

# Exercises in Holding a Stance with School Students and Researchers. A Call for Cross-Generational Dialogue

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Taking a stand? The German word «*Haltung*» [attitude/stance/posture] contains the terms «*Halt*» and «*Halten*» [hold/holding]; we hold something and it holds us. One important point is that we can let go of what we hold at any time. Metaphorically speaking, holding an attitude or a stance signifies assuming a position, an expressive moment, from which we pass on to a new movement and arrive at a new position. In our exercises on holding a stance, we have understood this stance or posture as a communicative process and by no means as a manifestation of a universally valid concept.

Two advanced art classes at the Nelson Mandela School and Paula Fürst School have made short films about living in Berlin. Thomas Elsaesser's film *Die Sonneninsel* [*The Sun Island*] (2017) formed the reference point for the Nelson Mandela School, which drew on the example of an alternative way of life in the 1920s to develop its own visions. Similarly, school students at the Paula Fürst School took as their source of inspiration the opening sequence of Wolfgang Staudte's 1945 film *Die Mörder sind unter uns* [*The Murderers are Among Us*], especially the view through the window of Berlin in ruins. The seven films offer glimpses of the settings where the pupils live, from the vantage point of their personal perceptions—with points of criticism, concerns, wishes and potential solutions. These formed the point of departure for a discussion with researchers, the other, teachers and Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin staff.

We view the films as being akin to a ball that is bounced back and forth, with the emphasis not on imparting knowledge, but rather on offering a way of looking at the world and one's own situation. The Fridays for Future movement demonstrates that young people, who make up a large swathe of our society, want to be actively involved in politics. There is a growing demand for participation, especially when it comes to shaping our built environment. After all, how can we deal with architecture and the life-worlds within it if we do not subject our findings to constant scrutiny, by comparing them with other social groups' perceptions?

Life experience is not a continuous process that can be understood in intersubjective terms but is instead a personal framework of experience; to attain a more nuanced view of the world, we must enter into contact with one another and with people beyond our immediate reference group, our circle of relatives, professional group and generation. As we can never know the full extent of all life-worlds, we cannot claim to find a universally

valid solution to questions about housing, lifestyles, and building. Constant change always requires new visions from different perspectives.

The films made at the Nelson Mandela School share a reflective attitude towards questions about life and housing that envisages new ways of dealing with one's existing environment or everyday surroundings, rather than dreaming up wishful utopian visions. In this respect, the films from the Nelson Mandela School seek to conserve; the camera is used to search for something that keeps us well-grounded and merits protection. *Visions for the future*, *Utopia* and *Urban jungle* use documentary means to show spaces through which the school students move, the problems they deal with and what fascinates them. The films made at the Paula Fürst School, on the other hand, express a resolute desire for change, highlighting shortcomings and presenting potential solutions. *Schöne neue Welt [Brave New World]*, *Time for changes*, *Less is more* and *Small changes are bigger than you think* are fictional narratives that render dreams of change tangible on various levels—in the built environment as well as in one's own behaviour.

Modernist architecture often has a problem in terms of reception and is perceived by many as too monotonous. This point of view is reflected in particular in the films *Time for changes* and *Small changes are bigger than you think*. In order to be in the right spot to catch the ball of the film as it bounces towards them, the viewer should always ask questions. Where is the interaction between life and architecture and to what extent is our built environment a symbol and a screen for projections for the life contained within it? Is it that symbolic image that needs to be altered or human interactions or both? How can we avoid isolation and bolster a sense of self-efficacy and community? What needs should architecture fulfil?

It proved interesting in the discussion to consider the occasionally contradictory statements made by the individual films. Particularly when it comes to housing and living environments, different needs are expressed depending on how we grew up, what we miss or what we want to free ourselves from. Something that is completely different is used as a screen for projections, without a reality check. In *Visions for the future*, for example, a toy castle serves as a metaphor for a carefree, happy future, i.e. exactly what the protagonists lost when they left childhood behind. *Time for changes* also calls for high-tech architecture, and something large-scale and ambitious is also emblematic here of the objectives

of change. It reveals that we need an interesting image that makes us dream, taking us far from our own reality.

But how do we deal with these visions? Often, we carry with us throughout our lives images that we find full of kitsch as some kind of dream vision, even though we have long abandoned them intellectually. There is a desire for luxury, even if it is the luxury of being a drop-out, abandoning affluence or having the option of doing so, the desire for a radiant life that promises light-heartedness and joy. The film *Utopia* offers a very direct depiction of this desideratum: It celebrates self-indulgence, with life in the world of nature, which in this context appears almost exotic, serving as the screen for projections, along with attempts to find pleasure and moral strength by concentrating on basic needs and renouncing excess. Change means life and wishes arise from the situation. When we feel bored or empty, we hope for rapid «redemption» in another lifestyle. «The grass is always greener on the other side», as the saying goes and the resplendent unknown almost always exudes fascination.

Architecture, however, does not give us the gift of happiness; it is simply a proposition. Human interaction and deeds lead to changes in the image and thus also influence our perception of architecture. The film *Less is more* considers how helpful it can be to explore other ways of living and to reconsider our prejudices. But how and where do we actually move beyond our own frame of reference? Ultimately, only other people can motivate us to move out of our comfort zone. Perhaps it is not increasingly scarce private space that determines our quality of life; what if we were to appropriate urban space as shared space and a never-ending source of discoveries, in the process satisfying our need for community, as the film *Urban jungle* suggests? Where can one glean new experiences as a young person? What does it mean to own space, use it privately or share it? Isn't having access to public space at all and feeling safe and valid within it already a privilege?

Change always requires a driving force—even if nothing but a miracle can save us, that miracle also needs an initiator or, as in the film *Schöne neue Welt*, someone who switches to the role of caring. Even the respiratory masks—the film was shot in September 2019—remind us of the COVID-19 era. «Take care!».