

Neues Konzerthaus

Complex Projects: Bodies & Buildings Berlin

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P5 Reflection

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0. Project description

Germany has a rich history in classical music. Berlin, in this regard, has been key in the development of the concert hall, most notably through the Berlin Philharmonic: the first concert hall with the so-called vineyard-style auditorium. The design features a layout where the audience is seated around the stage instead of in front of the stage. Based on the new-found principles of equality and democracy in the aftermath of the war, the program intended to break down the hierarchies and monumentality present within the culture surrounding the genre and its institutions.

With an increasing decline in visitors and structural financial support of concert halls together with developments in music culture, the building type once more is challenged to reinvent itself, leading to the following question: What spatial qualities could invite the larger audience to engage with classical music concerts while retaining the qualities specific to concert hall architecture?

1. The relationship between research and design

Research and design are inseparable. As both mutually inform each other in an iterative process, the rigid structure of the graduation year – one semester of research, and one semester of design – occasionally posed challenges. As architects, we tend to go through the cycle of question-and-answer at a rapid pace, using tools such as drawing and modelling in the process. Asking the right design question, however, is essential in pursuit of the right design solution. Furthermore, establishing a scientific framework enables one to formulate the conditions that should be met and consequently make well-argued design choices. This ethos is a central element throughout the Complex Projects graduation studio.

2. The relationship between your graduation topic and the studio topic

The primary focus of the Complex Projects Bodies & Buildings Berlin graduation studio is the building. Within the studio, the building's increasing complexity as a result of technological advancement and bodily demand is researched through the design of a large, complex and functionally specific public building. Due to this specificity, the building is a one-off in the city, and therefore referred to as 'One of Berlin.'

Concert hall architecture is, among other things, characterized by the rituals (bodies) in relation to spatial characteristics and relations (buildings). Through reassessing these spatial aspects, the project seeks novel design principles that could enrich the experience of concert hall architecture.

While the approach has led to potent design principles, the project also concludes that the specificity of the core program is simultaneously the richest architectural aspect of the building type. This specificity is also important from a functional perspective. Therefore,

by reconsidering these foundations, one risks a design of compromises, subverting the potential of the building type.

3. Research method and approach chosen by the student in relation to the graduation studio

The studio offers a rigid methodology towards the development of a design brief. Within this methodology, the inventory of information varies from, for example, literature and interviews (understanding the design problem at hand) to case studies and site visits (drawing from built examples to ensure that spatial requirements are met). The perspective of the intended users, in this regard, is of great importance to confirm or deny hypotheses and to ensure the right design choices are made, and will therefore play a bigger part in future design exercises.

4. The relationship between the graduation project and the wider social, professional and scientific relevance

Worldwide, concert halls are under pressure due to a decreasing amount of visitors and structural contributors. To sustain this heritage, the culture is challenged to develop itself, including its institutions. Here lies a role for everyone involved, including architects. Building forward on an existing body of (academic) work, the project has led to a set of conclusions, suggestions and principles that could inform future research and design exercises.

5. Ethical issues and dilemmas you may have encountered during graduation

Cultural heritage belongs to everyone. While concert halls are public buildings, classical music concerts are widely considered an elite venture. This also has to do with aspects such as marketing and ticket pricing. The role of the architecture itself, therefore, is limited. Simultaneously, the projects are largely publicly funded and therefore raise the question if something appreciated by few should be paid for by many, and to what extent this should affect design choices.