

WHAT FOLLOWS HOW

We know from admired writers and philosophers that we are not born to die but to persevere. That is what animates us to continue. Continue in our linear (or curved) existence, described or travelled in time, on this planet. And it started a long time ago. Meanwhile, we must also be aware that the planet has its trajectory, which surpasses our own. The trajectory of mankind, as we know it, has been traced upon learning, shared knowledge and social relations. History is a human initiative. From the first ages, humans had to work their way through nature. We had to find in our intelligence and resourcefulness the means to survive. Nature can be hazardous, violent, hostile, unhomely, with its phenomena and the wild. We built to thrive in it. Paradoxically, nature is also indispensable to our survival. Somewhere in our escape from prey to become a hunter, language began. Following an inexorable need to warn the other. Warn from danger (of other species or hordes), about the hunt, but also about discoveries, putting us definitely in the route of progress. Education and a sense of continuity through doubt have always been one of our greatest differentiating factors. Looking into history as the memory of the past and using our imagination and creativity as the *memory of the future* to come.

In the geological epoch of the Anthropocene, when human activities started to have a significant impact on the climate and natural systems, our presence seems to entail a catastrophic fate: the end of nature as we know it. Worst, the end of our existence on this planet. Part of the society denies this scenario, putting an unwavering faith in the capacity of man to construct solutions. History seems to give arguments to this. For the geo-constructivist, the environment always will be what we intend to do with it. And if needed, when all resources on this planet are depleted, we will find a way to escape and live on another. For Frédéric Neyrat¹ recognizing the damage caused by humans over nature is, also, the recognition of our capacity to transform and interfere with it. Dominating and possessing nature are the stages that lead to our capacity to reconstruct it, giving, in this sense, a new meaning to the reasoning funded by René Descartes in the XVII century: “man as masters and possessors of nature.” But this is mainly put in a technical perspective, neglecting the interdependence of all living things and the environment in a fragile equilibrium. A balance that must be preserved

¹ “...far from extracting a sense of guilt from this current situation, we must on the contrary, extract a profit from this telluric power. If we have damaged the Earth, it’s because we had the power to do so. We have made the Earth poorly? Then we must repair it, reprogram it – reconstruct it!”
Neyrat, Frédéric. *The unconstructable Earth: an ecology of separation*. NY: Fordham University Press, 2018, p. 18.

at all costs, where nature is almost a subject.² On the other hand, the exacerbation and radicalization of this ecological approach may imply different and greater dangers: the danger of denying history, of the comprehension of all that led to the actual stage; but also, the danger of exclusion and discrimination of those dependent on the actual paradigm and to whom alternatives are not foreseen.

This short contextualization serves us to approach the New European Bauhaus (NEB) initiative, launched by the President of the European Commission (EC) in October 2020, as part of the Green Deal plan. “Climate change, pollution, demographic explosion and digitalization” are elected as the new global challenges. The European Green Deal is the new growth strategy, aiming to make the EU’s economy sustainable. Meanwhile, the EC realized that this strategy, to become successful and broader, needed a systemic change, particularly on the cultural side. And that is perhaps why the Bauhaus movement was retrieved and used as an inspirational movement to this desired cultural shift. The need to address and foster collaboration between the three elected dimensions – Aesthetics, Affordability and Sustainability – is NEB’s main challenge.

“The ultimate aim of all visual arts is the complete building!” wrote Walter Gropius in the 1919’s *Staatliches Bauhaus Manifesto*, conceiving architecture as a *Gesamtkunstwerk*.³ The Bauhaus practice and main focus are well known to have been merging design with industry, following the theoretical concept of “form follows function”. The NEB projects a new concept, that goes beyond buildings: “form follows planet”, integrating the three above mentioned dimensions: “sustainability (including circularity), quality of experience (including aesthetics) and inclusion (including affordability).” Most likely, none of them is the one that best serves nowadays urgency, because it has never been a question of form, but a question of how. It is how we live that is destroying our cities. Not its shape or form. Our growing need for a biophilic way of living is the result of city life frustrations and emergencies. They don’t fulfil expectations. The form of cities (and the form of architecture) is the direct consequence of how we have chosen to live. Design and industrial production were intended to reach the larger number through multiplication processes but soon degenerated to become products of exclusion, accessed by few. Today is certainly ongoing a formation of popular culture over nature. However, the danger of degeneration is always near, and the highest price paid by most! Usually, degeneration starts to reveal itself whenever ruthless business, propaganda and profit maximization becomes the sole indicators of success. Speculation takes advantage of the least prepared, planned and poorly regulated cities, that are submissive to the capital and the economic power, leaving them with a tremendous cultural deficit. That is why cultural engagement is necessary and opportune. Culture and nature should come together, inseparable. The opposite of this would lead us to conclude that our life was

² Cf. *Ibidem*

³ Total work of art.

now behind the historical and geological dependence of Earth, separated. Therefore, confrontation is not anymore with nature, but with us.

Thus, a question must be asked: how do we want to continue living? What do we need to do to achieve it? What would be the best and more effective way to take this decisive step? Undoubtedly, education, in the sense of knowledge exchange, of learning (not teaching). It was, in fact, the educational vision of the Bauhaus its greatest achievement. It is in the education of current and future generations that we will find the necessary force to drive change. The seeds of constant questioning must be sown, their consciousness stimulated, pulling them out of an alienated condition formatted to professionalization. The architect is not only an appendix of the industrialized world, a professional of buildings and construction, stated Vilanova Artigas⁴ to his students on their inaugural lecture in 1964. On the contrary, we must also educate future architect's intellect, helping them to contradict and submit this imposing structure, that transforms women and men into victims of their creations. Human relations, in architecture, always conditionate what is technical.

But how to trigger change in students? How to stimulate and feed their disquiet? How to engage them with the community? It is far known the distance between science and practice, but in transnational problems like those that the NEB addresses it is crucial to bridge these two spheres. To do it we need to put the debate outside the universities, to think beyond the institution, integrate and root it with the social movements and the civic society toward a collective orientation. In the commons and the *Undercommons*.⁵ Only when the issue is spread and discussed by the people we can talk of a systemic change. Students must be encouraged to resist preconceived ideas of any kind. A critical spirit must be preserved and valued. Like Fred Moten and Stefano Harney argued, there is no other path in the modern university besides the one of subversive intellectual.⁶ After all, the question of art has always been a question of survival and resistance. The path to that is through education and knowledge exchange. To reach practical advances, a possible contribution could be to facilitate open learning to all, to cultivate it in a lifelong perspective and as part of daily life. A forum to study.

I like to imagine this short essay as the first pitch to a theme that I am interested in, to which I am available and ready to give my contribution.

Nuno Tavares da Costa

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⁴ Cf. Artigas, Vilanova. "Aos formandos da FAUUSP, 1964". In: *Caminhos da arquitetura*. São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2004, pp. 70-73.

⁵ Cf. Moten, Fred. Harney, Stefano. *The university and the undercommons: seven theses*. Durham: Duke University Press, 22(2), 2004, pp. 101-115.

⁶ *Ibidem*.