

Bernd Meurer, 1935-2011

Bernd Meurer passed away December 17, 2011. He was the most inspiring colleague I met, making me think in new terms, in new categories, in new ways—always broader, always deeper. He had an exceptional ability to see the large patterns behind the smallest events. He would not talk about transportation, but about public mobility; not about architecture, but about space; not about the design of things, but about the design of tasks as the designer's central problem. He was an exceptional combination of a philosopher—current with the most sophisticated European thinkers of the last 50 years—and a consummated craftsman, loving and knowing a wide range of materials and processes, and the technologies that go with them. Insight and tenacity took him to work tirelessly during many years and to create the *Laboratorium der Zivilisation*, from which he launched intriguing and inspiring events, amongst them *The City as Process (Die Prozessuale Stadt)*, *The Future of Space (Die Zukunft des Raums)* and *The Revision of Use (Revision des Gebrauchs)*, in which I was lucky to take part. This was my first professional contact with Bernd, after a few informal encounters where we found out that we could really understand each other. I owe to Maldonado the first contact with Bernd, who after getting in touch with me in the early 1990s thought he and I had many things to share.

Formed at the Design School of Ulm, Meurer grew well beyond it, not inheriting from Tomás Maldonado his responses to design problems, but the critical, vigilant and well-informed attitude, always learning, always growing, always challenging himself and his own assertions.

For his retirement party from the Design School Darmstadt, he organized a small event, that he called "*The Art of Doubt*." He confessed to me that he had failed, not really being able to put doubt at the center of the table for the talks of the invited speakers. He himself, instead, was not afraid of his own doubts and always saw them, in final analysis, as strengths, as possibilities to move beyond existing certainties that can become barriers or filters that prevent development. In that way he saw good architecture. Referring to three buildings which he discussed in my edited book *Design and the Social Sciences*, he wrote: "The three examples show how former certainties have been replaced by what Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens have described as self-produced uncertainty, and how doubts—or shall I say freedoms—may become form." And in his book, *The Future of Space*, he wrote: "The space which we experience as living space is space of action, orientation and communication. The 'Future of Space' means the design of space, a process which takes place in the respective present and is never completed."

I will miss him endlessly. He helped me grow as very few people had. It is a privilege to have been close to him. He deserves the last words in this brief homage to him and his impressive mind. He wrote in *Design Issues* 17, No. 1: "We experience the world we live in through action, and through action we change it. Change implies creation or design... Action implies grasping, doubting, negotiating, deciding, altering, and creating. Doubt is a prerequisite for creativity... Design must be liberated from the one-dimensional mode of thought that focuses on solving tasks, and instead must be seen as the constant creation of new tasks."

Jorge Frascara
Padova, December 2011
Professor Emeritus
University of Alberta, Canada

Bernd Meurer was Professor of Design at the Fachhochschule Darmstadt (Faculty of Design), as well as founder and Head of the Laboratorium der Zivilisation - Akademie Deutscher Werkbund.

From 1960 to 1968, he was Research Architect and Assistant Professor at the Hochschule für Gestaltung Ulm. In 1965-66, he was Visiting Assistant Professor at the Research and Graduate Center of the Texas A & M University's School of Architecture in the USA. Thereafter, he worked building and heading the Holzapfel Projekt Institut (Freudenstadt) and the Projekt Co' (Ulm). From 1973 until his retirement, he was Professor of Design at the Fachhochschule Darmstadt. From 1982 to 1986, he taught at the Faculty of Humanities and Philosophy of Philipps Universität Marburg. In 1991 and 1992, he was Visiting Professor at the State University of California at San Jose. In 1994, he was Visiting Professor at Musashino University in Tokyo. He was a member of the Deutscher Werkbund, of the City Development Council of Darmstadt and of the Scientific Committee of the Istituto Europeo di Design at Cagliari, Italy.

He published, among others, the following books: *Kritik der Alltagskultur* (A Critique of Everyday's Culture, with Hartmut Vincon), 1979; *Industrielle Aesthetik* (Industrial Aesthetics, with Hartmut Vincon), 1983; *Der Rechte Winkel von Ulm* (The Right Angle of Ulm), 1987; and *Die Zukunft des Raums/The Future of Space*, 1994. Some of his latest publications are: "The Birth of Contemporary Design," in *History of Industrial Design*, Milano, 1991; "Modernité - l'école d'Ulm - la création réflexive," in *Design, miroir du siècle*, Paris, 1993; "Il traguardo" in *Laboratorium der Zivilisation*, Milano, 1993; The Transformation of Design, in *User-Centred Graphic Design*, London, 1997; and Social Sciences and Design Innovation, in *Design and the Social Sciences, Making Connections*, London, 2002.