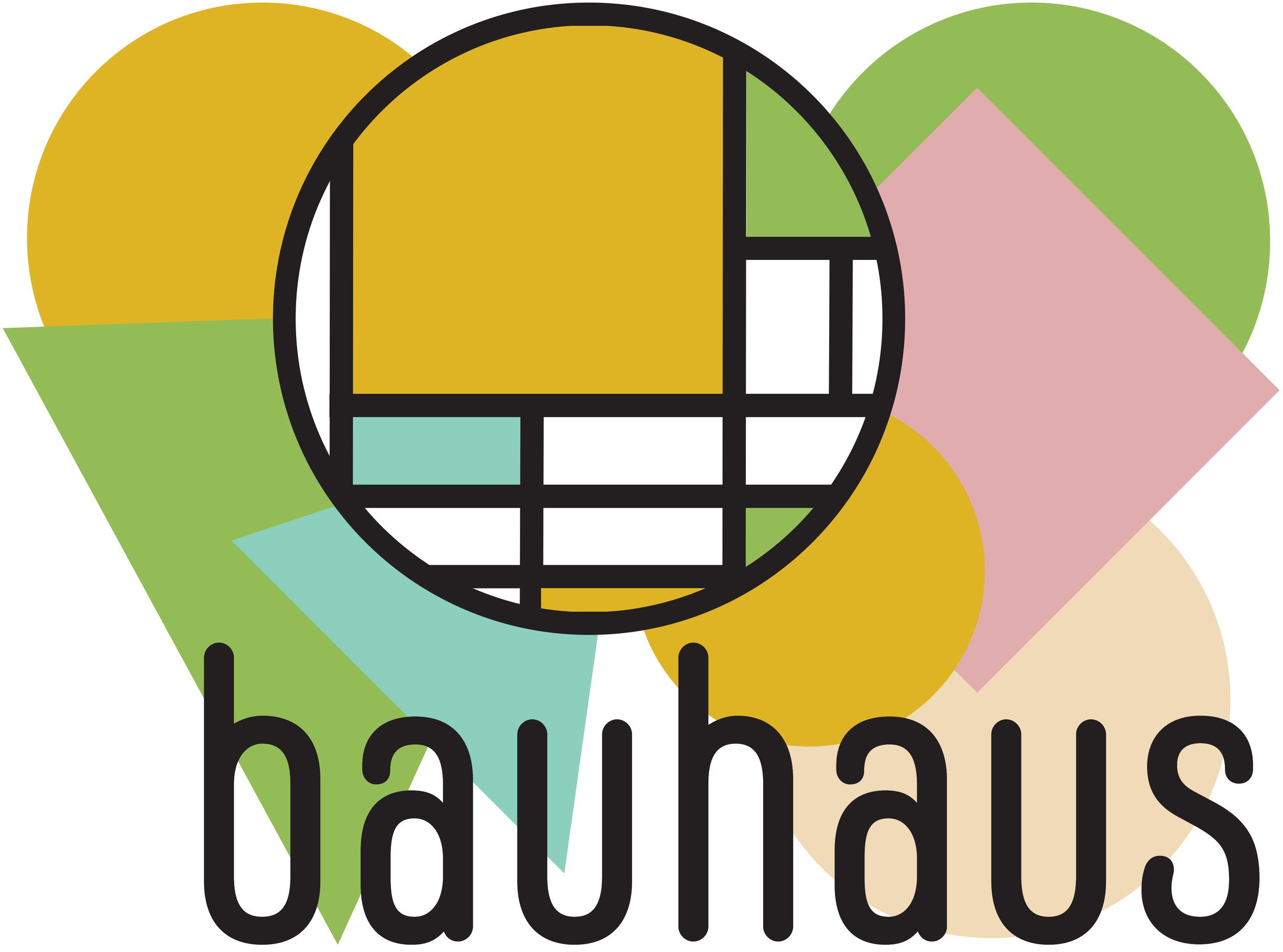

bauhaus

FIGURE 1

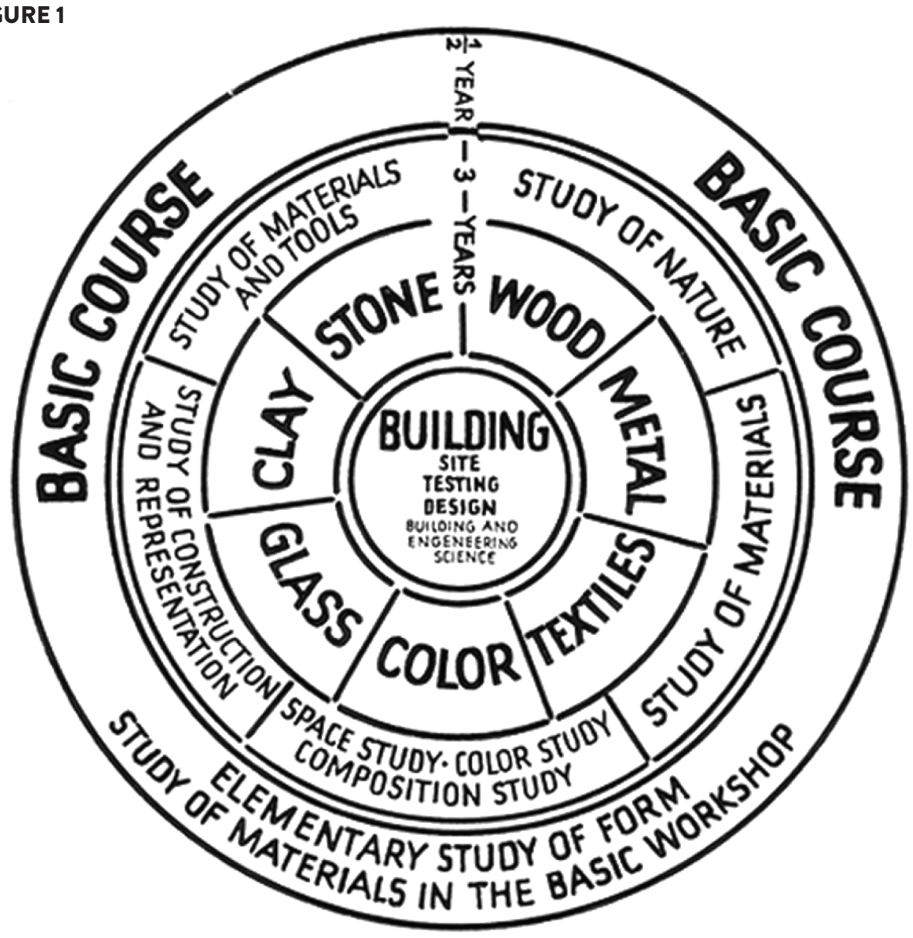


FIGURE 2

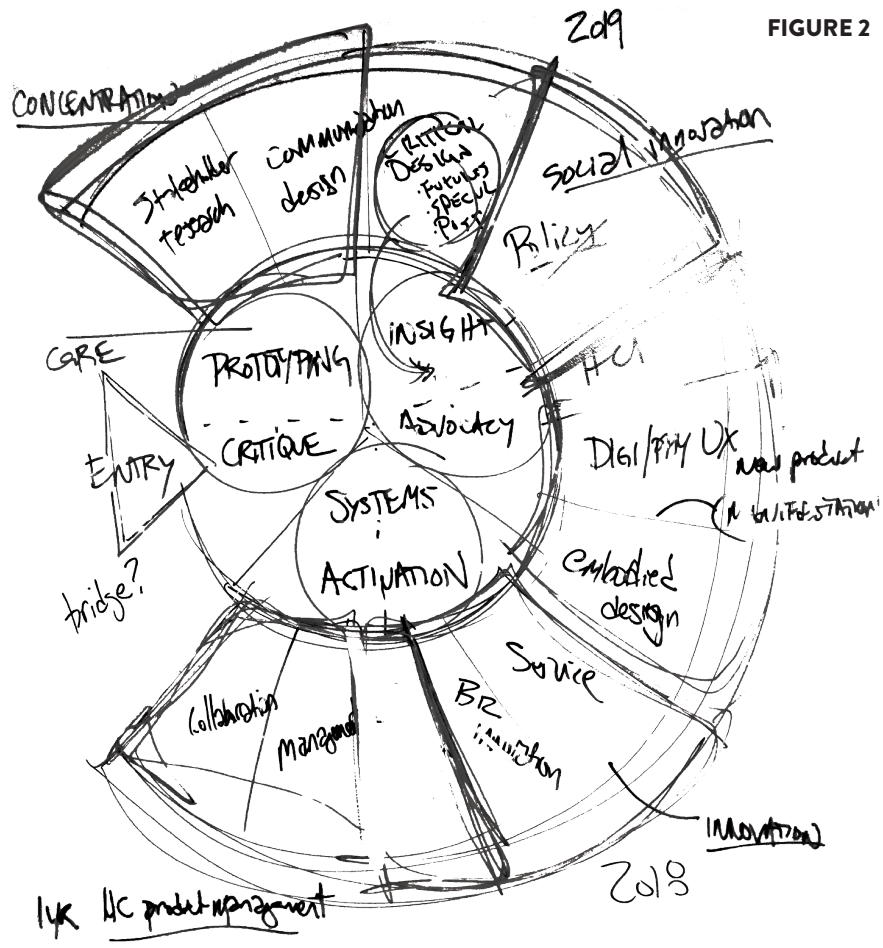


Figure 1 is the original Bauhaus curriculum. Figure 2 is a sketch of the framework for curriculum redesign at the Institute of Design. Entry represents the starting point for foundational coursework. **Image courtesy of IIT Institute of Design**

Building a new foundation

Adapting Bauhaus pedagogy for the future of design

M. TODD COOKE
+ JASON ROMANO
Students, Master of Design, 2020

I. What is design?

The Institute of Design, colloquially known as "ID," is a child of the Bauhaus: its rebellious teenager. As the second-generation instantiation of the German art school, with the most direct lineage, ID continues to wrestle with its Bauhaus heritage. The original Bauhaus has been both lionized and criticized for its outsized and normative influence on the discipline called design. To the dismay of architect Dong-Ping Wong, "The Bauhaus's role in commodifying design has really helped pigeonhole what most people understand "design" to be," with Jony Ive's universal and unobtrusive iPhone aesthetic becoming its apotheosis. On its surface, the Institute of Design has rebelled against this notion, attracting students who engage design with an aim to solve the proverbial "wicked" problems of the world today.

Unlike others who primarily engage the Bauhaus as a movement, a style, or a philosophy, the Institute of Design (ID) probes its legacy as an academic institution. The importance of this perspective is emphasized by Berry Bergdoll, curator of the Department of Architecture and Design at the Museum of Modern Art, who reminds those willing to listen that "the Bauhaus was a school. It wasn't a movement. It wasn't a style. It was a school." In spite of being, perhaps, the only cultural institution privileged with this unique perspective of the Bauhaus, ID has been reluctant to succumb to nostalgia as it tries to chart a path to the future. Yet as the centennial of the most famous European art school dawns upon us, ID has been forced to look back and engage its legacy.

II. Experimentation

Engaging the scholastic legacy of the Bauhaus is no easy task; teachers and administrators alike must weigh the pros and cons of which traditions to maintain and which to leave behind in the wake of the digital era. Against the backdrop of what's been called the third industrial revolution, the dilemma faced by modern pedagogues is similar to that of the original Bauhaus, who saw mechanization supplanting the work of the craftsman and the engineer taking the place of the artist in forging the future. Digitization is the new industrialization and, given the new landscape, Denis Weil, Dean of the Institute Design, sees the pendulum of design swinging back toward experimentation. Since he came on board two years ago, Weil has challenged the faculty to reconsider the existing course structure towards that end. "Whenever you have new technology," Weil explains, "you need to experiment to figure out what the best way forward is." If Bauhaus explored novel materials, such as steel and glass, "data is one of our new materials," Weil says.

In carrying forward the pedagogy of the Bauhaus into the modern age, Weil began with Foundation, the preliminary course of fundamentals training on topics ranging from form—what the German Bauhaus termed gestalt—to color, visual hierarchy, nature studies, and optics. As recounted by the Bauhaus Archive:

> *At the start of their studies, they received a year of basic training in the so-called preliminary course, in which they were able* ***to experiment with colour, shape and materials with no specific goals.*** *Depending on their individual suitability, this was followed by practical work in the workshops and accompanying disciplines. The students entered the workshops as 'apprentices' and sat for their 'apprenticeship' exams within a given time period. [Emphasis added.]*

Experimentation was encouraged as a means of making sense of change. The Bauhaus needed to engage technologies and materials for which society lacked both a vocabulary and a methodology. On that front, little has changed today. According to Weil, it has been through Foundation that ID has primarily engaged its Bauhaus legacy, having remained a part of the school's pedagogical approach for the entirety of its 80-year existence. However, Weil—himself a product of the Foundation program—has moved Foundation from a peripheral position to one of centrality, a position formerly occupied by Gropius' "building," bau in German [Figure 1 & Figure 2]. At ID, Foundation is the hub of the new wheel.

This represents an important decision in realizing the Bauhaus's vision of orienting design toward society and the common good. ID's new curricular subsections include concentrations like insight development, human advocacy, prototyping, critique & evaluation, systems thinking, and leadership & mediation [Figure 2], all of which radiate outward toward the world at large. Rather than promising technical mastery, these courses are designed to cultivate the skill sets required to engage multiple stakeholders. At the turn of the century, Bauhaus designers primarily concerned themselves with domestic space, an environment over which they could exert significant control. The school no longer aspires to that narrow view. In today's hyper-connected society, designers have more impact as collaborators than as sole decision-makers. In the generative design workshop led by ID studio instructor Zach Pino, many design 'decisions' are arrived at through computational mediation—algorithms, sensors, and code—while associate professor Carlos Teixeira's service systems workshop engages community members in developing solutions for industrial brownfield sites.

III. Systems

The shift from 'designer as decision maker' to 'designer as facilitator' arguably began with Jay Doblin. Doblin, who needs little in the way of introduction in the halls of ID, served as director during the school's most tumultuous period and set ID on the course it continues today. Weil mentions in endeavoring to solve systemic problems in the private and social space, Doblin took little in the way of pedagogical inspiration from his predecessor, the school's Bauhaus founder László Moholy-Nagy, shifting the focus toward professional practice.

Although Doblin himself was a product designer, today the school can, at times, appear perplexingly bereft of material. At first appraisal, contrasting the image of the excessively generative Bauhaus with the bare, all-white interior of ID's new Kaplan Institute can come as a shock. "The Bauhaus made stuff," studio professor Martin Thaler explains, "and for a long time the arc of the Institute of Design was away from making anything. That was my role, to keep that part of the institution alive." (Thaler heads the school's product design curriculum.) A possible rationale for the abrupt shift is that many of today's

(story continues on page 5)

from PAPER to PERFORMANCE

AUDREY GORDON
Student, Master of Design, 2020

The founders of the Bauhaus saw their world ending after World War I. Political turmoil, tens of millions of people dead, whole cities turned to ash—the world they knew was demolished. They saw the time after the war as their opportunity to rebuild a more ideal world. They viewed direct manipulation of materials as essential to the process of design, and they developed many methods and techniques to do this. These techniques often used abstraction to break down the process of world building into discrete building blocks for designers.

These methods have evolved and changed over time, particularly with the integration of new materials. Our vernacular has changed, but the core intentions are related. In October 2018, five IIT Institute of Design graduate students (including myself) had the opportunity to experience the original Bauhaus methods directly. We participated in a collaborative design workshop to create a performance piece with Hedwig Dances, a modern dance company in Chicago. The piece, *Futura Fractals*, was performed as a prologue to Hedwig's original work, *Futura*. We created a new world with characters and an environment to show to the audience. We will perform the piece again in September 2019 in Dessau, Germany as part of the Bauhaus centenary celebration.

So what is the value of practicing the original methods of the Bauhaus? How can they be translated into the contemporary design vernacular?

Bauhaus methods today

1. **Paper folding and embodying**
   The students and dancers were instructed by Torsten Blume, a choreographer from the Bauhaus Foundation, to fold a piece of paper however they liked. Then we had to recreate the paper form with our bodies and move in a way that the paper might. This equates to the contemporary craft of understanding form and affordances, often seen in product design.

2. **Character building and costuming**
   We abstracted the characteristics of our paper forms into building blocks—were they round, angular, springy? This became the basis of how the character would behave and appear visually. This relates to the modern concept of understanding stakeholders and empathizing with their needs. Our costume pieces, made of foam core, were the medium to communicate these attributes to our audience.

3. **World building**
   When designers create new products, services, or systems, we are creating a vision of a world that does not yet exist. The way that we visualize this future aesthetically through images, videos, and animations may be different than in the days of the original Bauhaus, but the practice of creating an environment is aligned. In *Futura Fractals*, we used lighting as a key element. We collaborated with Jason White, CEO of Leviathan, to create visual tableaus of the character shapes and project them upon us while performing.

4. **Understanding interactions**
   For me, the most interesting exploration was how our characters interacted with each other and with the space we created. What happens when an aggressive angular shape interacts with a calming round shape? What about becoming self-aware of your character when seeing the shapes projected in front of you? This is where the methods of the past and the design disciplines of the future are very much aligned. Designers today must constantly consider how stakeholders and systems interact together.

Alexandria Rengifo, an MDes student, practices embodying her paper form. / Photo courtesy of **Dan Chichester.** Illustration by **Tommie Collins.**

Bauhaus through imagery

How the Bauhaus explored photography

YUEYUE (VIVIAN) YANG
Student, Master of Design, 2020

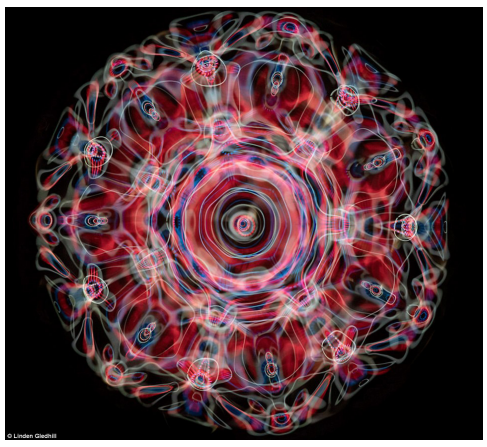
In the 1920s, photography was introduced into the Bauhaus curriculum as a way to explore light, objects, form, and the world around us. Walter Peterhans, a photography course leader at the Bauhaus, focused on the technical, chemical, and optical-physical aspects of photography. Armed with this knowledge, one could experiment with the medium to realize truly creative work.

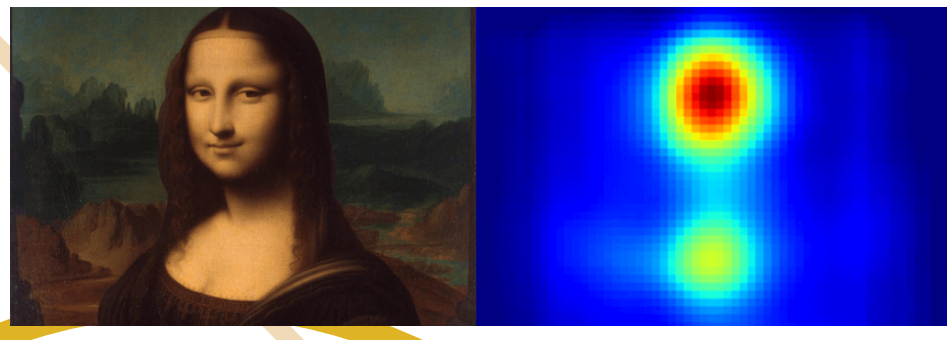
Present-day technology has enabled artists to continue exploring the medium in unique ways.

For instance, Linden Gledhill uses advanced microscopy and other non-traditional tools to create images that explore the scale and time of things not normally visible to the human eye, like chemical reactions and the form of sound waves.

Now artificial intelligence can help us recognize and interpret images based on color, form, and even emotion. The interpretation of an image can be output as another image. This new image is created from data collected by an algorithm. Here, we see an algorithm scanning the Mona Lisa for nudity, saliency, and memorability. The output is a color image similar to a "heat map."

No doubt, this area will continue to give photographers and image makers interesting tools to explore.





Top Left + Right Water Blasted Sound **/ Linden Gledhill**

Center SalNet Demo **/ Photo courtesy of Algorithmia**

Bottom Left Dead Hare (Still Life with Foil) **/ Walter Peterhans, circa 1929**

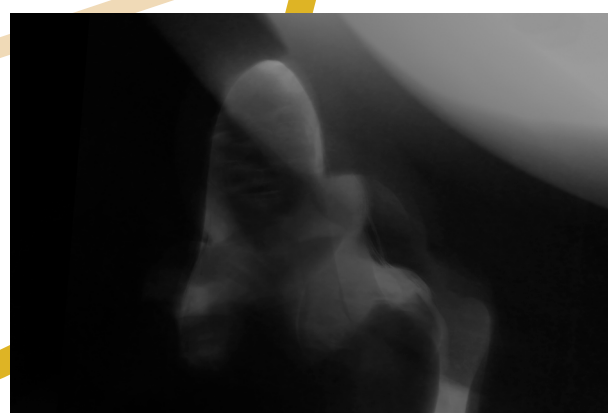
A modern take on the photogram

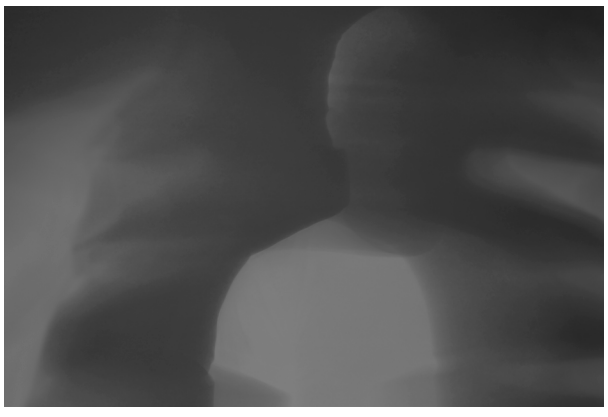
XUANYU CHEN
Student, Master of Design, 2020

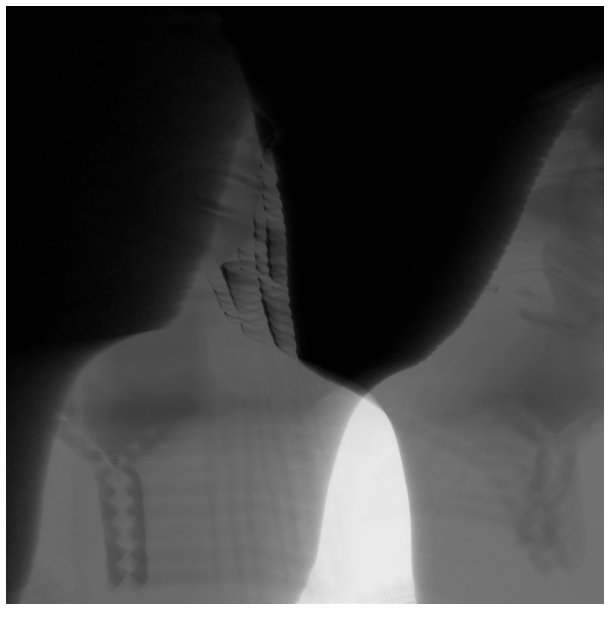
A photogram is a photographic image made without a camera. It's created by placing objects on the surface of a light-sensitive paper and exposing them to light. László Moholy-Nagy advocated this innovative approach to direct manipulation of light as a part of his experimentation with the medium of photography between 1922 and 1943.

The Bauhaus's legacy of photograms is still alive. At ID, we created a modernized photogram using a digital camera and Adobe Photoshop to manipulate the image—a method taught by Eric Hausman, adjunct professor at IIT Institute of Design (ID). We asked subjects to stand in front of a sheet of translucent white paper fixed to the window. After shooting compositions in color, we used software to convert them to black and white. We also inverted the colors of the output to mimic the original look of a photogram. This inversion changes our perspective of the photograph we took and opens our eyes to new possibilities, an essential skill for designers.

Moholy-Nagy focused on using various objects and media to create form and capture the most delicate gradations of light. For this group of photos, we chose to center on humans, just as ID focuses on human-centered design methods. We focused on bodies and interactions, exploring the light reflected by different textures and tones of clothes, hair, and skin and accentuating the human form.







Top, Center, + Bottom A modern take on the photogram utilizing computer programming and people instead of objects. **Xuanyu Chen / Institute of Design**

(story continued from page 2)

Adapting Bauhaus pedagogy

systemic problems stem from a surplus rather than a dearth of consumer goods. "We can make anything," adds Jeff Mau, who teaches an introductory survey course on design history and theory. "So the question now is what do we make?" Yet Mau agrees with Thaler—in spite of the ethical shortcomings of turn-of-the-century production practices, material exploration rises to significant value in the digital age.

If there's one common methodology that carries the Bauhaus legacy through to the present day, it's the diagram. According to civic architect Elizabeth Timme, "as the Bauhaus used it, [the diagram] was a tool to investigate something and also was a way to engage a larger audience about design." If the Bauhaus birthed the diagram as a communication tool, then Doblin turned it into a discipline entirely unto itself. Doblin sought to develop a methodology through which it was possible "to marry design processes to design problems." The diagram was his solution, engaging simultaneously the intermediate flow of information and its aggregate output. To invoke Walter Gropius's language, the diagram became a "new way of seeing and understanding the composite character" of the whole.

If diagrams and methodologies are a means to reframe problems, analyze information, and synthesize solutions, they can still be misused or used unnecessarily to signal 'rigorous design.' This is a common critique of the 'design thinking' principles pioneered at ID and brought into mainstream business lexicon by IDEO. A true design process, however, must practice self-critique and seek new methods when necessary. Clinical professor of design Tomoko Ichikawa, who teaches communication and information design in the tradition of Doblin, recalls an experience watching students incorrectly apply the 5E framework, a consumer journey map, to a social innovation situation:

Designers are problem solvers. So if you get to a place where the methods that you're using are not going to be applicable, what do you do? You have to modify the method. We have to come up with our own. And I think if you get too comfortable relying on frameworks and methods, that's a problem.

IV. Voice

The dissolution of the Bauhaus in 1933 threw many of its failings into sharp relief, one of which was its failure to encourage and support a diversity of voices and ideas. "The idea of wanting to bring the disciplines together was great," states contemporary designer Marlene Barnett, "but then the idea of bringing all the voices and people together didn't happen." Her sentiments are corroborated by historical record. The Bauhaus masters were almost all male, and women were restricted to studying traditional handicrafts, namely weaving. While they opposed the Nazis, the school was similarly plagued by anti-semitism.

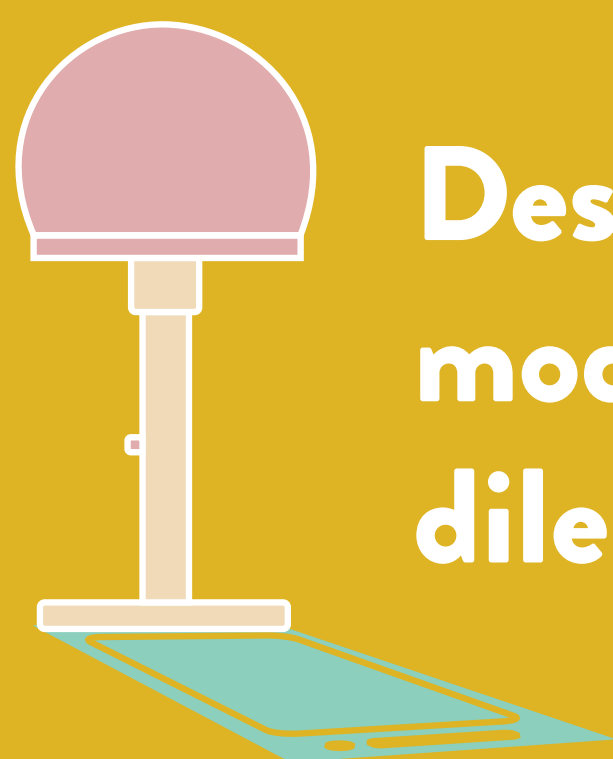
This is where Dale Fahnstrom (Director of ID, 1982–1986) and Patrick Whitney (Dean, 1987–2016), took a bold step in correcting and realizing the Bauhaus's original vision. If the Bauhaus engendered a close-minded groupthink in its pursuit of aesthetic "mastery," Whitney, in particular, attempted to open the school to a plurality of perspectives. He closed the school's undergraduate department in the early 1990s. This made ID the only graduate-only design school in the US and shifted the balance of its student body to accommodate 50% non-designers and 50% international students. According to Ichikawa, "the idea [was] that you can bring in multiple perspectives to have a much broader conversation around design and design solutions. As [Patrick] became the dean, he had very specific metrics in terms of what kind of community he wanted."

Another turning point for ID is currently underway as the curriculum prepares to re-embrace experimentation, and strengthen connections to current and emerging design practices. ID has returned to IIT's Mies campus after 22 years in downtown Chicago, softening its image as an industry-focused professional school and hoping to stimulate engagement with other disciplines at the university. The notion of legacy arises again, as the school considers welcoming new voices from outside its immediate sphere of influence—former ID grads and its professional corollary, Doblin-Deloitte (the innovation consulting firm founded by the school's former director).

V. Future

The strength of a design education undoubtedly lies in doing. For Matt Mayfield, ID's associate dean, the emphasis on making remains core to the DNA of the school: "[ID's curriculum] follows a constructivist pedagogy, you learn by doing." Walter Gropius instilled this philosophy in 1919, calling for a dissolution of the distinction between artisan and artist: "The ultimate goal of all art is building! Architects, painters and sculptors must learn a new way of seeing and understanding the composite character of the building, both as a totality and in terms of its parts."

In 2019, 100 years since the founding of the small German arts school in Dessau, the steam engine has been replaced by Moore's Law, and hyper-customization is seen as the modern-day foible to the malaise brought on by mass production. Where the Bauhaus sought harmony between the artist and the craftsman, today we seek harmony between data and the individual. The technological competency of the engineer, which once infringed on the domain of the artist, has been replaced by the Silicon Valley coder, whose decisions can impact millions in distant parts of the world. 'Design thinking', at once maligned and misunderstood, has been seized on with unbridled enthusiasm from the corporate and consulting world, just as titans of American industry once chomped at the bit to produce Bauhaus-styled goods. But as a pedagogical institution, caught between centuries, ID's ultimate goal, hopefully, perhaps foolishly, remains the same as when László Moholy-Nagy founded the school in 1937: forging a "New Vision," a new way of seeing.



Design's modern ethics dilemma

J. Smyk and Tommie Collins / **IIT Institute of Design**

J. SMYK
Student, Master of Design, 2020

Design has always sought to engage society's messiest problems. Designers believe that they are uniquely positioned to bring people and practices together in new ways, and that doing so, they can make an extraordinary impact. This has been the case for at least 100 years—since the Bauhaus was founded in Weimar Germany with the ambitious intent of rebuilding Western civilization. It continues today, with human-centered designers clamoring to help solve society's most pressing issues: wealth inequality, global warming, and the yet-undetermined consequences of developing artificial intelligence. However, if we examine the original ethical principles of both the Bauhaus and human-centered design, we can see unintended consequences that lead us to question those principles.

Perhaps now is a time for design to reevaluate its own moral compass?

Legacy of the Bauhaus

Walter Gropius founded the Bauhaus to, as Jeff Mau, adjunct professor at IIT Institute of Design (ID) puts it, "rebuild their world by embracing machines and the new economic reality." By embracing methods of mass production, Gropius and his collaborators wanted to create a new economy that made luxury craft goods accessible to the common worker. They wanted a system that served humanity ethically. That could be done, they believed, by equipping artists with the skills needed to work with rapidly advancing technology.

From its inception, the Bauhaus sought to push their newly-founded design ethics. They believed in universal design truths, and that right and wrong design decisions could

Perhaps now is a time for design to reevaluate its own moral compass?

drastically impact society. They pushed forward with experimentation to define those truths, and then carried them forward without compromise: form must follow function, materials must reflect the true nature of the object or building designed, and clean lines, geometric shapes, and appropriate colors must be chosen.

"In their minds, the worst thing they could do was be compromising," says ID studio instructor Zach Pino. Governments and legacy art schools were invested in the status quo, and thus did not want the Bauhaus to succeed. They felt this outside pressure and influence from the beginning. "They felt that if they gave up even an inch of their vision, it would leave them vulnerable to questioning," Mau said.

By relentlessly pushing forward with their vision of what design should look like, members of the Bauhaus made a legacy

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Design's modern ethics dilemma

for themselves, especially in the field of architecture and the International Style it spawned. However, we are left to consider a conflicted legacy of the Bauhaus, where many of its lofty goals were not achieved. Pino thinks this is a legacy that results from a desire to provoke, rather than engage the end user and evolve the design process. "Their ethic was bound in their design identity, but it was inherently limited," he says. And it was limited because it failed to consult with the common working class it was designing for. Because of this, many of the Bauhaus's designed objects proved unsuitable for the working class. For instance, Wilhelm Wagenfeld's Table Lamp (or Bauhaus lamp, as it's better known) never made it into scores of working class homes as intended. The problem was that it was never optimized for industrial manufacturing, nor use in the average home. Ironically, a modern version retails for around $1,000.

Enter: Human-Centered Design

The idea of human-centered design is simple: A designer must engage and consult the users of the product throughout the design process, and constantly iterate on the design by considering user feedback. While this appears to be a matter of common sense, human-centered design has proven to be a revolutionary idea. If you consider the scale at which it has been adopted, this approach has become arguably the most significant and influential design movement of the last 30 years.

The popularity of human-centered design has grown slowly over time. Its foundations began as early as the mid-20th century. Back then, designers like Victor Papanek were highly critical of design's infatuation with aesthetics over usability. Papanek stands as an example of one of the voices that was instrumental in modernizing design by weaving anthropology into the practice. He once said, "Design must be an innovative, highly creative, cross-disciplinary tool responsive to the needs of men. It must be more research-oriented, and we must stop defiling the earth itself with poorly-designed objects and structures."

> "We have to advocate for the data of users. They trust us to be their voice."

On its surface, human-centered design is inherently ethical, and a better approach than what the Bauhaus had offered to the world. If Wagenfeld had engaged potential users of his lamp, we can assume his research would have informed him that its cost and design didn't meet the criteria of viability, feasibility, and desirability.

Still, there is evidence of critical shortcomings in the ethics of human-centered design, mainly in the products and services coming out of the tech sector. "Designers must bear some of the blame for what is happening in tech," said Mau. "We have to advocate for the data of users. They trust us to be their voice."

As an example, consider how, in February 2019, TechCrunch caught Facebook paying teenagers for access to almost any and all information found on their iPhones. The Facebook Research app was designed explicitly to access things like personal shared messages, videos, and photos, and sought out teens as young as 13 to use the app, paying them $20 per month. Surely the users did not understand the full ramifications of their decisions, and were delighted with the new stream of income. Dubbed "Project Atlas" internally, Facebook's UX design team surely played a role in the app's development.

Perhaps the reason design has failed to maintain proper ethics is because it has always been held captive by business and industry. Ever since Gropius founded the Bauhaus, designers have been partnering with industry to create objects that, above all else, sell and make money. However, in that partnership, human-centered design methods have been much more successful than the Bauhaus methods, which never saw their products distributed on a wide scale. Thousands of products have been launched by companies employing human-centered design methods, and millions of people purchase them. And because of this success, the design community continues to push for "a seat at the table" within the C-suite of large corporations. But how can we be sure that design will suddenly bring better ethics into these situations? The track record isn't strong.

How Design Can Move Forward

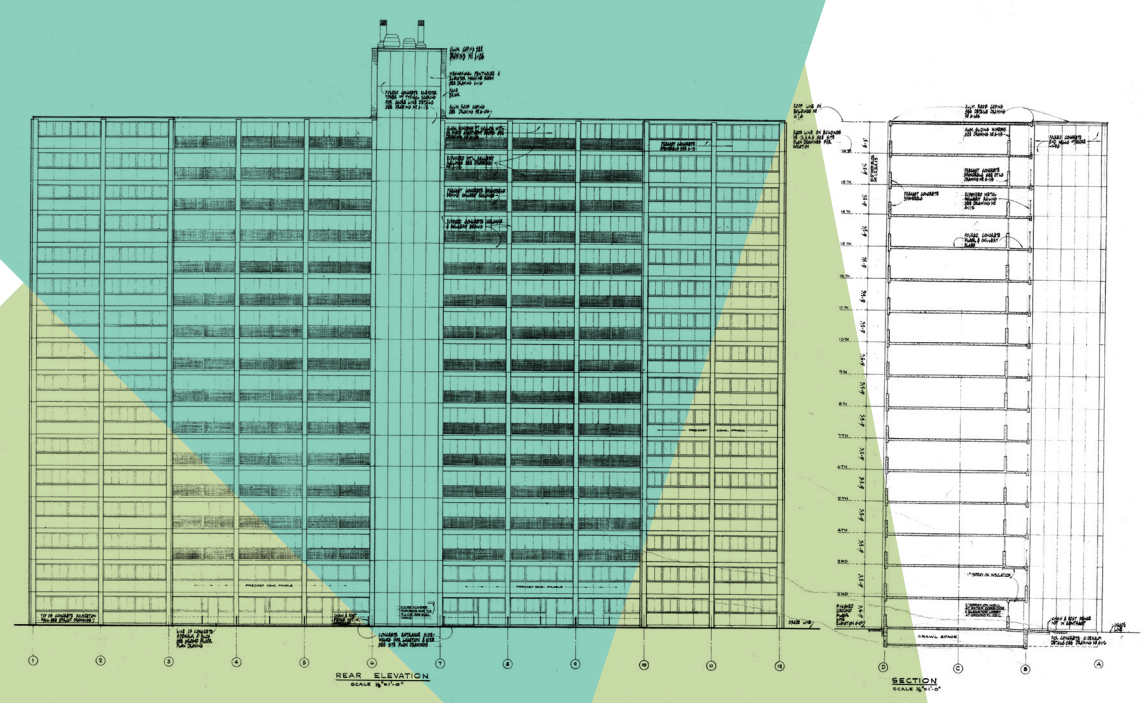
What design may need to do first is stop engaging the bad actors who are deliberately unethical. As Pino puts it, "We are entering a broken world, and we should not hesitate to reject servicing those pushing an agenda to maintain its brokenness."

Designers have the power to drive change by staying true to their ethics and trying to drive change in service of the user from within those companies. We have seen that this is tough for a designer to achieve, but the world needs people willing to push back, especially in the large organizations that have the biggest impact on our society.

One hundred years after the Bauhaus, design's ethical dilemma still is not resolved. Design still seeks to solve the major problems and questions plaguing society. But if design hopes to play a role in addressing global warming and the deployment of AI, it must rethink how it engages the world and seek ways to free itself from the captivity of industry. Designers should be skeptical, embrace uncertainty, and not be afraid to turn the microscope on themselves. If the Bauhaus has taught us anything, it's that we have to continuously evolve to remain effective in what we do.

Blaming Mies van der Rohe: Cabrini-Green

DAN MARTEN
Student, Biomedical Engineering, 2021



Above An elevation and section of Cabrini Green, a housing project under the Chicago Housing Authority. **Image courtesy of School of the Art Institute of Chicago**

Understanding the complex and divisive history of public housing in the United States is complicated, to say the least. In studying the decline and collapse of Chicago's Cabrini-Green Homes, historians have bounced between placing the blame on city officials, federal politics, the residents themselves, too much policing, not enough policing, and even architecture itself. The claim that the modernist blueprint of simplistic and compact high rises—as pioneered by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe—is to blame for the failures in American public housing leaves a lot to unpack. If bordering on victim-blaming, the later "white brick" high rises of Cabrini-Green were, in fact, Mies designs, drawing the question: since the modernist design philosophy of the neighborhood was seemingly built in his image, should we blame Mies van der Rohe for the failures of Cabrini-Green, or for all public housing shortcomings of the era?

Blaming Cabrini-Green's modernist architecture for its failures requires the belief that the arrangement of dense high rises filled with public housing residents is untenable. At the advent of modern public housing, much opposition was centered around a distrust of the residents themselves, around fears from the officials (mostly rich, mostly white) that the residents (mostly working class, mostly black) would somehow naturally devolve into crime or addiction or other dysfunctional behaviors in such close proximity to each other.

The Green Homes (despite their name, they are white in color) finished construction just north of Division Street in 1962. The designs for these high rises were based directly off of Mies van der Rohe's Promontory Apartments in Hyde Park, high rises which feature his signature exposed, supportive skeleton. The project was taken up by the architectural firm Pace Associates, which was directly employed by Mies van der Rohe to do the drawings for the project. Thus, the adapted end product undoubtedly bears the distinct, modernist stamp of a Mies building. The building blueprints were the final designs for public housing from Pace Associates.

The thought that the design behind what would become the city's most beleaguered and emblematic housing project wasn't so different from some of the Illinois Institute of Technology's own Mies-inspired residence halls is a sobering one.

Soon after the Green Homes opened, the irrational fears of the concerned and well-to-do were proven false, though hardly done away with. As long as proper funding and management remained, with plenty of factories and employment opportunities in the area, the citizens of Cabrini-Green were just as industrious as any other, going to work in the city, laboring as janitors in their own high rises, or staying back to tend home. If an awkwardly neoliberal explanation, and even if the houses were not utopian, this situation proved a far cry from both the situations its residents faced before arriving and the unfounded anxieties of the city government.

Irrational fears are just that, irrational, not able to be easily fixed with facts, reason, or even clear examples of success. Acting on that irrational fear, all levels of government started pulling money from the public housing "modernist experiments" as jobs started leaving the neighborhood. Racial violence erupted with the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968. Eventually, even the basic city-ran maintenance and housekeeping services faltered and stopped altogether. This is the web of systematic neglect and collapse that led to the failings of Chicago's public housing, with too many variables and committees and moving parts to find just one to blame for the continual disregard of the city's underprivileged. Rather, each cog in the machine bears its own piece of the fault.

It is in the total neglect of Cabrini-Green, not in its design, that those initial and irrational fears became a self-fulfilling prophecy for the people of the neighborhood. That reading of Chicago's history which proposes to blame modernist architecture, claiming that so many "undesirables" in the same housing are what led to the neighborhood's collapse, is as facetious as it is problematic.

Inconspicuous consumption

RAINA RUSS
Student, Master of Design Methods, 2019

"While the Bauhaus is so often thought of as a story of politics triumphing over design, it is really a story of design triumphing over politics… While the fighting and politics have come and gone, the objects will remain. They are classics."

—**Paul Goldberger,** architecture critic, *The New York Times*

"[T]he greatest responsibility of the planner and architect, I believe, is the protection and development of our habitat. Man has evolved a mutual relationship with nature on earth, but his power to change its surface has grown so tremendously that this may become a curse instead of a blessing."

—**Walter Gropius,** founder of the *Bauhaus*

This Mies van der Rohe and Lilly Reich Barcelona chair looks different from the images you may have seen captured a century ago, before we colonized our first neighbor-planet. Knoll doesn't exist anymore and, of course, neither does its patent on what was once one of its most expensive products. Mies did say the chair was "fit for a king." Though he meant it quite literally, it was easy to conflate his comment with the chair's exorbitant price tag.

Did someone give you the impression that the Bauhaus was a socialist utopia, in which the proletariat fought for the rights of common humans? You could say that the Bauhaus was fighting for the consumption power of the common human—better goods for everyone, and more of them. For a minute, when Bauhaus mystics and hippies were picking through trash for supplies, it was a bit socialist. Politics come and go though, only objects remain.

And now, they live forever.

THE designer is long gone and not far behind was the form of consumerism that almost destroyed our home.

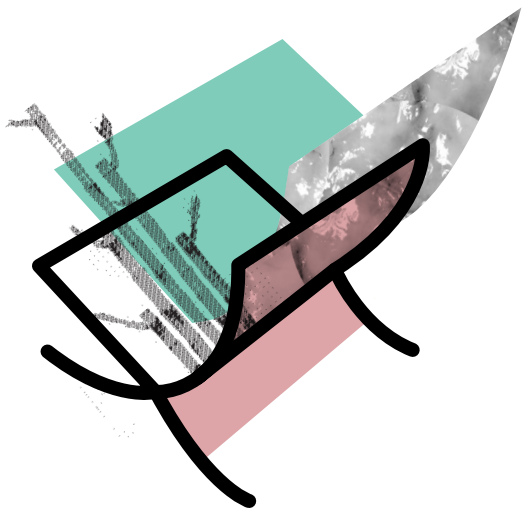
Bauhaus designers found hidden value in trash, as do I. But trash isn't what it used to be. Everything made is required to be remade, repurposed, reused, reborn. I remade this Barcelona chair, followed its streamlines and curves (which were designed to hide in plain sight). My new version will be shared by everyone, will last lifetimes with maintenance, and will change with your tastes. You see what you want to see in our augmented reality, but I know what I made. Its minimal materiality makes it an acceptable use of resources, according to contemporary dictates.

Using steel would be out of the question; that's reserved for high rises and farm equipment. Instead, bamboo was grown at the edges of our shared property for five years. After harvesting, I let it dry for a week, and flattened it. I shaped it into the curved frame of the Barcelona, careful to pull pieces just the right size because nothing is waste. The chair's straps are made of sealed polyesters, recycled and treated to ensure not a single fiber will escape into the air, water, or earth. Finally, a syntrophic mixed culture of bacteria and yeast creates the simu-leather covered cushions, which are made of natural latex. It feels like a Barcelona, but it looks like what might have been called a knock-off—almost right, but not the same.

It's a tribute that some would argue is an improvement on the original, but I am not THE designer, just a designer. THE designer is long gone and not far behind was the form of consumerism that almost destroyed our home.

But you imagine your world and I just stage it. Behind the layers of reality, I experiment with materials and processes in an attempt to reverse the effects of the Anthropocene era. The frameworks that guide what I do are based on what's best for the environment, with a modicum of consideration for what's best for you. (You did find the Barcelona and took a seat, didn't you?) Lead times are long, and prototyping for unintended consequences is key to moving a project forward. I measured the environmental impact of cutting back the bamboo, treating the polyesters, and growing the bacteria and yeast before making this one classic thing a reality. Today, creating something new is rare.

Today's designer is usually a resetter—we repair and replace, ensuring a closed loop. Most of what we make aren't things at all. Usually, they are anti-things—ways of cutting out what someone else created that is breaking apart the world around us.



The New Barcelona
Julia Rochlin + Raina Russ /
IIT Institute of Design

Once upon a time, the consequences of every little thing were sneaky, out there in the open, so inconspicuous. Now, every little thing is transparent—objects and consequences alike.

bauhaus

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about bauhaus

The German Bauhaus was born in 1919 and celebrates its centennial this year. The American descendant of the German Bauhaus, the IIT Institute of Design (ID) was founded as "The New Bauhaus" in 1937 by Bauhaus master László Moholy-Nagy, and has pioneered the development and dissemination of modern design. A year later Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, a former director of the Bauhaus in Germany, became head of architecture at the Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT)—making the university a global center of modernism in the mid-twentieth century.

In 2019, we at IIT celebrate the centenary of the founding of the Bauhaus, together with the Goethe-Insitut and partners worldwide. In the spirit of this celebration, this newsletter is a collection written, photographed, designed, and curated by students at IIT and ID. It is a personal reflection of how students view the influence of the Bauhaus legacy, and think about its relevance and impact 100 years after its founding. We also collaborated with the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where students also created a special newsletter for this occasion.

about goethe institut

The Goethe-Institut is the cultural institute of the Federal Republic of Germany. Global in reach, the Goethe-Institut aims to promote knowledge of the German language abroad, foster international cultural cooperation, and convey a comprehensive picture of Germany by providing information on Germany's cultural, social and political life.

a collaboration between

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100 years of bauhaus

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