grants and loans. These 'strategic aims' can be seen as responses to a global market still committed to a model of growth, and to the transformation from an industrial to a service-based economy. In both universities and art schools the recommendations were to have a significant impact on the relationship between teachers and students, as students were turned from makers into consumers of knowledge, and teachers rebranded as knowledge-providers. In its attempts to negotiate a new relationship with the university, the art school had to find a way to deal with an expansion defined by management in terms of increased student numbers. This not only altered the ethos of the curriculum but also had a devastating impact on the physical environment. Once built together with its community, it was now to be sold off or managed by governing bodies and private partnerships, whose interests had nothing to do with the philosophy of education and everything to do with economic survival.

While educational institutions across the board were forced to abandon many of their foundational principles, for the art school the loss was particularly acute. It had been built on the foundation of collective practice, shaped as an integral part of the learning experience. The way art, architecture and design students used to live and work together would inform the ethics of production, how materials are crafted and objects are used in everyday life, and of course how future environments look and feel. Students were helped to build their own knowledge and to become more confident in making judgements; this was particularly important for artists, designers and makers whose key task is to

imagine, shape and realize new possibilities. The newly professionalized world of knowledge provision, however, enforces quite different pedagogic priorities. The PISA accord pressurized university leadership to ensure parity and to drive up what it calls 'standards of excellence' in teaching and learning. Yet it largely failed to acknowledge the experience of those actually involved in teaching students, and to recognize that education, both in art schools and more broadly, requires an understanding of principles integral to diverse disciplines and carried forward over generations.

From a grassroots perspective, all education is a continuous process that relies heavily on the relations of trust created between students and staff. This trust can never be managed or manufactured; it grows from a different kind of ecology. It also depends on human judgement rather than data analysis. But current systems of management have been put in place precisely in order to avoid human judgement, to standardize human experience and to sift and sort individuals according to these standards. This accounts in large part for the ongoing tensions between the art school and the university, and for the exodus of many key artist-educators who no longer have either the energy or the appetite to protest. The result is an educational environment divided between those committed to the new principles of professional management, and those who continue to believe that education should give room for students to experiment, take detours and learn how to navigate issues and challenges. These philosophical tensions have led to a profound schism.

Those artist-educators who continue to work in art schools are left to navigate the schism through a form of diversionary practice that acknowledges institutional boundaries but works within these limits and protocols to retain some degree of independence and freedom. This echoes the ideas of Michel de Certeau (1984), who describes the tactics people use to subvert disciplinary powers. A tactic, for de Certeau, is not intended to be destructive, but is launched with the aim of retaining a measure of self-control or integrity. It 'must vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers. It poaches in them. It creates surprises in them. It can be where it is least expected. It is a guileful ruse' (de Certeau 1984: 25). The performance of everyday life is made up of endless attempts to navigate what you know will otherwise be closed down. While it is possible to keep playing this tactical game in the short term, in the long term it often becomes untenable, leading to either circumnavigation, conflicts of interest or dissent. The challenge is to sustain a place within the system whilst trying to retain a sense of truth and integrity. Many in the frontline of teaching are attempting to do just that: helping

the next generation imagine and realize a better future, while caught in a system not of their making that is resistant to any alternative.

The Dearing Report was intended to offer a twenty-year vision and action plan for HE. These two decades are now at an end, and our present institutional and educational crisis creates an opportunity to explore alternative ways forward. However, before calling for systemic change we need to think carefully about our vision for the future by returning to the practical dynamic of the learning environment. This calls for a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between the university and the art school.

## The Art School and the University

The art school and the university emerged from very different philosophical traditions. The university grew from a desire, rooted in the humanism of the Enlightenment, to accumulate knowledge about every aspect of the world, including its geology, natural history, peoples and civilisations, through the collection and classification of empirical data and their rational explanation. This is the basis for traditional academic studies, across the disciplines of both the natural and social sciences and the arts and humanities. The democratic art school, by contrast, is rooted in life philosophy (*Lebensphilosophie*) and the study of the natural world (*Naturphilosophie*). Born of a rejection of historical tradition, it set out to challenge conventional academic wisdom; its priorities were the attunement of sensory perception, the cultivation of material awareness and the development of imaginative capacities. Its vision was future-facing, looking for ways to rupture tradition and orthodoxy.

The avant-garde of artists and designers who came together to establish the art school, whilst often discordant in their views, was united in its purpose to imagine things differently. In this they had much in common with maverick scientists and philosophers who were also, in their different ways, struggling to articulate an organicist or process cosmology that would heal the split between nature and spirit imposed by Enlightenment humanism. Among the latter were some of the greatest names of twentieth-century science and engineering, including Max Planck, Albert Einstein, Heinrich Rudolf Hertz, Ludwig Prandtl, Hans Driesch, Raoul H. Francé and D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson, along with philosophers such as Helmuth Plessner, Patrick Geddes and Alfred North Whitehead. All were polymaths in the strict sense of the word, who shared a multidisciplinary vision capable of drawing together complex bodies of

knowledge to solve specific problems, along with an attitude to work and life bound up with the idea of experimentation.

Like their illustrious philosophical and scientific contemporaries, the founders of the democratic art school were not advocating deviation merely for its own sake. They were rather driven by a pragmatic disposition to find ways of instigating change without resort to violence, by slowly and incrementally fostering transformation from within. One cannot understand much about the Bauhaus or any comparable art school by examining its curricular frameworks or statutes, or by trying to pin down or account for its many diverse pedagogic principles. One can learn a great deal more by reading pedagogic sketchbooks and lecture notes. These clearly express a concern to enable each and every student to *un-learn* preconceptions and to challenge prevailing assumptions. There is a strong emphasis on allowing students to find their own voice and to use their particular perspectives to contribute to emerging citizenship. The overriding purpose of the art school was to provide the tools that would enable future generations to craft a different kind of world, appropriate to our times.

This kind of art school, indeed, has more in common with the idea of the civic or 'red brick' university as envisaged by nineteenth-century reformers, who were concerned to equip students with skills for the 'real world', often linked to engineering, architecture and industry. Many of the civic universities in major industrial cities grew from Mechanics Institutes, originally formed to provide adult education in technical subjects as well as to introduce an adult working class to the arts, with the express aim of enabling its students to improve their lives and together to build a better future. There were moments of accord in which the art school overlapped with these institutions and subscribed to much the same values. Thus, for many years, the art school served as a bridge between technical training, craftsmanship and design. This relationship flourished after the Second World War, especially as a kind of counterpoint to the 'real life' of those without the means to go on grand tours or to seek out exotic experience. They could travel, instead, in the imagination.

The bridge allowed movement in both directions: while some students found ways to exercise the creative freedom to imagine alternative futures, others found the means to apply their knowledge and practice to meeting present social and economic needs. The effects of this two-way movement can be clearly seen in the impact that artists, architects and designers have had over the last century across music, fashion, design, visual communications, film and television, and popular culture more widely. All of this, ultimately, had its source in the democratization of art and design schools. This is also why art schools have always played a

particularly significant role at times of uncertainty and crisis, which trigger a search for things that make life meaningful. This longing has often been described by artists, writers and social reformers, among them Walter Benjamin (1999) in his text *Experience and Poverty*, published in Prague in December 1933, in which he set out the dilemmas facing a generation navigating modernity and the existential crisis of loss of faith in religion and all forms of authority.

Today, however, the art school has been disconnected from its democratic origins and subjected instead to an academic regime that is closed to alternative ways of knowing. The frameworks of teaching and research imposed by this regime are intended to justify and accredit professional practices through various metrics and ranking criteria. They require of lecturers and researchers to spend most of their time categorizing and accounting for their methods, while those tasked with evaluating the results find themselves caught in a Kafkaesque system largely of their own making. In this educational climate, as educational theorist Ronald Barnett writes:

Academics are called upon to be responsive to the wider society, to have even greater consideration for their students and to be accountable in their teaching practices. In shaping their programmes of study, universities are asked to engage with constituencies outside the academy, especially the worlds of commerce and industry, and are asked to ensure that their research projects have impact on wider society. (Barnett 2003: 561)

This is a fluid and uncertain environment. Not only are the boundaries between disciplines and the wider world dissolving. Concepts of teaching, research, curriculum development and academic freedom are also disrupted and contested, laid open to multiple perspectives. Rereading Barnett's 'Universities in a Fluid Age' today, I am reminded of my present situation, in which my own internal doubts mirror the prevailing uncertainties pervading not only the universities but also society as a whole. Solutions do exist, however, if we are prepared to rethink the ecology of HE in ways that might open to a wider spectrum of approaches. To make a start on this, I return to the Bauhaus.

## Reclaiming the Foundation Course (*Vorkurs*)

The Bauhaus curriculum was imagined as series not of stages but of concentric circles; one steps into the learning environment at the outer circle, by learning how to *un-learn*. The journey moves not progressively upwards but inwards

toward the centre. All artists, makers, designers, architects and those studying a foundation course in art and design in Britain have either knowingly or unknowingly experienced the force of Bauhaus education. My own journey into the arts was built upon this educational model. Nowadays mythologized as a rite of passage into the arts, it has recast the futures of countless students whose knowledge was formed through practical and immediate experience, that is, through *learning by doing*.

The Bauhaus *Vorkurs* (preliminary art course) was conceived by the artist-educator Johannes Itten and developed and co-taught by László Moholy-Nagy and Josef Albers. The key aim of this foundational year was twofold: first, to challenge assumptions and prejudgements and second, to help give directions for future study. Most of the pedagogic exercises helped students understand the things to which they were personally most drawn – for example, whether they preferred working with materials or colour and form, or whether they were pulled more towards painting, sculpture, printmaking, fashion and textiles, or towards stage craft and performance, visual communications, the applied arts, photography and moving image. The course worked because it provided an alternative to university education at the same time as offering a way beyond the confines of technical education.

The pedagogical principles of the Bauhaus arrived in Britain by way of the networks and associations forged by the Bauhäuslers as they sought refuge from political conditions in their home country. Gropius, in particular, forged a relationship with the chief education officer of Cambridge, Henry Morris; another very significant conduit was the art historian Herbert Read, who had also visited Gropius and Moholy-Nagy, in Germany and later, Chicago. The Bauhaus philosophy was welcomed by an emergent generation in Britain who were seeking radical reform of social and aesthetic values and was particularly championed by artist-educators in the industrial heartlands of the north of England. Key advocates included Olive Sullivan at Manchester School of Art, who was connected to the Bauhaus through conversations with Read and the influence of his book *Art and Industry* (Read 1935), artists Victor Pasmore and Richard Hamilton at Kings College, Durham, and Tom Hudson and Harry Thubron at Leeds College of Art. Thubron's wartime experience of teaching soldiers informed his vision for a new 'post-war world', and from 1946 he began to develop new courses at Sunderland School of Art. Together with Hudson, he introduced experiments with heavy industrial techniques, such as welding, casting and moulding new materials like plastics.

In common with the Bauhäusler, these artist-educators in Britain dissociated themselves from the traditions and methods of the Academy. Like Itten,

Albers and Moholy-Nagy, they were interested in creating an atmosphere in which students could improvise and work in open and intuitive ways. They all knew of the Bauhaus experiment; Pasmore and Hamilton referred directly to the creative credo of Paul Klee, to the *Pedagogic Sketchbook* first published in English in 1953, and later to *The Thinking Eye*, translated into English in 1961 (Klee 1953, 1961). Hamilton also refers to the writing of Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, whose book *The New Vision*, written to inform a wide public about the principles of Bauhaus ethos, was first published in English in 1938, followed in 1947 by *Vision in Motion* (Moholy-Nagy 1938, 1947). However, while many ideas came through these English-language publications, the most tangible link was by way of the Bauhaus émigrés – most notably Gropius, who arrived in London in 1934, followed by Moholy-Nagy in 1936 and Marcel Breuer in 1937 – and their meetings with artists and designers who were also pushing for social and educational reform.

Significantly, the proposal to introduce a foundation course as the first, introductory year of the three-year Diploma in Art and Design (equivalent to today's BA degree) came from artist Sir William Coldstream, through his leadership of the National Advisory Council on Art Education (NACAE). The *Coldstream Report* of 1960<sup>9</sup> radically transformed art school pedagogy by creating a bridge between secondary education and degree-level courses. Allowing a significant moment of pause, beyond school life and before an unknown future, it enabled students to challenge previously unquestioned assumptions and to overcome their existing circumstances, not just physically but emotionally and intellectually as well. Avoiding disciplinary specialism, the foundation course instead drew students' attention to values deemed essential for all creative practices, including observational drawing, lessons in colour and form in relationship, material studies and spatial dynamics. This was tempered with lessons that were both practical and experimental, devised to free students from the constraints of theory, habit or convention. The course provided the tools and skills for students to find their own ways, to discover and learn through the experimentation in response to others.

As a student myself, attending art school between 1984 and 1988, I did not fully appreciate the significance of these experiences at the time. Looking back, however, I now recognize that I was caught up in a process of reform that was taking the art school in a direction radically different from both the academic establishment and the system of vocational or technical training. Most of us who managed to secure a place in art school were bound together through the common experience of the first-year foundation course. It created a kind of

kinship, or a shared sense of belonging, that continued long beyond art school and laid the basis for future collaborations.

However, the foundation course had a much broader potential, as it was devised to avoid premature specialism and to enable students to understand something of their own disposition and skills. At least until the late 1980s, this had an important influence on teacher training. Many future progressive educators gravitated towards the course, looking for creative ways to fuel the curiosity of the next generation. It was widely acknowledged that those wishing to pursue a professional career in teaching should be encouraged to take a detour, either to spend a few years travelling or to take a year off to do some form of community work or to undertake a foundation course. This had a profound impact on the perceptive and imaginative capacities of teachers and seeped more broadly into the education system. Evidence for this can be found in the National Arts Education Archives, held in the former Bretton Hall College of Education, now part of Yorkshire Sculpture Park, which was the home of an exemplary model for teacher training after the Second World War.<sup>10</sup> The archives reveal a close-knit network of artist-educators, which served as a crucible of art school reform and as an incubator for educational policy which profoundly influenced subsequent generations.

## Art as Experience

The importance of the foundational course is that it opens the imagination to possibilities far beyond our present circumstances. Offering an alternative way of knowing to that cultivated by the university, it draws on the *bildung* tradition of self-cultivation rather than professional training. As the concentric circles of the Bauhaus curriculum reveal, it is essential for students to find a direction of travel that is right for them, to recognize where their talents lie and where their dispositions and capacities might lead them. This notion of self-discovery is part of the *zeitgeist* of German culture, exemplified by the *bildungsroman* (coming of age genre) of which Goethe is the acknowledged founder, as in *Faust*, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* and the sequel *Wilhelm Meister's Wanderjahre* ('journeyman years'). The *Wanderjahre* novel speaks clearly to the disillusionment with conventional education, the hierarchy of knowledge and the ways individuals are captured and pigeonholed. The protagonist undergoes a journey of self-discovery and heartbreak, which enables him to escape his empty life of bourgeois convention and search for truth and meaning beyond transient



pleasures or predestined expectations. While the Bauhäusler were warned by their School Director not to steer too far toward the romantic and esoteric posturing of some of their intellectual forbears, they were nevertheless urged to reclaim the notion of aesthetic experience as integral to everyday life.

In the field of educational philosophy, this kind of reclaiming of aesthetics from eighteenth-century transcendence is not widely discussed or understood. However, it finds an echo in John Dewey's *Education and Democracy*, as well as in his *Art as Experience*: the former, published in 1916, was written during the First World War; the latter, dating from 1934, appealed to the many artist-educators and émigrés arriving in the United States to rebuild their lives after the enforced closure of the Bauhaus in the previous year (Dewey 1966, 1987). Reading these two publications together offers some insight into the relationship between education, democracy and aesthetic experience. It is perhaps because faculty and students fleeing the conditions of Nazi Germany found common cause with those navigating the extreme uncertainty and social and economic impacts of the Great Depression that Dewey's philosophy resonated so strongly with artist-educators interested in art as a living and social practice. Many of those associated with radical art education or the avant-garde were seeking in their own ways to describe the arts' core concern with the relation between freedom and social responsibility.

The conditions that finally forced the Bauhaus to close reveal much about the role of lived experience in creative ecology. Staff and faculty were branded as 'degenerate' or 'un-German'. They were marginalized and rebuked by a public which lined up to visit the exhibition *Entartete Kunst*, organized in 1937 by Adolf Ziegler and the Ministry of Propaganda of the Nazi Party, opening first in München and then traveling to other cities in Germany and Austria.<sup>11</sup> Modern artists associated with avant-garde movements such as cubism, Dada, German Expressionism, Primitivism and Russian Constructivism, along with the Bauhaus and other art schools across Germany which had adopted these approaches, were paraded as transgressive. They were shamed and sanctioned, forbidden to teach, to exhibit and, in some cases, even to make art.

Having grasped the power of print and audiovisual communications in the new epoch of photography, film and radio, the German Ministry of Propaganda made maximum use of these media to exalt values of racial purity, along with the senses of community, national pride and family life. By contrast, the artistic avant-garde was recast as elitist, morally suspect and incomprehensible. The criticism of the 'moderns' in conservative circles was shared by many; indeed, the phrase 'degeneracy in art' was taken from a much earlier speech in the

Prussian House of Representatives in 1913 and follows the argument that modern art is 'gutter painting' (*Grossemalerei*) and a form of aesthetic violence against the state. The Weimar Republic of the 1920s was viewed with disgust by the Nazi Party, and the art and art schools it promoted were regarded as cradles of barbarism. By reappropriating the Classical forms of Greek Antiquity and reinventing vernacular folk traditions, the Party sought to prove that modern art had been contaminated by Jewish influences. Modern and abstract art was thus portrayed as contrary to the German spirit.

For those who survived and managed to escape, these experiences were to play a formative role in the reform of the art school and the pedagogic principles and ethos on which it was based. These émigrés included the Bauhaus artist-educators Josef and Anni Albers and Xanti Schawinsky, later joined in the United States by the founder of the Bauhaus, Walter Gropius, and by László Moholy-Nagy, Marcel Breuer and Herbert Bayer. For them, Dewey's ideals of individual freedom and discovery must have felt like a beacon of renewed hope. But Dewey's philosophy was also foundational to the establishment of Black Mountain College, conceived in 1933 by John Andrew Rice after he had spoken out against the regime of knowledge and governance at Rollins College, Florida, where he held a faculty position. Dismissed by the College, Rice began planning a different kind of learning environment. He was joined at Black Mountain by a cohort of staff from the College who had been similarly dismissed for refusing to sign a 'loyalty pledge', and by those students brave enough to follow. Black Mountain eventually grew in numbers, as students defected or were attracted to this alternative model.

The pedagogic ethos and principles of this new independent college included the following: (1) that artistic and aesthetic experiences are central to democracy; (2) that learning emerges through immediate experience and independent study; (3) that governance should be shared by faculty and students; (4) that education extends through social relationships and endeavours beyond the classroom; (5) that oversight and judgement should be limited to participants in the collective experience; (6) that visitors should be invited from diverse disciplines. This ethos, and these principles, were never far from my thoughts as I was working with the KFI community in Scotland, but I also took them with me through travels to Weimar, Berlin and Dessau and to Chicago, Aarhus and Copenhagen. The line from the Bauhaus, through the philosophy of Dewey, to Black Mountain has provided me with a path to follow in my desire to imagine an educational environment based on process rather than objectification (Egglehöffer 2015).

In my teaching, too, I often invite students to look again at images from the *Entartete Kunst* Exhibition – to revisit that moment when books were burned and artworks culled – using the images to catalyse a conversation about the value of the arts and why it is so important to allow education in art to grow from the grassroots of practice. The all-too-evident parallels with the crises of the present lead us to realize that counterculture emerges not just as a reaction to one set of events, but in response to more enduring currents of history. The dynamic environment of the art school, forged by its participants, thus plays a key practical role in propagating hopes and fears and in imagining things to come, in ways that go much further than self-expression, representation or utility.

### Art and Possibility

As a curator, researcher and artist-educator, I have a deep interest in how the arts come together through their differences. This has been central to my own curatorial practice and stems largely from an interest in the utopian impulse or attitude of artists, designers and social thinkers, across all creative disciplines, who are prepared to hold up a mirror to the world, helping us to learn lessons from the past or to imagine things to come. It also finds an echo in the writing of the Jewish émigré Ernst Bloch, in his encyclopaedic work *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* ('The Principles of Hope'), published in three volumes between 1954 and 1959. I find Bloch's commitment to the future deeply moving, particularly when we remember the tragic experiences and unspeakable events that give force to his words. Most of all I feel an abiding sense of humility, as Bloch reminds us that it is possible to take another path if we are willing to do so. Here are his opening words, introducing the first volume:

Who are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going? What are we waiting for? What awaits us?

Many only feel confused. The ground shakes, they do not know why and with what. Theirs is a state of anxiety; if it becomes more definite, then it is fear.

Once a man travelled far and wide to learn fear. In the time that has just passed it came easier and closer, the art was mastered in a terrible fashion. But now that the creators of fear have been dealt with, a feeling that suits us better is overdue.

It is a question of learning hope ... The emotion of hope goes out of itself, makes people broad instead of confining them, cannot know nearly enough of what it is

that makes them inwardly aimed, of what may be allied to them outwardly. The work of this emotion requires people who throw themselves actively into what is becoming, to which they themselves belong ... The work against anxiety about life and the machinations of fear is that against its creators, who are for the most part easy to identify, and it looks in the world itself for what can help the world; this can be found ...

Everybody's life is pervaded by daydreams: one part of this is just stale, even enervating escapism, even booty for swindlers, but another part is provocative, is not content just to accept the bad which exists, does not accept renunciation. This other part has hoping at its core, and is teachable. (Bloch 1996: 3)

While every epoch has its own theories of education and every generation faces a different set of challenges, the sense of longing and hope for the future is echoed in an image of Bauhäusler taken almost a century ago, which I reproduce below (Figure 8.1). The photo marks a brief moment in time when those gathered there were celebrating the end of one era and the beginning of another. The school in Weimar is about to be forced into closure through political pressure. Behind the scenes, Walter Gropius – architect and first director of



**Figure 8.1** Art students on the occasion of a Bauhaus party, 29 November 1924, Weimar. Photo courtesy of Louis Held, Weimar, © Bauhaus Archiv, Museum für Gestaltung, Berlin.

this radical experiment in art school reform – is in the midst of imagining a new Bauhaus, to be designed and built together with his architectural studio, staff and students. The new school will carry forward the pedagogic ethos in viewing its spaces of learning as an integral part of the curriculum. For a few years, from 1925 to 1932, it will bring new life to the industrial region of Dessau and offer its students a living and working environment where they can experiment together and find ways to contribute to social reform. Blissfully unaware of things to come, the students hold up placards from a performance, displaying the words *GEMÜTSBEWEGUNG* ('emotion'), *SPANNUNG* ('tension'), *AUFTRITT* ('appearance'), *LEIDENSCHAFT* ('passion'), *PAUSE* ('pause'), *KATASTROPHE* ('tragedy') and *ABTRITT* ('withdrawal'). These are to serve as prompts for the audience.

This is one of those images that reminds us that education is not about providing tools for professional advancement or about creating a hierarchy of merit, but about life. Its purpose is to provide students with the imaginative and practical skills for living, so they can navigate uncertainty and live and work in cooperation with others while searching for alternatives towards a more sustainable future.

## Bauhaus Pedagogy: A Bibliographic Note

An up-to-date bibliography is available from The Bauhaus Kooperation, which also holds the most significant collection of primary sources. It comprises the three Bauhaus institutions that maintain collections – in Berlin, Dessau and Weimar; see <https://www.bauhauskooperation.com/>.

The huge accumulation of publications focusing on the Bauhaus presents a problem for anyone seeking to navigate through it. To put this in perspective, when I began research for *Bauhaus 1919–1933 / Language of Vision*, at Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art (2007), the list of extant publications exceeded 4,000 titles. For students, I have found it useful to focus directly on material published by the artist-educators themselves.

Alongside the Manifesto, written by Walter Gropius in 1919, *The Catalogue Staatliches Bauhaus in Weimar 1919–1923*, first published in Weimar in 1923, was recently translated into English for the Bauhaus Centenary. Alongside a carefully translated facsimile of the original Manifesto, the catalogue describes the pedagogic practices of Paul Klee, Wassily Kandinsky and Gertrud Grunow, conveying the diverse pedagogic perspectives of the teaching faculty. Gropius's

preface explains the structure of the state-run Bauhaus and how he radically reformed the art school. The book is designed by László Moholy-Nagy and Herbert Bayer.

In addition, a series of 'Fourteen Bauhaus Books' (*Die Bauhausbücher*), edited by Walter Gropius and László Moholy-Nagy, were published during the School's lifetime, between 1925 and 1930. These reveal the dynamics of the School and the pedagogic values outlined in this chapter.

## Notes

- 1 My formative experiences of teaching were in the Foundation Course of the Architecture Association, London, in 1992, through the invitation of the installation artist Julia Wood (1953–2003). This collaborative, site-specific project with students had a profound impact on my own approach to pedagogic practices and exhibition making. The project created a highly experimental, independent learning environment, the core premise of which was to challenge the established ways in which architects were taught about space and materials. These teaching experiences took place off-site in a warehouse building in Bermondsey Street, in the Bankside area of central London.
- 2 As a leading architect and advocate of creative reform, Gropius invited international figures associated with prominent artistic groups in Germany – such as *Der Blaue Reiter* in Munich and *Der Sturm* in Berlin – and members of the Russian avant-garde to teach at the school. His earliest appointments included the artists Lyonel Feininger, Johannes Itten, Gerhard Marcks and Gertrud Grunow. In the following years, Gropius hired other leading artists such as Paul Klee, Oskar Schlemmer and Wassily Kandinsky. His conviction was that these artists would be best placed to challenge students' ways of seeing and knowing. Teachers at the Bauhaus, Weimar, were called 'Masters of Form' or 'Masters of Craft' rather than 'Professors'. As the school progressed and Bauhaus students graduated, they were elevated to the rank of 'Junior Masters', in order to secure its continuity. Teaching was supplemented by guest lectures, with speakers from a wider circle of Bauhaus associates.
- 3 These lectures by Helmuth Plessner have remained largely unknown, and only resurfaced in 2001 in a publication entitled: *Politik – Anthropologie – Philosophie: Aufsätze und Vorträge*, edited by Salvatore Giammusso and Hans-Ulrich Lessing (Giammusso and Lessing 2001: 71–86). My initial attempts to close-read Plessner's address for the Deutsche Werkbund were supported through early discussions with filmmaker, visual anthropologist and KFI associate Christine

Moderbacher, and through correspondence with scholars and translators at the Bauhaus Dessau Foundation and Bauhaus Archive, Berlin.

- 4 The transnational movement of those associated with the school has been greatly expanded as a subject of investigation throughout the Bauhaus Centenary Year, most notably in initiatives such as *Bauhaus Imaginista* and *Art School Fundamental*, Dessau, which created a forum for Bauhaus scholars to respond to the way its principles meshed with those of a cosmopolitan avant-garde across the world. Two points of reference may also be helpful: first, for those interested in art education in Britain, *A Continuing Process: The New Creativity in British Art Education 1955–65* (Thistlewood and Nairne 1981); second, *Art School: Propositions for the 21st Century*, edited by Stephen Madoff, Senior Critic at Yale School of Art (Madoff 2009). Both works draw on the work of Bauhaus émigrés in Britain and the United States and show why the continuity matters.
- 5 See <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/research/kfi>.
- 6 The corpus of Paul Klee's unpublished writings and pedagogic sketchbooks can be found at the Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern. Suffice to say here that Klee opposed the notion of static form (*Form-Ende*). The entirety of his attention was dedicated to tracing 'formative forces', leading him to describe humankind's relationship to the environment as *cosmo-genesis* (form in movement).
- 7 Available at: [https://www.davidharding.net/?page\\_id=82](https://www.davidharding.net/?page_id=82).
- 8 The Dearing Report is available at: <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/dearing1997/dearing1997.html>.
- 9 Available at: <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/a71914a7-74c3-44ee-8fe3-88a16f718c9c>.
- 10 Bretton Hall College was founded by Alec Clegg in 1949. It combined specialist training in the visual arts, design and performance arts with teacher training, primarily for those in primary education or specializing in art instruction at secondary level. It was merged with the University of Leeds in 2001 and closed in 2007.
- 11 A number of exhibitions have returned to the *Entartete Kunst*. For me as a curator, the most significant introduction was through the Documenta Archives of the Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, in the City of Kassel, established by the painter and academy professor Arnold Bode in 1955 with the aims to bring Germany back into dialogue with the rest of the world after the Second World War, to present art that had been labelled by the Nazis as degenerate and to explore the roles of curatorial perspectives and institutions in transforming cultural attitudes. The first Documenta was a retrospective of works from major movements (Fauvism, Expressionism, Cubism, Der Blaue Reiter and Futurism), alongside those of many of the Bauhaus artist-educators, including Kandinsky, Klee and Schlemmer. See: [https://www.documenta.de/en/about#16\\_documenta\\_ggmbh](https://www.documenta.de/en/about#16_documenta_ggmbh). The publications

I have found most insightful include Enwezor (2016) and Ulbricht (2009). This is an unfolding area of research, as institutions explore in depth the provenance of work associated with the unlawful appropriation of art objects. For those who wish to return to the original material, see *'Entartete' Kunst: digital reproduction of a typescript inventory prepared by the Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda, ca. 1941/1942, (V&A NAL MSL/1996/7)*, London: Victoria and Albert Museum, January 2014, available at [www.vam.ac.uk/entartekunst](http://www.vam.ac.uk/entartekunst).

## References

- Barnett, R. (2003), 'Universities in a Fluid Age', in R. Curren (ed.), *A Companion to the Philosophy of Education*, 561–8, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Benjamin, W. (1999), 'Experience and Poverty', in M. Bullock and M. W. Jennings (eds), *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, Vol. 2.2, 731–6, Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Bloch, E. (1996), *The Principle of Hope*, Vol. 1, trans. N. Plaice, S. Plaice and P. Knight, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Brühlmeier, A. (2010), *Head, Heart and Hand: Education in the Spirit of Pestalozzi*, Cambridge: Open Book Publishers.
- Certeau, M. de (1984), *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. S. Rendall, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Dewey, J. (1966), *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*, New York: Free Press.
- Dewey, J. (1987), 'Art as Experience', in J. A. Boydston (ed.), *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925–1953, Vol. 10: 1934*, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press
- Egglehöffer, F. (2015), 'Process Instead of Results: What Was Taught at the Bauhaus and Black Mountain College', in E. Blume, M. Felix, G. Knapstein and C. Nichols (eds), *Black Mountain: An Interdisciplinary Experiment 1933–1957*, Leipzig: Spector Books.
- Enwezor, O. (2016), 'The Judgment of Art: Postwar and Artistic Worldliness', in O. Enwezor, K. Siegel and U. Wilmes (eds), *Postwar: Art between the Pacific and the Atlantic, 1945–1965*, 21–41, Munich: Haus der Kunst.
- Giammusso, S., and H.-U. Lessing (eds) (2001), *Politik – Anthropologie – Philosophie: Aufsätze und Vorträge*, Munich: Fink.
- Klee, P. (1953), *Pedagogical Sketchbook*, New York: Frederick A. Praeger
- Klee, P. (1961), *Notebooks, Volume I: The Thinking Eye*, ed. J. Spiller, trans. R. Manheim, London: Lund Humphries.
- Madoff, S. (2009), *Art School: Propositions for the 21st Century*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Moholy-Nagy, L. (1938), *The New Vision: Fundamentals of Bauhaus Design, Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture*, trans. D. M. Hoffman, New York: W. W. Norton.