

AGENTS OF TRANSFORMATION

Episode 2

Student's Statements

The second episode on 28 May 2021 brought together arts students and representatives of the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC), in charge of running the New European Bauhaus, to discuss questions regarding sustainability, inclusivity, and aesthetics.

The students presented their visions for a sustainable, inclusive, and aesthetic future and set the agenda for their input to the New European Bauhaus initiative.

Importance of art + design

Presented by David Reitenbach, BA Visual Communication, Berlin University of the Arts

Today, we will be showing you a fraction of the work done. And hopefully, this will also represent the work of many others who have participated in the first episode and others who are just joining us on this exploration.

Imagination [arts and societal transformation] What potential do the arts and design disciplines have in the face of the socio-ecological transformation? This is what we asked ourselves in the first part. Science has told us in time and again that we have all the technological tools needed already at our hands. What is needed now is the imaginative, creative potential of the arts. The potential to imagine other futures and to close the gap between knowledge and action. The potential to imagine radical change that leads us into a post-fossil-fuel world.

Design/Gestaltung [creating a shared vision/fostering empathy] Art and design have a fantastic tool for this kind of challenge: the sketch, draft, the prototype. In design, possible futures are negotiated and new ideas are developed. But design is especially suited to facilitating dialogic collaboration. It allows people from different backgrounds to take a stand on the question of what futures they find desirable – and, ultimately, to create a shared vision.

Conviction [changing attitudes] Finally, art and design help to represent and communicate these shared visions of the future and unite people behind them. In this context, the concept of beauty is also relevant: Maybe not in the somewhat dusty, dated understanding of the Bauhaus. But in the sense of moving from a materially oriented growth society to immaterial cultural values.

To summarise: Art and design play an important role for societal transformation. They help to create shared visions, foster empathy, change attitudes and mindsets, provide emancipatory potential and offer opportunities for productive contemplation. The next generation in art and design therefore needs a seat at the table, on eye level with all the other actors, to develop and implement holistic solutions.

This all sounds great, but: Unfortunately, as in other fields of academia, teaching in the arts is behind the times and does not take into account the greatest humanitarian catastrophe, the **climate crisis**. **We would like to see the New European Bauhaus advocate for teaching that does justice to this crisis**. Teaching that makes students aware of their agency. That creates a transdisciplinary space for reflection, design and realisation of socio-ecological change. Since academia is highly individualised in the fields of art and design, a decidedly collaborative approach is required, such as a pan-European teaching curriculum integrating the climate crisis in art and design teaching.

Circularity

Presented by Yris Apsit, MA Transdisciplinarity, Zurich University of the Arts

Thinking about sustainability leads us to echo radical and utopic ideas. To encourage the urgent shift, on the way we relate to and conceptualise "nature". It asks for us to shift the way we have seen nature as separate, as pure environment, as "something" for dominion and human disposition. This dichotomy, fuelled by capitalism and exploitation have created the extractivism and depletion we know already too well. These are not new ideas, this is not a new picture on the state of the world.

Sustainability leads us to think about how this system is closely related to social, economical, gender and racial injustices and disparities, and calls urgently for addressing how these problematics are and will be understood and addressed. Sustainability is thinking the big-picture. Is fostering radical ideas of change to tackle fragmentations.

In this sense, **sustainability MUST be a holistic and in-depth commitment.** Seeing interwoven generations that hold responsibility and are accountable. Seeing intra-action and inter-action, nurturing inter and transdisciplinary approaches, considering earth and beyond as living spaces and not just territories and borders, thinking the possibility of creating a legal frameworks that dare to support otherness as a subject just like many nations have already proposed, thinking otherness as a fundamental part of our diversities as ecosystems. For us to thrive, we need empathy and collective intelligence, understanding fully that we are interdependent. Here the local level plays a huge part in the aim for change. Local resources, local knowledge, local leaders, local ideas, local needs...

Sustainability is as well to think in everyday life. Access to health and mental health, access to education, access to play, access to care, access to a living that doesn't equal survival. This needs to be a holistic approach. **Understanding intersectionality, refuting necropolitics, nurturing our local networks as rhizomes, encouraging civil society to participate and be heard, supporting platforms of exchange and truly think how we are retributing ones and others.** Through this first episode, sustainability is imbibed with political thoughts.

Art and design need as well to be understood in this way. In circularity. Neither should be synonym of privilege, hierarchy and elite. Neither should perpetuate patterns of inequality and exploitation. That is why we see these topics as interconnected.

This is an invitation to see micro and macro levels, temporalities, generations, heritages, histories, holding accountable and imagining how and what a circular approach means. Our cities, our universities, our institutions, our prisons, our relations need to be able to benefit from this vision.

It is before all, a call to see **humanities, sciences and arts together in the power of imagination, a call to foster symbiotic relationships, and collaborations that dare to design a radical future, and transform knowledge into action.**

Distribution of Power

Presented by Dalís Pacheco, MA Art and Media, Berlin University of the Arts

The broad spectrum of structural discrimination due to race, gender, class, religion, ableism, resulting in global inequality and therefore the damage of our environment have very close ties to the colonial past that we are all carrying to this very day. **Our central demand as a generation that no longer has the patience to witness these injustices from near or from afar is that the visions and solutions for our future should be inclusive and collective.** And most importantly, that **on the road to achieving our goals we could distribute the power held by a minority in which we all do not feel represented, as well as finding alternatives that will not reproduce colonial structures and dynamics,** moving away from a Eurocentric perspective in order to relearn

the global history and to see people from other territories as producers of knowledge and not as objects of study. Where diversity is not seen superficially as something performative but is supported so that we all have equal access to opportunities and be able to learn, share and create the future in which we all feel part of.