

# ARCHITECTURES OF UTILITY

## Modernism of two German States

### SITE AND BACKGROUND

Bauhaus is preparing its 100. anniversary. There are currently three institutions in Germany claiming to inherit and follow institutions of the famous school. There is the Bauhaus Archive in Berlin showing original works from Bauhaus and other designed objects following the formal principles. Secondly there is the famous Bauhaus Campus in Dessau, remarkable architecture designed by Bauhaus teachers who later became famous for their so-called international style.

There is also Bauhaus-University in Weimar. Weimar is the place where Bauhaus was originally founded. The Nazi-Government found the activities of Bauhaus suspicious and forced the school to first move to Dessau, later to Berlin and finally to close down completely. In GDR-times the university of Weimar became famous for their education in architecture and civil engineering. After the reunification, the university re-opened led by new professors and was re-named Bauhaus-University again.

Weimar is a city with diverse historical heritage. The famous writer, academic and politician Goethe lived and worked in Weimar, the first Democratic State of German originated there and Hitler implemented his monumental representative architecture right in the middle of the city. Tourism is important and a proper Bauhaus-Museum would add to the range of sights. Therefore a competition was held to design a museum building replacing a canteen building from GDR-times situated in the famous English Landscape Park created by Goethe. Students and conservationists protested, because this canteen building is actually a fine example of East German modernist architecture. With their initiative „Mensadebatte“ they raised awareness of the buildings qualities. It was finally listed as a monument and a new competition was held for a different site in the very core of politically symbolic architecture, right next to Hitlers Gau-Forum which is now used by the citys administration. The chosen design is a simple white cube. The foundation responsible for the project has become very cautious about their actions, trying to avoid further controversies.

The museum will be made to preserve Bauhaus in its artifacts keeping a popular version of what the school was. A commentary to the news on planned celebrations of the 100. anniversary pointed out that Bauhaus was highly controversial at its time. Because a range of differing approaches towards changing society by art came together in one institution it was regarded by some politicians as a threat to their system of power relations. Furthermore the commentator suspects that a comparable institution in Germany today would be regarded the same way. German architecture critique is still talking about architecture in stylistic terms, linking it to certain ideologies. This is still used as a reason to demolish significant built heritage. So the statement does not appear far-fetched.

However there have been initiatives to keep up alternative understandings of Bauhaus. At Bauhaus University students founded a design group named „my bauhaus is better than yours“. This group collaborated with „Mensadebatte“. In early 2015 the main journal for architectural theory in Germany „Arch+“ started a series of events in the name of the Bauhaus anniversary titled: „Can art change society?“

## CONCEPT BASED ON RESEARCH

The ideas developed in the Bauhaus school were revolutionary. Its aim was nothing less than transforming society by art. The teachers developed different approaches how this could be done. Two main branches can be identified as I pointed out in my research: Firstly a rather spiritual approach focusing on the individual and organic growth represented by the teacher Johannes Itten, which is widely forgotten today, and secondly the idea of a universal rational order focusing on the collective. The second approach would later lead to the development of the international style in the United States represented among others by the Bauhaus teacher Walter Gropius. After WWII the young European welfare followed American examples. Especially in Germany a strict rational approach to architecture along with economic growth led to the production of many large scale public buildings, which are not necessarily following a certain style but share a common concept.

The German architect Ernst Neufert is known for his book „Bauentwurfslehre“ originally written in the 1930s. The approach of defining and applying the perfect (minimized) measurements on architectural design became the leading concept for the architecture of the 1960s and 70s in Germany. Measurements were defined as norms on many scales. Rudolf Hillebrecht is known for his controversial rebuilding of the city of Hanover. His calculations concerning building economy aim to include all possible parameters from door handles to urban scale. Aiming to provide the public facilities in the most economic way, he managed to provide the needed facilities fast. On the other hand spaces are highly programmed and leave little room for personal appropriation. The use of new building materials and the short building period also led to climate issues in many buildings. In his time his approach was regarded as exemplary beyond the borders of West-Germany. They were taken up by East-German architects and political leaders, who saw it as a solution to deal with the constant material shortage the country was facing.

The architecture of the 1960s and 70s can be seen as an historical follow-up on a concept developed in Bauhaus. German architecture today is still subject to a strict catalogue of norms. While remaining public buildings from this period a controversial – rejected by most laymen and defeated by some professionals – contemporary German architecture (with some exceptions) still follows the same design principles. The architecture is too rigid, not adjustable to changes of needs within society.

The new claim for sustainability along with the expressed need of people for individual appropriation are contemporary challenges that ask for a re-definition of the architect's profession. A look back into the history of the modern movement, a look back into the other forgotten approach of Bauhaus can help to develop new ideas. At the same time it is important to make a clear distinction between the old purely rational, collective approach and a new contemporary architecture. The architecture of the 1960s and 70s representing this old approach should therefore be interpreted in an historical context.

## DESIGN GOALS

I propose an alternative design for the Bauhaus Museum in Weimar. It aims to emphasize the experimental and educational aspects of the school. Therefore it will consist of an exhibition space as a base showing artefacts of the school from 1919 to 1933.

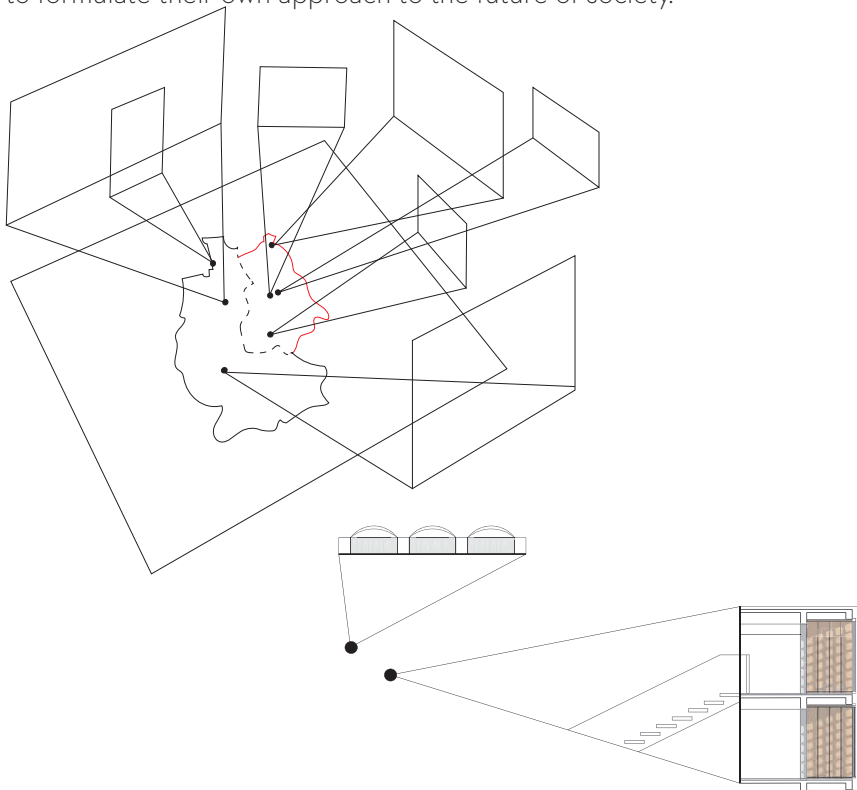
The site on city level has an edge towards the park, situated 5 meters below. The building is oriented towards the park. With main entrance and restaurant facing south.

Growing out of this base there will be a second exhibition route. For this part I use fragments of the buildings I examined in my research. As spolia they show what direction modernity took after Bauhaus. At the same time in their new arrangement they will create a new sequence of spaces. By breaking the purely functional and scientific setup of these buildings I hope to allow diverse forms of art and life.

The transition between the archaic underground and the fragmented ruin-landscape on top is an important part of the design, because the way the visitor encounters spaces shapes his perception of them. Movement is the key element to change and evolution as opposed to the „crystalized“ form, as Bernard Cache puts it, architecture took in the 1960s and 70s. The visitor will move through spaces with are connected via a mediating portal frame walk.

Cache also uses the notion of frame in which the spacial intervention takes place. The idea of taking certain framed pieces out of a whole and putting them back together in a different context is the idea behind my design. (see diagrams)

The setup I create will work as an exhibition showing the history of the buildings and communicating questions of where to go from there. This can add to the debate around the upcoming anniversary. The structures are put on the new site in their current state so the question of maintenance will be up to a generation of artists and architects to come. According to fulfill the promise made by Bauhaus University „I came to see a museum and I found a school“ they will be invited to use the museum as a base to formulate their own approach to the future of society.



## REFLECTION

So far the research for me was generally very helpful. First I collected information about my six case studies in different archives and on site. By developing a deep understanding of the architectural approach of the time I was able to put contemporary approaches in a context that helps me evaluate them. Although seemingly far away from the matter of 60s architecture „earth moves“ by Bernard Cache has been a great inspiration and helped me seeing things clearer.

After reading Cache I would aim for an architecture that starts from the features of matter, of the materials used instead of starting from a form the matter is forced into. But it is hard to apply Caches claim for movement in architecture to an architecture that represents the opposite of it. I had to compromise. In my opinion the arrangement of fragments has to follow the rules of the fragments to some extent, because I want to make the experience as authentic as possible. Therefore I keep the strict rectangular orientation. I tried to achieve an appropriate spacial experience also in the spaces inbetween, so I developed the courtyard. Those forms require rather traditional construction methods.

The use of a climate concept and the use of loam from the excavation on site ensure a good indoor climate as a step towards a less rigid architecture. Instead of pretending to be independent from its environment I aim to work together with the forces of nature. A strong connection to the spacially diverse surrounding is important.

The portal frame walks not only mediates between different indoor exhibition spaces but also between inside and outside. At the same time it is a space of individual contemplation and adds a spiritual quality. The movement of the visitor through this space and the transition into other spaces creates an experience in which the fragments of architecture and their decay are exhibited.