

A conference for the future: *From Bauhaus to the New House – Post-Covid Landscapes*

Lisbon, Portugal,
8 - 9 June 2021

When, on 15th October 2020, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, in her State of the Union speech and an article published in several newspapers, launched the idea of a New European Bauhaus, it surprised politicians, cultural agents and citizens in general. After all, we are not used to having a leader at the highest level, putting forward a cultural, artistic, and architectural issue as a central policy motivation.

Moreover, it drew on a century-old institution, the Bauhaus, undoubtedly one of the pillars of modern culture, where artists, architects, and designers in Weimar, Dessau, and already in decline, in Berlin, created a fundamental experience that was formative for modernity in the 20th century. In its time, the Bauhaus was in a continuous state of permanent and heated controversy. Now, a century on, it is also subject to the scrutiny of what is known as “politically correctness,” and to petitions and calls for “cancellation.”

Nonetheless, what is admirable in the president’s initiative, is the willingness to see in the emergencies of the present, not only a need for an environmental and economic project, but also a multi-disciplinary cultural challenge. In this sense, the invocation of the Bauhaus is welcome and pertinent. From 1919, in Weimar, the body and the machine were examined in the workshop. The approach was experimental and communal, today we would say it was interdisciplinary. The costumes and decorations of the many parties held, resulted from student work with the “Master of Form.” The communitarian idealism derived from the 19th century was tested by the pragmatism of those who wanted to work with industry and the market. Nowadays, the workshop will be different; the focus has shifted; there is a new fight against climate change. But the collaborative model of the Bauhaus, the interlacing of theory and practice, and of design and manu-

facture, retains an unparalleled acuity.

Furthermore, in the president’s initiative, proposed as a “movement,” the incorporation of culture at the center of today’s challenges, is primarily a demonstration that the European project is not only based on the primacy of economic and national interests. To regain people’s confidence, it can and must include a social, artistic, and architectural dimension, involving everyone.

The *Ordem dos Arquitectos* [Order of Architects] in Portugal resolved to respond positively to this challenge. The *Conferência Europeia de Políticas de Arquitetura – European Conference on Architectural Policies* (CEPA – ECAP) traditionally takes place under the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, which in the first half of 2021 falls to Portugal, and it will be held under the aegis of the New European Bauhaus. *From Bauhaus to the New House – Post-Covid Landscapes* will take place at the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, on 8th and 9th June 2021, and will bring together a series of participants from vari-

ous disciplines, drawn from several regions within and outside Europe, including Africa, Asia, and Brazil.

From Bauhaus to the New House alludes to the title of Tom Wolfe’s (1930-2018) book, *From Bauhaus to Our House*, from 1981, a devastating satire on the school, its architects and modern culture. Naturally, the conference will take a somewhat different outlook, but without ignoring the events of the past, the setbacks, excesses, and intransigence, which were also part of the story.

In fact, the state of emergency that Walter Gropius (1883-1969) experienced after WWII, and which led him to establish the Bauhaus has, in relative terms, some parallels with the post COVID-19 pandemic, social and climate challenges we now face. The reconfiguration of the city, and its relationship with the countryside, the new models of sustainable construction, and domestic space after the traumatic experience of the pandemic, have emerged as topics to which architecture, art, and the creative disciplines

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must respond. Consequently, the conference will involve various political and cultural figures, and will be divided into four areas for debate: the New European Bauhaus seen from outside Europe; transformations of the post-pandemic city; architecture, art, and sustainability; and architectural policies.

The conference will also include a presentation on the “state of the art” of architectural design, and feature several speakers linked to the European Commission, the New European Bauhaus program, and the Portuguese government and institutions. The keynote speaker will be Eduardo Souto de Moura, the 2011 Pritzker Prize winner, and an architect whose personal dialogue with Mies van der Rohe (1886-1969), the final director of Bauhaus, and his own position on “sustainability” issues, will undoubtedly be a controversial high point of the event.

The presence at the closing session of the President of **docomomo** International, Ana Tostões, is also a recognition of this institu-

tion’s crucial work and its natural affinity with the legacy of Bauhaus.

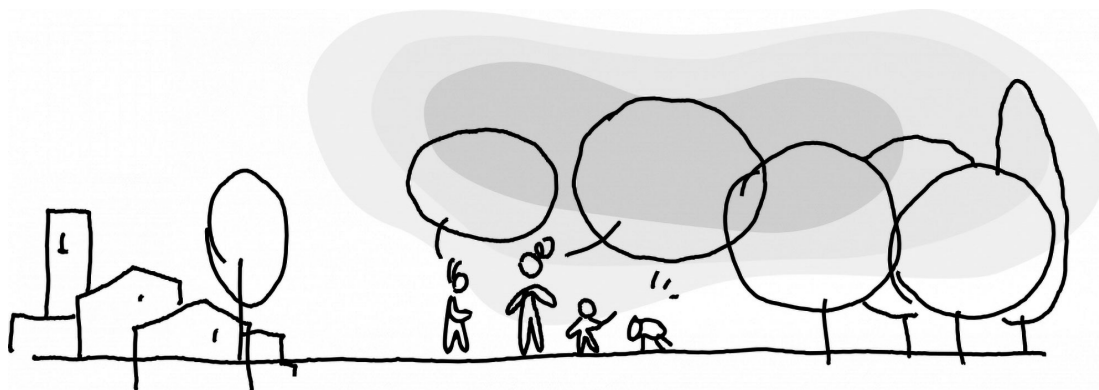
Oskar Schlemmer (1888-1943), a master of form, first in sculpture, and then in the theater workshop, was someone who found, in his drawings and murals, and his later plays such as the *Triadisches Ballett* [Triadic Ballet], a particular *baubausian* beauty, in which the human body meets the robotic geometrical form. Even nowadays, 100 years’ later, the innocent joy of such a strikingly innovative project is moving. Oskar Schlemmer’s masks linger in the imagination, enigmatic and unresolved, even today. In 1923, Walter Gropius organized an exhibition in which he presented the *Haus am Horn*, the first fully Bauhaus home, a state-of-the-art Bauhaus prototype, with objects created in its several workshops.

It is imagined – it is intended – that the projects the New European Bauhaus selects for its second phase, will be as radical as *Triadisches Ballett* or *Haus am Horn*.

As conclusion, a last personal note for

everyone: having visited the “White City” in Tel Aviv in early 2020, and the exhibition “Bauhaus: Our Play, Our Party, Our Work” at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, I was able to re-live the experience of the old Bauhaus, and remember how in Portugal, and particularly in the “School of Porto” where I graduated in the early 1990s, the legacy of the Bauhaus still persisted to some extent in a first-year “preliminary course.” The geometry and play of pure forms were combined with life drawing, in the *Beaux Arts* method and, in Portugal, seamlessly incorporated the modernity of Modern Movement architecture. Thus, despite the fundamental differences it calls for, there is a great deal of continuity at stake in the New European Bauhaus. In any case, *From Bauhaus to the New House – Post-Covid Landscapes*, opens its doors to everyone, inside and outside Europe.

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New European Bauhaus
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