

LESS EGO IS MORE FUTURE
Building a climate-modern Europe together

Essay

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1. Instead of an introduction

Following the texts about “Climate Beauty” (June 2020) and “From the Wiener Werkstätte to Climate Modernity” (January 2021), this is the third and last essay that I will write on climate change as General Director of the MAK. This text too was written at a time when the topic of the covid-19 pandemic was inescapable, then as now, and climate issues are, in relation to their significance, largely invisible. To this day, too few people in Austria and elsewhere acknowledge that we are teetering on the brink of a civilizational abyss into which we could stumble at any given moment. The invisibility of climate issues is treacherous, lulling us into the illusion that we could resume business and culture as usual after the pandemic and take up life as usual where we left off. As if there were no drastic over-exploitation of our planet, no brutal destruction of eco-systems, no disastrous extinction of species, no human-induced global warming with catastrophic consequences for all generations to come. As if there were no bitter failure in the recognition of our responsibility towards our planet.

True, there are many figures—not just among Fridays for Future activists, but among all generations—who take action for the planet day in, day out. They are active in the fields of politics, business, science, research and development, arts and culture, and they should be admired. But they largely remain exceptions, and they are struggling with the invisibility of climate issues. This is not to say that the climate crisis is ignored in the press, but that to a great majority of people the scale of the crisis remains unfathomable; unfathomable in its implications and the irreversibility of its gravest effects, but also in the quality gains that are within our reach if we manage to overcome it. That which is invisible simply escapes our imagination.

But why is the climate crisis with its eerie scenarios as well as its—should we answer the call to action—realistic promise of a higher quality of life not much more visible? Is it because the ceaseless string of dystopian visions renders us unresponsive and exhausted? Because positive perspectives and bright prospects of new modes of being fail to excite us? Why are the plentiful opportunities to shape our age of Climate Modernity not much more present, faced as we are with nothing less than the greatest challenge in the history of mankind? Why is it so difficult to communicate the sense of urgency of climate issues to the populace at large in Austria, Europe and across the globe when it worked so swiftly and unprecedentedly

with the covid-19 pandemic since March 2020? Or to communicate the joy of working together to shape a better world?

In this text I would like to engage with three central focus areas and their enormous potential in overcoming the climate crisis: literacy, business, and the arts. With literacy because it serves as a foundation for the kind of mindset that we urgently need in Austria, Europe and the whole world for a “climate-modern” future. With business because the great transformation of our society will not work without it, as it is primarily up to business endeavors to provide for the green jobs and wellbeing of the future, cementing their vital role in absorbing and spreading a spirit of new beginnings and innovation. With the arts because they have the power to upend us—to move us emotionally, to captivate us in our hearts and to shine and inspire where science, facts and prognoses are unable to. Put simply: The arts could be the joker that determines whether our fight against climate change succeeds or fails.

To focus on literacy, business and the arts is not to undermine the role of other agents. Without excellent politicians that enforce carbon taxes and incentivize sustainable practices, the great transformation of business and society will remain an incomplete mosaic. Which politician would not want to rise to the challenge of turning their nation or city into a burgeoning model region in our new age of Climate Modernity? It is surely preferable to bowing to resistance from interest groups tied up in backwards-looking practices. The pandemic has shown that resolute action is possible, in part owing to a novel standing of experts. With regard to the climate crisis, this means that we are in dire need of activist scientists who consult on policy at various levels of politics independently, and who support the media in acting and reporting responsibly. But ultimately there is no greater source of orientation than the one presented by educational institutions and the literacy they instill, of innovation than the innovation of businesses, and of creativity than the one spurred by the arts. And it is precisely these areas and the people behind them that must work together for the long haul. It is only by working together that they have the potential to give the climate topic the same sense of ubiquity and longevity that corona has received—to make it visible as the biggest challenge in the history of mankind, but also to make the potential for improving the world so accessible, so seductive as to make our eyes sparkle. It is only by working together that they can change tack and bring the climate crisis to the forefront as the number one priority.

All this makes it even more disappointing that the realms of both business and the arts are far from facing the climate challenge head-on and proving their pertinence and excellence in addressing it. There are, of course, exceptions that prove the rule, faint gleams of hope that develop new methods of presenting difficult questions in engaging ways and of alerting individuals as well as greater societal forces to their responsibility. To hurry back, post-corona, to the fossil-based streams of income that will hurl us into a civilizational no-man’s-land is no suitable strategy for the future, not anywhere. And least of all in Europe! True, there are forward-looking businesses, but still too many clamor against the necessary changes ahead. And where are the artists and creatives that *with their means* make the climate crisis with its potential for both destruction and improvement visible and inspire us to take action? Where are the cultural institutions that *with their means* make the case for a radical eco-social transformation of business and society?

I do not blame anyone; I would like to spur courageous steps forward. This essay is my appeal as General Director of a museum that has what it takes to become a model museum of Climate Modernity and that, as a green museum, is on the right path; it is my appeal to

acknowledge the climate crisis for what it is and what it could be: the—should we continue to underestimate it—greatest weapon of mass destruction of our society, but also the—should we rally up all our creative capabilities—greatest hope for a fantastic future that we have ever had. It is up to us to take action. To take action NOW!

2. An appetizer

A leading figure of the visual arts who has engaged intensely with the environmental crisis for years floods a world-class museum and titled his piece “LIFE”: This, of course, is the story of Ólafur Elíasson’s turning the Fondation Beyeler in Basel, a museum designed by Renzo Piano, into a green pond by connecting the garden of the museum with the interior and transforming it into one continuous waterscape. The exhibit is open to the public in the evening as well, at which point the water exudes a fluorescent glow. Elíasson has called the artwork a “nature-culture-landscape for human and non-human organisms alike.”

One of the internationally most progressive design studios installs hundreds of trees that had recently gone aflame in a forest fire in a renowned museum of applied arts. As visitors stroll through the blackened forest, they bear witness as the skeletal trees gently return their fertility to the soil surrounding them. In a clearing a shimmering water surface invites them to contemplate their reflection amid those of many other species of this planet. The designers of Superflux under the leadership of Anab Jain and Jon Ardern call their piece “INVOCATION FOR HOPE.”

A multi-discipline “think-and-do-tank” conjoining architecture, art, urbanism and landscaping builds a forest pavilion in the second largest Austrian city as part of the Graz Kulturjahr 2020/21 as a prototype to cool down the city. The Breathe Earth Collective thus creates a multi-sensorial space that also serves as an agora for a multi-faceted discussion of climate topics and puts forward a vision of a comprehensive “CLIMATE CULTURE” with proposals for solutions of varying scale, ranging from individual practices to the level of city-planning.

All three artworks prompt us to reflect on our fragile relationship with nature and the Earth and to premise it on a new foundation: They encourage us to give up the constructed notion of human-centeredness and assume a “more-than-human” stance that leaves other species sufficient room to grow and protects the Earth from over-exploitation. They help us redeem the lost connection with our home planet, a planet that is irreplaceable for our civilization no matter what the Mars enthusiasts say. But what can each of us do? What can we do as a community bound to the principle of more-than-humanness?

“Everyone is an artist,” proclaimed one of the most important and also most controversial artists of the 20th century, Joseph Beuys, who would have celebrated his 100th birthday in 2021. He was convinced that every person as a social being had the creative powers to transform him- or herself as well as the world. If, as scientists have persuasively claimed, this decade offers the last *window for climate action* before a massive und irreversible decline in the Earth’s climate takes hold, then we will need the creative powers of as many individuals as possible to deter it. The same goes for institutions that are, after all, led by people, from the public sector to NGOs to global corporations all the way to “Me, Inc.” And what may be most decisive in this pursuit could be qualities that we do not even primarily associate with the individuals, institutions and levels in question: *profoundly touched and creative citizens*;

visionary companies; *holistic* sciences; *ethical* technological research and development; *inspiring* media; *caring* cities and communities that are *receptive to change*; state governments that *consistently incentivize and invest*; a *soulful* European Union and much else. Artists and creatives cannot possibly supplant the climate activism of these institutions, levels and individuals—of every one of us. But they have the potential to be beacons of light with their work, empowering our imagination and calling us to action. They could provide the key impulses that transform our ignorance into knowledge and knowledge into action.

3. Uninhabitable Earth, uninhabitable Europe, uninhabitable Austria

If we want to make climate change visible, we cannot beat around the bush. David Wallace-Wells encapsulated the destructive potential of climate change in his bestseller *The Uninhabitable Earth* as no one else had before him:

“It is worse, much worse, than you think.

The slowness of climate change is a fairy tale, perhaps as pernicious as the one that says it isn’t happening at all, and comes to us bundled with several others in an anthology of comforting delusions: that global warming is an Arctic saga, unfolding remotely; that it is strictly a matter of sea level and coastlines, not an enveloping crisis sparing no place and leaving no life undeformed; that it is a crisis of the ‘natural’ world, not the human one; that those two are distinct, and that we live today somehow outside or beyond or at the very least defended against nature, not inescapably within and literally overwhelmed by it; that wealth can be a shield against the ravages of warming; that the burning of fossil fuels is the price of continued economic growth; that growth, and the technology it produces, will allow us to engineer our way out of environmental disaster; that there is any analogue to the scale or scope of this threat, in the long span of human history, that might give us confidence in staring it down.

None of this is true.”

The Paris Agreement of 2015, a key element in the struggle against climate change, stipulates that global warming should be kept significantly below 2°C and that further measures should ensure that the rise in temperature does not exceed 1.5°C. There is a broad consensus among the scientific community that 2°C would bring a considerably worse spiral of deterioration than 1.5°C and that a rise in temperature over 2°C would have dramatic consequences for our society. At this point, despite our efforts so far we are heading towards over 3°C by the end of the century! It does not take a genius to comprehend that the relentless increase of CO₂ and other greenhouse gases in the atmosphere will lead to catastrophe. It is like a bathtub: If the drain is clogged and no water flows off, adding more water to the tub will cause it to spill over, even if the amount of water added decreases. Either you clear the drain or you turn off the tap. Turning off the CO₂-tap, however, is more easily said than done: Humankind has used more fossil fuels in the last 35 years than it has in its entire prior history.

Twenty years ago the US-entrepreneur and environmental writer Paul Hawken began “out of curiosity” an intense examination of what we have to do to stop global warming and reverse it, i.e. which especially effective solutions already existed, what they do and how much they

would cost. Since there was no such list available, in 2013 he initiated the project “Drawdown.” *Drawdown* refers to the point in time when the concentration of greenhouse gases reaches its peak and begins to decrease year by year. Thus, it is about approaches that bind greenhouse gases already in the atmosphere. Students and researchers from around the world were invited to collaborate on the project and devise a solid scientific foundation for it. The result is the book **DRAWDOWN. THE MOST COMPREHENSIVE PLAN EVER PROPOSED TO REVERSE GLOBAL WARMING**, edited by Paul Hawken in 2017 and translated into many languages soon thereafter. The publication is updated on drawdown.org, where there is also more detailed information on the model calculations used (everyone is encouraged to supplement, correct and expand the information presented).

DRAWDOWN describes and analyzes 80 solutions, many of which are technological but nevertheless aspire to be ecological solutions as well (a small handful of solutions have detrimental side effects to human and planetary health, but these are marked as such). All 80 solutions are subjected to a ranking that orders them according to the total sum of greenhouse emissions that they would save or remove from the atmosphere, taking their global effect into account. Additionally, DRAWDOWN lists 20 “coming attractions” that are in the works or just beginning to appear on the horizon.

The ranking of the 80 DRAWDOWN solutions is full of surprises. The twelve most effective solutions are, in this order: refrigeration, wind turbines (onshore), reduced food waste, plant-rich diet, tropical forests, educating girls, family planning, solar farms, silvopasture, rooftop solar, regenerative agriculture, and temperate forests. The broad spectrum of these dozen solutions alone shows that no one has a right to shirk responsibility.

In his preface to the German-language edition of 2019, Ernst Ulrich von Weizsäcker applauds DRAWDOWN as “an outstanding and truly comprehensive work.” The one thing that irritated him, though, was that Hawken and his team expected change and improvement to come from the individual, from the investor, from the market. In the wake of constantly growing annual CO₂-emissions, for Weizsäcker this seemed naïve, especially since the growth rate of consumption surpassed the rate of progress in climate protection. “For the market does not want this protection; first and foremost, it wants more consumption! I hope that this book will inspire many decision makers in politics to conceive the kind of political, economic and legal framework that is necessary to give the solutions presented here a chance to become reality.” Weizsäcker got straight to the heart of the problem of mass consumption.

A forward-looking framework is thus the *conditio sine qua non*, but it must come to life. That is possible with the help of the right dynamic between literacy, business and the arts. But first we must clarify what we (should) mean when we say climate crisis.

4. The Viennese approach

In the years I have reflected on the great environmental issues of our time, I was always bothered that from an early stage there have emerged two general directions that do not collaborate closely enough: on the one side climate activists who focus predominantly on decarbonization and climate neutrality, and on the other those that bemoan the drastic extinction of species. The concerns of both directions could not be more justified, but since it is the climate crisis that is more likely to reap medial, political and economic attention, climate protection is the best starting point for a broad rethinking and a radical societal

transformation. However, this must not induce one to think that it is solely about limiting global warming. My proposed term “Climate Modernity” goes further than that and asserts that overcoming the crisis of the climate, biodiversity, and the environment with the social aspects it entails is the top priority of our age. Therefore, Climate Modernity does not just call for effective climate protection, but also the preservation of eco-systems and the Earth’s biological diversity. After all, biodiversity and the climate influence each other. Just as climate change, the destruction of eco-systems and the alarming extinction of species are closely intertwined, so the measures to overcome these mega-challenges strengthen each other. We especially must make the most of the contributions of eco-systems to the reduction of greenhouse gases. Certainly the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets put forward by the United Nations play an essential role in Climate Modernity. Since the 17 SDGs occasionally jar with each other (e.g., economic growth and ecological sustainability), Climate Modernity is well placed to provide a holistic framework that achieves a balance between ecological and social aims wherever they conflict.

It is up to us to shape Climate Modernity with a holistic approach. I call this comprehensive understanding of climate issues (including biodiversity, the quality of eco-systems and a sustainable use of the Earth’s resources) the Viennese approach, as it was developed for the MAK’s main exhibit, within the framework of the VIENNA BIENNALE FOR CHANGE 2021, entitled *CLIMATE CARE. Reimagining Shared Planetary Futures*. Let’s admit it: We love our planet. It is the only one that hosts ideal climactic conditions for human life. We need a more-than-human perspective in order to share the Earth with other species such as animals and plants with humility. Our planet does not hold an infinite amount of treasured resources to be exploited; it is a living organism that must be taken care of with dedication. Moreover, ecological progress will depend on an effective reduction of social inequality. In the spirit of climate justice, we have a special responsibility towards those groups usually located in the global south that are most impacted by climate change while barely having contributed to its aggravation. And we have no right to rob future generations of their opportunities and chances; we should rather follow the Seventh Generation Principle and consider the consequences of our actions as they may unfold over the next 200 years and beyond. Finally, let us bid farewell to the notion that technological progress alone could suffice to solve our problems. We know from experience that gains in efficiency are often counteracted by an increase in use or consumption (cf. the rebound effect). This is why we must develop strategies that engage all effective levers in overcoming the climate crisis—in the holistic, comprehensive sense of the term. Three key aspects of such strategies are:

CLIMATE-CARING: The Viennese approach, an approach combining climate issues with biodiversity, the quality of eco-systems and a sustainable use of the Earth’s resources, calls for a sufficiently broad understanding of CLIMATE CARE. In this broad sense climate care serves as a source of guidance and direction for both public and private decision-making, non-profit and for-profit economic activity, paid and unpaid work, for a holistic mindset and lifelong learning: Less ego is more future; more care is better shared quality of life.

CLIMATE-DIGITAL: In this context, digitalization can play a crucial role. How can we ensure a better alignment between digital innovations and overcoming the climate crisis? Which business models might prove apt, which incentives and investments do we need from the public sector, and how can we create a dynamic biotope for start-ups with sufficient private funding? How can we make sure that the opportunities arising from this endeavor reach as many people as possible? What kind of supportive structures can the EU contribute? European businesses especially, having largely failed to respond swiftly enough

to digital developments and lagging behind the US and China when it comes to artificial intelligence, stand to benefit from combining the climate topic with digital innovation—an immense field of activity where global thematic leadership is still possible.

CLIMATE-SOCIAL: The third key element—and fitting for Vienna if we consider its legacy in social housing—refers to the social aspects of a broad and inclusive understanding of climate issues: What are the negative social effects of the climate crisis and the measures we take to combat it? How can we as a society make sure that no one gets left behind? And how can we guarantee that the chances proffered by the Green Deal and similar initiatives serve as many people as possible, not just the profits of a happy few? How can we act in a genuinely social way, showing consideration for the opportunities of future generations and species?

Following the approach outlined above, a society is climate-modern if it acts in a way that is climate-caring, climate-digital and climate-social. The more we manage to have our apparent self-interest take a backseat, the more effectively and successfully we will rise up to these qualities. I speak of an apparent self-interest since ultimately we all stand to benefit not just from each other's climate-caring, climate-digital and climate-social behavior, but also from our own. My climate-caring plant-based meals or the time I spend walking is not just a caring act towards the climate, but also towards my own body; my dedication to climate care may cause me to feel a more profound connection to other species and heighten my own happiness. Using climate-digital innovations will reduce my own use of resources (while also making fewer demands on my wallet) and cement my sovereignty as both a consumer and an active citizen. Climate-social behavior will make new forms of meaningful work available to me, affirming me as an esteemed member of society and bringing new acquaintances and friendships.

5. The magic triangle of Climate Modernity: Literacy—business—the arts

Literacy, business and the arts are three spheres that at first glance do not have much in common. But when it comes to the defining questions of climate modernity, it is essential that they work together. Let us begin with three propositions:

LESS EGO IS MORE LITERACY: Human beings are social and cooperative, no matter what the prophets of individual profit maximization claim. Those willing to see the bigger picture will find themselves facing new worlds of education and knowledge that may also enrich their own perception of the world in a lasting way. This is an important point, especially when it comes to climate issues.

LESS EGO IS BETTER BUSINESS: Businesses who pursue not just profit but also a meaningful purpose will not only be held in higher esteem by well-informed consumers in an age of digital transparency; those that implement climate-friendly initiatives will also be rewarded with higher demand in the marketplace and tax incentives.

LESS EGO IS MORE SUSTAINABLE ART: The model of the lone-wolf genius is past its expiration date. The artists of special interest today are those that work comprehensively and compassionately with others and embrace their connection to other species, creating new climate perspectives from a rich range of communal processes.

There is no logical order determining what must come first nor what follows. The triangle connecting climate-literacy/business/arts unfolds its magic when its components interact congenially: LESS EGO IS BETTER SHARED QUALITY OF LIFE!

Let us examine a few examples of this interaction to gain a better understanding of its relevance:

- Artists and creatives, especially impact game and communication designers, can turn enhancing one's climate knowledge into something playful and fun and thus help overcome initial hurdles. The same goes for immersive digital works, visionary novels and similar artistic practices in other disciplines. The arts have an immense potential to stimulate climate literacy, and they can do so much more quickly than, e.g., an overhaul of school curricula. And creatives and artists too are likely to benefit from a higher overall level of climate literacy, not only by furthering their own knowledge, but also because they will meet with greater resonance and interest on behalf of the audience. This paves the way for participatory projects that can motivate and engage both sides (e.g., citizen science).
- Artists and creatives can influence companies in manifold ways. They can develop holistic new narratives and guidelines for responsible economic activity; they can use artistic means, including digital ones, to design the transparency of business practices in such a way that exemplary companies are rewarded by the market while black sheep are sanctioned. They can deploy circular principles in design and architecture to reduce resource consumption in a way that is significant and based on digital proof. With the help of greater climate literacy, they can transform consumers brainwashed by commercials into critical citizens and activists. The other way round also matters: Visionary entrepreneurs can include artists and creatives in their strategic decision-making and innovation strategies, opening up new alleyways of artistic and creative work.
- The arts can stimulate and fortify the interaction between climate literacy and business. Critical citizens and activists will demand different qualities in goods and services and more transparency than manipulated consumers would. Moreover, people with sharp climate literacy skills will have a better shot at sustainable jobs than those ignorant of these topics. And companies that display innovation in climate matters, thereby enforcing forward-looking business models and new shades of learning experiences, will in turn provide valuable impulses for climate literacy.

There is no telling what innovations the close interaction between literacy, business and the arts may bring. What is more, the arts are unpredictable. This makes things particularly interesting when it comes to giving the climate issue the visibility it needs: Artworks can render a poignant impression of the implications of climate change by demonstrating its effects across the globe—including in Europe and Austria—, thus making the case for prompt communal action. And, equally important, they can engage our imagination in illustrating ways towards a better shared quality of life that the great transformation of society and the economy may bring about. Artists willing to take on this challenge will march to the beat of their own drum; they would never allow themselves or their work to be instrumentalized. But they are also aware that we expect their artistic engagement to live up to the challenges of our time. To every art its freedom, but to every age its art!

6. The ladder of the arts

Some may remember the so-called Design Ladder that was adapted for Vienna from the Danish-Swedish model. It counts four levels: non-design, design as form-giving and styling, design as process (starting in the initial phases of product development) and finally, at the highest level, design as strategy. Today, a new ladder of artistic disciplines is called for that illustrates the potential role of these fields in shaping Climate Modernity in four steps. While the Design Ladder was generally conceived as value-neutral, the ladder of the arts developed here addresses *key values* of the future.

First level:

BUSINESS AS USUAL

Art institutions and artists/creatives engage in *business as usual* even though they are aware of the climate crisis and the overall eco-social crisis.

Second level:

ARTISTIC-CREATIVE CRITICAL REFLECTION

Art institutions and artists/creatives occasionally address questions of Climate Modernity but do not place it at the center of their programs and artistic-creative work.

Third level:

ARTS-FOR-CLIMATE AS A PROGRAM

Art institutions and artists/creatives recognize the climate issue as the biggest challenge of the 21st century and develop structured programs and artistic-creative works on fundamental questions of Climate Modernity. Certification with an eco-seal of approval such as the Austrian Ecolabel increases the credibility of art institutions at this level.

Fourth level:

ARTS-FOR-CLIMATE AS STRATEGY

Artists/creatives and art institutions subscribe to the conviction that the climate issue presents the greatest challenge of the 21st century and that as such it can only be overcome via a holistic approach, the arts playing a vital role in this endeavor. On this basis, they zero in on Climate Modernity and develop pioneering series of works with new solution-oriented forms of collaboration with other fields of art as well as other socio-political forces, especially science, research & technology, companies, media, and civil society. They do so with a maximum diversity of knowledge, experience, and perspective with the goal of developing groundbreaking impulses for Climate Modernity *together*, presenting them and making them available open source. As on the third level, certification with an eco-seal of approval such as the Austrian Ecolabel increases the credibility of art institutions at this level.

The arts have limitless possibilities to get involved in our age of Climate Modernity without subjecting themselves or their work to the vagaries of politics, business or civil society. TRUST THE ARTISTS! They are clever enough to delineate the scope and reach of their work themselves and effectively stave off outside interference. What we can ask of them, however, is to contemplate climate issues and their related aspects in a profound manner, including their social implications, and to keep up with the latest research. And we hope that the digital world we live in will prompt them to reflect on the artistic potential of digital innovations for CLIMATE CARE as well. It is where science fails to connect to people emotionally and touch hearts that artists and creatives come into their own in making the climate crisis visible, devising alternative images and narratives and opening up new realms of imagination.

Climate Modernity is not confined to advocating an unpopular culture of renunciation and abdication. On the contrary, it bears the chance to shape a sustainable quality of life. Climate Modernity does not have to rain on anyone's parade but should be regarded as a joyous rallying to the new horizon of a more-than-human civilization. Without the help of the arts these developments will not only unfold their dynamic much later but they will also lack the breadth of content that the arts could contribute. It is of the utmost importance that we create the best of all sustainable worlds as quickly as possible. Museums—especially art, design and architecture museums—should assume the pioneering role of “museums of active hope” by giving people an eco-social sense of direction (cf. climate literacy), spreading excitement about creating and shaping Climate Modernity, and, an essential element of active hope, inciting them to take action themselves.

The ladder presented above can of course be adapted to other spheres. When speaking of climate literacy, the four levels could be (*mutatis mutandis*): 1. Business as usual; 2. facilitating comprehension and critical reflection; 3. educationally driven activism-for-climate as a program; and 4. activism-for-climate as strategy based on solid climate literacy. Or speaking of the realm of business: 1. Business as usual; 2. facilitating comprehension and critical reflection; 3. businesses-for-climate as a program; and 4. visionary businesses-for-climate as strategy.

Not everyone is equally able to act with agency in Climate Modernity, neither in the arts nor in business nor among the most climate-literate. But they can all make the effort to pay more attention to this most important of all topics of the 21st century and follow up with action. Therefore, the following ladder is to be seen as an incentive and encouragement to climb higher.

7. A motif for the future

“Move fast and break things!”, the iconic leitmotif and call to arms of wilder digital years, sounds obscene today. Long-established structures are cracking and crumbling under the pressure of monopolistic digital platforms. While laudable that many physical products have been replaced with mostly dematerialized digital modes of consumption (e.g., streaming instead of CDs or DVDs), negative effects abound: a gig economy with dismally paid jobs displacing solid labor relations, a form of package delivery capitalism pushing thriving shopping streets out of business (a development that has been accelerated even further by the corona crisis), and most notably a new consumption binge driven by the smartest sales force humankind has ever come up with: artificial intelligence.

Lucky, there are refreshing countertendencies. Especially younger generations increasingly value experiences over products—a trend that will be resumed and reinforced after the covid nightmare. But this cannot gloss over the fact that we live in an age of enormous material stockpiling that will be amplified by the great transformation of society and the economy. For instance, cars using a combustion engine surely must be swept off the roads as soon as possible, but the solution cannot be to trade them one for one with electric cars. Urban spaces especially are requiring us to reimagine mobility and in doing so create a higher shared quality of life. Once again, less ego is more future.

Thus, “Move fast and break things!” has grown obsolete. We must rethink the opportunities presented by digital platforms and deploy them in new ways. The new motto for the future

could be: ACT NOW BUT LIVE SLOW AND REPAIR THINGS! It subscribes to the three principles of the slow food movement, “good, clean and fair,” but urges us to act NOW—and this also means we must redirect our lifestyles towards a circular society. At the same time, we should protest against companies wanting us as consumers to shoulder all responsibility for sustainable behavior. Let us demand a radical transformation from business at large and a comprehensive systemic framework from political decision makers—and not sometime in the distant future, but NOW.

Many people think that among a global population of 7.8 billion, their single contribution towards stopping global warming does not matter. Moreover, people become unresponsive when confronted with a never-ending series of terrible statistics and gloomy prospects for the future. That is why it is especially important to communicate a sense of joy about a new upcoming age NOW—a post-fossil age with a greater shared quality of life. Scientific findings support that the contemplation of beauty can bring out the best in us. Climate beauty creates a connection between beauty and the climate as an invaluable good for human life. It alludes to the notion of a society that brings about a lasting balance to the Earth (and a limitation of global warming in line with the Paris Agreement) by pursuing a mode of business and lifestyle that is ecologically and socially sustainable and is appreciative of other species and the Earth’s eco-systems. The goal is to create a sustainable quality society that is founded on clear values and regards the needs of other species and future generations, and functions in terms of biological and technical cycles. Keeping climate beauty in mind, we will be prompted to contemplate more seriously which of our decisions work to its benefit and which serve to deteriorate it. In the end, we are all climate artists working together on a big joint project: the further development of our home planet. Let us do so with embracing care, a social conscience, the best of digital innovations, and let us negotiate this goal in each of our social roles—as family members, as friends, as professionals and active, even activist citizens! Let us put our personal EGO on hold and attempt to make use of the remaining *window for climate action* TOGETHER!

8. The chance of a century for Europe

The climate crisis is a global affair. It thus requires effort and collaboration from around the world. However, this is not to say that we should only be as strong as our weakest link. Europe in particular, an actor responsible for a considerable amount of the CO₂-emissions from the earliest stages of industrialization, must give it its best shot and strive to be a model region of sustainability. The European Bauhaus, a project proposed by Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, is the right initiative at the right time. It calls attention to the fact that after corona we must construct a new modernity based on holistic concepts, and that in doing so we will rely heavily on both the visual and applied arts, notably design and architecture. We need bold ideas, daring experiments and ambitious collaborative projects. For all this, the new European Bauhaus offers a promising basis.

The new European Bauhaus is such a significant concept that it would make a suitable framework for almost all the EU’s fields of activity. This strategy should be marked by three terms that resonate with the three aspects of the Viennese approach (climate-caring, climate-digital, and climate-social) outlined above: integrative, innovative, and inclusive.

INTEGRATIVE: This means that it is not just about the climate crisis in the narrow sense of the term; climate issues and all measures of climate care must be addressed jointly and

holistically with the other ecological mega-challenges, i.e. the extinction of species, the destruction of eco-systems and the over-exploitation of the planet in general. Here the arts can and should play a significant role.

INNOVATIVE: As the greatest driver of innovation in our century (just consider the potential of artificial intelligence), digitalization should be deployed much more consistently in the struggle against climate change and in the pursuit of a resource-saving circular society. The EU, its member states, its cities and its regions have a chance to consolidate their approaches with the help of design, architecture and other artistic fields to one overarching, dynamic *European Climate Innovation Valley*.

INCLUSIVE: As a community of common values, the EU has the obligation to enable that we shape Climate Modernity with an eye to social justice and that in the great transformation of society and the economy no one gets left behind. Many cities, regions and member states will contribute inspiring impulses that the Union should evaluate and merge into a climate-social line of policy.

With this triple-“i”-strategy the EU could use the wonderful idea of a new European Bauhaus as a starting point to come into its own as a climate-modern model region, making use of its rich cultural variety in the process. I see this as the chance of a century for the Union: not only to develop a unique and holistically oriented thematic leadership, but also to use Climate Modernity as an additional tool to fortify and further develop the core values of democracy: With new approaches and tools, we should motivate people to actively contribute to this immense creative task. Let us act TOGETHER!

It is said that the President of the first Commission of the European Economic Community, Walter Hallstein, once contended that the European integration process was like a bike that falls over once it stops moving, and that it needed a constant flow of momentum. In an age where biking is celebrated alongside walking as the most sustainable form of mobility, is there a better mental image for the future-oriented project of European Integration than a bike in motion? Here is an addendum: We need as many cyclists as possible from Europe as well as partner regions across the globe in order to bike towards the horizon of our new future.