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Stasi as Architectural Producer: Surveillance and Scientific Management in the East German Built Environment 1961-1989

My dissertation project, titled “Stasi as Architectural Producer: Surveillance and Scientific Management in the East German Built Environment 1961-1989,” investigates the East German Ministry of State Security’s (Ministerium für Staatssicherheit – MfS) involvement in the East German built environment. Focusing on this overlooked facet of East German architectural history under state socialism, I explore the MfS—known as the *Stasi*—as an architectural producer to interrogate the multi-faceted and co-constitutive operations of the East German state security and its building industry. By including surveillance agents among the constellation of architectural experts and policy-makers, my project asks: how did the methods and conditions of surveillance influence the design, production and use of East German architecture and how, in turn, did architecture affect the objectives and techniques of surveillance?

My project’s analytical framework is comprised of three aspects of the *Stasi*’s architectural activities: its role as a *building agent* participating in the scientific management of architectural production, as a *building contractor* commissioning top-secret governmental structures, and as a *building user* occupying architectural spaces to conduct domestic surveillance. Recognizing that these diverse roles do not lend themselves to neatly delineated categories, my dissertation looks at numerous architectural institutions, objects and practices within which the East German surveillance apparatus’ manifold functions intersected, shifted and reversed.

First, I map the field of interplay between the *Stasi* and the Ministry of Building (Ministerium für Bauwesen – MfB) to chart their interactions within a series of governmental units for the State Building Control (Staatliche Bauaufsicht – StBA), Technical Surveillance (Technische Überwachung) and Inspection of the East German building production. Second, I analyze East German prefabricated mass housing types—known as the *Plattenbauten*—to understand the

Stasi's operations as a building agent when it simultaneously was a user. To do so, I study the three most widely applied *Plattenbau*-systems: P1, P2 and WBS 70—as they relied heavily on the instructions of scientific management for their serialized and rationalized material-technological evolution. The *Plattenbauten* also became the principal sites of house bugging and phone tapping by the *Stasi* as by 1990 more than fifty percent of the GDR's population came to live in the *Plattenbauten*. Third, my project looks at three *Stasi* structures commissioned and built under the auspices of the *Stasi*-run construction firm *VEB Spezialhochbau*: the headquarters in Leipzig and Berlin and the listening post at Brocken Mountain. Through these case studies, I investigate the history of the *VEB Spezialhochbau* to illustrate how the *Stasi*'s insights as a building agent were potentially translated into their operations as a building contractor. My project's theoretical underpinning challenges the model of the Panopticon, proposed by Jeremy Bentham and developed by Michel Foucault, which has so far provided the primary conceptual framework for studies on the relationship between architecture and surveillance in the GDR and beyond. I problematize the conception of architecture as epiphenomenal to surveillance, and propose, instead, to analyze *architecture as a technology of surveillance* that simultaneously facilitates and contests its techniques. To understand the agency of buildings as technological objects under the conditions of state surveillance, my dissertation traces the convergences and divergences between the dual production of knowledge via architecture and state surveillance in the GDR. I further explicate surveillance as a spatial practice with distinct architectural repercussions, and thus investigate both the ways the *Stasi* attempted to infiltrate the building industry, and the critical complicity of architectural experts and objects within the *Stasi*'s networks of architectural information and production.