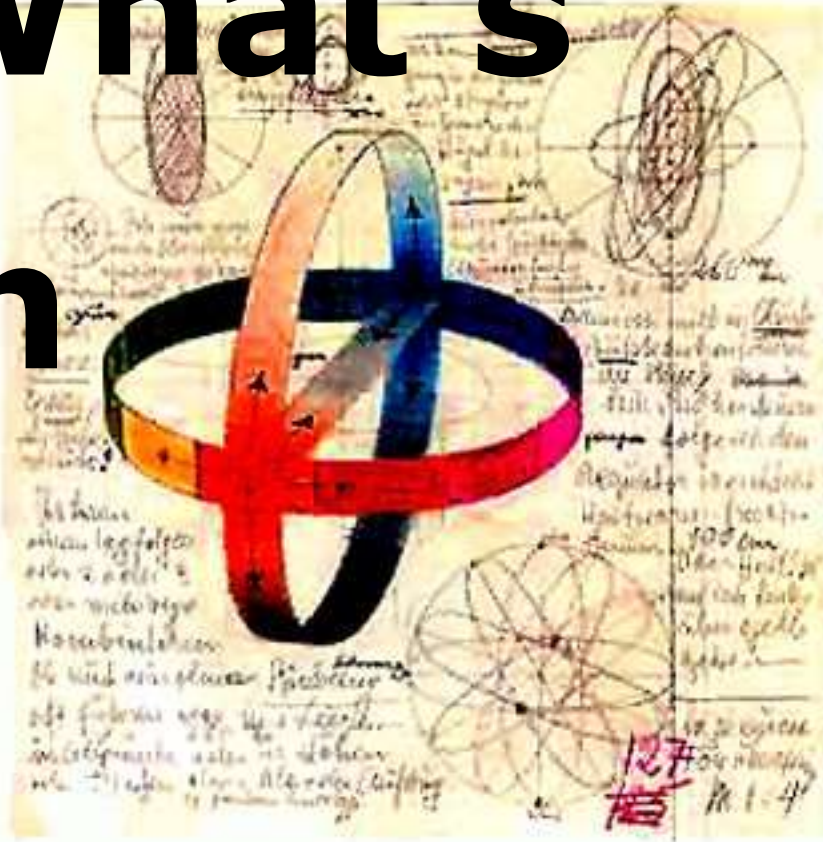


What's in a name ?



Art credit; Johannes Itten

Recent Visit to Bauhaus , Dessau.

I was quite recently at the Bauhaus, Dessau, not long before Covid 19 hit us all.

We stayed over, in the restored residences at the Bauhaus. There was much to admire: Calm; simplicity; space; elegant proportion; natural light; elemental materials, beautifully wrought. I was with a wonderful group, (GAIA International, which we founded in 1989), of architect colleagues, (practitioners, researchers, academics) from all over the

World. We were travelling, by surface, from North Germany, southward, and on into Austria and Switzerland, in our study tour/ biennial conference, to look at state-of-the-art eco buildings, infrastructure and settlements .

There were particularly good guide/ facilitators there, at PhD level, whom we intensely engaged in good conversations and enjoyed several such walk 'n talk tours of specific buildings and exhibits. It was an outstanding experience, much appreciated.

Influence; The Weimar ethos .

More than 50 years ago, as a student and young graduate, I was very influenced by the Bauhaus. 45 years ago I delivered a course in Design Procedures to students at third level . I amplified my interests and course material and practice, inter alia by reference to Johannes Itten's 'Basic Course' , not published in English until 1963, I believe . Teaching is one of the most intense learning experiences I have ever experienced.

I am still a big fan of Van de Velde, and the earlier Weimar ethos of Itten and later Muche, Klee , Anni Albers, Schlemmer, Schreyer, Moholy Nagy, Kandinsky, Feininger, Breuer- all disparate creatives, but bound by a common free spirit of Art as informing all human making , drawing on Nature .

(This ethos re-emerged again later, at Black Mountain, in Nth. Carolina, for a wonderful post-war decade from 1947 . It's influence is still felt, and invoked, very positively.)

Gropius and Mies

Whereas I respect and admire aspects of the work and career of Gropius and Mies, I am now extremely critical of them both. I believe their overall effect may have been negative, and impacted heavily on many of the outcomes we critically observe now, in our 'entangled' societies, addicted to mass-production and consumerism. These, inexorably causing climate change, now at catastrophic levels. This disentanglement from addictions is possible the greatest challenge of all.

(https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265841569_The_Entanglements_of_Humans_and_Things_A_Long-Term_View)

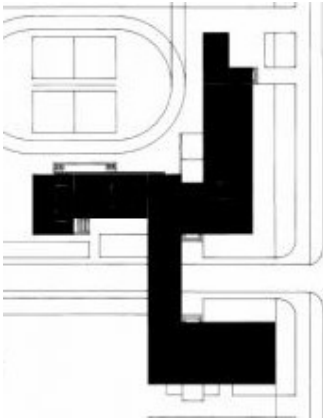
Gropius was in thrall to Junkers , who paid for everything at Dessau , including the Master's houses , after the termination and withdrawal of funds at Weimar. He obediently changed his whole ethos hitherto , toward mass-production and reductionist ethos, which was detrimental and affected generations to follow, I believe. Junkers however showed extraordinary character, in opposing the Nazis, and refused to collaborate and died as they forcibly took over his whole family business

to bend it later to their diabolical purposes .
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hugo_Junkers .

The Itten Gropius conflict is infamous: Gropius won . Mies won . Itten left. The winners are not always right ?

Mies was highly authoritarian in the Bauhaus, and forged a very different design ethos which, (though sometimes brilliant in his own hands, and those of a small number of acolytes), has done great harm, amplifying a sterile and alienating aesthetic and methodology, in my considered opinion .

Although the Bauhaus ostensibly opposed Fascism, I now believe that in many respects it became implicitly, possibly subconsciously , spiritually and culturally fascist in Dessau ; even the figure ground of Gropius design, I find disquieting:



Revisionist View in the 2020s

Now, after 50 years of design experience after graduation , most of it in my own practice in ecological architecture – www.GAIA-ecotecture.eu – I have metabolised my Bauhaus influence and am a critical revisionist about it .

There is no vaccine for Climate Change

Retracing the path of history , (always a fraught journey) , I ask : what was the Itten ethos? - as exemplified by him between 1919 and 1923 , and carried forward , by some of his pedagogical successors at the Bauhaus, for another decade, more or less, and less.....

It re- emerged at Black Mountain College in North Carolina in 1947; it has continued in some shape or form, at Art and architecture schools, worldwide, since then, due it's enduring qualities .

To attempt to characterise that ethos fully is beyond the scope of this paper. Much has been written on the topic and will be . Suffice it to say that it was Biocentric , Monist , Spiritually liberating , allowing the entire body, informed by all our senses, to act as a conduit for radical creative insights when engaged in Art and Design . It drew from the *zeitgeist* of the times, including, through Theosophy , Anthroposophy, Der Blaue Reiter / Neue Kunstler Vereinigung, Art Nouveau/ Jugendstil, Arts and Crafts Movement , Arbeitsrat für Kunst, Deutscher Werkbund, and the Novembergruppe, etc .

It is difficult to better Wilde's definition, which I believe insightfully verbalises what Itten knew :

- *Truth in art is the unity of a thing with itself... What the artist is always looking for is the mode of existence ...in which the outward is expressive of the inward: instinct with spirit, in which form reveals.*

Oscar Wilde : 'De Profundis'

In many ways Itten, for me, is spiritually related to the liberating , if challenging, Jiddu Krishnamurti who effectively told his followers in 1929 , 'forget your quest for a Messiah in me -I am not HE - Truth is a pathless land - be your own messiah- it's harder to do, but worth it'. That's the challenge to every person in the face of the inchoate, but especially to creatives.

SO : **Why** "New" Bauhaus ?

I seriously challenge, and question why, a century later, we need a New European "Bauhaus" (NEB) .

Why not a: n**EU** EUROPA **Oikos** : **NEO** . This would encapsulate *Logos and Nomos* , economy and ecology: both now so critically important in this critical decade, to our social routes of progression .

It's up to us now , to 'be the mRNA' , to change the DNA of the entire EU culture ? That calls for a wholly different ethos, and more diverse European sources may prove more reliable for a name, than 20th Century German.

In my respectful opinion , the EU should not be tendentious, in providing an overarching ethos for current spending by its citizens ; it is not *communautaire* to impose such an hegemonistic, redolent, dominant,

freighted name to a new movement , which seems so timely and urgent,
even to the very survival of our species .

It would be **co creative** to change it , at this time .



Johannes Itten