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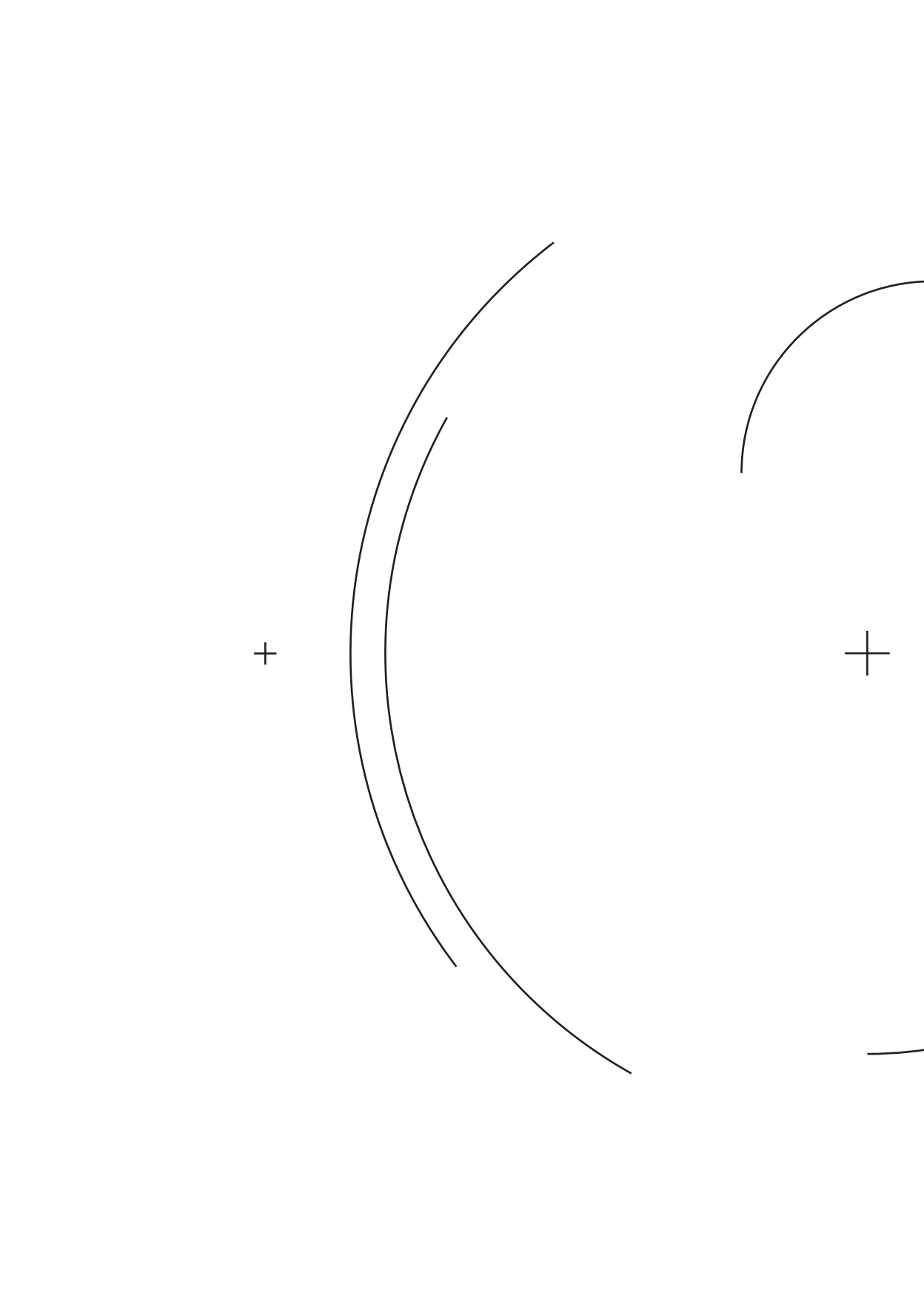

Disegno

Journal of Design Culture
Double-blind peer-reviewed, open access scholarly journal

Aims and Scope

Disegno publishes original research papers, essays, and reviews on all aspects of design cultures. We understand the notion of design culture as resolutely broad: our aim is to freely discuss the designed environment as mutually intertwined strands of sociocultural products, practices, and discourses. This attitude traverses the disciplinary boundaries between art, design, and visual culture and is therefore open to all themes related to sociocultural creativity and innovation. Our post-disciplinary endeavour welcomes intellectual contributions from all members of different design cultures. Besides providing a lively platform for debating issues of design culture, our specific aim is to consolidate and enhance the emerging field of design culture studies in the Central European academia by providing criticism of fundamental biases and misleading cultural imprinting with respect to the field of design.

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THE TOTAL DESIGN OF EVERYDAY LIFE

HISTORICAL IDEALS AND DILEMMAS OF THE GESAMTKUNSTWERK

Anders V. Munch

ABSTRACT

The idea of designing for everyday life on every scale, through objects, spaces, and systems, is central to modern design and architecture. The Italian architect Ernesto Nathan Rogers is often quoted for urging his fellow architects to design everything "from the spoon to the city" (Rogers 1946, 2). For designers and architects of the high modernism of the 1950s and 1960s this motto stood for the pursuit of "total design," in which every detail should be taken care of and aligned according to an overall scheme, from small living units to grand urban plans. The ideal is still very much alive today but is accompanied by the general criticism of modernism: that totalizing schemes confine everyday life in rigid frames and conformity. The idea of total design belongs, however, to a long tradition of thinking in art, design, and architecture. I will discuss key statements from high modernism on total design and total architecture, and revisit earlier expressions of the idea of the Gesamtkunstwerk as a comparable concept in art nouveau and the avant-garde. This broad notion, also called the Total Work of Art, was very productive and widespread, and has been widely discussed. I will discuss some of the dilemmas of this ambition to make comprehensive designs framing the experience of everyday life. This ideal contains some of the most valuable ideas in the history of design and architecture, which we should strive to keep alive whilst remaining aware that they have also been a continuous source of troubles and fierce discussions.

#everyday life, #total design, #Gesamtkunstwerk, #participation, #aestheticisation

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In my book, *The Gesamtkunstwerk in Design and Architecture*, I trace how German composer Richard Wagner's initial ideas developed into ideals in design and architecture through art nouveau and the Bauhaus School as part of the avant-garde. Despite earlier ideas from Gottfried Semper (Munch 2021, 70–71) and similar thoughts by William Morris (Munch 2021, 96–108), Wagner's concept of the Gesamtkunstwerk had little to do with everyday design and architecture. It was the idea to gather all art forms and artistic means to create an "artwork of the future," which could gather the people and merge art and life in the total experience of a new scenic art. Wagner only thought of architecture as a worthy and functional frame of the performance, but his ideas merged with ideas of Semper and Morris and inspired art nouveau artists and architects to combine high arts with the "lesser," decorative arts to make interiors and whole buildings into total works of art. By dissolving the former hierarchy of arts, art nouveau could both distil and condense artistic means into an enclosed space and distribute them in public space, to every corner of everyday life. Both dimensions were important to the following avant-garde artists and modernist architects making experiments across art, design and architecture to shape modern society through spatial organisation and visual communication.

The total design of high modernism inherits this tradition but is to be understood in a slightly different context, as practices became more institutionalised and technocratic than experimental (Tafuri 1976; Munch 2005). In this sense, the concept of Gesamtkunstwerk is more than total design, but some of the utopian and artistic dreams remain and are worth discussing. The moral, societal goal of merging art and life to enrich and improve everyone's everyday life continued but with less explicit understanding of the comprehensive aesthetic organisation of all aspects of life. In the worst cases, the life of users or inhabitants is reduced and confined as an artistic means, as part of the work of art. My focus here is on the dilemmas between the moral goals and the artistic reduction of the plural lifeforms, rather than any full historical explanation. I introduce cases and thoughts of designers and architects as well as artists like Kurt Schwitters and Constant who struggled with these dilemmas in their spatial experiments as labs for societal change.

FIGURE 1. *Nanna Ditzel, exhibition of the Villette-series, Belgium 1965. Photo by Louis Schnakenburg, permission by Nanna Ditzel Design.*

The photo of an exhibition of the Vilette-series furniture modules, made in 1965 by the Danish designer, Nanna Ditzel (fig. 1), provides a first illustration of the dilemma, and one that is closer to our time than art nouveau interiors or avant-garde installations. Ditzel wanted to emancipate people from fixed, bourgeois interior and its conventional ways of social behaviour as well as empower them to build their own, individual environments. The photo shows versatile modules on podiums of different heights showing how they can be used to build your own 3D-living landscape and colour composition. In this entertaining scene, the visitors have arranged themselves for the photographer, but how they might struggle to get to their feet again. After one of Ditzel's first experiments, a joint exhibition at the Museum of Decorative Arts in Copenhagen in 1952, a fellow fashion designer developed a new kind of jump suit that would be more appropriate for such gymnastics (Staunsager and Larsen 2023). When we need to dress differently, however, to suit the new total design, it is not just "emancipation," but a dictate of changing dress code and behaviour. The Danish architect, Arne Karlsen was critical of the trend of low furniture, pillows on the floor or hanging shells, as they "[…] are not just incompatible with the difference in age of generations and gymnastic abilities, but they act violently against everything else we express ourselves through. Not just against our ordinary, social interactions, but also against their material manifestations. Dress for example" (Karlsen 1965, 82). Of course, you can

read this as just a bourgeois defence of conventional manners and dressing, which Ditzel and others wanted to challenge and promote a more playful style. But their emancipatory experiments did create new bodily and social demands. The ambitions might be sound, but the actual framing threatened to reduce the inhabitants to the mere means or material for the full staging of the idea. The desire to design new forms of use might in radical attempts implicate designing people as new users.

Another challenge to this discussion is that the term "Gesamtkunstwerk" has been used rather loosely in the historical literature to refer to many kinds and aspects of synthesis and comprehensiveness. The concept itself invites rather sweeping outlines of mergers of any kind of art forms or creative practice. The exhibition *Der Hang zum Gesamtkunstwerk* (Szeemann 1983) showed a stunning historical array of hybrid forms including examples ranging from poetry, dance, theatre, decoration, installation, and happenings to monumental buildings, and even included idealistic organisations as the Olympic Games and Red Cross. The catalogue contained a philosophical and political critique of the theories of Richard Wagner and his followers but included no specific discussions of design and architecture. The same goes for a later wave of volumes on the Gesamtkunstwerk around 2010, which came mostly from studies of literature, music, and art history. Of course, design and architecture were part of the cases, but the critique was mostly theoretical (Finger and Follett 2011; Roberts 2011). Only Juliett Koss' *Modernism After Wagner* took a closer look at architecture around 1900, and with the main focus on theatre buildings, her critical reading traced a Wagnerian heritage in architecture (2010). Mark Wigley (1998a) published a short, interesting discussion of "Whatever Happened to Total Design?," covering art nouveau, avant-garde, and more recent architecture, but without engaging in the Wagnerian heritage or using the term Gesamtkunstwerk. My book on *The Gesamtkunstwerk in Design and Architecture* (Munch 2021) presents the history of the Wagnerian idea and how it merges into the prehistory of modern design and architecture, from Bayreuth to Bauhaus.

The fear of totalitarianism lurks in the criticism of total design and total architecture. The German art theoretician Bazon Brock tried to distinguish the concepts of the total work of art, total art, and totalitarian art in the 1983 catalogue, but did not distinguish them fully (Szeemann 1983). It is certainly important to see the comprehensive use of art and design by totalitarian regimes as part of this history and remember the lessons of *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* about how human reason inverts and becomes inhuman (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002). But if we demonise all attempts to embrace the total scope of modern life by design as totalitarian, we miss the positive contributions to modern culture from this tradition, and fail to build on the intentions, logics, and critical experiences of the Gesamtkunstwerk. I hope to strike a balance between acknowledging the good intentions and valuable solutions on

the one hand and the pitfalls and unseen consequences on the other. Central to the discussion that follow is the question of how people are seen as part of the total scope, as both aims and means.

THE TOTAL SCOPE OF HIGH MODERNISM

Setting off from the period in which modernist architecture realised some of its most ambitious projects, we find a motto parallel to Ernesto Nathan Rogers's from the Finnish-American architect, Eero Saarinen (1962, 5), who wanted to design everything from "ashtray to city plan" and explained furthermore:

Perhaps the most important thing I learned from my father was that in any design problem one should seek the solution in terms of the next largest thing. If the problem is an ashtray, then the way it relates to a table will influence its design. If the problem is a chair, then its solution must be found in the way it relates to the room cube. If it is a building, the townscape will affect the solution. (Saarinen 1962, 11)

This seems like very basic knowledge in modern design and found its full expression in the TWA-terminal, its sculptural, concrete volumes and nice ashtrays (Munch 2012). Interestingly, however, he related this advice to his father, the Finnish art nouveau architect, Eliel Saarinen, who made spectacular, decorative designs for buildings and homes as clear examples of the art nouveau ideal of the Gesamtkunstwerk.

In the 1950s Walter Gropius expressed the same idea with the concept of "total architecture," mentioned in the title of his book from 1955: "The realisation of the stated goal of a 'total' architecture that encompasses the entire visible world, from simple utensils to the complex city, still requires new experiments and the search for new truths in collaboration with artistically like-minded people" (Gropius 1988, 192). While Saarinen stood as sole maestro or *souverain* sculptor of his monumental buildings, especially the TWA Terminal, Gropius invites other kinds of artistic collaborators to work on the whole "visible world". Together with his work as school director and professor, this was preparing designers and architects for joint assignments. In *Vision in Motion* (1947), László Moholy-Nagy already stated how these Bauhaus ideas not only concerned the physical structures on any scale, but also forms of living: "There is design in organisation of emotional experiences, in family life, in labour relations, in city planning, in working together as civilised human beings. Ultimately all problems of design merge into one great problem: 'design for life'" (Moholy-Nagy 1965, 42). In line with this understanding of design as covering all shaping, framing, and organizing of public and private life, Moholy-Nagy urged all people to act as designers. These thoughts of Gropius and Moholy-Nagy are clearly the legacy of the Bauhaus:

During the all too few years of its existence, the Bauhaus embraced the whole range of visual art: architecture, planning, painting, sculpture, industrial design and stage work. The aim of the Bauhaus was to find a new and powerful working correlation of all the processes of artistic creation to culminate in a new equilibrium with our visual environment. (Gropius 1965, 87)

FROM INTERIORS TO SOCIETY

Despite Gropius ignoring any predecessors and maintaining a strong influence over the writing of the history of the Bauhaus as pioneering, it is clear to us today that not all their ideas and experiments started there, as *Before Bauhaus* (Maciuika 2005) and other recent research has shown (Alexander 2017). In 1911 the spokesman of the German Werkbund, Hermann Muthesius, resumed the initial development of this preceding organisation in the lecture "Where Do We Stand?":

What was originally a movement within the decorative arts became a general movement aimed at reforming our entire culture of expression. […] "From sofa-cushion to city building"—this is how one might describe the trajectory followed by the applied art-architectural movement over the past fifteen years. (Posener 1964, 188)

Here we see the earliest version of a motto in line with Rogers and Saarinen, mentioning neither spoons nor ashtrays but cushions as the point of departure. This statement, however, is slightly different because Muthesius also indicates a development towards city planning. But the Werkbund still embraced design of everyday items and interiors, so it expresses the same basic idea.

The Belgian designer and Werkbund member Henry Van de Velde is a perfect illustration of this broad spectrum of design for everyday experience, both because of his early artistic work with embroidery and his later work with industrial design, interiors for shops, and architecture. The complete design (including furniture and fittings) of his own *Villa Bloemenwerf* (1895), outside Brussels, was inspired by William Morris. The creative impulse of music is also visible in a photo of the interior through a score by Wagner on the grand piano (fig. 2). The total design is complete with his design of the dress of his wife Maria. Her "tea gown" was designed according

FIGURE 2. *Photo of Maria Sèthe, wife of Henry van de Velde, dressed in a "tea gown" designed by Van de Velde by the grand piano in Villa Bloemenwerf, 1895, Uccles/Brussels, designed by Van de Velde.*

to the life and gender reform ideas of the period, liberating women from the tight, torturous corsets. We can hope Maria was also involved in the concept for and the sewing of the dress. If not, her role is somewhat reduced to the wearer of this part of the total design, a mute extra on the stage.

The German designer Peter Behrens made a more far-reaching example of the total design for everyday experience in the Werkbund. Like Van de Velde, he was trained in painting, but took the task of designing his own villa in the Darmstadt artists' colony, Mathildehöhe, which opened in 1901. Here artists and industrialists would try to merge art and life, preparing the collaboration of Werkbund, which was established in 1907. As chief architect of AEG, he later expanded the design scope to cover everything from the logo and ads to products and buildings. In this role, he both designed condensed brand spaces for AEG in shops, shows, and factories and distributed the designed objects to many homes and public spaces. He created a corporate identity for the workers and other employees through buildings and graphic design of letters and posters, where they could perform in line with the brand. This remains today as one of the most widespread types of total design in everyday life, not only for corporate employees, but also for consumers "living the brand." And it might be difficult to distinguish whether consumers use the brands as means to fulfil their lifestyle needs, or if the brands use the consumers as means of branding. Their employees are at least payed to perform.

The most elaborated and comprehensive case of total design of everyday life conceived by Werkbund-members, however, is the garden city of Hellerau, planned and built from 1906 for the workers of Deutsche Werkstätten furniture factory, just north of Dresden. The city plan and the houses were designed by a board of artists and architects, who also designed the furniture made at the factory. It is a very strong example of how industrial leaders tried to use art and architecture to improve and enrich living conditions for their employees. It followed paternalistic ideals of social responsibility, was also beneficial for cultural education and encouraging loyalty. Even the cultural entertainment of the citizens was designed and staged at the festival house, where the inhabitants trained rhythmic exercises and took part in music, dance, and stage works. The Swiss choreographer Emile Jacques-Dalcroze, who was in charge of the Festspiel-Haus, stated his overall goal for scenic art in his seminal book from 1907 on rhythm and bodily movement: "Our entire life becomes a work of art, one that is quite simple despite all of its diversity. The purpose of life cannot only be to produce works of art, it must also be to appropriate it in all particulars and relationships, in short to elevate life itself to a work of art" (Jacques-Dalcroze 1907, 152). This expresses the ideal of removing any borders between art and life that we also meet in other radical experiments of the total work of art. But it does not investigate how to live in art or as art. In the pedagogy of his rhythmic gymnastics, you must be trained, not only to perform, but

also to optimally appreciate scenic and musical art. Is this then for the sake of life or for the sake of art? In the best cases it might be for both but few of us can claim to "elevate" our life to a work of art.

COLLABORATING ON THE ARTWORK OF THE FUTURE

It might be hard to imagine the heavy institution of the Bayreuth Festival and its conservative tradition linked up with this more progressive line of modern design and architecture. But Richard Wagner's ideas sprang out of utopian socialism. He envisioned *The Artwork of the Future* in 1849 as a fully collaborative effort, across all branches of art, made collectively with all kinds of artist and with the emotional participation of the audience. The mutual experience should give birth to a new culture, a new life. The ideas of the Gesamtkunstwerk were written down during the failed revolution in Dresden in 1848 and under Wagner's later political exile in Zurich. Here he also expressed his own scenic vision in a letter to his fried from the revolution, Theodor Uhlig, in 1850:

Here […] I would, in some beautiful meadow outside the city, erect a primitive theatre made of boards and beams according to my designs and equip it only with the scenery and machinery necessary to be able to perform Siegfried. *[…] all who announce their arrival and travel to Zurich for that purpose will be sure to be admitted, and, like all other admissions, it will of course be free! Once everything was arranged satisfactorily, I would, under these circumstances, enact three performances of* Siegfried *in a week: After the third performance, the theatre is to be torn down and my score burned.* (Habel 1985, 13)

This radical experience should only live on through the impact on the participants and their memories. In the end, however, the score was not burned and was expanded to the four operas of *The Nibelungen Ring*.

Radical ideas of participation in total design can be mirrored in these ambitions of shaping a new community through collective artistic experience. The most holistic ideas today of the user as co-designer and part of the total experience echo Bauhaus thoughts on total design. And they go further back to ideas of the Gesamtkunstwerk from Morris, Wagner and art nouveau artists. The "audience" was part of the artistic material for the total experience, a collective work of art. Going further than Wagner, the legacy of Bauhaus has influenced not only artists, but according to Moholy-Nagy, taught every user and viewer to "think in relationships," to connect thinking, feeling, and acting (1965). This is also part of modern pedagogy, such as Montessori and Fröbel approaches, as the means to shape and creatively engage responsible citizens. But to what extent did participants need to have received prior training or even aesthetic literacy to be able to participate in such a collective artistic experience, to be formed as part of the artistic "material"?

The participation of citizens was an explicit part of the *Scope of Total Architecture* for Gropius in 1955: "Because what we need is not only the creative artist, but a responsive audience and how are we going to get it?" He continues suggesting a way to develop and educate a responsive audience of engaged citizens: "It means, in short, that we must start at the kindergarten to make children playfully reshape their immediate environment. For participation is the key word in planning. Participation sharpens individual responsibility, the prime factor in making a community coherent, in developing group vision and pride in the self-created environment." (Gropius 1955, 177) Again, this is a very admirable ambition which has also been part of the public education agendas of various welfare states. But we need to be cautious about children and other citizens being aligned to the aesthetics of the planners and turned into material or tools for processes (Munch 2016).

DESIGNING LIFE OR PEOPLE?

There has been general criticism of many of the utopian ideas of the Gesamtkunstwerk and especially the shortcomings of the singular experiments. This criticism was also part of the tradition itself, as the ideas were often sharpened by critique, as exemplified by Moholy-Nagy (1925, 15):

What we need is not the "Gesamtkunstwerk," alongside and separated from which life flows by, but a synthesis of all the vital impulses spontaneously forming itself into the all-embracing Gesamtwerk (life) which abolishes all isolation, in which all individual accomplishments proceed from a biological necessity and culminate in a universal necessity.

Here, Moholy-Nagy not only highlights but even strengthens of the original ideal. He deconstructs the heavy term, Gesamtkunstwerk, which seems to burden him, rather than the artistic synthesis or the utopian vision itself (Botar 2010). Wagner himself would also speak of a union of art and life building on human needs and reaching for universal necessity. In fact, the word "necessity" is central to Wagner's rhetoric, as he wanted the merger of art forms to happen out of "necessary" artistic and historical developments to "redeem" both art and society (Kunze 1983; Munch 2021, 62). And he critiqued the singular art forms for having developed arbitrarily and therefore falling into empty virtuosity and decay. Moholy-Nagy emphasises a turn from material manifestations towards a merger in the dynamics of life. This is, however, also how Éva Forgács interprets the general development of the basic ideas in Bauhaus, from the initial merger of art and craft in objects and interiors towards a merger of skills and understandings in the education of the individual designer as full human being (Forgács 1997, 142).

We find a more disturbing critique of the dilemmas in the ideas of the Gesamtkunstwerk in the writings and projects of the German artist and graphic designer Kurt Schwitters. He appropriated the idea of the Gesamtkunstwerk through his own avantgarde concept of "Merz." His writings on Merz in poetry, design, and city planning are among the most elaborate and determined inquiries into the ideals and dilemmas of the Gesamtkunstwerk as an attempt to frame everyday experience. His autobiographical statement in *Sturm-Bilderbuch IV* states the central role of the Wagnerian tradition very clearly:

I developed Merz, initially as the sum of individual artistic genres, Merz-painting, Merz-poetry. The Merz-theatre pushes further, past different artistic genres to their fusion into the Gesamtkunstwerk. My last aspiration is to unite art and non-art in the Merz-Total World Image [Merz-Gesamtweltbild]. (Schwitters 2021, 66—67)

Schwitters began his Merzbau as a Dadaist assemblage of everyday objects, waste, and newspaper cuttings that mirrored life comprehensively. As they grew over the walls of his studio, he began to encapsulate them in more constructivist, white surfaces to shape the whole room—and neighbouring rooms as well (Elger 1999). Schwitters, however, was very cautious to include the dynamics and heterogeneities in his experiments on Merz, always building on existing parts and words, aspects and views of the world.

His continuous, critical thoughts and explorations point toward, what I would call a "critical Gesamtkunstwerk." In his journal *Merz 1* (1923) he recognises the immense task: "But if we want to shape the entire world as an art-work one day, we will have to reckon with the possibility that there are massive complexes in the world that are unknown to us or that we cannot control because they are beyond our command" (Schwitters 2021, 136). Earlier, in *Ararat*, 1921, he even stated the impossibility of creating the total design as a work of art: "Perhaps one day, we will have an opportunity to witness the creation of a Merz-Gesamtkunstwerk too. We cannot create it ourselves for we too would be mere parts, indeed no more than material" (Schwitters 2021, 76). To me Schwitters is a very important reminder of both the importance of transgressing the borders of art and design to grasp the totality of the space and the full situation of life, but also of recalling that with our fellow citizens we are all part of and the medium of the life we want to design (Munch 2021, 319–333).

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE GESAMTKUNSTWERK?

You could say that the Wagnerian visions of the Gesamtkunstwerk were so criticised and diluted during the first half of the twentieth century that they faded away and in the end lost their original sense. Although this was the case, it is surprising to see ideas, references or just fragments

keep popping up from this tradition as a kind of underground current. For example, the Dutch situationist artist Constant placed in this tradition his grand project about a new kind of playful life, which was performed in a superstructure hovering above automatised factories, and which he discussed in *Unitary Urbanism* (1960):

I have excluded everything that prevents a city from becoming a work of art. Nonetheless, New Babylon is just as real as any work of art. In essence it is the realisation of an old dream, a dream that figures in all tendencies, all movements, all endeavours in the history of art this century, and which, in its simplest form, one could refer to by its Wagnerian name: Das Gesamtkunstwerk, the total work of art. (Wigley 1998b, 135)

What then was his vision for this new life in the megacity as an open playground structure? Which kinds of life forms and activities should it frame? "Obviously, it will be a creative activity that replaces work. The fulfilment of life lies in creativity" (Wigley 1998b, 133). This is no doubt the ultimate emancipation or even redemption: to leave the hard work to the machines and have all the time in the world to play. This new frame would be a playful urban structure in which we would have to be creative to fit in. We would have to be artists and designers of our own life and share the understanding of art, design and play as fulfilment of the wish to live and flourish in the nomadic universe of New Babylon.

This brings us back to *Vision in Motion* by Moholy-Nagy. "In fact one could say that all creative work today is part of a gigantic, indirect training program to remodel through vision in motion the modes of perception and feeling and to prepare for new qualities of living" (Moholy-Nagy 1965, 58). This was his goal of his "design for life" that was quoted above. I think, this is a better way to articulate the reason of aesthetic education of the public. The teaching at his Institute of Design in Chicago trained, according to his book, designers to educate ordinary people to become designers themselves and form their own life (Mansbach 1980). But again, is there no exemption from the prescription to be creative or even a designer, and thereby participate in the design of everyday experience?

György Kepes, who was one of Moholy-Nagy's followers at the Institute of Design in Chicago, edited more volumes on new perceptions of the environment and vision in motion. In *The Man-Made Object*, modern media society was interpreted by Marshal McLuhan in quite similar terms: art is transformed through participation and turned toward the perception of environments.

The art object is replaced by participation in the art process. This is the essential meaning of electric circuitry and responsive environments. The artist leaves the Ivory Tower for the Control Tower, and abandons the shaping of art

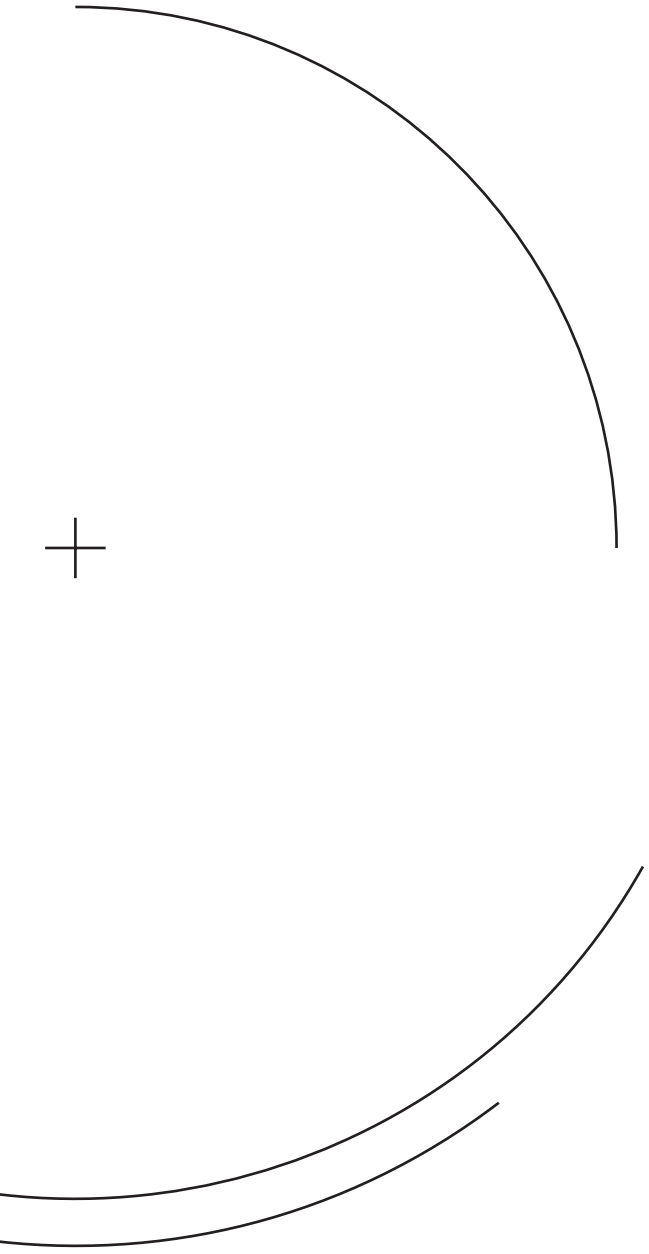
objects in order to programme the environment itself as work of art. It is human consciousness itself that is the great artifice of man. The making and shaping of consciousness from moment to moment is the supreme artistic task of all individuals. (McLuhan 1966, 94)

Here he links media art and digital design on the heritage of the Gesamtkunstwerk and the dilemmas of total design for everyday life. Human consciousness itself is here designed and shaped through participation in responsive media environments, either physical or digital (Busbea 2020; Munch and Jensen in Fallan et al. 2023). The concept of "responsive environment" grasps the dilemma Schwitters identified: not only do we shape objects and spaces, we are shaped ourselves as part of the artistic material or medium. But where is the critical agency, when "all individuals" are "making and shaping" consciousness in this media loop? Is it with the artist in the Control Tower?

McLuhan might help us to see how the dilemmas of total design for everyday life have migrated into media technology and the contemporary image economy, and how the issues of educating citizens for participation or shaping consciousness now follow branding and lifestyle media rather than artistic ideals and designer visions. In his critique of the development and role of design and architecture, the American art historian Hal Foster in 2003 made the historical verdict: "the old project to reconnect Art and Life, endorsed in different ways by Art Nouveau, the Bauhaus, and many other movements, was eventually accomplished, but according to the spectacular dictates of the culture industry, not the liberatory ambitions of the avant-garde. And a primary form of this perverse reconciliation in our time is design" (Foster 2003, 19). We must carefully consider where the game is changing, and how the ideal of educating people to take part in the total design of everyday experience turns into the moulding of them as receptive consumers of the creative industry.

The many quotations I have covered articulate and exemplify some basic dilemmas regarding the good intentions and admirable ideals of all-embracing design of everyday life that sadly sometimes turn into the opposite, the neglect of individuals and the multiplicity of life. I hope to have shown that the Gesamtkunstwerk-tradition contains important cases and texts to take into critical consideration on this. The initial ideal was to embrace all perceptions of the real world and suggest unity in its diversity, not to reduce diversity into a uniform image of society. I propose the concept of the "pluriverse," as outlined by Arturo Escobar, as a productive reminder of this challenge: "Today, difference is embodied for me most powerfully in the concept of the pluriverse, *a world where many worlds fit*, as the Zapatista put it with stunning clarity" (Escobar 2017, xvi). Part of the initial ideal was also to invite people to engage and participate, but the dilemma is:

how to empower them for this collaboration without moulding them as a prerequisite for a planned result. How can we strengthen the aesthetical perception and creative skills of citizens without just shaping their taste and attention as part of the aestheticisation of market, media and politics? How to save critical agency, dissensus, as part of collaboration on the commons, keeping in mind the many perceptions of the sensible? (Rancière 2004)



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