

5. Re-curated Remains

Exploring the Reconfiguration and Re-emergence of Two GDR Era Pieces of Art in Architecture in Contemporary University Media

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ABSTRACT

This case study explores how current curatorial interventions, such as an exhibition, in-house publications and representational photographs, engage with two large public pieces of art in architecture. These artworks by Gerhard Eichhorn and Waldemar Grzimek were produced in the early era of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and have remained set on the entrance of what is now the *Hochschule für Technik, Wirtschaft und Kultur* (Leipzig University for Applied Science). The artworks are approached as material remains, which nowadays appear as both detached from their time of production and open to new engagements. This chapter shows multiple modes in which these artworks are valorized and related to by drawing on an analysis of university media and interviews. They are reconfigured and re-emerge as an anchor point of social critique, part of public relations work visualising a vibrant campus lifestyle or trivial points of reference for representational photographs. As such, they carry a productive and subversive potential in the present and are actively recirculated and re-embedded in contemporary contexts that were not necessarily envisioned by the artists. The chapter further argues that analytical attention can be drawn to a broadened set of activities by conceptualising the built environment as an inherently curated space. This includes the re-curation in types of media beyond the physical environment. Thereby, the built environment of the university campus is co-produced in conjunction with other kinds of media.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last sixty years, two large pieces of art in architecture, depicting working people and the promise of industrial development, have welcomed visitors to what is now the *Hochschule für Technik, Wirtschaft und Kultur Leipzig* (HTWK; Leipzig Uni-

versity for Applied Science). These artworks were installed during the reconstruction of the Geutebrück building¹ in the Leipzig suburb of Connewitz in 1961 and show explicit traces of the by-gone era of state socialism. Imbued with educational visions and the ideological iconography of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), they inscribe a historically unique aesthetic into the built environment and represent the extensive deployment of art in architecture during the era of the GDR (1949–1989), particularly the genre of large, public wall paintings and sculptures (cf. Maleschka 2019). These efforts, especially in the case of educational buildings, aimed at lifting the aspired socialist identity to the level of sensory experience (Gibas/Pasternack 1999: 23). These efforts can be approached through the conceptual lens developed in this volume as curatorial interventions. What follows is not a historiographic analysis of the art production but an analysis of contemporary engagements with this particular material culture stemming from GDR times. This chapter, thereby, focuses on university media, such as an exhibition, in-house publications and representational photographs, and explores how the two artworks have become reconfigured and re-emerged; understood as curatorial interventions and their effects. In addition to analysing university media, this chapter draws on conversations with Franka Platz, head of public relations, and Benjamin Schäf, head of the university archive at the HTWK Leipzig, and an interview conducted with Annette Menting, Professor for Architectural History and curator of the exhibition featuring one of the artworks discussed.

The close attendance towards the legacy of these artworks follows the research approach outlined by anthropologist Jonathan Bach in his monograph *What Remains: Everyday Encounters with the Socialist Past in Germany* (2017). Bach argues that the material legacy of the GDR offers a “unique vantage point” for coming to terms with the past. Due to the “radical discontinuity” caused by the upheaval surrounding the German reunification, the material culture of the GDR became defunct, both politically and culturally, virtually overnight, appearing today “as debris, detritus, suddenly out of time and out of place, [as] anachronistic remnants of a failed dream for socialist modernity” (Bach 2017: 1–3). In this context, the “stubbornness of material remains”, i. e. their sheer presence, leaves present generations and their possible futures with little choice as to whether to encounter these remains or not (ibid.: 7). Bach further emphasises that through these encounters, the material remains recirculate in contemporary economies while their symbolic meaning is changed, displaced and/or challenged.

The recirculation and recontextualization of GDR art in architecture has only slowly become an area of interest in academic research (cf. Jenkins 2014: 14–20). Its “political contentiousness” (Bach 2017: 91) according to its urban placement has been a prominent discussion. As art in architecture occupies public spaces, it provides a setting for political issues to be reflected and negotiated through a built environment. The material legacy of the GDR is, therefore, often invoked as a possession of dan-

1 | Named after Alfred Geutebrück, founder of the *Königlich-Sächsische Bauschule* in 1838, it is one of the main buildings of the HTWK Leipzig (Hocquéél 2004: 210).

gerous potential, considering the general rejection of state socialism as a totalitarian system (Jenkins 2014: 2). In this vein, the architectural historian Ulrich Hartung (1999) questions, especially in the case of university buildings of the socialist era, to what extent material manifestations are able to accommodate or are to be modified for “democratic university work”,² problematizing the complicity of GDR era architecture and artwork with an anti-democratic, authoritarian regime. On the contrary, Bach argues that the material remains of the GDR have a productive and even subversive potential in the present. Furthermore, he states that material remains are able “to keep the present unsettled, to keep narratives from congealing” as “they are (mis)used in ways not anticipated or sanctioned by their makers, original users, or mainstream society” (Bach 2017: 3–4).

Nowadays, the artworks under scrutiny in this chapter occupy a rather peripheral site when compared to highly controversial cases, such as Gerhard Bondzin’s mural *Der Weg der Roten Fahne* in Dresden (see Silke Wagler in this volume) or the demolition of the East German parliament and national venue, the *Palast der Republik* (Palace of the Republic), in Berlin (cf. Binder 2009; Bach 2017: 91). While such monumental cases have received wide public and academic attention, the vast majority of GDR art in architecture is met largely with a sense of indifference and neglect, most often solely noticed by local residents (Topfstedt 2008: 15). Given this situation, the zooming in on a peripheral site to explore how and if it generates new engagements, as pursued here, seems a worthwhile undertaking.

In the following, this chapter approaches the contemporary reconfigurations and re-emergences of the artworks as acts and moments of “re-curation” in order to emphasise how current engagements overlay past curatorial interventions enacted during the GDR era. In doing so, the chapter shows that the meaning of not only the pieces of art in architecture but also the surrounding built environment changes throughout the processes of curating and re-curating. The chapter further argues that the built environment of the university campus is co-produced in conjunction with other types of media. In the first section, I introduce the two artworks on the campus of the HTWK Leipzig. I then analyse three instances in which the artworks became reconfigured and re-emerged. Finally, the curatorial interventions identified are summarised in the conclusion.

ENCOUNTERING THE ARTWORKS

Taking a walk in Leipzig’s southern district of Connewitz is a startling contrast between the bourgeois pre-war *Gründerzeitquartiere* of historicist housing and what is now one of Leipzig’s most vibrant, alternative neighborhoods, having experienced a substantial construction boom since the German reunification in 1990 (Fenzlein et al. 2016: 148). Only a few landmarks refer directly to the suburb’s socialist past.

2 | All translations by Martin Roggenbuck.

One example is found at the southern wing of the Geutebrück building, which is set along the highly frequented Karl-Liebknecht-Straße, thus, a street commemorating an iconic figure of GDR socialism. The building is part of what is now the campus of HTWK Leipzig, re-founded in 1992; its various predecessors dating back as far as to the 19th century. The Geutebrück building was initially built in 1913 as the new headquarters of the *Königlich-Sächsische Bauschule* (Royal Saxonian School for Construction). It took up a historicist style influenced by baroque and *Jugendstil* elements (Hocquél 2004: 210). After the Second World War, the University was re-founded in 1954 as the *Hochschule für Bauwesen Leipzig* (Leipzig University for Construction), which merged into the *Technische Hochschule Leipzig* (Technical University Leipzig) in 1977.³ Due to war damage, the southern wing of the Geutebrück building was reconstructed between 1958 and 1961, while the northern wing remained intact (Steiger 1964: 27). Designed by Hermann Pape, the reconstruction took the shape of a modernistic style, with a representative facade made of sandstone and blue corrugated metal, and generous foyers with wide staircases (Hocquél 2004: 210; Menting 2015: 165). It is a significant early example of what Simone Hain coins as the “selected noble modern rationalism” beginning in the late 1950s East German architecture (quoted in Gibas/Pasternack 1999: 23).

Not only does the architecture of the southern wing of the Geutebrück building present a sharp contrast to its northern wing and many other surrounding buildings, but it is also set apart through a relief and a mosaic which displays a socialist-realist aesthetic. These are installed on each entrance to the building, modestly set back from the street by a few, low flights of steps.

SANDSTONE RELIEF BY WALDEMAR GRZIMEK

Seen from the main street, a sandstone-relief carved by Waldemar Grzimek (Fig. 5.1) flanks the left entrance to the Geutebrück building. Rough edges and a granularly notched surface emphasise the manual production process of the relief. Divided into three vertical strips, it depicts an affectionate scene of apprenticeship. Two formally dressed men are making eye contact in the centre. While the younger man is holding books and a compass, the older one is embracing him cordially. They are surrounded on the left side by a tree and crops, sun, rain and a dove. To the right, they are framed by an industrial iron truss structure alongside a metallurgic tool. According to the artist’s catalogue raisonné, the relief dates back to 1958 and is titled *Ausbildung zum Ingenieur* (Education to Become an Engineer) (Roters 1979: 200).

3 | A brief overview of the institutional history is given on the website of the HTWK (<http://www.htwk-leipzig.de/hochschule/ueber-uns/geschichte/>, accessed 6 August 2019).

Fig. 5.1: Sandstone-Relief by Waldemar Grzimek.



MOSAIC BY GERHARD EICHHORN AND HEINRICH JUNGBLOEDT

A colourful glass mosaic designed by Gerhard Eichhorn, also visible from the main street, is found next to the right entrance of the Geutebrück building (see Fig. 5.2). It was produced by the late Heinrich Jungebloedt, one of the few mosaicists in the GDR, in 1962. A large variety of glass and natural stones are employed, differing in colour, gloss, shade, size and shape. The long, linear seams, which structure the mosaic are notable of the Jungebloedt style, according to the artist's biographer Klaus Schädel (2014). Its composition depicts men and women set in front of an industrial background. Indexes such as a lab coat, office chair and desk, and manual and metallurgic tools attribute the characters to a variety of professions. A woman dressed in bright green garments, centred in the mosaic, is holding a document folder and being attentive to peers standing next to her: a white-collar worker holding a paper chart is being embraced by a blue-collar worker. The upper-right corner depicts five people linking arms with each other while being over-arched by a dove. They are grouped around a woman of colour who is also highlighted by a green garment.

SOCIALIST SYMBOLISM AND AESTHETICS IN BOTH PIECES OF ART IN ARCHITECTURE

Despite the apparent aesthetic differences between them, both artworks at the Geutebrück building are examples of a common programme. Both share several recurring

Fig. 5.2: Mosaic Murals by G. Eichhorn and H. Jungebloedt.



motives that refer back to the iconographic repertoire of the GDR as outlined by art historian Peter Guth (1995: 37–44). The most explicit example is the pair of compasses, widely used as the symbol of the intelligentsia. The metallurgic tools and iron truss structures in both artworks do not only relate to the building being a school for engineering, but symbolize the early period of the GDR, termed as *Aufbaujahre* (literally translated as “construction years”), in which the success of the socialist project was connected to the construction of new industries (Guth 1995: 38; Gibas/Pasternack 1999: 13). Symbols such as the dove of peace and the tree of life, which were picked from Christian and antique symbolic genealogies in spite of the state’s overt atheism, are somewhat ambivalent (see Guth 1995: 41). The various figurative scenes in the two artworks generally follow typical representational semantics of GDR iconography, which Guth describes as “bland and appellative strategies” (*plakative und appellatorische Lösungen*). That is, images were dominantly chosen to be purposefully “one-dimensional”, invoking easily recognisable, often political associations (Guth 1995: 37–43). An affirmative, cheerful narrative prevailed, which encouraged the viewer to participate in social life understood in socialist terms.

As such, the embrace in the Eichhorn and Jungebloedt mosaic (Fig. 5.2) between the blue- and white-collar worker as well as between the white man and the woman of colour point to the socialist agenda of class solidarity and *Völkerfreundschaft* (international solidarity). Regarding educational contexts, this affirmative appeal often

took the form of a zealous mentality of being eager to learn (Guth 1995: 39), which is depicted in the embrace of the apprentice by the teacher in Grzimek's relief (Fig. 5.1).

This brief discussion of symbolism in the mosaic and relief suggests that the reconstruction of the Geutebrück building can be understood as a curatorial intervention, as an ideologically driven and aesthetically enacted inscription into the built environment (see introduction in this volume). The campus environment was reconfigured during the GDR according to socialist terms, creating a sharp contrast with the preceding historicist buildings of imperial Germany. As Martin Schönfeld argues, public artworks functioned as symbols of the state's power, manifested in public space (1999: 231). Although such symbols are nowadays politically defunct (Jenkins 2014: 2), the artworks remain readable and can speak of the GDR's legacy. Yet, they are equally individual expressions that transcend a purely collective value. They are also open to practices of re-curation, which creatively engage with them and assign them new meanings. Such processes are traced in the following section.

THREE INSTANCES OF RE-CURATION

By considering the Geutebrück building as a re-curated environment, I draw attention to the mechanisms through which medial and spatial interventions reconfigure how the artworks become valorized and related to. That being said, both artworks have remained unmoved and physically unaltered since the German reunification. No attempts of alteration are known to the staff of the university archive, and my interview partners agree unanimously on the historical value of the mosaic and relief; moreover, they assert that the art works are protected by *Denkmalschutz* (heritage preservation).⁴ Despite the latter, there have been accompanying installations, such as metal railings and rubbish bins, visibly built in front of both pieces (see Fig. 5.1 and 5.2), which indicate a sense of indifference towards the sites, as Topfstedt has observed in similar cases (2008: 15). What appears to be more significant, however, have been re-configurations and re-emergences of the artworks across various publications and an exhibition at the university which have changed their meanings. This was especially the case in the course of the HTWK Leipzig's 25th anniversary that was accompanied by several publications, exhibitions and festivities.⁵ I found three instances in my research in which the artworks became re-curated, to which I turn now.

4 | Interview with Benjamin Schäf, head of the HTWK archive, conducted on 25 July 2018; interview with Annette Menting conducted on 20 June 2019.

5 | See Grande (2018) for an overview of the anniversary programme; photobook internally distributed inter alia as a guest present and forwarded by Franka Platz, head of public relations at HTWK Leipzig; interview on 18 July 2018.

RE-CURATION AS AN ANCHOR POINT OF SOCIAL CRITIQUE

As a notable example of reconfiguration, the mosaic by Eichhorn and Jungebloedt (see fig. 5.2) was mobilised for an exhibition and its accompanying catalogue about gender equality in technical professions. That exhibition was curated by Annette Menting and a team of university staff and students. Under the slightly ironic title *Sagen Sie mal, Sie als Frau ...* (Tell me, you as woman ...), the exhibition portrayed 25 women of the university's staff, students and alumni in short interviews and photographs taken on the campus. The opening took place in the foyer of the *Lipsius-Bau*,⁶ directly opposite of the Geutebrück building, on 14 June 2017. Each of the 25 portraits were printed on large posters and hung up on the columns of the foyer (Fig. 5.3). The exhibition was prefaced by another poster on the column nearest to the entrance. It displayed a photograph of the mosaic together with the following introductory note:

The Leipzig University of Applied Science has been marked in several areas through a high proportion of men. This is demonstrated by the current statistics, on the one hand, and inter alia, by a mural mosaic by Gerhard Eichhorn at the Geutebrück building, on the other (1965 [sic!]). Here, a group of [male] scientists and engineers dominate the foreground, recognisable by attributes such as a T-square, the factory worker's blue overall and, close to the image's centre, a woman is standing in a green dress, gazing off into the distance and seemingly not really belonging to any group. The figure of the singular woman raises questions. What does today's image of the woman at the university look like?⁷

As we can see, the mosaic was not only selected as an illustration for the exhibition, but a specific interpretation of the mosaic is provided. The assigned awkwardness of the lone standing woman in between all these male workers reconfigures the mosaic in two significant ways. Firstly, such an interpretation subverts the mosaic's affirmative depiction of a seemingly positive ideal of an egalitarian society central to the GDR's iconography. This socialist self-declaration conceived gender equality as one of its core achievements.⁸ In this particular case, the former *Hochschule für Bauwesen* even issued a report on integrating women in the male-dominated engineering sector at the time the mosaic was produced (cf. Assistent Stegmaier 1960). However, a critical reassessment of the mosaic's socialist programme does not appear to be of interest for the exhibition. In fact, its socialist legacy and aesthetic is left unmentioned in the curatorial text. This showcases that material remains from the GDR era are reused in heterogeneous ways not necessarily marking them as socialist. The mosaic is mobilised here as part of the university's heritage for a specific purpose: It serves as an

6 | The building hosts the cafeteria and several lecture halls and is, thus, highly frequented. The exhibition later also toured to the *Sächsisches Staatsministerium für Wissenschaft und Kunst* (Saxonian State Ministry for Science and Arts).

7 | Müller et al. (2017: 13); translation by Martin Roggenbuck.

8 | See Möbius (1989) for a critique on the representation of women in public art of the GDR urban environment.

Fig. 5.3: Impression of the exhibition.



enquiry into the contemporary image and position of women at the university, provoking questions on continuities and differences between past and present. Therefore, the exhibition employs memory work in a productive way, as a contribution to a current issue.⁹ This resembles the subversive potential of socialist remains to unsettle the present, described by Bach (2017: 3). In doing so, the mosaic is marked as reproducing a gendered space in an ambiguous way. Simultaneously to this reconfiguration, the campus environment itself is marked and interrogated as a gendered space. The mosaic moves from being a visualisation of a social and educational vision towards being a visual anchor point of contemporary social critique.

This distinct reusage of the mosaic appears more clearly in the exhibition catalogue subsequently issued as an in-house-publication titled *25 Jahre Gleichstellungssarbeit an der HTWK Leipzig* (25 Years of Gender Equality Efforts at the HTWK Leipzig; Müller et al. 2017). The mosaic features prominently here as the cover illustration. However, the mosaic is not reproduced in total; only a small rectangular close-up of the scene between the women and the embracing men appears. Notably, the scene is shifted towards the two men pushing the woman out of the centre to the margin, as can be seen in Fig. 5.4. The cover, therefore, amplifies the interpretation of the singular woman discussed previously. What was a discursive affair in the curatorial text, becomes visually articulated through an image in which the mosaic is carefully rearranged through specific selection and positioning.

9 | Such re-readings of art in architecture are similarly suggested by Nurse (2014: 145).

Fig. 5.4: Cover of the exhibition catalog.



Furthermore, the cover showcases the inherently curatorial practice through which heritage is selected and arranged. It also reflects on the ambivalence of a post-socialist institution such as the HTWK, which has experienced a significant discontinuity since the German reunification. While the title strictly narrows the history of the university to the 25-year period since its reformation in 1992, the exhibition is illustrated by an artwork which clearly predates such a timeframe. Here, the socialist legacy of the mosaic has no explicit reference and appears muted. But, simultaneously, this seems to allow the mosaic to be mobilised more effectively in order to critically attend to continuities with preceding institutional manifestations of the university.

The circumstances of how the mosaic became part of the exhibition are recalled by the curator Annette Menting in the interview I conducted on 20 June 2019. It was already in the final phase of the exhibition project and the team was still pondering on what image to use for illustrative purposes when the idea came up. By that time, she wittingly remarked, she must have been passing the mosaic on a daily basis for almost twelve years, and had in mind for a long time that “something should happen” with it, before spontaneously “one morning” both ends came together. It was the anonymous and generic quality of the woman in a green garment depicted which, according to Menting, made the mosaic a feasible representation. This anecdote highlights what Bach calls the “stubbornness” of material remains as well as the “processual nature” of memory work (Bach 2017: 7). The re-emergence of the mosaic is based on its sheer physical presence in the campus environment, providing place and opportunity for everyday encounters. Yet, the mosaic does not re-emerge in a straightforward, me-

chanic process, but requires a specific reconfiguration enacted through a particular curatorial agenda in order to address a contemporary issue.

RE-CURATION AS PART OF CAMPUS LIFESTYLE

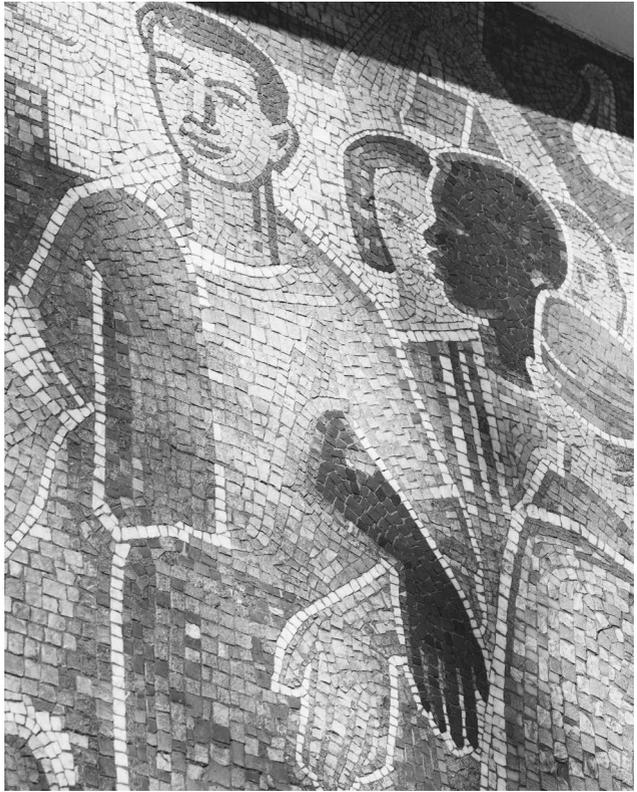
In addition to the 25-year anniversary of the HTWK, the photographer Johannes Ernst (2017) depicted both artworks in a photobook commissioned by the university administration and issued as an in-house publication. The photobook is dedicated to capturing everyday campus life and presents the campus from a subjective angle. The artworks are staged here in several scenes and are shown with no additional information.

One scene juxtaposes Grzimek's sandstone relief (Fig. 5.1) with a living counterpart. Two women dressed in casual clothing are leisurely talking in front of the relief and roughly stand in line with the two men depicted in it (Fig. 5.5). This playful imitation produces a continuity between past and present and bridges the generational differences visible in posture and clothing style. This curatorial intervention marks the relief primarily in terms of a cordial sociability, embodying affectionate conversations and showcasing the campus as a lively and youthful space. Such an intervention can change our perception of how the campus environment is experienced. The photography incorporates the relief into the contemporary lifestyle and, thus, reconfigures how it is perceived.

Fig. 5.5 Two women in front of the relief.



Fig. 5.6: Detail of the mosaic.



Another photograph in the book depicts the scene of the Eichhorn and Jungebloedt mosaic (Fig. 5.2), in which a woman of colour is linking arms with an optimistically looking white man (see Fig. 5.6). Presumably, this detail was initially issued as an affirmative enactment of *Völkerfreundschaft* with a prompting call towards the viewer. The hierarchical geometries established in the mosaic between the people depicted are reproduced by the photograph, as the image of the black female occupies far less space than her white male counterpart. The close-up is printed as an entire page and gives this small scene, which is usually hidden on the mosaic's top corner, full attention. Rather than the vibrant campus environment discussed in the previous photograph, the mosaic here is detached from its initial place on the campus and positioned like a piece of art in a white frame. However, this re-emergence is not merely a mechanical reproduction of the mosaic. Set in this format, full attention is directed towards the content and aesthetics of the mosaic, as the shades and shapes of its stones become distinguishable. The meaning of the detail is left open to interpretation by the viewer, who is invited to take a closer look at the scene. These practices of re-curation reproduce the detail of the mosaic in a manner which is pleasing and stimulating for the eye and contributes to the recirculation of the mosaic in the present.

RE-CURATION AS SPATIAL POINT OF REFERENCE

As my interview partners Franka Platz (2018) and Benjamin Schäf (2018) recount, alumni groups or staff often use Grzimek's relief (Fig. 5.1) as a background for group photographs needed for the HTWK Leipzig website or other representative purposes. As such, the relief also appears in the exhibition catalogue *25 Jahre Gleichstellungsarbeit an der HTWK Leipzig* discussed above (Müller et al. 2017: 38). The project team of the exhibition is depicted on the staircase of the Geutebrück building with the relief providing the background. These group photos do not usually capture the relief in its full size, unlike the previous example in Fig. 5.5, but are framed according to the people's heights. Thereby, only the lower half of the relief is depicted, and its content is often just vaguely intelligible.

The selection of the relief is recalled by Menting (2015) as an ad hoc decision by the team with seemingly no underlying motivation. But considering its recurring use as a photo background, it is fair to claim that it must be attractive for some reason. It is noteworthy that this usage indicates an unrestrained relationship with such remains of the GDR, one which leaves behind fears about the complicity of the artworks with the regime. The artworks are even deemed appropriate for representational purposes. Having said that, the setting of the group photos does not pay attention towards the content of the relief, either. Rather than a site of political contestation, the relief re-emerges here as a trivial landmark. It functions as a spatial point of reference, placing the group within the campus.

CONCLUSION

These three instances show that both artworks at the Geutebrück-Bau are actively recirculated and re-embedded in contemporary issues, as well as being chosen for representational purposes. In the case of the exhibition on gender equality, this engagement takes the form of a subversive interpretation for the purpose of social critique. This critique is firstly reconfigured through a narrative text and, in the following, becomes amplified by an image of the mosaic, arranged and selected with a visual effect in support of the narrative. In the photobook by Grande (2018), the campus environment is re-imagined through a playful juxtaposition with the relief as space of a lively, youthful lifestyle. These examples from a rather peripheral site oppose the presupposition that GDR art in architecture is met with indifference. The seeming ease with which the relief is used as a background for representational photographs indicates that such artworks are not considered as possessing an inherently dangerous potential. In fact, none of the instances refers explicitly to the socialist symbolism and aesthetic of the artworks. Instead, these artworks become reconfigured and re-emerge in multiple modes as they are approached by various actors within the university context in everyday encounters. The examples given support Bach's notion of material remains having a productive and subversive potential in the present (2017: 3).

This chapter has shown that the conceptualisation of curation as a method and practice, as pursued in this volume, can draw analytical attention to a broadened set of activities, including the re-curation of media forms beyond the physical environment, and be productively deployed in order to understand how (post-)socialist environments are valorized and related to. Consequently, the chapter has argued that the built environments of the university campus is co-produced in conjunction with other types of media and in dialogue with multiple audiences.

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