

Critical inroads: Towards a “European-African Bauhaus”

Anja Isabel Schneider
UCLM, Departamento de Historia del Arte,
Facultad de Bellas Artes, Cuenca

At a recent Digital-Live-Design conference (2021), bringing together Swiss art curator, critic and art historian Hans-Ulrich Obrist, Malian writer, film director, and cultural theorist Manthia Diawara and German author, producer and filmmaker Alexander Kluge, the discussion of the need for a New European Bauhaus for this century was addressed. One of the leading intellectual voices in Germany, Kluge specified that a new Bauhaus should not be “so rational and geometric as the historic Bauhaus.” Sparked by his cooperation with Diawara, Kluge made an appeal for a “European-African Bauhaus” in order “to rebuild our lives.” For Kluge this implies not only the architectural structures of houses or of landscapes, but also our inner faculties: “our thinking”, “our emotions”, “our souls” (Kluge, 2021).

This paper offers some reflections on Alexander Kluge’s critical vision in order to open up further inroads and new imaginaries. Cooperation, for Kluge, is key to achieving this (re-)orientation, one that is intrinsically related to the coming together of all the arts from distinct socio-cultural paradigms. Furthermore, what is needed, according to Manthia Diawara, are new forms of aesthetics, specifically an aesthetics of solidarity, to address the ecological crisis of the Anthropocene. How to sustain this critical stance that Kluge and Diawara advocate for in the conception of a new Bauhaus, all the while attending to its inclusiveness?

Within this critical positioning, I will revisit projekt Bauhaus, the 5-year project in which a critical inventory of the ideas of the historic Bauhaus was made. On the occasion of the completion of the project, the event Ciao Bauhaus! was held in 2019 at the Volksbühne Berlin 100 years after its founding, with participants, such as Beatriz Colomina, Mark Wigley and Alexander Kluge to reassess the old Bauhaus, “its utopian excesses, its immanent contradictions, and its potential for the present.”

