

Rixt Hoekstra

Goethe University, Frankfurt am Main

Capriciousness versus dogma: the debate on post modernity during the Bauhaus Kolloquia, 1979-1989.

This proposal deals with the debate on post modernism as held during the Bauhaus Kolloquia organised from 1979 to 1989 in Weimar, Germany. The first Bauhaus Kolloquium was organised in the year 1976, during the years of the GDR regime in Eastern Germany. It was an outcome of the debate by the side of scholars, architects and the Socialist Unity Party, on what to do with the Bauhaus heritage.

The debate about postmodernism started during the second Kolloquium, organised in June 1979. Many speakers protested against postmodernism, reinforced by the fact that they saw themselves as defenders of the Bauhaus tradition. In fact, in Weimar the debate about postmodernism was influenced by the politics of the cold war as well as by the memory of one of the icons of modernism in architecture. For many speakers, the Eastern German cities of Weimar and Dessau represented the true Bauhaus tradition, whereas Western Germany, even though they owned the Bauhaus Archive in West Berlin, should be seen as traitors for not sticking to the modernist cause. At the same time, the debate on postmodernism was connected in a direct way to cultural politics and sometimes politics outright.

The debate on postmodernism reached its peak during the last Bauhaus Kolloquium before the Change, in June 1989. In an emotionally and political charged time, this Kolloquium was dedicated not without reason to the theme of culture and power. Among others, a podium discussion was organised with Charles Jencks and Oswald Matthias Ungers as guest speakers. The outcomes of this debate were considered to be so politically charged that they could not be included in the conference proceedings published immediately after the Change. In fact, the debate remained unpublished until the year 2006.

In my contribution I want to analyse the debate on postmodernism as it structured the Bauhaus Kolloquia before the Change. Specifically, I want to demonstrate how close the debate on postmodernism was connected with cultural politics. I also intend to show the fate of the postmodernist debate during the difficult years of the Change.