

FROM AN “ALIEN, HOSTILE PHENOMENON” TO THE “POETRY OF THE FUTURE”: ON THE BAUHAUS RECEPTION IN EAST GERMANY, 1945–70

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The “Indestructible Idea” of the Bauhaus and its East German Reception

The Bauhaus, the most influential modern design movement of the twentieth century, made its presence felt in East Germany (meaning the Soviet Zone of Occupation from 1945 to 1949 and, later, the German Democratic Republic) not only through its intellectual and material legacy, but also through the activities of former teachers and students from the school. The reaction to this legacy was always a politically charged affair in East Germany, linked with fundamental questions of culture, lifestyle, or, as it was called in the GDR, the socialist way of life.¹

When one considers the legacy of the Bauhaus, particularly its adaptation in different cultural contexts, it is important to distinguish the Bauhaus reception from the general reception of modern art.² Throughout its existence, from 1919 through 1933, the Bauhaus considered itself part of an international avant-garde. Decades after the school was closed, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe spoke of the “indestructible idea” of the Bauhaus, without specifying whether this idea was more a question of style in the art-historical sense or, rather, one of lifestyle.³ The Bauhaus strove to shape the human environment comprehensively; in this regard, it was much more effective and complex than other institutions and movements concerned with design. It was a school which developed and applied new pedagogical methods; it was active in the fields of architecture, urban planning, landscape design, industrial design, and graphic design, as well as in the fine arts. At the same time, it was a forum for theoretical debates. Common to all of these efforts was the search for the spatial and material prerequisites for a new way of life. It was above all in the era of Walter Gropius (1919–28) and Hannes Meyer (1928–30) that the Bauhaus was interested in “good design” more in the sense of a standard of living than as a formal differentiation of various lifestyles.⁴

Any examination of the Bauhaus reception must recognize that architecture and urban planning were almost exclusively a state affair in East Germany. Government guidelines, plans, and orders determined which architectural models were favored and which projects were realized. One can distinguish four phases in the development of these state-

determined models, each of which had a different attitude towards modernism and thus towards the Bauhaus. The early phase (1945–50) was shaped by the concept of the “urban landscape,” associated with the landscape architect Reinhold Lingner and the architect Hans Scharoun. The years 1951–55 were dominated by the Deutsche Bauakademie and its director, Kurt Liebknecht (who in his youth was active as a modernist architect). Their concept of “national traditions” stigmatized the Bauhaus just as it rejected all modernist tendencies. The years 1955–70 were heavily influenced by Gerhard Kosel. A former student of Bruno Taut, Kosel was oriented towards scientific and industrial planning methods. This phase extended until a 1970 conference signaled its end. The last phase in the history of construction in the GDR after 1970, under Gerhard Gißke, was marked by a one-sided orientation towards the organization of the building process and led to a loss of a sense of architecture’s intrinsic aesthetic value. Despite an opening-up of debate, it led to a real decline in building culture.⁵

The unique reception of the Bauhaus in the GDR—at first continued, then demonized, then later appreciated in some quarters—differs greatly from the way it was considered by philosophers, architects, designers, and politicians in the FRG. In West Germany as in East Germany, former Bauhaus teachers and students worked as architects or designers, and schools of architecture and design either saw themselves as following in the tradition of the Bauhaus or rejected it. At various historical junctures, the reception of the Bauhaus was an important part of the discourse of national and international tradition and identity, of style and aesthetic ideology, and of lifestyle, political, and socio-economic conditions. In this essay, I will focus on those moments in East German history when an assessment of the Bauhaus was bound up with a wider discussion of goals, of the development of a new “socialist” and “German” society and its corresponding architecture. Of special interest is the question of how architecture itself can be invested with ideological meaning, either as a national style or in the sense of a functionalism derived from an understanding of the Bauhaus.

In the first two decades of the GDR’s existence, the tone was set by architects and politicians whose formative years were the 1920s; their lives and works will thus be a main focus of the first half of this essay. In the theoretical discussions of architecture and lifestyle which were dominant at the time, the Bauhaus was often portrayed as the enemy. The more nuanced theoretical and historical understanding of the Bauhaus and the positive official reaction to it which emerged later, in the 1960s, appeared more or less without grand ideological gestures. The socialist variants of “construction industry Functionalism”⁶ which were actually built were increasingly at odds with the GDR’s theoretical plans, which

had sought to revive Functionalism as a building form as well as a lifestyle. I will illustrate this in the second part of my essay with the example of Lothar Kühne, who approached the question in a quite differentiated way and connected it to fundamental questions of lifestyle.

The Bauhaus-Reception in the Soviet Zone of Occupation and in the Early Years of the GDR (1945–50)

When actual construction and the teaching of design slowly began again, a wide spectrum of design principles were possible, even in the Soviet Zone of Occupation in the first years after the end of the war, in the midst of rubble and unspeakable misery. As in the Western Zones of Occupation, the Bauhaus was often viewed as something unsullied by fascist ideology, as a victim of the National Socialist dictatorship, as something positive to which a new society could and should attach itself. The same is true of many individuals and works associated with the Bauhaus, but not all. The Nazi stigmatization of avant-garde culture, especially art and architecture, as “degenerate” contributed greatly to this image. Art and architecture in Nazi Germany was and still is often presented as free of avant-garde influence. But despite all of the *Blut-und-Boden* ideology, the reality of construction in modern, industrialized Nazi Germany was much more complex than a first glance at the buildings of an Albert Speer might indicate. There was a “Bauhaus modernism within National Socialism,”⁷ in which former members of the Bauhaus played an important role, even after 1945, in West and East Germany, with “biographical interconnections”⁸ across the numerous historical and political divides.

In East Germany, many architecture and design schools which consciously looked to the Bauhaus as a model were founded or reopened. Former members of the Bauhaus were active almost everywhere. In Weimar, the rededication of the Hochschule für Baukunst und bildende Künste (today the Bauhaus University) was connected with names such as Hermann Henselmann (who himself had not been part of the Bauhaus, but was a modernist architect and who emphasized its importance), Peter Keler, and Gustav Hassenpflug.⁹ In Dessau, Hubert Hoffmann took steps to reopen the Bauhaus through a planning group that he started. Mart Stam, Marianne Brandt, and Selman Selmanagic began efforts in Dresden and Berlin-Weißensee, and Walter Funkat was active at Halle’s Burg Giebichenstein (later the Hochschule für industrielle Formgestaltung).¹⁰ Often these developments met a premature end, even before the founding of the GDR in 1949. They clashed with the Stalinist conception of Socialist Realism and soon a general anti-modernist politics was introduced (for literature and the visual arts, already in 1947). Supported and

to some extent initiated by Soviet cultural officials, "Socialist Realism" succeeded politically as the only model in culture and design.

I would like to examine three cases in greater detail. In Dessau, Hubert Hoffmann was entrusted with city planning after 1945. He knew Dessau's unique situation very well because, together with other Bauhaus students, from 1929 through 1931 he put together an analysis of the city which was presented by Walter Gropius at the celebrated CIAM (Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne) conference.¹¹ Hubert Hoffmann was active during the Third Reich as a "regional planner" (*Landesplaner*) and in the early 1940s was a proponent of the modernist concept of a "segmented and loosened city."¹² Now he made plans for the reconstruction of Dessau, which was over 80 percent destroyed. At the same time, he made efforts to reopen the Bauhaus. He developed the idea for a curriculum which sought to combine elements of the Bauhaus theories of Walter Gropius and Hannes Meyer, and tried to recruit teachers for this new Bauhaus, including Gropius, now a professor at Harvard University. Hubert Hoffmann and his allies organized exhibits and competitions for city development ideas. The clear relation to the Bauhaus is also evident from the daily newspapers and academic and industry journals of the era. But there was not only positive support. Conservative architects and city planners opposed modernist plans. Changing political conditions signaled an early end to these efforts. Hoffmann's undertaking at first found support from the liberal mayor Hesse, the man who in the same job had brought the Bauhaus to Dessau in 1925 and for that reason was chased from office by the Nazis after 1932. As a politically untainted person, Hesse was installed by the Soviet occupiers as the first postwar mayor. As a result of the 1947 elections, the SED installed itself in power, and their candidate stopped the Bauhaus plans. Hoffmann left Dessau when, on top of that, he was reproached for his past as a *Landesplaner* in the Third Reich. For decades thereafter, Dessau was no longer a center of the Bauhaus reception.

In Dresden, Franz Ehrlich was in a position similar to Hoffmann's in Dessau. In 1945, Ehrlich commenced with urban development plans which aimed to reconstruct Dresden, not in its old compactness, but rather in the spirit of an urban landscape. Outlying areas of the city would introduce a new form of residential development with organically interconnected cells, which together would form Greater Dresden. An autonomous garden city was not the goal, even if there are echoes of this contained in the proposal. Instead, Ehrlich's plans related more to ideas such as those that the second Bauhaus director, Hannes Meyer, articulated at the 1933 CIAM Congress, and Ehrlich connected these ideas to Hubert Hoffmann's above-mentioned concept of the "segmented and opened-up city."¹³ Here, following the ideas of Hannes Meyer, modernity

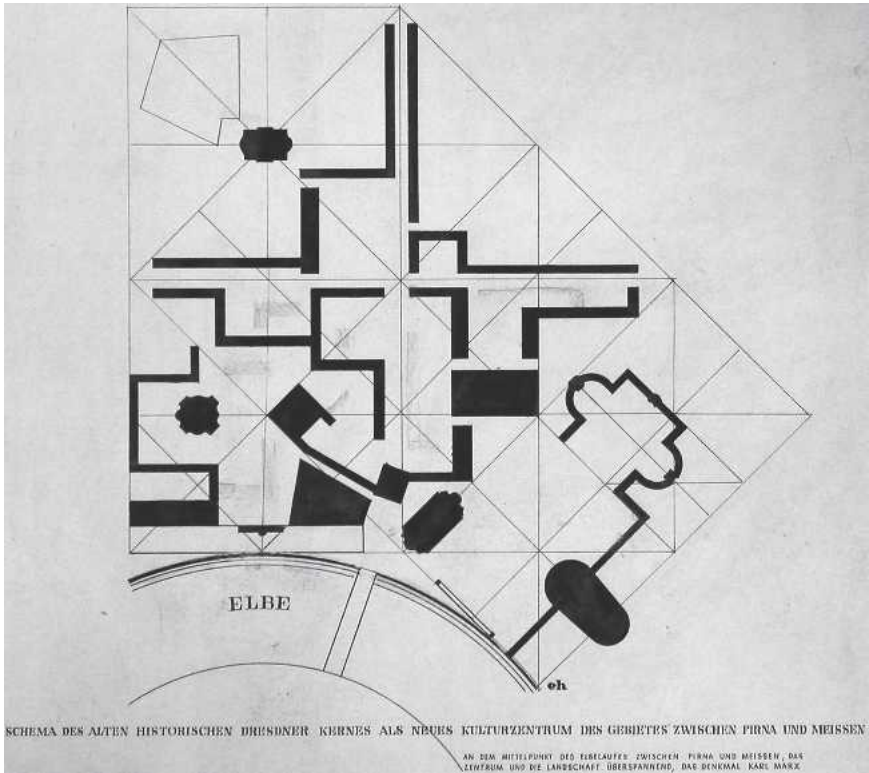


Figure 1. Franz Ehrlich, Plan for a new cultural center in the historic center of Dresden in the area between Pirna and Meißen, 1945–46. Note the baroque buildings on the right (the Hofkirche and the Zwinger). Stiftung Bauhaus Dessau.

is not understood in a formal or stylistic sense but rather as a process of urban development to optimize social, technical, and economic relations. Even Dresden’s city center would be integrated into this larger space (Figure 1). For that reason, Ehrlich envisioned a wide-reaching removal of the old city structure; only a few prominent older buildings such as the Hofkirche and the Zwinger were to be restored. Remnants of a city structure which had emerged over centuries thus came together as a contrast to the asymmetrically meandering modern buildings in a rapidly changing urban space. An abstract pre-stressed concrete monument in the form of a parable (a memorial for Karl Marx) marked the center of the urban landscape. It spanned an open space designed for demonstrations and parades and thus already fulfilled some of the “sixteen fundamentals of urban construction,” established in 1950. With the planned expansion of the Zwinger, Ehrlich combined modern concepts with plans dating back

to the 1700s.¹⁴ Under the direction of Hans Scharoun, the “Planning Collective” in Berlin worked on a similar concept of a city comprised of residential cells. Even Berlin was seen as a city to be organically integrated into a regional landscape formed ages ago by a melting glacier. One member of the Planning Collective was the former Bauhaus member Selman Selmanagic, who a few years later, as rector of the Kunsthochschule Berlin-Weißensee, tried to realize the Bauhaus ideal of the integration of all fields of art, design, and construction.¹⁵

The Bauhaus as an “Alien, Hostile Phenomenon” (1951–55)

Modernist concepts in architecture and art conflicted increasingly with the principle of “Socialist Realism” advanced by the one-party rule of the SED. “Socialist Realism” was a theory of art as “reflection,” first developed in relation to literature and then transferred to other arts, including architecture. Architecture was considered an especially effective ideological art form, a privileged tool to educate “the new man.” For architects and city planners, the “sixteen fundamentals of urban construction,” published in 1950 after leading East German architects visited the Soviet Union, became the guidelines for all of their work.¹⁶ The rejection of the Bauhaus (whose concepts were seen as incommensurable with such guidelines, despite plans such as Ehrlich’s above-mentioned one) reached its peak with the so-called “Formalism debate.” In the “struggle against Formalism in art and architecture,” modernist techniques of planning and design and “modernist style” were seen by leading SED politicians as an affront to “national traditions.” Naturally, the unique circumstances of the Cold War played a decisive role. In West Germany, it was “International Style,” intimately connected with the Bauhaus, which was promoted as a truly democratic architecture for the free world. In state-socialist countries, by contrast, “international” was understood to mean the creation of similar social and political relations through an emphasis on “national traditions.” The concept of International Style was developed in 1932 by Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Philip Johnson, and Alfred Barr and announced to the world with a book which grew out of a remarkable exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art.¹⁷ It is thus American in origin, but at the same time deeply marked by central elements of European architectural modernism, especially the Bauhaus. After the Second World War, a book was published in the American Zone of Occupation entitled *In USA erbaut, 1932–1944*.¹⁸ It took the 1932 MoMA exhibit as its starting point in order to demonstrate how an architectural style in which America was dominant had developed out of International Style. The book, published in 1948, declares that “to be sure, the museum was

the first to champion the new European architecture, but it also demonstrated the genesis and growth of a genuinely American modernist style, its kinship with the American landscape and its debt to 'International Style.'"¹⁹ Modernist architecture was seen, as it had been in 1932, first and foremost as a problem for style in its rejection of the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, which was equated with Functionalism: "The great value placed upon aesthetics was very therapeutic at the time because it stood in direct opposition to the exaggerated materialist theory of 'Pure Objectivity.'"²⁰ It proclaimed that, in America, "the struggle is over and ended in victory."²¹ Now it fell to Western Europe, and to West Germany in particular, to return to an aesthetic modernism now considered genuinely American.

Another reason for a return to traditional architectural styles was added to this "culture war" within the Cold War in the newly founded GDR. It was rooted in an earlier conflict, with many of the same protagonists, which predated the Nazi rise to power. In 1930, a split within European modernism had escalated. Absolute constructions were now called into question. In the United States, by contrast, intellectuals who were "frightened" by historicism saw hope for the future modern American architecture in International Style, which was developed in these buildings and liberated from Functionalism.²² The European modernist movement splintered when faced with the mounting world economic crisis. For many, the purist aesthetic of this architecture represented a striking lack of recognizable signs and symbols; it was clearly in no position to solve the crucial problems of civilization and culture in the way they hoped. Whereas the Functionalists promoted "subsistence-level dwelling,"²³ other modernist architects searched for a new language with which they could engage society. Within a few years, European architecture experienced a turn towards regional and national symbols. In the early 1930s in Germany, Italy, and the Soviet Union, classical orders were re-appropriated; in other countries "historical spoils, traditional materials, handicraft techniques, or rural motifs were integrated in a collage-like fashion."²⁴ In the early 1950s, the issue of the search for a unique architectural language, a new German architecture, emerged again for the GDR leadership. The return to classicism and to traditional local details and models was supposed to provide a familiar context for considerable social and political changes. Even limited use of modernist formal elements no longer seemed possible during the Cold War. By 1951 at the latest, modernist concepts from Constructivism to International Style, and especially Bauhaus, had no chance in East Germany. Because of their "artlessness" and "lack of beauty," they were considered "Formalist" or even "cosmopolitan-imperialist." Hermann Henselmann, who only a few years earlier had praised the Bauhaus as a great inspiration, described it

in 1951 as “especially characteristic of the conservative tendency which, in the guise of a pseudo-revolutionary theory, rose against the alleged academicism of earlier epochs” in its attempt to “allegedly create a new society and a new human being.” “The theory of Constructivism (also called Functionalism),” said Henselmann, “necessarily leads to cosmopolitanism through its dissolution of all value categories which elevate the construction to the level of a work of art.”²⁵ In his contribution to the fight against Bauhaus, Kurt Liebknecht attacked architectural details such as window shapes. Instead, he saw the model for the “new type of residence which would be an expression of our democratic order and a symbol of ‘Stalin’s care for humanity’” more in Gothic-style windows than in “the over-extension of window surfaces through the replacement of the entire external wall with glass.”²⁶ But the sharpest criticism was reserved for a building by the second director of the Bauhaus, the Communist Hannes Meyer. His Bundesschule des Allgemeinen Deutschen Gewerkschaftsbundes, a commission from the Organization of Trade Unions completed in 1930 in Bernau, was now a school belonging to the GDR umbrella union FDGB (Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund) and underwent a sensitive expansion in 1951. The SED politician Walter Ulbricht mentioned the school in a 1951 speech to the Volkskammer as “another bad example” and an “expression of cosmopolitan construction.” It is the sort of building “which could just as well stand in Africa or America,” typical of the “Bauhaus style which exercised a great influence even after 1945.” “This building,” said Ulbricht, “is . . . a mockery of the workers who are there to be educated into servants of our democratic order and whose resources were used to build the building.”²⁷ Ulbricht concluded that Bauhaus style “must be recognized as an alien hostile phenomenon (Nolksfeindliche Erscheinung)” because it denied “the necessity of the creative use of progressive elements of the national architectural legacy because it claims that ideas cannot be given architectural form and that, in architecture, form, function, and construction take precedence; it went so far that Hannes Meyer, one of the last directors of the Bauhaus, claimed that we can no longer speak of building as an art, but only in general as construction.”²⁸

In the centers of large cities in the GDR, streets began to take on characteristics of the favored “national traditions.” Most prominent was the Stalinallee, constructed from 1951 to 1959 (Figure 2). In addition to Hermann Henselmann and Hans Hopp, the former Bauhaus members Richard Paulick and Ernst Colleijn took part in its design. The first plans for the Stalinallee were conceived in the spirit of Bauhaus modernism and caused a political scandal among the SED leadership, even though there were no political symbols or features which suggested architectural stages labeled as “progressive.” Immediately preceding this episode,



Figure 2. Stalinallee (today, Karl-Marx-Allee) in Berlin, 1951–59. Photograph by Kurt Thöner, 1964.

Richard Paulick had experienced the change of course from the Bauhaus towards “national traditions” when he received a commission for the sports center on Berlin’s Stalinallee in 1951 and proposed a plan which drew upon modernist theater designs from the early 1930s, in which one could see all the characteristics of Philip Johnson and Henry-Russell Hitchcock’s definition of International Style. In the middle of the project’s construction, the “Formalism debate” was launched and Paulick had to adapt the sports center as best he could to the new demands, which mostly had to do with the entrance way, which was then outfitted with a frieze and columns.²⁹ Even Richard Paulick now distanced himself from Bauhaus and proved himself a master in adapting classical models of space and form. His reconstruction (in truth, a total reinvention) of the Staatsoper Unter den Linden in the spirit of Knobelsdorff is seen even today as a model, and was followed up with many similar projects. Having studied Erdmannsdorff in Dessau, he adapted such forms to the post-1945 experiments with industrialized methods of construction.³⁰

Despite the “struggle over national traditions,” there was also something of a “subliminal” fight to gain recognition for the Bauhaus. This was clear even with building projects realized in this period, in their subtle references to corresponding concepts. An example is the Rundfunkge-



Figure 3. Franz Ehrlich, Foyer of the Rundfunkhaus, Berlin, 1951–56. Photograph by Friedrich Weimer, Stiftung Bauhaus Dessau.

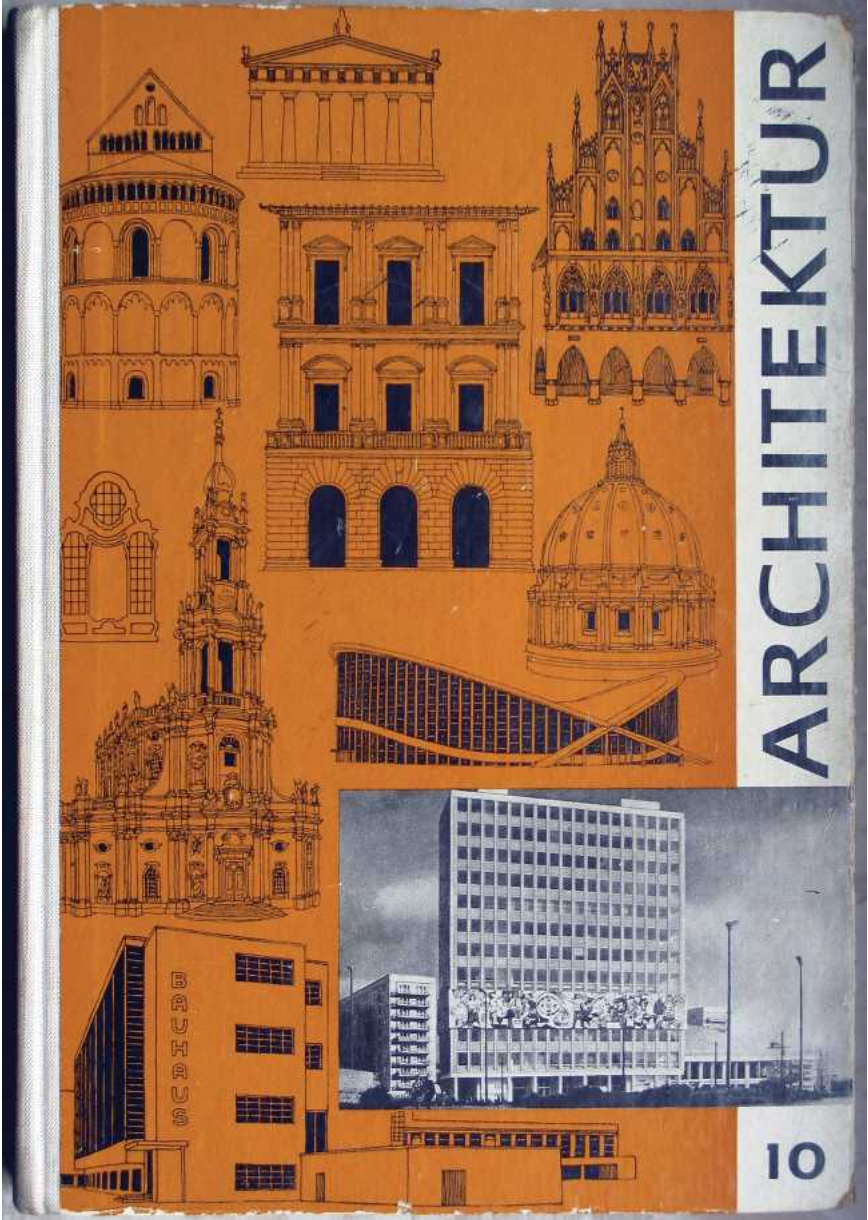
bäude in Berlin (1951–56) by Franz Ehrlich (Figure 3), to which Hoffmann-Axthelm ascribed a “specific Functionalism that was neither part of the main trajectory of modernism nor the by-road of national style.” “One recognizes,” writes Hoffmann-Axthelm, “that the architect is not crusading against modernism nor is he intentionally designing in a modern style, but was muzzled by adherence to the party line—he wanted to build in a purposeful . . . and socially visible manner; in this way, an

architecture was born that was between Bauhaus modernism and Gestalt-conservatism, more interested in details and connections to the environment, above all in an unmistakable Functionalism.³¹ According to Hoffmann-Axthelm, Franz Ehrlich “is one of the few twentieth-century architects who did not confuse Functionalism with style.”³²

The Bauhaus-Reception in the Era of the “New Economic System for Planning and Direction” (1955–70)

The change of direction in the politics of construction at the end of the 1950s was above all the result of economic pressures. It was introduced by Nikita Khrushchev in a December 1954 speech, in which he called for the loosening of Stalinist doctrines in architecture and for the industrialization of construction. The orientation towards typology, normalization, and modern technologies of construction was at first still associated with the “struggle against Constructivism,” which was now to be carried on with means other than “architectonic decoration and aesthetic ornament.”³³ A further reason for the new distancing from “national traditions” in architecture was specific to the GDR: the SED regime had given up the goal of reunifying Germany in the near future. Thus, “the demand for the development of a socialist architectural aesthetic with pan-German pretensions lost its political immediacy.”³⁴ The directors of the Deutsche Bauakademie were now concerned that “the theory of Socialist Realism, as a basis for overcoming Formalism and especially the one-sidedness of Functionalism and Constructivism” could be called into question.³⁵ A “false interpretation of Khrushchev’s speech” might “open the door to Functionalism and Constructivism.”³⁶ The new openness towards industrial methods of construction thus signified merely the appearance of freedom in terms of form. “It was the pressure to increase productivity which pushed aside the officially decreed decorative style; despite, or rather because of the unreflective turn from a narrow-minded historicism to an equally narrow-minded technology of construction from large pre-fabricated forms, the steady diet of forced over-ideologization remained unchanged.”³⁷ It was only after 1961, during the short phase of the “new economic system for planning and direction of the national economy,” when science and technology achieved greater prominence, that the process of rehabilitation began for Functionalism and Bauhaus. That was especially true in the construction field, which had not been considered very productive. In this context, the experiences and ideas of the “New Construction” of the 1920s became of interest once again, and with them, the Bauhaus. In 1963, a German translation of the Soviet writer Leonid Pazitnov’s *The Creative Legacy of the Bauhaus* was published.³⁸ The book was published by the Institute for Applied Arts, later called the Office for Industrial Design.

In the confrontation between the East and West German political systems, it was less a conflict between two cultures than of two essentially different standards of consumption. For that reason, after 1963 design was less influenced by ideology-laden debates about art. That cleared the way for the responsibility of artists from all disciplines for the human



environment as a whole to become a theme. The example of the Bauhaus played an important role in this.³⁹ In the middle of the 1960s, the first monographs about the Bauhaus by GDR authors appeared and the first exhibits were mounted.⁴⁰ A 1965 textbook also makes clear the transformation (Figure 4). Here, even cautious criticism of the Stalinallee (completed just five years previously) was possible, criticism that used the arguments of the once-demonized Bauhaus Functionalism: "The attempts to form links to traditional national forms of architecture (Classicism) led to an over-emphasis on decorative elements in individual buildings and therefore to a neglect of functional, economic, and technical questions."⁴¹ By contrast, a contemporary building by the third director of the Bauhaus, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Chicago's Crown Hall, was praised as "one of last decade's most impressive buildings in its extreme architectonic discipline and its unity of space and body."⁴²

Naturally, the theoretical confrontation with the Bauhaus was not without contradictions and ideological obstacles. Karl-Heinz Hüter's groundbreaking study of the Bauhaus in Weimar, for example, appeared only ten years after it was written in 1966.⁴³ At the same time, the Bauhaus legacy was discussed, and it was now considered a cultural monument worthy of preservation.⁴⁴ At the Hochschule für Architektur- und Bauwesen in Weimar, research on the history of the Bauhaus became part of the institution's program and especially after 1976, historical research was increasingly connected with the consideration of current planning, design, and cultural concepts (Figure 5). Leading theorists such as Karin and Heinz Hirdina or Lothar Kühne and practicing designers such as Clauss Diétel interpreted the Bauhaus as exemplary and developed a concept of Functionalism which was not formal, but holistic and ecologically oriented.⁴⁵ The outstanding project of these years, in which modernist principles informed both urban construction and the formal language of architectonics, was the construction of Halle-Neustadt from 1961 through the early 1970s (Figure 6). Richard Paulick was the chief architect in the decisive second phase of the planning and construction of this new socialist city, from 1962 through 1969. An entire city was to be

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Figure 4. Cover of a 1965 textbook, *Bauwerke und Baustile von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart: Lehrbuch für die Kunstbetrachtung in der zehnten Klasse der erweiterten Oberschule*. The black-and-white photograph next to the illustration of the Bauhaus building shows the Haus des Lehrers (Hermann Henselmann, 1964) in Berlin, which signaled the return of the formal language of modernism to official GDR architecture, here enriched by a Mexican-inspired mural.



Figure 5. Walter Gropius, the Bauhaus building in Dessau, 1925–26. Photograph by the author.

erected from pre-fabricated forms. Through his work on Halle-Neustadt, the former Bauhaus architect Paulick found his way back to a modernism which was no longer the height of fashion. A new generation of architects in the West criticized architectural and urban planning concepts like those of the CIAM, which were also the basis for Halle-Neustadt.⁴⁶ The city's first so-called residential complex "was built from 1964 to 1968 and is characterized by a continuous, open arrangement of relatively low block-houses, so that its basic plan is almost exclusively dictated by the path of the crane; the residence units to the west of the center of the residential complex are put together in a wasteland of monotonous rows while the attempt was made in the southwestern sector, without a convincing result it might be added, to suggest courtyard-like spaces by building the blocks in a three-sided open way."⁴⁷ Only in the later phases was it possible "to create a self-contained structure from open spaces connected to one another and to place buildings such that their intrinsic value determines the open space."⁴⁸ Halle-Neustadt, hardly viewed in connection with the Bauhaus even in East Germany, was presented in 1973 at the 15th Triennial in Milan and understood by the critic Joseph Rykwert as part of the Bauhaus tradition of Ludwig Hilberseimer, a



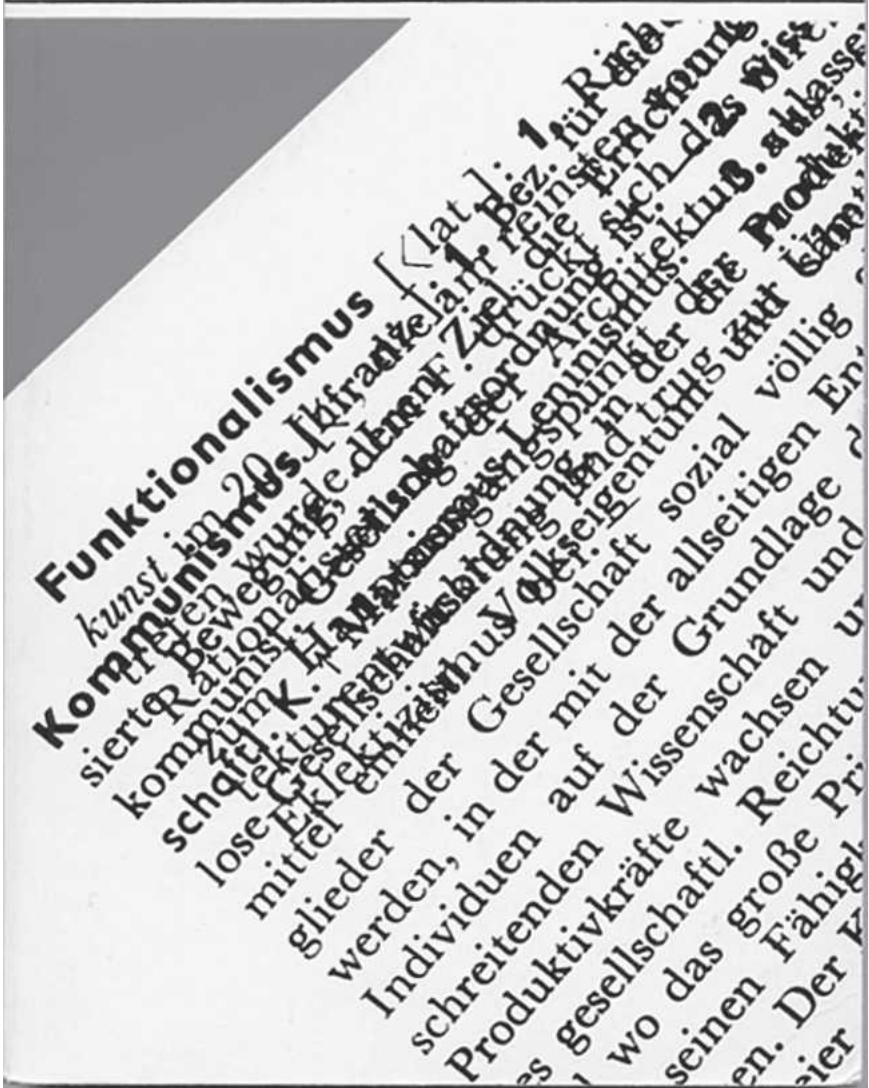
Figure 6. Richard Paulick and others, Halle-Neustadt, 1961–73. Photograph by the author, 1999.

remark that was not meant as a compliment. Rykwert wrote, “The catalog, if not the exhibit itself, wants to awaken our admiration for a seemingly repulsive Hilberseimer-like building, the East German residential complex of the Halle-Neustadt collective; to be sure, this is presented as a splendid example of a work method and not as an architectural achievement, but God save us from work methods, even if they are collective, that lead to such results.”⁴⁹ The criticism referred to something which intensified after 1971, when the state declared its goal of eliminating the housing problem: construction with a small number of prefabricated forms. The increasing crisis in the GDR economy (1970 was the height of the crisis) did not allow for other options. The profession of “architect” was reduced to that of “complex project designer.” In a state-industry system oriented towards short-term efficiency, young architects hardly had an opportunity to achieve a certain level of proficiency. In the GDR, the era of “master architects” and great names in architecture was over.⁵⁰

It seems paradoxical that it was precisely in this moment that the Bauhaus once again became an official subject for discussion in the GDR. The encounter with the Bauhaus remained essentially theoretical and could not give any real inspiration to the reality of building in the GDR, which was defined by a very different set of premises. In this phase, the Bauhaus (and, with it, Functionalism, which had been demonized since

Lothar Kühne

Gegenstand und Raum



the 1950s) became the great hope. Indeed, the philosopher Lothar Kühne called it the “poetry of the future” of a society which had in fact long divested itself of Communist ideals, without ever admitting it.

The Bauhaus as “The Poetry of the Future”

Like no one else in the GDR, Lothar Kühne thought about a unified model of socially equitable and future-oriented architecture. The central category of his theory was space. For Kühne, architecture served “to organize human life in space,” it was “neither art nor industrial technology, nor was it a synthesis of these.”⁵¹ Kühne was concerned with an aesthetics of use. Only an object which is satisfactory in its use is not exclusive, does not mask the human relations objectified in it, and could be considered satisfactory in an aesthetic sense. As with objects, for Kühne relations of ownership were also fundamental for buildings. He strove to find “the idea for a new type of building which would combine for human beings the values of urban life with those of nature.”⁵² Against this standard, he measures the reality of buildings in the GDR, which he saw as no more than vague efforts to achieve this. Kühne’s focus shifted from the individual building to the landscape, without considering the city, however. For Kühne, landscape was “the fundamental spatial form of life in Communism,” as it brought together and mediated “the unity of societal, micro-communal, and individual spatial areas” and “the realm of nature with the realm of production.”⁵³ That was not the reality of construction in the GDR. These ideas were close to Hannes Meyer’s program of 1929 and 1930, and the concepts from the years 1945 to 1950. In this sense, landscape only existed for Kühne where it could be seen with the naked eye and immediately be experienced “without special means of transportation.” For Kühne, space was thus freely available for all. These basic social relations, which in Kühne’s definition of Communism were to be aimed for, contained a greater freedom of choice for individuals and communities, and also for the natural conditions for human growth. Especially significant within this ecological orientation was the concept of “caution,” by which Kühne meant a social quality in which objects were mediated through a free association of equals purged of the curse of private property which destroys the conditions for existence. It was through this mediating function that Kühne saw an object’s new aesthetic quality. Two elements were united in his concept of Func-

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Figure 7. Cover of Lothar Kühne, *Gegenstand und Raum* (1981). Note how the ideal merging of Communism and Functionalism is visualized.



Figure 8. Hannes Meyer (with Hans Wittwer and the Construction Department of the Bauhaus Dessau), Bundesschule des ADGB in Bernau, 1928–30, view of the residence halls from the reading room. Photograph by Walter Peterhans, who established the first regular photography instruction at the Bauhaus, Stifting Bauhaus Dessau. Reprinted with permission from Brigitte Peterhans.

tionalism as a “concept of form oriented towards the future”: absolute state access to all of life’s preconditions and the use of this influence to promote caution and care for the environment (Figure 7). Thus for Kühne, under socialist conditions of property relations and power, modernity was not a negative concept, no utopia doomed to failure.

Kühne’s understanding of Functionalism was only possible because of his new thinking on social and aesthetic questions. He distinguished this from Constructivism. For Kühne, functional design was never the construction of artistic worlds and also no *Gesamtkunstwerk* which related to reality on many differentiated levels. Beginning in the late 1960s, the Bauhaus took on a positive role for Lothar Kühne. He saw the movement’s inspiration in “a feeling of responsibility for a new, socially just world” and saw Bauhaus as a prerequisite to overcome “ties to modernist handicrafts.”⁵⁴ Lothar Kühne saw this process at work in the Bauhaus building in Dessau: “The relations of the community are not turned inwards, but are open; there is no suggestion of completion, instead the



Figure 9. Members of the Bauhaus in front of the building in Dessau, December 4, 1976. Including Richard Paulick (fourth from left), Franz Ehrlich (seventh from left), Hubert Hoffmann (tenth from left), Max Bill (eleventh from left). Photograph by Ernst Steinkopf, Stiftung Bauhaus Dessau.

spatial conditions of the process are exposed—these are not a whole, but point towards a whole.”⁵⁵ Kühne did not find that comparable relations existed in the GDR, but he saw possibilities for them to develop. From this perspective, Kühne developed his critique of the reality of construction. His concepts became models of thought for which he found few precedents. He found one such precedent in Hannes Meyer’s *Bundesschule des ADGB* (Figure 8), which was denigrated by Walter Ulbricht: “Light tones, no gesture, the school building is set back from the street, empathetically rooted in the ground and integrated into the forest.”⁵⁶ Thus, for Lothar Kühne, a Bauhaus building served as a model in the last phase of the GDR, a style which was reviled during the first years of the state and which was rooted in a Functionalism that never attained exemplary status up through 1989.⁵⁷ In 1976, in the presence of many former members of the movement, the restored Bauhaus building was reopened as a “Center for Culture and Scholarship” (Figure 9). This attempt by the GDR elite to ideologically appropriate the Bauhaus failed, just as the attempts to reform the GDR from within also failed. In 1987, only two years before the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Bauhaus was reestablished in Dessau, out of which arose the present-day *Stiftung Bauhaus Dessau*.⁵⁸

Notes

¹ Lothar Kühne, “Zum Begriff und zur Methode der Erforschung der Lebensweise,” *Weimarer Beiträge* 8 (1978):8.

² Werner Oechslin, “Mainstream-Internationalismus oder der verlorene Kontext,” in *Die Architektur, die Tradition und der Ort: Regionalismen in der europäischen Stadt*, ed. Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani (Stuttgart, 2000), 98.

³ Regina Bittner, “Der Bauhaus als Lebensstil?,” in *Bauhausstil: Zwischen International Style and Lifestyle*, ed. Regina Bittner (Berlin, 2003), 26–37.

⁴ Hans-Joachim Dahms, “1929—CIAM-Kongress: die Wohnung für das Existenzminimum: Verwissenschaftlichung und Formverzicht,” in *Bauhausstil*, ed. Regina Bittner, 86–107.

⁵ Simone Hain, “Von der Geschichte beauftragt, Zeichen zu setzen’: Zum Monumentalitätsverständnis in der DDR am Beispiel der Gestaltung der Hauptstadt Berlin,” in *Macht und Monument, Moderne Architektur in Deutschland 1900 bis 2000*, eds., Romana Schneider and Wilfried Wang (Stuttgart, 1997), 189.

⁶ Heinrich Klotz, *Conversations with Architects* (New York, 1972).

⁷ Winfried Nerdinger, ed., *Bauhaus-Moderne im Nationalsozialismus: Zwischen Anbiederung und Verfolgung* (Munich, 1993); Walter Prigge, ed., *Ernst Neufert: Normierte Baukultur im 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt/Main, 1999).

⁸ Werner Durth, *Deutsche Architekten: Biographische Verflechtungen 1900–1970* (Stuttgart, 2001).

⁹ Klaus-Jürgen Winkler, “Bemerkungen zur Bauhausrezeption an der Weimarer Hochschule unmittelbar nach dem Krieg,” *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Hochschule für Architektur und Bauwesen Weimar* 38 (1992) A:5/6:277–86.

¹⁰ Simone Hain, "The Dictatorship of the Modern," *Rassegna* 47:3 (Mart Stam 1899–1986) (September 1991): 44–49.

¹¹ The "Studie zum Gesamtsiedlungsplan von Dessau" was, beginning in 1930, the collective work of the Bauhaus students Cornelius van der Linden, Wilhelm Jacob Hess, and Hubert Hoffmann. Photographs of the plans are in the archive of the Stiftung Bauhaus Dessau. On the Bauhaus and Dessau from 1945–47, see Stiftung Bauhaus Dessau, ed., . . . *das Bauhaus zertört 1945, 1947 das Bauhaus stört . . . Der Versuch einer Neueröffnung des Bauhauses in Dessau nach dem Ende des zweiten Weltkrieges* (Dessau, 1996).

¹² Hubert Hoffmann worked in the Deutsche Akademie für Städtebau, Reichs- und Landesplanung in Berlin beginning in 1944. There, together with Reinhold Niemeyer and Roland Reiner, he wrote the book *Die gegliederte und aufgelockerte Stadt* (Tübingen, 1957) which is greatly influenced by the Charter of Athens.

¹³ Lutz Schöbe, *Franz Ehrlich: Beiträge zu einer Monographie* (Diplomarbeit, Humboldt-Universität-Berlin, 1983).

¹⁴ Nadine Melhorn, *Franz Ehrlich (28.12.1907–29.11.1984): Arbeiten und Projekte für Dresden und die Deutschen Werkstätten Hellerau* (Magisterarbeit, Philosophische Fakultät TU Dresden, 2003), 48–49.

¹⁵ Hiltrud Ebert, ed., *Drei Kapitel Weißensee: Dokumente zur Geschichte der Kunsthochschule Berlin-Weißensee 1946 bis 1957* (Berlin, 1996).

¹⁶ Werner Durth, Jörn Düvel, and Niels Gutschow, *Ostkreuz: Personen, Pläne, Perspektiven: Architektur und Städtebau der DDR*, vol. 1 (Frankfurt/Main, 1998), 142–73. The "sixteen fundamentals" show many similarities with the first version of the Charta of Athens of 1933 (not to be confused with the 1944 version published by Le Corbusier). See Carolyn Weber, "Zwischen Stalinallee und Plattenbau: Beiträge zur Rezeption des Bauhauses in der DDR," in Holger Barth, ed., *Projekt sozialistische Stadt: Beiträge zur Bau- und Planungsgeschichte der DDR* (Berlin, 1998), 54.

¹⁷ Wolfgang Thöner, "1932—Ausstellung und Buch: International Style: Austreibung des Funktionalismus und Ankunft im Stil," in Regina Bittner, ed., *Bauhausstil: Zwischen International Style und Lifestyle* (Berlin, 2003), 108–31.

¹⁸ Elizabeth Mock, ed., *In USA erbaut, 1932–1944* (Wiesbaden, 1948).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Foreword by Philip L. Goodwin, 5.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

²² Alfred H. Barr, Jr., "International Style": *Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson, The International Style* (New York, 1995), 29. The book was originally published as Barr, *The International Style: Architecture Since 1922* (New York, 1932).

²³ Dahms, "1929—CIAM-Kongress: die Wohnung für das Existenzminimum," in Bittner, ed., *Bauhausstil*, 86–107.

²⁴ Simone Hain, "Die Architekturdoktrin der 'Nationalen Traditionen' in der frühen DDR: Ein Versuch der symbolischen Konstruktion von Heimat, Distinktion und Dignität gegen die 'internationale Bahnhofhaftigkeit,'" in Vittorio Lampugnani, ed., *Die Architektur, die Region, und der Ort*, 238.

²⁵ Hermann Henselmann, "Der reaktionäre Charakter des Konstruktivismus," *Neues Deutschland*, Dec. 4, 1951, cited in Andreas Schätzke, *Zwischen Bauhaus und Stalinallee: Architekturdiskussion im östlichen Deutschland 1945–1955* (Braunschweig, 1991), 147.

²⁶ Kurt Liebknecht, "Hohes oder breites Fenster?," *Neues Deutschland*, March 20, 1952, cited in Schätzke, *Zwischen Bauhaus und Stalinallee*, 155.

²⁷ Walter Ulbricht, Speech to the Volkskammer, October 31, 1951, cited in Schätzke, *Zwischen Bauhaus und Stalinallee*, 145.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 144.

²⁹ Stefan Hörter, *Die Sportwettkampfhalle an der Stalinallee in Berlin von Richard Paulick* (Magisterarbeit am Fachbereich Kunstgeschichte, Bonn, 1998).

³⁰ Christian Wolsdorff, "Bauhaus in Berlin: Bauten und Projekte im Überblick," in Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin, ed., *Bauhaus in Berlin: Bauten und Projekte* (Berlin, 1995), 19, 138.

³¹ Dieter Hoffmann-Axthelm, "Eine Entdeckungsreise: drei Bauen von Franz Ehrlich," *Bauwelt*, July 12, 1996, 1538.

³² *Ibid.*, 1539. At the same time, there was a debate about the Bauhaus in West Germany which remained very different and was restricted to certain expert circles. The architect Rudolf Schwarz began this debate when he accused the Bauhaus and especially Walter Gropius of "materialism." Many colleagues and supporters of Gropius responded. By the end of the 1950s, the sort of modernism identified with the Bauhaus became the dominant model in West Germany. Intended as a contrast to the Stalinallee in the tense atmosphere of the Cold War, the Internationale Bauausstellung (INTERBAU) was opened in 1957 in West Berlin's Hansa district and many former members of the Bauhaus participated, including Gropius, Hubert Hoffmann, and Wils Ebert.

³³ Nikita Chruschtschow, "Besser, billiger und schneller bauen. Rede auf der Allunionskonferenz der Baufachleute der UdSSR in Moskau am 7.12.1954," cited in Schätzke, *Zwischen Bauhaus und Stalinallee*, 159.

³⁴ Thomas Topfstedt, "Nachbetrachtungen," in Schätzke, *Zwischen Bauhaus und Stalinallee*, 170.

³⁵ "Stellungnahme des Präsidiums der Deutschen Bauakademie vom 9.6.1955," *Deutsche Architektur* 4 (1955), cited in Schätzke, *Zwischen Bauhaus und Stalinallee*, 160–61.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 162.

³⁷ Karl-Heinz Hüter, "Bauhaus-Rezeption in der DDR,"

³⁸ Leonid Pazitnov, *Die schöpferische Erbe des Bauhauses, 1919–1933* (Berlin, 1963).

³⁹ It was Siegfried H. Begenau in particular who made reference to the Bauhaus as the place "where for the first time it was considered a duty to humanize as a totality the environment of an industrial society based on modern technology." Siegfried H. Begenau, *Funktion—Form—Qualität: Zur Problematik einer Theorie der Gestaltung* (Berlin, 1967), 69. Even at the 5th German Art Exhibit in Dresden in October 1962 designs which suggested Minimalism were attacked, and the old charge of "Formalism" was resurrected.

⁴⁰ Lothar Lang, *Das Bauhaus, 1919–1933* (Berlin, 1965); Diether Schmidt, *Bauhaus: Weimar 1919 bis 1925, Dessau, 1925 bis 1932, Berlin 1932 bis 1933* (Dresden, 1966).

⁴¹ *Architektur: Bauwerke und Baustile von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart: Lehrbuch für die Kunstbetrachtung in der zehnten Klasse der erweiterten Oberschule* (Berlin, 1965), 202.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 188.

⁴³ Karl-Heinz Hüter, *Das Bauhaus in Weimar: Studie zur gesellschaftspolitischen Geschichte einer deutschen Kunstschule* (Berlin, 1976).

⁴⁴ In November 1965, the GDR Minister of Culture, Hans Bentzien, attempted to reopen the Bauhaus and the first preliminary plans for a restoration of the building were made.

⁴⁵ Karin Hirdina, *Pathos der Sachlichkeit* (Berlin, 1981); Heinz Hirdina, *Gestalten für die Serie. Design in der DDR, 1949–1985* (Dresden, 1985).

⁴⁶ The CIAM dissolved in 1959. See Wolfgang Pehnt, *Das Ende der Zuversicht: Architektur in diesem Jahrhundert. Ideen—Bauten—Dokumente* (Berlin, 1983).

⁴⁷ Thomas Topfstedt, *Städtebau in der DDR, 1955–1971* (Leipzig, 1988), 42.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁴⁹ Joseph Rykwert, *Ornament ist kein Verbrechen: Architektur als Kunst* (Cologne, 1982), 129–30. Halle-Neustadt's socialist residential complex was a model for young Italian architects and theorists through the 1970s. See Chiara Rodriguez, "DDR-Architektur: Die italienische Rezeption," in Holger Barth, ed., *Projekt sozialistische Stadt: Beiträge zur Bau- und Planungsgeschichte der DDR* (Berlin, 1998), 61–68.

⁵⁰ Holger Barth, Thomas Topfstedt, et al., *Vom Baukünstler zum Komplexprojektanten: Architekten in der DDR* (Erkner, 2000).

⁵¹ Lothar Kühne, "Über das Verhältnis von Architektur und Kunst: Kritische Reflexionen," *Deutsche Architektur* 2 (1968), 112–13.

⁵² Lothar Kühne, *Haus und Landschaft: Aufsätze* (Dresden, 1985), 39.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Lothar Kühne, *Gegenstand und Raum: Über die Historizität des Ästhetischen* (Dresden, 1981), 234.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Lothar Kühne, *Haus und Landschaft*, 185.

⁵⁷ Dieter Hoffmann-Axthelm summarized the situation as follows: "Afterwards came the prefabricated slabs, a functionalism of growing simplification, which no longer has goals, but only costs, quantities of material, and a mission to fulfill a plan." Hoffmann-Axthelm, "Eine Entdeckungsreise: drei Bauen von Franz Ehrlich," *Bauwelt*, July 12, 1996:1539.

⁵⁸ Lutz Schöbe and Wolfgang Thöner, *Bauhaus-Dessau: Die Sammlung* (Ostfildern-Ruit, 1995). Stiftung Bauhaus Dessau, ed., *Bauhaus Objekte: Eine Auswahl aus der Sammlung des Bauhaus Dessau* auf CD (Berlin, 2004).