

Free radicals

What does the “new man” look like? And how will this man live in the future? 100 years ago, the Bauhaus in Weimar began to revolutionize the world of design. A new museum spotlights its work

BY KLAUS GRIMBERG

The contemporary being must begin anew, to rejuvenate himself, to achieve a new humanity, a universal life-form of the people,” wrote architect Walter Gropius emphatically back in 1919. The sentence reveals the brutal disillusionment felt by an entire generation after the horrors of World War I. Their confidence in the blessings of technology had been deeply shaken by the mechanized killing and industrial annihilation of millions of young people.

But what exactly should this “new man” look like? At a new art school known as the Staatliches Bauhaus, founded in Weimar in April 1919, Gropius – the school’s first director – joined with the group of teachers and students he had assembled, all of whom were filled with a sense of new awakening, and set out on a path to explore this “new man” of the future and render him as tangible as possible.

In the early years, the Bauhaus was a virtually unregulated playground of creativity, a boundless laboratory reveling in the joy of experimentation. The school focused on the most holistic view possible of mankind, as well as on the perception of body and movement, colors and forms, materials and contrasts via all human senses. “I am leading all creative activity back to its roots, to play. Those who fail at this in my book fail as artists or students,” argued Johannes Itten, the founder of the preliminary “basic design course” at the Bauhaus, which all students were obliged to take before they could be admitted to one of the workshops.

His colleague Oskar Schlemmer, on the other hand, sought to find universally valid “human types” in which individual features were reduced and emphasis was



Interior as Gesamtkunstwerk

placed on characteristic forms. Yet another approach was taken by Wassily Kandinsky, who searched for new harmonies between man, nature and technology by means of radical abstraction and color analysis.

Today, the exciting atmosphere and zest for life in this wild and unbridled phase of the legendary school is on display in a highly accessible form at the recently opened Bauhaus Museum in Weimar. The new building was designed by architect Heike Hanada and sets a new and distinctive tone in this city of Goethe and Schiller. Most importantly, it helps visitors understand and reinterpret the connections between German Classicism in the period around 1800 and the advent of Modernism more than one hundred years later.

The highs and lows of German cultural history collide in Weimar like in no other German city. Only minutes away from the central square, which saw the creation and presentation of great Classical literature, the gathering of the national assembly of the first German republic and the laying of the foundation of modern design and architecture at the Bauhaus, the Nazis murdered tens of thousands of people at Buchenwald concentration camp. Today, the bulky yet delicate concrete cube of the new Bauhaus Museum is an effective and eye-catching contrast to the former Gauforum, the monstrous remnant of a city planned by the Nazis.

The Bauhaus school brought art and craftsmanship together to form a hitherto unknown sym-

biosis, and the fact that it was even able to develop into such a visionary institution was largely due to the efforts of Walter Gropius. Although the first Bauhaus director on many occasions drew on the preparatory work of his colleagues for his own designs, and although he himself was never considered an architectural genius, he was nonetheless a highly gifted communicator and a tireless fighter for the Bauhaus idea.

It was Gropius who brought well-known artists such as Lyonel Feininger, Gerhard Marcks and Paul Klee to the Bauhaus alongside Itten, Schlemmer and Kandinsky, even though he knew full well that a gathering of creative egos in a small space was bound to lead to artistic friction. It was

also Gropius who from the very beginning defended the design school against bitter opposition from the political and social realm – from the left, but above all from the right.

After the school’s initial phase of discovery, which focused on finding answers to questions relating to the “new man,” a second issue came to occupy the minds of the Bauhaus teachers and students: How do we want to live in the future? It was clear that it wasn’t possible to stop or turn back the ongoing march of technology. What then arose was the idea of merging technology and art to form a fruitful unity. Running water, as well as gas and electricity delivered directly to homes, were that era’s promises for increased comfort and a new way of living,

The task then became to make everyday life easier and more beautiful by taking full advantage of modern materials and functional design.

In 1923, the Haus am Horn – the only residential building built in Weimar according to Bauhaus principles – hosted the first exhibition of designs from the school’s workshops. Many of those objects and pieces of furniture served to furnish exemplary living rooms and children’s nurseries or kitchens, and they now tell the story of the arrival of design into everyday life at the new Bauhaus Museum.

Throughout the Weimar era of the Bauhaus, the *Bühnenwerkstatt*, or “stage workshop,” remained the school’s creative center, the place where light and movement, color and body were explored in a playful manner. Oskar Schlemmer’s “Triadic Ballet” became the epitome of artistic performance – one in which human-machine figures performed the dance of the future. The merging of the “new man” with technical and artistic attributes symbolized the school’s gradual rapprochement with industrial working methods and serial production. After its politically motivated expulsion – a right-leaning party had reduced the Bauhaus budget by 50 percent – from Weimar in 1925 to a new location in Dessau, it was precisely this change in perspective that made it possible for the Bauhaus to become the highly influential design institution it continues to be to this day, all over the world.

But that’s another story – one that will be told in Dessau starting in September, when a second new museum examining the history of the Bauhaus will open to celebrate the school’s 100th anniversary.

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Meet the neighbors

The wolves are back, and Germans are debating how to reconcile the large, carnivorous predators with the rural economy

BY ECKHARD FUHR

At the turn of the millennium, the wolves returned to Germany. On a military training ground in the Lausitz region east of Berlin, a wolf pair was spotted raising pups for the first time in 150 years. In other words, the 21st century began with the reemergence of wild predators. It was not generally understood as a sign of the times, but rather a curiosity, an historical misunderstanding, something to chalk up to the backwardness of the distant German east.

Today, almost 20 years later, the wolves have claimed not only a large share of Germany as their stomping ground, but a significant amount of political and media attention as well. Political parties and interest groups are quarreling over

the new neighbors; the wolves are becoming the object of management schemes, ordinances, coalition agreements and Bundestag debates.

To become better oriented in the hustle and bustle of wolf-based politics, it’s helpful to see the world through a wolf’s eyes, and at least make a stab at just once assuming the standpoint of the wolves vis-à-vis the land they are reclaiming. What makes a densely populated industrial country so attractive to an animal species that purports to feel most at home in the wilderness?

The German landscape is marked by extensive agriculture, which introduces massive amounts of nutrients into the biosphere as a whole. This leads to a situation where an inordinate number of wild, hoofed mammals – deer, elk, fallow deer, wild boar – live as bountifully as never before. What for many insects, birds, amphibians and reptiles would be a death zone is nothing less than paradise for the large, carnivorous wolf.

Wild, hoofed animals – or ungulates – are their natural prey, and Germany boasts roughly 10 times as many wolf prey per square kilometer than does Siberia, while meeting many other needs of the wolf as well. Despite the fre-

quency with which wolves fall victim to cars or trains, they find tranquility and plenty of opportunities to withdraw from peril in our forests and fields where, unlike 150 years ago, hundreds of thousands of people no longer trudge the land for work day in and day out. A sober evaluation by this wily and adaptive predator must conclude that Germany – and all of Central Europe – is an optimal habitat.

Plus, no one is really getting in their way. The very same modernization process that led to intensive agriculture and all that it wrought is also responsible for a fundamental shift in the mindset in European societies, a shift that has given majority appeal to the idea that not only butterflies have the right to prosper, but large predators as well.

There is thus no sound claim that the wolf “does not belong in our cultural landscape,” as lupine opponents maintain. These are not strays; their return is no mistake and in no way the result of the machinations of metropolitan nature lovers imposing their whims on earnest, down-to-earth, rural populations – a myth eagerly propagated by populists, not only those in the far-right AfD party. If the wolf becomes instrumentalized as a political vehicle, it will be hard to properly address the real conflicts triggered by its return.

German and European laws provide strict protections for the wolf species. Apart from in Saxony, it is illegal to hunt wolves in Germany. But even in Saxony, the inclusion of the wolf in state hunting law does not mean that wolves can actually be hunted. It has merely added another level of bureaucracy to the issue,

as now both nature preservationists and hunting authorities are involved in the fate of the wolf. Wolves may only be killed if they cause considerable economic harm or become a security risk. And a killing may only be prescribed if more benign measures have failed or are unavailable. Current law does not permit regulating, limiting or reducing the wolf population.

One possible change to this legal framework has triggered a political dispute that is driving a wedge into Berlin’s governing coalition. The Union and the agriculture ministry are pushing for controls on the population of wolves, while the SPD and environment minister are seeking to make case-by-case decisions more legally compliant and their enforcement more effective. Anything more seems impossible. Transitioning to population control would require that the European Commission change the protection status of wolves, and at the moment this is out of the question.

The most important and – to the sober eye – singularly relevant conflict linked to wolves is the fact that they feast on unprotected livestock. Not only does this have an impact on farmers, it also presents nature conservancy with conflicting goals. Extensive grassland management through grazing is essential to maintaining the biodiversity of the cultural landscape. A downturn in this form of agriculture would make for an ecological catastrophe.

Efforts by the federal and state governments are thus filtering out all the ideological bluster surrounding wolves and focusing squarely on helping keepers of livestock protect their herds by providing

financial assistance and consulting as well as by compensating their damages to the greatest possible extent. In Brandenburg – the German state boasting the most wolves – certain ordinances were enacted that are serving as models for other states as well as for the federal government. It can be an arduous task to reconcile wolf and agriculture, but it pays off.

Powerful interest groups like the German Farmers’ Association and the German Hunters’ Federation are not content with this pragmatic route represented by the existing legal framework. “Upper limits” and “wolf-free zones” are the catchwords most used in their arguments. Wolves cannot be confined to zones and fewer wolves does not equate to less damage. Even if wolves could be hunted, it would do nothing to lessen the current imperative to protect herds. Moreover, the legal stipulations for the public compensation for losses caused by wolves and for herd protection would no longer apply if the wolf ceased to be a strictly protected species.

There are now some 80 wolf packs in Germany, in addition to territorial pairs and lone wolves. The number of individuals can only be estimated, but the figure is somewhere between 500 and 1,000 – most of whom cause us no harm whatsoever and escape our notice altogether.

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