



project bauhaus

Can the Universal Be Specific?

Symposium

November 12, 2016

13:00 – 21:30

Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung

Berlin



Sileneville Sidon: 1001 Street Chairs of Cairo, 2015 © Manar Moursi and David Puig

With **Aristide Antonas, Anne-Julchen Bernhardt
& Jörg Leiser/BeL Sozietät für Architektur,
Christian Benimana/MASS Design Group,
Sabine Drewes, Jesko Fezer, Hans Peter Hahn,
Christian Hiller, Ina Kerner, Anh-Linh Ngo,
Marion von Osten, Philipp Oswald, Matteo Pasquinelli,
Ruben Pater, Ethel Baraona Pohl, Walter Prigge,
Stephan Trüby, and Karin Wilhelm.**



Since the advent of postmodernism people have been questioning the concept of the “universal.” Today, designers, architects and investors make a point of emphasizing the “site specificity” of their projects— although this is often little more than a rhetorical gesture. Local constructions of identity are fashionable again. This is true in the political sphere as well— increasingly, national and regional special interests are being marshaled against the idea of an international world community, and this in a time when the challenges facing us can only be tackled through global cooperation. Yet the design of universal infrastructure, on the other hand, is determined by multinational corporations and media firms. Actors such as Apple, Microsoft, Google, Facebook, Amazon, Airbnb, and Uber have concentrated on developing overarching platforms that supply universal structural frameworks for a host of different applications, and in doing so have fundamentally altered the global economic system.

With the question, “Can the Universal Be Specific?,” *projekt bauhaus* is reengaging with the ideas of universalism and internationalism posited by classical modernism— and critically reexamining their emancipatory potential. At the event, we’ll present different positions from the fields of political anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, art, architecture, and design, exploring the space for negotiation that lies between the universal and the specific— and in this tension, unearthing contemporary approaches to design.

All presentations will be interpreted simultaneously into English or German.

Limited seating, Admission 15 euro, reduced 8 euro, plus booking fee, tickets are available here:

www.projekt-bauhaus.de/en/

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Program



13:00

Why Universalism?

Welcome: **Sabine Drewes**, Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung

Introduction: **Anh-Linh Ngo**, **Christian Hiller**, **Philipp Oswald**, *project bauhaus*

13:30

Conflicts of Universalism

The concept of universalism—a core idea behind the Enlightenment and classical modernism, and by extension the Bauhaus as well—has undergone a crisis since the 1970s. Postcolonial discourse came to challenge whether the Western-inflicted notion of universalism was truly universal. Yet before the backdrop of contemporary urban marginalization and the resurgence of nationalist movements, the idea of universalism becomes relevant once again. Is universalism actually desirable? In everyday life, can the opposition between the universal and specific be reconciled and overcome? How can the idea of universalism be developed further?

Universalism: Foundations, Critique, Appropriation

Ina Kerner, political scientist, Humboldt-Universität Berlin

Everyday Wisdom. Dreams of a Good Life

Karin Wilhelm, architectural theorist and historian, Berlin

Right to the City

Walter Prigge, urban sociologist, Leipzig

Moderator

Philipp Oswald, architect, curator, and writer, Universität Kassel

15:15 BREAK

15:45

Architecture of the Universal

In the wake of World War II, architectural modernism spread across the globe. Universal design principles migrated to a host of different countries, adapted in each case—in different forms and with different dynamics—to the local construction methods, available resources, and specific needs. How are the universal and specific inscribed into architecture? How can the zones of conflict between these two poles be negotiated and harnessed in a positive way?

Who Builds?

Marion von Osten, artist, author, and curator, Berlin

Loaded

Anne-Julchen Bernhardt, **Jörg Leeser**, architects, BeL Sozietät für Architektur, Cologne

The African Design Center

Christian Benimana, architect, MASS program director, Rwanda

Moderator

Stephan Trüby, architect and curator, Technical University Munich



17:30 BREAK

18:00

Universal Products

The design principles developed by the Bauhaus and classical modernism are founded on rationalization, standardization, and norms, making it possible to mass produce consumer goods. With minimal adjustments to the PR and marketing strategies, these goods can be sold across the world. Yet in contrast to the original ambitions of the designers, these universal objects are often appropriated in specific ways in local contexts. Can objects become specific in being used?

The Politics of Design

Ruben Pater, designer, Amsterdam

Appropriation, Hybridization, Bricolage: Improvisation as Aesthetic Practice

Hans Peter Hahn, anthropologist, Goethe Universität, Frankfurt am Main

The Consequences of Withdrawal

Aristide Antonas, architect and author, Athens

Moderator

Ethel Baraona Pohl, critic, author, and curator, Barcelona

19:45 BREAK

20:15

Algorithmic Universalism

Universalism today is flourishing in the digital realm. The world is being measured, evaluated, and computed in binary code. Governments, multinational corporations, and online platforms regulate the stream of data and available courses of action. In the face of this “platform capitalism” with its algorithmic power structures, what are possible approaches to design?

On the Genesis of Western Computational Norms

Matteo Pasquinelli, philosopher, Hochschule für Gestaltung Karlsruhe

20:45

Discussion

With

Ruben Pater, Matteo Pasquinelli, Karin Wilhelm

Moderators

Ethel Baraona Pohl, Jesko Fezer, designer and author, HFBK Hamburg

Participants



Aristide Antonas

works in the fields of philosophy, art, literature, and architecture, and his publications range from literature and theater scripts to essays. His work has been featured at the Istanbul Design Biennial, the Venice and São Paulo Architecture Biennales, Display Prague, the New Museum in New York, Basel's Swiss Architecture Museum, and at the Vorarlberger Architektur Institut in Austria. In 2015 he won the ArchMarathon prize. He has also been nominated for the Mies Van der Rohe Award (2009) and the Iakov Chernikov Prize (2011). Currently he directs the Master's Program on Architectural Design at the University of Thessaly, Greece. He has been a visiting tutor at The Bartlett, UCL, and a visiting professor of literature at FU Berlin.

BeL

was founded in 2000 by Anne-Julchen Bernhardt (born in 1971) and Jörg Leeser (born in 1967). Its work has been recognized with major prizes like the Kunstpreis Baukunst (Art Award in Architecture) given by the Akademie der Künste Berlin. In 2016, before the backdrop of the current housing crisis, BeL will be expanding their self-build system "Grundbau und Siedler" to a city scale. The system was presented in their contribution to the 2016 Venice Architecture Biennale, titled *Neubau*. Bernhardt is a professor of building design at the RWTH Aachen, while Leeser teaches at the Peter Behrens School of Arts in Dusseldorf.

Christian Benimana

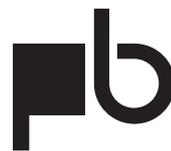
holds a bachelor's degree from the School of Architecture and Urban Planning (CAUP) of Tongji University and worked with LongiLat Architecture and Research in Shanghai prior to joining MASS in 2010, where he was a Global Health Corps fellow in 2011. He currently heads the implementation of the African Design Centre, a field-based apprenticeship to train top design talent on the continent in impact-based methods, in addition to being chairman of the Education Board of the East African Institute of Architects. Benimana has been involved with design/build projects, development initiatives, and operational and administration leadership. He has also taught at the architecture department of the former Kigali Institute of Science and Technology (KIST).

Sabine Drewes

has served as consultant for municipal policy and urban development and she is Head of Local Politics and Urban Development at the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung since 2007. She studied political science at Freie Universität Berlin. From 2002 to 2006, she was the editor of *Kommunalpolitische Infothek*. Prior to that, she was a publicity consultant for the Grüne/Alternative coalition in councils in North Rhine-Westphalia (GAR-NRW) and was a voluntary worker for the Grüne party councils in Düsseldorf and Dortmund (including a stint as "expert citizen" in the city of Dortmund's Foreign Residents Committee). From 1994 to 1997 she worked as a freelance journalist in Berlin (where her bylines included *Zitty*, *DeutschlandRadio*, *Deutsche Welle Fernsehen*, and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation).

Jesko Fezer

designer and author, is Professor for Experimental Design at the Hochschule für bildende Künste Hamburg. He carries out architectural projects in co-operation with ifau, is co-founder of the bookstore Pro qm, and is part of the exhibition design studio Kooperative für Darstellungspolitik.



Hans Peter Hahn

is a professor of anthropology at Goethe-Universität in Frankfurt am Main. His work focuses on material culture, consumption, and migration. In addition to cooperative projects with international museums, he conducts research on consumer goods and mobile phones in West Africa. His publications range from essays on economic issues to essays about bicycles, plastic sandals, mobile phones, and other everyday goods. He wrote the book *Materielle Kultur: Eine Einführung* (2005) and co-edited the *Handbuch Materielle Kultur* (2014). He is spokesman for the DFG research training group “Wert und Äquivalent” (GRK 1576) and is a member of the academic advisory council for the Humboldt-Forum in Berlin.

Christian Hiller

is a media scholar, curator, and writer. In addition to his work for the Haus der Kulturen der Welt (2014–2016), the Bauhaus Dessau Foundation (2009–2014), and the Hochschule für bildende Kunst Hamburg (2010–2013), he has headed exhibition projects shown in venues like MMCA Seoul, HOK Oslo, MNBA Santiago de Chile, SESC São Paulo, and the Venice Architecture Biennale. He researches and publishes about urbanism, architecture, design, art, performance, film, media, and their societal intersections.

Ina Kerner

is a political scientist who focuses on political theory and an associate member of the Center for Transdisciplinary Gender Studies at Humboldt Universität (HU) in Berlin. From 2009 to 2016, she was a junior professor of diversity politics at the HU, while also conducting fellowships and guest professorships at the University of the Western Cape in Cape Town, the Research Network on Interdependent Inequalities in Latin America *desiguALdades.net* at the Freie Universität Berlin, Goldsmiths University College of London, the Universidade de Brasília, and the Quaid-i-Azam University in Islamabad.

Anh-Linh Ngo

architect, author, and co-editor of *ARCH+*. His work focuses on generating critical awareness of the history of the discipline and an understanding for the socio-political meaning of architecture and the city. In 2015 he co-founded the international initiative *projekt bauhaus*; since 2010 he has been co-curator of the touring exhibition *Post-Oil City*. In 2010 he also became a member of the Advisory Board of the German Institute for Foreign Relations; in the same year he initiated the discourse platform *ARCH+ features*. In 2006/7 he directed *ARCH+*'s contribution to the magazine project of Documenta 12.

Marion von Osten

(born in 1963) focuses on cultural production in postcolonial societies, technologies of the self, and the governance of mobility through her activities as a curator, researcher, and publisher of books and catalogues. She is currently curating the exhibition *Migrant Bauhaus*, which will be on world tour from 2017 to 2019. Between 2006 and 2012, she held a professorship at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, and was Professor for Artistic Practice at HGK Zurich from 1999 to 2006. She is a founding member of the Center for Post-Colonial Knowledge and Culture, Berlin, and Labor k3000 Zurich.

Philipp Oswalt

(born in 1964) is an architect, writer, and professor of architecture theory and design at the University of Kassel, as well as an associated investigator at the Humboldt-Universität Berlin. He works as an editor of *ARCH+* and an architect for OMA in Rotterdam. He was the lead curator of the project *Shrinking Cities* for the Kulturstiftung des Bundes (German Federal Cultural Foundation), and is the co-founder of Urban Catalyst and *Volkspalast 2004*. From 2009 to 2014, he was director of the Bauhaus Dessau Foundation.



Matteo Pasquinelli

(born 1974) is a philosopher whose work occupies the intersection of political philosophy, media theory, and cognitive sciences. He teaches as visiting professor in media theory at the University of Arts and Design, Karlsruhe. He has previously taught at the Pratt Institute in New York. The works he has edited include the anthologies *Alleys of Your Mind: Augmented Intelligence and its Traumas* (2015) and *Algorithms of Capital* (2014).

Ruben Pater

creates visual narratives about geopolitical issues under the name *Untold Stories*. He initiates projects that involve investigative research, followed by visual storytelling techniques aimed at a wide audience, creating new relations between journalism and design. His work *Drone Survival Guide* (2013) received worldwide attention as an educational and activist tool against military drones. Research into disaster communication in times of climate change resulted in the *First Dutch Flood Manual* (2011). *Double Standards* (2012) was an installation and publication about the role of global maritime trade in Somali piracy. His first book, *The Politics of Design* (2016), is global guide for designers toward more responsible visual communication. He received an MA in design from the Sandberg Institute and currently teaches at the Royal Academy of Art in The Hague.

Ethel Baraona Pohl

(born 1970) is a critic, writer, and curator. She is co-founder, with César Reyes Nájera, of dpr-barcelona, an architectural research practice and independent publishing house. Their research and theoretical work has ties with leading publications in architectural discourse, including their work on the editorial team of *Quaderns d'arquitectura i urbanisme*, and as Archis advisors for *Volume* magazine, among others. She was associate curator for the exhibition *Adhocracy*, in 2012, co-curator of the third *Think Space* program with the theme "Money," and recently curated the exhibition *Adhocracy ATHENS* at the Onassis Cultural Center in 2015.

Walter Prigge

(born in 1946) is a sociologist and urbanist. He wrote his habilitation on urbanism and intellectual movements in the twentieth century at the Universität in Frankfurt am Main, and worked there as a lecturer and independent urban researcher. From 1996 to 2011, he worked with the Bauhaus Dessau Foundation on events, exhibitions, and books on architecture, the city, and modernism. These activities and publications covered topics like standardization in the built culture, modernity and the savage, and the periphery and shrinking cities. He became a senior fellow at the Bauhaus Dessau Foundation in 2014.

Stephan Trüby

(born 1970) is a professor of architecture and cultural theory at the Technical University of Munich. He studied architecture at the Architectural Association in London. His most significant academic posts include: visiting professorship in Architecture at the Karlsruhe College of Arts and Design (2007–2009), director of the post-graduate program "Spatial Design" at the Zurich University of Arts (2009–2014), and lecturer at the Graduate School of Design at Harvard University (2012–2014). He was a co-curator of the 2014 Biennale of Architecture in Venice and is a regular contributor to *ARCH+* and *Archithese*.

Karin Wilhelm

(born in 1947) is professor emerita from Technische Universität Braunschweig since 2012, where she was appointed a professor of urbanism and architectural history and theory in 2001. She received her PhD under Heinrich Klotz in Marburg. Her research is dedicated to twentieth-century architecture and urbanization processes, modern architecture, the Bauhaus, and utopias. She focuses on spatial structures and mindset formation in the postwar discourse of internationalization, and on the intellectual history of urban peace models.



About the *project bauhaus* – The international initiative “project bauhaus” was founded in January 2015. Its members include designers, curators and researchers from Europe, the USA and Asia. The platform’s objective is to conduct a lively debate on the currency of the Bauhaus. In the five years leading up to the centenary in 2019, the aim is to take critical stock of the ideas of the Bauhaus. From 2015 to 2019, *project bauhaus* offers a new question to debate every year. We begin in 2015 with the following question: *Can design change society?* In 2016 we ask: *Can the Universal be specific?*

www.projekt-bauhaus.de/en/question/