



**FROM THE WIENER WERKSTÄTTE TO CLIMATE MODERNITY  
THE MAK AS A MUSEUM OF ACTIVE HOPE**

**Essay**

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The MAK program in 2021 will focus sharply on the Wiener Werkstätte and Climate Modernity; this emphasis is not coincidental as they are closely related. What had initially been planned as a sequence, i.e. to present the projects on the Wiener Werkstätte before the VIENNA BIENNALE FOR CHANGE 2021 on PLANET LOVE & CLIMATE CARE, became entwined by rescheduling of exhibitions due to Covid-19. As a consequence, the first major exhibition on *THE WOMEN ARTISTS OF THE WIENER WERKSTÄTTE* will open only a few weeks before the VIENNA BIENNALE and both will then be on view in parallel. The new SHOWROOM WIENER WERKSTÄTTE in dialogue with star designer Michael Anastassiades will be launched directly after the end of the VIENNA BIENNALE and in December 2021 the largest exhibition ever on Josef Hoffmann will start under the promising motto “Progress Through Beauty.” As could be expected, this exhibition will also focus on the Wiener Werkstätte. Maybe this shuffle effect caused by Covid-19 is for the best as it makes us aware of how much we can learn, on the one hand, from the past for shaping the future and, on the other hand, from our work on the future for a better understanding of the past. After all, learning is never a one-way road, especially not when a museum is concerned. This also applies to the relationship between cultural institutions as is shown, for example, by the cooperation between the MAK and its partner institutions in the context of the VIENNA BIENNALE FOR CHANGE.

What can already be revealed from the intensive preparation of these ambitious projects is that they all emphasize the essential role of designers, architects, and artists from the avant-garde, be it Viennese Modernism 100 years ago or Climate Modernity, which will keep us deeply occupied for many years to come. The Wiener Werkstätte, whose archives are preserved by the MAK, stressed the importance of sustainability, high-quality craftsmanship and longevity of products, local production, and social responsibility—values that, *mutatis mutandis*, are also of utmost importance in Climate Modernity. As a result, the Wiener Werkstätte perceived itself as a reform program in which art was given the pivotal role of bringing beauty into people’s everyday lives through articles of daily use with high-

quality design and, consequently, empowering the people in this way. Climate Modernity is also a reform program towards a quality society and it strongly depends on a new avant-garde of designers, architects, and artists.

2021 will be a key year for setting the course for an ecologically and socially sustainable future in the Digital Age. Never since 1945 has the future been so open, never before has it been within our power to change so much in a positive direction. After Trump's departure, the way is clear for the USA to play a crucial role in shaping Climate Modernity. With the Biden administration, the EU led by President of the European Commission von der Leyen will receive support for the necessary transformation of economy and society in Climate Modernity. The roll out of the vaccination in large parts of the world finally promises a stepwise return to normality. But to which normality? The normality as it was before Covid-19—with its grave ecological and social aberrations? Or a fundamentally different, future-proof normality?

When we hopefully finally manage to control Covid-19 in 2021 and are once again able to fully look ahead into the non-pandemic future, the outlines of Climate Modernity will become evident with piercing clarity. After all, post-Covid-19 will not be a time of *business as usual*. In the last two decades, we have already been living in a new modernity which I have referred to as the Digital Modernity since its driving force was digitalization. However, all digital innovations will ultimately be of no use to humankind if we don't manage to overcome climate change and the overall ecological crisis linked to it. Modernity implies that we are challenged to fundamentally set the course for the future (and, consequently, we will be judged by future generations and future history books if and how well we have succeeded). In the coming years the focus will have to lie on transforming our Digital Modernity into a **Climate Modernity which is set out to be ecologically and socially sustainable**.

The **transition from Digital Modernity to the here proposed Climate Modernity** implies a clear shift of focus. It is no longer paramount to enforce digital innovations in all economic sectors and areas of life at all costs according to the motto "Move Fast and Break Things," but rather to secure long-term quality of life of humans and other species in times of rapid climate change and dramatic loss of ecosystems and biodiversity. By now, hardly anybody denies the necessity of a radical departure from present industrialization based on fossil fuels. The crucial questions are: "How can we achieve this great transformation and how do we want to shape Climate Modernity?" This includes combining digitalization and ecology by predominantly using the innovation potential of digitalization for overcoming the climate crisis and the overall ecological crisis.

For Climate Modernity, the following **guidelines**, among others, will be decisive:

1. It is beyond dispute that we need technological progress for our eco-social viability. However, from painful experience we know that the efficiency gains

achieved by this progress often lead to an increase in use and, consequently, the ecological advantage is lost (so-called rebound effect). Technological progress alone will therefore not be able to solve the climate crisis and overall ecological crisis for us. We will rather have to make use of **all our leverage** to decarbonize the world and make it climate neutral and to protect the biosphere and its diversity of species on a wide scale. As an eco-dictatorship (as it is, for example, developing in China by means of the social credit system) is not compatible with democratic principles, democracies require other paths of shaping an eco-social future.

2. Only focusing on decarbonization and climate neutrality and blinding out social aspects would be a capital mistake. After all, ecological progress fundamentally depends on a **reduction in social inequality**. As in education, nobody must be left behind when it comes to shaping Climate Modernity. The required radical transformation of economy and society can only be successful if as many people as possible are on board.
3. This is linked to the question of **climate justice**: Industrialization in the past 200 years was mostly a success story of those nations referred to as the Global North. These nations owe their level of development to their high carbon footprint while many of the socially and economically disadvantaged countries of the Global South are particularly strongly affected by climate change (by now, of course, China and other emerging nations have become major producers of carbon dioxide). Therefore, rich countries in particular bear the responsibility of helping those population groups located in the Global South who, through no fault of their own, are most exposed to the consequences of climate change.
4. “Après moi, le deluge” is not a suitable motto for being human in a responsible way. We have no right of depriving future generations of their possibilities and opportunities. According to the **Seventh Generation Principle** we should always take into consideration what impact our actions will have on the seventh generation and beyond. If we think seven generations (= ca. 200 years) ahead we will begin to understand how much responsibility is placed on us, our children, and children’s children to hand over a flourishing (rather than burning) planet to humans and other species in 2222.
5. Additionally, the perspective counts: **Humans are not the measure of all things** on planet Earth. It is precisely the Covid-19 pandemic that has reminded us in a rather painful way of how strongly our civilization is entwined with animals and plants and nature in general. The quality of the future from the perspective of humankind will fundamentally depend on how we fight the extinction of species and sustainably protect the biosphere—bearing in mind that we share the Earth and its treasures and beauty with other natural species such as animals and plants with dignity (and also make this coexistence possible for species created by us such as AI).
6. An economical handling of the resources of the Earth requires **humbleness and the art of moderation**. After all, the Earth is not an inexhaustible source of resources that can be exploited infinitely, but rather a living

organism that has to be cared for with dedication. The more honest our humbleness and the more noticeable our affection towards the Earth, the more quality of life we will receive in return. And vice versa, every mistake we make will turn into a boomerang that hits us with a vengeance.

7. **Capitalism** in its current state, often driven by the greed for profit and generally ignoring the costs for the environment, is a dead-end. Capitalism, however, can also be a crucial part of the necessary radical transformation of our economic and social systems if we succeed in shifting its focus away from quantitative growth (waste of products, cheap mass consumption articles, plastic plague, etc.) that is harmful for our climate and our environment towards circular qualitative growth. In other words: We now have the chance to reshape capitalism—in terms of an honest ecological-social digital market economy as part of a holistically functioning circular economy that decarbonizes, works in a climate-neutral and resource-friendly way, reduces social injustice, protects the biosphere of the Earth and the dignity of other species, and is dedicated to the common good of the current generation and those to come.
8. **Biological and technological cycles** will be the winning formula for Climate Modernity: *The future is circular!* Hence, we are approaching nature's established winning formula for millions of years. Let's improve the current approaches of circular economy with the goal of developing actually closed cycles of resources and become an ecologically and socially inspiring circular society!

The challenges are huge, alternatives, however, do not exist. In the USA, the *American Way of Life* will now indeed be renegotiable. The EU still has a particularly long way to go to reach a common climate-modern agricultural policy. But the direction seems to be clear because Covid-19 is “a fast-moving crisis within a slow-moving one that in some way resembles. Like the pandemic, climate change is impervious to populist denials, global in the disruption it causes and will be far more costly to deal with in the future if it is neglected now.” (*The Economist*, Christmas Issue 2020/21). Everything we so painfully learned in this pandemic will be needed for the ecologically and socially sustainable development of the digital 21st century. In light of the dramatic climate change and the extinction of species as well as the systematic destruction of ecosystems, there is no space for smoothing things over. We are definitely at the stage when push comes to shove.

So let's free our imagination to create a different, future-proof normality after the pandemic! Now it is important to find ways of implementing an ecologically and socially sustainable Climate Modernity as quickly as possible. This new normality will have to be radically different from the pre-Covid-19 normality and, at the same time, meet the requirements of being perceived as a coherent normality and being accepted by the people! After all, the fundamental transformation of economy and society will only be successful if the people back it and promote it themselves with conviction.

For an effective shaping of our Climate Modernity we will especially need

- a **new, positive mindset** as well as
- **art and culture** as active mediators between climate, nature, and environmental awareness, on the one hand, and the glorification of technology and consumption, on the other hand.

Let's admit to ourselves: We actually love our planet! It is the only one to provide ideal climatic conditions for human life—there is no planet B. Were we to compare the Earth with our bodies, we would already be suffering from a severe high body temperature as the global average temperature has risen by more than 1 degree Celsius since the beginning of industrialization. This increase can no longer be reversed. But we have to do everything in our power to not develop a permanent and steadily rising fever and ultimately risk our lives and survival. It is, consequently, not enough to want to repair the Earth as it is not a machine people can use as they wish. If we love the Earth, we will also be willing to care for it with dedication—like a person we love. PLANET LOVE refers to a fundamentally new quality of human love towards the Earth and its beauty, a love that will not remain unrequited as the Earth can love us back in many ways ...

PLANET LOVE is, at the same time, the ideal basis for attentive care work in Climate Modernity. In light of the rapid progression of climate change and the urgency of effective measures, as demanded especially by Greta Thunberg and *Fridays for Future*, the climate crisis, by now, is daily in the focus of the media, politics, and economy. Therefore, it seems reasonable to consider climate protection to be the starting point for a wide-ranging change in thinking and a radical change of civilization. CLIMATE CARE—in the broad sense—includes all measures that place our relationship towards the Earth, its diversity of species, and its resources on a sustainable foundation. After all, the (enormous) challenge of climate neutrality and decarbonization is closely linked to the overarching imperative of continuous reduction of consumption; long-lasting quality and diligent handling of products instead of mass consumption of disposable products; as well as the general replacement of linear economic models (“From the cradle to the landfill.”) by biological and technological cycles and the implementation of an honest circular economy. CLIMATE CARE reaches beyond the mere ecological requirements for human life and always has a social dimension as well. Therefore, CLIMATE CARE is an inclusive approach targeting all humans and guiding them optimally to lead their lives in a climate-protecting and resource-saving way.

With its choice of topic *PLANET LOVE. Climate Care in the Digital Age*, the VIENNA BIENNALE FOR CHANGE 2021 makes these two ideas visible and promotes the artistic and creative engagement with them. Art and culture are the backbone for a holistic reflection of the current level of development of human civilization with its ecological and social mega challenges. Art and culture are apt to serve as a bridge between flourishing nature, richness in species, unimpaired environment, and climate beauty on the one hand, and the technological drivers of innovation on the other hand. They are, therefore, key disciplines to transform Digital Modernity into Climate Modernity. The cultural and artistic achievements of the past, such as the Wiener Werkstätte, can provide us with valuable insights for the future.

Contemporary art in different fields is required to actively address the concrete shaping of Climate Modernity.

The arts are particularly good at directly reaching out to people emotionally and touching them in a totally different way with PLANET LOVE & CLIMATE CARE than science and other socio-political areas are able to. We expect the arts to embark on an unprecedented discovery journey. We need utopias that open up new worlds and visions to us just as much as the grim realizations of dystopias from which we can learn. We hope for powerful art installations, smart design processes, architecture close to nature, considerate urban and regional planning, grasping novels and subtle poetry, overwhelming theatre plays, musical theater that gets under our skin, compassionate compositions, powerful dance and art performances, utopian and dystopian film scenarios, and much more.

While the VIENNA BIENNALE FOR CHANGE may be focused on design, architecture, and fine arts (whereby the fine arts and the applied disciplines of design and architecture can set very different impulses), it always also allows for the crossing of boundaries towards other fields like, for example, literature with Kim Stanley Robinson's visionary novel *The Ministry for the Future*. Furthermore, the holistic approaches of designers, architects, and artists raise the hope for not only additional insights into PLANET LOVE & CLIMATE CARE but also for concrete, practically effective follow-up projects by artists and creatives with selected partners in politics, economy, science, and civil society. One further aspect is decisive: Artists and creatives can inspire other people to participate in Climate Modernity with their own or with co-creativity. Possibly the best result of the VIENNA BIENNALE FOR CHANGE 2021 would be if as many people as possible could be convinced to join in on (newly) awakened PLANET LOVE and CLIMATE CARE activities.

The fresh, positive mindset PLANET LOVE & CLIMATE CARE encourages us to depart towards a fundamentally new normality after Covid-19. If we tackle the radical transformation of economy and society, the following Gandhi quote can serve as a point of reference: "Be the change you wish to see in the world." While we have to act quickly, we will also have to do so with prudence and the knowledge of essential relationships. A minimum of ecological and social education will make us more confident to trust our own emotions and not only approach the topic with common sense but also involve our hearts.

The MAK is more than a museum of applied arts and fine contemporary art. It is also a **future lab** (like in the form of the MAK DESIGN LAB together with the MAK LAB APP) and, at the same time, a **museum of active hope**. After all, mere hope that Climate Modernity will develop into a future-proof direction at the necessary speed is not enough. Hope must be supported by active engagement, by concrete actions, tireless efforts, imperturbable strategies, visionary actionism. By means of co-creative projects with designers, architects, and artists, the MAK aims to be a hub to make the development of Climate Modernity attractive to you and all of us. Not only do we want to have an impact on the new normality after the Covid-19 turning-point but we

also want to pass our joy of designing on to you. Become part of our museum of active hope and contribute to a successful outcome of Climate Modernity!

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