

(RE)FORMING CULTURE: MONTE VERITÀ AS A SITE OF ARTISTIC
POLLINATION IN THE FIRST DECADES OF THE XX CENTURY

PREMISE: MONTE VERITÀ COULD HAVE
SERVED AS A MODEL FOR FUTURE ART
SCHOOLS IN THE XX CENTURY

The Monte Verità project and the Bauhaus School

- ✓ Historically documented encounter between the two worlds: in 1927, Bauhaus figures including *Josef and Anni Albers*, *Herbert Bayer*, *Marcel Breuer*, *Xanti Schawinsky* and *Oskar Schlemmer* visited Ascona and Monte Verità. Previously, artists like Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky also spent considerable amounts of time there.
- ✓ The Monte Verità historical archive explicitly describes Ascona as a kind of ‘counter-world’ to the Bauhaus.
- ✓ Different responses to the same historical crisis:
 - ✓ Monte Verità rejected modernity and proposed an alternative way of living and creating by forwarding the image of the ‘pristine’ human, ‘untouched’ and therefore ‘unspoiled’ by modern civilization → **alternative to modernity**
 - ✓ The Bauhaus reinvented modernity through the arts, instead of rejecting it → **alternative modernity altogether**



Walter Gropius's Bauhaus building in Dessau, the longest-serving of the three Bauhaus locations (1925–1932)

Josef Albers → member of the Bauhaus → visited Ascona at the end of the 1920s → arrived at Black Mountain (North Carolina) after the Nazi Government closed the Bauhaus school.

Pedagogy: *learning by doing (homo faber – homo creativus)*

BMC philosophy:

- ✓ art is not necessarily something added to life → it can become a method through which life itself is experienced and transformed.
- ✓ education itself should become a lived, creative and social experience → complete dissolution of the separation between life, art and education.



Main Building of the former Black Mountain College, on the current grounds of Camp Rockmont

RQ: WHY DID THE BAUHAUS FIND MONTE VERITÀ SO COMPELLING?

***RQ: HOW ARE THESE ALTERNATIVE PEDAGOGIES TRANSMUTED ONTO
ANOTHER CONTINENT, ONE GENERATION LATER, IN THE BLACK
MOUNTAIN COLLEGE?***

I. **Art and life should no longer be separated** (quintessentially modern idea)

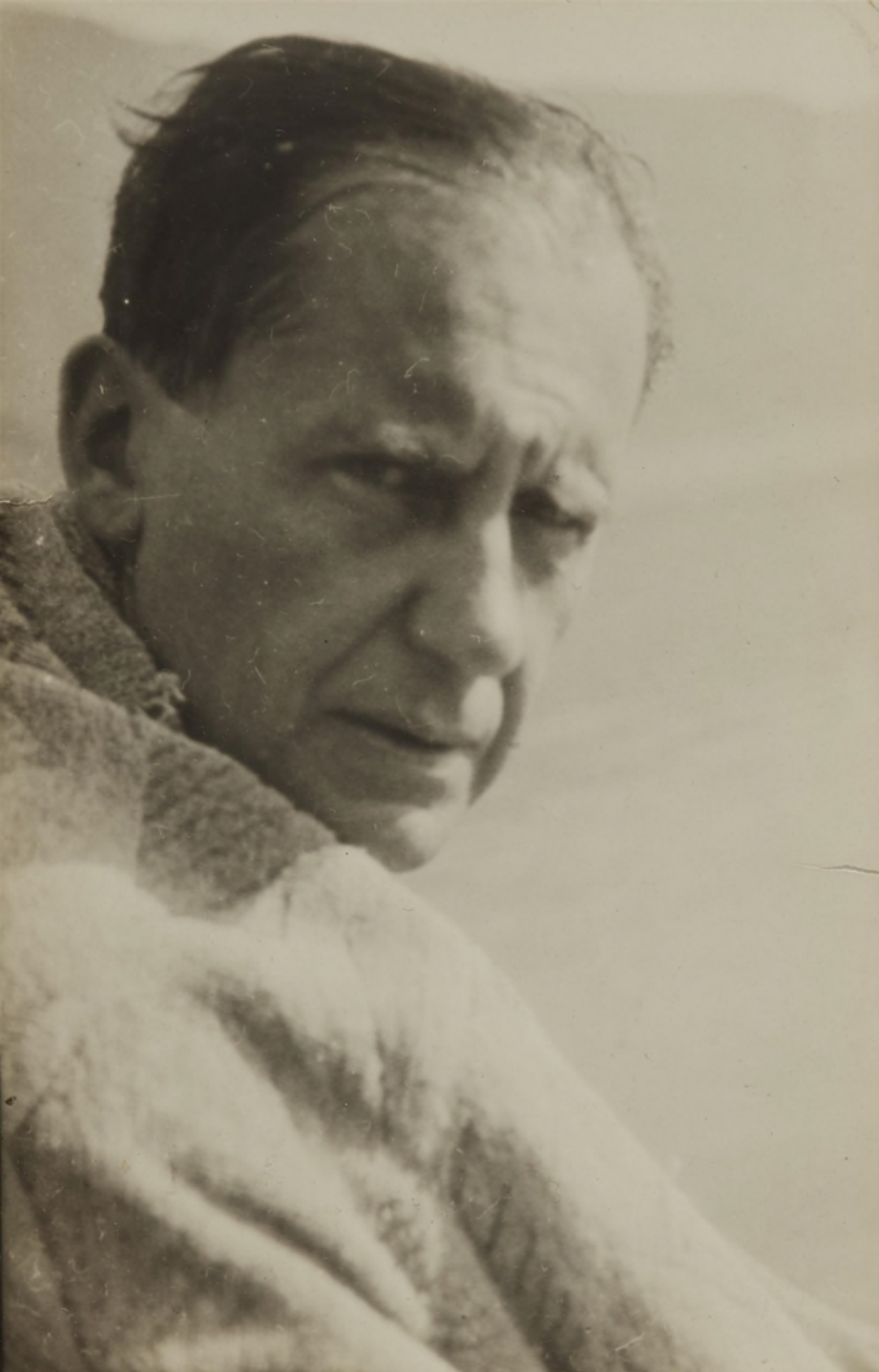
- ✓ Monte Verità → nature = the ultimate work of art
- ✓ The Bauhaus → *Gesamtkunstwerk* = the environment influences the human experience
- ✓ BMC → education = lived, creative and social experience



Sun and air bathing huts at the Monte Verità Sanatorium, photo attributed to Ida Hofmann, ca. 1905.
Harald Szeemann Papers Series IV (Photographs), © Getty Research Institute Los Angeles (accession no. 2011.M.30)

Vegetarian symposium
in Monte Verità, 1902.





(left) Walter Gropius in Ascona,
portrait by Joseph Albers, 1930



(right) Josef Albers with Herbert
and Mutzi Bayer in Ascona, 1929



(left) Frédéric Boissonnas, *The Four Dancers* (Dora Brooke, Jeanne de Salzmänn, Suzanne Perrottet, Annie Beck), students of Emile Jaques-Dalcroze, Monte Verità (1909). © Bibliothèque de Genève, all rights reserved.



(right) Dormitory with single balconies in Bauhaus style (residence, Dessau)

Nature → something to return to vs. designing nature / the environment in order to comply to modern civilisation vs. experiencing nature as a way of knowing



Class at the Bauhaus in Dessau, photo: unknown, ca. 1925–1932. © Stiftung Bauhaus Dessau.

Lawrence Kocher with students at Black Mountain College, North Carolina, ca. 1941 © Courtesy of Western Regional Archives



Black Mountain College, Photography class with Josef Albers, Lake Eden Campus, ca. 1944. © Courtesy of Western Regional Archives, States Archives of North Carolina



2. The body as the site of transformation

- ✓ Monte Verità → the body = site of liberation from the alienation of modern civilisation
Ex. *Rudolf von Laban's School of Art* (1913)
- ✓ The Bauhaus → the body can be understood rhythmically and spatially, still within the confines of modernity
- ✓ BMC → doing + making + performing + experiencing = forms of knowing → the body generating knowledge



Henri Oedenkoven, the industrialist's son, on the left, performing a rhythmic expressionist dance.
© Fondazione Monte Verità dpa-tmn

Body 'workers': Rudolf von Laban and Oskar Schlemmer

Laban in Monte Verità → artistic expression → body → nature → community → outdoor → inner experience generates movement

Schlemmer at the Bauhaus → human being → geometry → space → architecture → stage.



Movement choir at the summer school class taught by Laban in Gleschendorf in 1923



Rudolf von Laban's dance group on the shore of Lake Maggiore near Ascona, 1914.
Glass slide by Johann Adam Meisenbach
(Kunsthau Zurich, estate of Suzanne Perrottet).



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Bundesarchiv, Bild 102-08707
Foto: o. Ang. | November 1929

Young people performing a rhythmic dance at Laban's Choreographic Institute in Berlin-Grünwald, (1929). Image © Bundesarchiv, Bild 102-08707.



Costumes from Oskar Schlemmer's *Triadisches Ballett*, currently in the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart
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Buckminster Fuller and students assemble a geodesic dome.
Photo by Beaumont Newhall, Summer 1948.

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3. Educational experiments and reform pedagogy

- ✓ Monte Verità → educational environment (informal / alternative education) → the environment educates
- ✓ The Bauhaus → a school with a revolutionary educational programme → education is designed as environment
- ✓ BMC → focused on alternative humanist education

Reform pedagogy

- ✓ emerges from the *Lebensreform*, the Arts and Crafts Reform, the Educational Reform and alternative modernity
- ✓ Monte Verità → pedagogical immersion
- ✓ The Bauhaus → pedagogical experimentation
- ✓ BMC → perceptive, independent and critically engaged human beings

Different models of pedagogy

- ✓ Monte Verità → immersive pedagogy
- ✓ The Bauhaus → experimentation becomes curriculum
- ✓ BMC → how should we educate human beings?



A still from the film by Valerie Preston-Dunlop and Anna Cerliste: *Living Architecture. Rudolf Laban and the Geometry of Dance*, showing German expressionist dance therapist Mary Wigman at Monte Verità on Lake Maggiore, 2008, all rights reserved.

Wigman was enrolled at the Rudolf von Laban School for Art between 1913 and 1918.

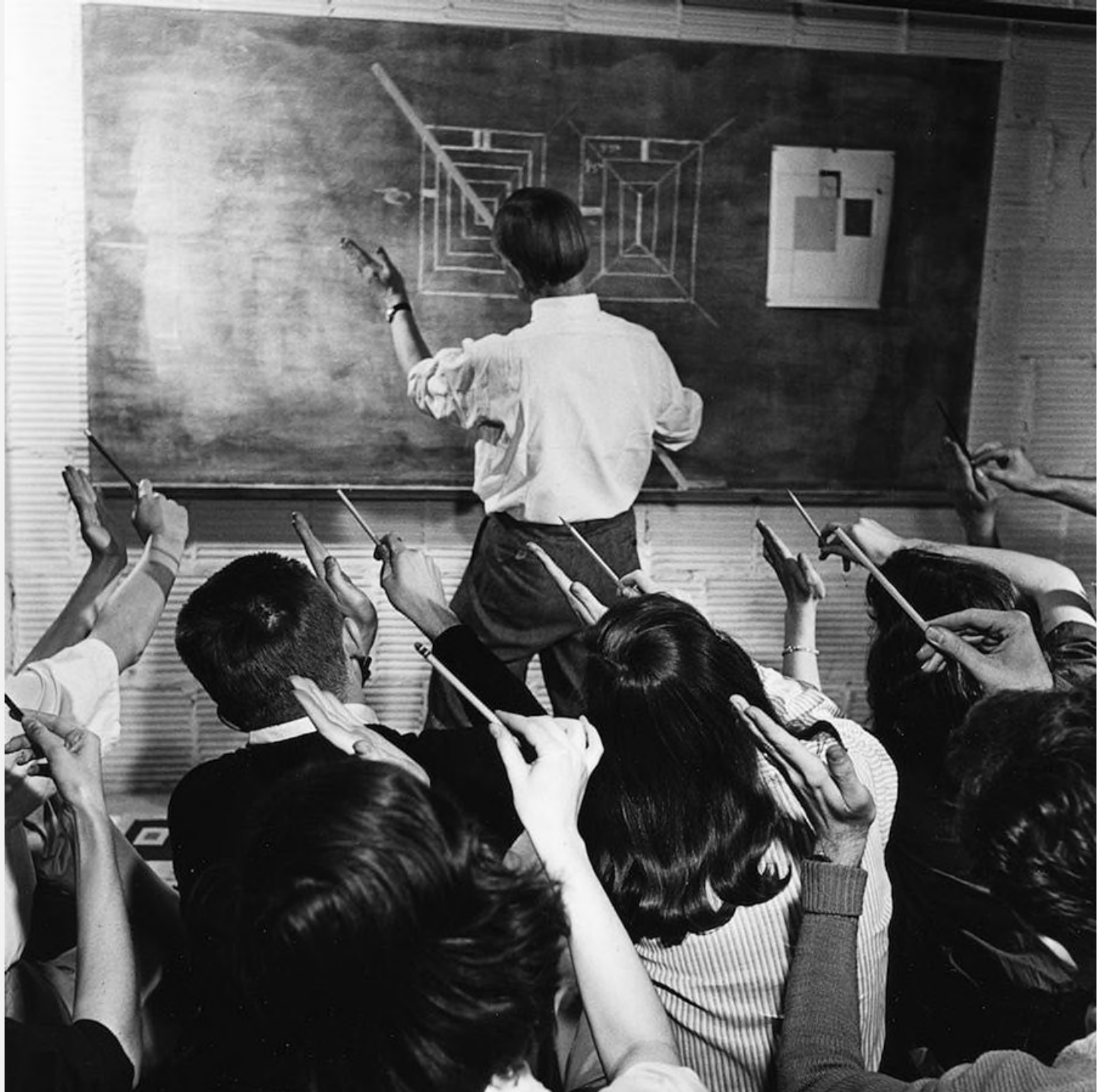


Mary Wigman rehearsing the dance choreography for the play 'Der Tanz um die Tänzerin' at Monte Verità in 1919





(left) Genevieve Naylor, photo of Josef Albers paper folding in class, ca. 1940
(right) Josef Albers teaching at Black Mountain College, ca. 1940





Black Mountain College, Theatre representation of 'The Physician in Spite of Himself' by Molière, 1941
© Courtesy of Western Regional Archives, States Archives of North Carolina

(working) CONCLUSION

Monte Verità, the Bauhaus and later the Black Mountain College represent complementary responses to the crisis of modernity: Monte Verità attempted to transform life by returning to nature, the body and alternative forms of community, while the Bauhaus attempted to transform modern life through education, design, technology and architecture.

THANK YOU! 😊