

ETH Zürich  
D-ARCH Departement Architektur  
Institut für Geschichte und Theorie der Architektur gta

Thesis Project  
Harbusch, Gregor  
Prof. Dr. Andres Tönnemann (Koreferat: Prof. Dr. Adrian von Buttlar, TU Berlin)

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The dissertation is concerned with the Berlin architect Ludwig Leo (1924–2012), who produced an unusual oeuvre that has so far been little studied. Leo belonged to the generation of architects who began their studies following their experience of the front line or of persecution during the Second World War. These young architects shaped the architecture of West Berlin starting in the late 1950s. Leo never developed his own formal signature in his work; instead, he designed in a conceptual fashion and synthesized a wide variety of influences – aiming to offer a functionally optimized and architecturally appropriate solution for each specific task.

His work needs to be read against the background of the economic boom that was taking place at that time, the sense of a new era dawning in society, and debates over up-to-date planning and architecture for modern society. His two most outstanding buildings – the Cavitation Tank 2 for the Berlin Testing Station for Hydraulic Engineering and Shipbuilding (Versuchsanstalt für Wasserbau und Schiffbau Berlin, VWS) and the Headquarters of the German Lifesaving Association (Deutsche Lebensrettungsgesellschaft), both started in 1967 – are spectacular specific solutions that have often been viewed as responses to contemporary architectural utopias. With their symbolic quality, they anticipate Postmodernism. Leo's work as an active architect ended at the peak of his career in the 1970s. As he largely avoided specialist debates and also did not write any architectural texts himself, the dissertation is mainly based on a critical analysis of his works and archives.

Leo's oeuvre, which is manageable in terms of its temporal and geographic extent, provides an opportunity to use a conceptually ambitious design personality to carry out a concentrated examination of the architecture of a decade that is increasingly moving into the focus of nuanced questioning and source-based research. The hypothesis raised in the dissertation is that in his unusual solutions, Leo was trying to respond to the demands and contradictions of his time and was seeking answers to the challenges of architectural design – in the tension between the Modernist tradition and its approaching crisis – in order to demonstrate that Modernism, with its unconditional linkage of demands for social emancipation with architecturally ambitious implementation, had lost none of its validity. In this sense, Leo in his rigorousness and independence marks a position that is architecturally original and conceptually radical, although in his own way he was also a typical contemporary exponent of committed international architecture after 1945.

### **Further Information**

["Ludwig Leo – Ausschnitt". Ausstellung in der Galerie "die raum" in Berlin. 13.9.–27.10.2013.](#)

["Soziale Justierungen. Zum Tod des Architekten Ludwig Leo". in: L.I.S.A. Das Wissenschaftsportal der Gerda Henkel Stiftung. 15.11.2012.](#)