



*farewell, Art*  
Bureau d'études

## **Inventing an Art School in a World in Ruins**

*“Today's artist lives in a dissolute, ruleless age. [...] The old forms are broken, the old world is shaken, the old human spirit is overturned and in full-scale mutation. We float in ignorance of a new order”* (Gropius, 1919: 59). This statement by Bauhaus' founding architect, Walter Gropius, was made in a world in ruins: the nascent Weimar Republic just after WWI. Gropius' words resonate with the uncertainty of our time, as the Anthropocene, with its procession of collapse events, is radically disrupting the conditions of life and modes of production that have prevailed since (at least) the second quarter of the 18th century, when the 'fossil economy' was invented in the British Empire (Malm, 2020). Responding to the social and cultural disarray in the aftermath of WWI, artist Franz Marc noted that *“we waver above nothingness. Now we have to create, to fill the world in order to be able to live”* (Marc, 1915: 26). A century ago, it was possible to imagine a new order.

No similar promise of a new, different world is apparent today. It seems that our imagination can only extend up to the understanding that the world that is to be – a world coming from the past, from a long history of capitalist extraction – may not be habitable for us humans. Climate change has already brought about scarcity of water and food, alongside depletion of oil and gas reserves, intensification of biopolitical control, and policies of austerity worldwide. More than that, what is currently taking place is not just the demise of capitalism on earth (and a stimulation for a development of extractivist politics on the Moon and asteroids), but a change in biogeochemical cycles and the sixth mass extinction of species: events without precedent in known human history, equivalent, in scale and intensity, with events that reshaped the earth in Cretaceous non-human time.

What are the stakes for contemporary art in view of these dizzying, menacing visions'? If the Bauhaus was an attempt to imagine and invent a new school for the (then) future, a school capable of responding to the challenges of an era of destruction and negation of possibility, how can we imagine a similar school today, in the midst of uncertainty? What school of art would allow us to inhabit a world without oil and coal, and without the energy sources and harvesting technologies (shale oil, ethanol, nuclear fission, solar, wind, tidal or hydroelectric power plants) that rely on near-depleted mineral resources?

The school we are writing about, the one we have tried to explore, will set out to make the world a habitable place during and after the collapse. It is not guided by an agenda of salvation, in the way that architecture was, for Gropius, the synthesis that would achieve unity of the arts, disseminated in multiple disciplines, and of the people, torn apart by the war, by assembling them all in a new *cathédrale*.

The school of the arts of the future, the school of the future through the arts, is dispersed. It is heterogeneous and lacks a programme. It is not necessarily made up of ‘professional’ artists; in other words, it does not belong to capitalism; it cannot exist within capitalism. Rather, it stems from an understanding of art as movement, formative of what does not yet exist. It resembles the composite and heterogeneous character of today's landscapes – aggregates of all places, ruins, memories, images, symbols, and the administrative devices and infrastructures of capitalism.

Here are some ideas that took shape in the course of our field investigation and our meetings with different people across Scotland between 24 February and 8 March 2020. The following list does not claim to be exhaustive; it only aims to update and put into work tracks of anticipation of the arts and schools of arts of the future. It does this by following three axes of investigation: *improving the landscape of possibilities*; *imagining commoning after capitalism*; and *making experiences of the multiple regimes of time and memories*.

How human and non-human societies will respond to the earth-systemic transformations that are underway is uncertain. From the point of view of art and its teaching, our approach is to prepare for a future that is largely unknown, and to explore the potential role and directions of the arts through this transformation.

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