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Between the individual tortoise shell and the collective malocas,  
we are nowhere in particular. A short imagetic essay

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Right: forest aerial view, courtesy of the Arara Shawādawa archives

Interview with Txāda Shawādawa  
<https://vimeo.com/355309074>



Reflecting on the Bauhaus beginnings in 1919, it becomes clear that one can speak a lot more of a “Bauhaus spirit” than a “Bauhaus style”. The architecture, art and design produced at Bauhaus during its inception was populated by various master concepts and expressions. They were diverse and yielded a plural heritage and influence throughout the world. Interestingly, that iconic spirit is felt again now and contains the same interplay: innovation driven by the advent of new and transformative technologies responding to emerging large(r)-scale necessities. The world has indeed drastically changed. In the 1920s, the horizontal planes stood wide open for the upcoming verticality of modernity. 100 years later, the ever-growing spikes of concrete and glass seem to engulf and dominate the large urban centers in the world. It’s getting hot in here. Let the air circulate. But has idealism lost ground to development at any cost? It seems now is a good time for more Bauhaus: the spirit to dare, the spirit to experiment, but also the spirit to resist first, in order to (sustainably) grow.

This spirit is strongly needed today to respond to spikes of another order – the proverbial white elephant in the room – global climate change and the ensuing environmental disarray coming at us with an inhuman speed containing various appearances and elusive effect, seemingly abstract at times, hard to grasp, algorithmically predictable but humanly unpreventable, perceived comfortably at length and at a distance via ubiquitous satellite “birds-eye-view” images, although populations and individuals directly affected by the effects can offer a very concrete sense of their occurrence.

As I write this, the deep forest is burning.

Philosophers have for the last fifty years spoken of a sense of groundlessness of a highly technological era. Today, many of us find ourselves nowhere in particular – the fixed point onto which to converge and

converse has been blow into the fragments of the digital age. On another spectrum, the strength of collectives, such as rooted in indigenous societies living in ocas, gathering in malocas, where the strong center surrounded by a network of supportive structures form its resilience and endurance, has been withering away. But they are still here, after 500 years of disruption. They know something about building webs of enduring relations. Autochtone societies have been dealing with the shock of the new as an ever-present situation, adapting to whatever remixes of traditional and “modern” artefacts might bring, resisting the effects of encroachment of every (dis) order. Their resilience is expressed outwardly, from a mind that dreams a common house of activities, including art & design practices inseparable from everyday living. The common houses provide for the spirit, mind and body, as a construction to strengthen the individual, as well as the collective, social body. And to the indigenous, the social is political.

Likewise, resisting the speed, while at the same time rolling with its punches, a Tortoise is known for its lifespan, capable of surpassing 200 years, carrying itself in its own shelter. Pondering on its endurance, as well as that of the autochtone collectives to imagine the next 100 years of Bauhaus, the question is: how to make room for the resilience principles in the new era, characterized as a playing field of immense possibilities, but existing in a somewhat suffocating world? How can we reaffirm that spirit of imagination and experimentation to transform the intangible into strategy? Much like the concentric rings formed by time on the carapace of the tortoise shell indicating its age, and tree rings bearing proof of its growth conditions, Bauhaus has its own layers of transformation, having endured turbulent events that left indelible imprints in its own history. And celebrating Bauhaus’ own resilience going forward, what structures can serve us as metaphorical and actual spring boards to launch the next 100 years?

