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Luxury and Legacy.
Moving Design Theory and Practice beyond Bauhaus



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Fig. 1: Henry van de Velde, art school building, Weimar (1910/11; now Bauhaus-Universität), detail of the staircase with mural painting by Herbert Bayer (1923), January 2019

The ever new preoccupation with the avant-garde movements of the 20th century is an integral part of the theoretical discourse of architecture, art, and design. In the case of the Bauhaus, one of the most received design schools of the past 100 years, different approaches can be observed. Looking into the history of writing the Bauhaus's multiple histories, we find hagiographic accounts as well as critical revisions of gender issues, strategies of branding and self-fashioning, and of the whereabouts of lesser known Bauhaus students. Especially on the occasion of Bauhaus anniversaries, the writing of Bauhaus history often coincides with reflections on how the idea of the Bauhaus could be put forward in the future. In 1968 the first comprehensive Bauhaus exhibition in Stuttgart presented a multi-faceted panorama of the teaching concepts and biographical data of selected Bauhäuslerinnen and Bauhäusler (and their whereabouts after 1933/45). The exhibition traced, for example, the Bauhaus-inspired teaching of Iwawo Yamawaki in Tokio, at the new bauhaus in Chicago and at other schools elsewhere.

aber wir wollten nicht nur das bauhaus in seiner historischen gestalt nachzeichnen, sondern wir wollten, soweit es überhaupt möglich war, erkennen lassen, wie sich die ehemaligen bauhäusler inzwischen weiterentwickelt hatten und wie sich die lehre des bauhauses fortsetzen konnte.¹

Statements like this one from the Stuttgart exhibition catalogue illustrate that the Bauhaus was perceived as an ongoing movement which had survived through (and even become more of a movement because of) the global migration of its protagonists. The impression of continuity was also evoked with regard to the active role a Bauhaus design approach might play meeting contemporary challenges. Hubert Hoffmann who was commissioned by the governing mayor of Dessau to prepare a possible reopening of the Bauhaus Dessau from 1945 to 1948, states 60 years after the founding of the Bauhaus,

der widerspruch zwischen kulturellen wunschvorstellungen und gesellschaftlicher wirklichkeit ist nur zum teil aufgehoben. das bauhaus hat erziehungsmethoden entwickelt, zeichen gesetzt – und die anfänge eines gestalt-kanons entwickelt, dessen gerüst in die zukunft hineinragt – das bauhaus ist nicht mit den erzeugnissen von zwei generationen abgeschlossen und eine mode die als passé angesehen wird – die idee ist gemessen an den bestehenden widersprüchen unserer zeit aktueller denn je.²

In her essay discussing 90 years of the Bauhaus Annett Zinsmeister interrogates the »current relation between fine and applied arts«, claiming the arts have become a »model of border-crossing«.³ Nonetheless, she asks for an »update« of the Bauhaus.

1 Honisch, Dieter: »Zur Ausstellung«, in: *50 Jahre Bauhaus*, Stuttgart: Württembergischer Kunstverein 1968, 31. [We did not want to just trace the history of the Bauhaus, but attempted to show how the former *bauhäusler* had advanced and put forward the teaching concepts. Transl. JW.]

2 *60 Jahre Bauhaus. Ausstellung vom 18.10. bis 17.11.1978*, Galerie Kul, Bruck an der Mur, n.p. [(...) The Bauhaus has developed teaching concepts and laid the foundations of a design canon. This has not ended with the design production of two generations – given the contradictions of our time, to pursue the Bauhaus idea is more important than ever. Transl. JW.]

3 Zinsmeister, Annett: »Update! 90 Years of the Bauhaus – What Now?«, in: Annett Zinsmeister (ed.), *Update! 90 Years of the Bauhaus – What Now?*, Berlin: Jovis 2010, 21.

Gerd Zimmermann and Norbert Korrek, at a symposium held in Weimar to honor the 75th anniversary of the founding of the Bauhaus, reflect on the claim of being avant-garde – not in order to glorify the 1920ies avant-garde, but to ask critically what »Avantgarde« means today:

Gibt es heute Avantgarde, oder handelt es sich da um eine überholte historische Figur? Die Ausgangsthese war und ist, daß es in der zeitgenössischen Kunst, Kultur, Architektur nicht nur Epigonen, sondern ebenso Avantgarden gibt [...]. Dem nachzugehen hieße auch, Kritik und Perspektiven der Moderne erneut zu thematisieren.⁴

The authors of this volume, submissions to an open call, all try exactly this in very different ways:⁵ Thinking beyond Bauhaus. Taking the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Bauhaus, they revisit critically its pedagogical concepts, gender policy and design theoretical implications. Finally, the contributions open up new perspectives on the increasingly hybridising fields of the design disciplines between virtual environments, the aesthetics of sustainable design, biotechnology and the question of a postcolonial ethic. In chapter 1, Ines Rödel and Olivier Gaudin discuss the teaching practices at the Bauhaus in the broader context of earlier pedagogical concepts of the »workshop«, or the close study of art history classics. Revisiting the Bauhaus heritage can also bring to bear another position, namely that of a different perspective of design and architecture. In chapter 2, Alexandra Matz, Aysar Ghassan and Adham Selim do exactly this and more or less leave the Bauhaus behind. Departing from contemporary concepts such as design thinking, design-based research and the notion of architecture as a critical practice, they offer new approaches to design theory as a theory of a practice. Chapter 3 deals with the contemporary challenges of (environmental change) on multiple levels. Arvid Krüger elaborates on the legacy of modernist mass housing concepts in today's planning schools, Leander Thiel reflects on the design implications of synthetic biology, Arthur Crucq discusses formal and stylistic issues of sustainable architecture, while finally Nicolai Bo Andersen considers »beauty« a most sustainable concept to meet the environmental challenges of the future. In chapter 4, in a somewhat manifesto-like quality, Christian Sinn, Vanessa Ramos-Velasquez and Josenia Hervás deal with the old and new issues of images and interfaces, our common condition humaine and the legacy of the female Bauhaus.

4 Gerd Zimmermann/Korrek, Norbert: »Avantgarde!! 75 Jahre Bauhaus Weimar«, in: *Thesis. Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift Hochschule für Architektur und Bauwesen* 40 (1994) 2, 1. [Is there an avant-garde today? Or is avant-garde an outdated concept? Our thesis is that in contemporary art, culture and architecture we do not only find epigones, but also an avant-garde. (...) Putting the argument further must include a critique and a discussion of the perspectives of modernism. Transl. JW.]

5 »Designs from a World to Come«, Call for Papers, Panel 4, XIV. Internationales Bauhaus-Kolloquium 2019. The papers presented at the panels of the Bauhaus-Kolloquium will be published by Eva von Engelberg, Ines Weizman, Max Welch Guerra and Johannes Warda with arthistoricum.net (forthcoming); <https://bauhaus-kolloquium.documentary-architecture.org> [19 February 2020].

Looking back at 100 + x years of Bauhaus history and attempts of renewing it, we are facing ever greater global challenges which require new designs of collaboration, solidarity, and planning. And yet we happen to have the luxury choice of either delving into facts and fiction of the »actual« Bauhaus, or being inspired by the objects, images and ideas, or moving beyond the all too well known references. To have this choice is part of the legacy of the Bauhaus, too. Alessa Brossmer, the artist-contributor to the publication project, has made her choice in appropriating the Bauhaus legacy: Her artwork throughout this volume invites us to expose ourselves time and again to the disturbing experience of the desired modernist objects. And to start playing with them.

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