

# Built on Care: An Architecture Curriculum for Living with an Infected Planet

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- [ 1 ] What can we learn from the history of the Bauhaus and Modernism when facing current issues? And how can this enable us to gain new insights into the past?

bauhaus centenary

modernist promise of  
a better future

new building of the future

repairing the future

learning to dwell differently  
in the world

100 years of Bauhaus: «Thinking the World Anew»—with the coronavirus outbreak, if not before, the programmatic approach and aspiration of the Bauhaus Centenary in Germany became questionable. «Thinking the World Anew» is necessary, but it is not enough; it offers no idea, concept, or strategy for the existing world, infected as it is, and not only by COVID-19. The question arises of whether we would be better advised to conceive and build architecture that puts «repairing the future» first, rather than adopting the hubris-filled, fatally flawed Modernist promise of architecture building a better future?

Care Materialism—  
A New Research Framework for  
Investigating Existing Architecture  
and Designing New Architecture

care as an issue in architecture  
feminist care ethics

[ 1 ]

In contrast, I would like here to propose opening up a new perspective with regard to Bauhaus Modernism by relating it to the issue of care in architecture, in particular traditions of thinking about care that have been developed in feminist care ethics. How does one go about addressing Bauhaus legacies through the lens of care? Care as the lens through which one can both investigate existing architecture and design new architecture is understood very broadly here. I borrow a definition from Joan Tronto and Berenice Fisher to think about architecture in architectural history, in architecture curricula, and in present-day architectural production. In 1990, the educational scholar Berenice Fisher and the feminist political theorist and care ethicist Joan Tronto proposed the following useful definition of care: «On the most general level, we suggest that caring be viewed as a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our <world> so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web.»<sup>1</sup> Through this definition, architecture can thus be easily understood as an agent crucially connecting social and environmental care with its care response-abilities, which range in scale from the individual human body to the planet humans live on. Picking up on this definition, architecture must therefore also actively address the interrelatedness and interdependence of the bodily, the social, and the environmental, in a nutshell: of the human and the non-human.

- [B] What do we understand by taking a stand regarding architecture and design, and particularly of the Bauhaus and Modernism?
- [C] How can we explore the kinds of stand taken by Bauhaus and Modernist architects and designers and their consistency?

### Questions for Investigating Bauhaus Legacies through the Framework of Care Materialism

Starting from this definition, how could a critical and historical investigation of care in Bauhaus legacies best be approached? How would one not only analyse the Bauhaus' architectural and spatial production through this contemporary definition of care, but also situate it within the historical understanding and ideology of care in the German and European context a hundred years ago? How would one relate the political, social, economic, technological, and cultural meanings given to care at the beginning of the twentieth century to the ideologies and the orientations that shaped Bauhaus pedagogies? How would one then proceed to connect these questions related to researching the historical dimensions of care with the relevant documents and sources that are representative of the widely different positions within Bauhaus pedagogies, in the light of an awareness that the Bauhaus is not monolithic, but made up of approaches and orientations that differed widely from each other? We might think here of fundamental differences in approach between, for example, Johannes Itten and Walter Gropius and Hannes Meyer and Mies van der Rohe. How would one relate the historical answers to the questions of care that were given by different Bauhaus approaches, on the one hand, with, on the other hand, today's critical theoretical perspectives and insights on care and architecture with regard to the ethics and politics of class, ethnicity, gender, race, able-bodiedness, materials, resources, and the environment? How would one analyse the architectural answers and solutions connected to care in built Bauhaus legacies? How would one analyse the shortcomings and failures, care injustice or care discrimination that are spatially built into Bauhaus legacies?

### A Feminist Approach to Analysing Spatialization of Care through Architecture

A theoretically and historically well-founded care materialism, particularly from a feminist angle, would make it possible to trace and analyse the translation of care into space through architecture, in other words, the spatialization of care in its interrelated and interdependent bodily, social, and environmental dimensions. The spatialization of caring labour in the household offers one specific line of investigation here. In feminist Marxist terminology, caring

bauhaus legacies  
care as an issue in architecture

bauhaus pedagogies

different bauhaus versions  
heterogeneity of the bauhaus

care materialism  
care as an issue in architecture

labour is referred to as «reproductive labour»; tracing the spatialization of reproductive labour with a particular focus on the intersecting axes of class, gender, and race would look at needs, spaces, and uses. Care materialism would look at existing examples of built Bauhaus legacies understanding them as a blueprint for organizing reproductive labour. Blueprints, literally and figuratively, offer a means of approaching analysis of the spatialization of caring labour in the household by examining the layout of floor plans, the dimensions of rooms, their location within a building, relationships between different rooms, and how particular spaces relate to light and air. Another line of investigation for this approach to care materialism would look at the intersection of economy and ecology in land use and land treatment. Yet another research area would be concerned with the building materials used and their ecological properties and environmental dimensions. Such a novel approach to the built Bauhaus legacies through the framework of care materialism holds the promise of new and critical insights and would definitively warrant the time and resources needed for several years of research.

### An Innovative Architecture Curriculum for Living with an Infected Planet—The Bauhaus as Revolutionary Precedent

architectural education reform  
new architectural curriculum

bauhaus school acting  
as a precedent

bauhaus legacies  
bauhaus as a call for change

interdisciplinary approach

When addressing the question of care in architecture for the future, it should be noted that architectural education is to a large extent manifestly unprepared to meet these challenges. To that end, let us look once more to the Bauhaus and the break with tradition it effected and ask what it holds for us today as strategies, as indications of how to think about reforming pedagogy, as well as implementing and institutionalizing a new architectural curriculum. The first Bauhaus legacy I want to mobilize here in strategic terms is an awareness that it is possible to unsettle and disrupt conventional architectural education and to mobilize the resources to establish a new school of design. Dissatisfaction must have been present at the outset when the Bauhaus was founded in 1919—a profound dissatisfaction with existing models of teaching and designing, of thinking and making. Dissatisfaction is an important factor. It can be the beginning of radical change. The second Bauhaus legacy I want to make use of is the intention to counteract and push back the boundaries of disciplines and overcome the divide between arts and crafts, between art and technology, design and industry.

- [O] What is the significance and relevance of the Bauhaus and Modernism today—a historical phenomenon or a resource for the present? And what, if anything, constitutes their current relevance?

- [O] At precisely this moment, when the climate crisis collides with the pandemic crisis, I will connect these strategic legacies of the Bauhaus. I shall therefore insist here, in speculative vein, that it is possible to imagine an architecture curriculum rooted in care that acts to counter the deleterious divisions between the ecological, the economic, and the social crisis.<sup>2</sup>

### Questions for a New Architecture Curriculum Focused on Care

For thinking openly, speculatively, and generatively, it is always important to start by searching for the questions that need to be raised. What would constitute the starting points for new orientations of an architectural curriculum? What are the damaging separations that need to be addressed and overcome today for imagining and building architecture that is conscious of the uncertainty of the future? What would be the knowledges (in the plural) that such a curriculum should actively seek out? How will these knowledges be constituted in a collaborative effort of educators, students, experts, the communities involved? What kind of architectural histories will be explored—histories that are developed from an awareness of architecture’s entanglement with the real world, with regimes of power, economic systems, ecologies of environments, technologies and materials, as well as with the everyday lived realities of needs and uses? What kind of architectural economies will be critically taught and developed? What is the significance of care for conceiving and building architecture? How can, could or maybe even will changes arise in the ways in which architecture is being thought about and built, starting from the understanding that we are, in fact, living with a deeply infected planet? What is the fundament for such a curriculum that starts from critically excavating and analysing how architecture is historically and presently implicated in and entangled with the crisis conditions of living with an infected planet? What might a curriculum for imagining and building architecture as a care-full and care-providing practice—in short, a curriculum for future caring architecture—look like? What might a curriculum for imagining and building architecture look like if it were to put «repairing the future» first rather than adopting the hubris-filled, fatally flawed Modernist promise of architecture building a better future?

new architectural curriculum  
interdisciplinary approach

collaborative forms of  
knowledge production

care as an issue in architecture

repairing the future

learning to dwell differently  
in the world

imaginaries and change

The questions raised here concerning ways of beginning to imagine a new architecture curriculum are, of course, complex. They are further complicated by the fact that, on the one hand, these are questions of urgency and emergency in need of immediate answers, while, on the other, answers to these questions cannot be provided quickly or easily. This irresolvable tension must be endured to pave the way to «response-ability» regarding life with and on an infected planet.

feminist care ethics

Starting from care means that we must understand that care is indispensable to human life. Humans are always in need of care. Throughout their lives, humans depend on care in different ways, and throughout their lives they give care in different ways. In the words of Berenice Fisher and Joan Tronto: «Survival establishes the fundamental context of caring. As a species, we have no choice about engaging in caring activities.»<sup>3</sup> Having no choice to care does not make humans unfree, even though this is one of the key narratives in Modernist conceptual traditions, which placed the care-free, autonomous, and independent white and male subject of Enlightenment Man in opposition to all other un-free and dependent subjects, with many of them concerned with caring labour, which has also been called «dirty work».<sup>4</sup> Freedom of care therefore is also not, as today's neoliberal ideology with its hyper-individualism would have us to believe, about individuals having the (false) freedom of tailored market choices concerning care services including health care, child care, or elder care.

### Architecture Bridging the Necessity of Care and the Freedom to Care

feminist care ethics

The relationship between freedom and care can be much better understood through concepts of public good or commoning. Freedom comes with care, with both, care-giving and care-receiving. Being free is not to be care-free, but to be free to care. As Joan Tronto argues: «A truly free society makes people free to care. A truly equal society gives people equal chances to be well cared for, and to engage in caring relationships.»<sup>5</sup>

new architectural curriculum  
care as an issue in architecture

A new architecture curriculum based on the premise of care would develop both from the necessity of care and the freedom to care. Irrespective of the way political, economic, and social life is organized within the specific structures and traditions of any historical social formation, care is indispensable to

human existence. Care is essential. As humans we are dependent upon physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual care and the necessary provisions for its fundamentals including air, water, food, health, clothing, shelter, sociality, education, and self-expression. The way care is being organized reveals the how and the what of the conditions that are created for living. With architecture central to the provision of care for humans, especially the provision of shelter, there is a necessity for architecture since the care it provides is indispensable for human life and survival. Architecture is most relevant to understanding how care is being organized and distributed in spatial terms in any historical formation, which, of course, includes present-day historical conditions and also the future. Starting from necessity and freedom, which taken together are understood here as fundamental care needs, offers radically new approaches to imagining and building architectures.

Everybody relies on architecture as a form of protection and of shelter. Architecture creates and provides the spatial infrastructure necessary for eating, sleeping, resting, taking care of bodily needs, being together with others in bodily, emotional, and intellectual proximity and exchange, or being alone to think, dream, restore oneself or recuperate. All these essential and life-sustaining activities performed in people's homes are called living. Homes therefore offer the support structure necessary for people to «live». This is fundamental to conceiving architecture as infrastructure offering the kind of support that is indispensable to human life and survival. «The dependency on infrastructure for a livable life seems clear but when infrastructure fails, and fails continuously, how do we understand that condition of life? We have found that that on which we are dependent is, in fact, not there for us, which means we are left without support. Without shelter, we are vulnerable to weather, cold, heat, and disease, perhaps also to assault, hunger, and violence.»<sup>6</sup> Human life is dependent upon the infrastructural support produced through architecture. Human life is therefore made vulnerable and put at risk if architecture fails to provide this necessary support. This shows that architecture providing the necessary care is «concomitant to the continuation of life».<sup>7</sup>

Rarely has the issue of continuation of life as dependent on having a sheltering home taken on such urgency as today, in the COVID age. The pandemic regime on the infected planet has led to now global instructions for flattening the curve and for stopping the virus from spreading: #stayathome, #staysafe, #stayinshelter. But what about those who do not have a home? «Housing has



become the frontline defence against the coronavirus. Home has rarely been more of a life or death situation», Leilani Farha, UN Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing, notes.<sup>8</sup> Farha stated that «approximately 1.8 billion people worldwide live in homelessness and grossly inadequate housing, often in overcrowded conditions, lacking access to water and sanitation—making them particularly vulnerable to contracting the virus, as they are often suffering from multiple health issues.»<sup>9</sup> Does this make architects essential workers? Or, put differently, will architecture education provide the tools that are necessary for architects to become essential critical infrastructure workers, to use the vocabulary of COVID times? Essential workers are those who keep the system running, those who work in health care, the emergency services, the food and agriculture sector, the waste management sector, the water sector, the communication and information technology sector, government operations, the financial services sector, and sheltering services. With no post-pandemic futures anywhere near, with the virus being with humans on this infected planet for years, decades, to come, an architectural curriculum that radically transforms the housing economy, working toward a system that provides housing as basic care infrastructure necessary for all, will be part of the solution to this structural care catastrophe heightened by the pandemic. In Farha's words: «By ensuring access to secure housing with adequate sanitation, States will not only protect the lives of those who are homeless or living in informal settlements but will help protect the entire world's population by flattening the curve of CV19.»<sup>10</sup>

The coronavirus outbreak happened on a planet on which millions of lives, human and non-human alike, were already in peril because of the climate catastrophe. The current climate catastrophe results from the planet having been infected for centuries with the virus of colonial «capitalist patriarchy». The authoritative modern master narratives of progress-cum-innovation, growth-cum-profit, and productivity-cum-independence have not only failed to place care at the center of organizing living with the planet, but also cause infection of the planet through extraction and exploitation. «The possibility that humans, or certain forms of human existence, are such an overwhelming malignant force that Life itself faces planetary extinction has changed the topical foci of the humanities and humanistic social sciences and the quantitative social sciences and natural sciences.»<sup>11</sup> It should also change the topical foci and priorities in the architecture curriculum.

In 2019, which marked the 40th anniversary of the First World Climate Conference, 11,000 scientists from around the world co-signed the *Warning of a Climate Emergency*.<sup>12</sup> The warning states: «The climate crisis has arrived and is accelerating faster than most scientists expected. It is more severe than anticipated, threatening natural ecosystems and the fate of humanity. [...] climate chain reactions could cause significant disruptions to ecosystems, society, and economies, potentially making large areas of Earth uninhabitable».<sup>13</sup>

With architecture fully implicated in capitalism, and with architecture centrally concerned with the way in which humans inhabit the planet, architecture has thus a dual response-ability to deal with the consequences of climate change. Practicing architect and architectural educator Peggy Deamer has stated «One could say that the history of architecture <is> the history of capital».<sup>14</sup> If this holds true, then refusing architectural business-as-usual is central, in order to prevent architecture from continuing to «build» the future of capitalism. On the contrary, architecture could choose to become the history of life.

What if architecture really chooses to become the history of life? If architecture is a form of life support, architecture as an active agent, together with all those who are behind the production of architecture, must refuse moves to withhold this life support. This is architecture's responsibility. The economy defining the production of architecture needs to be radically changed in order to provide for the infrastructures indispensable to life for all, indispensable for the 99%.<sup>15</sup> Only a different economy, in which meeting vital needs, which are related to the infrastructure required to sustain life, is put first, would result in a different production and provision of architecture. Currently, architecture is fully defined by the interests of capital. Architecture is a product under pressure, a commodity squeezed by the interests of real-estate speculation and the construction industry.

An architecture curriculum actively searching for other economic models, together with economists, lawyers, policy makers, activists, social housing movements, developers, future users, and others important to the process of housing production would critically address the divide between architecture education and the economy that characterizes present-day curricula, and would have significant potential for helping to develop a non-capitalist economy. Sustaining life entails not only having housing needs met but means that the way in which these housing needs are met

history of architecture as  
history of power/capital

refusing architectural  
business-as-usual

architecture as an  
active agent vs. an object

problems of habitat

new architectural curriculum

collaborative forms of  
knowledge production

sustainable living

need for a different  
architecture of values

need for a different  
economy of desire

repairing the future

should be conducive to climate care, earth care, planet care, future care. This is not the same as the Global North's standards for sustainability, with these standards largely dovetailing with green business interests. Caring for an infected planet through architecture that does not separate economic, ecological, and social concerns will support the planet's future healing and repair.<sup>16</sup>

### Starting in the Middle of Things

new architecture curriculum

architecture as an  
active agent vs. an object

repairing the future

imaginaries and change

A new architecture curriculum built on care must start from the given, must start from living with an infected planet in need of healing and repairing. There is no *tabula rasa*. There is no «Hour Zero». These concepts are dangerous and toxic ideological fictions. Conceiving architecture as a care activity necessitates leaving behind the idea of architecture as an object or a thing. Architecture is an active agent, taking care and providing care. Architecture contributes to care justice through enabling the freedom to be cared for and to care. Architectural responsibility is consequently not just for the object conventionally referred to as architecture or as building but for the kind of care provided through it. Joan Tronto writes that architecture «starts instead from responsibilities to care, not only for this <thing>, or its creator, builder, or patron, but for all who are engaged in contact through this thing».<sup>17</sup> It is not easy to think of all those with whom architecture as an active agent engages in care-taking and care-providing activities. One must start conceiving and building architecture in terms of providing care, providing a living environment for humans and non-humans alike, for animals, plants, materials, resources etc. Such care-driven thinking in imagining and building architecture brings to the fore the way in which the object called architecture is fully entangled with building the environment, forming part of the habitat that we call our planet. Echoing Tronto, care starts «in the middle of things». Starting in the middle of things, in the mess we find ourselves in on this infected planet, is the point of departure for a new architecture curriculum.

## Notes

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- 2 See Nancy Fraser, «Contradictions of Capital and Care», in: *New Left Review* 100, July/August 2016, p. 99.
- 3 Joan C. Tronto, and Berenice Fisher (as Note 1), p. 39.
- 4 Bridget Anderson, *Doing the Dirty Work? The Global Politics of Domestic Labour*, London/New York: Zed Books, 2000.
- 5 Joan Tronto, *Who Cares? How to Reshape a Democratic Politics*, Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 2015 p. 38. [First published in Joan C. Tronto, *Caring Democracy: Markets, Equality, and Justice*, New York 2013, p. 170]
- 6 Judith Butler, «Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance», in: Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti, and Leticia Sabsay (eds.), *Vulnerability in Resistance*, Durham and London: Duke University Press 2016, pp. 12–13.
- 7 María Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care. Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds*, Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press 2016, p. 70.
- 8 OHCHR, «Housing, the front line defence against the COVID-19 outbreak, says UN expert», <https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25727&LangID=E-> (Consulted May 20, 2020).
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Elizabeth Povinelli, «Geontologies: The Concept and Its Territories», in: *e-flux Journal* 81, April 2017, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/81/123372/geontologies-the-concept-and-its-territories/> (Consulted May 20, 2020).
- 12 William J Ripple, Christopher Wolf, Thomas M Newsome, Phoebe Barnard, and William R Moomaw, «World Scientists' Warning of a Climate Emergency», in: *BioScience* 70, no. 1, January 2020, <https://academic.oup.com/bioscience/article/70/1/8/5610806> (Consulted May 20, 2020).
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Peggy Deamer, «Introduction», in: Peggy Deamer (ed.), *Architecture and Capitalism 1845 to the Present*, New York/London: Routledge 2014, p. 1.
- 15 Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya, and Nancy Fraser, *Feminism for the 99%. A Manifesto*, London: Verso, 2019.
- 16 See: Angelika Fitz and Elke Krasny (eds.), *Critical Care. Architecture and Urbanism for a Broken Planet*, Boston: MIT Press 2019.
- 17 Joan Tronto, «Caring Architecture», in: *ibid.*, p. 28.