

CIRCULAR UTOPIA(S): ALFRED WELLM'S *MORISCO* AND THE SOCIALIST CITY

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ABSTRACT

In the context of the German Democratic Republic's longstanding aesthetic and political discourse on social utopianism, this article will discuss Alfred Wellm's novel *Morisco* (1987) and Halle-Neustadt as a key to understanding the relationship between the socialist new town and the East German cultural imaginary. Through Wellm's novel, the article will argue that the construction of modernist new towns provoked a cultural response engaging with the rift between built reality and the utopian imagination/ambition of the classless, socialist city in different literary and visual media. Evoking Tommaso Campanella's utopian *City of the Sun* (1602), the novel critically positions Neustadt within a cyclical Marxist eschatology, simultaneously expressing frustration with and hope for the progress of the socialist project. It therefore also represents the post-Stalin aesthetic shift from grand socialist realist narratives to subjective everyday perspectives, and the revived interest of authors in utopian themes in the 1980s against the backdrop of the Socialist Unity Party's (SED) claim that socialism had already been achieved.

Keywords: GDR; modernist architecture; socialism; East Germany; architecture and fiction; housing; ideal cities; new towns

AUFBAU [CONSTRUCTION/ERECTION], one of the key terms of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), particularly in the country's first two decades, signified both the rebuilding of the war-damaged cities and towns as well as the creation of a socialist society, 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 up, build, [...] for a better future], Kurt Liebknecht, the president of the GDR's newly inaugurated *Deutsche Bauakademie* (DBA) [German Building Academy], in 1951 explained:

Die Frage der deutschen Architektur spielt bei der Bewusstseinsbildung unseres Volkes eine große Rolle, denn die Architektur ist die Kunst mit dem größten gesellschaftlichen Aufwand, ist die Kunst unsere Städte und Dörfer so zu gestalten, dass deren [...] Architekturensemble und deren Gebäude den Optimismus unserer Gesellschaftsordnung widerspiegeln.¹

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[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.]

Thus, architecture and planning were conceived as primary ingredients of the GDR's political self-conception.

From the late 1950s onwards, a special focus was given to the development of socialist new towns. The concept of building the socialist city was a highly symbolic feature of GDR nation-building that combined two aspects: on the one hand, the cultural trope of utopian and ideal cities and states that merged Marxist teleology with modernist planning principles, fuelling ideas that political utopias could literally be built as symbolic space.² On the other, urban social development projects such as Ebenezer Howard's garden city, the regional planning and social housing experiments of the 1910s and inter-war years and Clarence Perry's early twentieth-century model of the neighbourhood unit all led to the idea that one can impact societal functions and social relations through the design of the built environment – an idea that was embraced by liberal, communist and fascist societies alike.³ The New Town movement of the 1960s, which had reach across the globe, can be seen as the peak of this concept, and modernist mass housing would thence start its global triumph and become the most widespread architectural scheme of the twentieth century.⁴ These new towns and large estates were conceived in the context of correlating ideological and economic rivalry on both sides of the Iron Curtain, inspired by a euphoric inter-connection of vision and ability to plan, the active role of the state and the trend of expansive urban planning and building.⁵ 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.⁶

Planning was one of the ideological foundations of the East German imaginary, perceived as a rational, egalitarian, teleological and total vision of a new spatial arrangement. In this teleological logic, state-socialist planning sought to transform society in its totality, in an attempt 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 was the overall aim and the propagandistic plan, but was in most cases only partially realized.⁷ As Peter Caldwell notes, in state socialism the idea of the plan primarily operates on a mythical as well as a technical level. While the pretence of total control over the entire societal system never actually existed at any point in time, the myth of a planned technological transformation of the world in the name of a qualitatively better future and a qualitatively new human formed the central claim to legitimacy for the socialist state.⁸

In line with the logic of teleological planning, the post-war internationalist imagination conceived these new cities as all-encompassing megastructures and machines that quintessentially merged technological futurism, grandeur and power, an

egalitarian mass society and total rationalism.⁹ The idealized socialist cities 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 and its public realm and they would represent the spatial site for a new socialist generation that would grow up in peace and happiness.¹⁰

Within this architectural symbolism, a specific focus lay on the (both self-perceived and officially stylized) agents of building and planning: construction workers and architects. While the workers were easily incorporated into the ideology of the workers and peasants' state, a new narrative had to be found for the formerly bourgeois profession of the architect as a full agent of the *Aufbau*, a narrative which many of them took seriously and passionately.

The GDR's political ideology was embedded in the Hegelian-Marxist teleological model of the cyclical recurrence of history that is disrupted and elevated to a higher phase of societal development (step by step from class-based feudal or bourgeois to classless communist society) through crises and revolutions. Within this logic, the GDR perceived itself as a revolutionary moment about to break one of these cycles. The professions of architects and planners, as Sarah Pogoda has shown, were deeply embedded in this quasi-mythological eschatology as the iconographical harbingers of a socialist promise of salvation, as artists who fight for the development of humanity into a higher form of being and as makers of 'built kerygma'.¹¹

Halle-Neustadt: The socialist city

Four socialist new towns were built in the GDR. They represented different urbanist approaches and eras, and each attempted to improve on the mistakes of the earlier ones: Stalinstadt/Eisenhüttenstadt (from 1950), Hoyerswerda (from 1957), Halle-Neustadt (from 1964) and Marzahn-Hellersdorf as a new district of Berlin (from 1977). Halle-Neustadt (literally 'new town') was constructed to serve as the *Sozialistische Stadt der Chemiarbeiter* [socialist city of chemistry workers] for the Leuna and Buna chemistry plants, and was built for 100,000 inhabitants on a site west of the district capital Halle. Designed to be a new ideal city type that could easily be copied, it was a clear symbol of Walter Ulbricht's post-1961 ambitions to modernize the GDR on a grand scale and to showcase the state's social and technological progress. Within the futurist mindset of the state's so-called scientific-technological progress, the task of former Bauhaus student and Neustadt's chief planner Richard Paulick was to 'combine economic efficiency, practicability and beauty in harmony', which meant nothing less than cheaper construction costs while also improving urban quality. These outcomes were supposed to be achieved by concentrating the social infrastructure, high-density building and the application of scientific-technical innovations in a designated city centre.¹² Construction started in 1964. At the ceremony for laying the cornerstone, the first Socialist Unity Party (SED) party secretary for the district of Halle, Horst Sindermann, elaborated the new city's socio-political and urbanist aims:

Uns geht es dabei nicht nur um schönere und hellere Wohnungen, in denen sich die Menschen wohlfühlen sollen. In der Chemiearbeiterstadt wollen wir überhaupt solche Bedingungen schaffen, die ihren Bewohnern Zeit und Muße für ihre geistig-kulturelle Bildung, für eine sinnvoll genutzte Freizeit bieten, eine Stadt, in der zu leben für jeden Glücklichein heißt. So bemühen wir uns, dass die Vergangenheit verschwindet.¹³

[For us, what matters is not only beautiful and brighter flats where people feel at home. In the City of Chemistry Workers, we want to create the very living conditions that provide inhabitants with the time and leisure for their intellectual and cultural development, with meaningful free time, a city in which living means happiness for all. In this way, we endeavour to make the past disappear.]

Neustadt was thus promoted as the quintessential socialist new town championing the ahistoricity of modernist architecture, which was appropriated as a revolutionary, anti-fascist tradition in favour of a classless mass society. While the city's primary aim was to improve the housing conditions of the working class, it also served as a solution to the social question and as an arena of German-German ideological competition.¹⁴

In Neustadt prominence was given to public art as a colourful and individual stimulus for social engagement, both as a marker of identity for a socialist city, and as a counter to criticisms of monotony. Compared to the heroic portraits of workers, peasants and communist thinkers of the 1950s, these works mark a shift towards the conquest of space (an effect of the successful launch of the Sputnik satellite), and also to the depiction of scenes from everyday life. In total, Halle-Neustadt includes 184 works of art of all kinds (murals, sculptures, fountains), of which only twenty-three percent have political content.¹⁵ Most noteworthy are the giant mosaic murals by the Spanish artist Josep Renau.¹⁶

However, most of the planned landmark buildings, such as the chemistry tower and the concert hall, were scrapped after Paulick retired in 1968, and, as Michael Ostheimer explains, most of the anthropological and cultural underpinnings of the planning process were drastically changed in the early years to make way for more affordable construction. This decision subverted the central demands of communist anthropology and instead reduced the individual to an object within the master plan.¹⁷ Like many of the GDR's political and social ambitions, instead of implementing them, the party – in the present – simply declared the socialist new towns as the socio-political successes they were originally intended to become in the future.

Cultural responses

The discrepancy between utopian ambition and a somewhat disappointing reality prominently features in the ubiquitous cultural responses that reflect upon the process of *Aufbau*, most notably represented by literary works such as Brigitte Reimann's *Franziska Linkerhand* (1974), Erik Neutsch's *Spur der Steine* [*Traces of Stones*] (1964) or Stefan Heym's *Die Architekten* [*The Architects*] (mid-1960s, only published in 2000). Maria Brosig has described the cultural semantics of *Aufbau* as contributing to

building the *Haus des Sozialismus* [house of socialism]. For Brosig, the house of socialism serves as an architectural 'model metaphor' within the GDR cultural and ideological imaginary and a means for artistically negotiating an aesthetic and engaged vision of socialism.¹⁸ The 'house of socialism' is a part of a larger cultural phenomenon that synchronizes the architectural and ideological *Aufbau* of the socialist state with the aesthetics and semantics of *Alltag* [everyday life]. In this regard, the socialist new towns in the GDR represent what Louis Marin has called *urban utopics*. The structured plan, the map, in Marin's words, 'represents the production of discourse about the city while the deconstruction of this representation uncovers the ideology controlling it. [...] The city map is a "utopic" insofar as it reveals a plurality of places whose incongruity lets us examine the critical space of ideology'.¹⁹

Contrary to their own expectations, the 'deconstruction' of the arrival of the new age was mediated by a group of writers as well as filmmakers commissioned to document the construction. In the case of Neustadt, the montage/reportage-style pamphlet *Städte machen Leute. Streifzüge durch eine neue Stadt* [*Cities Make People: Expeditions Through a New Town*] (1969) by the collective around Werner Bräunig, Peter Gosse, Jan Koplowitz and Hans-Jürgen Steinmann, employed a conceptual correlation between the urbanist imprint on social policy and the social imprint of urban planning.²⁰ Ostheimer attests that the collective's writings, in line with the city's original anthropological ambitions, foreground a genuine desire for individual fulfilment within the futurist temporality of the utopian 'chronotopos' that is Halle-Neustadt, which at the time was already in stark contrast to the collective mentality of the state's planning.²¹ It is this very contrast between, on the one hand, the state's spatial and social planning euphoria so typical of the 1960s, and, on the other, the cultural concern and interest about creating a liveable environment for a diversity of people that provides the recurring theme, the utopic, in all of these works. Curtis Swope points out that GDR writers in the 1960s saw both their own subjectivity and the architecture around them not just as symptoms of modernity, but as instances of reality both complicit with and potentially resistive to power structures.²² Moreover, culture effectively functioned as the legitimizing synchronization between technological-economic and social development, mediating narratively between these two spheres through a symbolism that connoted political agency.²³ In practice, it often also meant pointing out the shallowness of political rhetoric. In their introduction to *Städte machen Leute*, the authors declare that they will look beyond the political declarations of intent:

Halle-Neustadt, jüngste Stadt in unserer Republik, soll eine sozialistische Stadt sein, aber was macht den Sozialismus aus in einer Stadt? [...] Ein Städtebauprojekt wie dieses, so zielbewusst den Bedürfnissen des arbeitenden Menschen gewidmet, ist unter anderen gesellschaftlichen Verhältnissen nicht vorstellbar. Aber – kann das schon alles sein? Was macht eine Stadt zur *sozialistischen* Stadt? [...] das Zusammenleben der Menschen, die Menschen selbst, die in dieser Stadt wohnen, leben, das Heute und das Morgen dieser Stadt selbst formen. Ist aber Halle-Neustadt nun schon das, was man eine sozialistische Stadt nennen darf? [...] Vielleicht kann die Stadt selbst, ihr Sein und ihr Werden, uns eine Antwort geben.²⁴

[Halle-Neustadt, the youngest city in our republic, is supposed to be a socialist city, but what actually defines the socialism of a city? [...] An urban construction project like this, so purposefully dedicated to the needs of the working people, is not imaginable under different societal conditions. But – is that everything? What makes a city a *socialist* city? [...] the coexistence of people, those (very) people who inhabit this city, who form the today and tomorrow of this city. Is Halle-Neustadt then already what one would call a socialist city? [...] Perhaps the city itself, its being and becoming, can give us the answer.]

Although the official state media – such as Wolfgang Bartsch's 1968 documentary *Gestern und die neue Stadt* [*Yesterday and the New Town*] and the television documentaries *Der Mensch muss auch wohnen* [*People Must Have Homes, Too*] (1974) and *Halle-Neustadt – die Stadt der Chemiearbeiter* [*Halle-Neustadt – City of Chemistry Workers*] (1975) – propagated a clear vision of an imagined socialist state employing International Style modernist architecture and consumer goods to showcase its social and economic progressiveness internally and externally, various cultural voices contested this socialist imaginary as merely a construction site in itself still requiring ongoing and complex discussion. Works such as Rainer Kirsch's *Heinrich Schlaghands Höllenfahrt* [*Heinrich Schlaghand's Descent into Hell*] (1973), Jan Koplowitz's *Die Sumpfhühner* [*The Swamp Hens*] (1979), Hans-Jürgen Steinmann's *Zwei Schritte vor dem Glück* [*Two Steps Short of Luck*] (1987) and Edith Bergner's children's book *Das Mädchen im roten Pullover* [*The Girl in the Red Jumper*] (1974) share a focus on the difficulties of appropriating the space as laid out through its master plan, and on individual spatial practices that neglect, subvert, and improve the urban built environment. Similar to the architectural change, they therefore also represent the post-Stalin aesthetic shift from grand socialist realist narratives to subjective everyday perspectives, mirroring social life, class structures, gender relations and individual political utopias that critically reflect their surroundings against the backdrop of the utopian socialism that had been promised by the SED.

'Morisco', or: The taming of the Demiurge

Alfred Wellm's multilayered novel *Morisco*, published in 1987, is of particular interest here as it offers a retrospective coming to terms with the modernist new towns from the position of the post-modern discourse of the late 1980s that privileged the restoration of the historical city cores.²⁵ Wellm approaches the problems of Neustadt's construction through the eyes of an increasingly disillusioned architect named Andreas Lenk, who is revisiting his involvement with the building of an unnamed new town (which has striking similarities to Neustadt). After a clash with his superiors over several planning decisions, he quits, obtains a divorce and joins a team refurbishing a Renaissance palace in the north of East Germany, ultimately withdrawing to a socialist meta-fantasy of Renaissance and Enlightenment utopianism. Wellm, born in 1927 and mostly known for his children's books, continuously challenged the GDR's claim that socialist society provided an environment of safety and comfort for children and young adults by depicting it as a place where communication was impossible and where it was easier for children to escape into fantasy worlds than

engage with the empirical reality around them.²⁶ Wellm took a similar approach to that of Lenk, the protagonist of this novel of some 550 pages, whose inner monologue contemplates his life choices as an architect retrospectively, until the narrative chronology meets the narrator's present in the final forty pages of the novel, moving the plot forward. Ultimately this dissolves any sense of linear time and replaces it with a circular recurrence of political utopias and their subsequent deconstruction.

Wellm's novel reflects on the utopianism of socialist new towns within the East German cultural imaginary in several different ways. Above all, it contemplates the state's proclaimed political mythology and supports the idea of city building for the consolidation of a new socialist society that is to emerge out of the ruins of fascism – referred to above as 'built kerygma' – with every finished new building being a built symbol of the things to come. This is juxtaposed with a reflection upon marriage and social relations, including the nepotism of the political class, as a stand-in for the failures of the utopian social project of *der neue Mensch* [the 'new socialist personality'], who continues to alienate themselves and others while compromising their lives in party-political entanglements for the greater good of society. The novel furthermore references the modernist narrative of an artist in crisis (*Künstlernovelle*) that here symbolizes the taming of the artist/architect as the crushing of a symbolic agent of socialism. The frequent (albeit undifferentiated) references to Enlightenment and Renaissance utopian traditions made by Lenk, furthermore, mark a general trend of GDR cultural production of the late 1970s and 1980s that returned to the utopian promise that the post-war build-up of a socialist and ultimately communist society had promised, and that could no longer be found in the over-bureaucratic and static ideological and political climate of the late GDR.²⁷

Despite all later disappointment, the retrospective first-person narrative leaves no doubt that initially Neustadt exudes the potential to represent the utopian construction of the new socialist era. In a grand (and technically accurate) gesture, Lenk's narrator presents the construction site of a high-rise residential building as a spectacular act of creation in the tradition of the great cultural achievements in world history, and, moreover, as the first step in the actual realization of this utopia:

Es sah gewaltig aus, wie der Arm des Kranes die Platten gegen den Himmel hob, [...] '...Setzen wir voraus, der Mensch ist anspruchsvoll in seinem Wesen', sagte Marinello [...] 'er hat das Urstadium schon überschritten, hat Babylon errichtet, Memphis und Theben schon gebaut, er hat die Ilias und die Odyssee geschrieben, hat die Akropolis geschaffen, die Kathedrale von Reims erbaut. [...] Er hat die Buchdruckkunst erfunden, die Mona Lisa schon gemalt...'. Neinein, es macht mir wirklich Spaß, es ist ja doch das erste Haus in meinem Leben, Marinello, sagte ich.²⁸

[The way in which the arm of the crane lifted the slabs towards the sky looked tremendous, [...] 'Let's suppose, humans are ambitious by nature', Marinello said [...] 'they have already surpassed the primitive stages of evolution, have erected Babylon, built Memphis and Thebes, written the Iliad and the Odyssey, created the Acropolis, the cathedral in Reims. [...] They have invented printing, already painted the Mona Lisa...'. No no, it really is fun for me, it is after all the first house of my life, Marinello, I said.]

Building a city is presented as an act of original creation for humankind, even as the internal dialogue with a character called Marinello appears to place all these efforts in doubt. The figure of Marinello, as we only learn near the end of the novel, connects two significant time periods for Lenk by appearing, in two guises, in each of them: one Marinello is Lenk's late fellow student and roommate, the other is later introduced as an Italian Renaissance architect who redesigned the palace Lenk ends up restoring, and who similarly has had to compromise his artistic vision. As they both represent similar types of the creative genius Lenk is striving to become, they are often blurred and indistinguishable, giving insights into Lenk's mind and his perception of the utopian endeavour that he considers his work as an architect to be. In addition, the way in which Marinello's voice undermines Lenk's amazement at the utopian potential of the construction site chimes with the development of Lenk's private and professional life. His wife Anna immerses herself more and more into the ideological mindset of party politics while growing increasingly impatient with the idealism of her husband. Lenk, in turn, becomes disillusioned with the nepotism and double standards of many of his superiors, and the dull execution of the often-impractical urban master plan that leaves no room for spontaneity or input by the public who are supposed to move into Neustadt. In hindsight, the narrator combines his personal lack of fulfilment with the creeping frustration that the construction site's underlying utopian 'repertoire of ideas', as Peer Pasternak terms it, did not correspond with the actual construction. This repertoire of ideas was based on a belief in a 'cybernetic mode of utopia', a belief that egalitarian uniformity of the city's architectural design and living conditions would unambiguously translate the politico-social vision of the city into the thinking of the builders and eventually of its citizens. Thus, that utopia was imminently being realized through the very construction (built kerygma).²⁹ This political and planning belief was unanimously contested and contradicted by all sociological and cultural responses engaging with Neustadt that instead argued that the creation of the new urban society should be a reciprocal process between what the urban design afforded and how the residents, in return, were to appropriate the urban space.

The inner dialogue with the Marinellos also introduces Lenk's escapist work on another city, the ideal city of *Helianthea I*, the truly utopian substitute city he creates, counterbalancing his frustrations with Neustadt:

Damals, in vielen Stunden, zeichnete ich *Helianthea I*. Richtiger: ich setzte fort, was Marinello und ich einmal begonnen, womit wir nächtelang uns seinerzeit beschäftigt hatten. Wir hatten Thomas Morus gelesen, und Campanellas 'Sonnenstaat', hatten die Erfahrungen von vier Jahrhunderten bedacht, manches verworfen, manches bestritten, manches belassen (nicht modifiziert), manches hinzusetzen, und Marinello hatte in seinem Bett gesessen, die Knie angezogen, und *unsere* (doch vornehmlich seine) Utopien auf die Zettelchen gekritzelt. Regelungen im weiten Sinne. Es ging um die Stadt der Zukunft, der wir den Namen *Helianthea* gegeben hatten. Nun also setzte ich diese Arbeit fort. (*M*, 112)

[Back then, over many hours, I drew *Helianthea I*. More precisely, I continued what Marinello and I had once begun, what kept us occupied for nights on end at that time.

We had read Thomas More, and Campanella's *The City of the Sun*, considered the many experiences of four centuries, abandoned some elements, challenged some, kept some (unmodified), added some, and Marinello had sat in his bed, knees pulled towards him, and doodled *our* (but mainly his) utopias on little bits of paper. Regulations in a broad sense. It was a question of the city of the future that we had given the name *Helianthea*. Now, I continued this work.]

Lenk's city plan entitled *Helianthea* functions as one of the central symbols for Neustadt's utopian *repertoire of ideas*: it references Tommaso Campanella's *La città del Sole* [*The City of the Sun*] (1602), an ideal circular city in the shape of the sun with circular and radial streets emerging from its centre, and a proto-communist utopian spatial vision of a centrally organized, collectivist ideal state where private property and traditional family structures have been abandoned. Lenk's *Helianthea* incorporates the Greek word *helianthos* for sunflower. The sunflower, which pivots towards the light of the sun, in Lenk's logic represents the light of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment as precursors of the historical project that materialized in twentieth-century socialism. Not entirely coincidentally, it was also the chosen symbolic flower within Neustadt's ideological imaginary. In *Städte machen Leute*, the author collective – much to the planners' unease – tried to persuade Neustadt's population to actively take part in shaping their city with a public call to plant sunflowers all over:

*Eine Blume könnte das, was unser Halle-Neustadt für uns sein soll, besonders schön ausdrücken. Ist nicht die Sonne, Wahrzeichen des Lebens, ein sinnvolles Symbol für unsere junge aufblühende Stadt? Oder – die Sonnenblume? Sonnenblumen in unsere Stadt! [...] Wenn viele unserem Aufruf folgen, [...] wird Halle-Neustadt schon in diesem Sommer eine Stadt der Sonnenblumen sein.*³⁰

[There is perhaps *one* flower that could express what our Halle-Neustadt should be for us particularly well. Is not the sun, emblem of life, a suggestive symbol for our young blossoming city? Or indeed – the sunflower? Sunflowers for our city! [...] If many follow this call, [...] as early as this summer, Halle-Neustadt will be a city of sunflowers.]

Moreover, the very structure of Campanella's idea of a circular, sun-shaped city was woven into Neustadt's urban fabric in various ways. The first finished *Wohnkomplex* [housing complex] features a mosaic mural formerly attached to the complex's supermarket entitled *Gaben der Völker* [*Gifts of the People*] and *Die Erde hat genug Brot für alle* [*The Earth Has Enough Bread for Everyone*], designed by Martin Hadelich and finished in 1968.³¹ It features a girl holding up a large sunflower, whereas in another a farmer couple proudly present their produce next to their field, under a highly stylized sun whose rays form a perfect circle around the sun's central core, in a manner similar to most graphic seventeenth-century representations of Campanella's city. The idea is also manifest within the built structure of the complex. In the television documentary *Der Mensch muss auch wohnen* the camera's gaze lingers on the mural's imagery for a few moments only to capture the sun, to then zoom out, and cut to an aerial shot of a circular kindergarten building whose roof displays the exact same structure before zooming back into its centre (see figures 1 and 2 below).³² In the visual narrative of

the documentary, this display of innovative construction methods represents the rays of the sun shining on a brighter future for the children of the new socialist society. The centralized circular layout, similar to Campanella but largely drawing on a tradition of German urban planning and housing design from the 1910s and 1920s, was to represent a classless, democratic, non-hierarchical mass society, where all points in the city had the same distance to the centre, and no building was prioritized, as the basic requirement for such social transformation.³³ In Wellm's novel, the same double-coding of the sun/sunflower's simultaneous symbolic utopian aspirations and anti-individualist totality within the wider architectural, visual and literary *repertoire of ideas* of Halle-Neustadt, is the key metaphor both for Andreas Lenk's utopian aspirations and for his ultimate disillusionment.

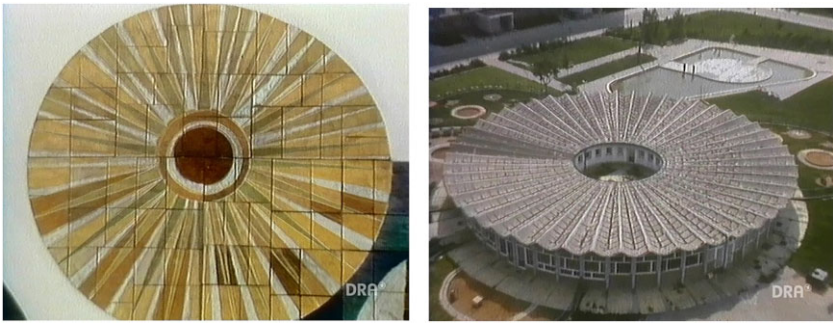


Figure 1 (left), a still from *Der Mensch muss auch wohnen* (DRA, 1974), featuring a close-up of a stylized sun in Martin Hadelich's mosaic mural *Gaben der Völker* (1968), Halle-Neustadt.

Figure 2 (right), a still from *Der Mensch muss auch wohnen* (DRA, 1974), featuring an aerial view of the Buratino kindergarten (1968), Halle-Neustadt, designed by Erich Hauschild and Herbert Müller.

Within the post-war literary trope of staging architects as demiurges and ideological saviours, Wellm's novel sees Lenk and the formerly utopian cityscape of Halle-Neustadt become a merely utilitarian housing machine in utopian disguise. Thus, Lenk instead represents a symbolic taming of the architect, and by extension of the artist, as an agent of socialism.

The novel explores this process on several levels. The first level is the storyline of Andreas Lenk himself. As mentioned above, Lenk is constantly positioning himself in the context of monumental architectures (ancient Greece, Babylon) and ultimately the Renaissance, 'das große Beben Europas' (*M*, 540) [the big shaking of Europe], and the Enlightenment, and he despairs that his enlightened ideas either do not live up to this expectation or never materialize. The creeping loss of utopian sentiment is also represented in a shift in how he perceives the construction site. Suddenly, the machine-like construction that he admired so much before, now becomes a threat to his idealism:

Wie allein die Kräne die Architektur bestimmten. [...] Wegen der Kräne die Planierung, die völlige Einebnung des Geländes. Wegen der Kräne [...] die schnurgerade Ausrichtung der Häuser, die Typenreinheit, der Zeilenbau – ich brauch darüber nicht zu sprechen. Wir waren bereit, auf das alles einzugehen, und dass dies ein Teufelspakt war, das sollten wir viel später erst erfahren, Jahre danach. (*M*, 164)

[How just the cranes themselves determined the architecture. [...] Because of the cranes, the levelling, the complete flattening of the site. Because of the cranes [...] the dead straight positioning of the apartment blocks, the purity of building types, the row construction style – I don't need to talk to you about this. We were prepared to agree to all this, and we were only to learn much later, years later, that it was a pact with the devil.]

Die gewaltigen Fabriken, die weit hinter dem Horizont entstanden, ein Erfordernis gewiss, hier forderten sie Unterordnung und Zugeständnisse: unsere Stadt ist ein Verlangen der Industrie, nicht umgekehrt. (*M*, 229)

[The enormous factories that grew up far behind the horizon, a requirement for sure. Here they demanded subordination and compromise: our city is a demand of industry, not the other way around.]

The process of prefabricated panel construction, initially hailed as a utopian cultural technique, is here perceived as dehumanizing machinery: machines and automated thinking dominate the construction, not humans, and the resulting rectangular monotony of the buildings lacks any, in Hermann Schmitz's phenomenological wording, 'suggestions of movement towards corporeal dynamic' with which the human body and mind cannot thus connect.³⁴ In similar fashion, Henri Lefebvre criticized the architectural repetitiveness of prefabricated construction in French estates of the 1960s, in which 'repetition has everywhere defeated uniqueness, [...] the artificial and contrived have driven all spontaneity and naturalness from the field' and where 'Repetitious spaces are the outcome of repetitive gestures (those of the workers) associated with instruments which are both duplicatable and designed to duplicate: machines, bulldozers, concrete-mixers, cranes, pneumatic drills, and so on.'³⁵ The aforementioned cybernetic effect of large-block and panel building methods that were understood by enthusiastic technocrats as expressions of socialism in built form, as Greg Castillo has shown, was increasingly subject to criticism by writers like Wellm.³⁶ Disenchanted by the economic reductivism of these structures, they were increasingly concerned about a lack of spontaneity and artistic experimentation for their own aesthetic expression. Like in many new towns across Europe, Lenk's perspective as architect and artist shifts from his initial enthusiasm to a detached resignation over the realization that building the city was only really ever about the affordance of industry, while the utopian semantics became lost in the industrial and political process.

Utopian shift and Romanticist turn

In addition to personal disappointment, the novel makes several points about artists and architects being forced to compromise on their artistic visions. Lenk commissions

a talented, unknown sculptor who, like Marinello, lives exclusively for his art, to create a monument for the city. The sculpture is, however, rejected by the workers' representatives committee because of the supposedly 'obzönen Nacktheit' [obscene nudity of the figures] and 'nihilistischem Konzept' [the nihilistic concept] (*M*, 291–92). The public debate over commissioned art in Neustadt becomes a discussion about what art qualifies as appropriate for the workers and peasants' state, as well as being an instance of total artistic vision triumphing over planning practice.

The point of Lenk's full capitulation as an architect/artist and as a full member of the socialist society marks his escape further into Renaissance symbolism as a substitute utopian discourse at the end of the novel. He leaves Neustadt behind and accepts a position renovating a Renaissance palace, likened to Güstrow Palace in Wellm's hometown, that indeed was restored and renovated between 1963 and 1978. The palace was given its Renaissance form by Italian-born architect Franz Parr (who died in 1580, and offers a model for Marinello in the book) after the southern wing had burnt down. Here, Lenk begins a love affair with a fellow restorer, and his blossoming new love and the atmospheric historical built environment shift his perception of temporality:

Die Dinge, so kommt es uns auf einmal vor, haben sich verkehrt: das alte baufällige Haus ist unsere Gegenwart, und mit allem, was wir tagtäglich schaffen, nähern wir uns einem Zustand, der einmal war. Ja, so unnatürlich das erscheinen mag, unser Denken und unsere Neugier sind zurückgerichtet. (*M*, 422–23)

[Things, it seems to us all of a sudden, have been inverted: the old, dilapidated house is our present, and with everything we create each day, we get closer to a state that once was. Yes, as much as this appears unnatural, our thinking and our curiosity are pointing backwards.]

Ultimately, Lenk's fantasies about courtly life at the palace function as a second correlative. In his exploration of the Renaissance as the birthplace of humanism, hailed by the GDR as one of the 'revolutionary traditions' of European history that the state adopted as a precursor to the socialist imaginary of its present, the presentist temporality of Lenk's Renaissance fantasy becomes inherently political as it marks a *mise en abyme* debating the GDR's current state of affairs. Similar to the cultural critiques prominently explored by authors such as Christa Wolf or Heiner Müller, who analysed German Romanticism or Prussian (intellectual) history as historical forerunners to the increasing anti-intellectual paranoia of the GDR's political circles in the late 1970s and 1980s, Wellm's detour questions the role of the artist under the idealized Humanist period as a pillar of socialist ideology.

Within Güstrow Palace, two figures feature as stand-ins for this discourse: one is the Renaissance architect Marinello, the second is the eponymous Morisco, an Arabian horse that is being tamed in the courtyard of the palace. 'Morisco', the Spanish word for 'Moorish', refers to the Moorish population that was forced to convert to Christendom after the Reconquista in fifteenth-century Spain. Without any subtlety, Wellm suggests a parallel between the domestication of the horse and the

life of the protagonist, who is similarly 'tamed' to fit into a society that considers his ideals utopian, or too utopian:

Das junge Pferd, das sich relativ frei entwickeln konnte, soll sich an die Einengung gewöhnen. [...] Denn in der 'Urwelt des Pferdes', wie Mustafa es nennt, ist die Bewegung der Pferde nicht behindert und unterliegt allein dem Willen eines Pferdes. [...] Und es ist, dies kommt hinzu, der Schiefe des Pferdes entgegenzuwirken; denn von Natur aus ist ein Pferd stets schief, und wir müssen es während der Dressur geraderichten, müssen ihm helfen, ein anderes, ein seiner Natur nicht entsprechendes Gleichgewicht zu finden, im Takt zu traben und zu galoppieren. (*M*, 138–39)

[The young horse able to develop relatively freely needs to get used to confinement. [...] Because in the 'original horse realm', as Mustafa refers to it, the movement of the horses is never restrained and is only subject to a horse's will. [...] And, additionally, you have to counter the lop-sidedness of the horse; it is in its nature to be lopsided, and we need to correct this through dressage, need to help it find a different equilibrium, one not in its nature, to trot in strict time and to canter.]

Thus, the socialist society of the GDR is embedded within a realm of European cultural history that spans centuries and that, despite the positive demarcation of the socialist imaginary and SED ideology, signifies a rift between art and power, and between utopia and mundane political pragmatism. The enlightened, egalitarian utopia of the socialist city, likened to the taming of the horse, becomes a symbol for the way the socialist state betrays its own utopian and ideological foundations. At the same time, social utopia and political ideology are problematized as inherently destructive for humanity in their ambition to transform society in its totality, leaving no room for creative experimentation and spontaneity.

The novel presents us with the idea of the modernist architect as a failed product and victim of enlightened modernity and modernism, but, most of all, of the destructive dangers of declaring a teleological utopian aim a present reality, as Honecker did when he proclaimed that no more utopia was needed as the GDR already had 'real existing socialism', while being far from it.³⁷ Like many East German authors engaging with the original utopian project of socialism in the 1980s, Wellm's protagonist shifts the idea of utopia back into the futurist temporality and the utopian space of the continuous construction site. It becomes again a teleological ideal for the sake of ultimate human fulfilment, while being firmly critical of the present East German state that was still far from achieving that, having, instead, compromised this ideal for the sake of total power and control. In humanist disguise, Lenk's reserved outlook is not, however, without hope:

Ich grübele über die Renaissance, diesen Aufbruch, den ich einst beging. Erinnere mich meines Gefühls, als ich es unternahm, von meinen Göttern mich zu trennen. [...] Ich fühle mich so unversehens mündig, ja meine Volljährigkeit hat nun begonnen. Gewiss, man wird sie mir bald wieder nehmen, man nimmt sie mir bereits [...]. Und ich werde mich jetzt häufig daran erinnern [...] und eines Tages, eines Jahrhunderts werde ich die Mündigkeit mir nicht mehr nehmen lassen, vielleicht in diesem Jahrhundert, vielleicht im übernächsten, ich weiß, zu lange wird es nicht mehr dauern. (*M*, 540)

[I ponder over the Renaissance, this process of awakening I once underwent. I remember how I felt when I ventured to cut myself loose from my Gods. [...] I suddenly feel so mature, indeed, I have now come of age. Sure, they will take my legal age away from me soon enough, they are taking it already [...]. And I will remember it often now [...] and one day, one century, I will no longer let my maturity be taken from me, maybe in this century, maybe in the one after the next, I know it will not be too long now.]

On the long path of and to Enlightenment, Lenk's pondering of the past and future utopias abruptly takes a melodramatic turn and symbolically ends in despair: after he realizes that his co-restorer is also having an affair with another colleague, he suffers a mental breakdown, and when the palace suddenly catches fire, he takes the blame, although it turns out that a mentally unstable contractor on the site was responsible for this event. His Renaissance utopian fantasy cycle once again returns to its beginning, with only the hope remaining that it will be broken at another point in the future.

Circular Marxist utopics

Morisco is thus highly representative of a general trend in East German cultural production in the late 1970s and 1980s that simultaneously supported this new modernist 'socialist space' as an idealized space for utopian political and personal opportunities of human self-fulfilment, while criticizing the underwhelming architectural and societal status quo. It is also a fascinating historical document that nostalgically deconstructs the GDR's urban utopics. From the retrospective gaze of post-modern architectural and revived utopian aesthetic discourse of the 1980s, the novel critically relives the utopian and eschatological planning euphoria of modernist new towns in the 1960s. Wellm's novel dissects how the economic restrictions, master-plan obsessions and political power plays, as well as the lack of public participation, caused the abandonment of the city's utopian potential and envisaged repertoire of ideas. Symbolically, the novel represents what caused many engaged authors to rescue their utopianism through literary fiction, proving that the socialist utopia had to be revived again as, contrary to the party officials' claims, it had not yet materialized. Depicting an 'architect failing to realize/materialize the overpowering real-socialist future',³⁸ the novel is a complex reflection upon architecture as a medium of human development on the path to enlightenment and self-fulfilment, as well as a reflection upon the limitations of its cultural impact on a society.

Finally, the novel is deeply embedded in playing with the cyclical structures of Marxist eschatology and its step model of society's enhancement towards communism where, within every step, society is stuck in a cycle of repetition until a revolution elevates it to the next level. The novel critiques the GDR's self-styling as the revolution that will break the current cycle of social development towards the next step of human development, in an attempt to revive the state's utopian potential for the literal building of a new social order which it perceives as buried under political power plays. In doing so, it contextualizes the construction site and the architect as a Renaissance act of world creation and universal genius experiencing the failure

of all utopian hopes. The circular structure of Marx's ascending determinism is both embedded in the visual and architectural iconography of Halle-Neustadt, and paralleled in the novel's narrative structure, subverting the GDR's revolutionary ambition as reduced to ideological rhetoric. Ultimately, the narrative dissolves any sense of linear time and replaces it with a circular recurrence of political utopias and their subsequent demystification. This, however, is not a sign of defeat: Lenk's hope for an ultimate realization of the utopian project is an expression of his trust in the Hegelian-Marxist teleological model. The GDR may have missed a historical opportunity, but for Wellm it constitutes another step towards the realization of utopia.

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NOTES

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² Rosemary Wakeman, 'Was There an Ideal Socialist City? Socialist New Towns as Modern Dreamscapes', in *Transnationalism and the German City*, ed. by Jeffrey M. Diefendorf and Janet Ward (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 105–24 (pp. 105–06).

³ Rosemary Wakeman, *Practicing Utopia: An Intellectual History of the New Town Movement* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2016), pp. 20–46.

⁴ Florian Urban, *Tower and Slab: Histories of Global Mass Housing* (New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 1.

⁵ Lena Kuhl, 'Zwischen Planungseuphorie und Zukunftsverlust. Städtebau in Ost und West am Beispiel von Halle-Neustadt und Wulfen (1960–1983)', in *Gedachte Stadt – Gebaute Stadt. Urbanität in der deutsch-deutschen Systemkonkurrenz 1945–1990*, ed. by Thomas Großbölting and Rüdiger Schmidt (Köln: Böhlau, 2015), pp. 85–118 (pp. 85–86).

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- ¹¹ Sarah Pogoda, *Demürgen in der Krise, Architektenfiguren in der Literatur nach 1945* (Berlin: Piperger & Kremers, 2013), pp. 157, 164–65; Karrasch, *Die 'nationale Bautradition' denken*, pp. 87–88.
- ¹² Kuhl, 'Zwischen Planungseuphorie und Zukunftsverlust', pp. 85–89.
- ¹³ Ibid., p. 90.
- ¹⁴ Michael Ostheimer, *Leseland. Chronotopographie der DDR- und Post-DDR-Literatur* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2018) p. 116.
- ¹⁵ Frank-Peter Jäger, 'Den neuen Menschen in lichterfüllte Räume führen', in *DDR Architektur*, ed. by Hans Engels (München: Prestel, 2019), pp. 5–12 (p. 11).
- ¹⁶ See also: *Bauhaus Shanghai Stalinallee Ha-Neu. Der Lebensweg des Architekten Richard Paulick 1903–1979*, ed. by Thomas Flierl (Berlin: Lukas Verlag, 2020); Anja Jackes, *Halle-Neustadt und die Vision von Kunst und Leben: Eine Untersuchung zur Planung architekturbezogener Kunst* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021); Matthias Hunger, *Sozialistisches Wohnkonzept und Wohnungsbau in der DDR: Das Beispiel Halle-Neustadt* (Hamburg: Diplomica, 2000); and *Baubezogene Kunst DDR. Kunst im öffentlichen Raum 1950 bis 1990*, ed. by Martin Maleschka (Berlin: DOM Publishers, 2019).
- ¹⁷ Ostheimer, *Leseland*, p. 117.
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- ²³ Ostheimer, *Leseland*, p. 118.
- ²⁴ Werner Bräunig, Peter Gosse, Jan Koplowitz and Hans-Jürgen Steinmann, *Städte machen Leute. Streifzüge durch eine neue Stadt* (Halle/Saale: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1969), p. 37.
- ²⁵ Florian Urban, *Berlin neo-historisch. Geschichte aus Fertigteilen* (Berlin: Reimer, 2007), p. 12.
- ²⁶ Bernd Dolle-Weinkauff and Steffen Peltch, 'Kinder- und Jugendliteratur der DDR', in *Geschichte der deutschen Kinder- und Jugendliteratur*, ed. by Reiner Wild (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 2008), pp. 413–36 (p. 432).
- ²⁷ Christa Wolf, Heiner Müller, Stefan Heym and Franz Fühmann would be the most prominent names here, many of them inspired by their reception of Ernst Bloch's *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* [*The Principle of Hope*] (1954). See Stephan Ehrig, *Der dialektische Kleist. Zur Rezeption Heinrich von Kleists in Literatur und Theater der DDR* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2018), pp. 112–13; Wolfgang Emmereich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR* (Berlin: Aufbau, 2009), pp. 272–81; and Stephan Pabst, *Post-Ost-Moderne. Poetik nach der DDR* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2016), p. 62.
- ²⁸ Alfred Wellm, *Morisco* (East Berlin: Aufbau, 1987), pp. 102–03. Subsequent references are to this edition, presented as *M* and incorporated into the main text.
- ²⁹ Peer Pasternak, *Zwischen Halle-Novgorod und Halle-New Town. Der Ideenhaushalt Halle-Neustadts* (Halle/Saale: Hallescher Graureiher, 2012), p. 53.
- ³⁰ Bräunig, Gosse, Koplowitz and Steinmann, *Städte machen Leute*, p. 10.
- ³¹ Martin Hadelich, *Gaben der Völker*, 1968, mosaic mural, Halle-Neustadt, Germany, *Halle im Bild. Die Webseite über Objekte der Kunst- und Zeitgeschichte* <<https://www.halle-im-bild.de/fotos/wandgestaltungen/gaben-der-voelker>> [accessed 29 November 2022].
- ³² *Der Mensch muss auch wohnen* (DRA, 1974), TV documentary, available online via YouTube, 28 January 2018, <<https://youtu.be/86DpEgOunPg?t=816>> [accessed 29 November 2022]. The

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³⁸ Ostheimer, *Leseland*, p. 151.