

# NACHKURS

## The changing role of design in society in the post-Bauhaus educational models

**Antal Lakner**

Doctoral Dissertation

Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design Budapest  
Doctoral School  
Art Science (Design Theory)  
PhD Division of Design Culture Studies

Supervisor:  
József Tillmann PhD, habil.  
university professor  
Budapest, November, 2024.

### THESES

1.

In his Chicago schools, László Moholy-Nagy sought to reconcile the nonprofit agenda of design's social mission – derived from the holistic, life-centered design principles of the Bauhaus –, with the expectations of the advanced, profit-oriented consumer society of United States. This incongruity was “resolved” by WWII, as the hinterland experiments of the School of Design/Institute of Design to alleviate the war crisis the way for the beginnings of experimental and social design.

2.

The Center for Advanced Visual Studies at MIT, founded by György Kepes, sought to fulfil the social mission of the Bauhaus by creating a community art based on the reconciliation of humanism and the technological-digital age. Criticized in its time due to its perceived proximity to the military-industrial complex, the CAVS successfully implemented its educational program aimed at integrating science and art, ensuring its creative autonomy and social agency, and by developing interdisciplinary public and media art education practices based on new technical media, it served as a blueprint to many new media centres to come

**Lakner Antal**  
Doktori disszertáció  
Moholy-Nagy Művészeti Egyetem  
Budapest, 2024. november

**NACHKURS**  
A design társadalmi szerepének  
változása a Bauhaus utáni  
oktatási modellek tükrében

3.

The Black Mountain College, founded by John Andrew Rice, synthesized American pragmatism with Bauhaus ideas and functioned as a creative parallel society. The realization of their social goals was expected of creative individuals who would develop through experimentation and shape the society of the future. The social impact of the BMC, which pursued the humanization of science through the cooperative activities of scientists and artists, was achieved through interdisciplinary, autonomous, aesthetic-social projects and the subsequent activities of alumni artists who later became catalysts for the creation of neo-avant-garde art forms and social reform movements.

4.

In the context of the Cold War of innovation and the German economic boom, the Hochschule für Gestaltung Ulm, which started under the rectorship of Max Bill and continued the functionalist-industrial legacy of the Bauhaus, successfully reconciled the objective of modernizing and democratizing society with the needs of modern consumers, but also with the requirements of production technology and the market. For a decade and a half, the HfG Ulm has had a decisive social impact beyond the mass-production of functionalistic, technical products, by creating a professional industrial design education and, through this, a culture of objects for modern lifestyles.

5.

Under the dictatorship of the GDR, the Bauhaus, based on its functionalist, welfare-oriented heritage, transformed an industrial, minimalist aesthetic program of forms similar to that of Ulm into a design practice that supported a material culture that promoted social equality. Under the direction of Martin Kelm, the Amt für Industrielle Formgestaltung implemented a particular state functionalism, as opposed to a free-market model based on planned obsolescence. With its AIF centralized design and production model, it was able to stabilize an affordable, standardized, obsolescence-free permanent product range and the resulting everyday object culture for many decades.

6.

In his anti-consumerist and anti-industrial reform program, Victor Papanek redefined the social function of design and its education, based on ethical principles and real human needs. He was able to successfully channel the debate on the social role of design into the discourse of the counter-cultural movements of the time, and thus played a significant role in enabling design to become a socio-political tool. Papanek extended his egalitarian, necessity-driven design agenda to the global periphery, where he developed a decentralized, local, interventionist social design.

**Lakner Antal**

Doktori disszertáció  
Moholy-Nagy Művészeti Egyetem  
Budapest, 2024. november

**NACHKURS**

A design társadalmi szerepének  
változása a Bauhaus utáni  
oktatási modellek tükrében

7.

At the HfBK Hamburg college, under the leadership of Jesko Fezer, the Öffentliche Gestaltungsberatung (ÖGB), Papanek's interventionist social design program was updated as a participatory educational practice focusing on the emerging problems of the urban population of the present. In the shared design autonomy of ÖGB, they engage in a direct social design practice using participatory and reparative solutions through the cooperative integration of lay users.

8.

At the Design Academy Eindhovenben (DAE), in response to the problems of post-industrial societies, a programme synthesizing life-centered and industrial design has been successfully implemented, whereby courses have been shifted from material-centered design disciplines towards interdisciplinary design horizons that address problems in a complex way. Dutch conceptual design, which also integrates an autonomous approach to art and can be understood as inverse functionalism, has played a catalytic role in transforming Eindhoven from the former largest industrial complex in the Netherlands into the center of postindustrial Dutch autonomous design culture.

9.

The historical evolution of design's role in society, as shown in the design education case studies in this thesis, has been determined by the mediating role of design between the rational imperatives of mass production and technological development, and the biological and spiritual needs and desires of its consumers, in addition to the society-shaping goals of its actors. The essential aspect of design education is its relation to society, and therefore the exploration of relevant social contexts and the definition of social goals are inevitable when designing an educational program. In the schools analyzed in this thesis, there is a continuous repositioning of the relationship to science and technological development, to the human way of life, to the autonomy of designers and to environmental problems. The lessons of these changes can help to shape the future, rethought role of design and design education in society in a responsible way. The erosion of techno-optimistic social utopias, the emergence of polycrisis in the wake of global crises such as the pandemic, the economic and ecological crisis, or the global decline of literacy culture, are open up new horizons for autonomous design. The designer, who has evolved into an ethical-socially responsible and autonomous social shaper, can find his task in the development and education of a cooperative product management method and an integrative, participative, reparative, revitalizing, conceptual design culture, which is intended to shape and save post-industrial society.