

# Aboard the Bauhaus

## Modernism and Migration

An encounter of art and science

29<sup>th</sup> - 30<sup>th</sup> May 2008

Geschwister-Scholl-Straße 8, Weimar  
Rektoramt, Oberlichtsaal

"Aboard The Bauhaus" is a scandalous formulation. After all, "the Bauhaus," in German: "*das* Bauhaus" (a neuter noun), literally refers to the house of modernism, founded in 1919 by Walter Gropius in Weimar as a design school, the name of which would soon become an international label. "The Bauhaus" came to define an aesthetics of classical modernism affecting a sustainable and global style of industrial design and architecture. As an architectural style, "the Bauhaus" is literally based on the architecture of a "house" as the epitaph of immobility and stability. The formulation "Aboard *The* Bauhaus", than, causes some difficulties because it turns the house into a vehicle, a ship or an aircraft. This vehicle named "*The* Bauhaus" is in German no longer called "*das* Bauhaus" (a neuter noun), but "*die* Bauhaus" (a feminine noun). In the light of this untranslatable crossing of grammatical gender, "*The* Bauhaus" not only destabilizes the construction of the "house," but along with this, also the ideas of the domiciliary right, the right of the householder, the host or the *maître de maison*, the *Hausherr* understood as the symbolical figure of the father, if not of the fatherland. "Aboard *The* Bauhaus" is to be understood as conceptual travel that takes its departure point from this figure of the Bauhaus as a house; it is based on it and it thus accentuates the archaic desire for domiciliation and dwelling. At the same time, however, this figure is to be investigated as always already carrying the movement of migration and (gendered) exile within the foundations of its very architecture.

Rather than a house, the Bauhaus has from its beginning on also been a movement. Already in Weimar, it came into being as an event within the dynamics of the encounter of international artists. And when the Bauhaus left Germany in 1933, it literally became a means of transport, an airplane or a ship, taking passengers "on board" to move them to their exile, thus interweaving the concepts of modernism and migration. Modernism and migration, or progress and globalisation, Enlightenment and (neo-)colonialism, or, for the sake of Weimar, "tolerance" and "Leitkultur," each time understood in binary oppositions – raise new questions in the age of global media culture. It is to these questions that this conference is devoted.

This conference aims at rethinking the concept of modernism by negotiating modernism in relation to migration. Any idea of a "modern society"—this is the conference's point of departure—is in a certain sense always based on the ethical and esthetical foundations of the European traditions of Enlightenment: hospitality towards the foreigner (Rousseau), cosmopolitanism along with the utopian visions of world-citizens and world-peace (Kant), tolerance towards the other and the idea of unity in diversity. All these ideas serve until today as the basic of western, democratic and progressive society. The

conference aims to reconsider the relations between modernity and migration for the current and future area of globalization.

The post-modern epistemic and artistic avant-gardes are often concerned with medial enactments of and about migrants and refugees (sans papiers) in post- and neo-colonial contexts. Here, the relation of modernism and migration is mirrored in the confrontation of Christian-secularized (or "modern") Occident as opposed to a so-called "pre-modern" Moslem Orient. These political and religious aspects need to be—due to the topographic order of the conference—complemented by the special rhetoric of the city of Weimar as post-fascist and post-communist scene. As much as neo-colonial discourses, current debates on the mutual infiltration of the East and the West also contribute to the figure of "The Bauhaus" as a ship. Within this interdisciplinary and international dialogue, the discussion of modernity and migration has to serve as a lever to rethink the idea of Europe and of World, for which the travel "aboard The Bauhaus" stands as an exemplary figure of critical analysis.

The conference invites artistic and academic contributions that are critically dealing with the junction of modernity and migration. Ideas of Enlightenment and Modernity, both historical and contemporary, are to be analysed within their specific cultural and medial shapes: in which form are "tolerance", "hospitality", and "asylum" promised or asserted? How are their politics enacted in the media? How can we conceive of the concept of the house as a place for dwelling and living in the age of globalisation? What does "home" mean, and what "Heimat"? And how do these ideas relate to concepts of nomadism, the drive to travel and the feeling of being driven or driven out? In which sense do the conference's basic figures—„das Bauhaus" as a house and „die Bauhaus" as a vehicle—follow a logic of gender difference, and in how far is this logic decisive for the mechanisms of patronymic piloting and controlling of houses and of ships?

Languages of the conferences include German, English and French.

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