

Who was Hugo Kükelhaus?

“What does exhaust us is the non-utilization of the potential of our organs and our senses, the disconnection, repression.... What does motivate us is development. Development through dealing with a world that completely challenges me.”

Hugo Kükelhaus

Hugo Kükelhaus (1900 - 1984) was a universal thinker, who made us aware of central problems of our times and also made suggestions to how these problems might be overcome. He observed the modern man of our technical civilisation becoming impoverished in his physical and emotional strength and unbalanced. In his eyes the reason behind this were an assessing system which one-sidedly lifts the intellect from the entirety of the human capabilities, as well as technology and environmental design directed to relieving the strain on the body and the senses instead of challenging them.



Hugo Kükelhaus 1984

An environment that becomes more and more monotonous, that doesn't give the senses much to do and gives less and less freedom to fundamental physical experiences and developmental capabilities corresponds in his eyes with an artificial sensory overload. By overcharging particular senses such as seeing and hearing it contributes to a further decay of differentiated perception capabilities. Kükelhaus goes as far as talking about life deprivation. He illustrated tirelessly the devastating consequences for the human behaviour in all aspects – to himself, to fellow men, to nature and technology.

“Complementary to the transformation of their own planet into a heap of waste, people also decompose their own organisms, particularly their environmental organs.”

H.K.

“Life lives on stimulation. Stimulation is something very sensitive, which means, it may neither be too strong nor too weak. Weak stimulation leads to the development of organs, medium stimulation strengthens them, strong stimulation impedes them and too strong, a stimulation destroys them.”

H.K.

In the early nineteen thirties he emphasised the importance of diverse sensual experiences – right from the start – with the development of “Allbedeut” toys, wooden toys promoting the senses in the early years. Kükelhaus designed these toys under the impression of Froebel Pedagogy and a developmental psychology with growing importance. Under the term “Greiflinge” (clutching toys) they later received numerous awards and Kükelhaus paved the way for today's clutching toys for infants.



Playthings “Allbedeut”

Over many years Hugo Kükelhaus published his culture critical and human ecological knowledge and concerns in his presentations and his teaching work as well as in numerous essays and lectures. In 1934 he published his first work titled "Urzahl und Gebärde", many more followed amongst others "Werde Tischler" (lit. Become a Carpenter) (1936), "Das Wort des Johannes" (1953) (lit. Johannes' Word), "Organismus und Technik" (1971) (lit. Organism and technology), "Unmenschliche Architektur" (1973) (lit. Unhuman architecture) and "Entfaltung der Sinne" (in cooperation with Rudolf zur Lippe, 1982) (lit. Development of the senses).

For a long time Kükelhaus was some kind of "proclaimer in the desert" who wrote or held his lectures about the fact that seeing what is in front of our eyes is what matters. That what matters is the 'little doing' of the sense and perception organs, their training through being used and challenged: "We have to do something. Gaining experience involves action; we must learn by doing. That's were the hurdle is. For centuries we have been trained to replace experience with knowledge. And now we live in a substitute world!"

It wasn't until the development of the "Field of Experience towards unfurling of the senses" that Kükelhaus was able to give his audience an understanding of his concerns. Since the middle of the seventies the "Field of experience" is being shown in a touring exhibition in many places both at home and abroad. There are about forty stations for experimenting and playing giving people the opportunity to actively deal with laws of the "external nature" (such as vibration, gravity, polarity, colour etc.) and to vegetative experience the reciprocate connection to physiological laws of the "internal nature" meaning sense processes and body movements. The ability to experience the senses – often already stunted – will be revived or enhanced to re-experience "...how the eye sees, the ear hears, the nose smells, the skin senses, the fingers touch, the feet (under)stand, the hand be(hold), the brain thinks, the lungs breathe, the blood pulsates, the body vibrates...."



"Organism and technology"

"The entire biology of our learning is in danger of becoming stunted due to a lack of organic stimulation, caused by the media-dominated form of our life situation. With his didactic conception Kükelhaus has introduced a revolutionary quality of learning which uses a sensible approach to self-knowledge, which makes hungry for autonomous learning, and which makes the learner face the real world instead of escaping into unreal (virtual) ones.

Klaus Schneidewind



... how the food (under)stands and feels ...

Kükelhaus saw the "Field of experience" only as a methodical approach in having a sensitising, awareness causing and compensative effect on the deficits he had pointed out. And as long as there is no fundamental reorientation and transformation of our world, that field of experiences - and the one in the style of this one and rebuilt in many places – will not lose any of its up-to-datedness and necessity.

The rather late inclusion of Kükelhaus' beliefs in scientific areas is probably related to the difficulties frequently caused by his integral approach to mediate between nature and arts. But since – in view of perception, movement and learning disorders in children – the negative consequences of decades of disregarding various physical and sensual experiences become more and more obvious, these days – particularly imparted by the 'Field of experience' - attention of different scientific disciplines is turned to Hugo Kükelhaus, who pioneered a complete approach taking the physical and sensual experiences in the educational process serious.

Kükelhaus was vividly occupied with the questions of building and living. Since the early seventies he had been criticising 'modern' architectural tendencies which he found increasingly threatening to our existence and he developed the fundamentals of a construction method orientated on the needs of the human senses and the human organism. Sensible building and design suitable for people was a lifelong pedagogical concern for Kükelhaus.

Beyond the areas addressed so far Hugo Kükelhaus worked creative and artistically in various forms: as a designer of furniture, as illustrator (i.e. for manufacturing processes) and graphic designer, as sculptor, as draughtsman and author of picture stories and short stories (Träumling etc.). Many of his works are architecture-bound: colour design, drafts for coloured glass windows, graffiti and wall paintings which he also implemented himself as well as sculptures. Furthermore he researched

"All the more, we have to be grateful to Hugo Kükelhaus. In so many areas he provided the main impetus for making us learn from what we experience and understand the relation between our thinking and objective reality."

Frederic Vester

"In the last few years it has become more and more obvious that Kükelhaus, with his revolutionary ideas about education was far ahead of his time. At a very early stage he discussed aspects of education the significance of which was realized and investigated by educationalists only in the last decade. This is to be understood particularly with regard to the rediscovery of the importance of the human body and the senses for therapeutic pedagogy. Kükelhaus made a determined effort to vindicate the use of the senses in the classroom in favour of an all-round education based on perception, activity, experience, playful and joyful learning in a communicative and architectural context."

Walther Dreher



"Inhuman architecture"

Goethe, analysed fundamental questions about craft design and wrote philosophical essays. His calligraphic, frequently illustrated letters and book manuscripts as well as the interior design of his home in Soest were strongly suggestive of his extensive formative impetus.

Despite all the diversity, his activities were always corresponding. Kükelhaus was 'undisciplined' in every sense of the word: he did not commit to just one particular subject, he didn't accept boundaries in ones way of thinking and he established connections between various disciplines.

Today his works are incorporated in many different areas from scientific arguments of various professional fields over the practical implementation in pedagogical facilities and experimental museums up to approaches from anthroposopic and esoteric perspectives.

Due to his elementary principles which integrated mystic and oriental wisdom as well as scientific knowledge in an independent manner, Kükelhaus was occasionally described as "undiscovered Guru". But he felt rather suspect about followers and admires. He never wanted to spread an ideology with irreversible truths – much too big was his openness implied in his fundamental thoughts.

What Kükelhaus wanted to enable people to make experiences and be inspired and encouraged to question how they can design their lives in such a way that they can grow with all their possibilities and abilities instead of evading more and more from their own basis of existence.

What Kükelhaus left behind are requests for doing, methods instead of opinions, guidance for self experiencing through own activities – to live a life in every sense. Not more but not anything less either.

"With his own intellectual contribution to architecture Kükelhaus demonstrated that architecture can be more individual, tolerant, natural, thoughtful meaningful and appealing to the senses."

Hartmut Niederwöhrmeier



Träumling (lit.: Little Dreamer)

"Nobody entirely understands him, but anybody can infer from his ideas whatever they need."

Uta Joeressen

"If I was successful, I would say I failed."
H.K.

Weißt du,
 wie die Hand
 die Dinge hält, so ist
 das Leben:



solange die Hand
 offen bleibt,
 bleibt es
 darin;

... wenn die Hand
 aber zu fassen
 & fest zu halten,
 nicht losläßt ...



You know, life is like the sand there in your hands.

As long as you hold it in the palm
 of your hand, it will remain there.

But if you clench your fist in order to keep it,
 it 'll run through your fingers.

H.K.

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www.uni-leipzig.de/~engl/kuekelhaus/werwar3.htm

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