

AR2A011

20.04.2023

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*‘[...] We should help the artists
to overcome the bad luck that
has overcome them’*

A thesis on the relationship between politics,
power and practice of Hermann
Henselmann.

Hugo van Rossum, 4840909

Introduction

As a future architect, I'm continuously learning about the process of designing our built environment - what are its influences? What factors determine the spatial structure, materials and details? Most of the time it is a complex combination of architectural trends, governmental regulations, spatial context, client needs... A moment in history where the relationship between these factors differed greatly from the contemporary western architectural world was during the German Democratic Republic (DDR), from 1949 to 1989. In this socialist one-party state, architecture was seen as an important tool for making the socialist ideology a spatial reality.

In this thesis, I wish to research the effects of political choices, goals and ideologies of the DDR and the USSR had on the architecture constructed there in the period after the second world war until the mid 1960's. As the width of this subject does not allow me to go into enough depth, I wish to research this through the life of one specific architect – Hermann Henselmann (1905 – 1995). It can be said that he was the only 'starchitect' of the German Democratic Republic.



Figure 1, Hermann Henselmann

Henselmann designed some of the most notable East German architecture, like the *Hochhaus an der Weberwiese*, the *Haus des Lehrers* and the *Fernsehturm*. This translated quote from the East German book "Hermann Henselmann - Gedanken, Ideen, Bauten, Projekte" from 1978 shows the admiration for him: "Hermann Henselmann is the most famous architect of the DDR – in his own country and abroad. He got this distinction because he [...] politically determined went to become the architect of the future socialist republic". (Heise, 1978)

This relationship between political power and Hermann Henselmann's architecture is carried out in the context of two significant buildings in Berlin designed by him: the *Hochhaus an der Weberwiese*

(1952), a distinct Stalinist and Socialist Realist building, and the *Haus des Lehrers* (1964), an important Socialist Modernist building. These two projects, their design eight years apart, have a vastly different architectural language applied to them. How could this drastic change happen? What processes lead to their conception? How did the politics of the east German and Soviet governments impact their design?

Academic context

There is a vast amount of information accessible to me about the life and practice of Hermann Henselmann and architecture of the DDR. Most sources that I found about Henselmann give an overview of his life as a whole: Who was he? What did he make? Also the course of East German architecture is well-documented. Who were the big players? What buildings make it distinct? What was the societal context of this architecture? What I want to do is take a specific angle to this subject matter: Distill the large amount of information into the pieces that specifically explain the trilateral relationship between Henselmann, the socialist east German government and the architecture he designed.

Structure of this thesis

This thesis is about change. It is about the political impact on Henselmann's designs changing from Modernism, to Socialist Realism and finally towards Socialist Modernism. This story is anchored by looking at the two aforementioned case studies as culminations of Henselmann's architectural evolution. It is described as objectively as possible, with research being used that was composed after the fall of the DDR, making it unaffected by their policies. This objective information is contrasted or supplemented with articles and lectures from that time, making it possible to investigate if there was a difference between opinions of that time (or 'strategic points of view' Henselmann used to navigate the political maze he found himself in).

WW2 up until 'Das Hochhaus an der Weberwiese'----

Background

Henselmann was born on the third of February 1905 in Roßla. He learned carpentry, just like his father and was consequently expected to take over the carpentry workshop of his father. However, he went to Berlin to study Architecture. At the beginning of his architectural career in the early 1930's, he designed the Villa Kenwin in eastern Switzerland for a rich couple. He worked together with the Hungarian film architect Alexander Ferenczy, whose influence and abilities were the reason the reason Henselmann was hired to work there at all. This relationship largely played down in Henselmann's autobiography, where the role of Ferenczy was portrayed as that of a mediator and not even referring to him by name, just by 'that friendly Hungarian'. It could be a political move of Henselmann to give himself more praise than in reality could be accredited. As a convinced socialist, he felt the need to justify designing a house for a couple of millionaires; In his autobiography, he stressed multiple times how the clients were still socialists, regardless of their fortunes.

This house has strong Modernist characteristics, like visible load-bearing columns, ribbon windows that pass around the house's corners and the roof terrace. It is seen as a collage of modernist elements, rather than a coherent system (Kossel, 2013, p. 32). Henselmann saw modernist architects like Gropius and Le Corbusier as big examples for his architectural designs.

Weimar

After the second world war, Germany had to be built from the ground up – physically, socially and politically. As a part of this undertaking, Hermann Henselmann aided to re-establish the KPD, the Communist Party of Germany. He became deputy chairman of the antifascist committee of the KPD. Following these political undertakings, he was appointed leader and professor of the 'Staatliche Hochschule für Baukunst und bildende Künste in Weimar', the Federal School for Architecture and the Arts, although this appointment came with some criticism. To many, it seemed like he was not experienced enough to lead an entire school. On top of this, the fact that he was appointed by his political connections did not feel right to some. Regardless of these criticisms, he continued to work on reopening the school.

His affection for Socialism, Modernism and German Humanism was apparent in the speech he gave when the school opened its doors in 1946. In this speech, he advocated for a new direction in architecture: connecting Modernism with the Humanism of the German classic period (characterized by authors like Goethe and Schiller). Modernism to Henselmann was of German heritage and he saw it as an appropriate style for a time after National-Socialist rule. As the leader of the school, he tried to reform it after that long period of oppression - one of the measures to achieve this was by organizing courses for the teachers where the atrocities of the NS-rule were depicted. Particular focus was directed towards disproving the Nazi-ideologies concerning architecture and art. Following this, he fired almost all professors and teachers because of their political inclination during the national socialist rule. On top of this, he implemented political education about the future political ideology that would be compulsory for the entire Soviet Occupational Zone (future Eastern Germany). This included for example celebrating the 125-year birthday of Friedrich Engels. Henselmann wanted to go back to the educational model of the 'Bauhaus' before the war, with the removal of class privilege as a main focus. The school should be open to all highly qualifying students from the workers' class.

Henselmann described these first post-war years in Weimar as follows: *"I worked in Gotha in the Communist Party, from the first moments. Then the party decided that I should take upon me the leadership of the School of Architecture in Weimar. I built that school from nothing."* (Kossel, 2013)

Articles and Lectures

In 1948, still in Weimar, Henselmann published an article in the newspaper 'Forum' with the title 'Art and Society' (Henselmann, 1948). In this politically loaded article, he criticized the takeover of the 'Soviet System', with a stress on cultural and architectural questions. He reused concepts, sometimes even literal sentences from his speech that celebrated the opening of the school in Weimar, making it apparent that this article was to be an update on his cultural-political position. About American and Soviet art he writes: *"The Soviet arts has the name of 'Socialist Realism' [...] We already are finding out right now that this encounter [with Socialist Realism] is necessary, and necessitates us to be thankful for this, [...] but that we cannot use these things. We need our own shapes, our own forms"*. (Kossel, 2013, p. 82) In 1947 Henselmann held a lecture where he advocated to

learn from Modernism (Henselmann, 1948), of which he was, like mentioned earlier, a big proponent. In this lecture, he argues that “*The beauty of Modernism is the grace, its truth is the freedom and the strived goodness the cheerfulness that will overcome the demonic life (meaning life under national socialism)*”. To Henselmann, the view outside of Germany’s borders was necessary. During the war Modernism had developed further in the USA, unlike the standstill of Modernist development during the NS-era. He wanted to learn from it to make Modernism suitable for the current Soviet Occupational Zone (Kossel, 2013).

Leaving Weimar

After some time, tensions started to develop with Alfred Becker, who was delegated to Weimar to ‘defend against decadent philosophies’ and often publicly disagreed on Henselmann’s ideas. Henselmann gave him in his letters the rather uncharming nickname of ‘*the Polyp*’, which gives an idea what his opinion was on him. One example of this was Becker’s dislike of the lectures about Modernism that Henselmann gave at the school in Weimar, giving as reason that they were ‘*professionally and politically redundant*’. This went so far that Becker proceeded politically against Henselmann, which made his work seem ‘*politically concerning*’, reaching as far as the central government of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED). On the 13th of June 1949 he resigned from his position in Weimar to completely move to Berlin. (Flierl, 2018)

Interesting enough, these political struggles seem to be played down significantly in a book about Henselmann from 1978, written in Eastern Berlin by himself under the rule of the SED. In this book, a struggle about ‘the further leadership of the school’ is discussed that made it impossible for him to stay in Weimar. Issues about his lectures not being in line with the political ambitions of the time are not discussed.

From Weimar to Berlin – Institut für Bauwesen

On the first of July 1946 the ‘Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin’, the Berlin Academy of Sciences was reopened. Here, on the 16th of October 1947, the ‘Institut für Bauwesen’ (IfB) was opened. The main motivation for the IfB was the urgent need for housing, following war-time destruction of around 40% of all housing (Baghdady, 2016) and a massive influx of refugees from former East German territories. (Flierl, 2018) The founding of the IfB was under the leadership

of Hans Scharoun. This key figure in the rebuilding of Berlin was appointed city planning officer by the Soviet city command in Berlin between May 1945 and October 1946. During his time there, he managed the day-to-day affairs of rebuilding Berlin, yet also looked into the future: from August to October 1946 he showed designs for the future of Berlin in the exhibition *Berlin plant*, ‘Berlin is planning’. Shortly after the Weimar school of Architecture and Arts was opened, Hermann Henselmann joined this discussion. From 1947, both worked together in founding the IfB. After the Soviet military administration approved of the leaders of the departments that were suggested by Scharoun and Henselmann, the IfB could finally be opened with prominent architects as chairs of the departments, like Max Taut being responsible for *Wohnungswesen*, ‘dwelling’.

The beginning of the IfB happened quite slowly – the work that was happening would be under constant supervision by the allied occupying forces and workplaces were in short supply (Flierl, 2018). On top of this, Henselmann had a reputation for the aforementioned political untrustworthiness that came with him from Weimar.

Despite big aspirations of Scharoun and Henselmann, the IfB only lasted until 1950. The main cause for the end of this short-lived institution was the *Aufbaugesetz*, the ‘Rebuilding bill’, enacted by the Parliament of the DDR. In this bill, the IfB was merged with the Institute for Urbanism and Highrise at the Ministry of Rebuilding, to form the *Deutsche Bauakademie*, or the German Building Academy, but most importantly, it enacted the *Sechzehn Grundsätze des Städtebaus*, or the Sixteen Principles of Urbanism. (Kossel, 2013). For this thesis these Principles of Urbanism are crucial, since they quite directly impacted the design of the *Hochhaus an der Weberniese* and shaped early East German architecture. In the next paragraph, I will elaborate further on this impactful set of rules

Sixteen Principles of Urbanism

All new construction in the DDR between 1950 and 1955 was dictated by these Sixteen Principles, that should bring the Soviet architectural system to the German Democratic Republic – from now on, ‘Socialist Realism’ was obligated by law. These rules were the result of a study trip to the Soviet Union by a group of East German architects and politicians in the first half of 1950 (Kossel, 2013, p. 91). During various meetings with high-ranking representatives of the ministry of urbanism and the school of

architecture of the Soviet Union, it was becoming apparent that the goal of the Soviet representatives was to encapsulate the DDR into the realm of Soviet architectural-political practice. (Kossel, 2013, p. 91). In a lecture by the president of the Academy of Architecture of the USSR, Modernism (or as they called it, 'Constructivism') was a 'failed experiment', and 'an expression of grave pessimism'. Modernism was described as avoidant of the past and inventing new forms that totally lack an artistic component.

Some of these Principles include (6) *The city center is the defining core of the city. The center of the city is the political center for the life of its population.* (Bekanntmachung der Grundsätze des Städtebaus., 1950) Another point being made in these Principles is that (14) *architecture in its shape should be national, and in its content democratic*, where 'democratic' was a word used early on by the SED to signify 'socialist'. Rules about how compact the city should be or where prominent buildings and large boulevards should be places were also added to these Principles. Even a direct aversion against the Modernist urban planning, where isolated apartment buildings were placed in a green 'park', was established: (12) *The city cannot be transformed into a garden. Obviously, green spaces are necessary, yet this Principle cannot be overruled: In the city one lives in an urban environment, in the suburbs one lives more rural.*

The design of these Sixteen Principles was heavily contested by Henselmann and Scharoun, who received a draft before its enactment as something they could discuss on by the deputy Minister President Dr. Lothar Bolz. Together they wrote a list of suggestions for alterations to the Sixteen Principles, which included mentions of the Principles being too 'dictatorial' and sometimes using terminology for elements of urban design that were 'also used by Hitler himself'. The alterations that they submitted were ineffective – the Aufbaugesetz was enacted without their consideration.

Two failed attempts at designing the Stalinallee

After the large scale bombing of Berlin in the second world war, the *Große Frankfurter Straße*, an important street in Berlin, was largely destroyed. Being situated in the post-war Soviet occupational zone, this destroyed street was seen as a way to display architectural and urbanistic ambitions of the future DDR. From now on, it would be considered the 'the first Socialist Street in Berlin' (Kossel, 2013, p. 100). In June of 1950, Henselmann made a design for the *Große Frankfurter Straße*, from now on the *Stalinallee*. This draft version was called *Vorentwurf I*,

'Pre-design I', and was an adaptation of *Wohnzelle Friedrichsbain*, a housing project designed by Hans Scharoun, the first realized architectural-urban design for post-war eastern Berlin. *Vorentwurf I* consisted of eight-story housing blocks, perpendicular to the main street with shops on the ground level. The underlying principle was a design by Max Taut that was much used in west-German reconstruction efforts (Kossel, 2013, p. 101). This connection to west-German architectural practice exhibits Henselmann's closeness to international Modernism. It almost goes without saying that this alignment was not met with rejoice by the SED.

After his *Vorentwurf I* was declined because it was too formalist – an umbrella term used by the SED to designate architecture that was not appreciated by them, usually modernist or functionalist - he was encouraged to design the street with more attention to 'national tradition'. This criticism was most probably founded in the just-released *16 Principles of Urbanism*. As a result of this, Henselmann collaborated with the architect Rolf Göpfert on a second design for the Stalinallee, *Vorentwurf II*. Göpfert already had experience in designing under an authoritative government - he joined the NSDAP in 1935 and took part in competitions to design buildings for the *Hitlerjugend*, the national socialist youth organization. In 1939 to 1944 he worked for a petroleum company to design factory buildings (Kossel, 2013). After the war, Henselmann and Göpfert met and he was subsequently employed at the IfB. Henselmann's architectural practices in the first half of the 1950's were crucially influenced by Göpfert's experience during the national-socialist era in designing buildings following politically influenced guidelines; following this Göpfert was an important help for Henselmann in giving socialist architecture in the early '50s a representative character (Kossel, 2013). Despite renewed efforts by Henselmann and Göpfert, their *Vorentwurf II* again was rejected by the Politburo of the SED.

***Formalismus und Realismus* [H.H. In: *Planen und Bauen*, 4 (1950), H. 6, S. 182-190]**

Just as the *16 Principles of Urbanism* were released and it was getting apparent what role the government wanted to have in architecture, Henselmann wrote the following article in *Planen und Bauen* (Henselmann, 1950): In this article, he attempts to give the contemporary architect a place in the architectural debate that was going on at that time. The article has a 'disclaimer' in the book (Henselmann, 1978) where I found it amongst other texts by Henselmann, about that it sparked

huge debate when it was published. The reason given was that 'it didn't distance itself enough from the Modernist style'. Henselmann argues that modernism started as an almost rebellious movement against the destruction of capitalist forces in the built environment – the modernists tried to design light, affordable and livable dwellings in a time where 'Architecture had become a commodity'. He praises the factories by Gropius, the dwellings by Bruno Taut and the new spatial ideas developed by Mies van der Rohe in the Barcelona Pavillion.

***Der reaktionäre Charakter des Konstruktivismus* [Neues Deutschland, 4. Dec 1951, Berlin)**

Within a year, Henselmann's stance on Modernism and functionalism changed drastically. He discusses his new views in the national newspaper of the DDR, the *Neues Deutschland*. The article (Henselmann, 1951) starts with his idea of how architecture comes to exist: to him, content and form (*Inhalt und Form*) are in a continuous fight, yet form a dialectic unity, both of which shape the design process. In his view, the quality of architecture decays when one is preferred over the other – like function over idea and material over form. From that point, the main subject of this article is his disregard of choosing functionalism over form. In this context, Bauhaus is discussed – Henselmann points out that Bauhaus started with the idea that architecture should be an *'Einheitskunstwerk'*, where artists and craftsmen are united as both giver and receiver of knowledge. However, in his opinion this progressive stance weakens up to the point that the aesthetic of the Bauhaus can be defined with the premise that *'the perfect function is beautiful'*. Henselmann agrees that the proper functioning of a building causes some 'beneficial psychological effects', yet in his view, the aesthetic experience of a building cannot be compared to the 'pleasure of functionality' – the happiness of seeing a car buzzing along does not compare to seeing the Freiburger Münster (an impressive gothic church in the German city of Freiburg). To further explain his disdain for this functionalist attitude, he almost mocks Bauhaus with this expression: *'They asked: should we place a statue of our ancestors, or a toilet? And of course, the toilet was chosen'*. Additionally, Henselmann discusses how developments like the *Existenz-Minimum* apartments are a direct result of capitalism – the saved costs are only profitable for the bourgeoisie and architects are only successful in capitalist societies if they can achieve maximum profits for the bourgeoisie. He

argues that when there is only function and no art, architecture becomes cosmopolitan. Henselmann finishes the article with the statement that the people should recognize their traditions and history in their architecture – *'Not architecture for the people, but architecture of the people'*.

'About architectural style, political style and comrade Henselmann' – More political interference into the design of the rebuilding of Berlin

In spring of 1951, there still no urban design and architectural language for the Stalinallee, so a competition was announced for its design, held between 25.04.1951 and 31.07.1951. This competition was covered by the SED-controlled newspaper *Neues Deutschland*, 'New Germany'. In the final days of the competition, the end of July, an article by editor-in-chief Rudolf Herrnstadt was released, called *'About architectural style, political style and comrade Henselmann'*. In the article, a meeting on the 25.07.51 was discussed between selected members of the SED and the leaders of the *Meisterwerkstätten* of the *Deutsche Bauakademie*, initiated because of a rejected design by Paulick for the Weberwiese. In this meeting, the lack of 'satisfying designs for large projects' was discussed. Herrnstadt continues criticizing Paulick's design for the Weberwiese, yet also gives a refutation of Functionalism. High-rises by Mies van der Rohe are criticized because of their 'textbook-example of Cosmopolitanism in architecture and its rejection of artistic principles'. On top of this, Henselmann's designs for the Stalinallee are criticized: *'So did Henselmann do something bad? Yes. He acted against the political style, that we expect from our comrades'*. (Flierl, 2018, p. 40). A solution to this alleged problem is also given: *'So what should we do in a scenario like this? The job for the party is clear: We should help the artists to overcome the bad luck that has overcome them'*. It is clear what the ambitions were of the SED concerning architecture and the arts: strict control – so the political ideology is adequately represented.

In this article, a competition was announced for the *Weberwiese*, the first project that was planned to be built in the Stalinallee. The 'three masters' of the *Meisterwerkstätten* of the Bauakademie were challenged to make a design for this large building, within one week.

The competition for the Weberwiese

All three leaders of the *Meisterwerkstätten* - Henselmann, Hopp and Paulick - delivered a design by the end of this week. Designs for the previous

competition for the Stalinallee by Hopp and Paulick were already praised earlier, while Henselmann's designs were criticized; This led to an enormous pressure on Henselmann to do his absolute best to regain his reputation as a designer.

On the third of August in 1951, Herrnsdorf published an article discussing the results of this

competition, *'our architects give an answer'*, declaring Henselmann the winner as a *'comrade that is capable of learning, who is allowed to sometimes make a mistake'*, meaning that Henselmann politically redeemed himself and his reputation was saved. The design that was proposed by him (see figure 2), would already be starting construction in one month, on the first of September.

Conclusion part 1 – WW2 up until the construction of the Hochhaus an der Weberwiese

From his first project, well before WW2, Henselmann saw himself as a convinced socialist and a big proponent of Modernism, drawing inspiration from the big names like Gropius or van der Rohe. It's because of his socialist alignment that shortly after the war, he helped to establish the Communist Party in Germany, that would later become the SED. In these early years, he advocated for Modernism in a Socialist context with great vigor. Yet during his years in Weimar, in Berlin at the IfB and at the Bauakademie, he was politically 'encouraged' to design in this historicizing style due to the political aspirations of the SED and the strong influence of Socialist Realist architecture from the Soviet Union. Having talent in navigating this political labyrinth, his designs started to be more and more influenced by the requirements of the SED. This architectural language that was imposed on him culminated in the *Hochhaus an der Weberwiese* – a striking example of Socialist Realist architecture in early post-war eastern Berlin.



Figure 2, Hochhaus an der Weberwiese, Hermann Henselmann

Part II: Stalin's death (1953) until the Haus des Lehrers (1964)

Destalinization

On the fifth of March in 1953, Joseph Stalin died. Being the General Secretary of the Communist party from 1922 up until 1952 and seizing dictatorial powers in 1928, he had a profound impact on politics of the Soviet Union and the life of its inhabitants. The power vacuum left by his death was filled by Nikita Khrushchev; this long-time member of the Communist Party, long a close colleague to Stalin, aimed for policies of de-Stalinization and less oppressive government. The implications for the future of architecture through this change in leadership were made apparent in the All-Union conference in Moscow in November 1954: here, a 'new course' was projected that encompassed a vision for the future of soviet architecture. At the conference, the soviet architect G. Gradov emphasized that *"The party and the government have repeatedly pointed out that ostentation and ornateness contradict the essence of Soviet architecture, that it should be purposeful, that it must please the eye with simplicity, logic and beauty of forms."* (Kossel, 2013, p. 117). This 'new course' caused something in the DDR that could only be described as an identity crisis. For a new country that was actively trying to establish its own architectural language, a U-turn in governmental architectural policy proved to cause difficulties. Where from 1950 Socialist Realism was *de iure* the only style practiced in the DDR – with its historicism, ornaments and classic monumentality - five years later this was replaced by an architectural mentality that was described as *"the current state of the development of science and technology"*.

It has to be noted that in the Soviet union, the Socialist Realist style had been in use since the early 1930's and had therefore been allowed more time to develop. When this style was imposed on the DDR in 1950, the architects were struggling to find their own interpretation of this Soviet style. And just as they were developing German interpretations, the rules dictating it were revoked.

As the east German government wanted to differentiate itself from the *box-houses that are built to rebuild west German cities* (Kossel, 2013, p. 117) – even though there was a strong incentive from the central government in Moscow to fully industrialize the construction industry - Walter Ulbricht pushed for government buildings to still be constructed in the Socialist Realist style developed in the early 50s.

He clarified: *"The box houses, which are being built in West Berlin, in Frankfurt am Main, in Stuttgart and in Hamburg according to the American model, mean a complete break with the national traditions of the German people. [...] it is the task of the architects of the German Democratic Republic to honor the great achievements of the German master builders."*

A new direction in architecture

In June 1955, Henselmann wrote an article in 'Sonntag', *New Directions in Architecture* (Henselmann, 1955) where he proclaimed that architecture had to go into a new direction. In his view, mistakes had been made in the past few years ('We need to bite into the sour apple of self-criticism'), that he then proceeds to elaborate on. First, he criticized how (1.) 'The handling of the method of Socialist Realism was based on incorrect perceptions' and (2.) the 'convincing' of architects to utilize the style of Socialist Realism by the government was rather based on authority, not on conversation.

Henselmann elaborates further on these mistakes, he argues that they consisted of overvaluing the non-material part of architecture, which in many times resulted in undesirable results in the building, like 'petite-bourgeois façade architecture' (excessive ornamentation) and a disregard of the (technical) functionality of the building. In his 1955 view, functionality and technical perfection is essential for experiencing architectural beauty.

Henselmann continues his article on the evolution of architecture; Every age has its own architecture, representing changing ideas of the corresponding society. Because the unique situation of each society manifests itself in the built environment, decaying capitalism causes a decay of architecture – In his view, capitalistic architecture misses big ideas, imagination and plasticity. What is the result of this? Boxes with empty decoration.

How should this new path in architecture be shaped? He bases his opinion on a statement about music by Andrei Zhdanov, a high-ranking soviet politician and a 'cultural ideologist', that describes his desire to return to classical music: *'It would not be bad, if we would compose more musical pieces that equal the classics in content, form, brilliance, beauty and musicality'*. In Henselmann's view, this approach to music is impossible for architecture – *'We cannot build the worker's palaces like ancient temples'*. He argues that sticking to an old architectural canon halts the use of new construction materials and methods.

Haus des Lehrers and Oscar Niemeyer

In 1955, during the design of the Interbau 1957 in the Hansaviertel – a rebuilding project in West Berlin where many prominent modernist architects were invited to design a building – Oscar Niemeyer was visiting Berlin to concretize his design for the Interbau. During his stay in Berlin, Niemeyer visited Henselmann multiple times in East Berlin and complimented the design of the Stalinallee, describing it as ‘*A street that without a doubt has the aspect of great European avenues*’. This praise of essentially socialist architecture was subsequently barred from publication in the West (Kossel, 2013, p. 156).



Figure 3, Three Forces Square, Oscar Niemeyer



Figure 4, Haus des Lehrers, Hermann Henselmann

Niemeyer, a Brazilian modernist architect, had a profound influence on the architecture of Hermann Henselmann. In figures 3 and 4, the Three Forces Square by Niemeyer and the *Haus des Lehrers* by Henselmann are shown – the influence that

Niemeyer had on Henselmann is clearly visible in the low dome, contrasted with the narrow high-rise.

Haus des Lehrers in Berlin

Henselmann got the opportunity to write about his design for the Haus des Lehrers in Berlin in the magazine *Deutsche Architektur* in 1964 (Henselmann, 1964). One of the first key aspects that characterize his design is that ‘*Design principles that correspond to the current level of abilities in the construction industry were used in the design*’. This future oriented attitude – in stark contrast to the articles he wrote in the late 40s and early 50s – can also be found in this quote: ‘*an architect rather talks about what he will build, than about what he has built*’.

He continues about the design of the building, the composition of the massing and the contrast of the high-rise and the low-rise elements. What I found remarkable was the following part, where he in depth praises the beauty and visibility of the functional acoustic elements in the big hall: ‘*The hall was formed in total agreement with the acoustic requirements, these requirements were made visible, verifiable and tangible*’. He summarizes this with this statement: “*Man muss sehen, wie gut man hören kann*”, or ‘*It has to be visible, how good the acoustics are*’. It can be said here that he sees beauty in the visual functionalism that is present in his design.

Henselmann proves in his opinion that monumentality can be achieved with industrial manufacturing methods of construction materials, and that giant architectural steps like these are crucial in preventing being stuck in ‘*mediocre provincial imitations*’.

Conclusion Part II: Stalin’s death (1953) until the Haus des Lehrers (1964)

When in 1954 Khrushchev came to power, his policies on de-Stalinization subsequently stopped the enforcement of Stalinism in architecture. The new way of architecture was industrialized, functional and on the level of current science and research. This sudden change of direction was welcomed by Henselmann – functionalism was suddenly no longer a ‘taboo’ and he embraced the beauty of it in the Haus des Lehrers. In his texts, the transition from Socialist Realism to Socialist Modernism is clearly visible. Where he first denounces functionalism and advocates for the use of historical elements in architecture - as ‘encouraged’ by the SED – he later shifts back to his modernist roots.

Looking back and conclusion

Hermann Henselmann died in 1995, just six years after DDR ceased to exist. In my search of his 'true self', hoping it would be revealed after the strict rule of the central socialist government, surprisingly little information could be found. Even though the end of the socialist rule was characterized by the exposure of multiple secrets about how the state was run, like the publication of all files that the ministry of state security (Stasi) had kept on the population, there was no 'final statement' or a position by Henselmann on his time as the most prominent architect of East Germany.

When interviewed in 2005, ten years after the death of her husband and still living in a building designed by him in Berlin, Irene Henselmann revealed Hermann Henselmann's character and position towards architecture with this simple and expressive motto: "*Wenn sie Scheiße wollen, baue ich sie ihnen immer noch besser als andere*" – 'If they want shit, I'll still build it better for them than others' (Gundlach, 2005). It's a reaction to the common criticism that Henselmann was opportunistic due to his rapidly changing style from modernism, to socialist realism, to socialist modernism. Even if he was forced to build something he did not totally agree with, he tried to make the best of the situation and create a good design. She adds to this by insisting that he always was able to insert his own unique design solutions, even though there was not much freedom for expression under the socialist rule. According to her, building was his biggest passion and what he devoted his life to.

For me, this quote gives more grounds to my hypothesis: Hermann Henselmann was not only a modernist and socialist, he was also well-versed in traversing the political challenges that were imposed on him. In part I of this thesis, it is quite apparent how the from the late 40s until the death of Stalin, the political grip on his design practice and the architectural world in East Germany in general was continuously getting tighter, with the legal enforcement of state architectural ideology being realized in 1950 with the *16 principles of urbanism*. Of course this was not without resistance from

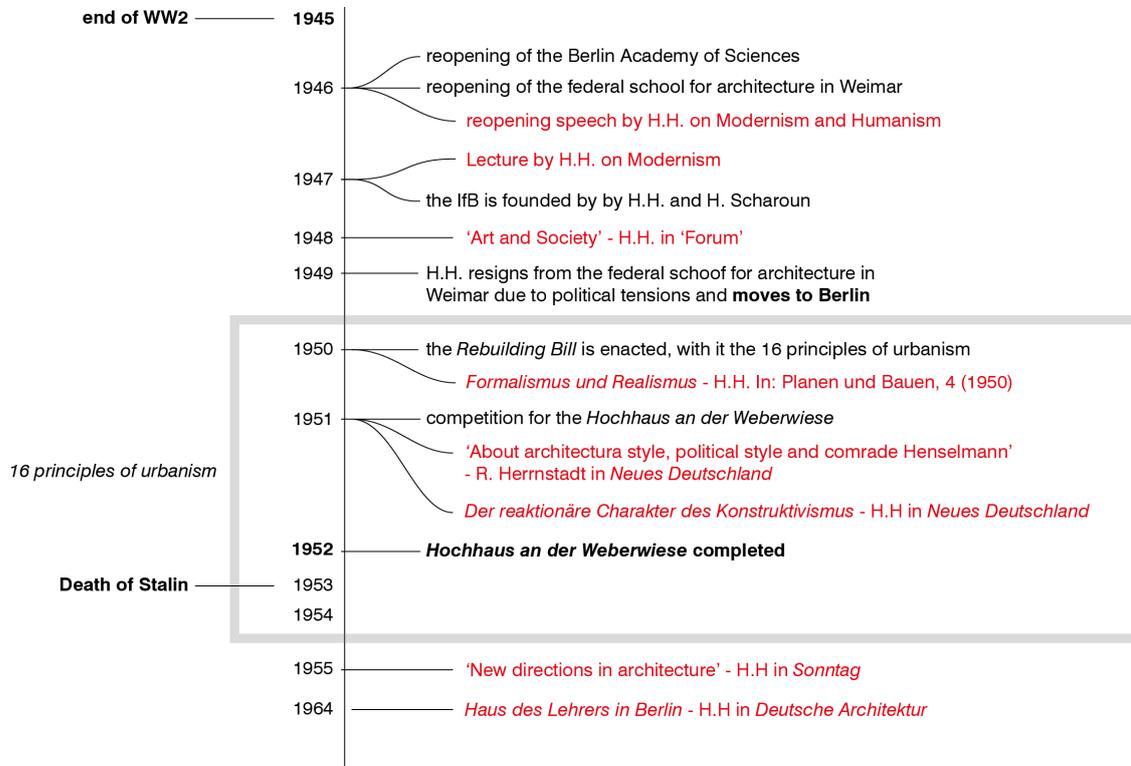
Henselmann and his colleagues; firstly Henselmann was a convinced modernist and did not want to be forced to design soviet-inspired historicist architecture – in his lecture, articles and designs in the late 40's he is still displaying his belief in a modernist approach to architecture and urbanism. On top of this, the authoritative and monumental architecture that was demanded by the central governments in Moscow and East Berlin to many seemed like a reminder of the monolithic and politically loaded architecture of the national-socialist era.

After being publicly shamed in the national newspaper for design proposals that were deemed too modernist, Henselmann in his articles and designs shifted to the socialist realist style.

After the death of Stalin, a more functionalist approach to architecture and urbanism was desired by the central government in Moscow. This allowed Henselmann to again design with the ideology that he was educated in and most adored: the marriage between modernism and socialism.

Henselmann was a modernist all the time. Even if political circumstances were continuously changing, an architect still needs work – especially if designing buildings is such a passion as was the case with Henselmann. Constantly in some new creative way he tried to navigate the political maze that he was subjected to and rose to fame within the strict boundaries of the government's wishes. He fought to implement his own ambitions in the creative room he was given and always attempted to enlarge, resulting in various significant projects: most having received monumental status by the unified German government, all landmarks of the evolution of architecture and politics in East Germany.

Appendix 1: timeline



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