



We were the Future

open call

The third edition of the Exercising Modernity Academy, a Polish-German-Israeli cooperation fostering intellectual and artistic exchange, will be devoted to the ways in which modernities across the world have envisioned the future — with its new man and woman, its new society, new ways of life and a new everyday order.

By rejecting the burden of the past, modernity has often emphasised an openness to the future. The “new” was imagined to bring peace to society, and the idea of historical progress fuelled the hope for the ever greater prosperity of ever greater parts of humanity. The ways in which societies might be organised and in which everyday life might be regulated were a subject of interest for many modernisation strategies as well as for modernist projects across the globe. The crucial issues included physical health and hygiene, the upbringing of children, pedagogy and education, the division of labour and economy, and

nation-building. These visions were translated within the scope of various ideological frameworks (e.g. the Zionist movement with its kibbutzim in Israel or Communism in East Central Europe) into specific strategies of organising collective life with distinct spatial politics but also forms of social engineering. The struggles for new forms were closely linked with an idea to bridge the gap between technological progress and private life, as well as with a faith in the new political and social order. Housing and city planning played a key role in this process. The belief in their emancipatory potential and their role in changing the rhythms of every-day life created a growing interest in how objects became tools for building a state identity and how the constructed and designed environment became an expression of certain biopolitics.

This process can be seen though as taking place in an ambivalent way. The strive for something radically new could make way for hitherto unseen terror and decay. Engines of social and technical progress such as standardisation, normalisation and typisation turned out to be a basis for totalitarian building plans and radical spatial segregation – apparent in the Stalinist terror and in the horrors of National Socialism, the darkest chapter in the history of modernity.

The critical experience of the First World War is often called the actual beginning of the 20th century and it has already been stated that 2020 might turn out to be the analogous beginning of the 21st century. Therefore, organised in the midst of a pandemic and in the context of the climate crisis, when questions of possible scenarios for the future are at the centre of public debate, the third edition of the Exercising Modernity Academy proposes to look back on some of the ideas that fuelled the belief in the future a century ago. Exploring the intersections of humanities, architecture, design, art history, social and political sciences, we invite our lecturers and participants to look at what modernisms and 20th century modernisation practices have to offer us today. It will be reflected on contemporary life as a field which requires new action. What kind of new world can art, design and architecture promise us today and help us to achieve? What can we learn from the 20th century experiments today? Can a critical revision of their ideas serve as an inspiration for the solutions we now urgently need? Is it possible to learn from their mistakes and further develop what they have left unfinished?

In these discussions we will be guided by experts representing different perspectives and disciplines, including Zvi Efrat, Sharon Golan, Shira Levy-Binyamini, Marci Shore and Robert Jan van Pelt.

During the Academy, we will encourage reflection through lectures, seminars, workshops and, in the second part, traveling.

The first part, taking place in January and February 2021, will cover three main thematic sections:

Section I: New Ideas and Visions

In a first thematic section, New Ideas and Visions, we wish to explore the philosophical and historiographical concept of modernity in its relation to the “new” and to the idea of progress towards a better future. Crucial to modernity is a revision of tradition, regarding several spheres of life such as technology and economics (the rise of capitalism), religion (secularisation), and politics (development of nation-states). In the East and West, this process manifested itself in strikingly different arrangements, its temporality diverged in each concrete expression. The notions of future, past and their historical relationship to one another differed in respective cases.

Another sphere touched by modernity was the arts, bringing about modernism as an artistic style. This leads to the question of how modern futuristic ideas found a cultural materialisation that we want to explore in a second thematic section.

Section II: New Art for a New Life

The early 20th century trans-national attempts to create a new (wo) man and to shape a new society also reached art, design, and architecture. From housing and kitchen reform, through urban planning and design, modernist visions explored the agency and potential of objects that could serve as a tool for identity-building, at the same time redefining the role of artists and architects in new communities. Modern art and architectural strategies embodied and mirrored many contradictions inherent in modernity, showing the ambivalent potential of modernist projects. The section New Art for a New Life focuses on art, design and architecture as important fields of shaping daily life and as vehicles for implementing new ideas, but also as means for regulation, control and political propaganda.

Section III: New State and Society

New visions of social structure and social order were accompanied by new institutions and new forms of collective life. The section New

State and Society explores manifestations of modernist ideas in different parts of the world, focusing on their ideological and political backgrounds and their consequences for social life. During the Academy, we will be exploring both the historical and socio-political contexts of modernisms as well as their legacy in our contemporary life and culture. Furthermore, we will focus on the ambivalence of this legacy and ways in which it affected 20th century Europe. Through a critical examination of these issues, we will also invite our lecturers and participants to reflect on those aspects of the modernist vision of society that can still inspire those looking for solutions to present-day challenges.

The Exercising Modernity Academy 2021 will be divided into two stages: the winter phase, online, and the spring phase, taking place in stationary form in Israel, Poland and Germany (depending on the current restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic).

Dates of phase I

(online):

29.01.2021–31.01.2021

05.02.2021–07.02.2021

12.02.2021–14.02.2021

Dates of phase II

(depending on the situation

regarding the COVID-19 pandemic):

spring 2021

(May-June 2021)

Our offer includes:

- gratuitous participation in the Academy,
- in case of organising the second stationary part partial coverage of transportation costs and provision of lodging (details will be announced during the first stage of the Academy)
- lectures and workshops held by experienced and acclaimed scholars and artists,
- an interesting program of accompanying events,
- for those who complete the course the entitlement to submit their own research or artistic project, elaborated or expanded during classes, for a special scholarship program organised by the Pilecki Institute and devoted to the issue of modernity in the 20th century (details will be announced mid-2021).

Applications:

The Exercising Modernity Academy is open to researchers specialising in the humanities, curators, architects, and artists who shall come from or reside in Israel, Germany or Poland. Admission to the Academy requires good working knowledge of the English language.

Candidates are invited to submit their applications by e-mail to the address:

apply@exercisingmodernity.com

20.12.2020 (8:00 p.m.)

Please write "Academy 2021" as the subject of the e-mail.

A complete application should include:

1. Scans of signed forms:
 - declaration concerning the controller of personal data – attachment no. 1,
 - declaration concerning the provision of consent to the processing of personal data and personal image data – attachment no. 2,
2. Artistic/academic biographical note and/or portfolio,
3. Draft for a six-month research/artistic project related to the subject matter of the 2021 edition of the Exercising Modernity Academy (up to 2500 characters incl. spaces).

The organisers reserve the right to contact the selected candidate(s) for additional online interviews.

Additional information:

- Application documents will be accepted only in English.
- Successful candidates undertake to attend all sessions online held in the course of the first stage of the Academy and to attend the stationary stage in spring 2021 (depending on the COVID-19 pandemic; details will be announced during the first stage of the Academy)
- Courses, lectures and workshops will be held in English.
- Information on the Exercising Modernity Academy is available on the website of the Pilecki Institute (www.instytutpileckiego.pl) and on www.exercisingmodernity.com.

- Any questions or concerns should be sent to the address: contact@exercisingmodernity.com.
- The results of the recruitment procedure shall be announced by 05.01.2021, and the list of selected participants will be published on the website of the Pilecki Institute (www.instytutpileckiego.pl) and on the project website: www.exercisingmodernity.com.
- The organisers are not under any obligation to substantiate the decisions of the enrolment committee. No appeal procedure has been provided for.
- For candidates selected to participate in the project, the present document will constitute an attachment to the agreement concluded between any such candidate and the Pilecki Institute.

Links to attachments:

[Attachment 1 – Declaration Concerning the Controller of Personal Data](#)

[Attachment 2 – Declaration Concerning the Provision of Consent to the Processing of Personal Data and Personal Image Data](#)

Organiser:
Pilecki-Institut Berlin

Partners:
Adam Mickiewicz Institut
The Liebling Haus – White City Center

