Introduction

Aufbau, Ankunft, Alltag, Neubau: Experiencing and Remediating East German Modernist Architecture

In Lothar Warneke's 1982 DEFA film *Die Beunruhigung* [Apprehension], the modernist built environment plays an implicit but crucial role in understanding the emotional state of its main protagonist. Inge Herold (Christine Schorn), a marriage counselor and single mother, lives in a two-bedroom apartment in the modernist *Rathauspassagen* in the East Berlin city-center forum located around the TV Tower and Berlin's city hall. The anonymity of the large complex appears to be perfect for the independent, professional woman in her late thirties who enjoys occasional casual sexual relationships with men she meets in bars and other urban environments that allow her to go about her desires and activities without neighbors and others observing her. In panoramic establishing shots from a birds-eye view, the large squares and parks around Berlin's Alexanderplatz present a modern, elegant, and progressive cityscape with its modernist grand structures framing the generous public spaces provided for the GDR's citizens and guests. However, after a medical diagnosis throws Inge's life into turmoil, these vast and enormous spaces designed for mass gatherings and marches, now filmed from below and often showing only Inge by herself, come to emphasize the forlornness of the female protagonist who perceives herself as a social outsider on the margin. One of the most remarkable scenes, framed in a wide long-shot, puts Inge on Alexanderplatz completely alone, emphasizing the vast emptiness of the vertical Socialist-modernist planning, which has been, up to this point, mostly staged as spectacular.

By constantly emphasizing the built environment, many DEFA films remediate how people use and appropriate the (Socialist) modernist urban space that had come to dominate most cities by the 1980s, but also by critically engaging with it: how the built environment encourages or discourages quotidian mobility, how attractive or impractical spaces are for leisure activities, how they facilitate different encounters, and most importantly how they contribute to the transition toward a successful Socialist society. In Warneke's *Beunruhigung*, the framing of the East Berlin built environment engenders an affect-based double-coding of "spatial tactics" in what Silke Steets describes as "mode of attention towards objects and buildings crucial for the subjective construction of meaning."[1]

Alexanderplatz can showcase the vast and elegant modernist design of the center of the GDR's capital city, while simultaneously remediating the emotional experience of the very same space in that moment for the film's protagonist. At the heart of the present study is exactly this, the interplay of modernist architecture and urban spaces with the human experience of these spaces, narrated in a GDR cultural genre that I call *Neubau* culture.

In his influential 1966 essay, *The Architecture of the City*, Aldo Rossi claimed that architecture is a constituent element of what he calls "urban artefacts," "especially at those times when it is capable of synthesizing the whole civil and political scope of an epoch, when it is highly rational, comprehensive, and transmissible—in other words, when it can be seen as a *style*."[2] This style can without doubt be claimed for the specific type of modernist architecture in the GDR, especially the ubiquitous Wohnungsbauserie 70 (WBS 70, housing construction series 70, the most commonly used prefab building style) that can even be considered a "cipher" for the East German state.[3] Even more so as it is now a relic and signifier of the past, it is instantly recognizable, and there is cultural memory attached to it. Especially after unification in 1990, modernist housing estates, now renamed *Plattenbauten* (large-panel buildings), a derogatory term usually used by West Germans, whereas *Neubau* was the commonly used term in the East, became the quintessential material expression of East Germany and the Socialist model.

Similar modernist modifications can of course be found in every state in postwar Europe but the main difference to the West was that in East Germany all housing was erected under the constituting factor of state ownership of property—that is, the abolition of private property—which fundamentally establishes the qualitative difference between the Capitalist city and the Socialist one. On a quantitative level, this becomes even more obvious between the two postwar Germanies: in the mid-1980s alone, public industrial housing construction made up 80 percent of all housing construction in the GDR. In the Federal Republic, it was only 2 percent.[4] This is

not only a defining factor for the everyday life experience of East German dwelling, as Steffen Mau has recently shown, it also is a contributing factor to the societal transformation East Germany has undergone since 1990 and the subsequent re-establishment of private ownership and state-centralized planning. Moreover, one can argue that the semantics of *Neubau/Plattenbau* have shifted since 1990, especially in the public and cultural imaginary of reunified Germany that tended to view the public discourse from a Western, and thus exterior perspective, at the dawn of the neoliberal privatization period in Europe. This dominant Western, *neoliberal gaze* quickly made the East German spatial logic obsolete, dismissed it as a redundant remnant of a dictatorial past, and consequently most buildings and ensembles were quickly over-formed, if not demolished. This buried the forty-year urban and cultural discourse largely with it. One aspect of this study is dedicated to reconstructing the everyday life experience of living in GDR *Neubau* housing from within, through its cultural remediation.

This introduction will explain the structural and methodological outline of this study by elaborating the East German cultural imaginary around modernist architecture and theoretical approaches of perceiving and experiencing the built environment (modernist space), by arguing how film and literature specifically remediate the experiences of East German architecture and housing (*Remediation*), followed by an overview of architecture and planning in the GDR (*Spacing*), and a discussion of gender, class, and age as structuring principles of the study (*Synthesis*), before ultimately giving a chapter overview.

Experiencing East German Modernist Space

In the GDR, which found itself in a constant housing crisis for the forty years of its existence, architecture, urban development, and planning cannot be clearly separated from social policy and Socialist ideology, and neither can they from cultural production. The much-invoked *Aufbau* (construction, building, development), a key concept especially in the first two postwar decades, referred both to the sociopolitical construction of a Socialist state on German soil and to the reconstruction of war-damaged cities, with the social and spatial forming an intricately linked union of two factors that were mutually dependent. Architectural symbolism and semantics are ubiquitous in the language of the *Aufbau* years of the 1940s and 1950s: while the Free German Youth organization (FDJ) sang "Bau auf, bau auf, … für eine bessere Zukunft" [build, build, … for a better future], and Johannes R. Becher's national anthem beginning with "Auferstanden aus Ruinen und der Zukunft

zugewandt" (risen from ruins and facing the future), Kurt Liebknecht, the president of the GDR's newly inaugurated Deutsche Bauakademie (DBA) (German Building Academy), in 1951 explained:

> The question of German architecture plays a great role in the awareness building of our people because architecture is the art that demands the greatest societal effort, it is the art of designing our cities and villages in such a way that the … architectural ensembles and their buildings represent the optimism of our social order.[5]

Thus, architecture and planning were conceived as primary ingredients of the GDR's political self-conception. *Neubau* (newbuild) would become the central term for all modernist buildings in GDR built from the 1960s onwards, in opposition to Altbau (old building) that represented the prewar architecture of the bourgeois city tainted by the recent atrocities of fascism from which socialism was supposed to provide a fresh start. From this teleological standpoint, state-Socialist planning sought to transform society in its totality, to encompass and reshape all existing social systems, thereby creating a qualitatively better future. *Vergesellschaftung* (socialization) and complete central control fully incorporated into the central planning agenda became the overall aim and the propagandistic plan, even though in most cases this was only partially realized.[6]

In connection with architecture, it can probably best be understood as a late Enlightenment project for the modern mass society: a supposedly rational, egalitarian, teleological, and total vision of a new spatial arrangement. On the backdrop of war destruction and formerly confined, unhygienic old towns and working-class tenement buildings, the vision must have appeared similar to the sketches of the large, symmetrical, and geometric squares, octagons, and circuses in the early modern period that meant to bring order and reason to the narrow, dark alleys of medieval cities. This time, the *telos* would be communism: Marxist-Leninist ideology teleologically anticipated the collapse of capitalism and the establishment of the classless society. This new and better society was proclaimed by the various Communist parties across Eastern Europe and legitimized their self-perception as the avant-garde of the future ruling working class (the SED [Socialist Unity Party] had the slogan *Vorhut der Arbeiterklasse* [Vanguard of the Working class]). The five-year economic plans after the Soviet model henceforth established a cyclical time regime: the future was plannable because it was attached to the ruling party.[7]

In line with the logic of teleological planning, the postwar internationalist imagination conceived the various new towns and large housing estates erected across the country as all-encompassing megastructures and machines that quintessentially merged technological futurism, grandeur, and power,

an egalitarian mass society and total rationalism in a planning euphoria that believed it could change society for the better through planning alone.[8] The idealized Socialist cities like Eisenhüttenstadt, Hoyerswerda, Halle-Neustadt, or Berlin's Marzahn further operated within a specific ideological framework, as defined by Rosemary Wakeman: they were new because they were planned and "therefore avoided the incoherency and bourgeois cosmopolitanism of the capitalist city;" they were linked to heavy industry and would give the workers the right to the city.[9] Semantically:

> … their ideological and symbolic content was enormous. As political cyphers, they became almost as important as the Red Flag. They were conceived as complete, coherent urban places and imagined as "splendid living environments, economically and culturally, that would promote the collective life of mankind." … Here were all the prerequisites of the new socialist man.[10]

In the GDR, modernism was embraced as Socialist internationalism after 1955, when Khrushchev initiated the Soviet-wide order of industrialized building after Stalin's death, ending a decade of architectural Socialist realism.[11] As Urban has noted, the serial apartment blocks that became popular at the time relied on two conceptual foundations, which originated in the late nineteenth century and soon came to be inseparably connected with the rhetoric of modernist architects and planners:

> First, the development of standardized design and industrial building techniques that profoundly changed the nature of residential construction, and second, a belief in egalitarian living conditions as a social goal and the paternalistic state as its most effective promoter. Mass housing rested on a conviction that state authorities were to take responsibility for the welfare of their citizens and counteract social polarization.[12]

The specific characteristics for Socialist cities, as Zarecor points out, were that most Socialist and Communist regimes had much more spatial and legal control compared to Capitalist states, and that their ideal urbanisms were conceived within a state project of the total societal transformation that instrumentalized the city as a critical element in these efforts.[13] The ensembles were to represent a clear shift from the urban fabric of the past, and the mostly homogenous design was to mirror the planned development of the conditions of the Socialist society.[14] The other aspect is a specific infrastructural approach that she refers to as "socialist scaffold" and describes as a basic infrastructure for future growth and with an overarching ideological thrust onto which other systems—economic, social, political, environmental—can attach and become activated.[15]

The unfolding of industrialized prefabricated construction came attached to a social utopia that had the potential to foster a radical shift from the traditional societal model toward building communism. Modernist architecture, in that context, delivered a perceived model of actively contributing to societal and social changes. It became the exciting challenge to create something new: with the "tranditionless proletariat" as its commissioner and client, a new legal order, a new imaginary, and the opportunity and necessity to begin anew after the terrors of fascism and war destruction. This was the Socialist promise: the building and housing industry would become the central component through which the "Socialist society" would constitute itself symbolically and materially.[16]

Conversely, this sociopolitical dominance of building and planning for the delivery of a Socialist state on German soil created an entire literary and cinematic genre including construction site novels, reportages, and documentary films to fictional works exploring how residents made sense of these new spaces. Parallel to the Bitterfeld Conference in 1957 that encouraged historically predominantly middle-class writers and filmmakers to get first-hand experience of work in factories and in agriculture to inform their work, while also encouraging workers and farmers to start writing about their lives and labor, the omnipresent construction sites and emerging new towns of the 1950s and 60s populate a plethora of literary and cinematic works that foreground the ideological and symbolic value of building for a Socialist society. Many of them stage the construction site as the very embodiment of the utopian project itself, and as a spatial-cybernetic act of midwifery for the *New Human*.[17]

On a theoretical level, these new towns and estates and their cultural remediations constitute a productive historical source for an exploration of what Maria Brosig has termed "das Haus des Sozialismus" (the house of socialism),[18] a "model metaphor for the GDR imagery" within what, following the philosopher Ernst Cassirer, I will term a specific "order of meaning" (*Sinnordnung*) and a "semantic sub-realm" (*Subsinnwelt*) within the East German cultural imaginary.[19]

As most research into urban environments and space takes a monodisciplinary and empirically grounded perspective (social sciences, geography), film and cultural production more broadly have so far been neglected as a source of fundamental insight into the human experience of the built environment. Urban space has been approached as psychologically mapped,[20] "imageable,"[21] and phenomenologically as corporeally experienced atmosphere,[22] while the French Marxist tradition understands it as produced, appropriated through everyday life, and shaped by power structures and habitus.[23] One early model of this dialogical process of urban space employed by this study is Michel de Certeau's writing on city walking that pivotally

combines the social experience of urban space with the rationalism of planning. In *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1980), de Certeau famously examines two complementary modalities through which urban subjects perceive and interpret their environments. The first, likened by de Certeau to the passive act of reading, involves totalizing models of the city, such as maps and aerial shots, which impose an orderly structure, the recognition of a plan on the chaos of urban space, similar to Kevin Lynch's *paths* that arrange space and movement between spaces.[24] This abstract idea can be transcribed to the largely coherent and ahistorical Socialist-modernist rebuilding of the city from the early 1960s onwards that was imposed onto the remains of the prewar urban fabric. The second, inspired by Debord's *dérive*[25] and likened to the active act of speech, emphasizes precisely this chaos as experienced by walkers immersed in the "immediacy" of the street, their conscious choices in movement and direction analogous to the process of writing:

> The act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language or to the statements uttered. At the most elementary level, it has a triple "enunciative" function: it is a process of *appropriation* of the topographical system of the part of the pedestrian (just as the speaker appropriates and takes on the language); it is a spatial acting-out of the place (just as the speech act is an acoustic acting-out of language); and it implies *relations* among differentiated positions, that is, among pragmatic "contracts" in the form of movements.[26]

Spatial practices established as a combination of knowledge of the built environment and an active appropriation of the built space through usage and movement function as two habitual practices that, de Certeau argues, "in fact secretly structur[ing] the determining conditions of social life."[27] As this study suggests, reading these novels and films as mediators between the architectural and ideological masterplans on the one side, and the different gendered, aesthetic, and social meanings attached to the built environment by its various agents (architects, builders, residents, artists) on the other, the present study seeks to apply urban sociologist Martina Löw's dialogical concept of spatial perception consisting of "spacing" and "operations of synthesis." With the term spacing, she refers to constructing, building, or locating buildings and architecture, and so in this case, the architectural masterplan and architectural narrative of a new town and the material shape of that new town's built environment. Löw combines this concept of spacing with what she terms "operations of synthesis;" that is, processes of perceiving, imagining, and remembering that built environment depending on specific context and defined by class, gender, and milieu-specific schemes.[28] These would address cultural, ethnic, and historical contexts, as well as the age of the perceiver. Further, Löw defines a place "as a location, site, specifically

nameable, usually geographically marked yet simultaneously and collectively charged with meaning,"[29] in which "[t]he discussion of theories of space … and of the empirical findings on processes of space constitution … implies that space is construed in this double sense as a structuring arrangement and as a process of arranging."[30] It is this very duality of space as a structuring arrangement and as a process of arranging that she terms *spacing* and *operations of synthesis.* More precisely, she defines her terms as follows:

> By spacing I mean the placing of social goods and people or the positioning of primarily symbolic markings to identify ensembles of goods and people as such. Spacing thus means building, deploying, or positioning. By operations of synthesis I mean the processes of perception, imagination, or remembering in which social goods and people are integrated to yield spaces. Power is understood as an integral element of human action.[31]

Building on Löw's spatial practice, this study treats the literary and visual sources under discussions as specific remediations of the experience of the modernist built environment through means of fictional narrative and cultural semantics, informed by operations of synthesis of a specific built environment (spacing). More precisely, I will read these sources as cultural responses to, and reflections on, the preceding affective, aesthetic, and corporeal perceptions of atmospheres of these modernist spaces that are crucial for the construction of meaning within literary and visual works. Structured around affected social groups (by class, gender, and age), the case studies will then be read as the "remediation" of the semantics of literary and visual responses to architectural discourse and spacing around authentic architectural sites via their spatial, temporal, and cultural attunement. Applying this model to GDR cultural production, I argue that they represent a remediation of the radical modernist restructuring of the built space in the GDR and its Socialist imaginary that encapsulates both the dialogical process between the ideological grand narratives of the futurist Socialist utopia and the plurality of citizens' and residents' experiences thereof.[32] At the same time, it adds a contemporary and often more critical perspective on the part of the user. So, in Inge Herold's case in *Die Beunruhigung*, her affective experience of Berlin's *Rathausforum* can simultaneously be cinematically framed as liberating, modern, and metropolitan, as well as alienating and isolating.

The sociological, geographical, and spatial readings of cultural texts is particularly productive for the GDR as most of these works were obligated to the aesthetics of Socialist realism in its various guises, which, while never fully defined, meant a commitment to authentic and realistic depictions of everyday life, labor, and social relationships.[33] However, in general one can make out two competing Marxist aesthetics in the GDR around different

interpretations of realism as well as other approaches to aesthetics. On the one hand, we have a more doctrinaire concept of Marxist modernism, whose utopian project conceived the possibility of a total reshaping of the world and society in the context of mass societies provided the fertile soil of the ideological grand ideas of the twentieth century. This version of cultural Marxism, favored by literary theorist Georg Lukács in particular, shaped an aesthetic that promoted Socialist realism with its optimistic heroes, mass scenes, and grand narrative arches.[34] On the other hand, as I have established elsewhere, we have the dialectical approach[35] that engages constructively and critically with the ideological masterplan through the inclusion of compelling subjective perspectives coupled with a focus on the contradictions of everyday life. This approach can be part of Socialist realism but more in the shape of *negative poetics*, or it can dismiss realism altogether and privilege more experimental forms. In both cases, given the ideological importance of the new built environment, writers and filmmakers were often employed and invited to write about the construction process as well as the experiences of the new built environments by its first users. Therefore, especially for the many construction site and relocation novels as well as *Alltagsfilme* (everyday life films), the authors and filmmakers discussed in this study actively shadowed the planning and construction process and featured detailed technical building procedures, and all films were shot on location, using real construction workers, architects, other professional staff, as well as residents as extras, and featured detailed technical building procedures.

The logic of this specific understanding of Socialist realism was underpinned by a genuine interest in the changing process of society with all its successes and failures, informed by as much technological and academic detail as possible, while maintaining the belief that fiction models possible realities by referring to observable realities. The references to reality are cited, varied, and enriched with "invented" material for a variety of reasons. Literature and film, whether in the form of a feature film or a TV series, are involved in the experience of existing realities through the construction of possible realities.[36] It can sharpen perceptions and thus also knowledge about "the circumstances," confirm, modify, refute, and shape them in different ways through processes that range from the affirmative to the critical. Within this sociological epistemology of literature and filmmaking, the narrative techniques employed seek to capture the development of the new Socialist societal experiment to document not only the status quo, but also the *quo vadis* of the utopian project of East German state socialism.

While some historical and sociological sources do account for an impact on the (self-)image of women in particular who were socialized in the GDR,[37] this study demonstrates that architecture and indeed space and the dialogical process of building and perceiving architecture has heavily impacted on the

East German cultural sphere, and on literary and visual art in particular, and reciprocally, these cultural semantics of architecture have partly shaped our understanding of everyday life in and around it.

Cultural Remediation

All these spatial theories play a significant and fundamental role when approaching what this study will discuss as the GDR cultural sphere's remediation of modernist space—the literary and visual responses to perceiving, imagining, and remembering the built environment. I will explore the different remediations of the built environment by analyzing how these experiences translate into plots, narratives, framings, symbols, and metaphors. Expanding on Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's theorization of remediation within media studies,[38] I suggest using the term remediation as an act of culturally mediated urban perception that synchronizes the spacing of the GDR built environment, the operations of synthesis of the experience and perception of the built environment, and the cultural semantics in literature and film. In doing so, I argue that the distinct genre of GDR *Neubau* culture actively remediates experiences of the East German built environment in cultural coding, remediating them from experiences to the media of literature and film.[39] With the cultural sphere effectively being the *Ersatzöffentlichkeit* (substitute public sphere)[40] of the GDR, through literature and film that showcased a strong sociological interest in building, planning, and dwelling, as well as a self-understanding as a Marxist dialectical and critical corrective to the status quo of the East German socialist project, I argue that it is indispensable to focus predominately on works of fiction when one wants to learn about historical experiences of the built environment of the GDR. Through this, I further argue that the media of film and literature explore whether modernist architecture and housing adequately reflected different needs arising from gender, age, and class (the categories that were supposed to be radically changed and improved through the new built environment) and analyze how it facilitated or prevented gendered and social development and impacted on cultural means of performativity. Further, the ambiguity and complexity present in literature and film is a crucial witness to how people make sense of new urban and social contexts. In doing so, the study will present how the fascination with the semantics of construction and urban environments represents a significant proportion of GDR cultural production and the state's Socialist imaginary. I will read these films and texts as highly architecturally informed, but predominantly subjective and affect-driven critical responses to building and planning. The works provide strongly subjective insights into the atmospheres and semantics around the spatial practices the new residents employ. As these narratives also actively (co-)create affective atmospheres of

modernist space that have further significant impact on the public image of these buildings on the viewer/reader, the study argues that they also represent *Neubau* culture as a specific genre of East German cultural production.

Several studies by other scholars who have ventured into similar territory over the last years have influenced my argument. Emily Pugh's seminal *Architecture, Politics, and Identity in Divided Berlin* (2014) argues that "architecture and the urban environment as a whole and as cultural landscapes not only represent and reflect the meaning of social discourse but also help to shape shared meanings and transform social values."[41] Her book offers a wide range of insights into architecture and planning in its cultural context of both sides of the Berlin Wall, which includes some discussions of popular DEFA films by reading them as part of the architectural discourse and by presenting "housing … as an especially evocative symbol of Heimat-GDR."[42] However, her short discussion of film remains largely illustrative and does not treat them as ambiguous cultural texts within the unique cultural contexts of their production.

Curtis Swope's 2018 *Building Socialism. Architecture and Urbanism in East German Literature, 1955–1973* offers an expansive analysis of built space for literature and drama of the *Aufbau* and *Ankunft* periods in the context of East Germany's Scientific Technological Revolution. As he states, from "Heiner Müller's production plays of the 1950s to the publication of Brigitte Reiman's architect novel *Franziska Linkerhand* (1973), the built environment was a defining element of playwrights' and novelists' structural and linguistic choices and a literary platform for critiquing East Germany's modern industrial society in an internationally attuned way."[43] He shows that the representation of buildings, streets, and interiors was never a static backdrop to human agency. "Instead, it was imbued with an urgent temporality, for example of social revolution or the history of the working class, that impinged upon the temporality of dramatic action and narrative structure and became implicated in the choice between metaphoric and descriptive language."[44] Further, Swope argues that East German literature of the 1960s must be seen as much in terms of modernity as in terms of issues specific to East German socialism. The staging of the encounter between people and buildings constitutes a highly sophisticated reckoning with key modern issues. These include "possibilities for agency against objectifying historical forces, modern cities and modern consumer culture as both confining and liberating, the role of architecture in state propaganda, and the relationship between post-war modern space and the mechanized killing of the Holocaust."[45]

In a similar vein, Paul Stangl's 2018 *Risen from Ruins: The Cultural Politics of Rebuilding East Berlin*[46] offers a wealth of insights into the cultural politics of the rebuilding of East Berlin from the end of World War II until the construction of the Berlin Wall, combining political analysis with spatial and architectural history to examine how the political agenda of East German

elites and the ruling SED played out in the built environment. Both books underline the omnipresence of *Aufbau* as a central trope of East German social reality and debate reflected in the depth to which it exerted its force as an agent in the writing process. As Swope concludes, the "focus on architecture reveals that East German literature of the 1960s must be seen afresh, not as a parochialized curiosity of a bygone culture, but as a significant achievement of modern European literature."[47]

Hunter Bivens, in his 2025 *Laboring Affects: The East German Construction Novel*, also dissects the literature of the *Aufbau* period by focusing on a series of Socialist realist novels and reportages written in the early 1950s through which East German authors sought to capture "the new feeling of work" under socialism, to portray the collective enthusiasm of building a new world out of the ruins of fascism and war. While in the GDR this construction literature received an ambiguous reception even at the time, it was dismissed as propaganda in the West and is now largely forgotten. Bivens shows that East German construction literature provides us with a set of case studies in the social reorganization of work and the emotions and infrastructures that attend to it, even as these novels attempt to contain these transformations through Socialist realist aesthetic strategies.[48] All three works unearth invaluable sets of knowledge and prove that urban space was a decade spanning cultural and ideological obsession. However, they only focus on the first two decades, land largely lack the perspective of both architecture as well as everyday life experience and the intermedial discussion with visual culture that I am going to contribute with this study.

Further, Sarah Pogoda, in her 2013 *Demiurgen in der Krise: Architektenfiguren in der Literatur nach 1945*, has shown that fictional architects in post-World War II literature in both East and West Germany are depicted as quintessential ciphers of the mid-century crisis of political ideologies and utopias.[49] While this book is concerned with public urban environments, Paul Betts and Greg Castillo have shown how interiors were designed to feed into notions of a Socialist imaginary from a historical and design perspective, reflecting private lives, personal desires, as well as imaginaries of modernity in a Cold War competition.[50] Last but not least, Michael Grisko and Günter Helmes, in their 2024 edited volume *Auferstanden aus Ruinen: Planen, Bauen und Wohnen in Spiel- und Dokumentarfilmen der DDR*, have showcased a wide range of cinematic depictions of building, planning, and living in the spectrum of societal reality, filmic staging, and constitutional guaranteeing.[51]

Narrating Remediated Neubau Experiences

This present study will build on this wealth of scholarship by focusing exclusively on the experiences of the GDR's *Neubau* built environment, adding

an intermedial perspective intersecting film and literature. Each case study will feature a detailed account of the architectural and planning context that illuminates the *spacing* factor each of these works is relating to, by further employing urban sociological theory to appropriately inform my cultural analysis of these texts that were, conversely, informed by the urban planning and construction discourse and driven by a sociological epistemology toward built space. As the view of GDR architecture, especially of the ubiquitous WBS 70 slabs and high-rises, almost immediately shifted after 1990 and they lost all their cultural prestige—most prominently symbolized through the linguistic and onomastic shift from the East German *Neubau* to its replacement by the West German pejorative *Plattenbau*—this study hopes to unearth, revive and differentiate the complex, critical, and aesthetic realm of GDR *Neubau* modernist space culture. At the same time, through its merger of architectural, sociological, and cultural lenses, the volume aims to contribute new perspectives toward understanding user experiences of mid-century modernist architecture in the GDR, but also as a model that can be applied beyond that.

Within the *Neubau* genre of GDR cultural production, despite the diversity of texts and sources, specific tropes, themes, narrative devices, and tendencies can be condensed from works dealing with modernist spatial experiences as genre-typical elements. The floating prefab concrete slab being lifted by a crane into position is an omnipresent image that populates most DEFA films and symbolizes the *Aufbau* effort like no other: in the spirit of realism, authenticity, the *Bitterfeld Way*, and the ambitions of the scientific-technological revolution all share the position that they are highly informed by urbanist discourse, construction and planning detail, and authentic user experiences, most of which were acquired by working or shadowing the actual planners and builders and by interviewing residents of the estates. As Swope notes, when discussing the social and mental processes with which architectural elements stood in a dialectical relationship:

> The theoretical dimension of the passages is in part rooted in the authors' increasingly sociological and psychological approach to built space; it is this recourse to a social-scientific frame, which literature shared with architecture during this time period, that tended to interrupt narrative trajectories. That frame gave passages about built space the quality of discrete, concentrated ruminations parallel to rather than intertwined with the narrative."[52]

Similarly, all films discussed used authentic construction sites and buildings with real construction workers and other workers as lay extras, and employed documentary-style filming techniques to provide a sense of realism. Especially within the sub-genre of relocation literature, works such as

Insel der Schwäne or *Das Mädchen im roten Pullover* focus on spatial practices and appropriation and routine/habitualizing techniques of the new towns or neighborhoods. Simultaneously, the atmospheres of the new built space in novels such as *Ulla* or films such as *Der tapfere Schulschwänzer* are described using various affective and sensory impressions, often using pathetic fallacy (bad weather) and negative corporeal affects as an introduction, which are later remediated through better weather and positive emotional responses when the protagonists have established a better sense of home.

Another important feature is a contrastive narrative around public green spaces. On the one hand, this transpires into a contrastive depiction of nature as a counterspace to the built environment into which the utopian hopes for the GDR are increasingly being projected, as they cannot be found in the new towns any longer. These natural symbolic or literal islands are staged as clearly Rousseauian, romanticized heterotopian, and arcadian Socialist idylls and as *mise-en-abyme* for the shifting hopes and frustrations with the GDR. On the other hand, public green spaces are often contested as a critique of technocratic masterplans that fail community building, appropriation, and identification with the new towns (in works such as *Zwei Schritte vor dem Glück* or *Taubenjule*). These can both be informed by real protests or staged symbolically as a critique of a lack of public participation and democratic practices. In general, escalations around public spaces are frequently linked to intergenerational issues and conflicts. Especially from the mid-1970s onwards, they increasingly include environmental and ecological concerns. The other important aspect within the public realm, in particular in the case of Halle-Neustadt, is the involvement with public art, which was to demarcate Socialist values and inspire a Socialist way of life while, serving as identity markers for the Socialist city in order to not confuse it with Capitalist new towns. Most works engage with these works of art critically in a general discussion around aesthetics, values, the power of images and media, and political power play in the selection process of these works.

Narratively, works such as *Einzug ins Paradies* are often interested in social dynamics and encounters that the new built environment affords, and they use these both as plot device as well as narrative perspective. That very often is performed through narrative polyphony as a technique to allow for, in Bakhtin's terms, "a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices" where characters are "by the very nature of his creative design, not only objects of authorial discourse but also subjects of their own directly signifying discourse."[53] Within these works, polyphony was the narrative of choice for a sociological epistemology to account for differently gendered as well as class- and age-related perspectives simultaneously and in their intersection, in order to portray a GDR society *en miniature*. The other popular narrative trope,

especially in film, is that of city walking and *flânerie*. In works such as *Die Beunruhigung*, *Fräulein Schmetterling*, or *Sabine Kleist, 7 Jahre*, this is often portrayed through women as a form of discursive walking that explores the opportunities and limitations of gender equality. It is also used to capture as well as stage a sense of subjective authenticity and sensemaking of the changing cities and urban realms, often employing shifting gazes and temporalities toward different architectural periods in a contrast between *Altbau* and *Neubau*, most prominently in the 1960s (wartorn cities to modernism) and in the 1980s (modernism to obsolete prewar architecture). In addition, many films with strong *Alt-/Neubau* contrasts frequently feature demolition of prewar architecture. These, in relation to the real number of demolitions, excessively over-represented explosions of old buildings (the GDR only destroyed housing when it was in the way of a special project, more housing, or it could not be saved), demarcate a typical example of double-coding of urbanist projects in film: for an official narrative, these scenes can be presented as progress toward better and more equal housing in line with state ideology, while for artists and filmmakers these often represent a metaphorical marking of the perceived loss of an individually designed (artistic) living space.

Spacing: Architecture, Planning, and the East German Imaginary

If we employ Löw's term of *spacing* as the "placing of social goods and people or the positioning of primarily symbolic markings to identify ensembles of goods and people as such, [meaning] building, deploying, or positioning,"[54] this study investigates East German modernist buildings as a seminal factor to the political and societal utopia of socialism and communism that operated within its very specific order of meaning, as its own semantic sub-realm, both contributing to a "Socialist imaginary" of what modernist architecture could achieve for the utopian political project, and ultimately establishing a "new consciousness of space" (Lefebvre) that will impact the East German cultural production that *remediates* this architectural discourse into cultural semantics.

As established above, in the GDR, architecture, building, and planning cannot be separated from social policy and Socialist ideology. Although there was not necessarily a clear idea of how to build this new societal space, both literally and figuratively, the political leadership agreed that the built environment was a form of self-assurance as a nation, and that architecture and urban planning would be efficacious indicators for understanding human self-interpretation within their environment. Parallel to the incipient debate around what to consider as national cultural and historical heritage (*nationales Erbe*), attempting to make the difficult distinction against the Federal Republic with whom the GDR shared its cultural heritage, architecture and planning

were given outstanding importance for the nation-building process and were conceived as primary ingredients of the GDR's political self-conception.[55] By creating a distinct built environment, the party leadership hoped to initiate the population's identification with the build-up of communism as "risen from the ruins" of national-Socialist terror and destruction, in an attempt similar to what Ernst Bloch would later describe in *The Principle of Hope*: architecture as "an attempt to producing human homeland (*Heimat*)," and a new *Heimat* had to be created from scratch.[56] In this attempt, the leaders of the newly merged SED tried to reconcile the directives from Moscow with specific German architectural and intellectual traditions for the self-proclaimed revolutionary process of building socialism.

Phases of GDR Architecture and Shifting Temporalities

For the development of architecture and planning in the GDR, Jäger distinguishes five essential stages:[57] the first, between 1946 and 1950, characterized mostly by disposal of the air-raid rubble and first rebuilding under the guidelines of the functionalist Charta of Athens, led by the Soviet military administration. The second, 1951–57, can be called the "Stalin era," characterized by the *Nationale Bautradition* (National Building Tradition, NBT) and Socialist realism. The third, 1957–70, can be called the first modernist phase: it is characterized by the post-Stalin functionalist turn toward international-style modernism. In the fourth phase, from 1971 until 1980, "modernist mass housing" is named after the *Wohnungsbauprogramm* (housing program) following Honecker's rise to power. The fifth phase, 1980–90, sees a neohistoric postmodernist turn combined with an increased focus on refurbishing of pre-1945 buildings, while the construction of huge estates such as Marzahn continues.

For the purposes of this study, I will distinguish phases by merging the first two in Jäger's logic, and treat the last two as parallel rather than subsequent developments as, aesthetically and culturally, these phases of construction and planning are attached to specific and implicit temporalities that change both their styles and architectural typologies as well as the cultural gazes and semantics toward them.

Techno-Futurism: The first two phases as well as the beginning of the modernist phase (1946–61) can be summarized under the key term of *Aufbau* (rebuilding, building, constructing), which is aligned with a teleological futurism toward a utopian end goal. With the arrival of modernism post-Stalin and the first results of modernist new towns in Hoyerswerda and Halle-Neustadt (1961–70), one can speak of the *Ankunft* (arrival) period where the futurist utopia gets revived through modernist internationalism that sticks to the monumental style, especially in city centers.

Presentism: The fourth architectural phase (1971–80), marking the shift of power from Walter Ulbricht to Erich Honecker, can be aligned with the key term of *Alltag* (everyday life). This includes a temporal shift from a futurist to a presentist utopia manifested by Honecker's program of prescribed focus on everyday life socialism and his kerygmatic announcement of "real existing socialism" that performatively brought the long-term goal of socialism to the present day. This provoked even stronger discrepancies between aspiration and real-life experiences of the planning totality. With the shift from the 1970s and 80s and the shift from *Aufbau/Ankunft* to *Alltag*, Richter suggests a first and a second modernism in GDR planning and building, with differences: firstly, in form and aim of modernization proclaimed by the people in power; secondly, in the importance of utopia for the form and communication of planning aim; and thirdly, the relevance of chronological-temporal order for urban development.[58] The period is marked by modernist mass housing and large estates in WBS 70 style, while the turn to everyday life leads to an aesthetic "subjective turn" that questions the individual within socialism, while the shift to "realized/presentist eschatology" creates a desire to postpone the realization of anything utopian to a not further specified future, with utopia effectively replacing the futurist implementability of the Socialist project in the presence of the various crises of the 1970s.

Retrospective Presentism: The fifth architectural phase (1980–90), *Alltag II*, aligns with a temporality of a perceived stagnant present that, on the one hand, nostalgically and critically revisits the futurism of the Aufbau period, while on the other, fueled by Solidarność and Perestroika, attempts to revive and renew the hope of a Socialist utopia for a distant future. Politically, there is a change of paradigm from urban expansion to urban renewal and from a growth-oriented progress paradigm to a present-day focus and socioeconomic stabilization.[59] This aligns with the disappearance of the modernist regime and the feeling of being stuck in the everyday.[60] While the large estates planned in the 1960s and 70s are still being finished, the urban discourse shifts from abandoning the new town and large estate idea toward renovation and refurbishment of the crumbling city centers and finding new ways to use prefab construction for neo-historicist construction in historic neighborhoods. Neohistoric architecture becomes the representative for a wider shift toward a more differentiated appropriation of the past,[61] as part of a state legitimization strategy, popular interest, and an intellectual Marxist critique of the wrong beginnings that impact on the present status quo. Everyday life in ahistorical modernist new towns or housing estates changed the perspective of how people perceived historical urban environments. Simon Ward, in his study *Urban Memory and Visual Culture in Berlin* (2016), builds on de Certeau's experience and perception of the "concept-city" and factors in historicity and memory, arguing that it is not only the organization of the gaze upon the city "but … the perception of time in urban space."[62] With a

focus on perception as a means of attention toward the Benjaminian aura of the built environment, he speaks of a "synchronic urban gaze" that produces a particular "regime of attention,"[63]—similar to Steets' *modes of attention*—which, in turn, changes the perception of historical layers. In particular, the diverse cultural semantics of modernist architecture creates what Ward, using Andreas Huyssen's terminology, terms a "spatial image" that fosters the *museal gaze*:[64] by contrasting the modernist postwar with any historical prewar architecture and organically grown environments, the focus shifts toward those spaces obsolete for modernist planners that facilitate a different social behavior and a different appropriation of urban space, creating a more differentiated perception of the *asynchronous city* in its entirety.

GDR Architectural Theory

The discussion around architectural perception in the GDR, for a long period but certainly for the first two decades, consisted mainly of ideological window-dressing and planning optimism rather than a firm theoretical approach, in most cases building on previous planning practices from the 1910s and 20s and the Soviet Union. Until the 1970s, research into architectural theory was widely nonexistent in a systematic form. GDR star architect Hermann Henselmann wrote in 1966:

> Many architects started out, and still do, from the self-deception that their buildings, regardless of the production conditions, can bring about a change in society and human relationships if they only use all the means of modern technology to organise people's coexistence as perfectly as possible. A number of socialist architects also believe that the consistent application of the admittedly very important means of industrial construction will, as it were, automatically produce socialist architecture according to the formula: industrialisation and standardisation = socialist architecture. … However, this erroneous position is the main cause of a number of mistakes made by urban planners and architects, which have been criticised by the party and state leadership.[65]

A key term for this "erroneous position" was cybernetics. A concept imported from the Soviet Union, Peer Pasternak has discussed cybernetics in the context of the new town of Halle-Neustadt as a specific "cybernetic mode of utopia." The mode in which this utopian urbanism was realized was cybernetic in two respects: the city was planned and built as a self-regulating subsystem in which functional lack of ambiguities were to enable the trouble-free progression toward a Socialist life and aspirations. At the same time, a city-human coupling was the aim: through its morphology and its network of institutions, the city transmits behavior-controlling messages to its inhabitants, who then move in the control loops determined by urban planning

and institutions.[66] Urban construction therefore was intentionalist, insofar as the city was an exemplary component of a social project that knew its goal and was willing to ignore any irritations as irrelevant or, if necessary, clear them out of the way in order to achieve it—instead of dealing with them. The urbanist paradigm of functionality was supplemented by an orientation toward the contemporary mainstream of science. Scientific rationality gave rise to ideas of precise determinations of causality, which once again fueled the optimistic assumptions of plannability and control. In a cybernetic manner, urban morphology—urban layouts and mobility networks—was seen as the source of an overall systemically controlled and sub-systemically self-regulating development of urban social life. To this end, the aim was to combine several conceptual ingredients in an exemplary design: New Building, functionalism, cybernetics, and Socialist social theory were to be amalgamized in a novel urban combination. The result, in turn, was not to be merely an annex to a conventional city; that is, one characterized by the idiosyncrasies of established structures. At any rate, this was the aspiration: a "unique city, thought through and planned in every detail of its life, its functionality, its supply, its culture, entertainment, education," the reconstruction chronicler Jan Koplowitz emphatically wrote in his reportage *die taktstraße*.[67]

In the 1960s and 70s, various attempts were made to reconcile Marxist and spatial theory with a theory-led conception of building and planning for the GDR, most prominently Lothar Kühne and Bruno Flierl. Kühne in particular tried to theorize a form of functionalism that privileged human needs and human perception without damaging the environment, and without technology dominating the way cities are planned and built. In doing so, he reconnected with a specific line of German thought going a long way back to the late nineteenth century, to the architectural historian August Schmarsow. His 1894 lecture, 'The Essence of Architectural Creation' (*Das Wesen der architektonischen Schöpfung*), was the first to claim the subject, not the object, as the starting and reference point for a sense of space and spatial creation.[68] Schmarsow describes the subjective sense of space as the essence of architecture, which is furthermore founded on sensory-corporeal experience that establishes the spatial imagination:

> The intuited form of space, which surrounds us wherever we may be and which we then always erect around ourselves and consider more necessary than the form of our own body, consists of the residues of our sensatory experience to which the muscular sensations of our body, the sensitivity of our skin, and the structure of our body all contribute. As soon as we have learned to experience the ourselves and ourselves alone as the center of this space, whose coordinates intersect in us, we have found the precious kernel, the initial capital investment so to speak, on which architectural creation is based.[69]

Thus, Schmarsow concludes that the history of architecture is a history of *Raumgefühl* (sense/feeling of space) and therefore a foundational component in the history of philosophy and ideology. As Łukasz Stanek gathers, this became part of a spatial discussion with Schmarsow on the one side and an "understanding of space as enclosure," influenced by Gottfried Semper, rethought by Hendrik Petrus Berlage and Peter Behrens, and incorporated into Adolf Loos's "*Raumplan*" on the other, merging in the interwar years to a "consensus about space as the 'essence of architecture' [which] later became commonplace in architectural culture between the world wars in Germany and beyond."[70] All these factors contribute to a clear spatial turn to the spatial focus of the architectural avantgardes of the 1910s and 20s who conceptualize their ideas of architecture not merely as art but as a social technique, a medium of socialization and society-building.[71] Kühne in particular picks up on this discussion and combines it with Marxist theory and postwar planning. In a 1968 essay called 'Über das Verhältnis von Architektur und Kunst: Kritische Reflexionen' (On the Relationship Between Architecture and Art: Critical Reflections), Kühne writes,

> Architecture serves people directly in the spatial organisation of their lives. It is neither art nor industrial technology. It is not a synthesis of the two. Technology is a system of relationships in which something is produced: the life of people. Industrial technology is also a means of producing architecture. Architecture is used by socialist society as a means of human self-determination, as a social technology.[72]

As Simone Hain summarizes, on the one hand, this referred to the image-based architecture, which was essentially represented by Hermann Henselmann and Bruno Flierl through its purported artistic character, from which a depraved architecture emerged under the name of a "synthesis" through adaptation to art, having lost one of its specific characteristics.

The experiences of the first finished new towns stirred up an interest in the relationships between place and community, examining daily life especially in prefabricated developments, as a means of exploring how best to build a community and represent identity. Considering the day-to-day lives of residents was also seen as a way to confront the "problem of monotony" in these buildings and to derive methods of counteracting it. As Bruno Flierl wrote in his *Deutsche Architektur* essay on Hoyerswerda and the development of Socialist life, "It is important above all that we urban planners and architects develop close and active contact with the populations of just such growing cities" and "to learn about the real, day-to-day life in the city from the experiences of its residents. It is through such means," he concluded, "that we will be successful in constructively uniting architecture and life in the interest of the socialist

community."[73] The first theoretical conference of the DBA in 1960 paved the way for modernism in response to the new modernist ways in the Soviet Union, prepared for by the DBA and architect and critic Bruno Flierl's works. In the October edition of the GDR architectural journal *Deutsche Architektur,* the conference highlights the new industrialized aesthetics:

> Socialist architecture fully applies the beauty of socialist industry which is based on the functionality, lightness, precision and clarity of industrially fabricated products. Through the clear tectonic structuring of the buildings, through the harmonic proportions of architectural details and through a tasteful treatment of new materials as well as the optimistic use of colour, it brings to bear the beauty of industry.[74]

Kühne adds to these remarks a strongly theorized perception theory in his writings about "resonance." In the 1981 *Gegenstand und Raum* [Object and Space], he articulates the dialectical relationship between built object and observer as a reception-centered dialogue that is being co-created:

> Individuals tend not to accept, reject or avoid objects that do not appeal to them aesthetically. This relationship of resonance is perceived within the subjective and not within the objective level of measurement. Thus, although the work of art is created by the artist, its concrete character is not determined by him alone, but by the totality of its recipients. This means that the effect of the works of art is at the same time objectified. The effect of aesthetic objects is also modified by the sensory-physical characteristics of individuals and by other individual peculiarities. However, it depends essentially on the type and level of aesthetic receptivity. The ability to understand is determined by the readiness to understand, which is conditioned by one's world view, and by the ability to perceive the specific "language" at all.[75]

Kühne's and Flierl's spatial aesthetics thus chime with more pivotal theories of spatial reception and add to the aesthetics brought about by most films and texts discussed in this study.

Operations of Synthesis: Gender, Class, and Age

The simultaneous *Alltag* periods of the 1970s and 80s are particularly important for the academic and cultural interest around perceiving and experiencing the modernist Socialist city and will hence receive a prominent focus in this study. As established earlier, in Löw's concept, perception of the urban built environment (spacing) is formed by operations of synthesis by which she understands "processes of perceiving, imagining and remembering that built environment depending on specific context and defined by class, gender

and milieu-specific schemes."[76] Loosely, this notion of operations of synthesis will form the structuring principle of this study, as class, gender—and age as a third category—very much form the sociological basis for urban planning as well as for the sociological epistemology of GDR cultural production.

Gender, class, and age, especially children's and youth perception will form the structuring principles of this study. In the GDR, gender and class were two crucial social factors that influenced the experience of social space, while fictionalized children's and teenage perspectives would become an important critical tool within cultural production. All three of them are tied to the Marxist promise that the Socialist/Communist revolution would abolish all socioeconomical classes and deliver equality for all gender and racial differences, leading toward human self-fulfillment and emancipation ["*Zu-sich-selber-Kommen des Menschen*"]. Both heavily impacted the Socialist imaginary in the GDR and manifested themselves materially in the housing and planning policies, and in the discourse of cultural production.

Löw refers to gender and class as *structural principles*. Perception, she argues, is not immediate but "pre-structured by education and socialization. Thus, perception is not only directed at material artifacts, but also at smells, sounds, and haptic impressions. It presupposes the activity of the perceiving person and the external effectuality of what is perceived. Perception is an aspect of action that permeates both the operation of synthesis and spacing."[77] She further distinguishes three forms of synthesis: "synthesizing in perception, in memory, and in abstract imagination."[78] Gender and class, in her argument, have to be treated differently in synthesizing the aforementioned social structures (the routine paths of action, the structural dimension of the spatial, the deployment of the body, habitus, the potentials for change, the significance of symbolism and matter, and finally the constitution of places, and the emergence of atmospheres) "inasmuch as class and gender structures are not simply one structural variation among many others, but rather pervade all social structures."[79] For that reason, she proposes to understand class as well as gender as *structural principles*:[80]

> From this it follows that both social structure and all isolatable structures are suffused with a gender- and class-specific character. Consequently, I speak of gender and class as structural principles. In terms of the duality of action and structure, I hypothesize that gender and class are recursively reproduced in action.[81]

That means that the persistence of gender- and class-specific practices and the social inequality involved are based to a considerable extent on the embodiment of structural principles that permeate every field of life: "My conclusion is that they also penetrate the body and in the formation of a habitus,

permeate practical and discursive consciousness as well as every form of action."[82] The body thus gains an essential significance in several respects:

> In the first place, people are physically in the world. They move and take place with the body. In the second place, the physical expression guides both the placements and the syntheses of other people. This bodily expression and its perception are permeated by the structural principles class and gender. The body is thus at the center of many constitutions of space.[83]

For the logic of this study, I will add age and the perspective of children and teenagers as a third structural principle. Especially after the 1963 *Jugendkommuniqué* (Youth Communiqué), a SED attempt to regain the initiative and convince young people that the party was on their side, presenting them as the "masters of tomorrow" who held the future of East German socialism in their hands,[84] the experience of children and teenagers of the built environment, while often not planned into the masterplan, increasingly would become a litmus test of the futureproofing of modernist architecture. As the narrated generations usually present perspectives of GDR citizens who have been fully socialized in the Socialist system, these perspectives are further used as a critical lens for the status quo of GDR social policy.

Focusing on gender, class, and age, thus allows for a study of deviation and change that will unearth different aspects of experiencing the built environment that permeate the boundaries of normativity and critique them—all aspects that feature heavily in GDR literature and film. Conditions of alienation, alterity, and otherness might mean, for example, that people or social goods are encountered that are not easily rendered coherent with accustomed routines, or that symbolism attached to social goods seems unintelligible or contradictory.[85] This can both allude to empirical everyday life problems impacted by moving into modernist housing, for instance, as much as it can provoke cultural and narrative tropes that *remediate* the cultural practitioner's discomfort with modernist housing in principle. Accordingly, in the analysis of space, the possibility of action that does not repeat everyday habits based on practical consciousness has to be entertained: "In this context, a distinction must be made between *changes* to habits and *deviations* or *creative*, *formative action*. Whereas deviations or reformations vary the spectrum of action, changes involve the abandonment of old habits in favor of new routines."[86] Deviations from routines and creative–formative actions can be triggered by bodily desire, but it is different in the case of habitus. As Löw states, "[h]abitus is characterized precisely by the fact that it channels bodily desire in keeping with the social situation."[87] Accordingly, gender, class, and age will be treated as structural principles in this study and analyzed in the way they, as social factors, impacted both the architecture and planning as well as the cultural responses to them.

Structure

In order to explore the diversity of intersectional gendered, class- and age-based experiences of modernist architecture and planning in the GDR, the structure of the study will follow Löw's logic of putting the *spacing* of a specific city or neighborhood into dialogue with the culturally remediated operations of synthesis. Each case study has an individual introduction into the respective architectural and planning context to which the texts and films respond. As these experiences are mediated, in Löw's terms, depending on specific context and defined by class, gender, age, and milieu-specific schemes, the chapters are organized around class, gender, and age as structuring principles, by user group rather than by location, acknowledging the clear intersections between these categories as most works address all of them.

The selection of case studies is motivated by different considerations. As established above, various studies have already established the immediate interwar period with a focus on fictional architects, construction sites, and workers. Particularly canonical works such as Peter Kahane's *Die Architekten* (The Architects, 1990), Stefan Heym's *Die Architekten* (The Architects, 1960s/2000), Brigitte Reimann's *Franziska Linkerhand* (1974), or Heiner Carow's *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* (The Legend of Paul and Paula, 1973) have justifiably received a wealth of scholarly attention already and will be referenced throughout. However, given the large extent of *Neubau*-related literature and films the GDR has produced, and the lack of an experience- and perception-focused study, I will privilege less established works for most of my case studies in order to extrapolate them for new audiences and to showcase how they add and extend this discourse. This particularly applies to children's and youth literature and film, which is too often still ignored within academia as allegedly trivial and lacking in complexity. However, for the experience of urban environments, they prove an indispensable and productive source. The revived interest in the GDR's built heritage in recent years has further led to various predominantly German-language architectural and planning historiographical studies, which inform each case study. As a cultural studies scholar, taking an intermedial approach intersecting the built environment, literature, and film is often a self-evident affair. However, for the remediation of subjective experiences of the built environment, combining the first-hand accounts of literary texts with films shot in authentic locations reveals much broader and in-depth insights into architectural perception in the GDR and its complex cultural semantics. Several of the works discussed in this study consist of a literary source and a filmic adaptation, many showcasing the constant dynamic of shifting architectural discourse, urban gazes, and Marxist aesthetics in the course of just a few years. All these works contribute to a complex understanding of the ideological and dialectical aesthetics and

semantics of the GDR's *Neubau* "Socialist imaginary." Both the Sabrow commission[88] and scholars such as Thomas Lindenberger have recommended the focus on *Alltagsgeschichte* (everyday history) as the most appropriate approach for writing histories of East Germany: "[East German] lives, their behavior, their commitments and passivity, are important factors of the historical entity 'GDR' … both structures of power and domination *and* social practice and experience have to be studied and debated."[89] Rarely, however, does this feature the GDR's substitute public realm of cultural production that, with its Marxist obsession toward dialectics, can both complicate and diversify any binary notion of the East German everyday, and that is why these works are fascinating objects to study, as well as entertain oneself with.

Notes

1. Steets, *Der sinnhafte Aufbau*, 69.
2. Rossi, *Architecture of the City*, 116.
3. Urban, *Tower and Slab*, 68.
4. Apart from a few *grands ensembles* with the Märkisches Viertel in Berlin, Köln-Chorweiler, München-Neuperlach or Neue Vahr Bremen as the most prominent examples. Mau, *Lütten Klein,* 28.
5. Karrasch, *Die "nationale Bautradition" denken*, 13.
6. Zervosen, *Architekten in der DDR*, 41.
7. Seefried, Hoffmann (eds), *Plan und Planung*, 10–11.
8. Hnilica, *Großstrukturen der 1960er und 1970er Jahre*, 5–49.
9. Wakeman, "Was There an Ideal Socialist City?" 105–6.
10. Ibid.
11. Kossel, *Hermann Henselmann*, 181.
12. Urban, *Tower and Slab*, 2–3.
13. Zarecor, "What Was So Socialist About the Socialist City?," 6.
14. Zervosen, *Architekten in der DDR*, 399.
15. "The socialist scaffold was an integrated system of parts and the logic of how they fit together. These included: public transportation networks; road and rail systems that served major sites of production and distribution; centralized public utilities that extended into new districts as they were built; dispersed green spaces and recreational areas; state-sponsored cultural institutions like museums, theaters, ballet and opera companies; and a series of housing developments, each with their own set of services and schools. The power of the scaffold was its capacity to anticipate and accommodate new nodes as they were needed in the network—a proactive, rather than a reactive approach that tried to think beyond the present. It also operated outside of the realm of real estate development and its profit-making motives, which had profoundly affected urban development in all capitalist contexts." Zarecor, 'What Was So Socialist About the Socialist City?' 7–8.
16. Delitz, *Gebaute Gesellschaft*, 283–90.
17. Pasternak, *Der Ideenhaushalt Halle-Neustadts*, 52–54.
18. Brosig, "Das 'Haus des Sozialismus'," 75.
19. Steets, *Der sinnhafte Aufbau*, 113.

20. Cosgrove, *Landscape and Landschaft*, 61; Yi Fu Tuan, *Space and Place*.
21. Lynch, *The Image of the City*.
22. Böhme, *The Aesthetics of Atmospheres*; Schmitz, *Atmosphären.*
23. Bourdieu, *On Symbolic Power*; De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*; Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*; Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*.
24. Lynch, *The Image of the City*.
25. *Dérive*, coined by Guy Debord, decribes an unplanned journey through a landscape, usually urban, in which participants drop their everyday relations and "let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there." Debord, *Theory of the Dérive***.**
26. De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 97–98.
27. Ibid., 96.
28. Löw, *The Sociology of Space*, 134–36.
29. Löw, *Vom Raum aus die Stadt denken,* 17.
30. Löw, *The Sociology of Space*, 150–1.
31. Ibid., 135.
32. For my use of the term "Socialist imaginary," I draw on the work of Charles Taylor and Seán Allan's recent expansion thereof. As Allan has noted in his use of the socialist imaginary for DEFA, the concept lends itself to a wider exploration of East German political and aesthetic discourse that goes beyond closed academic and political circles. Accordingly, Allan uses the term "Socialist imaginary" to focus on the way in which ordinary people "imagine" Socialist society and seek to articulate this not in theoretical documents, but rather in terms of a set of images, stories, legends, and other cultural products, including literature and film. Allan, *Screening Art*, 4.
33. Dietrich, *Kulturgeschichte der DDR*, Vol. 1, 432.
34. See Spies, "Georg Lukács und der sozialistische Realismus der DDR," 42.
35. Ehrig, *Der dialektische Kleist*, 14–31.
36. Feinstein, *The Triumph of the Ordinary*, 113; Felsmann, *Inszenierte Realität*.
37. Dietrich, *Kulturgeschichte der DDR*, Vol. 2, 858; Kaminsky, *Frauen in der DDR.*
38. Bolter, Grusin, *Remediation*.
39. Ibid., 45.
40. Herminghouse, "Literature As 'Ersatzöffentlichkeit?"' 85–99.
41. Pugh, *Divided Berlin*, 15. Noteworthy studies, albeit on different eras, are: Ladd, *Ghosts of Berlin*; Ward, *Post-Wall Berlin*.
42. Pugh, *Divided Berlin*, 141.
43. Swope, *Building Socialism*, 5–6.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid., 12–13.
46. Stangl, *Risen from Ruins*.
47. Swope, *Building Socialism*, 235.
48. Bivens, *Laboring Affects*.
49. Pogoda, *Architektenfiguren in der Literatur nach 1945*.
50. Betts, *Within Walls*; Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front*.
51. Grisko, Helmes (eds), *Planen, Bauen und Wohnen in Spiel- und Dokumentarfilmen der DDR.*
52. Swope, *Building Socialism*, 132.
53. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 6–7.
54. Löw, *The Sociology of Space*, 135.
55. Durth, Düwel, Gutschow, *Architektur und Städtebau in der DDR. Vol. 2*, 65.

56. Bloch, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, 871.
57. Jäger, "Den neuen Menschen in lichterfüllte Räume führen," 5–6.
58. Richter, *Das neue Hoyerswerda*, 19–20.
59. Kuhl, "Zwischen Planungseuphorie und Zukunftsverlust," 98–99; Hübner in Jarausch, *Ende der Zuversicht*, 261–78 & 263–65.
60. Assmann, *Aufstieg und Fall des Zeitregimes der Moderne*, 18; Fuchs, *Precarious Times*, 9; Kosselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History*, 120.
61. Angermann, *Die ernste Postmoderne*; Urban, *Berlin/DDR Neo-historisch*.
62. Ward, *Urban Memory and Visual Culture in Berlin*, 19.
63. Ibid., 20.
64. Huyssen, *Twilight Memories*, 31.
65. Henselmann, "Der Einfluß der sozialistischen Lebensweise auf den Städtebau und die Architektur in der DDR," 264.
66. Pasternack, *Der Ideenhaushalt Halle-Neustadts*, 53.
67. Ibid., 51.
68. "Psychologically, the intuited form of three-dimensional space arises through the experience of our sense of sight, whether or not assisted by other physiological factors. All of our visual perceptions and ideas are arranged, are ordered, and unfold in accordance with this intuited form; and this fact is the mother lode of the art whose origin and essence we week. … Our sense of space [*Raumgefühl*] and spatial imagination [*Raumphantasie*] press toward spatial creation [*Raumgestaltung*]; they seek their satisfaction in art. We call this art architecture; in plain words, it is the creatress of space [*Raumgestalterin*]." Schmarsow, "The Essence of Architectural Creation," 286–87.
69. Ibid., 286.
70. Stanek, *Lefebvre on Space*, 146.
71. James-Chakraborty, *German Architecture for a Mass Audience*, 11.
72. Kühne, "Über das Verhältnis von Architektur und Kunst," 113.
73. Flierl, "Hoyerswerda und die Entwicklung des sozialistischen Lebens," 219.
74. Quoted from: Zervosen, *Architekten in der DDR*, 150.
75. Kühne, *Gegenstand und Raum*, 103.
76. Löw, *The Sociology of Space*, 134–36.
77. Ibid., 166.
78. Ibid., 167.
79. Ibid., 146.
80. Ibid., 147.
81. Ibid., 147.
82. Ibid., 150.
83. Ibid.
84. McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism*, 25.
85. Löw, *The Sociology of Space*, 156.
86. Ibid.
87. Ibid., 157.
88. Sabrow et al., *Wohin Treibt Die DDR-Erinnerung?*
89. Pugh, *Divided Berlin*, 45.