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Title:
Do we change, or do we comply?

Date:
2022-04

Citation:
Brejzek, T., Hinkel, R. & Wallen, L. (2022). Do we change, or do we comply?. Brejzek, T (Ed.). Hinkel, R (Ed.). Wallen, L (Ed.). Bauhaus X IKEA Legacies of Modernism, (1), pp.5-16. URO.

Persistent Link:
https://hdl.handle.net/11343/313753

DO WE CHANGE, OR DO WE COMPLY?

THEA BREJZEK, ROCHUS URBAN HINKEL AND LAWRENCE WALLEN

Bauhaus × IKEA — What kind of diabolical mathematical equation is at work here? Are we calculating a cross-section of IKEA and Bauhaus? Is this a Venn diagram designed to sample the differences and similarities between a pedagogical enterprise and a commercial one? How are these comparisons qualified? Are both dedicated to the mass circulation of "good design"?

The title Bauhaus × IKEA is a simple provocation, aiming to raise many questions. This collection of essays explores and critiques the far-reaching impact and influence of the Bauhaus and the furniture company, IKEA: the consequences and the philosophies of these 20th-century design juggernauts, these cultural icons by which the 21st century remains captivated. This introductory essay frames the collection of essays through reflections on our current social and political context, exploring the similarities and differences of their concepts of 'design' in its totality. What can one learn from Bauhaus and IKEA for the current struggles within design and architecture, or even within society at large?

In its fleeting 14 years of existence (1919–1933), the Bauhaus set in motion the democratisation of design. In doing so, it provided a theoretical and functional framework for design-orientated global organisations, such as IKEA (founded in 1943). IKEA's motto, 'Design for everyone', embodied the Bauhaus's ideas and brought them to a global market. The impact of Bauhaus and IKEA both unfold across entire industries; and have shaped manufacturing, and driven affordability and mass production in the 20th and early 21st centuries. While Bauhaus was primarily directed at pedagogy and the relationship between art and craft, IKEA had commercial interests – yet both became global brands.

As an interdisciplinary, international workshop of modernity and laboratory of the future, the Bauhaus changed daily life through design, from single objects to buildings and cities in the search for the creation of a new man, a new city, a new world. Rather than acting as a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, Elizabeth Otto argues in her book, *Haunted Bauhaus: Occult Spirituality, Gender Fluidity, Queer Identities, and Radical Politics*, that the Bauhaus engaged with a diverse and even paradoxical collection of ideas, from occult spirituality to gender fluidity and queer identities, and that it often supported radical politics (Otto 2019). Its leadership captured different political orientations — from socialist to democratic and, finally, to stay operational in its final years, aligning closely with the reigning National Socialists under the leadership of Mies van der Rohe.

Bauhaus × IKEA is an investigation into two different worlds. While both are important in any discussion of design and accessibility to design, they are very different in their nature.

On the one hand, the ideologies with which the Bauhaus tends to be associated emphasise a democratic, even a socialist, approach to design. When it comes to the Bauhaus, its brief-yet-influential history of pedagogical and enterprising activities, their interruption with the rise of National Socialism and the war that followed, there is not one but a series of ideological thrusts. Though it might now be recognised as a singular brand, the Bauhaus was never just one idea.

Variations of IKEA products are available according to local climate, building materials and local labour, but they are obliged to comply with the common goals and ambitions of standardisation.

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Habitual understandings of architecture and design might presume the immobility of their artefacts, but this would be to overlook their thoroughgoing imbrication in global flows of finance and market-driven neoliberal capitalism.

We must ask ourselves: what is really at stake today? In the geological epoch of the Anthropocene, in the dim light of the climate emergency and from the midst of a projected sixth mass extinction event, unimaginable environmental problems now plague us – some more immediately than others. Around 40% of the world's CO2 output each year is connected to the building industry, architecture and design (UNEP 2020). Consequently, developers, architects and designers must radically change their thinking about the profession, its relation to industry and old habits of extraction and production, right down to the detail of the material choices they make. Where do we source our materials from? What is a material's or a building's life cycle? These are some of the questions we need to reflect on. What role can architecture and design play today? Are they environment destroyers, or can they work together to find the best means of caring for environments, constructed and natural? Is design reserved for a few, or can design find new ways of multiplying its effects as an art of living amidst planetary damage? (Tsing et al. 2017). Faced with these pressing questions, architects and designers cannot continue according to the logic of business as usual. They need to change their attitude and get involved, not accepting anymore the traditional frameworks at global and local scales, either in the profession in general or on building sites. They, we, can't hope for excuses to be accepted any longer. Everyone needs to develop, offer, ask for, advocate for and apply alternatives. The profession must change by supporting global and local social, and environmental struggles; we need to mobilise socially and politically to achieve a desirable future. A world where we ask not how much, but how little we need to build.

The collection of essays in this publication begins with reflections on the *Open Stage* at the Bauhaus Museum Dessau by the former director of the Bauhaus Foundation Dessau, Claudia Perren. The building, which was opened in 2019 to coincide with the 100th Bauhaus anniversary, was designed by the Barcelona office of Gonzalez Hinz Zabala (Addenda Architects). Located in Dessau, between city and park, the building's glazed façade offers transparency and references its parent building in its curtain wall façade and bridge. However, it articulates a central volume, with the collection housed in a black box positioned between two staircase blocks that form a second interior storey. Conceptualised as an open and flexible performative space, the museum's ground floor can host a diverse range of installations that allow the public to interact with the building in a playful manner.

Open Stage acts as a contemporary response to the Bauhaus utopian theatre space, the *Totaltheater*, which translates to Total Theatre, designed by Walter Gropius for Erwin Piscator in 1927 and also to Oskar Schlemmer's vision of the stage as a spatial organism. In a 1927 performance–lecture to the Friends of the Bauhaus, referring to the then-new Bauhaus Dessau building, Schlemmer said: 'We atomize the constricting space of the stage and translate it into terms of the total building itself, the exterior as well as the interior — a thought which is particularly fascinating in view of the new Bauhaus building' (Schlemmer 1971, 88). The *Open Stage* of the new Bauhaus Museum Dessau has transgressed the traditional theatrical division of auditorium and stage into defined spaces for presentation and reception. Indeed, the building itself has become the stage.

Continuing in the vein of performative space, POP-HUB by Axel Kufus explores turning the city of Berlin into a mobile stage. The 2019 performance piece by Kufus and Nils Holger Moormann fabricated and transported the iconic FNP Kufus shelf directly from studio to client in a specially designed bicycle trailer. Awarded the AD Design Award 2019 for Best Concept, Kufus's humorous performance presents a pointed critique of global fabrication and distribution chains in the face of climate change and dwindling natural resources. Dressed in bright orange utilitarian jackets with the POP-HUB logo, Kufus and Moormann cycled from the similarly branded studio to deliver a total of 67 furniture

packages over two days. The arrival of the deliveries was ritually celebrated with a POP-HUB beer in the apartment of the client once the shelf had been assembled onsite by its designer. Kufus's position is presented as a counteraction in the performative subversion of conventionalised modes of global product fabrication, packaging, transport and delivery in favour of a tailor-made, localised design and distribution model.

POP-HUB recalls the significance of artistic methods at a time of environmental crisis and that sustainability cannot be simply one aspect of a product. Instead, sustainable principles and practices must be at the core of design, which involves local makers, sourcing of materials, fabrication methods and distribution. Kufus's visual essay highlights the role and responsibility of the designer between artisan and industry in a contemporary response to the Bauhaus maxim and dilemma.

In his contribution, Melbourne architecture and design academic Rochus Urban Hinkel rallies against profit-driven global flows of goods. Hinkel asks whether contemporary design can adopt an ethical and a sustainable approach, and at the same time be accessible for 'the many' – to cite one of IKEA's mottos. Hinkel begins his essay with a brief overview of the historical origins of the Anthropocene, the unofficial nomenclature for our contemporary geological epoch. This epoch is also, in a radical terminological escalation, termed 'Capitalocene' by geographers, such as Andreas Malm and Jason W Moore, to draw attention to the political and economic system of capitalism that has actively fuelled the current global environmental crisis over the past 500 years (Baldwin and Erickson, 2020). Is a return to locally produced goods made from local materials and locally distributed the answer?

Hinkel reflects on the early furniture maker Thonet, which owned not only patents but also plantations, thus setting up their fabrication and distribution chain as one of the examples of the increasing industrialisation of design in the 20th century. Hinkel recounts that the Bauhaus, with Gropius as its first director, proclaimed the unity of art and craft, while cultivating close contacts with industry to make design, as well as housing, highly accessible. Far from drawing a simple genealogy from Bauhaus to IKEA – from the historic design school to the contemporary global player – Hinkel introduces two alternatives to the dominant design, production and distribution processes; namely, the renovation and interior design of the ground floor and cafeteria of the New Nationalmuseum in Stockholm by a collective of designers and the MakersHub, Oslo. Here, similar to the Stockholm example, Hinkel recognises a productive slowing down in all processes based on a culturally ingrained respect for craft and craftspeople. Hinkel argues that to design for a better world is a desire that – in this time of global environmental, cultural and social crises – an increasing number of architects and designers must live and work by.

A visual essay by Stefanie Bürkle, a Berlin artist and the Chair of Fine Arts at the Technical University Berlin's Department of Architecture, ties in with the desire to live a better life and to stage one's everyday existence through the design of one's own house. In researching the relationship between identity and built spaces – in particular, private residences in the context of migration and re-migration – Bürkle expands her research on re-migration from Turkish-German migrants to Vietnamese-German migrants returning to South Korea. Bürkle's photographs of the so-called 'German Village' on the island of Namhaedo show the generic typology of the German single dwelling; its design features were translated and mediated by South Korean builders, namely by those re-emigrating to Korea. Namhaedo has become something of a tourist attraction. It is like a German theme park – and the result is uncanny. It can be seen as a metaphor for the complex identity negotiations underlying migration and remigration, and how design concepts, memories and spaces for living can travel. Linked to Bürkle's recent visual research project and publication, *MigraTouriSpace: Migrating spaces and tourism* (Bürkle, 2021), the images published in this volume present, at first sight, a typological catalogue of German suburban housing. In their unified bleakness and their ever-so-slight strangeness, however, they also speak of memories, desires and a homecoming that is blurred between national and cultural identities.

In her chapter, Italian PhD scholar Rebecca Carrai from the Faculty of Architecture at Leuven University, Belgium, interrogates the concept of the 'better life' in the context of IKEA's slogan 'Democratic Design', prevalent in the company's public communication and marketing. Understanding IKEA and the Bauhaus as 'myths of modernity', Carrai links and differentiates the manifestations of the concept of 'better design for everybody' throughout the twentieth century, emphasising some of the marginalised figures in the histories of both design bodies. While noting the IKEA slogan's commonalities and aspirations to the Bauhaus ideal, Carrai traces its origins to the thinking of the 19th-century Swedish feminist philosopher and pedagogue, Ellen Key. Carrai meticulously unpacks Key's writings on the domestic interior and the central role of beauty in constructing harmony and identity, from the family unit to the nation, and traces her enduring influence on Swedish social, cultural and political notions of the importance of homemaking. This was articulated in 1919 by designer Gregor Paulssen as 'better things for everyday life', in the very year of the foundation of the Bauhaus in Weimar. Carrai's literature and archival research culminate in the figure of Viennese designer Tomas Jelinek, hired by IKEA in the late 1960s, who was to become IKEA's in house-designer. Following a distinct modernist aesthetic and adapting to IKEA's fundamental principles of low prices and functional designs, Jelinek, a trained set designer, proceeded to stage IKEA's range as sequences of fully furnished enterable rooms that made tangible the domestic mise-en-scènes available for purchase. In coalescence with the commercial goods, as Carrai points out, a complex communication system that welcomes the buyer as a member of the IKEA family was set into motion, fuelling both the desire for a 'better life' and the consumption of the products that promise its advent. If, the author claims, we understand modernity as an emancipatory project, global players such as IKEA must take on a role of responsibility for the 'better life' in a 'better world'.

Similarly, Christof Mayer, a member of the Berlin architecture collective 'raumlabor' critiques the apparent need for ever-more growth, and sees the actors involved in planning, designing and constructing the built environment as complicit in speculative practices that continue to advance environmental destruction. The project he centres his reflections around, Making Futures Bauhaus+ (from 2018), proposed a counter position to master-planned development in the form of collaborative, slow, everyday actions of living and learning. Together with a contemporary response to the historic Bauhaus, it aims to weave learning and living into a socially responsible yet progressive form of education and practice. Mayer's text is accompanied by images from the three mobile workshops in Istanbul, Palermo and Thuringia, and the project's base station at the Haus der Statistik in Berlin. There is something hopeful and utopian about the images of everyday activities collaboratively undertaken by the participants that Mayer has chosen for this volume; their slowness and care correspond with Hinkel's observations on some of the alternative design practices in Scandinavia.

Melbourne philosopher and architectural theorist Andrew Benjamin's chapter 'Karel Teige and minimum dwellings. The Bauhaus's other possibility?' returns to the question of housing with the figure of the Czech writer and critic, Karel Teige (1900–1950), and his relationship with the Bauhaus. In *The Minimum Dwelling*, originally published in Czech in 1932, Teige advocated for a radical new housing type, in pointed opposition to what he perceived as the elite residential villas designed by modernists such as Gropius, Le Corbusier and van der Rohe. Teige argued for the abolition of the nuclear family structure, with the kitchen at the centre of gendered family life. He rallied for the socialisation of children's education and for so-called 'dwelling cabins' for workers that could be massed together into 'dwelling hives'. Thus, enabling the dissolution of the family unit and a uniform, purely functional mass housing of the working class. Benjamin, in a complex contextualisation of Teige, Walter Benjamin, and Adolf Loos in the tensioned framework between minimum dwelling, technology and ornament, posits architecture, above all, as 'the housing of life'. Life, or rather: 'the good life,' as Andrew Benjamin specifies, is that which is 'not yet'. For Teige and Walter Benjamin, respectively, technology and mass production in

architecture and design held the promise to transform the 'not yet' into the 'now'. Teige's legacy, so Benjamin argues, lies less in his specific articulation of the minimum dwelling in terms of 'needs', but in the responsibility of the designer and architect to strive for 'the better life' — a responsibility that, today, encompasses both the understanding of and action against the human-made fragility of our planetary existence.

Australian art and architecture historian Adam Jasper, from the gta Institute, Department of Architecture, at ETH Zürich, is concerned with a different kind of housing. In an analogy between Swiss artist duo Fischli Weiss' sculpture *Haus,* installed in a suburb of Zurich, and the first IKEA store outside of Sweden in yet another suburb of Zurich, Spreitenbach, Jasper, as a kind of architectural ethnographer, playfully unfolds and describes both buildings. He articulates them both as icons of banality, one a store and storehouse filled with globally distributed goods whose makers and their labour are invisible, the other an installation that shows a house at a scale of 1:5, molded in aluminium, and not enterable. As a mute object, increasingly covered in graffiti, *Haus* acts as an ironic reminder of what Jasper terms an 'anti-heroic vernacular modernism', which stubbornly holds its position in the gallery of grey, functional buildings that hide their purpose and their contents. The flat-roofed blue and yellow IKEA stores have become their own type of building, while sharing the 'anti-heroic modernist' quality of the Oerlikon art installation. The promise of a better life through better design slumbers in both.

This volume concludes with a chapter by Thea Brejzek and Lawrence Wallen from the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Technology, Sydney, on the silent and highly enigmatic edifice, the Torin building. Built for the Torin Corporation, it rises out of a low-rise industrial zone in the outlying suburb of Penrith, 50 km west of Jørn Oberg Utzon's iconic 1973 Sydney Opera House. Completed in 1976 and designed by Hungarian-American Bauhaus architect Marcel Breuer in collaboration with Viennese-Australian modernist architect Harry Seidler, the Torin building is one of Australia's least prominent modernist buildings by two of the leading advocates of the modernist movement. Yet, it embodies a chronology of events spanning from the Bauhaus, MoMA, Harvard University and the Black Mountain College in America to Penrith, Australia, tracing a significant vein of modernist architectural personalities, discourse and production. Perceived almost entirely through Max Dupain's silver gelatine black and white photographs of the time, the Torin building stands as a late example of 'heroic' Bauhaus modernism. Its representation in photography renders it both real and mythical, the antithesis to Fischli-Weiss' scaled-down *Haus;* the capitalist counter-position to Karel Teige's radical housing concepts; and the austere opposition to the branded IKEA stores.

Bauhaus × IKEA aims to trigger associations, provoke questions and problematise the multiplying effects of both the Bauhaus and IKEA. Each chapter responds to this provocation in its own way, traversing the intersection between IKEA and the Bauhaus according to the author's specific concerns. Some essays choose a historical and political angle; others offer reflections or speculations on alternatives; and some critique IKEA and/or the Bauhaus through artistic, designerly and performative acts. This collection is a dynamic assemblage, opening onto many different points of distinct, and even contradictory perspectives, personal reflections and points of view. What many, if not all contributions share — sometimes implicitly, sometimes explicitly — is the apprehension of both Bauhaus and IKEA as global players that are ubiquitously recognised — whether through products or ideas.

Their designed objects and ideas have become multipliers, as the American architect and writer Keller Easterling would put it, deploying design standardisation across multiple locations, crossing cultural barriers and multiplying the relations in which people come to be affected by them from the home to the office (Easterling 2014). IKEA and Bauhaus have mass-produced the aesthetic lenses through which we perceive and apprehend our constructed living environments. They have become omnipresent and systemic, making it almost impossible to reflect on their conjoined impact as we are so embedded in the context these

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The editors would like to thank the University of Technology Sydney (UTS), IKEA Australia, and Goethe Institut Sydney, for their support of this publication and the endeavours of the IKEA × UTS Future Living Lab.

design phenomena have infiltrated; today, there is not an outside to design. No standpoint can be taken where we observe, describe and reflect from a distance; it has become impossible to create such a distance. *Bauhaus × IKEA* is the expression of our contemporary world, thoroughly entangled in our social and political Zeitgeist – shaping us as much as it shapes our environments.

While *Bauhaus × IKEA* explores the far-reaching impact and influence of the Bauhaus and IKEA, many questions remain: how do Bauhaus and IKEA continue to shape our world? Are companies like IKEA able to adjust and rethink their role as responsible global players? Are we able to — or do we even desire to — return to the kinds of radical social agendas Bauhaus was once driven by? Is a radical social agenda necessary in order to achieve the fundamental change that is necessary to address the challenges we face today?