

Keynote

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- [A] Can we see in the Bauhaus as a whole—despite its apparent heterogeneity—a uniform stance or even something like the epitome of a social attitude?

modernist architecture

Morning Cleaning is the title of a photograph by Jeff Wall. It depicts the interior of the Barcelona Pavilion. The building is a reconstruction of the 1929 original, which Mies van der Rohe used to demonstrate the Weimar Republic's achievements in crafts and industry at that year's World Fair. Spanish architects rebuilt it in the 1980s. It is considered an iconic example of modernist architecture. Countless photos of the pavilion exist. But Jeff Wall's version stands out from the crowd: The carpet is rolled back, the row of designer chairs is awry, and the curtain also hangs somewhat askew. And then there is a cleaner with a mop and yellow bucket.

neues bauen [new building]

Jeff Wall's photo is a staged piece from 1999, but it says a great deal about the Bauhaus and the tradition of *Neues Bauen* [New Building]—or what has become of it. Because one thing is clear: The man doing the cleaning does not own this house, nor does he live nearby.

iconic symbolic value vs.
social utility value

- [A] Creating affordable high-quality products for the masses; thinking from an artistic perspective about objects that are part of everyday life and can be manufactured industrially; using up-to-the-minute technical skills to build good homes for workers—in a nutshell, democratizing what is good and beautiful, forms the quintessence of all the narratives that circulate today about the former *Neues Sehen* [New Vision], *Neues Denken* [New Thinking] and *New Building* movements. We realize that this is a somewhat one-sided interpretation. And we are also aware that chairs, sofas, and lamps shaped by that era's design have now come to symbolize the lifestyles of the upper middle class, who view them as something special. Similarly, housing once constructed for the working class is now rarely owned by low wage earners. In the cultural capitalism of our time, the «Bauhaus» label signals special merit; it adds value. An ironic transformation. At least when we think of some of the original goals.

bauhaus brand's effect of
social distinction

Have the workers been forgotten? Or do architecture and urban planning that pick up on the Bauhaus tradition today offer new, positive solutions for people like that man with the bucket? I am delighted to have an opportunity to discuss these questions with you.

A design language that still impresses us and brings new inspiration today was developed in response to the major questions confronting that era. It was a constructive movement. Rather than merely distancing itself from what had gone before, it created workshops replete with countless positive ideas—and some of those involved really went out on a limb.

- [E] What are the political prerequisites for socially engaged architecture or design?
 [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] These were women and men with new ideas and very precise visions of how to proceed, what they wanted to do, right down to the smallest detail. I like the passionate common sense that can be seen in so many places—in worker s' apartments, in fitted kitchens with a table for the family to sit around, in factories flooded with light, but also in designs for chairs and armchairs.

artistic and social renewal

Photographs from that time reveal that it is (also) a matter of perspective, the motto here being: New Vision. There were snapshots that nobody considered to be art, along with images that turned the art world on its head: close-ups of screws, a view through railings or a tree photographed from close to the trunk. These were completely different from the carefully orchestrated shots of the rich and beautiful that held sway at the time. The cameras seem to be curious. They ask: What does the world look like from below? What have we missed so far?

The concepts developed in Neues Bauen [New Building] also incorporate a different perspective. The old approach involved rigid class differences: metropolises that had mushroomed in the wake of the Industrial Revolution. Chimneys belched out smoke right next to residential areas, and workers lived in catastrophic, thoroughly unhygienic conditions. It was loud, cramped, and dirty.

modernist housing estates
affordable housing

It was against this background that progressive housing and modernist architecture emerged. The residential world was reinvented. In housing estates in Berlin, Hamburg, Stuttgart or Frankfurt you can still see today what that meant: There were now flats with central heating and hot water, offering an unusually high degree of comfort by the standards of the day—and actually inconceivable for the working class. People were proud that they could move into this housing. Even today it is generally very agreeable to live there.

new political, social, and
architectural awakening

- [E] A remarkable historical constellation of forces underpinned the construction of so many attractive housing estates: a combination of a social, political, and architectural new awakening. The projects were implemented under the aegis of mayors, councillors in charge of construction or senior building officers. In addition, new forms of ownership and credit were introduced in the form of cooperatives, the entire planning and building process was reorganized, and large numbers of impressively timeless apartments were constructed.

cooperatives as new forms
of ownership

- [B] What do we understand by taking a stand regarding architecture and design, and particularly of the Bauhaus and Modernism?
- [I] 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 as a social attitude

bauhaus centenary

lessons from the bauhaus

new building movement

resolving social issues through architecture

new political, social, and architectural awakening

emancipatory promise of modern architecture and design

social utopian aspirations

«new man» as a concept

bauhaus modernism under the national socialist regime

[B] A deeply social and democratic attitude is evident in this engagement with reality on the ground that is such a hallmark of the Bauhaus and *Neue Sachlichkeit* [New Objectivity] movements. Considering the way things should look for being good for those who use them—without forgetting half or most of those users in the process—is a progressive perspective. That is why it fits perfectly that you have conceived the Bauhaus anniversary year as an international learning space. Because we face comparable questions and once again need new forms and solutions.

[I] Architecture is the art that influences everyday life most directly. The New Building movement grasped that point. Chiming with that awareness, it developed concepts on how to build a community using architectural and design means.

Manifestos and quotations from that period convey remarkable confidence in the writers' own abilities and those of society. They were grounded in a conviction that it was possible to do better. And were written by men (and a few women) who were keen to engage with the future, for they knew they were on the threshold of something new.

However, the tenor of some texts makes you stop and think and is no longer at all appropriate nowadays: That desire I already mentioned to do everything from scratch, coupled with a firm conviction that one knows what is right: and for everyone else too.

Today, this didactic programme—seeking to revolutionize vision, to reinvent cities from the ground up, to change society, not to mention the whole world, and to create a New Man—and this kind of utopia are most disconcerting. There is a holistic imperative about it that seems authoritarian. Misjudgements and highly questionable actions are also part of the Bauhaus.

Its early days were rather esoteric and sought role models in the past. And although the National Socialists were antagonistic towards the Bauhaus and closed it down, some Bauhaus students and teachers made deals with the new ruling powers and committed dreadful deeds.

Against this background too, I think that we do well to celebrate the Bauhaus by asking, for example, what directions building should take in coming decades. How does architecture for an open society look? How should we build if it is indeed true that architecture is the art that most directly influences how people live together?

Today we are aware that cities and the ways in which we live together constitute highly complex structures. That means we need neighbourhoods where diversity feels at home and housing that suits different phases of life and a range of lifestyles.

Urban society is characterized by the most diverse milieus and cultures. Encounters between a whole host of very different people, friction, coexistence and the creative blend of hugely varied lifestyles are what makes cities worth living in. However, precisely this tradition of European urban culture faces major challenges.

Our cities are growing and there is a housing shortage. You can see in Berlin, Frankfurt, Hamburg or Munich how scarcity is causing rents to rise. In Copenhagen, Oslo, Stockholm, Helsinki or Paris and London, housing is already much, much more expensive. People on an average income there can no longer afford an apartment in the city centre. This urban boom is accompanied by social displacement and cultural impoverishment of inner cities. US economist Richard Florida has called this development «the new urban crisis». Yet we also want nurses, taxi drivers or teachers' families to be able to find a home in our cities.

A vibrant city needs affordable commercial space for small businesses and craftspeople. And there must be enough housing: owner-occupied homes, flats for the commercial rental market and social housing. In Germany, hundreds of thousands of apartments now need to be built every year.

I would therefore like to pick up on two aspects that are seldom addressed in the public debate, but for which valuable points of reference can be found here, in the context of the Bauhaus anniversary year: serial construction and mixed-use cities.

Firstly, prices for housing construction need to fall, which means we must draw on all the possibilities of industrial and digital production. A relatively high number of households in Germany can claim a certificate entitling them to live in publicly funded housing. That means we must maintain high numbers of social housing units and ensure that a decent proportion of social housing is built, particularly also in attractive locations.

Even today it would be possible to construct well-equipped housing that could be rented, without any subsidies, for eight euros per square metre (not including heating costs)—if buildings were also based on standardized models. And if the procedures involved were made more efficient. Climate-neutral construction and renovation can also be carried out much more economically

displacement processes

gentrification

new urban crisis

demand for
affordable housing

rationalizing housing
construction

mixed-use city

standardization

mass housing construction

affordable housing

- [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?

climate protection

using mass-produced solutions. In future, both considerations must come into play: affordable housing and climate protection.

functional city

Secondly, before World War II and for many decades afterwards, cities were built according to the principle of functional separation: the idea was that there were centres where work concentrated, but that citizens wanted to live on the outskirts of the city. The legacy for urban areas took the form of transport corridors and isolated residential islands, giving rise to major problems for social cohesion, quality of life and the climate. It is hard to imagine that being «car-friendly» was once seen as a positive attribute for cities.

mixt-use city

European cities have summarized our current visions in the «Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities» (2007). We want a city in which there is a mix of functions and social backgrounds, a city which is compact and mobile, has a strong focus on urban development and at the same time takes sustainability into account. The legal framework is however still shaped by another model.

legacies of modernism

We should not forget that the legacy that modernist architects, including those from the Bauhaus, have left us is the model of the functional city, as described in the Athens Charter (CIAM IV, 1933). It still defines our urban planning. That is why it is difficult to create day-care centres or sports grounds in residential areas or to build apartments in Hamburg's docklands. Changing this is a laborious process. Nonetheless, in 2017, incidentally at Hamburg's initiative, a new paragraph was successfully added to the Baunutzungsverordnung (Federal Land Utilization Ordinance) (§ 6 a BauNVO). German zoning legislation therefore now reflects an awareness that urban areas exist and that it is good for urban culture if commercial uses and housing coexist.

Engaging with the tradition of the Bauhaus 100 years on can also mean not seeing the past as a utopia and not describing the future in apocalyptic terms, but daring instead to set out on a new path with all our capabilities and know-how.

- [1] We need to rediscover the creative restlessness, the confidence in craftsmanship and technical skills that characterize the Bauhaus and the New Building movement. We must combine them with the lessons we have learned over the last 100 years.

For example, the lesson that every city needs different answers. That when society is going through a time of upheaval, we must ensure everyone is on board as we move forward, but that no one should presume to speak for everyone.

The open society always starts with the principle that, at all times, we need to view people, be it ourselves or others, as an end and never as a means, irrespective of how fantastic some utopia may look.

You may agree with the view that, as a universal principle, a triangle should be yellow, a circle blue and a square red (Wassily Kandinsky), but you may also think that it is complete nonsense. In an open society, we must accept that cities are also a jumbled patchwork of styles. That they are in motion, marked by shifting attitudes towards what is considered beautiful and aesthetic.

The challenge we will face in future is how to find cohesion, and thus devise solutions for many different people, while living in this society of singularities, as Andreas Reckwitz calls late modernity. Because the issue is not just art, aesthetics, and culture, but ultimately also the stability of our democracy.