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Hochhausscheibe A—E: Investigating Temporal, Material and Political Matters of the In-Between

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Buildings on Standby:

Hochhausscheibe A—E:

Investigating Temporal, Material and Political Matters of the In-Between

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INVESTIGATING TEMPORAL, MATERIAL AND POLITICAL MATTERS OF
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Pour le Doyen de la Faculté des géosciences et de l'environnement

Professeur Martin Müller

Abstract

This work examines the buildings in Halle-Neustadt called 'Hochhausscheiben A–E', which lost their (human) use towards the end of the 1990s and which have remained in an intermediate state for over two decades. Through an investigation of temporal, material and political matters, the ethnographic study describes this in-between as a mode of standby.

The profound transformations that the city of Halle (Saale) underwent after German reunification not only brought renewal. They also left many people and places in-between.

It is the in-between and things that stay that this work turns to, through a study of an ensemble of high-rise buildings that – with the exception of one of the buildings that was reactivated in 2021 – will, by 2023, have been vacant for over 20 years.

Since the buildings lost their initial use, their futures have been struggled over and is yet to be found. Numerous possible futures between demolition and preservation have been un-/made throughout the years – that is, designed, thought and decided, but never eventually materializing.

This work argues that the Hochhausscheiben in Halle-Neustadt are lingering in an in-between which can best be described as a 'standby mode.' From a socio-material perspective and applying a relational understanding of buildings as proposed in in social studies of buildings and architecture, it investigates relations between buildings, urban transformation and urban planning after socialism.

Based primarily on archival research, observations and day-to-day conversations with planners of the city of Halle as well as interviews, the ethnographic study examines buildings on standby by way of temporal, material and political matters.

As this work shows, time sometimes seems to stand still and go round in circles on standby. The buildings resist possible futures, and an alignment of actors that would enable a realization is not achieved. But it is through going on, maintaining and struggling, among other things, that socio-material and temporal relations do not break completely, that the future remains open and that the in-between of the buildings is prolonged. It turns out that the in-between is not an empty space, but takes on specific material and organizational forms that may themselves stabilize it.

Situated at the intersection between Urban Studies and STS/ANT, the study brings together literature from various disciplines to explore standby in its multifaceted dimensions.

It enters into dialogue with and contributes to work on time, materiality and organization of urban (in-between) spaces, processes and practices of buildings in the (re)making, and develops an understanding of buildings on standby, grounded in a detailed case study.

Through its focus on the (un)making of possible building futures, this work contributes to research on buildings as they relate to urban transformation and in particular to an understanding of the lives of buildings 'post-use'.

Résumé

Le présent travail étudie les bâtiments de Halle-Neustadt appelés 'Hochhaus-scheiben A-E', qui ont perdu leur usage (humain) vers la fin des années 1990 et qui sont restés dans un entre-deux pendant plus de deux décennies. Cette étude ethno-graphique décrit cet entre-deux comme un mode de 'standby', en considérant trois axes : temporel, matériel et politique.

Les profondes transformations que la ville de Halle (Saale) a subies après la réuni-fication allemande n'ont pas seulement apporté un renouveau. Elles ont également laissé beaucoup de personnes et de lieux dans un entre-deux.
Ce travail porte attention à cet entre-deux et à ce qui persiste au travers de l'étude d'un ensemble de cinq tours qui, en 2023, sont vacantes depuis plus de 20 ans, à l'exception d'une seule d'entre elles réhabilitée en 2021.
Depuis que les bâtiments ont perdu leur usage initial, leur avenir ne cesse d'être débattu. Il reste à trouver. De nombreux futurs entre démolition et préservation ont été envisagés tout au long de ces années, mais ils ne se sont finalement jamais con-crétisés.

Ce travail soutient que les Hochhausscheiben de Halle-Neustadt sont pris dans un entre-deux qui peut être décrit comme un mode de 'standby.' L'étude s'inscrit dans une perspective socio-matérielle et une approche relationnelle des bâtiments comme proposées dans les sciences sociales portant sur les bâtiments et l'architecture. Elle étudie les relations entre les bâtiments, la transformation urbaine et l'urbanisme après l'ère socialiste.

A partir d'une étude ethnographique basée principalement sur des recherches d'ar-chives, des observations et des conversations quotidiennes avec des urbanistes de la ville de Halle ainsi que sur des entretiens, ce travail examine les bâtiments 'on standby' selon trois axes : temporel, matériel et politique.

Comme le montre ce travail, en mode de standby, le temps semble parfois s'arrêter et tourner en rond. Les bâtiments résistent à des futurs possibles. Un alignement des acteurs qui permettrait d'envisager une réalisation n'est pas atteint. Mais c'est entre autres par la poursuite, par la maintenance et par la lutte, que les liens ne se rompent pas, que l'avenir reste ouvert et que l'entre-deux des bâtiments est prolongé. L'entre-deux n'est pas un espace vide. Il prend de lui-même des formes matérielles et organi-sationnelles spécifiques qui contribuent elles-mêmes à le stabiliser.
Cette recherche se situe à l'intersection des études urbaines et des STS/ANT et ras-semble une littérature issue de diverses disciplines pour explorer le standby dans ses multiples dimensions. Elle contribue et entre en dialogue avec les travaux sur le temps, la matérialité et l'organisation des espaces urbains (intermédiaires), les processus et les pratiques des bâtiments en train de se (re)faire alors qu'ils sont pris dans cet entre-deux. En se fondant sur une étude de cas détaillée, elle cherche à développer une compréhension des bâtiments 'on standby'.

En se concentrant sur les futurs des bâtiments qui sont faits et défaits, ce travail contribue à la recherche sur les bâtiments en lien avec la transformation urbaine, en général et sur la compréhension de la vie des bâtiments lorsque leur usage initial est révolu, en particulier.

Zusammenfassung

Die vorliegende Arbeit untersucht die ‚Hochhausscheiben A-E' genannten Ge-bäude in Halle-Neustadt, die gegen Ende der 1990er Jahre ihre (menschliche) Nutzung verloren haben und seit über zwei Jahrzehnten in einem Zwischenzustand verharren. Entlang zeitlicher, materieller und politischer Aspekte beschreibt die ethnographische Studie diesen Zustand als Standby-Modus.

Die tiefgreifenden Veränderungen in Halle (Saale) nach der deutschen Wieder-vereinigung brachten nicht nur Erneuerung. Sie haben auch viele Menschen und Orte im Dazwischen zurückgelassen.
Diesem Dazwischen und dem Bleibenden widmet sich die Arbeit anhand der Unter-suchung eines Hochhausensembles, das – mit Ausnahme eines 2021 reaktivierten Gebäudes – im Jahr 2023 seit über 20 Jahren leer stehen wird.

Seit die Hochhausscheiben ihre ursprüngliche Nutzung verloren haben, wird um ihre Zukunft gerungen. Zahlreiche mögliche Zukünfte zwischen Abriss und Erhalt wurden im Laufe der Jahre entworfen, diskutiert und beschlossen, ohne jedoch eine Materialisierung zu finden.
Die Arbeit argumentiert, dass sich die Hochhausscheiben in Halle-Neustadt in einem Dazwischen befinden, das als ‚Standby-Modus' beschrieben werden kann. Aus einer sozio-materiellen Perspektive und geleitet von einem relationalen Verständnis von Gebäuden, untersucht diese Arbeit die Beziehungen zwischen Gebäuden, städt-ischer Transformation und Stadtplanung seit der Wende.
Basierend auf Archivrecherchen, Beobachtungen und zahlreichen Gesprächen mit Planern der Stadtverwaltung Halle sowie Interviews untersucht die ethnografische Studie Gebäude im Standby-Modus entlang zeitlicher, materieller und politischer Aspekte.

Wie diese Arbeit zeigt, scheint die Zeit im Standby-Modus manchmal still zu stehen, die Gebäude widersetzen sich möglichen Zukünften oder deren Realisierung scheitert an der mangelnden gemeinsamen Ausrichtung der Akteure. Aber es sind unter anderem das Weitermachen, die Instandhaltung und Prozesse des Ringens, die Verbindungen nicht vollständig abbrechen lassen, die die Zukunft offenhalten und das Dazwischen der Gebäude verlängern. Es wird schließlich deutlich, dass das Da-zwischen kein leerer Raum ist, sondern spezifische materielle und organisatorische Formen annimmt, die es ihrerseits stabilisieren können.

Die Studie ist an der Schnittstelle zwischen Urban Studies und STS/ANT ange-siedelt und führt Literatur aus verschiedenen Disziplinen zusammen, um Standby in seinen vielfältigen Dimensionen zu untersuchen. Sie tritt in einen Dialog mit und leistet einen Beitrag zu Arbeiten über Zeit, Materialität und Organisation urbaner (Zwischen-)räume und über Prozesse und Praktiken der (Trans-)Formation von Gebäuden. Anhand einer detaillierten Fallstudie entwickelt sie ein Verständnis von Gebäuden ‚on standby'.
Durch die Fokussierung auf das Ent- und Verwerfen von Gebäudezukünften leistet diese Arbeit einen Beitrag zur Erforschung von Gebäuden in städtischem Wandel und ihrem Leben nach dem Ende ihrer ursprünglichen Nutzung.

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Fig. 1
Insight. Dorenkamp, ca. 1974.
Source: Bauverein Halle & Leuna,
Geschichtswerkstatt.

Vignettes

Vignette #A, B, C, E: Hanging in the Air

On 23 July 2018, one of the employees of the History Workshop,[1] the district archive of Halle-Neustadt, reports that the buildings Hochhausscheibe B and E are still 'hanging completely in the air'; for Hochhausscheibe C there is a federal subsidy for the construction of housing and for building A there are plans to renovate it in order to house parts of the administration of the city of Halle here. In the History Workshop, my first port of call in Halle-Neustadt and an important source for my research (all newspaper articles on the Hochhausscheiben have been collected by one of their workers since 2004!), I learn from the staff that 'something is happening now'. According to the staff, now is a decisive moment and they are happy that the current mayor, in contrast to their predecessors, appears to care about Neustadt and the buildings (field notes, 23.07.2018). After my appointment at the History Workshop on one of my first visits to Halle-Neustadt in the frame of my research project, I walk to the Hochhausscheibe A–E, only a 5-minute walk from the archive. That day, there is still no visible sign of the future I am told is dawning. Scheibe A only shows traces of artistic use, while Scheibe C is covered in green nets.   → fig. 2; 3

Vignette #C: Material Resistance

In 2019, I'm taking part in what is supposed to be a 'milestone' event in the development of Hochhausscheibe C – at least, if it's up to the investor who plans to transform the high rise into flats for students. My field notes record:

> 'Swiss,' the architect says to me (knowing that I am living and working in Switzerland) and points upwards to the scene: the Swiss constructors of the first wooden module, which is being inserted into the building on this day as a 'trial module', hang from climbing ropes on the façade. We are all standing on the parking deck opposite building C, invited by the investor to be part of that important moment in the course towards innovative renovation of the building. Among others, the investors, the donors from different ministries as well as the investment bank, architects, engineers, structural engineers, heating and sanitary engineers, several scientists and representatives from the city administration in Halle are present. There is sparkling wine and a buffet with canapés and cold cucumber soup – it is a hot June day. The representative from the city says that one doesn't want to miss out on that; they are a little sceptical, but they say they think the overall concept fits in with the times.
> I wonder whether such a project would have been possible 10 years ago; 'no,' they reply.
>
> The rails to slide the module in are too narrow and had to be pushed apart with a steel pipe earlier; now they can't get the pipe out and the module in – it's stuck. They try to prise it out, sawing and jiggling – it takes forever. Again and again, people start filming (me too), the module moves a bit and then comes to a halt again – the investor chats to everyone, tells them what's going on, then nothing happens again. At some point everyone starts to get nervous, the investor included.

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1   'Geschichtswerkstatt' (History Workshop) is an institution existing in many German cities, dedicated to writing history 'from below' and usually run as an association.

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

Fig. 4

Fig. 2
The Hochhausscheiben with building A
in the foreground. Hühne, 02.–03.05.2016.

Fig. 3
Detail of the façade of Hochhausscheibe A.
The author, 12.07.2018.

Fig. 4
Insertion of the module.
The author, 26.06.2019.

The buffet no longer distracts enough from the fact that the module moves less smoothly than hoped. Not only the investor depends on the module fitting in, so do all the present actors involved in or supporting the project.
field notes, 26.06.2019   → fig. 4

Vignette #A, B, C, E: (Time is) Moving in Circles

During a group discussion at Halle's city administration, it turns out that they feel set back as, while no one has so far progressed beyond conceptual planning, it is not the first attempt to 'bring' the empty Hochhausscheibe A–E to redevelopment and not the first that risks failing or that has actually failed. On a Thursday morning in February 2020, some of the city administration employees in Halle (Saale) laughed during my presentation of some findings of my research on past planning for the empty Hochhausscheiben A–E].

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw the team leader making circling movements with her hand holding a pencil. For a moment, the laughs and the circling confused me: was what I was saying boring or repetitive? After I finished my presentation, one of the planners said:

I find it interesting [...], but also depressing how it all repeats itself. [note: several people laugh] – well (loudly) – it's still always the same when you see that the topics have actually been discussed for 30 years [...] – so somehow that is totally interesting and somehow the point we are at today is similar to perhaps 20 years ago.
And another participant added:

indeed, it is now almost another, another step in the circle, since we met last time. In fact, the developments actually indicate at the moment that we will at least make the next round.
group discussion, 06.02.2020   → fig. 5

Vignette #E: What can we do Here?

In an email in 2004, a city planner wrote to her colleagues that Scheibe E had become an 'object of speculation' that 'constantly changes hands and is mostly bought out in a foreclosure sale. The open space around it also belongs to a dubious private company that cannot be reached in any way.' The city administration was overwhelmed with the many purchase transactions in Halle, so that the planner's request that buyers and their intentions be examined went unheard. The relevant office replied that they had 30,000 transactions a year on their table. The planner therefore asked her colleagues: 'what can we do here?' and 'who is inviting the buyer to get a picture of the current situation?' (email, 08.06.2004).[2]

The owners of Scheibe E changed several times in the early 2000s. The company that had bought the building in 2001 filed for insolvency in 2002 and the building went into forced auction. When the city contacted the new owner, they answered on the phone: at the moment they had no time and in August there were company holidays in Bavaria. A planner commented cynically on the telephone transcript: 'how nice!' (22.07.2003). Afterwards, the investors could no longer be reached.

Coming from Halle's old town by tram along the central axis called 'Magistrale', the first thing you see is Hochhausscheibe E, adorned with a huge banner announcing that the building is 'for sale'. The poster is getting on in years; it was put up by the owner in 2008 and still hangs here today, even though the building has changed hands many times in the meantime.   → fig. 6

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2   The email is part of the archive of the urban planning department of the city administration of Halle (Saale). The archive has not yet been transferred to the city's municipal archives, so there are no official file numbers for the documents. Quoting from them, I will throughout this work indicate for each case the type of document (e.g. email, letter, minutes) and the date. All documents are written in German and translated by the author. For the handling of the documents, see also the description of methods later in the introduction.
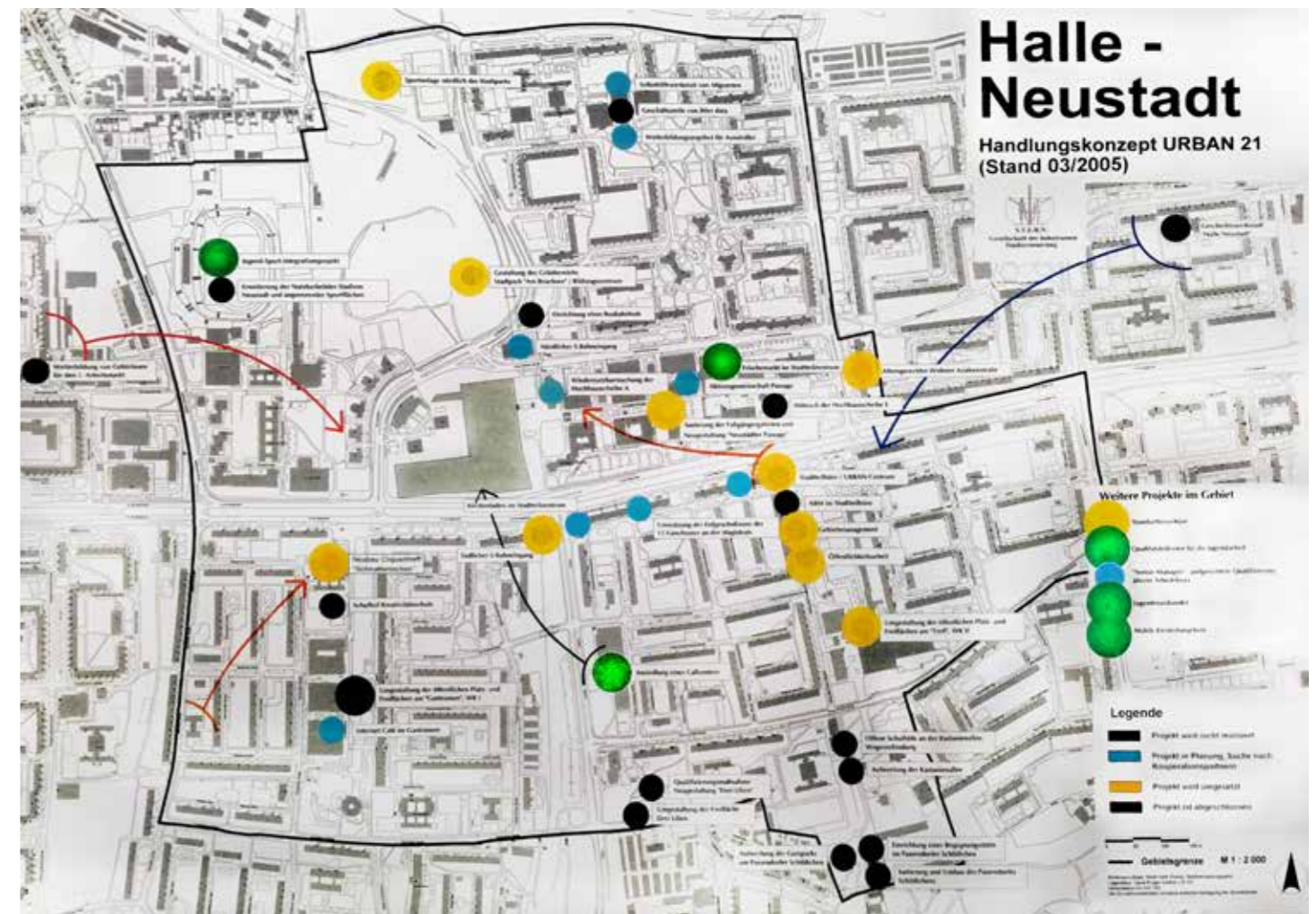
Fig. 5

Fig. 6

Fig. 5
Plans to reuse
Hochhausscheibe A and demolish
Scheibe E from the early 2000s failed,
as many other plans
after them. Concept by Schultz
for the City of Halle, working status
03/2005.
Source: Halle City Administration.

Fig. 6
The 'for sale' sign had been hanging
on the façade of Scheibe E
since 2008. Hühne, 20.04.2016.

Vignette #B: **The Future to Come**

On 28 June 1998, a local newspaper *MZ* from Halle reported that Scheibe B had been sold. The article states:

> The high-rise building in Halle-Neustadt known as 'Scheibe B' has a
> new owner. A buyer from southern Germany acquired the nineteen-
> storey building yesterday evening for 1,050,000 marks, a spokesperson
> for the Treuhand-Liegenschaftsgesellschaft (TLG)[3] told the MZ [...]
> It was not possible to find out last night what the new owner plans to
> do with 'Scheibe B'. In GDR times, the high-rise building served as a
> workers' hostel in Halle-Neustadt. Today, however,
> it is mostly vacant and awaits comprehensive renovation.
> <u>MZ</u>, 25.06.1998   → fig. 7

Hochhausscheibe A–E

The situations compiled here are situations from the life of an ensemble of high-rise buildings that are the object of study of my research project. The vignettes hint at what this work will be about. They indicate that the future of the vacant buildings is uncertain and open, but that a future is being struggled for. They also indicate that this process is a difficult one in which time seems to go round in circles, owners are unreachable and the buildings seem to resist a future. City planners in particular have kept asking themselves: what can we do here?

In the following section, I will briefly introduce the buildings and situate them spatially and historically before presenting my research questions and going into why it is interesting to study them and how I do so in this work.

The high-rise buildings with the simple names A, B, C, D and E are located in Halle-Neustadt, a district of Halle (Saale). With almost 250,000 inhabitants, Halle is the most populous city in the eastern German state of Saxony-Anhalt. Halle-Neustadt, numbering around 47,000 inhabitants in 2022, was built as the socialist model city 'Halle-West' mainly for the workers of the local chemical industries as an independent city. It has therefore also been called 'Chemical Workers' City'. Halle-Neustadt was incorporated into the city of Halle after German reunification in 1990.   → fig. 8
In the plans for Neustadt, the Hochhausscheiben were meant to provide a vertical frame to the otherwise rather flat functional buildings and facilities and to create a concentration in the centre by combining living and working. They are located north of and at right angles to the main axis running through Halle-Neustadt from east to west, the so-called Magistrale. The Magistrale encloses the centre to the south, while the buildings enclose it to the east and north.   → fig. 9; 10

The buildings owe their name to their shape. The term 'Hochhausscheiben' describes the fact that the buildings are slim and tall, constituting an ensemble of buildings standing close and parallel to each other as if they had just been cut apart: 'Hochhaus' is the German word for high-rise building, while 'Scheibe' literally means slice.   → fig. 11; 12

The buildings are tall and long, but narrow in width (around 58 m long and 17 m wide). Four of them line up parallel to each other; the fifth, Scheibe E, stands slightly offset. They were built in an industrial monolithic construction, and each consists of 18 floors plus ground floor.

The centre of Halle-Neustadt can be traced back to designs by Joachim Bach, among others, deputy chief architect of the chemical workers' city and his team. They were all members of the 'office of the chief architect' Richard Paulick, a graduate of the Bauhaus, who had been summoned to Halle to

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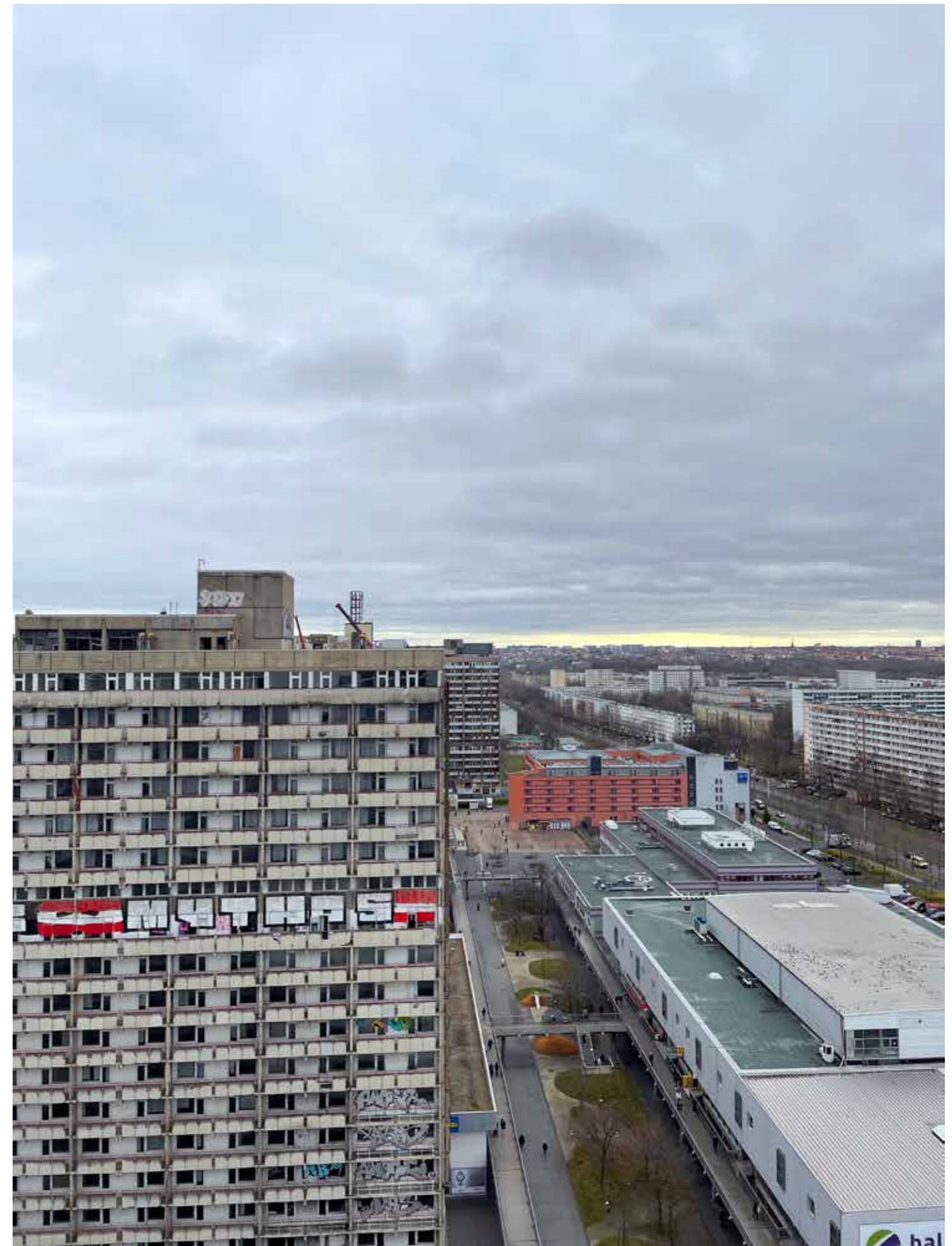
3   The Treuhand was the institution that organized the privatization of state-owned companies and combines after German reunification in 1990. The subsidiary responsible for real estate was founded in 1991. The mandate of the federally owned real estate company was to reorganize land ownership in the new German federal states in accordance with the principles of the social market economy. It was responsible for the 'privatization, utilization, management and development of real estate and former public properties' (Oschmann & Raab, 2002, p. 463).

Fig. 7

Fig. 7
Hochhausscheibe B.
The author, 01.12.2021.

Fig. 11
The Hochhausscheiben A–E.
Dorenkamp, 1974.
Source: Bauverein Halle & Leuna,
Geschichtswerkstatt.

Fig. 12
Halle-Neustadt centre.
Dormitory "B" west view, 1971.
VE(B) Wohnungsbaukombinat
Halle. Source: Halle City Archive.

Fig. 12

Fig. 11
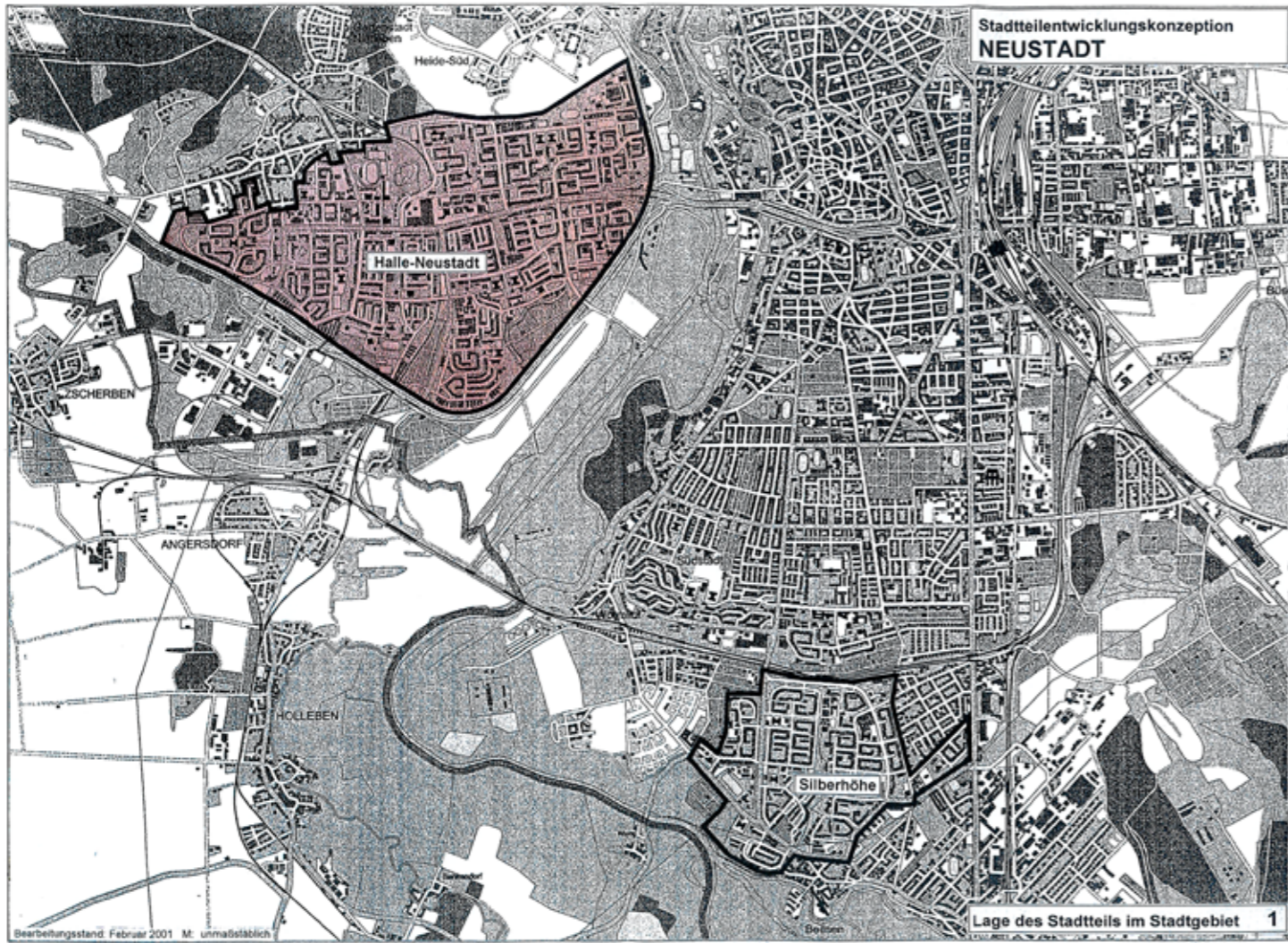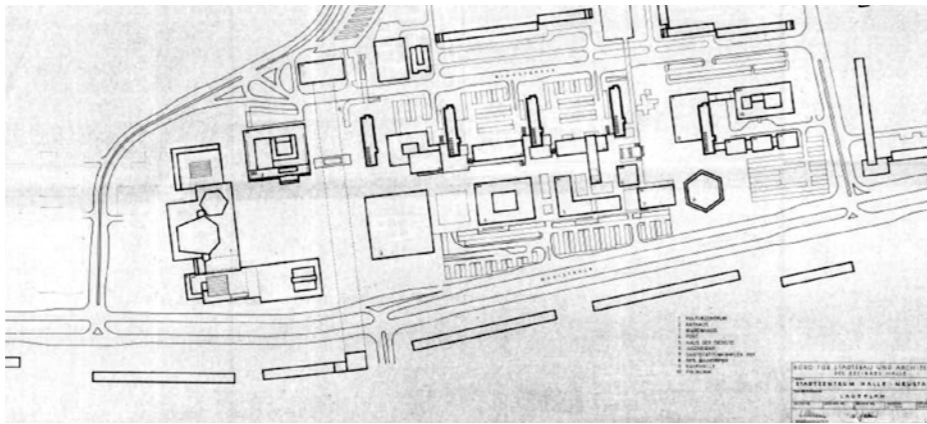
Fig. 10

Fig. 8
Map of Halle (Saale) and
Halle-Neustadt.
Source: Schultz for the city of Halle,
(Neuordnungskonzept für
den Stadtteil Halle-Neustadt, 2001).

Fig. 9
Site plan of Halle-Neustadt's Centre.
Office for Planning and Architecture,
1970. Source: Halle City Archive.

Fig. 10
Figure-ground diagram of today's
centre with the Hochhausscheiben.
Schönborn Schmitz Architekten,
2018.
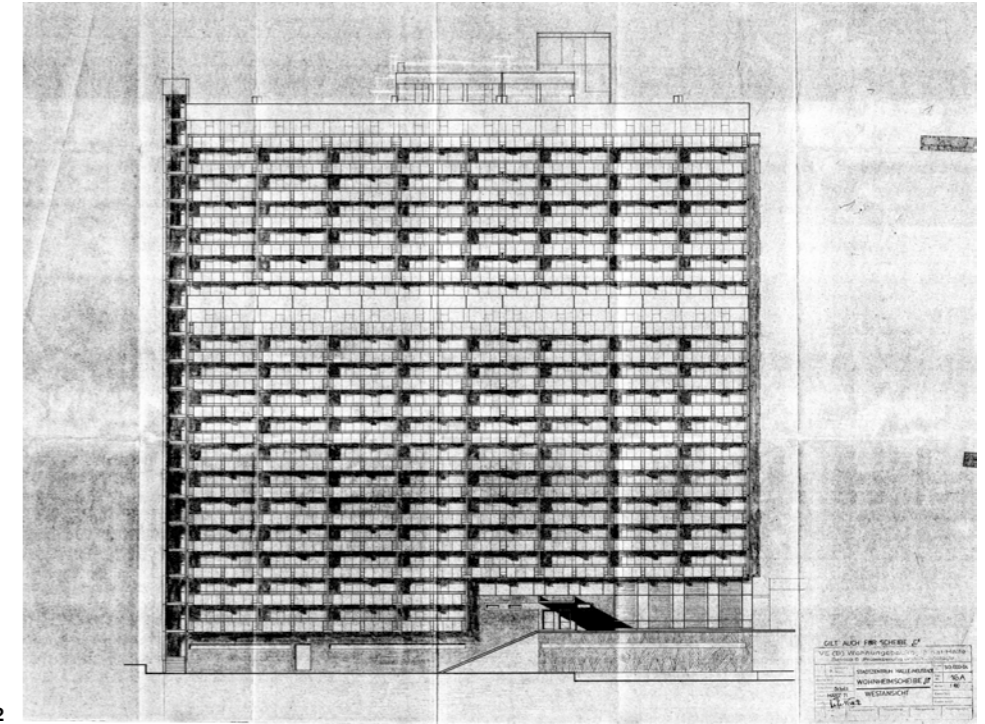
to promote innovative building, scientific expertise and the visibility of Halle-Neustadt. From 1963, his employees (1963/64–1968) and then his fewer known successors took over and were responsible for the planning and implementation of the high-rise buildings.

Architect Bach remembered in 1993 that Halle-Neustadt was meant not only to express socialist ideals but also to be differentiated from a capitalist, western city. For the centre, this meant that, while in western cities, city centres were characterized from the 1960s by an expansion of the tertiary sector, with the construction of large department stores, banks and office buildings, here it was meant to be multi-functional and explicitly also residential. The original plans for the centre of Halle-Neustadt included cultural institutions and a visible dominance of the economy in the form of a skyscraper that was to be called 'Hochhaus der Chemie'. The residential function, as Bach wrote, 'was also to find visible expression in the originally four, later five, Hochhausscheiben, which were designed as dormitories for single people, students and those who were only there temporarily' (Bach, 1993, p. 24).

The initial concept for the centre of Neustadt, developed in an urban design competition, was, however, only partially realized and considerably modified. This has been explained as a result of the regime facing economic constraints and the changing priorities of the political elite. Bach writes about the construction of Halle-Neustadt:

> Everything was dominated by the responsibility for the progress of construction and the associated constant pressure of deadlines. There was hardly any time for fundamental discussions. The problems of construction were the subject of discussion – not the idea. The city was not discussed, it was built.
> (Bach, 1993, p. 33; own translation)

Not realized in the centre, for example, was the prominent tower, and the constructed pedestrian passage that connects the Hochhausscheiben also strongly deviated from the concept (Bach, 1993, pp. 29–30). Instead of the two-level galleries, the pedestrian areas were now at the level for delivery and parking, and two-storeyed business buildings were constructed between the high rises (Bach, 1993, p. 31). 'The grand gesture,' as Bach writes, 'remained a fragment' (Bach, 1993, p. 32; own translation). Fahr and Hagenau equally note that 'the plan for the centre always remained a plan, as the centre of Halle-Neustadt seems to be cursed' (Fahr & Hagenau, 1994; own translation). → fig. 13

In contrast to other planned volumes for the centre of Halle-Neustadt, the Hochhausscheiben were realized. The first Hochhausscheibe to be built was Scheibe E, after an agreement had been signed between the City Council and one of the local chemical works (Buna) that it would be used as a single persons' dormitory for the workers of the chemical works. 'The dormitory accommodates employees of the Buna chemical works who have to live away from their families during the week or for a longer period of time. The room programme was adapted to the different functional needs,' reads the Explanatory Report on the buildings' construction (VE (B) Wohnungsbaukombinat Halle, 1970, p. 2). Building B equally served as a dormitory for workers, while Scheibe A and C served as dormitories for students and Scheibe D comprised housing offices.

In the GDR, workers' dormitories were boarding school-like accommodation for single working people who were either working temporarily (on assembly) at another place of work or who could not yet get their own flat because of the general housing shortage. They were also used to house foreign contract workers and were usually attached to a company. Building E included 3-, 2- and 1-bed rooms of different sizes (between 11 and almost 20m²), organized in groups with 6 or 10 people sharing sanitary facilities. Mini flats with a 2-bed room were also integrated. In total, there was space for 52 people per floor (VE (B) Wohnungsbaukombinat Halle, 1970, p. 5). Each floor included a kitchenette equipped with electric cookers, refrigerators and food cupboards. Functional rooms such as laundry rooms, offices, infirmary, recreation rooms for craftsmen, cleaning staff and the office of the home's director were located on the first floor (VE (B) Wohnungsbaukombinat Halle, 1970, pp. 5–6). → fig. 14; 15

Fig. 13
City centre. Bird's eye view of the entire complex according to the concept developed until 1970.
Source: Schlesier et al., 1972, p. 114.

Fig. 14
Hochhausscheibe E, south view.
VE(B) Wohnungskombinat Halle, 1970.
Source: Halle City Archive.
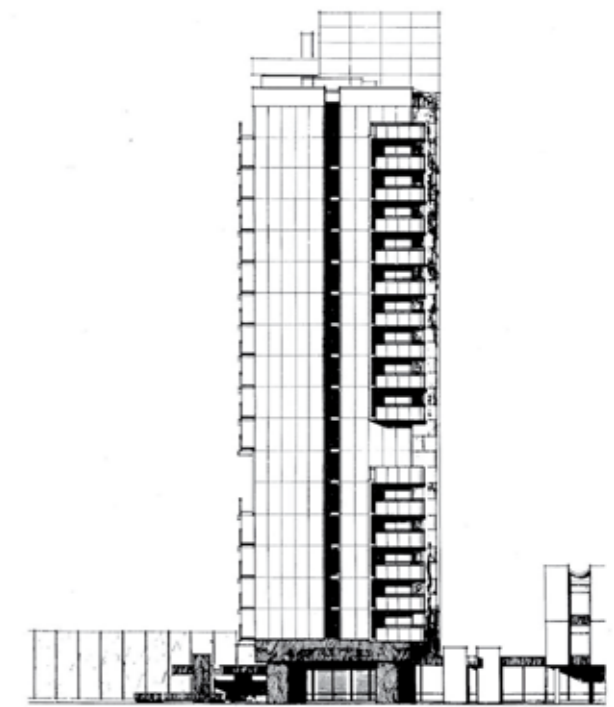
Fig. 14   Südansicht   August 1970

Fig. 13
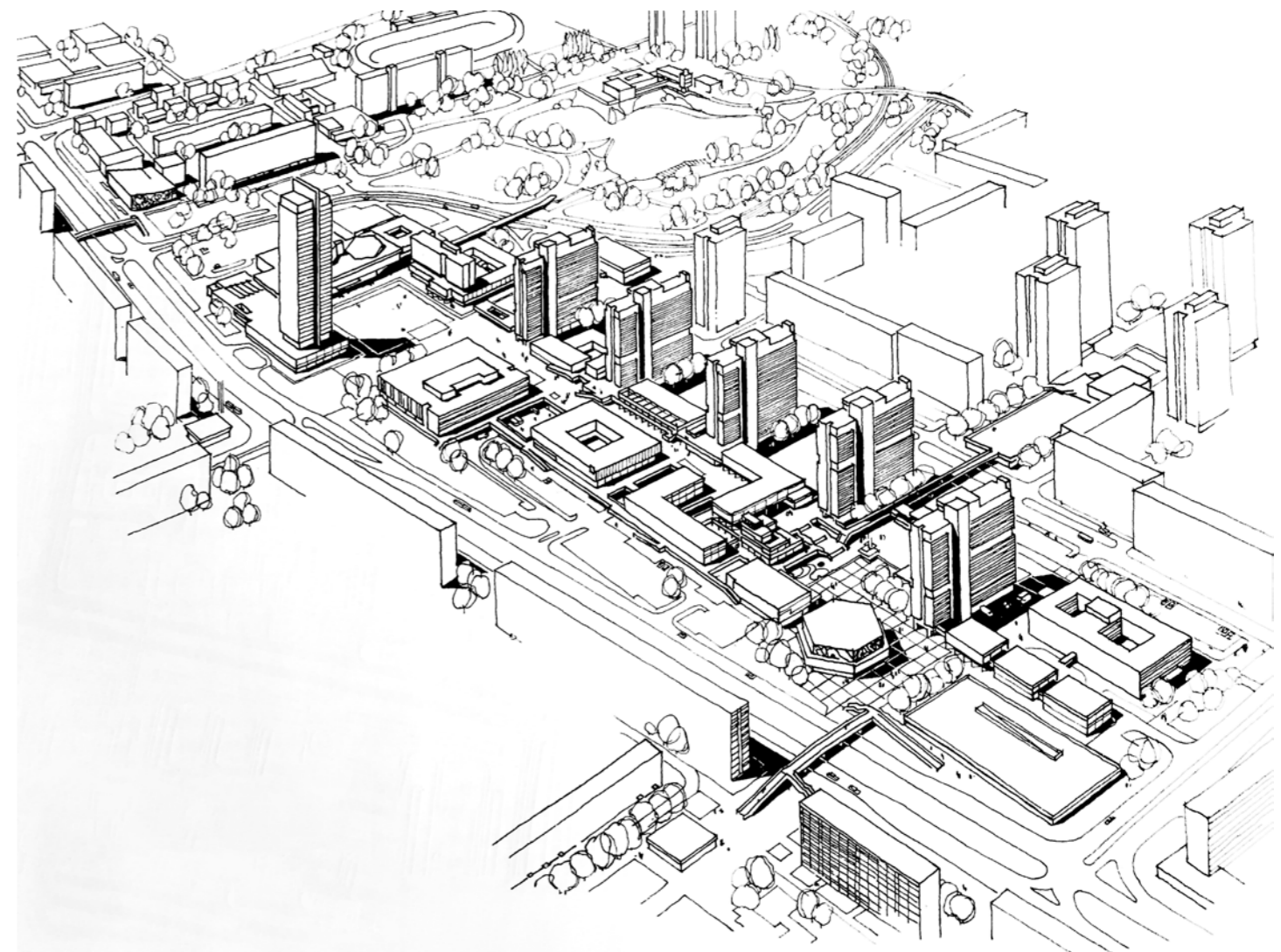
Fig. 15
Halle-Neustadt Centre. Dorenkamp, 1972.
Source:
Bauverein Halle & Leuna, Geschichtswerkstatt.

Fig. 16
Newspaper article on the opening of the Hochhausscheibe E, (Liberal-Demokratische Zeitung, 1971).
Source: Halle City Archive.
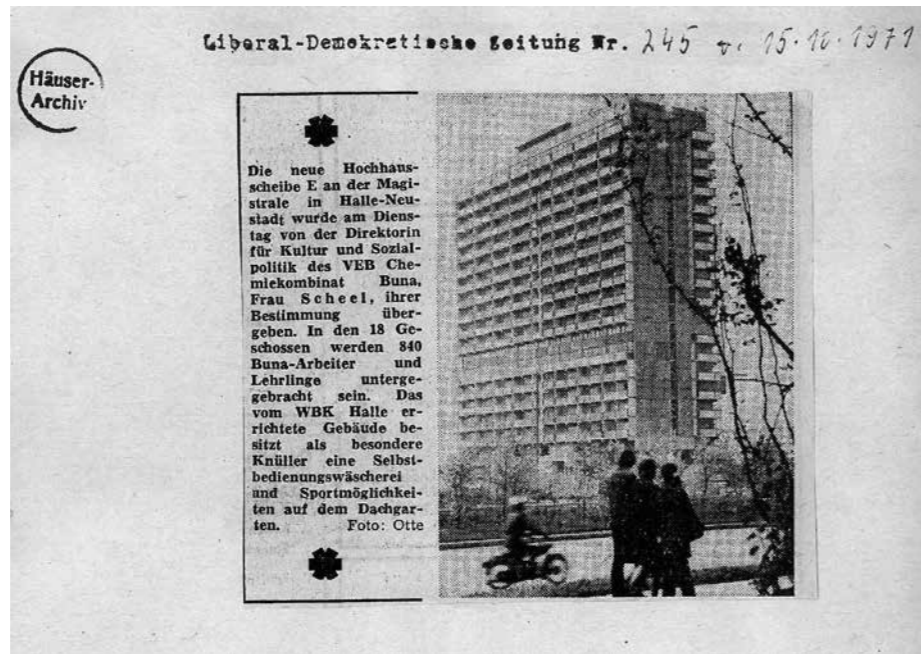
Fig. 16

Fig. 15

In 1971, Scheibe E was proudly opened with an opening ceremony. The article on the opening states:

> The new Hochhausscheibe E on the Magistrale in Halle-Neustadt was handed over to its intended use on Tuesday by the director for culture and social policy of the VEB Chemiekombinat Buna, Mrs Scheel. The 18 storeys will house 340 Buna workers and apprentices. The building, constructed by WBK Halle, has a self-service laundry and sports facilities on the roof garden as special treats.
>
> Liberal-Demokratische Zeitung, 1971 → fig. 16

Over the next two years, the other high rises were completed and put into use.
The political upheavals happening around twenty years later were to have a radical impact on the purpose and use of the buildings. In the wake of German reunification in 1990, far-reaching transformations changed the organization of Halle-Neustadt and also raised fundamental questions about ownership and who should maintain, use and decide on the future of the built environment. In 1993, researchers examining the economic, social, spatial and political reorganization of Halle-Neustadt saw major problems 'in functional, technical and aesthetic areas and in the lack of employment and social infrastructure' (Projektgesellschaft mbH Dessau, 1993; own translation).[4] At the same time, they highlighted the advantages of 'a good supply of mass transportation, open spaces and kindergartens, the vicinity of the centre of Halle and the good mixture of social classes'. 'Potential,' as they write in a report, 'is to be found in a well-defined ownership, in the possibility of densification and in the inhabitants' basically positive attitude towards their estate.' In the following years, Halle-Neustadt's population decreased dramatically. What had been built as an independent city for the workers of chemical industries, providing housing for almost 90,000 inhabitants at its peak, was facing an outflow of inhabitants, leaving up to 22 per cent of the housing stock vacant (Fachbereich Einwohnerwesen, Fachbereich Planen, 2018; Stadt Halle (Saale), 2017, p. 324).[5]

While the construction and management of housing had been controlled by the state under socialism, after 1990 the housing stock of Halle-Neustadt was 'marketized' in several stages (Bernt et al., 2017, p. 560). First, and immediately after German reunification, the stock was transferred to the ownership of municipal housing companies and cooperatives. These commercial enterprises were closely linked to the city in terms of personnel and management. In a second step, they were forced by law to sell about one-sixth of their stock to private so-called 'in-between-purchasers' in order to 'diversify' ownership structures in the large housing estates. From a commercial point of view, this step was not very successful, as Bernt et al. note. In fact, 'much of the stock ended up in insolvencies and under the control of the creditor banks' (Bernt et al., 2017, p. 560). In the following years, new globally acting financial owners 'acquired large chunks of insolvent or cut-price properties, using "leverage effects" to achieve quick profits' (Bernt et al., 2017, p. 560). According to Bernt et al., this marks a third privatization phase around the year 2000, after first municipal housing companies took over a large part of the building stock in Halle-Neustadt and then socalled 'in-between-purchasers'. The authors see the third phase as linked to the liberalization of property rights and low interest rates. According to them the new owners' 'business involved funneling capital into undervalued assets. For

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4   The research was conducted within the framework of the federally funded programme 'Experimental Housing and Urban Development' (ExWoSt), which still exists today. According to the supervising Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development (BBSR), the programme 'promotes innovative planning and measures on important urban development and housing policy topics in the form of research fields, studies, initiatives and model projects' (BBSR, ExWoSt, n.d.). Between 1991 and 1996, a research project entitled 'Urban development of large new housing estates' was funded that included a study on Halle-Neustadt, in the framework of which urban development concepts were developed in 'prefabricated housing estates' in the new federal states and East Berlin (BBSR, Städtebauliche Entwicklung großer Neubaugebiete, n.d.). The reports quoted here are, as far as I know, unpublished. I found a folder with reports and collected documents, including newspaper articles, in the archive of the city planning office of the city of Halle.
5   At the peak of the population loss between 1996 and 2001, Neustadt lost 28% of its residents. Since the end of the 1990s, the population losses have been accompanied by rapidly developing housing vacancies, with a peak rate of 22% (7,500 units) by mid-2003. The rates differed in different parts of Neustadt, ranging between almost 28 and 19% (Stadt Halle (Saale), 2017, p. 324).

them, property acquisitions were not seen as a long-term business activity, but as part of a portfolio striving for maximizing revenue in the short to medium term (Bernt et al., 2017, p. 560).

The Hochhausscheiben were not all privatized immediately after what is referred to in German as 'Wende', meaning literally 'u-turn' and describing the collapse of the GDR and the subsequent reunification of Germany, and none was transferred to municipal housing companies. Scheiben E and D changed hands as early as 1991, while Scheiben A and B were auctioned off at the end of the 1990s. Scheibe C was sold by the state of Saxony-Anhalt, to which the building had been transferred, to a private owner only in 2015 after reunification. However, with the exception of building D, which was bought by private investors and renovated as an office tower in the 1990s and has been used as such ever since, all the buildings lost their initial use around the year 2000. This point in time is similar to what Bernt et al. describe as the third phase of privatization in Halle-Neustadt. → fig. 17 Twenty-five years after the Hochhausscheiben were built, the buildings had lost their uses and from now on, in the words of the Geschichtswerkstatt employee quoted in the first vignette above, they were left 'hanging in the air'. The vignettes give an impression of the life of the buildings over recent decades. This was and is, as becomes tangible here, characterized by great uncertainty as to the future of the buildings, but the vignettes also bear witness to the fact that possible futures were repeatedly sought.

When I first encountered the buildings in 2018, they had not only stood unrenovated and with an uncertain future, but had also witnessed more than 20 years of searching for possible futures for them. → fig. 18; 19

Fig. 18

Fig. 19

Fig. 17

Fig. 17
Overview with dates on privatization, vacancy and current situation for each of the buildings. The author, 2021.

Fig. 18
Development Concept; analysis: functions of the centre. For the Hochhausscheiben, it finds (in blue): 'vacancy' (Scheibe E partly vacant, flower shop on the ground floor, Scheibe C vacant, kitchen studio on the ground floor). Schultz for the city of Halle, working status 12/1999.

Fig. 19
Hochhausscheibe A–E in 2018. Hühne, 06.04.2018.

How Come the Buildings Stayed (that way)?

My work starts from the moment when the search for possible futures for the buildings began – a process that has continued during the years of my research between 2018 and 2022. The aforementioned architect Bach assumed in 1993 that enormous challenges would face political decision-makers, urban planners and architects in dealing with present and future social and structural problems of Halle-Neustadt (Bach, 1993, p. 38). In fact, the future of Halle-Neustadt and the Hochhausscheiben was unclear and uncertain, and remain so today. But the buildings have remained and they have remained vacant. It is the staying, non-linear paths, possible futures and the conditions of (im)possibility that are the subject of this work that is interested in the interplay of buildings, planning and urban transformation.

Paying Attention to Things that Stay

Why might it be relevant and interesting to study what contributed to the fact that the high-rise buildings A–E in the centre of Halle-Neustadt have remained and not been renovated? First, in practical and academic discussions on East German urban transformation after 1990, little attention has previously been paid to areas and individual buildings located between demolition and development, between plan and realization (Beer, 2002, p. 53). An exception here is Weszkalny's work on Berlin's Alexanderplatz, which planners referred to her as 'a *Platz im Wartestand*: a place caught in the moment of waiting for the better future to come' (Weszkalnys, 2007, p. 222).

Mostly, when the built environment is addressed, it is in connection with conflicts over the symbolic meaning of architecture. Another focus is analyses of East German urban policies and in particular of the prorgamme 'Stadtumbau Ost' ('Urban Restructuring East'). One of the funding priorities of these programmes was demolition, often seen as a 'one size fits all' solution to the complex problems in East German cities after 1990. In fact, after the establishment of the national urban development programme Urban Restructuring East in 2001, more than 270 municipalities with a vacancy rate of over 15 per cent in their housing stock 'reworked planning schemes in a very short period of time and made the demolition of vacant buildings their prime urban development goal' (Bernt, 2009, p. 763). Among these was the city of Halle where in the area of Neustadt around 5,000 residential units – one-seventh of the stock – were demolished between 2001 and 2017. The vacancy level had been reduced significantly to a still above-average rate of 13 per cent by 2017, most of it in privately owned housing blocks (Stadt Halle (Saale), 2017, p. 324).

Things that remained have so far been pointed out mainly in connection with governance issues (Bernt, 2009, p. 761; Grunze, 2017, p. 138; Haase et al., 2018, p. 197). Bernt shows that urban restructuring emerged as a 'random process', as the willingness and interest of owners to demolish their properties with the help of state subsidies was spatially unevenly distributed. As Bernt notes, 'the spatial fragmentation of conditions and interests leads to an asymmetrical pattern of demolitions that has little to do with following a spatial master plan' (Bernt, 2009, p. 764). To consider the built environment not only as resulting from policies, but to take it as starting point, seems promising for understanding East German urban transformation and the complex reality in particular places (cf. McFarlane, 2008, pp. 1–2).

My first impulse for researching the Hochhausscheiben was that they appear to be an 'obstacle' to planning for Neustadt and Neustadt's future (Ringel, 2018, p. 70). No urban planning in Neustadt can get past them, but they seem to have defied all planning and, as mentioned above, are hard to miss, due to their central location and their size. Even from one of the heights around the old town of Halle, they appear on the horizon. In addition, their increasingly decaying state is seen as an obstacle to the development of the area. The buildings have become a controversy, part of an unfinished and maybe also unfinishable project of urban development and central in attempts to integrate the district of Halle-Neustadt into the city of Halle (group discussion, 06.02.2020). But how come they were never demolished or renovated?

Secondly, the question seems conceptually relevant. It follows on from fruitful debates at the nexus of STS and actor–network theory and urban studies, where the role of materiality for change and as an obstacle to urban change has been addressed under the concepts of 'obduracy' and 'resistance'.

The question concerning 'obduracy' was first posed in relation to globalization and the spread of the internet and communication technology and against a dominant perspective in social sciences that highlighted fluidity and change. Against this backdrop, Law asked:

> If everything is process, everything is change, if everything is flow, then how come so much stays in place? How is it that through those flows some kind of quasi-stability is secured? Some kind of obduracy is assured? Certain kinds of distributions of productivity seem, hegemonically, to sustain themselves? (Law, 2003, p. 3)

Recognizing that the world is indeed changing rapidly, he nevertheless finds: 'But. But, and. Though everything changes, also it remains the same' (Law, 2003, p. 3) and turns towards obduracy.

Socio-Material Limits to Possibility

Law's concerns should be understood in relation to the fact that scholars of social constructivism in the mid-1980s 'temporarily started to neglect the obdurate, resistant character of technology'; anything seemed possible and there has been little space 'left for exploring the social and technical limits to what is indeed possible' (Hommels, 2005, p. 330).

Law was one of the scholars contributing to a reopening of the perspective, facilitating the study of obduracy (Hommels, 2005, p. 330). He understands obduracy as emerging from the delegation of social relations into materiality. Furthermore, according to Law,

> it is achieved in part by virtue of the fact that there is no such thing as a purely social relation. (Though we also need to be cautious here, and not to slip into a version of technological determinism. It is not that objects – such as machines – have a form which holds willy-nilly. They have a form but that form is no more than an effect of the network of relations into which they are inserted, and which they then help to produce.) (Law, 2003, p. 4).

Drawing on such a perspective, obstacles are always social and material, stable and fragile; they are able both to stabilize and destabilize the social through its capacity of showing 'obduracy' (Hommels, 2005; Law, 2003) that is itself to be understood as being the effect of relations rather than an intrinsic quality (Law & Mol, 1995, p. 274).

Questions of obduracy are, as Hommels highlights, especially interesting when thinking about the urban and the built environment. Hommels finds that

> despite the fact that cities are considered to be dynamic and flexible spaces, numerous examples illustrate that it is very difficult to radically alter a city's design: once in place, urban structures become fixed, obdurate. As a consequence, urban artifacts that are remnants of earlier planning decisions, the logic of which is no longer applicable, may prove to be annoying obstacles for those who aspire to bring about urban innovation (Hommels, 2005, p. 323).

Obduracy, according to Hommels, plays a role for 'conceptualizations of the process that involve the negotiations and attempts at undoing the sociotechnical status quo in a city, changing the taken-for-grantedness of its reality' (Hommels, 2005, p. 324). In this sense, questions of 'obduracy' are of great importance not only for urban practitioners, but also for theoretical debate (Hommels, 2005, p. 323). In a socio-technical and socio-material perspective that I equally propose for this study,

materiality has agency, but only when embedded in and connected to other elements (see, for example, Law & Mol, 1995). After Hommels, several authors have also studied how, in attempts to change buildings, these resisted change as both humans and non-human things posed resistance toward each other (Beauregard, 2015, p. 541). One example is Yaneva's study of the renovation process of a historical building in Vienna, which shows how buildings resist and make the renovation process change many times as they 'surprise'. Studying the process of architecture and its '"renovation in the making"' (Yaneva, 2008, p. 10), Yaneva finds the building 'affords, surprises, renders possible, suggests, facilitates, and influences other actors and possible actions' (Yaneva, 2008, p. 18) and thus makes actors reconsider their actions. In Beauregard's study of a museum building in New York, the obduracy of the building stands in the way of its own future as it resists being adapted. In the case of the building he studies, architects successfully 'blame' particular features of the building for being un-changeable, making its demolition an obvious necessity (Beauregard, 2015). And Jacobs et al. note for the Red Road housing complex in Glasgow, for example, '[S]teel and asbestos in partnership with social others operated as the collective that stabilised Red Road and held it together, albeit provisionally, as a viable, safe housing solution' (Jacobs et al., 2007, p. 619). The authors also trace how these stable entanglements and materials become destabilized, 'transforming Red Road from a widely supported housing fact into a more fragile and vulnerable socio-technical entity' (Jacobs et al., 2007, p. 619). The building complex studied here was eventually demolished after what held it together desintegrated. What the works listed here show is that it is complex socio-material assemblages that keep buildings alive, enabling them to resist change, or make them disappear.

In line with such approaches and hoping to contribute to them through the study of buildings for which there is no renovation project and which have not been demolished, the question *What contributes to the fact that the buildings have been neither demolished nor renovated?* is then one of the questions guiding my explorations in this work.

Possible Futures Un/Made?

The main activity in the encounter with the buildings was to make futures for them – that is, to think, design, discuss, decide, negotiate what could be done with them. I made this observation quite early in my research process when I came across numerous documents, as well as statements of involved actors bearing witness to the range of *possible futures* that have been made but have never materialized. Besides the fact that the buildings became an obstacle, I realized that the buildings have become and continue to be 'objects of debate and consideration' (Ringel, 2018b, p. 70).

This observation led me to wonder *what possible futures have been and are being made for the buildings and how these are made*. I consider it necessary to understand how possible futures are made in order to understand the workings of the elements that have contributed to the buildings not having been demolished or renovated. Therefore, I moved from the question of why the Hochhausscheiben are still (vacant) to a 'how' question that addresses modalities and practices. Such a move is typical for actor–network theory (ANT), which 'contends that understanding *why* a particular arrangement has come to be as it is can only be understood through illustrating *how* it has come to be' (Müller, 2015b, p. 68).

According to Latour, ANT is interested in the actual processes of '[t]he "making" of any enterprise – films, skyscrapers, facts, political meetings, initiation rituals, haute couture, cooking' (Latour, 2005, p. 89). For buildings, we may thus assume with Jacobs et al. that they are 'always in process and part of a socio-technical realm of practice, which is both quotidian and routine but also always political and power laden and potentially spectacular […]. A building is always being "made" or "unmade", always doing the work of holding together or pulling apart' (Jacobs et al., 2012, p. 128; see also Rose et al., 2010, p. 334). Scholars referring to ANT are emphasizing the *work* involved in assembling, in 'bringing elements into relation' (Rydin & Tate, 2016, p. 6) and aligning them well (Suchman, 2007, p. 366). Mol, for example, notes: 'For a technology to succeed, it must somehow interest financers, builders, users. In order for a network to form, associations have to be made. This is hard work' (Mol, 2010, p. 259). In line with such a perspective, I conceptualize the work needed to hold buildings and their networks together and to make and unmake building futures as 'practical activity' (Gherardi, 2012). The move towards the question of 'how' allows me to pay more attention to practices. It is grounded in the assumption that the ways possible futures are made will have an impact on what is thought and eventually realized (Dünckmann et al., 2019, p. 325).

My question as to why the Hochhausscheiben were neither demolished nor renovated was thus joined by a second when I discovered the numerous possible futures that have been un/made for the buildings: *how were and are possible futures for the Hochhausscheiben un/made?* What possible futures were thought of? Who were the actors involved? What practices characterize these processes? What do these say about how actors relate to the past, present and future? How do actors relate to one another? What is the relation between the potential and the conditions of possibility to actually realize possible futures?

The question of how possible futures were made is relevant because it puts the focus on the role of the future for the being and becoming of buildings on the one hand, and on the conditions of the possible as they are shaped in relation and in the work of relating on the other hand.

Making the Future in the Present

Possible futures, as I understand them, are perceived options for action and forms of dealing with the buildings that have been proposed, considered and discussed as possibilities during the process of searching for a future for the Hochhausscheiben. I will define possible building futures as use-related, form-related, or management-related visions for one or more of the high rises. As I will find, visions for one or more buildings relate to diverse and larger anticipated futures, such as demographic or economic change. The question of how possible futures are un/made relates my research to recent attempts to understand the role of the future for the present and the practices of relating to and acting on the future across disciplines.

Time and especially the future have gained new attention across disciplines, including anthropology, human geography, sociology and even history in recent years. On the one hand, this is because it has long been neglected in the study of the social, but the increased interest can also be explained by a sense of uncertainty that is reinforced today (Alexander & Sanchez, 2018b, p. 4). Addressed in newer research is 'how we know and, more specifically, how to gauge and act on unknown futures' (Alexander & Sanchez, 2018b, p. 4). Ways of relating to the future, (re-)acting on it in the present and practices of crafting, enabling and reclaiming time and the future (Ringel, 2014, p. 68) have thus gained new attention. As the geographer Anderson notes for our times, the present is often associated with the fact that the future is not only unknown but also 'unknowable' (Anderson, 2010, p. 793). What Anderson shows is how that unknowability is today part of the practices of anticipation and preparedness. That fact that the future is unknowable (and, as I will find out, unplannable) does not mean that people address the future less in their practice. Despite the high level of uncertainty and indeterminacy of both the present and the future, 'temporal agency' is encouraged rather than suppressed (Ringel, 2018b, p. 71). But these practices seem to have moved away from modern ways of knowing and acting on the future, in which the future did not necessarily turn out as expected but people still believed that it could be planned. Therefore, it seems relevant to study how actors relate to the future, what effects this has on their practices in the present and how they enact the future and act on it. I follow Abram here who finds that 'understanding how imagining the future, planning for the future, and acting on the future can tell us about life today' (Abram, 2017, p. 79).

Possible Futures and their Non-Realization

My research hopes to contribute to the study of the future in the present through a study of the practices of future-making over time and through a focus on the tension between future-making and the non-realization of these futures. The possible futures that were designed for the Hochhausscheiben have, as we know, not been realized. It is crucial to study these, to consider their making in relation to their unmaking, in order to understand the history of the Hochhausscheiben. Beyond a better un-

derstanding of these specific buildings, I also hope to gain a new perspective on relations between past, present and future in a specific time. In doing so, I would like to focus on the experiences and perspectives of urban planners from the Halle city administration who deal with the future of the Hochhausscheiben in their everyday work. Studying possible futures for the Hochhausscheiben from the past, I will predominantly explore how the future was met – that is, what planners did and what possibilities for the future they saw. I will be studying the paths taken by those involved in the search for possible futures for the Hochhausscheiben and how in their practice (or not) they brought futures closer to their materialization with the acquisition of new knowledge and with shifts or by shifting in the conditions of (im)possibility (Plourde, 2018, p. 179). The question of how possible futures have been and are being un/made thus also aims at how the conditions of (im)possibility are shaped.

Un/making Possible Building Futures in Planning

I assume that possible building futures are predominantly made in relation and in the work of relating times, spaces, and both human and non-human actors.

To examine how possible futures are un/made, I will therefore focus on a practice for which I assume 'aligning relations' (Marskamp et al., 2018, p. 3) to be at its heart and that I consider in general to be a future-oriented practice: urban planning (Abram & Weszkalnys, 2013a, p. 3).

Urban planners are involved in processes making the future for the Hochhausscheiben, as it is their job to work on the spatial organization and design of the city. But planners do not, of course, make futures in isolation; rather, they themselves are only one actor among many involved in the process. As Marskamp et al. state, 'planning identifies, projects, and aligns relations across the physical environment. These relations are formed between activities and buildings, or more generally planning relates *objects*' (Marskamp et al., 2018, p. 3; emphasis in original). At the same time, 'the relations between the *objects* of planning,' Marskamp et al. continue, 'are increasingly shaped by the adversarial, multiple, and heterogeneous relations inside the *practices* of planning' (Marskamp et al., 2018, p. 4; emphasis in original).

To increase the chances of realizing plans and achieving visible results, it is found that planning is generally concerned with securing unpredictable events and relations (Dünckmann et al., 2019, p. 323). However, it has been noted that '[r]elations are perhaps the most significant variable and the most magical, being fragile, vulnerable and difficult to describe' (Abram, 2011; as cited in: Dünckmann et al., 2019, p. 323).

While I will examine practices within the process of un/making of possible futures among planners, I will also investigate what capacities governmental planning has to relate people and things and to thus affect (Farías, 2016, p. 42) the becoming of the Hochhausscheiben and where the limits of such capacity lie. An important question will therefore be not only what connections planners draw, but also what the 'quality of relations' is and 'how agency is distributed' (Färber, 2014, pp. 121–122) among actors participating in the un/making of possible futures. The quality of the relations, how actors act on relations and are able to shift relations, what alliances are formed and can be formed will, I anticipate, have effects on the possibilities for building futures to (not) find a materialization.

Buildings on Standby:
How is their In-Between to be Understood?

The possible futures planned and designed for the buildings range from demolition of all or of individual buildings, different forms of their transformation and adaptation, partial demolition, or conservation. Demolition on the one hand and preservation on the other form, as I want to suggest, poles spanning a tensional in-between, in which the high-rise buildings move with the ideas and plans for their future.

As said before, possible futures in the making contribute to the fact that the buildings are still there and render an in-between of the buildings legitimate, as they indicate that there is or at least might be a future for the buildings. Possible futures are, however, '[s]ituated in a "not yet,"' and 'sometimes they are (re)assembled despite better knowledge, that is, "nonetheless"'(Färber, 2019, p. 267). As I suggest, we need to understand the Hochhausscheiben through expectations of redevelopment and postponed promises of redevelopment, through a living sequence of successful and failed concepts and designs (Latour & Yaneva, 2008, p. 8). Thinking back to the image from the beginning with the buildings hanging in the air (field notes, 23.07.2018), I assume that designing possible futures prevents the buildings from falling down, as they point to a future, while their non-realization in turn indicates that they were not anchored in the ground.

The metaphor of buildings hanging in the air is a very appropriate description of the status of the buildings. It shows that the buildings float, neither falling down nor being anchored in the ground – they are in between, neither on nor off, not-yet, stable and unstable at the same time. The image also inevitably makes us wonder what held them in the in-between. In order to understand their in-between analytically, I translate the buildings' in-between status into 'standby' – that is, into a mode in which 'on' and 'off' are 'merged into a simultaneous on-offness' (Kemmer et al., 2021, p. 1). Recently, standby has been identified as an 'ordinary *mode of organizing sociomaterial lifeworlds*' (Kemmer et al., 2021, p. 1; emphasis in original). As the editors of a special issue on the theme state, standby is commonly known from technology, describing an 'operating state in which energy continues to flow despite an apparent shutdown, thus allowing for sudden reactivation' (Kemmer et al., 2021, p. 1).

Besides technological devices, there is a range of professions, such as that of the fire brigade or the rescue service, from which a standby mode is also known. And it seems to be expanding to other and new areas today – let's think, for example, of suppliers of food or groceries in big cities who are waiting with their bicycles, smartphone in hand to take the next order. 'If we mobilize the concept as a lens through which to observe social phenomena,' Kemmer et al. note, 'standby can be understood as a state of "in|activity" that indicates readiness without immediate engagement, but that nevertheless requires and generates energy, resources, and relations' (Kemmer et al., 2021, p. 1). I value the fact that standby draws our attention to the energy that flows in such a mode – the practices and processes that sustain the in-between, and to the orientation of standby to what comes next (Kemmer et al., 2021, p. 15) as particularly important for the understanding of the Hochhausscheiben's in-between.

Coordinates of the In-Between

Understanding the buildings' in-between as 'standby' implies that the focus moves beyond the poles, and to characteristics of the in-between. It is not only the binary of demolition and preservation, but foremost the coordinates, modalities, practices and processes of the in-between that are to be the focus of my research and the questions presented above help me identify these. Furthermore, the notion of standby allows me to understand the buildings' in-between not just as the status of the buildings, but rather as an 'operating state' (Kemmer et al., 2021, p. 1) in networks within which the buildings form a 'network node' (Jenkins, 2002, p. 230). Whereas stabilizing networks of human and non-human actors which ensured the use fell apart and collectives disintegrated in the aftermath of the disintegration of the GDR, the buildings are not fully disconnected (Kemmer et al., 2021, p. 6). With the help of the notion of standby, we can understand that they are only seemingly 'switched off'. It makes us look for people and things, practices and processes that have prevented them from falling down. Since the buildings have become vacant, they have been an enduring 'problem' for which finding a 'solution' remains pending, especially for the people at the heart of my research – the planners from the city administration in Halle. The buildings are materiality that resists and must be taken care of and a symbol that provokes controversy. And there are those who do care and engage with possible futures for the buildings and we will see how they do so. If there were no more controversy, no more expectations, no more struggle, the buildings would become ruins that could not be reactivated, but would need to be reconnected entirely if anyone wanted to reuse them.

The notion of 'standby' will help me to organize and condense my findings, place my research in a larger frame and add analytical rigour to my project. While my research on the Hochhausscheiben will explore how standby manifests itself when it comes to buildings, I also wish to contribute through my project to the understanding of standby as an in-between mode. Bringing first existing conceptions of standby as a mode of socio-material organization (to be found predominantly in a special issue published on the theme in 2021 by Kemmer et al.) together with literature from various disciplines and research fields such as STS and, in particular, ANT, anthropology, urban studies, geography, planning, sociology and a range of sub-fields within and across these disciplines, I will develop an understanding of buildings on standby, starting from and at all times strongly committed to the Hochhausscheiben and what mattered to those engaging with them.

More than addressing one distinct discipline or research field, this thesis brings together different bodies of literature and hopes thereby to open up new perspectives at the nexus of buildings, planning and urban transformation.

'*Ah, here she is again*': Methodology and Methods

Following and Participating

My ethnographic research[6] is composed of a range of methods, including participant observation, interviews and ethnographic reconstruction, that allow me to follow and trace objects, processes and practices, rhythms and temporalities, as well as relations between all kinds of actors participating in standby. The method of 'following' actors and associations between them, introduced by ANT (Latour, 2005), has been widely used in recent years. For his early laboratory studies, Latour chose 'to become part of a laboratory, to follow closely the daily and intimate processes of scientific work, […] to follow in every detail what the scientists do and how and what they think' (Salk et al., 1986, p. 12). In a similar manner, Latour also followed the project for the transport system Aramis for Paris, believing that

> In order to follow a technological project, we have to follow simultaneously both the narrative program and the degree of 'realization' of each of the actions. For example, the rendezvous of Aramis' platoons is an action programmed at the time of Bardet's earliest ideas, but its degree of realization varies according to whether we go from the earliest discussions with Petit to the patents, to Matra's plans, to the Orly site, to the imprinting of the chips, to the reports on the experiments, or to the report on the end of Phase 0. Depending on the point at which we look into the action, the 'meeting of the branches,' we will have ideas, drawings, lines in a program, trains running before our eyes, statistics, seductive stories, memories of trains running before the eyes of our interlocutors, photos, plans again, chips again. (Latour, 2002, p. 81)

It was this understanding that things can only be fully revealed to us if we study the 'branches' and that objects of study take on different forms at different sites that shaped Latour's thinking. In *Reassembling the Social* (2005), Latour defines the aim of a 'sociology of associations' as to study '*translations between mediators that may generate traceable associations*' (Latour, 2005, p. 108; emphasis in original). Following actors, to trace the associations that an actor was affected by and affecting, was what he considered our main task as researchers (Müller, 2015b, p. 68).

6   In line with most ethnographic approaches as Atkinson and Hammersley characterize them, my work has a strong focus on 'exploring the nature' of a specific phenomenon rather than testing hypotheses; it works with '"unstructured" data' and open analytical categories; it furthermore studies only one case and is interested in the interpretations and meanings that actors give to their actions (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994, p. 248).

My research process is characterized by an open beginning and an increasing narrowing down, first in terms of the period studied (focusing on post-1990), actors (those participating in planning, and urban planners at Halle's city administration) and, finally, thematic focal points. On this path, I mainly followed the buildings, but also individual possible futures and transitions from one situation to the next, in order to capture rhythms and temporalities of processes. I followed practices of future-making through documents and practices in situ through participant observation. I also followed relations between actors to map out the networks in which the buildings are embedded and which constitute standby. And I zoomed in on individual relations and examined how they played out in a standby mode.

First of all, I followed the buildings along their 'trajectories of movement' (Ingold, 2010, p. 69) – that is, along 'thousands of moves, decisions, conflicts, actors, twists and turns' (Mommersteeg, 2018, p. 223). Following the buildings, I developed an understanding of the complexity and multitude of elements involved, but also of individual situations, rhythms and temporal relations that are decisive for their being and becoming.

From 2018, I started visiting the Hochhausscheiben and local archives and meeting all kinds of actors gathering around the buildings. I thus started with the 'large' field, which was added to later through in-depth research in a 'small field', as I will describe below (cf. Potthast, 2017, p. 91). I proceeded through interviews, researching policy documents and media articles and visiting archives. Researching archives mainly enabled me to understand the buildings' origins, while the online research provided an initial understanding of the processes of the decades of their vacancy. Interviews helped me to link the past with the present and to understand what was at stake if one was to think of what characterized the life of the Hochhausscheiben and their possible futures. As far as the interviews are concerned, I was mostly passed on as I always asked my interview partners for further contacts whom they could recommend or help me get in touch with. In addition, I myself contacted architects, investors, politicians, citizens, social workers and scientists whose names I had stumbled upon in publications and newspaper articles about the Hochhausscheiben. The twenty in-depth interviews lasted mostly between one and two hours and I kept the interviews open, although I always prepared questions that focused on a person's specific engagement and relationship with the buildings. I usually asked my interviewees about their own relation to the buildings, and what they thought were marking moments in the history of the high rises, as well as past and present plans and concerns. I met several of the interview partners twice. This was the case with the owner of Scheibe C, for example, but also with a local politician. In the case of the investor, I also took part in their planning meeting, met with the commissioned architects, and walked through the building with them.

Following can take a backward or forward direction; it can be a multi-sited ethnography or focused on one site, following a specific process or practice. Things are followed back to their origins in many recent 'studies that "follow-the-thing"' (Hulme, 2017, p. 157), but also in 'classics' such as Mintz's study on the place of sugar in history (Mintz, 1986). Such studies usually start from a product, and follow it back along its global production chains and the multiple production sites it has travelled before ending up at its site of consumption. Following forward, we would, for example, be able to study the extraction and multiple transformations of a resource into a final product. This would mean following things along the process of their making. Instead of multi-sited ethnography, it is also possible to study processes of making in a place in order to better understand a specific practice, as is the case with research inspired by pragmatism and actor–network theory, and this has been shown to be fruitful for the study of design and architectural practice (Ingold, 2010; Mommersteeg, 2018; Potthast, 2017; Yaneva, 2009).

I myself chose a place for my research where I could both trace and follow forward current processes. In retrospect, I was interested in how the buildings had remained standing and vacant for so long, and also in what had changed and made today's renovation projects possible. After the first interviews at Halle's planning department and the discovery of their archives, I decided to proceed with my research in the form of participant observation, taking on the role of an intern. Besides following the buildings, my aim was to follow possible building futures-in-the-making by studying in detail how urban planners engaged with the buildings in their everyday. The planning department became my 'small' field, where I conducted an ethnographic study to investigate processes of making and unmaking of possible futures, mainly through regular and consecutive conversations, participant

observations and the analysis of archival documents. Discovering the archives at Halle's city administration made me decide to focus on how possible building futures are made and unmade at this specific site – that is, the city planning office of the city of Halle. Here, I find the traces of possible futures and of processes of un/making possible futures in the form of plans, concepts, protocols and letters. While the processes involved many different and ever-changing actors, possible futures from the past seem to have found a place here where they came together and were kept. I will understand the archives at Halle's city administration as a materialization of standby. In fact, without these documents that testify to the processes of (un)making possible futures for the buildings, we wouldn't be able to understand that the buildings are 'on standby'. Throughout this work, I follow 'backwards' and 'forwards', interested in how the past and the future are made in the present, how possible futures for the buildings were made in the past and how they are made in the present, and at changing possibilities for these futures to materialize.

I completed my first internship of three weeks in June 2019. The planners and I agreed that my main task would be to look through the folders and plan rolls in their office. The documents filed here are protocols, letters, emails and newspaper articles, as well as plans and concepts that the staff members have filed in folders for the individual buildings (folder 'Scheibe A' etc.), the ensemble or the centre of Neustadt (e.g. 'Stadtzentrum Neustadt: Konzepte' etc.). Usually, though not always, these folders are arranged in chronological order; some are found twice and there are gaps in the chronology, but overall they are surprisingly dense. My focus of attention during my first internship was on concepts and plans that were designed for the buildings. I had considered the following questions for the concepts in advance: What was addressed in the concepts and plans – individual buildings, the ensemble or the pedestrian area surrounding the buildings? What was suggested? Which elements should continue/which should be demolished/which should be changed? Who were the actors involved (office, client, engineers, etc.)? When was it designed and what do I already know about the date and what further information do I need to understand the concept or plan? What was the 'function' of the concept/plan? Was the concept's feasibility (cost calculations, statics, etc.) considered? What and how were the present analysed and the futures suggested in these plans and concepts?

During my first internship, I got to know the department, its staff and spatial organization, their different tasks and how they shared these tasks among them, administrative procedures and rules. I took part in their morning coffee rounds and took notes from observations of their relationships with each other, hierarchies and individual roles, as well as on questions they encountered in everyday life and the topics they discussed in order to jointly identify solutions. The morning rounds, in particular, enabled them to stay up to date and share information from higher hierarchical levels of the administration and other departments, but also to exchange and strengthen their personal relations. Usually, we also went for lunch together, which gave me the opportunity to ask questions and enter into conversation with different team members beyond those I was mainly working with. The first internship mainly allowed me to get an overview, build trust with my informants and acquire an initial insight into their everyday work. I learned about the current projects for Scheiben A and C, administrative procedures and relations between politics and planning, how they differentiated what they did from other teams and what they thought were the major challenges in Halle's urban development. I also helped them with smaller tasks, such as evaluating a questionnaire in which citizens could express their concerns and wishes for the centre of Neustadt and their opinion on the city's current plans. However, my ability to actually participate in their practice was limited (see below). Mostly, I researched the documents and reported on what I had found. At the end of my stay, I gave them the Excel tables I had prepared and in which I had recorded the contents of the concepts and plans of possible futures through columns that distinguished between analyses of the present, proposed future, actors involved and date. After my first internship, I was in regular contact with the planners, who informed me by phone and email and during my shorter visits to Halle of usually 1–2 days about what they were currently working on, and what the status of the ongoing renovation projects on Scheibe A and Scheibe C was. Several months after my internship, I also presented these findings to them.

As I studied the concepts and plans, I became increasingly interested in the processes, especially the administrative processes, in which the possible futures are embedded. This interest arose above all from astonishment at how much had already been thought about, planned and decided, but also from the tension between these designed futures and their non-realization. For me, their non-re-

alization led to the question of what function concepts have, of what effects non-realization has on the process of searching for possible futures, on the temporality of the process and on networks. I became further interested in the role of urban planning for the conditions of the (im)possible and how they dealt with obstacles and gaps. For a second internship, my intention was to widen my view on the administrative processes and interactions in which the possible futures were embedded.

The second internship was delayed by a few months, partly because of the COVID-19 pandemic, and I finally conducted it from March to June 2021. The city planners asked me to fulfil three tasks: write a short text (about ten pages) on the history of the ensemble that they could use whenever needed for brochures, reports, etc.; research what I could find on Scheibe E as this was the building about which they had the least information to hand; and help them look through and sort all archival documents in their offices in preparation for their move into Scheibe A after its refurbishment, scheduled for summer 2021. For my part, I had formulated the following questions to guide my research during the internship: How does administrative planning plan? What are the predominant practices, and how are they organized? How do they develop criteria for public action? What references are important to them (scalar or spatial, actor, temporal …)? My main objective was to gain a deeper understanding of their practices, what they thought and did in relation to the Hochhausscheiben. I planned to approach these questions through their archives and through observation. Due to the pandemic, possibilities of observing their practice in detail turned out to be limited. While they were working on site, they didn't meet for coffee in the morning (or at least very rarely), nor did they go to restaurants together, and their team meetings, as well as meetings with other actors, were held online. I sat at a distance of several metres from their desks and was in their office only from ten to noon every day, working from home for the rest of the day. But what was very good and important was that we exchanged information each morning about what had happened the previous afternoon and what I had found. It was always possible for me to ask questions and discuss my findings with my main informant and other colleagues. I attended the larger meetings online and followed individual exchanges, but was able to observe practices in situ less than I had hoped. Most of the data I collected during my internship therefore consists of archival documents, as well as the extensive notes I took on our conversations and documented in detail at home in the afternoon or evening.

For the text on the history of the centre, it turned out that the basis for this was to be all the council decisions made since 1990 on the Neustadt centre and the Hochhausscheiben. One of the staff members had started this research in the city's online database, and I was asked to complete it. For this, I had to find my way into the online system, and a colleague explained to me the processes within the department, the coordination between departments and different decision phases and types. The output of this research is an Excel spreadsheet, a list of resolutions and their core elements assembled in one document, and a document with continuous text from which text modules could be used for different purposes. I created an additional document for myself in which I also listed preliminary versions and discussions on resolutions concerning the Hochhausscheiben. For the research on Scheibe E, I went several times to the city's municipal archives, sometimes accompanied by one of the planners. The planners were particularly interested in the property boundaries as they had been drawn after 1990, and we looked for plans and documents on the privatization process. In the end, I wrote a text on the history of Scheibe E, its particularities and turning points in its becoming. Most of the time was spent, as a pair and by me on my own, going through and sorting the folders and plans. We had to develop a system for archiving that would enable the planners to retrieve what was in the folders more easily; we had to discuss how to decide what would no longer be needed in the future and could be thrown away, and what they wanted me to show them from what I found. I will devote a separate subchapter to the process of sorting, in which I also reflect on our joint work in making the past. While the documents provide a 'glimpse of the future through the lens of the past' (DeSilvey, 2012, p. 49), the processes of sorting gave me an insight into the view on the past and the futures designed in the past, from the present.

A Give-and-Take? My Relations with the Field

The Halle Urban Planning Office has experience with people who complete an internship there or make enquiries for research purposes. Generally, they are interested in interactions with researchers, also hoping that the research could be useful to them for their own work. Furthermore, they see it as their duty as a public administration to respond to enquiries and make archival material and information available for scientific purposes. An example they brought up in a discussion on the occasion of a research request while I was with them was a Master's thesis that actually contributed to individual buildings being listed in Halle. The thesis had presciently and extensively presented the advantages of such a status and served as a basis for argumentation. I found it very interesting to listen to this discussion, as I had wondered what their discussions were like when I contacted them, and realized at that moment how lucky I was to have ended up there. One of them said that, with me, it was really a give-and-take, and I agreed (field notes, 15.03.2021).

In general, my relationship with my informants was very friendly. They helped me to familiarize myself with the buildings, but also with administrative procedures and planning practices, and offered me deep insights into how possible futures for the Hochhausscheiben were and are made. They generally seemed happy to engage with me and reflect on their everyday, discussing the 'bigger' questions, or 'societal' or 'philosophical' as they often called the questions I was asking. They were very open in sharing current processes, allowing me to participate in their meetings and sharing difficulties they were facing. Even though there was not always much time for it, it seemed that conversation with me allowed them to let the process they were currently working on rest for a moment and regain the overview and context, but also to (re)ask conceptual questions, which they said they often didn't have time for in everyday work routine. Sometimes, and even though I was taking notes during our conversations, they seemed to forget that I was there as a researcher, and I took on the role of a companion to whom things are entrusted that they might later prefer to be left out. At several moments, they told me that something should remain among us and not leave the administration's offices, or that something was their personal opinion and should not be passed on. Such moments were mostly linked to relationship issues *in* the field – that is, within the city of Halle, but also between the city and other actors, such as private investors. Gaining the trust of the planners and giving them the assurance that I would not 'misuse' this trust was and remains an important process to this day, because I am aware that my research, which depends on my relationship with the planners, could also fail because of this relationship (Potthast, 2017, p. 92). During the research process, the awareness of the fact that people in the field were interacting not only with me as a person, but also with scientific representation and that they could still reject it (Potthast, 2017, p. 92), was an important insight and also the subject of discussions I had with the planners. We agreed that they would get the chance to read my thesis prior to submission as, while I have left out the names of people from the field, my field remains small and fully preventing traceability is therefore difficult.

At times, the relationship with the planners has been a little challenging, due to my role as both insider and outsider (a double role that most people doing participant observation encounter). My role was that of someone who had to learn everything from scratch and who was a clear outsider to their profession, while being familiar with the buildings; and, while learning from them, I also had to keep the necessary distance to be able to observe and take notes. After my first internship, I presented my findings to some of the planners. While some were just curious about what I had found out so far about processes, decisions and ideas, one planner questioned the reason for the meeting and my intentions. They assumed that they already knew what had been discussed in the past. After my presentation, it was the same planner who made me understand that the planners perceived the past years as an uncomfortable temporal in-between in which the same discussions were repeated over and over again – a very important insight for me later (group discussion, 06.02.2020). But before the meeting, I had difficulties explaining why it was important for me to see how they reacted to what I had found.

Some of the planners clearly found it amusing that I, a doctoral student from Switzerland, wanted to write a thesis about the Hochhausscheiben in Halle-Neustadt. One day, I was sitting in the office surrounded by documents and plans that I was sorting and photographing or summarizing for them and for my own research purposes. One of the planners came in, wondering:

Planner 1:	Ah, here she is again. Does she also have time to write her thesis?
Planner 2:	She is digging up treasures here
Planner 1:	Rather an unbelievable chaos
Me:	Traces of careful administration
Planner 1:	From July on, you won't find anything here anymore
Planner 2:	Hendrikje records everything before it ends up in the containers; you know all this from your own experience, but for us it's treasures and some surprises that she finds; on building E, for example [...]
Planner 1:	In your defence, if they haven't all fainted, they get a schnapps.

field notes, 05.05.2021

I interpret this and similar comments as linked to mixed feelings towards my interest in the site. According to my reading, the older planner (Planner 1 above) assumed that people in Switzerland, where I would defend my thesis, would be surprised to be hearing about Neustadt and the Hochhausscheiben. I hear in such comments an element of modesty, but also a little incomprehension as far as my interest in the subject is concerned. Sometimes in these moments, I would highlight my own biographical and personal ties with East Germany and Halle, a city where several of my relatives live. For the younger planners, what I find in the documents is partly as new and astonishing as it is for me. That day, after the older planner had left, Planner 2 commented that when Planner 1 ceases working at the administration, there will be a lack of knowledge. For them, my role is important in terms of preserving the knowledge of the past. Before Planner 1 left, Planner 2 said, pointing to me:

'It's really very valuable what she does and, you see, she also makes sure that not everything ends up in containers' (field notes, 05.05.2021).

The planner who came in asking about my doctoral thesis was my first contact person at Halle's planning department, and they would be retiring in the foreseeable future. For our first meeting in 2018, I had put together a few questions, but before answering them, they took on the task of introducing me to Neustadt and the Hochhausscheiben. Also present was a younger colleague who had just started their job and who was to take over the planning for Halle-Neustadt in the near future. In particular, they told us about the initial plans for Neustadt and how the transformations after 1990 had changed the conditions of how planning was able to affect the built environment. On a later visit to their office, the younger planner told me that they had listened to the recording of our meeting several times in the car in order to familiarize themselves with Neustadt. They were invited by their superiors to attend three more meetings I had with planners, their socialization crossing a bit with mine. They then proceeded in the same way with a planner who joined the administration in 2019 and who would henceforth be responsible only for the centre and the Hochhausscheiben. I joined at a time of great movement, and the administration's openness towards me can also be explained by these changes. 'At the moment, there is a lot going on in the area of the centre and the Hochhausscheiben,' they wrote to me in our first email exchange (email, 13.09.2018). The centre of Neustadt gained a new place in the organization of the city administration with renovation projects for Scheibe A and Scheibe C taking on form and a redevelopment zone being established. In addition, a generational change and a restructuring of the planning department were being prepared in the city administration. Since I started my research at Halle's city administration, many of the people I spoke to have left for retirement or other jobs in administrations in other cities.

Assembling Practices,
Practising Assembling, and Writing

A large part of my work is based on archival documents from Halle's city administration, including resolutions and policy documents, as well as concepts and plans that they keep both in the planning office and in their digital archive on their computers. Other archival documents are from Halle's city archive and newspaper articles that are collected in the archives of the Geschichtswerkstatt in Halle-Neustadt. The possibilities and limits of investigating practices on the basis of documents are subjects of controversial discussion in praxeological research, due to a 'lack of primary observation of spatio-temporal practices' (Shankar et al., 2017; Wenzl et al., 2019, p. 351; own translation).

I have been fortunate in that the archives of the city administration show a great density, thanks to the administrative care of employees working here before the digital age. It is the density of documents, the personal comments on them and the different versions of individual documents that convince me that I am able to trace 'practices, objects, rules, knowledge, and organizational forms that produced them' (Shankar et al., 2017, p. 62). In the folders of the city administration, correspondence and processes can be traced in detail. For example, the trajectories of individual possible futures, how they were introduced, how they were debated in terms of concerns and in different committees and correspondence can be traced. It is possible to understand how urban planning took its task as a public administrative unit seriously in so far as it responded to hundreds of citizens' requests, or how the city gradually lost control over the ownership of the Hochhauscheiben in the early 2000s. I will trace these processes in different chapters of this work. The density of the archive thus allows reconstruction, tracing processes back, and following processes forward until their trace is lost. However, it is not always clear why something was done in a certain way, why certain decisions were made and why possible futures were ruled out. Reconstruction always requires the construction of a plausible past, a past as it might have been (DeSilvey, 2012, p. 36). How the planners gave meaning to their actions, how they interpreted things, etc., can only be understood when administrative staff expressed their views through personal comments on letters, for example. For a better understanding, I drew on interviews and conversations about what I had found in the documents. My own notes on observations and conversations on current practices additionally helped me to understand how possible futures are made in planning. But for past practices, of course, there remains a risk of misinterpretation from the perspective of today's knowledge, which is inherent in the retrospective. The advantage of such a perspective is that we are able to trace effects of the practices of un/making possible futures or how people adapted their visions and ways of doing 'as new knowledge was being created and shared and as they became more knowledgeable about issues and opportunities' (Plourde, 2018, p. 174).

In order to identify recurring themes and central elements, I keyworded all documents, notes and interview transcripts with the help of the program Atlas Ti. Using the program helped me in increasingly regrouping and subdividing the material into themes and categories that would serve as a basis for my analysis and the structure of the narrative of buildings on standby I was going to build in my written text. In order to do justice to the complexity and messiness of the world (Law, 2004a, p. 2), I tried in this work to 'give up on simplicities' and left the actual focal points open for a long time in my research process, allowing them to emerge and 'peel out' from conversations and the archival material, but also from conceptual interests and current scientific debates. The number of concepts and the research this work speaks to is considerable, as are the coordinates and modalities that constitute the complexity and also the ambivalence of standby.

What emerged as central to standby were questions of temporality, materiality and politics, which divide the text into three large parts. The text is rich in themes, for the elaboration of each of which I gathered the empirical material and concepts that would help me understand the material. I also proceeded in the writing process as I did throughout the whole research process: from a great wealth of ideas and material on one theme, I condensed and sorted until narratives emerged that provided answers to my questions. I also included at times longer translations of documents (that I translated from German), translated quotes from recorded interviews and notes from conversations with planners as well as descriptions of episodes, in order to allow the reader to get a feeling for the kind of processes of future-making in governmental planning. In addition, this work is characterized by a need I feel, to think very different things together – that is, to synthesize the heterogeneous. For example, I sometimes break

up chronologies in order to grasp the disparities and connections between events that lie apart (Saupe & Wiedemann, 2015, p. 4), and I also merge examples of all four Hochhausscheiben. While each building has its own history and present, they form an ensemble 'on standby'.

In its methodological approach, the project is driven by an overall aim to describe things as precisely as possible and to conceptualize these observations to come to more general arguments that would enable other case studies and comparisons. My project is furthermore guided by the consideration that things could be otherwise. As Law writes, and I am following him here, 'Reality is not a fixed thing out there. […] The natural, the real, is not a gold standard. It can, at least in principle, be unmade and reconstructed otherwise' (Law, 2004b, p. 3). This does not mean that things do not reach a (sometimes brutal) reality, but it does mean that we should direct our gaze to how things are brought to that reality. Behind my proceeding for this work lies a conviction that reality is made and is therefore to be found in practices of making, in the everyday and in making in relation to everyday things (Mol, 1999; Suchman, 1994; Woolgar & Neyland, 2013). I am following Woolgar and Lezaun here, who note that

> Exploring how objects are 'enacted in practices' implies, first, a refusal to draw on 'context' as an explanatory or descriptive tool. Objects do not acquire a particular meaning in, or because of, a given context; they cannot be accounted for by reference to the external circumstances of their existence. Rather, objects are brought into being, they are realized in the course of a certain practical activity, and when that happens, they crystallize, provisionally, a particular reality, they invoke the temporary action of a set of circumstances.
> (Woolgar & Lezaun, 2013, pp. 323–324)

Applying the assumption that 'it could be otherwise' implies a kind of wonderment or curiosity from afar that I see as typical for ethnography. My question of why the buildings were neither demolished nor renovated may tempt some readers, especially those familiar with the site, to suggest: because nothing else was possible. However, if we apply the assumption 'it could be otherwise' here, then it seems necessary to look at the temporal, material and political aspects of standby from a perspective from 'within' (Färber, 2014, p. 120) – that is, how they 'are locally relevant and locally contested' (Lynch, 2013, p. 456).

Temporal, Material and Political Matters

Individual chapters are organized along three thematic lines:
time, materiality and politics. These also constitute the three parts of this work.

Temporal Matters

Within part I on Temporal Matters, I investigate how standby can be understood in temporal terms and what standby does to time. I address these questions by looking first at how time is experienced (chapter 1), then at what rhythms can be discerned (chapter 2) and finally at how time itself is made in practice (chapter 3). My approach to temporal matters is thus threefold: it first pays attention to the temporal experiences, secondly to rhythms and thirdly to practices of time.

Chapter 1, 'Stuck in Time?', investigates what standby does to time by exploring how time is perceived and experienced in standby by city planners participating in searches for a future for the vacant high rises. Starting from a policy paper from 2015 framing the past 15 years as the status quo and specifying that this period was marked by stagnant development, increasing decay and the unsuccessful search for a long-term use for the buildings, I set out to understand what standby does to time by studying experiences of time by planners working for the Halle city administration. I will find that experiences of stagnant time and of turning around in circles are a prevalent temporal experience among those engaging with possible futures for the buildings. Time appears to not move forward when, in fact, those engaging with the buildings are in constant movement. I will describe the experience

of time in relation to anthropological writing on hope and waiting and concepts of the experience of time, such as 'stuckedness' (Hage, 2009). Finally, the concept of 'ongoingness' will allow me to see that standby is characterized by an attitude of moving on, nonetheless. The term 'ongoingness' is used in the conception of production, circulation and consumption of products. Here, researchers use the term to refer to the non-linearity of the paths products take and their continuous existence after consumption (Herod et al., 2014; Lepawsky & Mather, 2011). Feminist cultural theorist Berlant uses the term together with forms of 'getting by, and living on' (Berlant, 2011, p. 99) and the experience of 'crisis-shaped subjectivity' (Berlant, 2011, p. 54) within people's everyday. The processual character of standby, tangible in 'ongoingness', will be more explicitly explored in chapter 2.

Chapter 2, 'Rhythms of Standby', explores the question of what standby does to time further. In order to trace the temporality of standby, I understand standby as a non-linear process and explore the rhythmicity of standby as a process, following the 'rhythmanalysis' as it has been proposed in geographical and other studies of rhythms of place (Brighenti & Kärrholm, 2018; Crang, 2001; Edensor, 2010a; Lefebvre, 2004). This literature makes suggestions for understanding movement, time, rupture and change and 'temporal events of varying regularity' (Edensor, 2010b, p. 3) in relation to space. A rhythm perspective on standby will allow me to analyse the complex relations between events and processes in standby. The chapter argues that the rhythm of standby consists of the rhythms of trajectories that possible futures (un-)made for the Hochhausscheiben take. These are brought in at one moment, discussed, calculated and negotiated in different formats and networks; they can then disappear and be brought back to the table after some time. Conceptually, the chapter addresses a number of questions revolving around how to study standby time in its complexity and situatedness (Bastian et al., 2021), focusing on relations between changing networks, events and process. As an example, I follow one of such possible futures, the proposed relocation of governmental authorities into building C along its path. The possible future was first introduced in 1999 and dissolved in 2009. Drawing from observations following the trajectory of this particular possible future, I argue that it is non-linear trajectories of dis-/continuity, disruption, repetitions and (non-)synchrony that characterize standby as a process of lingering in-between.

Chapter 3, 'Making Time on Standby', consists of two larger subchapters (so I list them separately here), each dealing with practices of time-making in a standby mode. The first looks at past-making and the second at future-making. The approach to time here is practice-oriented. Particularly in the anthropology of time, the relationship between agency, practice and time has been conceptualized (Bear, 2016; Gell, 1992; Munn, 1992; Rabinow, 2008; Ringel, 2016a). I draw here on Bear's 'techniques of time' defined as 'skillful making enacted within timescapes, which bring social worlds into being and link them to nonhuman processes' (Bear, 2016, p. 490), but also Ringel's conception of 'temporal agency' (Ringel, 2016a, p. 25).

The first **subchapter** (**3.1**), 'Harmonizing the Past', is devoted to the archives of the city administration that I understand as a materialization of standby. In order to examine how the past is made in standby, I will draw on literature on categorization and the role of archives and archiving for narrating the past, reading the present and building the future (Decker, 2013; DeSilvey, 2007; Foucault, 1994; Yaneva, 2020, p. 65). As I will show, the documents of the archives enable city planners from Halle's city administration to create a shared set of knowledge on the past as a basis for their working on the future. The archiving, ordering and alignment of past events that I describe in this chapter are, as I argue, practices of making the past that are crucial for collective action and an integral part of making building futures. **Subchapter 3.2**, 'Navigating and Being Prepared', is devoted to the making of the future. To investigate how the future is made in standby, I draw on conceptions of how knowledge about the future is made and how people act on the future, again from various disciplines, including planning theory, STS, geography and the anthropology of the future. Key here is the understanding of anticipatory practices as practices that bring the future into the present, one of which is scenario planning. And an understanding of ways of acting on the future despite its uncertainty and unknowability (Adams et al., 2009; Anderson, 2010; Ringel, 2014), one way of which is navigating between short-term and long-term futures in planning (Hillier, 2011b). As I argue, standby as a mode of being in-between can be particularly characterized by its specific relation to the future. While I looked in the first chapter at how the future is experienced, in subchapter 3.2 I examine future-oriented practices of planners, asking: What are the forms of the future that they refer to, respond to and craft

themselves in their practices? In the first section, I study scenario building as the first of several future-oriented practices related to the making of possible futures for the Hochhausscheiben. Then, I show how planners navigate between long-term visions and short-term measures when translating visions for the centre of Halle-Neustadt into action. Finally, I show how the uncertain and unknowable future is brought into the present and how the present is rendered indeterminate and full of potentiality.

Material Matters

Thinking standby with regard to Material Matters lets me turn to the Hochhausscheiben as material objects in Part II (chapters 4 and 5).

Chapter 4, 'Challenging Objects', first distinguishes buildings on standby from ruins and suggests understanding them as 'challenging' objects. For an understanding of material matters in standby, I predominantly draw on conceptions of materiality as proposed by actor–network theory to conceptualize buildings on standby as 'challenging objects'. This includes attributing agency to non-human actors (Latour, 1996, 2005) and paying attention to material limits to the possible (Hommels, 2005), but also understanding stability as a network effect (Law & Mol, 1995). The chapter investigates the ways buildings on standby resist certain actions and require others. Buildings on standby, as I will show, challenge surrounding networks and the municipal planners in particular through their material presence, their resistance to possible futures, and material ruptures that oblige them to become engaged. I will suggest understanding buildings on standby as 'objects of debate and consideration in the present' (Ringel, 2018, p. 70) and as objects that challenge through their presence (Cairns & Jacobs, 2014, p. 111; Macmillen & Pinch, 2018, p. 290) and both their stability and fragility. I will explore the material elements (such as concrete, height, and plots) and how these contribute to resistance towards both demolition and renovation. After exploring forms of socio-material resistance, I will show how the buildings' fragility requires maintenance and forms of 'standing by' as the increasingly decaying buildings risk to become a material threat. I will show in a last section, how the city of Halle got engaged in maintaining standby's potentiality. Studying maintenance of standby, I will draw on Wiedemann's conception of standby as a socio-technical mode that requires 'a continuous vigilance and readiness' (Wiedemann, 2021, p. 32) and differentiate the maintenance of standby from 'curated decay' and conservation. Whereas maintaining standby does not mean keeping an object 'in a state of protected stasis' (DeSilvey, 2006, p. 326), neither does it mean '[l]etting "nature take its course"' (DeSilvey, 2017, p. 179). Maintaining standby rather means maintaining the potentiality of reactivation.

Chapter 5, 'Problem and Value', takes up an aspect echoed in chapter 4 – that is, that buildings and materiality are to be understood in relation to the networks they are embedded in. The chapter then studies how they are being put in relation in processes of (e)valuation. What brought me to this is, among other things, that it is central to the question of maintenance whether we consider something 'worthy' of preservation. Furthermore, I assume that whether buildings get performed, e.g. as success or failure (Jacobs et al., 2007, p. 613) might have considerable effects for their future. Beyond discourses around the symbolism of architectural form, in this chapter I explore how judgements of value are made in practice. The chapter is predominantly inspired by the emerging research field of valuation studies. In recent years, a promising interdisciplinary field (including sociology, anthropology, science and technology studies, cultural geography, market studies, and philosophy) of study has emerged: valuation studies (Alexander & Sanchez, 2018a; Berli et al., 2021; Cefaï et al., 2015; Greeson, 2020; Helgesson & Muniesa, 2013, p. 3; Nicolae et al., 2019). Most of these newer approaches to value and valuation highlight the processual and changing in value, or conceptualize value as a verb (Kjellberg & Mallard, 2013, p. 15), a conception I will follow. Such conception of valuation 'draws attention to the fact that value is non-intrinsic to the object but produced in the relationship between the object and the person who considers it valuable, and results from practical valuation activities' (Chiapello, 2015, p. 16). As I will show, buildings on standby are performed simultaneously as a problem and as value and, more precisely, as 'problematic but not problematic enough' and 'valuable but not valuable enough' (DeSilvey & Edensor, 2013, p. 473). For planners, the buildings are the biggest problem of Neustadt due to their 'emptiness', but they equally are valuable as the buildings' form and origins are valued as 'significant' and I will study how planners arrive at such (e)valuation in practice.

Political Matters

Part III on Political Matters (chapters 6, 7 and 8) investigates how 'conditions of (im)possibility' for building futures to materialize are shaped in relations and networks that span the Hochhausscheiben and make them what they are – 'on standby'. I assume that tracing relations allows for important insights into the production and sustention of the buildings' in-between (O'Callaghan et al., 2018). I follow a classic ANT perspective here, assuming that 'conditions of possibility are not given' (Mol, 1999, p. 75), as reality in general, but are *done*. In such a perspective, 'things are what they are because they are *done* that ways by actors relating to other actors. It is only as a result of such performances that fixation, relative stability, and so forth, exists' (Gad & Bruun Jensen, 2010). Following such an approach, I understand conditions of (im)possibility emerging in relation and shaped in practice. I consider it important to examine the quality of relations between actors that hold the buildings on standby and the capacities of actors to shift, stabilize or challenge conditions of (im)possibility.

Chapter 6, 'Detachment', studies the specific quality of relations in standby. What I will be interested in here is 'the dynamic processes by which networks of relationships become formed, shift and have (or fail to have) effect' (Rydin & Tate, 2016, p. 9). I will argue that relations in standby are loose and find with Kemmer et al. 'looseness' as an organizing principle in standby (Kemmer et al., 2021, p. 14). In addition to Callon's suggestions for an investigation of power in processes of network building (Callon, 1984), conceptions of detachment will be important for my analysis (Candea et al., 2015). Looseness, as my material from Halle suggests, is tangible in processes of drifting apart of predominantly the city, owners, the buildings and the future. As I will show, looseness as a principle in standby is furthermore to be found in failing attempts at alignment, when owners detach themselves, and the city aims to take on a role of a mediator but fails to fulfil its self-given role. Standby itself is, as I will argue, not to be understood simply as non-alignment of actors, but as attempts at alignment that often fail. While my informants explain the non-alignment through the metaphor of a puzzle with missing pieces, I will find that not only are alignment and engagement central in standby, but so is detachment (Kühn, 2021, p. 129). As I will find, the city is itself concerned to keep relations loose – in particular to the buildings. In this way, detachment appears as a form of dealing with complexity.

Chapter 7, 'Struggling', starts from the statement of a planner from Halle that the Hochhausscheiben show the 'struggling of urban society with a place' (field notes, 14.05.2019). Assuming that the conditions of possibility are not only dependent on the quality of relations and the abilities of actors to stabilize relations, but that these capacities are themselves shaped in the negotiation of agency and responsibility between actors, chapter 7 will study standby as a process of struggle. What I will suggest is that things play a central role in negotiations around agency and responsibility. I conceptualize these things as 'dis/connectors' as they 'help bring actants into association with each other' (Rydin & Tate, 2016, p. 8) across gaps, but at the same time keep actors at a distance. Each of these enables and/or delimits forms of engagement and agency (Gomart & Hajer, 2003, pp. 36; 47) and thus plays an important role for a possible alignment of the actors that would enable a demolition or renovation of the Hochhausscheiben. As I will show, different 'modes of struggling' revolve around state funding, donations and regulations acting as 'dis/connectors' within networks of loose relations. Subsidies, I notice, hold the promise of bringing actors together, but have in fact both activating and deactivating effects. Donations that are supposed to fill gaps coming with subsidies, open the door for individual negotiations behind the scenes with disruptive effects for relations. And regulations can, through their openness for interpretations either bring actors together and enabling alignment or keep relations loose, depending on how they come to matter. It is Barad's conception of 'mattering' that will allow me to understand that determinations of matter and meaning may change at any moment (Barad, 2010, p. 254).

Chapter 8, 'Doubt and Accountability', starts from the observation that the Hochhausscheiben are an object of public debate. Drawing on Woolgar and Neyland's conception of accountability being enacted in relation to things, I will investigate how 'accountability relations are enacted' (Woolgar & Neyland, 2013a, p. 14) in relation to the objects on standby – that is, the Hochhausscheiben. The term 'accountable' has, as Woolgar and Neyland show, different meanings, assembling explicability, responsibility, and an obligation for justification (Woolgar & Neyland, 2013a, p. 31). I will study articulations of doubt and the role of doubt for standby, drawing on what Pelkmans notes for doubt –

that is, that 'doubt points […] to pragmatic referents, to the question "what to do?" Questions of being, of truth and of action should always be seen in relation to each other' (Pelkmans, 2013, p. 2). As I will find, articulations of accountability relations become tangible in moments of doubt.

Doubts are, as I find, affecting processes of future-making. First, I show how the doubts of those citizens that the city relies on in opting for revitalization will force the city to explain its aspirations. Second, I observe how doubts turn into expectations, the search for alternatives and claims concerning the city's role in the search for a future. Citizens' doubts are directed towards concepts and the city commissioning concepts, since concepts have not brought about a realization of possible futures over the years and have become, in their view, a sign for standby's in/activity. Last, I trace how doubts increased the political pressure in the 2010s on the newly elected mayor from Halle, who had promised during their electoral campaigns to fix a future for the buildings. Citizens and the mayor who, on the occasion of Halle-Neustadt's 50th birthday in 2014, set an ultimatum that a solution for the buildings had to be found within a year, finally acted past Halle's city council. Through their votes in a referendum in 2017, citizens from Halle asked the city administration to move into Scheibe A as a tenant.

Central findings of what matters for buildings on standby in terms of time, materiality and politics will be summarized in a general conclusion. Here, I will organize my findings not along thematic lines but along coordinates and modalities of buildings on standby – that is, along tensions and principles of the in-between, ways of understanding standby as a process and through practices. The conclusion will also revisit a question I ask myself at various moments – namely, whether we are today facing an end to the standby of the Hochhausscheiben. Finally, the contributions that this work is able to make and how the questions addressed here could be relevant for dealing with vacant buildings in practice, as well as directions future research could take, will be presented.
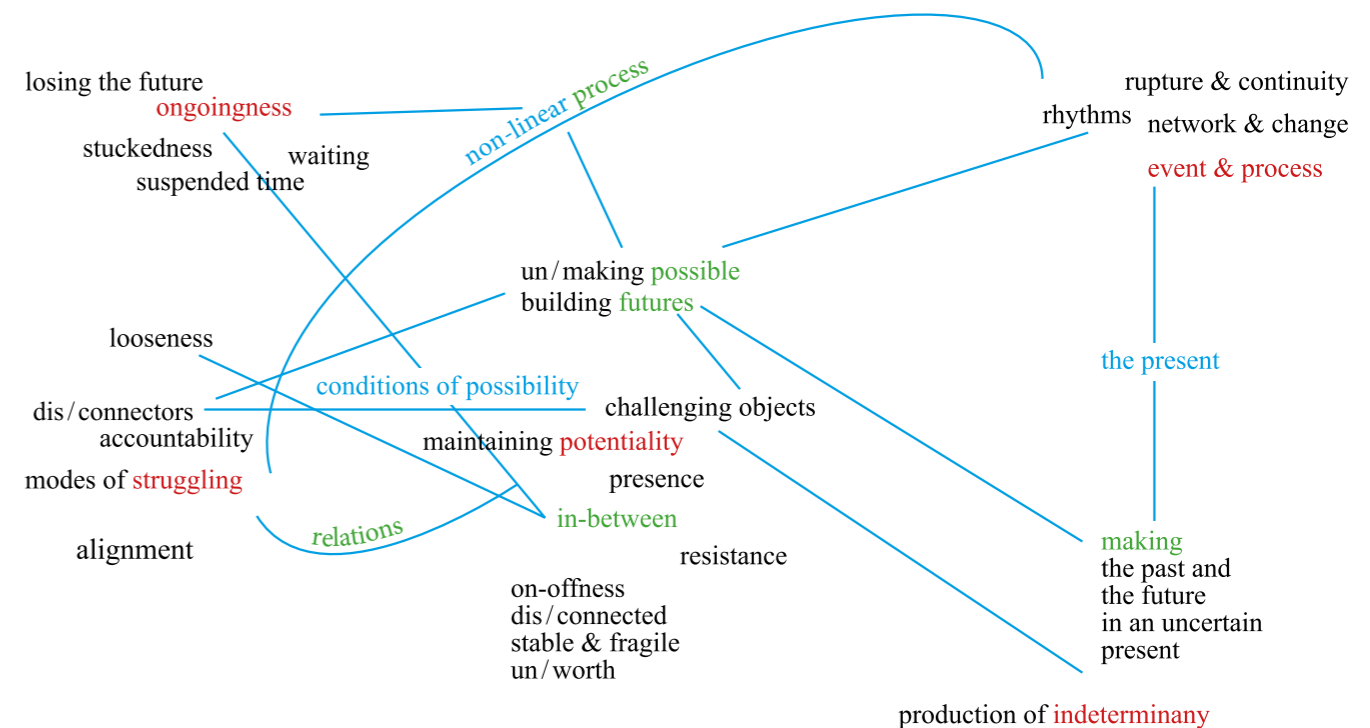
Fig. 20

Fig. 20
Mapping of concepts and terms.

Fig. 21

Part I:
Temporal Matters

Fig. 21
Temporal Matters (view from Scheibe A).
Grimberg, 25.01.2023.

1   Stuck in Time?[7]

In November 2015, the City Council of Halle passed a resolution entitled 'Decision in Principle to Preserve the Scheiben Ensemble in the Centre of the Neustadt District'. The decision intended to replace a past, in which 'no long-term uses could be found' for the buildings, as it says here, and which was characterized by 'years of decay and stagnated development', with 'planned development' (VI/2015/01130, 2015, pp. 3–4).

To describe this past from which one wanted to break away, the term 'status quo' was used. It was the 'status quo of the last 15 years' that was intended to end with the political decision aiming at paving paths towards the preservation of the buildings.

In its common use, the status quo describes 'the existing state of affairs (at a particular time)'(Collins English Dictionary), and in its original meaning and historical use the status quo describes a standstill, a period before a rupture or change, in most cases before a war (also known as 'status quo ante (bellum)'). What is expressed with the terminology is the 'dissatisfaction with the present that implies the negation of the present and the propensity to work is its supersession' (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 209). What is striking here, however, is that a whole period of 15 years is referred to as the status quo.

I am interested in this framing of time in retrospect because the period that is the focus of my work partly coincides with the years that are referred to here as the status quo. The term suggests that nothing happened during these years. To me, this can be explained by the fact that time is understood as linear and measured by the change that time brings.

Stagnant development has characterized the past 15 years, says the resolution text from 2015. It states as one of the characteristics of the time that no long-term use could be found for the high rises. And indeed, change did not materialize, one might suggest, as no future for the buildings materialized. What the 'status quo' in the resolution suggests can be read as if there was a 'shrinkage of existential time' that is reduced to 'a present that hardly qualifies as such any longer, given the virtual effacement of that past and future that can alone define a present in the first place' (Jameson, 2003, p. 708). It seems as if temporality ended in the aftermath of German reunification and was replaced by an ongoing present, as no destiny, no future could be determined for the buildings. The 'status quo' is framed as a state that transcends the past, present and possibly also – if no change comes (and fulfils the purpose of the resolution) – the future. Framing the last 15 years as the status quo suggests that something remained the same over a longer period; it highlights both the ongoing and the remaining, which seems timeless as it stays. The resolution assesses the time after the change it has brought. It seems as if time is linked to visible outcomes such as use and that, without actions or outcomes, everything is the same, status quo, timeless.

I suggest that the last 15 years are seen as a period when nothing really happened, when time did not go anywhere – are devalued because they are premised against a linear 'going somewhere' (Vignehsa, 2014, p. 3; see also Jeffrey, 2008, p. 956). As no direction could be determined, however, time got framed here as ending (Jameson, 2003, p. 710). The reference to the past and the present as the 'status quo' in the resolution serves then as a 'signal for change' (Vignehsa, 2014, p. 4) that would bring historicity back to the present.

Starting from the term 'the status quo', I ask myself not only what has happened throughout the years that are summarized in this term, but also what has happened *to* time during that period. I will explore in this chapter what standby does to time. I use the expression *what standby does to time* to underline my assumption that standby itself shapes time in the sense that it will have an effect on how time is perceived and experienced. Thereby, I focus on temporal perceptions and experiences of urban planners participating in the process of searching for a future for the Hochhausscheiben. I assume that standby challenges (linear understandings of) time through tensions between processes of making possible futures for the Hochhausscheiben and their non-realization, between stagnant and circulating time, and between the future hoped for and the fact that it does not come. As I argue, time is 'suspended' (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 210) in a standby mode (see Carse & Kneas, 2019; Gupta, 2018 for similar observations in relation to unfinished and half-built infrastructures).

My approach to what standby does to time in this chapter is, as I said, the temporal experiences of planners dealing with the Hochhausscheiben and their possible futures in their everyday work. I will distinguish three forms of temporal experience for suspended time in standby: a sense of stagnant time associated with hope and despair; a circular sense of time associated with a sense of 'stuckedness' (Hage, 2009); and 'ongoingness' of time in a waiting mode. As I will show for standby, time is experienced as not passing as planners linger in between hope and despair and as it is running in circles. The latter leads to a sense of stuckedness among them. I will furthermore show how waiting as a mode of experiencing time's suspension is accompanied by a sense of 'alternativelessness' that makes people get by (Berlant, 2011, p. 99; see Kemmer et al., 2021, p. 4 for a similar observation for affective states in standby).

Before I get to what standby does to time, I want to trace how the future became increasingly uncertain and time multiplied until finally, with the emergence of standby, time became suspended. Taken together, the in-between of the Hochhausscheiben is, I will suggest, on the one hand to be located historically in a time when the future had yet to be found, and on the other hand to be understood as a tense mode between stagnant and circular time at the intersection of which 'ongoingness' (Berlant, 2011, p. 99) becomes a predominant coordinate of standby.

1.1   Losing the Future

In what follows, I will describe how the future of the Hochhausscheiben became uncertain in connection with the transformations in the aftermath of German reunification and how a search for a future began. I would like to return here to the 1990s and trace how the city planners from Halle were first holding on to the present while soon being overwhelmed with time's multiplicity, and then increasingly lost and relinquished control over the future until time became 'suspended' in standby. Two temporal characteristics shape the time just before and while the buildings fall vacant and standby emerges as an organizing principle: first, a sense of overwhelming temporal multiplicity and a feeling that there was no time to look for the future, and second, the perceived absence of a future, as prospects and ideas for it were lacking.

At the beginning of the 1990s, there seemed to be little time to find a future for Halle-Neustadt and the Hochhausscheiben. According to scientists accompanying urban change in Halle-Neustadt after 1990, the mayor of Halle 'has no time to look for the old new city, the lost one, since he has very little time left to find the new city' ('The search for the new city', ARGOS 3/93; as cited in: Projektgesellschaft mbH Dessau 1993). Testimonies from the 1990s testify to the fact that the future was much discussed, but a direction was not clear. It is interesting here that there was obviously the expectation on the part of the scientists to search for 'the new city' instead of the 'old new city'. They seem to suggest that the only way to cope with the accelerated change that the city went through was to opt for the new. As many authors have shown, there is today almost a compulsion to change. According to Adam and Groves, 'Change rather than stability is the order of the day. In this dynamic world of universal mobility, standing still means falling behind' (Adam & Groves, 2007, p. 1). This is also expressed in the scientists' vision for Neustadt: that embracing change and the new was the only way to cope with the present.

The question of whether standby should be understood as a form of stuckness is also posed by Kemmer et al. The authors ask: 'Is standby a form of "stuckness"? What is the difference between standby and "waiting"?' (Kemmer et al., 2021, p. 2). I will explain below what answer they arrive at and how my findings differ from this.

Fig. 22
Visualizations from 1992. ARGE KNY & Weber,
Wörle und Partner for the city of Halle.
Source: Halle City Administration.

Fig. 23
Front elevation, showing the façade of Scheibe
D that was rejected by Halle's city planners.
Bayer, Morgner + Partner, 1991.
Source: Halle City Administration.

Fig. 23

Fig. 22
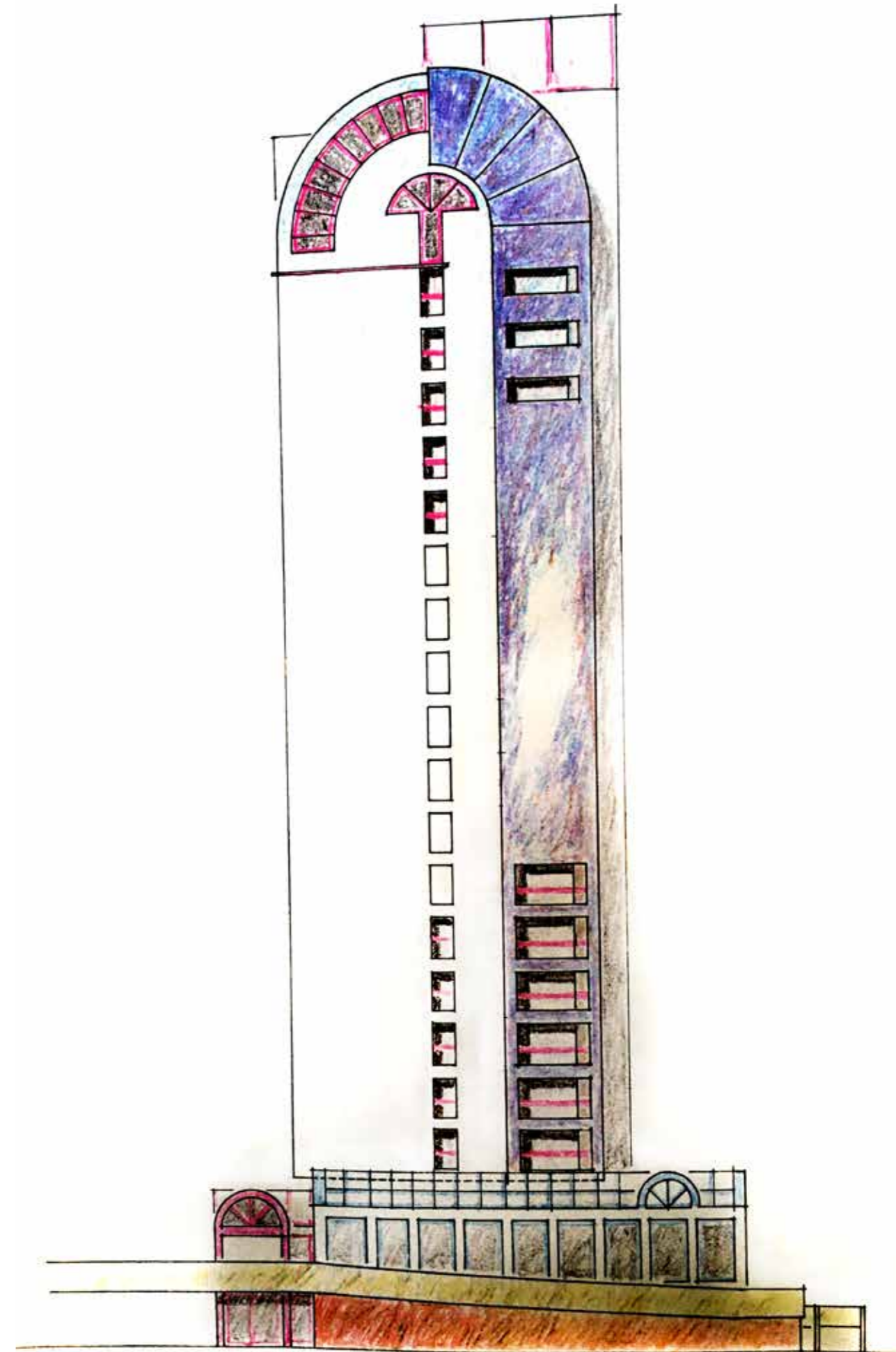
Controlling the Passage into the Future

Halle's city planners, however, initially countered the all-encompassing transformation processes by insisting on continuity and the prolongation of the present (Ringel, 2014). Very soon, however, such relation to time turned out to be challenged by time's multiplicity and the prospect of the future getting lost.

Scheibe D and Scheibe E were the first of the five Hochhausscheiben in the centre of Halle-Neustadt to be marketized, namely in 1991. In that year, the first consultations on Scheibe D took place in the city administration. In GDR times, the building was used to house state building authorities and the interested investor planned to keep the building as an office building, i.e. to continue the existing use. Only a higher volume of vehicles was foreseen by the city's planners with new users and their customer traffic (memo, city administration, 23.05.1991), and the building was to undergo 'extensive renovation measures worth millions to repair structural damage due to the building's 20-year service life and with a view to more efficient use in the future' (memo, city administration, 07.10.1991).

The planners imposed conditions on the redevelopment and used their leeway as the approving authority to control the future. They underlined in a memo:

> The Neustadt district centre represents an architectural achievement in its own right that is to be protected. It is a row of 5 analogous high-rise buildings with a pronounced ensemble effect (defining the cityscape!). [...] There are indications that the other 4 buildings are to be converted from a current residential function to office buildings. This will cause considerable urban development problems (parking space deficit!!! Desolation of the centre by displacing residents!!!).
> memo, 07.10.1991

The three exclamation marks indicate the importance the municipality attached to preserving the buildings in their present use and form. They also proposed a preservation bylaw to protect the area, and to protect it from change, as the same memo states. As they were convinced that the buildings had to be treated as an ensemble of five, they consequently rejected the redevelopment plans of the investor of Scheibe D, who had envisaged a postmodern design of the façade. Instead, they instructed the investor to undertake a simple renovation that would preserve the shape of the building. There was also consultation on the colour of the building and the lettering 'Bürohaus West'. A few years later, the city still prohibited the attachment of advertising to the building, since an advertising installation, as requested by the investor, would disturb the 'uniform architectural structure of the district centre' and would impair the 'local image' (statement, 13.03.1996).   → **fig. 22; 23; 24; 25**

The documents from the early 1990s show that Halle's city planners had a clear idea of the future for the buildings: preservation and protection of the existing. With Scheibe E, they equally attempted to control 'the passage into the future' (Abram & Weszkalnys, 2013a, p. 2). As the memo above makes clear, the planners rejected office use of the other buildings and favoured residential use instead. In an internal letter, they wrote that they were 'following the conversion of the Hochhausscheibe in the centre of the Neustadt district with concern. For a attractive and lively design of a centre, the 'LIVING' function is indispensable (letter, 20.01.1992).[8] They thus adhered to the ideal of the socialist city, which was characterized, among other things, by the fact that it favoured residential use in the centre (see introduction). The planners therefore rejected the private investor who wanted to convert Building E into an office building.

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8   I will also address the question of possible uses and what planners considered and consider 'meaningful' uses in **chapter 5**.

Fig. 24
Fig. 25

Fig. 24; 25
Scheibe D, renovated in the late 1990s.
Grimberg, 25.01.2023

Losing Control, Losing Ground

While the planners of the city of Halle wanted to hold on to what existed and control the future of the buildings, they did not succeed in saving the buildings into the future as intended, but were soon overwhelmed with time's multiplicity. As I will show, not only was the organization of the city and, in particular, the organization of property changed, but also the temporal relations were reshuffled in the aftermath of German reunification.

One of the planners remembered how politicians and planners thought throughout the 1990s that 'It will be okay, it will be okay… yes, it's difficult now, but it will be okay' (interview, 25.10.2018). However, scholars who accompanied the transformation processes of the 1990s in Halle-Neustadt actually held the city responsible for countering the loosing of the future for Neustadt that they saw coming. The researchers highlighted 'the complexity of urban, social, technical and political questions' (Projektgesellschaft mbH Dessau, 1993). As one of the accompanying researchers was quoted in a newspaper article, they were angry as, in their view,

> local politicians and offices have still not understood that there is a
> social bomb ticking over there [i.e. Halle-Neustadt]. They are
> helpless in the face of the problems. The word about the demolition
> of Halle-Neustadt, once attributed to a mayor of Halle, which
> he had quickly denied at the time, is still haunting the offices. Just
> the other day, a department head in the magistrate's office said:
> Mr Schmidt, it's impossible. It has to be demolished.' At the same time,
> however, decisions were being made whose social consequences
> for the residents could not be estimated.
> 'The Search for the New City', ARGOS 3/93, p. 11; own translation

Architect Bach who was leading the design of Neustadt's centre (see introduction), wrote in 1993 'that the collapse of the socio-economic conditions under which and for which the city was built, the confrontation of its spatial realities with the contradictions of urban life under capitalist conditions will still have lasting consequences' (Bach, 1993, p. 36; own translation). Bach saw 'dramatic changes [emerging] that will take place will not primarily affect the architectural form […] but the socio-economic foundation of the city itself'. While he was more concerned about socio-economic conditions than the built environment, which could be adapted if not through demolition, he stressed that redevelopment of the building stock and its adaptation would be central to preventing socio-economic decline and the exodus particularly of the middle class from Neustadt. He saw in this task of 'structural renovation' a 'race against time' (Bach, 1993, p. 36; own translation). During a lecture on Halle-Neustadt in July 2019, sociologist Pasternack presented a timeline to reflect Halle-Neustadt's past 30 years (1990–2019) in keywords. While 'loss of function' was first mentioned here for the 1990s, followed by 'devaluation' and 'segregation', Pasternack labelled the late 1990s with 'administrative helplessness' (Pasternack & Zierold, 2019).

From what I found for the Hochhausscheiben, the city planners did not seem to be helpless at the beginning of the 1990s, but they held on to what existed and were soon caught up in the change that was taking place beyond their reach, but with massive implications for the future of the buildings. In the same year, 1993, the first consultations on the future of the Hochhausscheiben took place. As the minutes of a meeting between the city and the state of Saxony-Anhalt record, the state estimated the necessary investment for maintenance of both Scheibe A and C at 20 million Deutsche Mark for 1994 and 12.5 million DM per year for the following years (estimations for the following years covered the period from 1995 to 1997). It estimated the renovation costs for Scheibe A at DM 25 million and the centralized accommodation of students in a high-rise building was found to be unfavourable. In consequence, the state authorities of Saxony-Anhalt responsible for the management of state-owned property prohibited the use of funds for buildings A and C and set the buildings on uncertain paths. In 1998, the state of Saxony-Anhalt informed the city of Halle that it intended to permanently close the student halls of residence in the high-rise buildings A and C in the centre of Halle-Neustadt by 31 December 1999. The abandonment of these two buildings was imperative from an economic point

of view, as the state wrote in a letter. At the moment of the state's decision, the vacancy rate within the buildings was approaching 60 per cent and, as the buildings were decaying, the state expected an increase in vacancies in the future. Since the state said it did not want to abandon the buildings to neglect and recognized the importance of the buildings for Halle-Neustadt, it aimed to inform the city in good time so that a future could be found for the buildings (letter from the Ministry of Culture to the City of Halle, 12.03.1998). From the city's point of view, information 'would in no way do justice to the problem'; it saw the future in danger and the state with a duty to deal responsibly with the buildings' future as they considered the future of the buildings of great importance for the future of the entire district. In their response to the state, the alderman of the city of Halle wrote that the city of Halle

> would therefore like to repeat to you once again the question that we
> have addressed to the state: How does the state see its responsibility
> as the owner [...] in the centre of one of the largest Plattenbausiedlung[9]
> of the former GDR? What concrete strategies are being developed?
> letter, 23.03.1998

The alderman therefore asked for a meeting with all possible actors during which 'economic, use-related and technical aspects can be discussed in concrete terms with the aim of defining key points for a strategy against the threatening neglect of these towers' (letter, 23.03.1998).

As one of the city's planners from Halle told me, it is a not insignificant detail that not all the buildings lost their use and were marketized only at the end of the 1990s, as in the early 1990s private investors were still coming to Neustadt with ideas and intentions to renovate and develop the properties they had acquired. By the end of the 1990s, this had changed drastically. They remembered during our interview:

> We had lost all uses. But [luckily, as they add, ironically, we had] the
> market economy, the wonder weapon, [that would bring us] buyers! Yes,
> of course there are buyers. What kind of buyers are there? There are
> those who seriously want something and there are those who want to
> earn a lot of money; who would be interested in these things that went
> into operation at the beginning of the 1970s and went out of operation
> in the mid- to late 1990s? Who? [...] Since they didn't come on the
> market right at the beginning, in '91/'92, when some people were still
> [...having] ideas, but much later [...] and we suddenly had a massive
> exodus, the idea of taking up residential use again was actually
> reduced to absurdity, because we had vacant flats en masse. This is how
> various investors, rather addicted to quick money, turned up and that
> led to the fact that we as a municipality had no contact person at all.
> Some have been sold 5, 6, 7 times – you had no contact person.
> interview, 02.10.2018

In fact, the 1990s and 2000s were characterized by uncertainty, characterized by purchases and sales coming with the liberalization of property regulations (Bernt et al., 2017, p. 560) (see introduction), new laws – a time that seemed overwhelmed by multiplicity (Baraitser, 2017, p. 13).

Shortly before (or after) privatization, high rises A, B and E not only became vacant but also became objects of 'speculation, resales, mortgages and foreclosures' that 'led to owners being unable or unwilling to act in the case of three high-rise buildings', as the resolution text from 2015 notes (p.3). Scheibe C is excluded here, as the building continued to belong to the state of Saxony-Anhalt until 2015.

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9   The term 'Plattenbausiedlung' (prefabricated, panel-built housing estates) refers to neighbourhoods where the majority of the buildings are of prefabricated industrial construction.

Researchers a ccompanying the marketization process in Halle-Neustadt warned very early on of the danger of speculation with the housing stock of Halle-Neustadt (newspaper article BILD, in: Projekt-gesellschaft mbH Dessau 1993). Among other things, the participating scientists asked 'Selling to whom?' and gave suggestions for the procedure. They suggested that criteria for privatization be es-tablished, and that, for example, assistance be given to private individuals to finance the purchase of housing and that ownership be transferred to small cooperatives in order to promote democratization associated with marketization (Projektgesellschaft mbH Dessau, 1994, pp. 18; 19–21). For the Hoch-hausscheiben, acquisition by the residents was not an option, because the buildings were primarily workers' and students' dormitories (interview, 02.10.2018).[10] With the closure of those, the buildings lost their (human) use. However, as the table in the introduction also shows, this did not happen all at once with German reunification, but only at the end of the 1990s.

Ringel made a similar observation in the Eastern German town of Hoyerswerda. He writes: 'It was not the political changes of 1989/1990 that brought deconstruction, it was a continuous and less determinate series of practices, events and contested decisions, retrospectively so easily forgot-ten, that led to WK 10's[11] doomed (future) present'(Ringel, 2016b, p. 398). As Ringel states, 'the story about how these blocks in WK 10 lost their future overnight and found themselves in novel, postsocialist times, fated for demolition, is wrong; although it looks like they were set on the path to demolition then, the story unfolds less determinately' (Ringel, 2016b, p. 398).

For the Hochhausscheiben, too, it can be said that their abandonment is embedded in complex processes in which it is negotiated how the present and the future, which became uncertain after 1990, could and should be met. Scheibe A and C, as the letters above indicate, lost their use as dormitories for students in 1999. Except for building D, the other Hochhausscheiben also lost their (human) use around the year 2000; they were auctioned off and sold (see introduction). While at the beginning of the 1990s the city's planners were still trying to counter the transformation by attempting to preserve the present, they were soon overwhelmed by the processes and overlapping events beyond their reach. In the resolution text of 2015, this overwhelming multiplicity of time finds its expression through the plural form and the missing chronology in the resolution text ('Speculation, resales, mortgages and foreclosures', see quote above). It suggests that these actions were recurring and overlapping, many and none, happening in time but surprisingly timeless, as they did not provide a future and the city had lost control over events in the present and over the future of the Hochhausscheiben.

Is the Future Lost?

From the perspective of the planner, the chance to shape and determine the future was missed within the small window of the 1990s, when a future for the Hochhausscheiben might have been found. Scheibe E, for example, was from 1999/2000 onwards administered by a mortgage bank in Berlin as the owner was in bankruptcy proceedings. At this time, 40 per cent of the space was occupied by businesses and a small number of students and the investor had not invested in any maintenance of the building, except for two lifts that were added (notes, 08.03.2000). The building was put up for auction, but without success. According to a letter sent from the financial department to the planning department of Halle's city administration, a first auction took place on 12 December 2000,

> in which one bidder only submitted a bid in the amount of the procedural costs (minimum bid). On 14 November 2011, a new auction was held in which, according to the town treasury, it would be possible for the town to purchase the property at a price of approx. DM 63,000.00 without any encumbrances. [...]

> Since I do not know what construction planning intentions your department is pursuing with regard to the Neustädter Passage, I would ask you to check whether Department III considers an auction of the property to be necessary.
> letter, 01.10.2001

In reaction, the alderman of the city of Halle wrote in an internal letter:

> The result of the auction is not surprising, as there is practically no demand for high-rise buildings and, incidentally, financially sound banks are totally holding back. For this reason, I have now taken the initiative to develop alternative concepts for the core area of Halle-Neustadt that also include the demolition of at least one Scheibe. The demolition of Scheibe E is certainly one of these concepts, although, as I said, this is initially only a concept.
> letter, 09.10.2001

They furthermore informed their colleague that an auction on the part of the city was out of the ques-tion, because whoever bought Scheibe E at an auction would have to bear the demolition costs. In development plans from 2000, the building was foreseen for demolition, as it was 'predominantly vacant' and 'no coherent utilization concept' had been presented (URBAN 21 action concept, Sep-tember 2000). However, no funding for the demolition of one or several of the Hochhausscheiben was granted. The same planner that I quoted above explained to me that by the time around 2000, when according to them, it was realized that the market would not bring a future for the buildings, the chance for public funding had passed. They remembered:

> At the very beginning, people always thought in such a friendly way that it would sort itself out, the market would sort itself out and the market is a good thing; when we realized that somehow the saw was stuck, it was too late; that was at the end of the 90s/beginning of the 2000s; [...] So if I get into trouble because I have a product that is not in demand – too bad! [...] housing shortage like in the West is years away; there is no pressure on the housing market, it will probably take years yet.

> Now I can say, 'OK, this is a problem for society as a whole, I'll pour some real funding into it.' Unfortunately, the funding for such projects has slowly been running down from its peak.
> interview, 02.10. 2018[12]

When, around the year 2000, Scheibe A and B also became vacant, it seems that not only did the city of Halle lose control over the future, but the future of the buildings themselves also seemed extremely uncertain. In a newspaper article from 1999, it is said that

> the head of the planning department is sounding the alarm. He sees a wasteland emerging in the heart of Neustadt in the near future. Even worse: 'If nothing happens here, the centre of the district will be dead.' The reason for the 'cries of great distress' is the desolate condition of the so-called Scheiben. The five high-rise buildings are largely vacant, and there are currently no feasible concepts for their use.
> *Saale-Kurier*, 01.12.1999)

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10   From the perspective of one of the city's planners, it is important to mention that the buildings were never used as originally planned. The original plan was for flats for workers, not dormitories for students, single people and short-term workers (interview, 02.10.2018).
11   Ringel uses the common abbreviation 'WK' (German 'Wohnkomplex') here for a residential district.

12   What I will show below is that from 2001 onwards, new urban development programmes were launched that would lead to the demolition of thousands of housing units in Neustadt. The unapproved demolition funds for the Hochhausscheiben can be explained, among other things, by the fact that demolishing the high rises would be extremely expensive. A fact I will explain in **chapter 4** when I will discuss the material resistance of the buildings.

The question that arises at this point, and this brings us to the main question of this chapter: What happens to time when the future seems lost or is at least becoming uncertain? With the beginning of a new relation to the future for the buildings, their in-between (that I specify in this thesis as standby) begins, coming with specific temporal experiences that I will outline in the following section. 'Suspended time' serves as their superordinate term.

1.2   Suspended Time

Standby time can be described as suspended time. As Carse and Kneas understand it and apply it to their study of half-built and unfinished infrastructures, a 'suspended presents' heuristic 'is concerned with the varied social experiences and affective states associated with infrastructural delay, from hope and anxiety to waiting and disillusionment' (Carse & Kneas, 2019, p. 18). According to the authors, 'Suspension can mean delay or hangover. Both characterize a temporal orientation defined, on the one hand, by uncertain horizons of project initiation, renewal, or closure and, on the other, the experience of deferral' (Carse & Kneas, 2019, p. 19).

Gupta finds that infrastructures turning into ruins after their construction – he calls them 'ruins of the future' – are 'occupying a temporal zone between the start of projects and their completion […] between potential and actualization' (Gupta, 2018, pp. 69–70). As he finds, the hopes these infrastructures embody become suspended as they remain half-built (for similar observations see also Ssorin-Chaikov, 2003 and Weszkalnys, 2007, p. 222). He furthermore states:

> To label them 'incomplete' would be to succumb to the narrative of completion
> as telos; we should think of this suspension, rather, as a condition in its own right,
> not a transient property on the way to becoming something else. Rather than
> theorize it as immanence, the emergent suspended highway already visible in its
> pillars, I see such ruination as its own condition, its own end.
> (Gupta, 2018, p. 70)

Whereas Gupta studies the 'the afterlife of construction' (Gupta, 2018, p. 68), I am studying the Hochhausscheiben 'post-use'. As said, my take on the temporality of standby is here the temporal experience of planners. Firstly, as I will elaborate, planners involved in the search for a future for the Hochhausscheiben linger between hope and despair and time seems stagnated; secondly, planners share a sense of 'stuckedness' as time is experienced as going round in circles. Last, I will show how waiting as a mode of experiencing the suspension of time is accompanied by a sense of 'alternative-lessness', 'lulling people into "a thick moment of ongoingness"', of transitions and adjustments to the current state' (Berlant, 2011; as cited in: Kemmer et al., 2021, p. 4).

Stagnant Time: Between Despair and Hope

I want to argue that two things make time to stagnate in standby: the lack of future prospects leading to a sense of paralysis; and second, clinging to a hope for a future that is unattainable. In the case here, the future hoped for is growth.

Despair
Planners working at the city administration had lost the prospect of a future and were paralysed in the face of it:

> At that time, this 'shrinking' [note: they are speaking here about
> the shrinking of the city of Halle in terms of inhabitants, but also
> economic decline] was like a paralysing lid on everything, and it was
> very difficult to develop any prospects at all that involved buildings

> and, I don't want to say growth, because I think that's a critical term
> and our societies would actually be well advised to finally put an end
> to this growth. Nevertheless, it's the case that a city, just like a person,
> somehow needs a positive perspective in order to be able to develop
> ideas and to have the courage to implement ideas. And Halle didn't
> have that ten years ago.
> interview, 25.10. 2018

The planner stressed the necessity of a prospect, of possibility and a future to come. If this prospect is missing, they said, there is like a paralysing lid on everything. In the case of Halle, as they described it, this consisted of two things: a depressing present marked by the shrinkage of the city that would provoke a perception of a missing prospect of possibility, a lacking future. On another occasion, they spoke of the shrinking as 'a sword of Damocles' (field notes, 14.04.2021).

The fact that the city could not find a future for the buildings was also, however, due to the fact that 'no one really knew what to do' with the Hochhausscheiben, as a city representative told me in an interview (interview, 28.05.2021). To shape change and make the future, ideas are needed, as planners from Halle are convinced. However, as they told me, it was ideas that were lacking as a prospect for the future was lacking. In Halle, the lack of ideas was also linked to a sentiment of lacking agency to actually realize ideas:

> In contrast to the 2000s, where we didn't even have an idea and no
> implementation, in the 2010s to mid-2010s you already have ideas, but
> implementation continued to falter [...] Credo: we have come much
> further than we have been in the very sad 2000s and in the 2010s,
> which were obsessed with ideas but little with realization; it could
> become something [today], but 'the cow isn't off the ice at all'.[13]
> interview, 02.10.2018

A lack of ideas for the future is common in descriptions of the time after the disintegration of the GDR. For Rottenburg, it is precisely the lack of future-oriented ideas and ideology that characterizes postsocialist transformation and distinguishes it fundamentally from other forms of social change or revolutions (Rottenburg, 2000, p. 89).[14] One of the planners from Halle, who has been working as a planner both under socialism and today, put it this way:

> I think I'm one of the last fossils here that has lived two different
> approaches to planning: top-down governmental planning and now this.
> Neither one has worked out. With top-down planning, the
> possibilities were disappearing at one point due to economic restric-
> tions, but the idea remained.[15] I build a city, a future, an idea,
> that is an idea of a state and a society and today, this is my under-
> standing of planning today: we're successful if we prevent the worst.
> group discussion, 06.02.2020

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13 This is the literal translation of a German proverb that expresses uncertainty.
14 Rottenburg himself, however, was not that sure about the duration of the current state he described, adding: 'However, I do not want to present a general paper on transformation. I also do not intend to give any final answer to the specific question relating to one of the more fascinating cultural aspects of transformation: Is the classification system with its boundaries, working within the social space-time which I will try to describe, presently undergoing a change from one stable form, through a period of liminal crisis, to another relatively stable form, or is the classification system rather becoming more fluid?' (Rottenburg, 2000, p. 89).
15 Bach, in contrast, remembered that even in GDR times there was not much discussion about the idea behind the plans neither: 'Everything was dominated by the responsibility for the construction progress and the associated constant deadline pressure. There was hardly any time for funda-mental discussions. The problems of construction were the subject of discussion – not the idea. The city was not discussed, it was built' (Bach, 1993, p. 33).

The planner associated the transformation from one planning system (socialist top-down) to another (they don't specify what this would be) with the disappearance of ideas for the future. Today, as the quote suggests, the future has disappeared in their everyday practice as there is no idea of the future guiding their action. Ringel's ethnographic material from the city of Hoyerswerda, East Germany, has equally shown how city officials 'failed to provide Hoyerswerda's inhabitants with a convincing idea of the near future' (Ringel, 2018a, p. 92).

Hope

The missing ideas, as can be understood from Guyer, refer to the near future. Guyer notes an evacuation of the near future in postmodernism. This, however, does not mean that there are no ideals for distant futures; these may very well coexist (Guyer, 2007, p. 410; cf. Ringel, 2018a, p. 97). I would now like to show how the hope for these futures brings with it a sense of stagnant time as they are unattainable. As I will suggest, hope can bring a sense of stagnant time when it is directed towards unattainable futures. In one of the quotes above, one of the planners underlined during our interview that planners in the city of Halle hoped that the market, imagined as a 'wonder weapon', might hold a future for the buildings. However, they reported that the Halle city administration had to realize at the moment the buildings became vacant and Scheibe A and C were marketized that the market would not bring a future. What I argue based on my material from Halle, however, and this is somewhat different from the planner's account, is that it is at this moment that hope for the market gained momentum. While some of the planners in retrospect share the view that hoping for the market was unjustified in the early 2000s, I see standby characterized by hope for a future for the buildings brought with private investment.

Standby, in the case of the Hochhausscheiben, is in part to be understood in relation to a 'regime of hope' (Moreira & Palladino, 2005) for the 'better futures' that capitalism promises to deliver. As Kemmer et al. recall,

> feminist critiques have indicated, the affective implications of standby
> become apparent when one studies how conditions of precarity, contingency,
> and crisis linger on and intensify in the shadow of liberal capitalist promises
> for 'better futures' (e.g. Povinelli, 2011, Berlant, 2011). In lieu of struggling for
> transformation, people seem to cling to auspicious government policies […]
> despite their apparent shortcomings and at times detrimental effects.
> (Kemmer et al., 2021, p. 4)

Employees of Halle's city administration hoped, as my informant says, for the 'wonder weapon' (interview, 02.10.2018; see also above) of the market and for growth. They recalled that after 1990 the expectation took hold that the market, and no longer the state, would be the main agent of change (interview, 02.10.2018). Such an expectation as the one they describe entails a turning away from the idea of a future that *can* actually be planned (see Seefried, 2017). This has to do with the fact that they had no possibility to implement their own plans and were relying on the agreement of private investors. As Bernt et al. find, a 'huge gap between the municipal plan to demolish a large share of housing stock' in one of Neustadt's neighbourhoods called *Am Südpark* and 'realities on the ground' emerged, for example. The authors state: 'Indeed, while the strategic goals of the 2002 Masterplan remain officially in place, none has been implemented in the last 15 years. Even worse, the very existence of this plan has practically excluded the neighbourhood from all existing public subsidy programmes for urban development projects' (Bernt et al., 2017, p. 566). Based on their findings, the authors argue that this situation is to be understood as 'a state of limbo in which public planning remains theoretically in place, but its implementation is impossible'(Bernt et al., 2017, p. 567). The authors thus suggest what I have equally observed above, that not only the buildings, but also those engaging with them, seemed to remain in an in-between. The gap described here is, as other authors show, often filled with hope. In Hoyerswerda, as Ringel had found, it was predominantly the Lord Mayor referring to the future in terms of hope. Instead of making promises that they might not be able to see fulfilled (as had often happened in the past), the Lord Mayor very vaguely promised a good future that the city could

hope for, as the city would always be a lovable and liveable city (Ringel, 2018a, p. 97). While Ringel points to the vagueness of the future in hope terms, Metzger points out that hope can serve to stabilize present conditions (Metzger, 2018). Metzger refers here to urban planning and states that

> many articulations of hope in contemporary planning endeavors in practice more
> or less function as mechanisms of cooptation of more radical transformative
> impulses, harnessing the mobilizing potential of hope and enrolling 'progressive'
> planning idealism in a way that it comes to serve as a system-stabilizer rather than
> the system-transforming force many proponents perhaps would like to see it be.
> (Metzger, 2018, p. 118)

In addition to the planners' lack of agency and ideas, which also goes hand in hand with the lack of positive future prospects, the planner mentioned holding on to a future that seemed unattainable: growth (see quote above). The planner problematized that growth seemed a dominant ideal.

Interestingly, East German shrinkage policies of the early years of the new millennium were initially often analysed as policies beyond a growth mindset. East German postsocialist transformation has gained broad attention and has been analysed as 'political and planning agendas that are aimed more at adjustment than at growth' (Bernt, 2009, p. 755). It has even been interpreted 'as a sign of a new openness on the part of decision-makers to urban development without growth'. As Bernt notes, however, 'there are currently more and more voices (also against the background of rising population figures) that criticize the demolition as a policy of interests guided by neoliberal concepts, in favour of the housing companies' (Bernt, 2017, p. 42; own translation). The abandonment of growth as an ideal is thus increasingly questioned in scientific analyses.

One of my informants from Halle's city administration recalled how, even though they received national attention for their policies, they could not identify with urban agendas beyond growth:

> There, even with nationwide attention, people dealt intensively and
> creatively with how to shrink a city healthy,[16] to run it down in every
> respect.[17] And I think this 'shrink healthy' had a similar psychological
> effect as when you say to someone, 'you can be saved, but unfortunately
> we have to amputate both your legs now'. I would say that the joy of
> surviving outweighs the pain, but you still have to fight for the rest
> of your life. That's perhaps a harsh comparison, but I think it went in
> that direction.
> interview, 25.10.2018

My informants perceived the early 2000s as a 'midway place between hell and heaven' (Otto & Strauß, 2019, p. 1806), as they received support for their policies through national restructuring programmes (that drove their actions in the first place). However, 'shrinking healthy' would still not feel satisfying, as shrinking was psychologically difficult to accept, as my informant said. The comparison of shrinkage with the amputated leg seems interesting here. One could also have the association of weight loss in this context, which often has a positive connotation. But here, my informant used the metaphor of the amputated leg, a part of the body that is cut off and does not vanish into thin air or become invisible, like the fat we lose. It does not make us fitter; on the contrary, it hinders our walking. Shrinkage and demolition had been a taboo for a long time and were not politically opportune statements, as another informant told me (interview, 26.10.2018) and as we will see again below.

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16   What is meant with shrink healthy is to say – shrink until it gets to a healthy state (which in an entrepreneurial sense means a balance between offer and demand).
17   Running it down here means first and foremost to reduce it in size. However, it means to adjust all social infrastructure, define new hubs, adjust political organization etc.

Sticking to the ideal of growth can be understood as creating an 'impasse' in Berlant's terms, as it is unattainable.[18] In such a case, optimism is attached to promises that cannot, however, be realized (Otto & Strauß, 2019, p. 1808). On the very first page of her book *Cruel Optimism* (2011), Berlant explains how a

> relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing. It might involve food, or a kind of love; it might be a fantasy of the good life, or a political project. […]. These kinds of optimistic relation aren't inherently cruel. They become cruel only when the object that draws your attachment actively impedes the aim that brought you to it initially. (Berlant, 2011, p. 1)

In John Fante's novel *Wait Until Spring, Bandini,* which Otto and Strauß study to explore the experiences and effects of impasses, it is the American Dream that has become an ideal that many Americans in uncertain working conditions are attached to and stick to, but that decreases their self-esteem (Otto and Strauß 2019). I see growth, but also linearity and change as such ideals that might create a sense of being left behind and having an affect on temporal experience. I may suggest that today's compulsion to change (Adam & Groves, 2007, p. 1) can lead to violence for all those people and places that are not able to embrace change and actively shape it. Others have furthermore shown that it is not only change but also visions of linear time that can exert violence, as they create a perception of failure or of being left behind (Jeffrey, 2008, p. 955) among those whose lives are not 'going somewhere'.

Hoping for the market as a 'wonder weapon' in times of economic decline takes the form of 'mere' waiting. Gasparini defines this as waiting without expecting something concrete to come and contrasts this form of waiting with anticipative waiting, where an actor consciously expects that an event will take place at a given time and exerts certain control over a situation (Gasparini, 1995, p. 30). It speaks to forms of waiting 'when one's lived experience is that *nothing at all is changing*', a sense of 'living in the time of waiting for the event' (Baraitser, 2017, p. 13; emphasis in original). The planner I worked with was questioning growth as an (achievable) ideal, but there was obviously also a lack of other ideals that could have replaced it and formed a way out of the impasse.[19] In such a case, and this is part of standby, time is experienced as stagnant.

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18   The fact that, ironically, as already mentioned, 'shrinking healthy' has led to financial consolidation or even growth for some is not considered here and did not play a role in the perception at the time from the perspective of the city planners.
19   To what extent an ideal that is unreachable might still guide one in meaningful ways is widely discussed in the literature on, among other things, utopia, hope, dreams and wishes (Levitas 2000; Levitas 2010; Ringel 2014). For Lynch, for instance, 'wishes are part of the mechanism of action. Thinking of them is one way of learning how to act better in the present' (Lynch 1975; as cited in: Bates & Kullman, 2017, p. 239). As Ringel critically notes, such scholarship often imposes its own wishful thinking for change on its objects studied. Within such scholarship, he writes, 'the logic is usually the same: change the virtual limits of the possible in order to affect the actual world. At first, a new idea emerges, then follows its actualization in practice. […]. The hoped-for outcome of these imaginary, virtual, or utopian practices in the scholarly imagination is usually the emergence of the alternative or the new–posed against any notion of predetermination' (Ringel, 2014, pp. 62–63). The people Ringel encountered in the shrinking city of Hoyerswerda were, however, more concerned with prolonging the present rather than as radical change. Nonetheless, as I suggest, it is not impossible that such a future equally becomes an impasse, as it may be unreachable.

Circular Time: Stuckedness

Studying temporal experience among planners further, however, it turns out that time is also experienced as circular and therefore not passing. This sense of time is, as I will show, linked to a sense of stuckedness.[20]

Kemmer et al. ask whether standby should be understood as 'a form of "stuckness."' The authors conclude that standby is not a form of stuckness when understood as a verb. In the verb form of 'standing by', at least as Kemmer elsewhere suggests with Simone in regard to standing by promises, to which the authors refer here, standby can entail a kind of emancipatory turn (Kemmer & Simone, 2021). In the act of standing by, people stick to promises, 'hold the promisors accountable and to keep the very objects and aspirations connected to their promises in play' (Kemmer et al., 2021, pp. 4–5). According to the authors, people are in this way able to free themselves from a crisis of subjectivity in the face of the non-fulfilment of capitalist promises that feminist authors have described (Kemmer et al., 2021, p. 4; see above).

My material shows, however, that planners 'on the ground' indeed share a sense of stuckedness in their engagement with the Hochhausscheiben. This is why, in what follows, I will refer to the literature on stuckedness, which helps me to understand the planners' sense of time in standby. Such a feeling has not been described so far for employees of the state, but rather for people who suffer from state repression. The sense of stuckedness here refers to the impossibilities and difficulties that planners experience in their everyday work. This everyday is characterized by processes of making possible futures in the face of the many constraints that their realization faces. Their way of getting away with it is, as I will show in the following section, to take care of other places in the meantime. Furthermore, a normalization of stuckedness takes place in that no alternatives are seen.

In recent years, stuckness or stuckedness has been observed to be an increasingly occurring mode of being. Hage (2009) defines 'stuckedness' as a 'sense of existential immobility' (p. 97). He and others qualify the feeling of being stuck as a recent phenomenon, not only as an experience that has been increasing and that intensified with permanent crisis but also as an experience that has today been normalized (Hage, 2009, p. 97). Stuckedness appears not only or primarily if one remains in an unwanted state but often also when one remains in an in-between state. A range of scholarship has described how people were put into a state of limbo as they lost their jobs due to rapid economic liberalization or were unable to find a job at all, or how they got stuck in refugee camps and 'in an exceptional but enduring present' that excludes both the past and the future (Alexander & Sanchez, 2018b, p. 11). In a study on long-term unemployment, Laliberte Rudman and Aldrich (2016) found that participants experienced a tension between being activated through governmental programmes and, at the same time, being stuck. They carried out and were forced to carry out a whole range of activities, such as training, courses and, of course, job applications. They felt as if they were doing everything they could, but they were still unable to find a job. Stuckedness has mainly been observed in contexts of great uncertainty linked to precarious living and working conditions. According to Otto and Strauß, 'uncertainty has become an experiential norm, if not an existential threat, for people across professions, localities and milieus' (Otto & Strauß, 2019, p. 1806). Besides feelings of stress and anxiety, experiences of precarity and uncertainty may be linked 'to sensations emanating from feelings of being trapped, stuck, in limbo, or permanently liminal' (Otto & Strauß, 2019, p. 1806). What studies on stuckness share is the sense of in-between-ness, experienced as remaining between 'on' and 'off'. Also, repeated attempts at exiting this state apparently do not free people from the feeling of being held in the same place.

Participants in Laliberte Rudman and Aldrich's study on long-term unemployment have described how, with feelings of stuckedness, life did not move forward but sometimes moved backward (Laliberte Rudman & Aldrich, 2016, p. 7) or in a 'vicious cycle' (Laliberte Rudman & Aldrich, 2016, p. 8). A similar experience was shared by my informants from Halle, for whom time felt stagnant, as the resolution states, and circular, as the following episode from 2020 which I recorded in my field notes shows:

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20   'Stuckness' describes the feeling of being stuck or getting stuck. Ghassan Hage suggests the term 'stuckedness' for situations of prolonged 'stuckness' (Ghassan Hage [@anthroprofhage], 2021). I will use both terms as I also refer to authors who speak of 'stuckness'. Nevertheless, I understand standby as being and remaining in an in-between and therefore prefer the term 'stuckedness'.

On a Thursday morning in February 2020, some of the employees of
the city administration in Halle (Saale) laugh while I'm presenting
some findings of my research on past planning for the empty high-rise
towers A–E post-1990.
From the corner of my eye, I saw the team leader making circling
movements with her hand holding a pencil. For a moment, the laughs
and the circling confused me: was what I was saying boring or repetitive?
After I had finished my presentation, one of the planners said:
'I find it interesting [...], but also depressing how it all repeats itself.
[note: several people laugh] – well (loudly) – it's still always the same
when you see that the topics have actually been discussed for 30 years
[...] – so somehow that is totally interesting and somehow the point
we're at today is similar as perhaps 20 years ago [...].'

And another participant added: 'Indeed, it's now almost another,
another step in the circle, since we met the last time. In fact, the
developments actually indicate at the moment that we will at least
make the next round.'

group discussion 06.02.2020

It was thus not the repetitiveness of my talk but the perceived repetitiveness and circularity of time that made them laugh. During my presentation in 2020, I presented to the staff what I had found so far in the archives of the city administration in answer to my search for explanations as to why the Hochhausscheiben have been neither demolished nor renovated in the past 20 years and how possible futures for them were made and unmade. I told them that for me, the numerous plans, concepts, minutes, letters, emails, calculations, newspaper articles, etc. testified to the fact that the buildings have always been and still are in a tense position in-between, oscillating between demolition and various forms of preservation. I proposed the metaphor of the buildings 'hanging in the air' that a Neustadt local had used (field notes, 12.07.2018) during one of my first visits to Halle-Neustadt in 2018 and that had illuminated many of my thoughts on the high-rise towers since. To stay in the air and not fall down, but also not to be anchored in the ground, activity was needed, as I explained, and we were able to trace such activity in the archival documents. I saw the documents as reflecting redevelopment expectations and postponed promises of redevelopment and the 'animated series of projects, successful and failing, as a changing and criss-crossing trajectory of unstable definitions and expertises, of recalcitrant materials and building technologies, of flip-flopping users' concerns and communities' appraisals' (Latour & Yaneva, 2017, p. 109).

To the planners listening to my presentation, time appeared to be circular as they felt that it was not only the buildings, but they themselves who remained in an ongoing, never completed process of search for a future for the towers. As I presented plans and processes around finding a future for the Hochhausscheiben to the planners on that day in February 2020, the sensation that they were moving in circles, that things were repeating themselves, occurred. On the one hand, they felt that it was the same issues and problems they had been discussing for 20 or 30 years that were standing in the way of a future for the buildings. These issues included, according to one of the planners, the condition of the buildings, their significance as built heritage and vertical accent, alternating good and bad relationships between the city of Halle and other involved actors, including, above all, the state of Saxony-Anhalt, but also differing ideas about possible uses (field notes, 06.02.2020). On the other hand, there were small circles of attempts to define a future that had failed and brought the planners back to the starting point. Time was experienced by the planners as not passing, as it passed in 'circular rhythm' (Kemmer et al., 2021, pp. 14–15).

Repeating is also one of the modes of 'time's suspension' Baraitser describes. In her book *Enduring Time* (2017), Baraitser assembles various such modes, including 'waiting, staying, delaying, enduring, persisting, repeating, maintaining, preserving and remaining'; what these share, according to the author, is that they 'produce felt experiences of time *not passing*' (Baraitser, 2017, p. 2; emphasis in original). From the situation described above and other instances from the field

where the planners complained that 'nothing moves forward' (field notes, 20.04.2021; 27.05.2021), I suggest that time is experienced as circular and as 'suspended time', as time without (linear) flow in a mode of standby (Baraitser, 2017, p. 1; Kemmer et al., 2021, pp. 14–15). Suspended time means that time is not lost or stopped, but it becomes a 'viscous fluid' and is 'no longer a line with direction or purpose but a pool, the welling up of present time that will not pass and has no rim'. It 'both holds and suspends time as motion' (Baraitser, 2017, p. 1). For such temporal experience when activities in the present and the known forthcoming break down, it has been found that 'the present can come to weigh on the minds of the individual subject as a type of "curse" or "burden"' (Jeffrey, 2008, p. 955). Bourdieu describes how moments can become 'critical moments', 'when the forthcoming does not come, but is suspended, in question, objectively or subjectively' (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 210). Time stagnates in a mode of standby, one might suggest, as it requires 'constant negotiations with a lasting experience of ambiguity, in-betweenness, placelessness (Ybema et al., 2011), a condition that has in fact become an (undesirable) status quo' (Otto & Strauß, 2019, p. 1808). Although much has happened and the city administration has repeatedly problematized the high-rise buildings and been involved in negotiations for their future, the goal of their use has not been achieved. The negotiations therefore seem to go around in an endless circle.

Ongoingness: Waiting

Waiting, and especially 'permanent' (Bear, 2017, p. 147), 'prolonged waiting' or even 'chronic waiting' (Jeffrey, 2008, p. 954) are described in the literature in connection with a similar sense that I have described above: that time does not pass. Forms of extended waiting have more recently been described and conceptualized predominantly in relation to long-term displacement and (im)mobility (Conlon 2011; Hyndman and Giles 2011; Mountz 2011; Brun 2015).

What I observe in the case of the planners from Halle is that waiting is rather a form of freeing oneself from the feeling of being stuck. Not in relation to the fact that new possibilities and change arose for the Hochhausscheiben, but I see waiting emerging in relation to a form of moving on, nonetheless. The planners' way of getting by and freeing themselves of a sense of stuckness, as I will show, is to take care of other places in the meantime. Furthermore, a normalization of stuckness takes place, in that no alternatives are seen.

What will become tangible here is standby's 'ongoingness'. The term 'ongoingness' is used in the conception of production, circulation and consumption of products. Here, researchers use the term to refer to the non-linearity of the paths products take and their continued existence after consumption (Herod et al., 2014; Lepawsky & Mather, 2011). Since I describe the standby mode of the Hochhausscheiben as a 'post-use' mode of buildings' lives, the notion of 'ongoingness' therefore seems very appropriate from my perspective. In addition, 'ongoingness' is used by feminist cultural theorist Berlant, together with forms of 'getting by, and living on'(Berlant, 2011, p. 99) and the experience of 'crisis-shaped subjectivity'. Berlant points here to the 'adjudication, adaptation, and improvisation' (Berlant, 2011, p. 54) within people's everyday. Such an understanding of 'ongoingness' again fits the concern here – namely, the temporal experience of the planners involved in the search for possible futures for the buildings. I will now explain how ongoingness comes together with waiting and represents a third form of suspended time.

Panic and Inertia

Jeffrey identifies several types of temporal experience coming with prolonged waiting, one of which 'consists of a volatile mix of *panic and inertia*' (Jeffrey, 2008, p. 956). This type is of particular interest for us if we are to understand temporal experiences among Halle's city planners.

In this waiting mode, the sense of time always oscillates between 'urgency and boredom', as Jeffrey notes. For the definition of the fourth type of prolonged waiting, he refers to Bourdieu, who argued 'that moments of "emergency" or crisis unpredictably interrupt people's experience of empty successive time, such that waiting communities lurch between acute crises and long periods of "dead time"' (Jeffrey, 2008, p. 956).

These descriptions speak to what one of the planners said about the time at the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s:

> Of course, people were aware that we were losing population, which is also a psychological phenomenon: this population loss was actually most blatant in the first years after the fall of the Wall, and from the pure statistics you could see this all the time – no secret, figures are open – and until the end of the 1990s until the 2000/2002 overall crash, the banking crisis came.

At this point, the description speaks to inertia. Then, however, my informant described a turn to panic:

> And then came exactly the turn to the opposite, that people said, 'have you actually looked at the figures?' That's also such a phenomenon: of course, everyone had looked at the numbers, they had just interpreted them differently; and then they said, 'That's dramatic, that's horrible, that's a catastrophe, what have we lost in population, we've lost one of the largest populations of all the cities in East Germany'; and then you get into such a rut, also a certain self-pity …
> interview, 25.10.2018

Acknowledging the increasing vacancy of the housing stock was not politically opportune. In fact, several ministers at the time, including the then Minister of Construction of Saxony-Anhalt, said in 2000 still, 'I'm not a demolition minister', a quote that one of my informants from Halle remembers during an interview as well (interview, 02.10.2018). According to the reading of the journalist reporting on this issue, all those politically responsible 'shirked the necessary consequences as a precautionary measure' (Bornhöft, 2000).

While subsequently, as I have shown, the hope was placed in private investment with regard to the Hochhausscheiben, from 2001 onwards the city of Halle reacted – in line with national urban development programmes – to the growing vacancies with large-scale demolitions.

In 2001, the city of Halle (Saale) elaborated its first general plan or Integrated Urban Development Concept for Halle-Neustadt (called 'Integriertes Stadtentwicklungskonzept' or ISEK in short), which my informant called a 'panic-driven' plan (interview, 02.10.2018). Whereas demolition had been a taboo in the 1990s, they remembered politicians saying all of a sudden, at the end of the 1990s: 'Oops, this is going to be a really big problem' (interview, 02.10.2018).

It might seem strange to call the demolition of thousands of apartments 'waiting'. However, I see it as a form of 'equipped waiting'. With Gasparini we might speak of 'equipped waiting' as occurring when 'the actor pursues a strategy whereby time is filled so as to reduce its costly or unpleasant effects […]. Waiting is an experience filled with substitute meanings' (Gasparini, 1995, pp. 35–36). While Gasparini is referring here to individual everyday equipped waiting and to activities such as eating or sleeping, which may function as meaningful ways of filling waiting time, I take inspiration from his work to suggest that taking care of other places and demolitions may become meaningful actions *while* waiting for change or growth that might bring a new demand for the Hochhausscheiben or, alternatively, the opportunity to demolish them and redevelop the area. In fact, an influence was exerted here on the relationship between supply and demand and the coffers of the housing companies were cleaned up. For the Hochhausscheiben, however, nothing changed with the demolitions in Neustadt, because people either moved out of Halle into the old town or into one of the emerging single-family housing estates on the outskirts of the city (Stadt Halle (Saale), 2020, p. 58).

The planners devoted themselves to other places, while not managing to achieve the materialization of any future for the high-rise buildings in the centre. As one of the planners explained, once the situation had changed into panic, they became engaged in the demolition of the housing stock and neglected the existing stock, including the high rises in the centre. They said:

> We [also] didn't think about the fact that not just demolition is the solution, but that you always have to drive on two tracks, of course,

have to take stock away, but I have to take care of my stock, that wasn't an issue at all, at that time it was just demolition. [...] So, we lost 10 years senselessly and then slowly the realization came, not only among the few technical idiots, but also among what is called the citizenry, that the high rises are of great importance, but equally absolutely problematic.
> interview, 02.10.2018 [21]

The planner used here the proverb 'high in the sky, sad in death', referring to a poem by J. W. von Goethe, to describe how in urban development people were happy to have been given an opportunity to act, on which they then (and almost without exception) focused (interview, 02.10.2018). The city of Halle only partially engaged in developing the existing and so also the Hochhausscheiben.[22]

Alternativelessness

However, they themselves made clear that, as urban planners, they would have had no alternative but to engage only partially with the Hochhausscheiben.[23] The feeling of being stuck obviously does not mean that urban planners were giving up. But they continued elsewhere, leaving decisions on the Hochhausscheibe pending, while still partially engaging in searches for their future. Waiting, as I suggest drawing on this, makes time go on while being partially engaged.

As I furthermore find, suspended time takes on another meaning when it is thought of as 'alternativeless'. The planner saw waiting and suspended time as 'alternativeless', because the alternatives were not considered reasonable. Asked whether there had been alternatives to waiting with regard to the high rises, the planner said:

> What alternatives are there for municipalities to waiting and seeing? There are none. We aren't owners, today's urban planning is a pastoral task, you have to convince; the chances of success are not necessarily a given; we are only attached to the money; if I put in subsidies, then the question is whether that is sustainable[24]; there is no alternative to waiting.
> interview, 02.10.2018

The head of the planning department saw himself as an optimist, believing that where there is a goal, there is a way. But then they added: 'Of course, it has to be said that the situation in the previous years arose during an economic downturn, where you can't work magic. You can then [only] put an infinite amount of public money into it' (interview, 08.07.2020).

Hage has argued that being stuck is perceived as something 'which has to be endured' rather than as something 'one needs to get out of at any cost'. In the case that I see expressed in the testimonies from Halle, '*waiting out* of the crisis' was valued and prevented calling for change (Hage, 2009, p. 1). Or, as Kemmer et al. note, referring to Berlant (2011): 'the ordinariness of such affective unease can also function as a soothing rhythm, constantly lulling people into "a thick moment of ongoingness", of transitions and adjustments to the current state' (Kemmer et al., 2021, p. 4).

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21 The valuation of the high rises A to E as valuable but equally as a problematic will be discussed in a separate chapter (chapter 5).

22 Bennett argues drawing on for ruins in contemporary Russia that 'ruins can actually result from progress rather than its reversal' (M. M. Bennett, 2021, p. 334). My finding here supports such argument as the city only partially engaged in determining a future for the Hochhausscheiben and instead focused on other sites where action was enabled through national urban development funds.

23 I will come back to this when I will be exploring how the city of Halle engaged in maintaining standby through standing by the buildings (chapter 4). In chapter 6, I will further develop on the relation between city and the buildings as well as their future, but also between the city and owners of the Hochhausscheiben being loose in a mode of standby (cf. Kemmer et al., 2021, p. 14).

24 The planner questions the sustainability of public investment in the buildings, as a large sum of public money would be needed to maintain the Hochhausscheiben and yet one could not be sure that long-term uses and economic viability could be achieved.

In Halle, waiting and adjusting to the current state meant, as the city's mayor is quoted in a newspaper, postponement. In 2014 – one year before the resolution of 2015 discussed at the beginning of this chapter and the year of Halle-Neustadt's 50th anniversary – the mayor surprisingly brought into play the demolition of the four empty high rises, if no long-term use had been found by 2015. A media article cites them as follows: 'We are now waiting for another year and then a solution must be found. The ultima ratio [last resort] is demolition' (*MZ*, 25.02.2014). They announced that, by summer 2015, the planning office was to develop ideas and use concepts for the four high rises. The newspaper cited them again: 'The decision has been postponed for years; now we need an end point'. They added that none of the owners were taking care of the buildings and that 'security costs for the city of Halle were high' (*MZ*, 25.02.2014). Their statement that the future for the Hochhausscheiben had been postponed over recent decades reflected a will for activity and reactivation of the buildings that would find expression in the 2015 resolution. With the resolution from 2015, the city of Halle wanted to end what they framed as the 'status quo'. Postponement itself also suggests an intention of waiting for the past years, i.e. a form of active waiting. However, as mentioned above, from the planning point of view, there was no alternative.

1.3   Synthesis

As the title suggests, this chapter asks whether standby can be understood as a state of being stuck. It aims to grasp how we can understand standby in temporal terms and what standby does to time by studying how time is perceived and experienced among urban planners involved in the search for possible futures for the Hochhausscheiben. It started with the terminology of time as 'status quo' in a resolution paper from 2015 that suggested that the City Council preserve the high-rise buildings in Halle-Neustadt. Looking back at the past 15 years, the resolution found that decay and stagnated development characterized the past decades of the buildings. After German reunification, the paper states, no long-term use was found for the high rises. While the buildings were sold and resold, no future could be determined. Within the resolution, time is measured in relation to linear conceptualizations of time and to mobility and change. This framing of post-reunification development resonates with what several authors have noted for postmodernity: that time lost its direction and got lost and replaced by an ongoing present.

What this chapter shows is that city government planners in the early 1990s tried to control the future and preserve the present. For example, they imposed conditions on the private investors of Scheibe D and E for the renovation and use of the buildings. Increasingly, however, the future was out of their hands. Around the year 2000, the buildings lost their use and their future became uncertain. Documents from the city administration show that the prospect of future use was considered almost impossible by city staff. With the vacancy of the buildings, the search for possible futures begins for them under new resolutions – one of them being that time has been suspended, as I argue.

For standby, which I see historically emerging around the year 2000 and when the Hochhausscheiben fell vacant, people experienced time as not passing, as the shrinkage weighed on them like a 'paralysing lid' and they lacked prospects for the future. I showed, furthermore, how the lack of ideas for the future was linked to sticking to ideals such as growth as an (unreachable) ideal in the Halle of the early 2000s. Not only despair but also hope, as we have seen, led to a sense of stagnated time as it was addressing unreachable futures. What I furthermore found is that a sense of stuckedness is linked to repeated processes of making possible futures and discussions on constraints to their realization. Time then becomes circular, with experiences of being trapped in an ongoing in-between characterized by repeated discussions and negotiations. Third, I identified waiting as a form of the temporal experienced within suspended time. Waiting that comes with only partial engagement of the city of Halle in the future of the Hochhausscheiben has been presented by some of my informants as the (only) reasonable way to deal with the future of the buildings, as potential ways out were not considered reasonable. In fact, from the early 2000s, they were mostly involved in large-scale demolitions in Halle-Neustadt, funded by national urban development programmes launched in 2001. Not only were there no prospects in times of urban shrinkage, but according to planners, there were also no alternatives to waiting, leading to a mode of 'ongoingness', in the sense of getting by.

While in the resolution, the past years were characterized as the 'status quo' – that is, as a time that is lost as no visible change occurred – I have nuanced what standby does to time. Exploring what standby does to time also required moving beyond linear and static perceptions of time and paying closer attention to the involved actors' perceptions and experiences. What I observe is a tension between stagnant and circular time in standby that comes together in a mode of ongoingness. While standby can lead to a sense of stuckedness and make time circulate and stagnate, time is filled by practices and modes of reasoning with a substitution effect, e.g. postponement.

2   Rhythms of Standby

If we recognize that time is not a simple succession of events on a string towards progress and a chain of cause-effect reasoning (Benjamin, 1986) – a lesson I take from **chapter 1**, we search to understand how it flows, what forms and directions it takes and what makes it turn, slow down or pause. Dodgshon notes that

> Under the heading of time flow as something continuous, we can distinguish between a continuous but regular flow of time as opposed to a continuous but uneven flow: the former being best represented by the fixed, even measure of clock time and work disciplines, while the latter is represented by experiential time and its innate variability of flow (e.g. Lefebvre 2004). Contrasted with the continuous flow of time is the view that its flow can be disrupted by broken, disconnected or disjunctive moments.
> (Dodgshon, 2008, p. 10)

Analyses of rhythms have become popular since the early 2000s, especially in time geography. Lefebvre assumes that 'Everywhere where there is interaction between a place, a time, and an expenditure of energy, there is rhythm' (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 15). His 'rhythmanalysis' (Lefebvre, 2004) has inspired much of the scholarship on rhythm, especially in geography. It was, for example, the starting point for a book edited by Edensor in 2010, *Geographies of Rhythm: Nature, Place, Mobilities and Bodies* and equally serves me as starting point for this chapter. As Edensor writes, 'Rhythmanalysis can help explore notions that places are always in a process of becoming, seething with emergent properties, but usually stabilized by regular patterns of flow that possess particular rhythmic qualities whether steady, intermittent, volatile or surging' (Edensor, 2010b, p. 3).

This chapter expands from the first chapter and equally studies what standby does to time. It explores temporal processes as rhythms and builds up from repetitious and circular experiences of time that I have described in **chapter 1**. Rather than understanding standby as a state of being in-between, I suggest understanding it as a non-linear process, 'associated with distinct temporal frames, rhythms, and conditions of possibility' (Carse & Kneas, 2019, p. 18).

Kemmer et al. also find that 'The repeated duration of standby indicates how despite having a temporal quality of being-in-the-present, standby always also refers to that which comes next' (Kemmer et al., 2021, pp. 14–15). In line with this observation, I will argue that in the case of the Hochhausscheiben, the rhythm of standby is to be found in repetitive (both repetition of the same and repetition entailing difference, see Bryant, 2016, p. 25) processes of making and unmaking possible futures. Possible building futures usually contain use-related, form-related, or management-related visions for one or more of the high rises. → **fig. 26; 27; 28; 29; 30**   Not all of them address these aspects and/or do not treat these aspects equally. They are related to anticipated potentialities with regard to monetary or symbolic rewards for the neighbourhood, the district of Halle-Neustadt or Halle (Saale). Possible building futures thus relate concrete visions for one or more buildings to diverse and bigger anticipated futures such as demographic or economic change.[25] Possible building futures are thus related to a diversity of futures on both tighter and bigger spatial-temporal horizons. An example would be the so-called 'refugee crisis' in 2015, with more than a million people entering Germany. Anticipated demand and the expectation of ad hoc government funding for renovations to accommodate

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[25]   The term 'big futures' has been used to describe large-scale and substantial changes and to study how these are related to small-scale changes emerging with the unfolding of the everyday (Michael, 2017, p. 510). While big futures get enacted in everyday practices, scholarship using this term equally highlights how everyday practices may shape and inform big futures. The aim of this distinction is to elaborate the multiplicity of references to different futures in everyday practices, e.g. in relation to socio-technical change (Michael, 2017).

Fig. 26

Fig. 27

Fig. 26; 27
Possible futures for the Hochhausscheiben.
Study on an overall urban development
concept for Halle-Neustadt's district centre.
ARGE Graul and Partners, 12.12.2001.

people motivated the development of possible futures for the high rises in Halle-Neustadt. Controversies surrounding these anticipated futures united different possible futures from the national to the neighbourhood level and the concrete material transformation of the high rises.[26]

As I see it, trajectories of possible futures for the high rises are at the heart of standby, as it is the trajectories of these possible futures that hold within them the potential of on-ness and off-ness in the event of their being realized, but also the recurring actualization of standby if they do not get realized. In a mode of standby, the potential is nurturing the process without imposing directions. The intermediary stage is thus not a static position, but, as we will see, standby constantly gets 're-examined, renegotiated and/or re-established' (Sormani et al., 2019, p. 4) with the examination, negotiation and non-realization of possible building futures. To look for the rhythm of standby, I consequently decided to follow trajectories of possible building futures. Following possible futures implies, as I see it, 'rhythms, cycles, rituals, (a)synchronicities, and time horizons' (Abram and Weszkalnys, 2013, p. 22). Inspiration to follow the trajectory of possible futures for the buildings came from works within the literature on design processes and 'doing architecture' where temporal aspects of processes and rhythms have received attention, as in the work of Mommersteeg who writes: 'Following the trajectory […] will require us to pay attention to these "intervals", to everything that happens in between, in specific moments and sites, and to the experiences that constitute detours and bifurcations' (Mommersteeg, 2018, p. 223). Such scholarship that recollects trajectories (Yaneva, 2009) not only considers the non-linear becoming of, in this case, an architectural design, but also pays attention to forms of such non-linearity. In order to be able 'to capture a rhythm', as Lefebvre writes,

> one needs to have been *captured* by it. One has to *let go*, give and abandon
> oneself to its duration. Just as in music or when learning a language, one only
> really understands meanings and sequences by *producing* them […]
> Therefore, in order to *hold* this fleeting object, which is not exactly an *object*,
> one must be at the same time both inside and out.
> (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 219; emphasis in original)

The documents that form the basis for such experimental encounters in my case are like a fractured landscape (DeSilvey, 2012, p. 36) that we can read along and through. However, I want to note that to a certain extent, the project will always remain incomplete; things appear here as chronological or even causal sequences that may not have been. Furthermore, I want to highlight that working with historical documents allows me to know things – for example, how events unfolded and what things remain or re-emerge after longer breaks, that the people (un-)making possible futures in the past did not necessarily know (Plourde, 2018, p. 175).

2.1   Ruptures and Continuity

The examples within this chapter come from the trajectory of one possible future – that of 'governmental use and revitalization'. The possible future 'governmental use and revitalization' is just one of many possible futures we are able to follow along non-linear trajectories. It is one of many possible futures that 'never saw the light of day', that were thought, planned and decided, 'but stopped before they led to a more formal commitment' (Plourde, 2018, p. 184).

They emerge at one moment in time and disappear at another, get forgotten for some time and re-emerge again. Other possible futures were discussed in parallel, such as residential use or demolition. Not all possible futures for the high rises have such a long trajectory, and there are possible futures that do not refer specifically to one building but to one or even several buildings, such as the possible future 'residential use'. These possible futures exist simultaneously; their trajectories meet, coexist or compete with each other.

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26   In other cities in Germany as well, the 'refugee crisis' led to a reassessment of buildings that were previously destined for demolition. Ringel notes for such case in Bremerhaven: 'Such practices of revaluation helped to reconsider the temporal properties of postindustrial excess, whose future had until recently been avoided, forgotten, or forfeited' (Ringel, 2018b, p. 69).
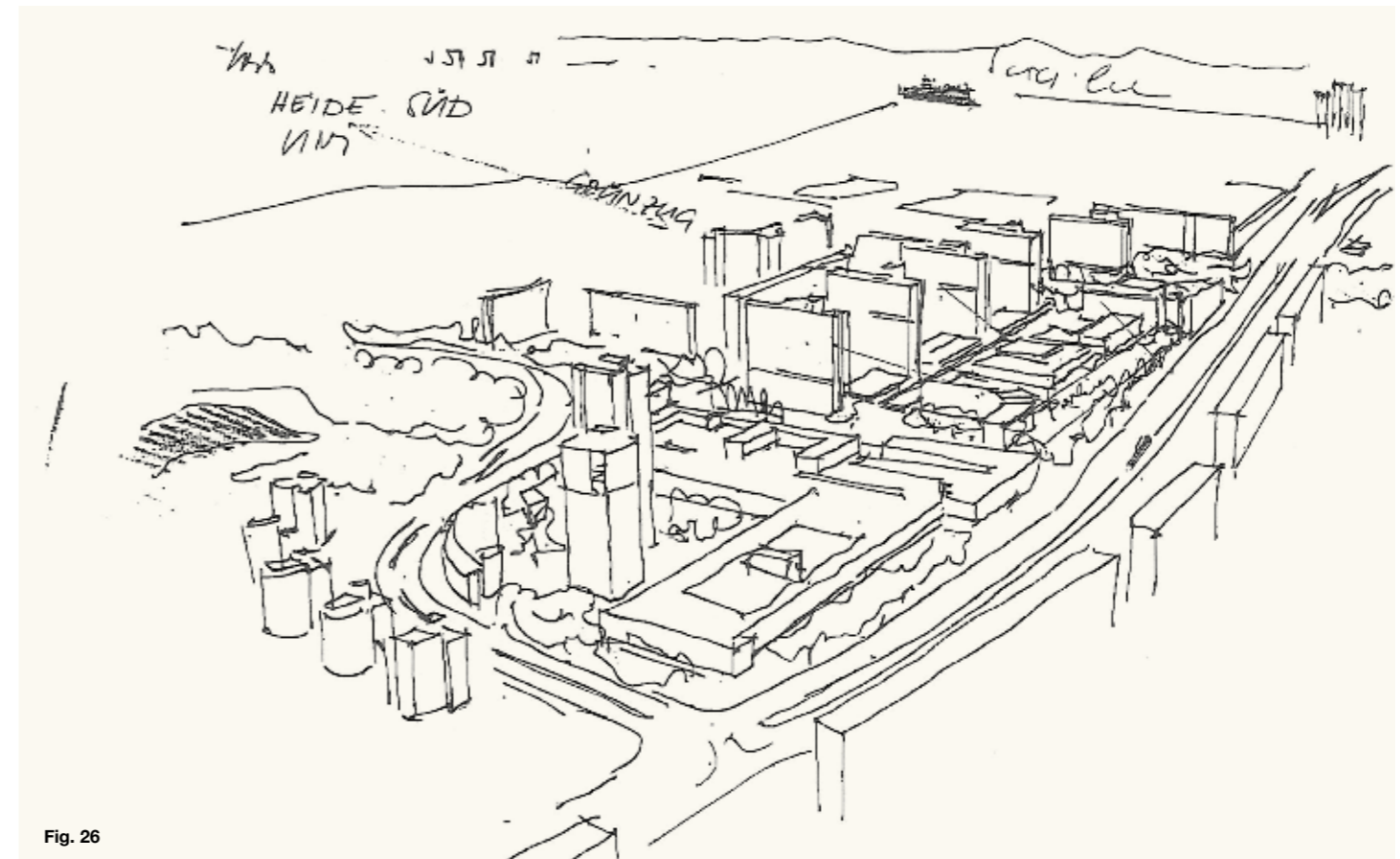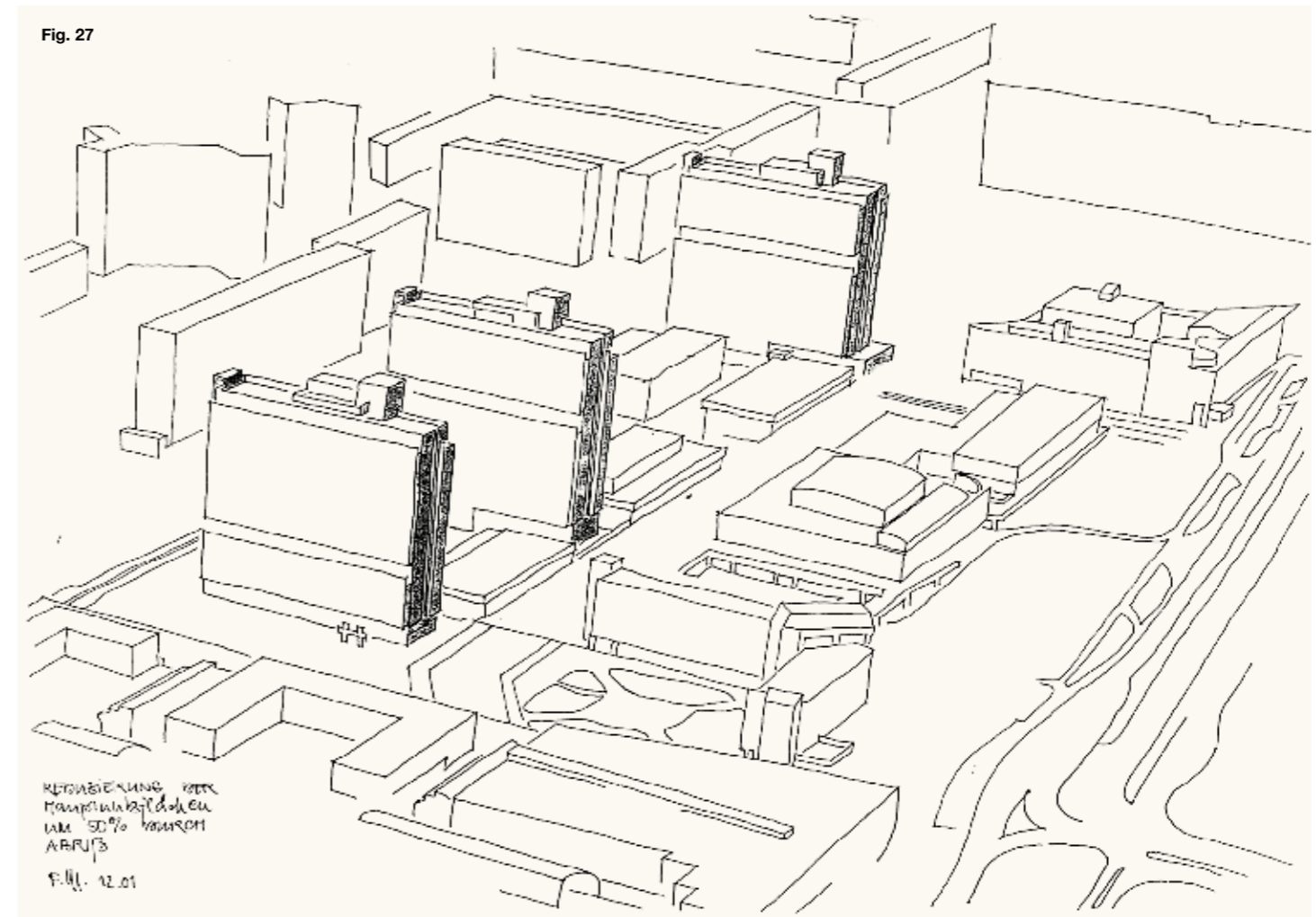

Fig. 28; 29; 30
Possible futures for the Hochhausscheiben.
Study on an overall urban development
concept for Halle-Neustadt's district centre.
ARGE Graul and Partners, 12.12.2001.

Between 1999 and 2009, there were repeated considerations and efforts to use Scheibe C to house state institutions of the state of Saxony-Anhalt. This building is the only one that was still in state ownership, namely that of the state of Saxony-Anhalt, until 2015. As a result, the state was repeatedly asked by the city administration to contribute to the creation of a future of the buildings and the stabilizing of the Neustadt district by using Scheibe C to house governmental authorities and, specifically, its tax authorities. It was assumed, or rather hoped, that a use of one of the buildings could also lead to a use of the other empty high-rise buildings.

In fact, the Halle city administration saw use by the authorities as the only possible use for the building. This has hardly changed over the years. At least the reasons given in 2000 read similarly to those given in 2009, and in 2005 one of the city planners from Halle answered the question of whether there were alternatives to state use with a clear 'no' (email, 19.10.2005). Both the reasons for accommodating the authorities in the building, put forward by the city administration and citizens' initiatives from Halle, and the counter-arguments of the state against it, read similarly. And yet, on closer inspection, there are differences between 2000 and 2009. These relate less to elements involved in the configurations (they seem quite similar) but to the harmony between different rhythms and the effects that the situations have on the future, as I will show.

The main argument I want to develop in this chapter is that, on the one hand, individual events lose their eventfulness in standby mode while, on the other hand, events as part of processes looking for possible futures actualize and stabilize standby. The rhythm of standby results from continuity, which is shaped not only by the continued existence of the building itself and its vacancy, by actors such as the city, neighbours and the state, but also by the continuous impossibility and unattainability of the future. At the same time, it is characterized by recurring search movements, smaller and larger ruptures and voices that sometimes run parallel and sometimes against each other.

We can think of standby as a non-linear process that resembles a piece of music: on one side we have a *basso continuo*, and then we have different voices that form variations in different but recurring patterns. Lefebvre has noted a coexistence of both 'cyclical repetition and the linear repetitive' (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 8) within the rhythms of place. Important to note, however, is that the basso continuo is not to be imagined as regular movement, but as irregular and repetitive. We have continuity and we have pauses and punctures of different intents that manifest themselves in events that are marked by the destabilization of networks, by non-synchrony or rupture.

In following the possible future of governmental use and revitalization along its trajectory, will look at what is changing and remaining, as well as at continuity and ruptures.

Building C was used as a student dormitory in GDR times and was owned by the state of Saxony-Anhalt. In 1999, before the final closure of the dormitory was imminent,[27] the city of Halle's deputy mayor, responsible for city development and planning, decided to initiate a Round Table[28] over the buildings' future to prevent its vacancy. They wrote in a letter to the Ministry of Finance:

> Since I am not willing to accept the vacancy of building C without comment, I would like to use this letter to inform you that I will invite representatives of the City Council, the press and also the affected neighbours of the Neustadt centre (the merchants have joined together to form a community of interests in the Halle-Neustadt-Verein) to a Round Table discussion.
>
> letter, 14.09.1999

The round table discussion was held on 29 November 1999, with various actors concerned about the future of the buildings – among them representatives of the state. In my view, the Round Table should be understood in terms of three aspects: as an event in the face of the imminent rupture; as a moment in which the future of the building was consciously linked to other futures on different scales; and as a moment in which the city tried to get the greatest possible number of actors involved in the 'gathering' (Latour, 2003, p. 235) behind the future it proposed at the meeting – that is, to house government agencies in the building and thus continue to use the building and by this method secure its future. These aspects become clear from the letter excerpt quoted above, where the alderman of the city announced he would involve representatives of the City Council, the press and neighbours in the discussions, and another excerpt from the letter written by the alderman to the state:

> After the failures of the past months, this seems to us to be the last remaining opportunity to get back into the conversation.
>
> [...] Despite the overall difficult situation in the economy and thus in the labour market and the resulting increase in vacant flats due to fluctuation, I appeal to everyone's responsibility to look intensively for ways and possible solutions to avert the further threat of vacancies and to find a reasonable use for them.
>
> I hope that the Round Table will bring the hoped-for movement into the discussion, and above all I hope for your understanding for the situation and for the approach.
>
> letter, 14.09.1999

The Round Table and the possible future 'governmental use and revitalization' proposed here appear in a situation of perceived urgency, acceleration and extreme uncertainty. It is to be seen as a last-ditch attempt to prevent the building from becoming vacant. The round table was organized as the closure of the student dormitories was approaching and as bilateral negotiations with the state of Saxony-Anhalt had failed. Heading straight for this perceived dead end, the city tried to turn the impossibility resulting from the failed bilateral negotiations around. They furthermore tried to prevent what might have irreversible effects not only for building C, but also for the other high rises and the district as a whole. One of the planners from Halle explained in an interview how the city – in view of the vacancy or imminent vacancy of *all* the Hochhausscheiben (except for building D) – tried to get the state at least to take responsibility for the building. They said: 'after we realized at some point [...] that the self-running of the market was probably not going to help us, we tried to 'torture' the state a bit and put a tax office there' (interview, 02.10.2018). By this time, Scheibe B was already vacant and the closure of the dorms in buildings A and C was about to happen.

It is interesting that in view of the imminent rupture, which the city wants to prevent (last minute), the vacancy of the high rises is first made, or is to be made, a 'matter of concern' (Latour, 2003, p. 235) of many through the Round Table. This can be seen as a deliberate step that the municipality was taking here to expand the range of possible futures and thus find a future where there seemed to be none. First, the issue is made a problem that affects a whole range of actors and is multi-scalar embedded. As is clear from the letter above, the economic situation and the labour market situation, associated migration and the vacancy rate in Neustadt in general are linked to the fate of building C. Getting more actors involved, linking the building's future to bigger futures, the city

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27 As early as 1993, the Studentenwerk, which looks after the dormitory on behalf of the university and the state as owner, reported that the number was decreasing due to the poor condition of the dormitories. The renovation effort is estimated to be too high, the building is assessed as 'unfavourable' for accommodating students. No further investment should therefore be made in this location. The phasing out of both Scheibe A and C as student dorms was planned from 1993 on (Consultation minutes of a meeting between the Studentenwerk and representatives of the city administration in 1993). However, the dormitory was not closed until the end of 1999 (see **chapter 1**).

28 The so-called Round Table was an institution in East Germany that started on 7 December 1989 in East Berlin. Between 1989 and 1990, the Round Tables, at which the future of the GDR was negotiated with representatives of parties and citizens' movements, met almost weekly. They were supposed to accompany the transformation, promote democratization and control the administration (Petschow, 2016).

hoped, could avert sole responsibility from the city, circumvent the impasse towards which the Hoch-hausscheiben were heading and lead to the development of perspectives for the future. The effect of the dead end was a movement towards opening the future. Following the round table, the following newspaper article was published, recalling that the round table was meant to give an impulse to open up for 'perspectives':

> The five high-rise buildings are largely empty, and there are currently no feasible concepts for their use. A round table, which took place on Monday evening in the Steinberger Hotel, should nevertheless give an impulse to think about perspectives.
> *Saale-Kurier,* 1.12.1999

After predominantly bi- and trilateral negotiations over the continuation of using building C as a student dormitory, we see that the number of actors involved was increasing, that they were getting together to discuss different options or, as the article says, 'perspectives'.

As the newspaper article reporting on the Round Table event says, different possible futures, among them the tax authority use, were discussed and negotiated, and 'options are calculated' and evaluated according to various criteria, such as the accessibility of the buildings (*Saale-Kurier*, 1.12.1999). At the meeting, the deputy mayor then proposed and underlined the possibility of using one of the high rises to house tax authorities and, through the prospect of a future use, enabling the buildings' preservation and renovation. Soon, it turned out that this specific possible future appeared to the city administration to be the *only* possible future.

This is already clear from the above quotations. For here it is implied that there are no concepts and cannot be any in view of the bleak future that the city administration sees for Halle-Neustadt in general. As a planner from the city administration explained to me, it was for Halle and other cities 'something very typical, that the administration itself moves into real estate in order to give it a function' (field notes, 28.05.2021), when no other use seems possible. As the planner I quoted above said, the city was trying to – as they said – 'torture' the Land and bring about an accommodation for the authorities as they saw no other possible futures. As I see it, the Round Table was initiated by the city not primarily to involve more actors and talk openly about perspectives, but above all to get these actors to work with the city to persuade the state to use the building.

The city thus tried to 'gather' (Latour, 2003, p. 235) as many actors behind this possible future to enlarge its possibility for realization. The event of the round table discussion inscribes itself into the search of the city administration for allies on the way to the future and an attempt to har-monize visions for the future and actions into a common path. The (un-)making of possible futures requires synchronization of rhythms and practices and visions of the future both internally and exter-nally. As Plourde notes,

> Internally, it requires the persuading of organizational members to espouse one vision of the future and to decide on a path that could make it a reality. Externally, it requires conducting actions that have the potential to alter others' view of reality, to favour one future over alternative possibilities. In doing so, an organization is likely to elicit resistance, as altering others' view of reality implies changing beliefs and taken-for-granted behaviours. In this process, a focal organization will have to adapt to others' enactment. As to how actors enact the(ir) future, a focus on the past allows us to see how actors were thinking about these possibilities, how they engaged in activities to bring these possibilities closer to fruition and how they adapted their actions as new knowledge was being created as a result of their actions. (Plourde, 2018, p. 179)

Convincing the state seems only possible by first making the building and its uncertain future a 'matter of concern' for a whole range of actors and then by stabilizing the possible future 'governmental use' as the only possibility. This resonates with what Latour wrote, namely that 'matters of fact emerge out of matters of concern. In both cases, we were offered a unique window into the number of *things*

that have to participate in the gathering of an *object*' (Latour, 2003, p. 235; emphasis in original). The process towards realizing this future is to be stabilized by the study 'Study on the accommodation of the Halle-West and Halle-South tax offices in the Neustädter Passage 10 (building "C")' that was subsequently commissioned. The commissioned architects estimate the remaining useful life for the building, which was erected in 1974, at approximately 75 years, and the costs for a refurbishment as an office tower at DM 15,415,000 (Morgner und Partner, 1999). They demonstrated a general fea-sibility of transforming the building to accommodate the authorities, although some renovation and modernization measures were needed.

Several months after the discussion at the round table, a representative of the Ministry of Finance wrote in a letter that the ministry had studied the proposal considering structural and use-related aspects, but had then decided to use another public building for the tax authorities. Instead of using the building, the state would seek the sale of the high-rise (letter, 19.04.2000). What we observe here is a rejection (even though temporary, as we know in retrospect) of one possible future, and through the decision to sell the building, the decision on the future of the building gets postponed and left to others. With this letter, the process of considering governmental use and revitalization as a possible future for building C, introduced by the alderman of the city, discussed in different formats and on dif-ferent occasions, evaluated through a study checking on both structural and financial aspects, comes to an end. The door to this specific possible future – the revitalization and use by governmental units – has been shut for the time being. But the city of Halle will nevertheless try to change the course. The course of becoming that the city of Halle is anticipating is the 'years-long' vacancy, as their hope of finding possible futures after privatization is low. The only possible future the city administration then considers as an alternative is demolition. The 'not-yet' they anticipate makes them, however, act in the present to prevent the anticipated future.[29]

A sticky note that a planner from Halle's city administration has put on it says: 'for your in-formation: B. [the alderman] is working with H. [the mayor] to correct the course. Hopes low.' In the letter that followed, the city still tries to change the state's decision, pointing to the non-existence of alternatives to state use:

> I am aware that all the necessary resolutions for the accommodation of both projects have been passed after some lengthy discussions. However, I have come to the firm conclusion that these were wrong decisions, which run counter not only to the interests of the city, but also to the economic interests of the state. [...] In coordination with the city of Halle and the urban development goals for Halle-Neustadt, the state had previously assumed that high-rise C would be preserved and, after it was no longer feasible to continue using the student union, marketed for this purpose.
>
> In the meantime, however, it has become clear that it is no longer possible to market the approx. 20-storey high-rise in Halle-Neustadt for residential use, at least not without substantial state funding. Of a total of 5 high-rise buildings, 4 are now as good as empty. [...] Sooner or later, the alternative will be to demolish Scheibe C and other high-rises. [...] What is particularly important to me here is the fact that a de facto almost hopeless marketing of Scheibe C or a years-long acceptance of housing vacancy in the middle of the largest large housing estate in our country would be in stark contradiction to the declared urban development goals of the state.
> letter, 13.06.2000

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29   Weszkalnys observes similar phenomena in her studies on the politics of the 'not-yet' disaster (Weszkalnys, 2014, p. 213).

The mayor mentions at several moments in the letter the long and complex discussions and the common main goal – that is, the preservation of building C. Past negotiation processes and agreements, and also goals for the future from the past, play a big role in the perception of the rupture, as continuity of these goals is no longer ensured, causing a sense of betrayal. What we observe is how the present is '"saturated with pasts that are not over"' (Gordon, 2008; Barad, 2017; as cited in: Lapiṇa, 2021, p. 241), while at the same time the future seems unattainable. The rupture that results from the rejection of use by the state breaks not only with continuity from the past, but also especially with continuity in regard to the future, with the city anticipating a years-long vacancy.

With this rupture, a circle of attempts to work towards a future for building C seems to come to an end. The possible future 'governmental use and revitalization' emerged, as I have shown, in 1999, was introduced at the Round Table event mobilizing a whole range of actors, and took on potentiality through negotiations and the architectural study following the round table discussions. Then, however, it lost its potentiality and was rejected by the state. What I would like to point out here is that these movements taken by the trajectory of the possible future depend both on changing configurations and on events. As I have highlighted above, referring to Latour (and this is a widespread argument in ANT and post-ANT more generally, see Mol, 2010), the possible future and its potentiality increases with the mobilization of different actors, with relating the fate of the building to larger futures and the architectural study. Latour, in his study of the unrealized Paris transport project Aramis (orig. 1993), suggested following the project along events and both the 'narrative program and the degree of "realization" of each of the actions' (Latour, 2002, p. 81) as '*[d]epending on events*, the same project goes back into the heaven of ideas or takes on more and more down-to-earth reality' (Latour 2002, p. 68; emphasis added). Latour notes how, for projects,

> The frontier between 'the bulk of the work' and 'fine-tuning the details' remains in flux for a long time; its position is the object of intense negotiation. [...] by going from what is less real to what is more real, you often divide up projects into so-called phases: the conceptual phase, the feasibility phase, the scale-model phase, the full-system site study phase, the commercial-demonstration phase, the acceptance phase, the phases of qualification, manufacturing, and homologation. If Aramis fit into this grid, there would at least be a regular progression. Unfortunately, not only are the phases ill-defined, but they may not come in order at all.
> (Latour, 2002, pp. 67–68)

What Latour shows us is that a project or a process is not linear, but consists of the unexpected, of interdependencies and uncertainty. What he is highlighting is that the process is turning in unexpected ways, depending on events. Conversely to the stabilization in networks that the city tried to achieve in events such as the round table discussion, one could assume that possible futures lose their potential when they fall out of these stabilizing networks (see Edensor, 2005, who explained ruination with such dropping from stabilizing networks) in disruptive events that will punctuate the flow of time. At such a moment, continuities seem to be torn apart, and hopes on the part of the municipality for a common path into the future fade away.

However, what struck me in the analysis of the further course of the trajectory was that something else seemed to equally fade away: the eventfulness of the disruptive event that appeared to have made the possible future disappear in, as Latour wrote, 'the heaven of ideas'. In fact, maybe I should have realized, reading Latour more carefully here, that the heaven of ideas does not immediately mean complete disappearance. Rather, it could mean moving out of sight into a hiding place from which one can lurk and crawl out again when the opportunity arises.

In fact, the possible future 'governmental use and revitalization' did not disappear over the next years and re-emerged and regained momentum in 2006.

What this fact made me realize is that possible futures can outlast networks and that I should be careful in my analysis not to overvalue individual events, but to see them in relation to other events and the process as a whole. I will elaborate on these aspects that turned into arguments below, but first I will present the observations on which they are based.

2.2   (Seeming) Pause: Networks and Change

As it had announced, the state of Saxony-Anhalt tried to sell Scheibe C after it had decided not to use the building. In that sense, it is true that, with the disruptive event that is the rejection of use, the state would not be involved in networks that would carry the possible future 'governmental use and revitalization' further. As I realized following the possible future further through the documents, however, the city administration, together with neighbours of the building, would form new networks that would indeed keep the possible future alive. As long as attempts to sell the building were not successful, the possible future thus remained in the realm of potential, even though in different configurations. The possible future 'governmental use and revitalization' remains as a possibility, in-between potential or unlikely realization, as there is no other possibility in sight. I may suggest, following from this, that it is impossibility rather than possibility that makes the possible future endure.

Parallel to the attempts to sell the building, negotiations continue as neighbouring owners are worried about the anticipated vacancy of building C and the impacts for their own property. The owners of building D – the only renovated high-rise at that time – suggested buying the building for one symbolic Deutsche Mark, developing it and renting it to state authorities. Furthermore, the city administration urged for new cost calculations that would include the costs needed for demolition in the event of the state not managing to sell the building (memorandum, 28.06.01).

In fact, the networks have changed with the disruptive event described above. However, if we follow the possible future further in the documents, it becomes apparent that this can outlast the individual event in other networks. Enduring elements across individual events are, besides the building itself that remains empty on its site, neighbours and the municipality. Around these elements, new formations are formed that carry on the possible future. Following the possible future, I would suggest that we need to think beyond the changing networks to recognize the continuity alongside the ruptures.

It was Rankin who made me understand that, in addition to networks, I should pay attention to projects in my analysis of rhythm. Rankin observes that projects can develop their own momentum and that we cannot assume that changing networks alone will bring about a change in a project or that networks that fall apart will provoke failure once and for all (Rankin, 2017, pp. 357–358). Rankin insists on paying attention to the project and not only networks changing over time, as he realized that projects like the cartographic projects he was investigating (the creation of an International Map of the World (IMW)) could 'endure relatively unchanged even as its original creators lose interest or control' (Rankin, 2017, p. 357). Realizing that projects and networks are not always related as we think brought him to study 'how projects and networks interact and what happens when they diverge' (Rankin, 2017, p. 357).

In fact, the years between 2000 and 2006 seem like a pause, and there are not many documents on the possible future 'governmental use and revitalization'.[30] For even if the city keeps the future alive, there is no prospect of its realization. But it survives nonetheless, because the strong connection between the building and the city planners of Halle and the impossibility of any other future remains. As I will show elsewhere in more detail, the municipal planners are the ones that are obliged to engage with possible futures for the buildings as long as they are there and as long as they are not

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30   Within the archives of the city administration, there is little documentation on building C and the possible future of governmental use for the years around the millennium. During these years, however, the documents show that a pause here does not mean that there is nothing happening, but often that action happens elsewhere or in relation to other high rises, in different configurations and at different rhythms. One of the reasons for this specific possible future remaining in the heaven of ideas, is certainly the fact that in 2002, the dedicated alderman had left the city of Halle – only one of the reasons. Another reason is what we have seen in **chapter 1** – namely, that the early 2000s were characterized by a waiting associated with hope for an abstract future. As I found out later, government investment flew into the building that the tax offices occupied provisionally in the early 2000s. This investment would later in 2009 be used as an argument against moving into building C.

in use, as they see the buildings' vacancy as a threat to the image and the future of Halle-Neustadt; and as long as no other actors would take care of the possible within the gap created by impossibility (see Stengers, 2015). In a 2005 email, a planner from the city of Halle wrote in response to the question asked by the state 'Are there alternatives to governmental use?' – 'No. Without major conversion measures, there would be no other economic usability' (email, 19.10.2005). As in the year 2000, the city administration saw no other future than governmental use that would secure the building's future. Standby is made by the movements of enacted possible building futures in everyday practice (Ingold, 1993, p. 161). Enactments are a 'process of undertaking actions to shape the future'. This means that 'by acting, individuals and organizations create structures, constraints and opportunities that did not exist or were not necessarily noticeable, before their actions' (Plourde, 2018, pp. 178–179). Following from this, I might suggest that since the city administration see no other possible future, the possible future remained the only thinkable future and survived until its reappearance in 2006. As I realized with Rankin, networks and possible futures

> diverge, reassemble, and diverge again, and we should be ready to analyze constantly shifting overlaps of collaboration, production, indifference, anti-networking, after-networking, and undead creation. […] and collaborative projects, continually reimagined, can end up persisting long after cooperation has ceased. (Rankin, 2017, pp. 372–373)

2.3   Re-emergence and Repetition: Events and Process

It was in 2006 that the possible future 'governmental use and revitalization' in Scheibe re-emerged, and a new cycle began. The 'new' question is (still): will Scheibe C become an administrative site? In 2006, the cabinet of state of Saxony-Anhalt put on its agenda to decide the question of whether to use Scheibe C or another building in Halle to house its tax authorities. A letter from March 2006 stated that 'the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Construction and Transport have been instructed to create the necessary conditions for the relocation of the tax offices in building C, Halle-Neustadt' (07.03.2006). Follow-up letters even spoke of preparations for the move.

The letters travelled through various departments within the city administration, each of which signed and dated them; the first letter was even classified as 'urgent'. From the matter being treated as 'urgent' from the administration's point of view, it can be concluded that the city of Halle saw a door opening in 2006 and did not want to leave it unused.

Even before the state had announced its willingness to relocate the tax authorities into building C, members of a citizens' association from Halle-Neustadt had appealed to the state, highlighting positive developments in the centre of Halle-Neustadt from the last years and warning the state that if they did not use the building now, the future would remain open. This was an option that the initiative fighting for the preservation of the buildings would not be able to accept:

> In recent years, numerous measures have ensured that Halle-Neustadt has not become a social hotspot, as some have repeatedly predicted. The work of many people, supported by a variety of funding projects, has long since borne fruit. But we are only halfway there. There is still a need for a variety of activities to secure and expand the status we have reached. In this context, the decision on the future seat of the state authority is of great importance. [...] Unused, it is abandoned to further decay; a decision on the future of the building would remain open.
> letter, 31 January 2006, from the Halle-Neustadt Association to the Minister President of Saxony-Anhalt

From their point of view, the use of Scheibe C would be a long overdue continuity. This is also the view of the city administration, which is trying to use the momentum after the state's decision to get other owners to develop their buildings as well. As Baraitser notes, 'one hope, in the act of repetition, is that to return and go over the same ground may allow a small degree of difference, an opening for something new to emerge' (Baraitser, 2022, p. 1). And indeed, fuelled with new hope, the city administration contacted, for example, also the other owners of the Hochhausscheiben to initiate change for the other buildings as well. A planner wrote to one of the owners in 2007:

> It's been a long time since we last discussed the development of the vacant tower block. A lot has changed in the meantime. The city has refurbished the Neustädter Passage, i.e. the gallery and the pedestrian level. [...] Our biggest headache is still [...] the vacant Hochhausscheiben. A lot has changed in the meantime. The city has refurbished the Neustädter Passage, i.e. the gallery and the pedestrian level. [...] there have been developments at the state-owned Scheibe C that give reason to hope for a renewal in the foreseeable future.
> email, 04.07.2007

I realized that the re-emergence and repetition of practices such as the mobilization of several actors and processes emerged in a context built up in enduring efforts rather than a whole new situation. It is a whole series of elements that have led to the revival of the possible future. One is that the building has not yet been sold and is still empty. As I will argue, the buildings on standby become, in this way, resistant objects producing repetitious practices while being themselves stabilized in repeated practices (Schäfer, 2013, p. 354). And while the existence of the buildings invites repeated consideration of their possible futures, they themselves can prevent their realization. Secondly, in the intervening years, the city of Halle has used public funding, approved by the state, to strengthen the Neustadt centre. The city administration and a range of actors from Halle-Neustadt have done several things to ensure and/or enlarge possibility. On the one hand on the symbolic level,[31] on the other hand on the structural level – through the redesign of the surrounding area. These measures result in a linear process of different steps built on top of each other: From 2002 onwards, the city administration has pushed ahead with the conversion and redevelopment of the surrounding area in individual steps, a process that continues to this day and which sometimes aims to promote a revitalization of the Hochhausscheiben. In addition, the city of Halle and the state jointly developed an urban development concept for the future in which the state undertakes not to use economic factors alone as the basis for decisions on accommodation for state institutions. It states:

> The state government and the city of Halle (Saale) want to cooperate more closely in the future use of state properties. [...] [a representative of the state; name in the document] emphasized: 'Urban development aspects must be given greater consideration in the future when selecting locations for authorities, science and research institutions.'
> press release, 12.08.2005

While on the one hand the buildings challenge recurrent and also new processes of making and unmaking possible futures, here the repetition of the circle of this specific possible future seems possible because there have been continuous actions and several elements, including the city and the state, have remained.

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31   I will further elaborate on the symbolic aspects and directing attention in a later chapter. But to give an example: In 2003, the image campaign of the 'double city' was established. This aims to develop Neustadt as a complementary part to the old town of Halle (Stadt Halle (Saale), n.d.). In this context, it was also argued that the centre of Neustadt and the Hochhausscheiben should be preserved. Symbolically, the doubling of 5 towers established itself as the core of the double city; 5 church towers in the old city then corresponded to the 5 Hochhausscheiben in Neustadt. Almost all my interview partners mobilized this image at one point or another.

It was mostly with the re-emergence of the possible future in 2006 and the study of how the re-emergence was embedded in continuous activities of care for the possible, that I realized how the possible future not only outlasted networks but could survive in the 'heaven of ideas' as long as the buildings were not entirely disconnected (Kemmer et al., 2021, p. 6) and there were still people engaging with their possible futures. It furthermore made me realize that I would need to better understand events in their embeddedness in a larger process. If I only looked at the situation in 2006 alone, I would not be able to see all those undertakings above that seem important to understand the repetitious movement of the possible future. Because standby's rhythm is, after all, characterized by a lot of continuity – not in the sense of a 'regular flow', but rather an 'uneven flow' (Dodgshon, 2008, p. 10) of repetitive non-linearity.

While, on the one hand, I see repetition as enabled through irregular but continuous engagement with the buildings' future, my material supports, on the other hand, what Deleuze has found – that repetition always entails difference. For Deleuze, novelty and difference lie precisely also in repetition (Dodgshon, 2008, p. 9) and, according to Deleuze, an event of actuality is '"a mixture of the dependent and the aleatory"' (Deleuze, 1988; as cited in: Dewsbury, 2000, p. 490). Crang has noted that becoming includes a 'sense of temporality as action, as performance and practice, of difference as well as repetition; the possibility, as Grosz (1999) argues, for not merely the novel, but the unforeseen' (Crang, 2001, pp. 187–188). In fact, the trajectory of the possible future does not take the same turns in its repetition.

The second circle within the trajectory of the possible future 'governmental use and revitalization' will also close in 2009. This time, with the future's final disappearance.

The serious attempts to realize the possible future 'governmental use and revitalization' were then interrupted by surprises and turns:

In the aftermath of elections that had been held in Saxony-Anhalt in April 2006, a restructuring process within state authorities and a reform of the management of state-owned property began. And whereas attempts to use building C continued, changing personnel and priorities allowed doubts over the suitability of the high-rise to arise anew in the following years.

The responsible person within the Ministry of Finance was removed and given another position within the government. The press release stated that this decision was part of a comprehensive process in which the property management of governmental buildings is being reworked in terms of personnel and content (Press release of the Ministry of Finance from 04.07.2006). After the elections, the state government had decided, in view of the demographic development and the reorganization of the state, to also rework the structure of the fiscal administration to the current developments and to reduce the number of fiscal offices in the state of Saxony-Anhalt from 21 to 14 (*HalleForum*, n. d. [2009]).

The restructuring and new agendas lead to major conflicts between different ministries, fighting over competencies and responsibilities. The goal agreed with the city of considering not only economic factors in the decision did not meet with the approval of the new commissioner in the Ministry of Finance. Various ministries then accused one another of setting the cost of a revitalization of building C too high or too low and of not defining responsibilities clearly. In an *MZ* article from January 2009 with the title 'Zoff um Hochhaus "Scheibe C". Costs explode for the redevelopment of a new official seat in Halle-Neustadt' (*MZ*, 05.01.09, 19:56, updated 05.01.09, 19:58) stated:

> The transformation of the high-rise building 'Scheibe C' in the centre of Halle-Neustadt to the central tax office in the Saalestadt[32] could be significantly more expensive than previously calculated and thus comes into disarray. [...] A bill to deal with this issue was submitted by the Ministry of Construction at very short notice and on a holiday. This caused displeasure in the Ministry of Finance, which therefore did not co-sign this bill, quite an unusual procedure apparently. The State Finance Secretary was upset about the short deadline for the

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32   The term 'Saalestadt' means city on the river Saale – that is, Halle.

> submission and refused to sign. 'The paper had been received on December 12 – a Friday – and was to be signed as early as the following Monday.' [...] [The] written reply [...] was accordingly unanimous: 'The time needed for a final evaluation of the documents is not possible within one working day.' Then he became more explicit: 'Even after a rough examination, there are serious doubts about the seriousness of the cost determination.'
>
> *MZ online*, 05.01.2009

In fact, what could be observed for the 'pause' between 2000 and 2005 can be observed again here on a small scale – that is, the endurance of the possible future *while* involved actors are busy with other things. While the pause at the beginning of the 2000s was characterized by the fact that actors focused on other projects, were no longer in close contact and actions were no longer carried out in common networks or with each other, I also observe a parallelism. In parallel, one ministry commissions an economic feasibility study, while the other commissions the preliminary planning from an architect's office. Furthermore, it is announced in the press that construction is scheduled to begin in 2009. I observe how events and processes unfolding at different sites 'at the same time, in parallel, do not follow the same rhythms or fit into the same narratives' (Jordheim, 2017, p. 65). In our case, we are dealing with non-synchronicity among mundane forms of durations and institutional practice – for example, when the bill is introduced on a Friday and the ministry refuses to review and sign the bill within this short period of time. Disputes between the ministries and doubts do not, however, stop the examination and the work towards the relocation of the tax offices for the time being. As I see it, over a longer period of time, it is quite possible for actions to run in parallel and for the possible future to continue to exist as a possibility during this time.

The non-synchrony will yet again take on a different dimension in the aftermath, with far-reaching consequences for the possible future. Increasingly, different voices are out of joint; there is not one rhythm but several (Ingold, 1993, p. 161). In fact, it is difficult to speak of a rhythm, as there are different rhythms 'associated with different people, activities, tasks, and interactions that collectively form a complex temporal fabric' (Reddy et al., 2006, p. 41).

In the case of the trajectory of this specific possible future I follow here, voices no longer run parallel, but are increasingly running against each other. Whereas the state of Saxony-Anhalt had decided against using building C for their own purposes without informing other actors, the city administration of Halle prepared a letter to support the possible future of governmental use (letter, 18.04.2009).

The non-synchronicity is equally reflected in contradictory newspaper articles throughout 2009 and also in requests within Halle's City Council as to whether the city of Halle had any reliable information and what the city administration was going to do (City Council question, 05.08.2009; publicly noted on 26.08.2009). For example, one newspaper addresses the following question to the city in an email:

> According to my information, an internal decision on the future of Scheibe C has already been made at the state. Namely, Scheibe C is not to become the location of the tax offices after all. Accordingly, the planned renovation of the high-rise building will not take place for the time being. Instead, the current location of the tax offices in Blücherstraße is to be retained and modernized.
>
> — Is this decision status also known to the city?
>
> — If Scheibe C were indeed not to be redeveloped and become the location of the tax offices – how would the city assess this, what possibilities would there still be to upgrade the high rises and thus the Neustadt centre (are there possibly already joint considerations with the state on this?)?
>
> email *MZ*, n.d. [2009]

The city administration actually did not have any information on the status of decision-making within the state by this time and there were no joint considerations on this between the city of Halle and the state of Saxony-Anhalt. A city representative wrote:

> I appeal to you today,
>
> — to support the relocation of the tax office to Scheibe C in Halle-Neustadt and thus enable the permanent preservation of this building.
>
> — To work towards open communication of the decision-making process with all parties involved in the interests of the IBA.[33]
> You will be familiar with the process on the basis of previous activities. Our impression, however, is that the scope of the problem is not being properly recognized by everyone. I would therefore like to take the liberty of expressing to you the particular weight of this concern.
> letter, 20.07.2009

They refer to past activities and past common goals and futures and, as in 2000, the city of Halle feels betrayed by the state of Saxony-Anhalt. Voices are increasingly running against each other where they were running in parallel strands in the years before. In 2009, the non-simultaneities refer to disjointed processes and practices that caused disruptions of the relationships between the city and the state, disappointment among citizens and great attention in the media. The media have increasing difficulty in following the overlapping events, contradictory actions and statements. Unlike in previous years, where activities around building C were not synchronous but the possible future remained, the increasing non-coordination amounts to a dead end and the disappearance of the possible future of 'governmental use'.

As I have shown, voices are often out of sync. The decisive factor here, as I have found, is whether different strands of action and the projects of different actors in the networks run synchronously, in parallel, with or against each other. As I found, possible futures remain pending when action happens in parallel, at other sites and in other rhythms, and they will disappear when voices are running against each other. Based on the above passage, it seems to be more the harmony between their rhythms that determines the course of events than which actors exactly participate in a situation. Carse and Kneas observe 'how multiple temporalities can coalesce as planners, builders, politicians, potential users, and opponents negotiate with a project and each another [sic]. In this sense, infrastructures, whether unbuilt or unfinished, are sites where temporalities emerge in dialectical relation' (Carse & Kneas, 2019, p. 11). The same can be said for buildings on standby. Because if there is a rupture characterized by non-synchrony, the possible future is lost and standby is actualized. One characteristic of this, as I would like to show lastly, is the opening of the future. This is what distinguishes the disruptive event of 2009 from the one from the year 2000.

33   International Building Exhibitions, or IBAs for short, are large-scale urban and regional development projects that have been held at various locations in Germany since the 1920s. National building culture is presented within the framework of the building exhibitions (Bundesinstitut für Bau-, Stadt- und Raumforschung (BBSR), *Internationale Bauausstellung*, n.d.). The IBA Urban Redevelopment 2010, which took place in Saxony-Anhalt under the motto 'Less is the Future' (German '*Weniger ist Zukunft*'), sought 'answers to the population decline in eastern Germany between 2002 and 2010,' according to the website. As the motto suggests, the urban development opportunities in cities without growth were to be explored and tested in practice in model projects (BBSR, *2002 – 2010 IBA Stadtumbau // Weniger ist Zukunft*, n.d.).

Dead End and Actualization of Standby

During a meeting of planners within the city administration in January 2009, the head of the department announced (so even before the final decision of the state): 'The topic of high-rise buildings in Halle-Neustadt is to be reconsidered from a planning point of view.' What does a reconsideration mean? In particular, demolition of the buildings is also to be considered and conditions of possibility should be evaluated. Contact should be established with all owners (email, 13.01.2009). This implies that the modalities of impossibility should be questioned and, if possible, shifted to clear the way to a future. The planners received the instruction to look openly for all possible thinkable futures; they were asked to design them and check their feasibility. In order to do so, they started researching the current owners of the high rises and contacted different departments within the city administration, e.g. the department of finance, like in the following email that an employee of the planning department had sent to a financial officer in search of further information on the ownership of the buildings:

> Dear Mr X,
>
> We are once again dealing with the high-rise buildings in Halle-Neustadt.
> email. 26.01.2009

What is particularly interesting here is the 'once again' as it indicates the repetitive temporal movement of standby. The dead end within the process of becoming of building C has led to a new sequence within the process that comes with a reopening of the future as every possibility is then again to be considered by the planners. My informants were apparently aware that this was potentially going to be a long and complex process as they were writing in a letter from 2010: 'Over the next few years, there will be intense debate about the future of the district centre and the high rises' (letter, city administration, 2010).

With the break of 2009 and the disappearance of the possible future, standby is actualized and stabilized. New and open searches begin that will not, however, either be realized or end standby. This makes me realize that, even if the second circle that the possible future takes is very different from the first – because one closes it further and allows the possible future to persist, while the other makes it disappear – both events must be seen in relation to standby as a process at large.

I emphasize this because, while following the buildings on standby and their possible futures, I often had to realize that turning points I thought I had identified, when studying them more closely have always been characterized by the fact that they have brought change, but not the end of standby. On the contrary, these events, because they bring with them impossibilities more than possibilities, always seem to slip out of my hands when I try to grasp them as turning points. I agree with Dodgshon that 'the sustained flow of time and these disjunctive moments need not be exclusive but juxtaposed, as with the interplay of Braudel's *longue durée* with his moments of change, or *événementielle*' (Dodgshon, 2008, p. 10).

Crucial for our understanding of the rhythm of standby, which I understand as a non-linear process, is to develop a sense of how events relate to process. Two ways of understanding the sequence of events have dominated human sciences and shape our understanding of time, according to Gell. He refers to the distinction between 'A-Series' and 'B-Series' made by time philosopher Mc Taggart. In the 'A-series', time is found in the passage of events from the past to the future and the present contains traces of the past and the future. In the 'B-series', events are isolated happenings that separate a before from an after and are suspended on a string 'like the beads on a necklace' (Gell, 1992, p. 151).

While we have seen the former conception in relation to the framing of standby time as the 'status quo' in the first chapter, more recent literature on process and rhythms often argues in the direction of the latter. Within poststructuralist and non-representational literature on process – among them in Latour's proposal that helped me to understand rhythms within a circle – rhythm has been described as 'emerging from the incessant unfolding of events and entwining of self and world' (Merriman, 2012, p. 20) whereas 'the unfolding of events is characterised by a prepositioning and

turbulence, and by material, experiential and relational effects of spacing, timing, movement, sensation, energy, affect, rhythm and force' (Merriman, 2012, p. 21). The merit of these approaches is that they have questioned ontologies of time, space and objects and instead focus on actual processes of becoming. Specific places, as is believed in large parts of this literature, consist of specific rhythms that can change and may be 'polyrhythmic', made of interwoven rhythmic processes, of 'temporal events of varying regularity' (Edensor, 2010b, p. 3).

While some underline the importance of events, others have criticized these works that predominantly draw on Deleuze 'for always wanting to go at the ever new' (Simpson, 2008, p. 810). Studying the rhythm of standby, I equally see a risk of overemphasizing the effects of events on process and especially the underlying assumption of change that often comes with such emphasizing. As I also showed in the first chapter, the urban planners who have been looking at possible futures for the Hochhausscheiben for years neither feel that time has stood still, nor that there are always new events that bring new possibilities. Even if new possible futures are always being designed, their trajectories are moved not only by new configurations in new events, but also by continuities relating to these events and making them punctuations in circles rather than turning points. In this chapter, beyond the experience of time, but through the analysis of disruptive events, repetition, pause and continuity, I have also shown that standby time is characterized by a tension between ruptures and continuity.

2.4   Synthesis

Along the passage of following the building future 'governmental use and revitalization' for building C, ruptures, pauses, and accelerations become visible. Along its path, the possible future takes 'thousands of moves, decisions, conflicts, actors, twists and turns' (Mommersteeg, 2018, p. 223).

Studying the trajectory of the possible future 'governmental use and revitalization' of building C, I came across many unexpected twists and turns provoked by small ruptures. These processes of enactment consist of events, each of which is creating both possibility and impossibility. A larger rupture, leading to the opening of the future, occurred only in 2009, when this specific possible future was finally off the table. It is within such bigger ruptures that 'possible futures are being shut down whilst equally new possibilities open up' (Dewsbury, 2000, p. 479). Drawing on the trajectory of this specific possible future, we find that standby is not a static state, but a non-linear process driven by the prospective making of possible futures, and their unmaking.

The analysis of one circle in the trajectory of the possible future 'governmental use and revitalization' allowed me to understand the contingent temporal patterns of becoming in-/determinate (Barad, 2010, p. 254). Within one such circle, the potential is nurturing the emergence of a possible future, but there is no conductor, no 'central controlling or decision-making unit' (Latham & McCormack, 2004, p. 707) that would synchronize voices. Rather, the trajectory appears as 'an ongoing outcome of the interaction between a myriad of small-scale self-organizing processes that are not determined' (Latham & McCormack, 2004, p. 707). And so life in standby mode is indeed moving, but 'dis/oriented', 'dis/jointed' (Barad, 2010, p. 244). I argue that ruptures, pauses and non-synchrony, within the process of (un-)making possible buildings futures, shape the rhythm of standby as a process. Now, of course, we have to imagine for standby more generally that there are many such paths simultaneously and unevenly crossing, complementing or excluding each other. Following these in such detail as I have done with the possible future 'governmental use and revitalization' would not have been possible within this chapter.

Again and again, possible futures are conceived, but they are not realized. The relation of possible futures made in non-linear processes and their non-realization characterizes 'being on standby', punctuated by ruptures and often out of sync.

And yet, bigger ruptures did not mean the end of standby. Rather, standby is recurringly made endure and stabilized through recurring processes of the making of possible building futures and ruptures that prevent revitalization and use, and demolition at other moments. Even without materialization, the possible futures have effects on the present and thus on networks in the present, and they eventually stabilize standby through repetitive occurrence.

I would like to conclude by arguing that, to understand the rhythms of standby, it is important to look beyond individual events and see them in relation to each other. On the one hand, by following the possible future over a long period of time (and this is what the archive documents allowed me to do), I understood that events can have different effects on the process. There seem to be ruptures of different sizes – the ones that allow a possible future to persist and the ones that make it disappear and open the future to all possible futures or no futures. On the other hand, with the study of two circles that trajectory takes, I understood that even if repetition always entails change (in fact, for repetition, I found that it builds on continuity of actions and elements as well as on changed configurations), events lose their eventful character in a standby mode. In a mode of standby, disruptive events are in a tense relation to continuity and in most cases, they contribute to an actualization and stabilization of standby rather than bringing change.

3   Making Time on Standby

With the expression of *making time* chosen for the title of this chapter, I aim to highlight agency with regard to time (Flaherty, 2003, 2010), pointing at the relationship between human practices and non-human rhythms (Bear, 2016).[34] Especially anthropological writing has long been interested in the connections of time, action, space and actors (Gell, 1992; Munn, 1992, p. 116; Rabinow, 2008). Several authors have addressed the activities related to time, among them Munn, who writes: 'we make, through our acts, the time we are in' (Munn, 1992, p. 94); she thus suggested the notion of 'temporalization'

> that views time as a symbolic process continually being produced in everyday practices. People are 'in' a sociocultural time of multiple dimensions (sequencing, timing, past-present-future relations, etc.) that they are forming in their 'projects'. In any given instance, particular temporal dimensions may be foci of attention or only tacitly known. Either way, these dimensions are lived or apprehended concretely via the various meaningful connectivities among persons, objects, and space continually being made in and through the everyday world.
> (Munn, 1992, p. 116)

From her writing, we learn that the ways we experience time are linked to everyday processes, knowledge and practice. The same is true for other anthropological writing throughout the late 1980s and 1990s, such as the work by Rabinow (1986), Gell (1992) and Greenhouse (1996) that study the role of time in everyday life (Ringel, 2016b, p. 402).

Within this chapter, I want to move beyond cultural and epistemic dimensions and perceptions of time and argue that time itself is made. This will entail taking practices of representation seriously and approaching them as 'performative in themselves, as doings' (Simpson, 2008, p. 810). Moving beyond epistemology and towards ontology means not only assuming that time plays a role in social life and practice, but tracing how it is specific pasts, presents and futures that are, with Bear, made in '*techniques of time*'. Bear is using the term 'techniques' to demonstrate the skilful making of time that will 'intersect and affect social and nonhuman rhythms' (Bear, 2016, p. 489). These techniques cover, according to Bear, 'all forms of skillful making enacted within timescapes, which bring social worlds into being and link them to nonhuman processes' (Bear, 2016, p. 490). In recent years, a number of scholars have underlined the activity in relation to time and the future specifically. Ringel, for example, suggests the notion of 'temporal agency' to study how actors are able to (counter-) act on time, and especially on the future. He differentiates between two different ways of time-tricking: one on an epistemic level, concerning 'practices that manipulate, coordinate, structure or reorder knowledge about temporal processes' and one concerning practices that act on 'the contents of time' (Ringel, 2016a, p. 25). Ringel states that the past gets tricked when past time is selected and (re-)constructed from the perspective of a present. Time is tricked on an epistemic level in this case. Ringel notes:

> Knowledge referring to the past is easily tricked. No matter what might be deemed the actual past, one can conceal certain aspects, rewrite history, focus differently or even trick oneself with more favourable accounts and slight adjustments against one's better knowledge. Whether as actual lies or self-assuring deceptions, what is tricked is a social, contextually concrete reference to the presumed past, often deeply embedded in long-standing social or political conflicts.
> (Ringel, 2016a, p. 25)

The second mode of time-tricking includes practices that – through specific imagined futures – will have transformative effects on time itself, e.g. the acceleration or deceleration of processes. Ringel argues that all forms of time-tricking of the second mode are forms of 'future-tricking' (Ringel, 2016a, p. 24), as they address the progression of time. He notes for such mode of time-tricking:

> By predicting, forecasting, prophesying, conjuring, evoking or provoking, by dreading, hoping, planning, projecting or envisioning, and by arranging, intending, designing, budgeting, aligning, organizing or coordinating, we attempt to subject the future content of the progression of time to our agency. Much human practice is directed at making one's desired outcomes more probable, and like the conservator or the instructors, we might actually accelerate, decelerate, interrupt or delay some particular future content of time.
> (Ringel, 2016a, p. 26)

Recently, Oomen et al. have suggested the notion of 'techniques of futuring' to link the realm of representation and imagination with practice and to study how the future is made in '*imaginative work and practices*' (Oomen et al., 2022, p. 254; emphasis in original). The authors define '*futuring*' as 'the identification, creation and dissemination of images of the future shaping the possibility space for action, thus enacting relationships between past, present and future' (Oomen et al., 2022, pp. 253–254).

In the two subchapters, I will show how both the past and the future come to play a role in present practices of (un-)making possible futures for the high rises as the planners from the city administration act on both the (non-linear) past and the (unknown) future. The practices studied are practices of archiving, sorting and alignment and reproduction with regard to the past, and scenario building, navigating and the production of indeterminacy. I argue that standby allows and even calls for 'time work' (see Flaherty 2003) as its instability renders temporal relations difficult, but provokes a need for positioning and action. In similar vein, other authors have suggested that despite the great level of uncertainty and indeterminacy of both the present and the future, agency is encouraged rather than suppressed (Ringel, 2018b, p. 71).

The aim of the planners from Halle is to find a future for the Hochhausscheiben, to prevent unwanted futures and to navigate towards desired ones. This endeavour first involves knowing the past and aligning past events into a narrative that forms the basis for working towards the future. They seem to share a set of knowledge of past processes and events, and I will show in the first subchapter how this set of knowledge becomes formed and stabilized. We will find that the making of the 'correct order of events' (Abram, 2014, p. 135) and the making of distinct futures are both not easily achieved but are at the same time necessary for collective efforts of making building futures in a mode of standby. The second subchapter then studies practices of making the future, responding to uncertainty related to it, and acting on it within a present that my informants perceive 'as contingent upon an ever-changing astral future that may or may not be known for certain, but still must be acted on nonetheless' (Adams et al., 2009, p. 247). We will explore in this chapter how my informants respond to the unexpected and unpredictable. As I will argue, practices related to the past will contribute to a stabilization of the past that allows for an internal harmonization and enables collective work towards a future for the high rises; practices involved in the making of the future enable the planners to feel prepared for whatever future comes. They are, as we will see, embracing uncertainty, opening the future and hoping to navigate towards preservation and revitalization of the high rises by doing so. My focus here will not be on time work to synchronize multiple voices within the networks of future-making at large (issues of alignment of actors will be addressed in part three of this work), but ways of acting on the past and the future to harmonize the past and navigate the future internally – within the city administration and more specifically, the urban planning unit. As we will see, making time will have transformative effects not only on time, but also on organization.

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[34]   Inspiration for a practice-oriented approach to time also came from a panel on 'Doing and Making Times', organized by Filip Vostal and Helge Jordheim at the 4S STS conference (online) where I presented initial thoughts on Making Time on Standby (Vostal & Jordheim, 2021).

3.1   Harmonizing the Past

Archive and Archiving

The first subchapter deals with the making of the past and the past in the making. In my search for answers to my basic questions about how futures for the Hochhausscheiben are made and unmade and to understand the in-between that is driven by these processes, I discovered the archives of the Halle city administration. Next to the archives in the city administration, a local archive in Halle-Neustadt called *Geschichtswerkstatt* and the city archive of Halle (Saale) host folders documenting past processes related to the buildings. Archives are basically the only materialized form of past futures, for these remained unrealized and unmaterialized 'out there' on the buildings and in urban space.

It is one of the main characteristics of standby as a mode of in-betweenness that possible futures remain possibilities of the not-yet. In the form of archival documents, however, the past possible futures find a materialization in paper, and in a room – the office of urban planning. Beyond their materialization in the form of documents that ended up filling an archive, they do not have a materialized form. For my own understanding of 'what was at stake' with the Hochhausscheiben being neither renovated nor demolished for over 20 years, it was mostly through the materialization of past, unrealized possible futures in the form of archival documents that I realized the buildings were on standby. The archives and the documents they contain are, along with the decay of the buildings, the only forms through which time – and, more precisely, standby time – becomes tangible. It is through these documents that I understood that the lives of buildings are not characterized by inactivity alone, but that in the buildings on standby both 'activity and inactivity are fused into a single space' (Kemmer et al., 2021, p. 12); that they are not entirely dropped by all networks (in contrast to ruins Edensor, 2005b, p. 313), that there are a myriad possible futures made and unmade. And that the life of the Hochhausscheiben on standby is characterized by non-synchrony, ruptures, and continuity (**see chapter 2**). I argue that, while it is possible for buildings to be in standby mode without an archive, it is not recognizable and nameable as such to researchers.[35]

The archives on the centre of Halle-Neustadt with its high rises at the city administration comprise several metres of shelves in the offices of the urban planning department, in archive rooms and a number of plan cabinets. It is a special archive in that it is internal, containing protocols, letters and emails, newspaper articles, as well as plans and concepts that the staff members have filed with the unfolding process of looking for possible futures for the high rises. The documents have been filed along the unfolding of processes of (un-)making possible building futures for the high rises and the revitalization of the district centre, seen from the perspective of the city administration and with a focus on their own everyday engagement with the buildings. They are materializations of the everyday practices of the administrative staff and are intended for internal use and accountability of their work. In the words of Harper, they are 'mundane' documents – 'just these very ordinary things – the bits of paper, the memos, the reports that are fundamental to organisations' (Harper, 1998, p. 13). They are thus 'sources that are close in time, internal and written with only immediate uses in mind' (Decker, 2013, p. 166). On the one hand, these documents give an account of past practices and activities and are, in Yaneva's words, archives *of*, in our case of this specific site and of practices related to it. The archives are, however, also archives *for* (Yaneva, 2020, pp. 131–132), as planners go back to them and as the documents remain an important source for their everyday work on possible building futures. In addition, these documents bring up the lives of the high rises as they make them tangible and contribute to knowledge production, including my own. The documents had action-guiding effects

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35   Of course, these could also be different archives than those of a state institution. I have already mentioned that I first visited the archives of the *Geschichtswerkstatt* in Halle-Neustadt, an association committed to researching and presenting the history of buildings from below. There, a staff member had collected all the newspaper articles published on the Hochhausscheiben in the local newspapers since 2004 – a treasure for my research and another indication that the life of the buildings is being vigilantly followed, especially by citizens. I will look at this vigilance, that I understand with Wiedemann (2021, p. 44) as another characteristic of standby, in more detail in a later chapter.

for the processes within which they were produced, and they keep on guiding actions as, for example, with the task I was given to go through them, but also, as we will discover in more detail below, when they need to be sorted and moved. Furthermore, the archive could be called with Potthast a 'possibility space'. As Potthast notes,

> architectural offices are storage spaces in which, compressed in various ways, unrealized projects are stored. Taken together, the storage spaces of all architectural offices would result in a gigantic collection, in a central archive, which could be called a possibility space. Entire alternative cities could be assembled from the design material. The design density is undoubtedly highest for the centres of large cities. (Potthast, 2017, p. 1; own translation)

What Potthast does not mention here is that the unrealized also tells us something about the conditions of the impossible (and about the (material) space of standby time).

In contrast to architectural designs, the administrative files document the processes in which the architectural designs are embedded and with which they are in dialogue. Architectural concepts have to pass administrative procedures that often transform them (Potthast, 2017, p. 1). One may suggest that this is true for the opposite as well, namely when concepts let administrations take new directions. The collection in the offices assembles both: architectural designs that are visualizations and calculations of possible building futures, and the administrative practices that they interact with and that are part of enactments of larger possible futures that possible building futures are related to. The archive in the rooms of the city administration had attracted my interest, as it bears witness to the years of engagement of the city planners with the Scheiben. I hoped to learn something about the everyday processes of making and unmaking of possible futures for the buildings. Moreover, my informants themselves are interested in the evolution of planning since the 1990s (field notes, 17.06. 2019) and in the 'processes in these files that actually show how things happened' (field notes, 28.05.2021). In contrast to what Decker found, namely that organizations' interest in their own histories was often low (Decker, 2013, p. 160), especially the team leader of the planning unit I worked with, seemed curious to see what I would discover.

As they didn't have time to look through the folders in their daily work, we agreed that I would come and look through the documents in the frame of an internship. One of my tasks during an internship at the city administration in 2019 was then, as defined in my contract, the 'research and evaluation of historical planning documents and concepts concerning the redevelopment area *Stadtteilzentrum Neustadt* [Neustadt District Centre]'. Ideally, we thought, this would be a win-win situation: they hoped to learn from past processes to develop strategies for a successful revitalization of the district centre and the high rises in the present (field notes, 18.03.2021) and to avoid re-making mistakes that have been made in the past. One of the employees told me once: 'Of course, it would be good to know what has been done in the past so as not to make the same mistakes again and again' (field notes, 21.04.2021).

Going through the folders, I discover bundles of emails, held together with paper clips. These trajectories of emails and their replies, copies of letters, sometimes in multiple versions with different addressees, tell us something about the rhythm of producing these artefacts and the trajectories of possible futures that we have studied in the previous chapter, but also about administrative documentation and archiving that I see as an important practice related to the (un-)making of building futures. How the past is made, how it is archived and ordered, tells us above all something about the present. Ringel assumes that it is not past events that can be changed but only knowledge on the past that can be altered; questions of making time in relation to the past will address questions of selecting pasts and make them 'fit into the genre and format of a certain context' (Ringel, 2016a, p. 26). Building on this assumption, I hoped that the study of positioning in time – first in relation to the past, would tell me something about temporal matters of standby.

For Foucault, the connections we draw within collections are a way of making history (Foucault, 1994). In line with such a perspective, Yaneva argues that collections 'are places where we juxtapose, and all these juxtapositions, classifications and catalogues present a way of connecting things both to the eye and to the discourse' (Yaneva, 2020, pp. 29–30). Archives and archiving have gained

increasing attention as a source for ethnographic studies with the 'archival turn' in the 1990s, to then transform into a subject from the early 2000s, with the archives themselves becoming the target of research (Yaneva, 2020, p. 88). While Foucauldian investigations into archives would be mainly interested in the forms of order, ANT researchers would focus on 'the work involved in "ordering"' – considering order as a verb (Mol, 2010, p. 262). As Mol writes, 'Shifting away from the noun, order, it constrains the gerund as a verb, ordering thus stresses that ordering involves work' (Mol, 2010, p. 263). Yaneva, for instance, argues that we need to study archiving in order to understand archives (Yaneva, 2020, p. 88). In her book *Crafting History: Archiving and the Quest for Architectural Legacy* (2020), the author examines the knowledge production in architectural archiving, drawing on ethnographic research at the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA). The book shows how archiving is connected to architectural design by studying

> the situated and local practices of arranging (cataloguing, archiving, numbering)
> and taking care of archival objects (preserving, conserving, repairing,
> maintaining) and how they all happen to produce larger structuring effects in
> collections that resonate with greater epistemological anxieties, coming
> from the discipline or the profession.
> (Yaneva, 2020, p. 24)

Researching archives, confronting them with questions on what architecture can offer, as Yaneva notes, may result in the rethinking of the discipline (Yaneva, 2020, p. 131). For public administration, archiving has always been of great concern, as the detailed filing of the documents in the folders of the city administration suggests. What we will be interested in, however, is not primarily what we can learn about administration by examining archiving in general; therefore, I do not go into discussions on the role of archiving in (modern) bureaucracy – a topic much debated in ethnographic studies of bureaucracy (see, for example, Riles 2006). Rather, through studying the archive and practices of archiving, sorting and ordering of the past as forms of making time, I hope to learn about standby's relation to time.

The documents recording past processes of (un-)making possible futures for the high rises and Neustadt's district centre are stored in the office of the planning unit on different shelves. In addition to the folders on the bookshelves, there is a cubicle with plans in the office and some boxes with plan rolls as well as the cabinet they call the 'black box', also containing plans and concepts. My informants call the cabinet with drawers the 'black box' because it is black but also because its contents are obscure. Although these are labelled according to areas and specific locations, such as the 'Stadtteilzentrum Neustadt', none of the staff seem to really know what is in here. Archiving by location without a time, a time span or a project does not seem to be a suitable means of recording the past (field notes, 20.06.2019). In addition to the shelves and the black box, there is a shelf closer to the working desks with folders they regularly need to access and a small table next to the desk with the day's transactions and an online archive.

The archive within their offices forms what my informants call the 'Handapparat' (hand apparatus) – meaning archives they potentially need access to in their everyday work (field notes, 22.04.2021; 27.04.2021). Other folders of the team and the department are stored on another floor of the building; they contain completed processes. And there is of course the municipal archive, to which, in theory, all completed administrative processes and projects are transferred. Theoretically, because as the employees explain to me, this transfer is complicated and they don't have time for it (field notes, 28.05.2021). At the same time, as I understand it, keeping the folders close to them in their offices is a sign of the temporal incompleteness of standby. The engagement with the high rises is more than a project for the city planners. It is an ongoing process with many ends and no end until today. Of course, there are processes, such as the preparatory studies for the redevelopment area, which are considered completed. Those of 2002 are superseded by those of 2016, and those of 2016 completed, because the redevelopment area was subsequently designated. But the planners have to access the results of these investigations, and it cannot be ruled out that visions formulated here will also change again. As long as the present and the future remain uncertain, until no preservation is permanently secured, standby as a mode of being will endure. And the attempts, the unfinished paths, the revision and reinterpretation of what has been believed to be achieved will continue.

The shelves installed to the side of the office space and the plan cabinets mainly contain documents covering the years from 1990 to 2015, in some cases to 2017. Here, documents are stored in folders for the individual buildings (for example, folder 'Scheibe A', 'Scheibe B' etc.), the ensemble of high rises (folder 'Scheibe A–E') or for the district centre of Halle-Neustadt as a whole (for example, folder 'Stadtteilzentrum Neustadt: Konzepte 2001–2003'). And then there are folders for special projects like the revitalization of public spaces or government programmes such as 'Urban 21', a Saxony-Anhalt state initiative for urban development, with whose help some projects were also realized in the centre of Halle-Neustadt at the beginning of the 2000s.

Within both types of folders – those categorized according to objects and those according to projects, documents are ordered with a clear intention to file chronologically, with the latest record on top. For the high rises, they usually start with records on the privatization in the 1990s and then contain records of negotiations, changes of ownerships, concepts, applications for state funding etc. As shown in the previous chapter, the trajectories of possible futures can be traced through these documents. They emerge at one moment and get lost at another. Confusion over where processes start and where they end is a characteristic of a mode of standby characterized by dis/continuity. Despite the visible concern for chronological order, chronology often gets lost within the folders as processes multiply or run out of synch. Going through the documents, connections between events and effects are often not clear; processes are started and then get lost and dissolve. We have seen in previous chapters that there is a quest for the chronology of time in administration, but how it is often lost in a standby mode. This is also evident in the archives. Nevertheless, I am impressed by the detailed filing and the richness on offer here.

Of particular interest are also those folders that contain an ordering of the past from the perspective of a specific present and an associated specific interest. These include, for example, a folder that was created in preparation for an exhibition – it contains not only concepts for the future, but also plans, photos, etc., that were assembled to depict the history of the place. Or a drawer in which all kinds of documents from the archives were also compiled to serve as a basis for discussion for the development of a strategy in relation to the future of the high rises. I noted for these plans, old concepts, visualizations, etc. that the city planners had collected to develop a strategy:

> in the plan cabinet in the top drawer, labelled 'overview plans', P1
> and P2 have collected all sorts of things that helped them think about
> strategy; from different times, from concepts, internal considerations,
> council decisions such as ISEK 2001 and reorganization concept,
> historical city plan, etc.; one can only imagine how a successor will
> come across this folder and not know why this mixture is together in
> one folder; but for them this is still too recent to take it apart again
> and sort it into respective historical folders.
> field notes, 26.04.2021

Surprisingly for me, these are also originals that have been removed from other folders without leaving a note in these folders at the gap that has been created. In my view, this indicates that the past only comes to matter according to a given present and, on the other hand, that the planners are so consumed by their many activities in the present that no time (neither past nor future) exists except the present. It seems as if the past has an indecisive and undefined existence via the 'stock' of documents that constitute it. Planners come to reactivate certain elements of this past that make sense in the present moment. It is through this performance of the past that the past itself gets made. These folders assembled in a past present can provide surprises as, while these projects are still present in my informants' minds, they won't be in the future; going through them now, my informants are already coming across plans they had forgotten about but that are of interest for a task they are working on. What they usually do in such a situation is scan the document and file it online. The past seems full of surprises, and where connections can be made to the present, these pasts take on a different meaning. During my first internship, I was mainly going through the folders explicitly dealing with the Hochhausscheiben. I recorded the contents in Excel spreadsheets, as well as plans and concepts archived in the offices of the city administration. I tried to bring these together with the concepts and plan rolls

filed elsewhere because of their size, in order to understand in which administrative processes the idea developed in the architectural concepts are embedded: how did the commissioning come about? who were the actors involved? And what possible future was designed for which identified problems? And why weren't these realized? Some of the answers I found to these first questions related to the content of the archived processes can be found across this work. Increasingly, however, I was interested in how planners today access the past, and what role the past plays in their everyday work lives engaging with the Hochhausscheiben today. In 2021, I got the opportunity to explore this question further when the planners were confronted with the past through their materialized form of the documents.   → fig. 31; 32

Sorting Pasts Out

In 2021, the planning department was going to move into building A. And as my informants' new offices were going to be smaller, archiving became of particular concern as they would have to re-arrange their archives to make them fit into the building and the new organizational structure of the city administration. Moving into building A was not only a change of location, it also came with a restructuring process of the administration (equally finding its spatial expression with a changing office composition) and, as said, a rearrangement of archives.   → fig. 33

In preparation for moving into building A, the objective was to record the folders and documents more systematically and, above all, to sort them out and reorganize them. Completing these together with them became the main task of mine during a second three-month internship. One of the tasks in 2021, as written in my contract, was then the 'Exploration of the existing file situation in relation to archiving ability; creation of a file list'. Working together with them allowed me to observe how the employees ordered the past.

During the three months that I spent with the city administration in 2021 for a second internship, the focus was on the move and, in this context, on present and future archives. The topic was a topic of conversation in the corridors: how were different departments approaching this task? were they sorting before measuring the metres of shelves they would need for archiving? Some did, while others measured the current status without considering the growth of the archive in the future. Within the planning department, findings were re-sorted and exchanged between departments, and piles of files in the corridor testified to sorting processes throughout the building. Of course, the effort of sorting out was also to be based on the space available in the future (field notes, 21.04.2021). Ironically, the high rise itself, in its capacity to host archival shelves or not, would in 2021 have an impact on considerations of what to keep from the archives on the engagement with the high rises. On the one hand, the future space, on the other hand, our working together and also the time we (they) had available for this task played a role when it came to sifting, sorting and sorting out the documents of the past.[36]

There is also another point that I would like to focus on now: the evaluation and the ordering of the past from a present.

> I'm sitting on the floor, cutting out the spines of the folders, when another colleague comes into the office; they say:
> P1:   Ah, here she is again. Does she also have time to write her thesis?
> P2:   She is digging up treasures here
> P1:   Rather an unbelievable chaos
> Me: Traces of careful administration
> P1:   From July on, you won't find anything here anymore
> P2:   Hendrikje records everything before it ends up in the containers.

---

36   (Ironically, we will not end up sorting out very much, because compared to other planning areas, the folders on the Hochhausscheiben are not that many and can fit almost all in the staff member's future office. But that will only become clear in the end of the process.)

Fig. 31

Fig. 31
The folders that the Hochhausscheiben have left in the office of Halle's planning department and the workplace of the author.
The author, 15.05.2021.

Fig. 32

Fig. 33

Fig. 34

Fig. 32
Archiving.
The author, 18.05.2021.

Fig. 33
Archive in Hochhausscheibe A
(in construction).
The author, 01.12.2021.

Fig. 34
Sorting things out.
The author, 27.04.2021

You know all this from your own experience, but for us it is treasures and some surprises that she finds; on building E, for example [...] that's really very valuable, what she does and, you see, she also makes sure that everything doesn't end up in containers; she's just glueing the folders and sorting them.
field notes, 05.05.2021   → fig. 34

The question of document classification, sorting and archiving became relevant with the question of which of the documents were considered 'worth keeping'.

As the notes above show, what is chaos and things to be put into the trash, are treasures for others. As a collective effort, the sorting of the archive demanded negotiations between us on how to classify these documents and the processes and events they document. Involved in sorting the folders on the centre of the Neustadt district and the high rises were the two employees working at the planning department on the area. In the future, they would no longer share an office as they are employed within two different teams, and a reorganization of the office according to the teams was planned. Instead of an organization according to planning areas (and across teams), the new offices would bring those employees making plans and those realizing these plans closer together (interview, 28.05.2021). Consequently, it was a matter of deciding who would take which folders and plans with them. The centre of Neustadt, with its high rises, was to be separated from the rest of Neustadt. There were usually three of us in the sorting process and we had to coordinate how we would proceed, where in the room we would collect which files and plans and how we would label them. Most importantly, I then worked with the staff member responsible for Neustadt's district centre. They had to decide which documents they might need in the future and think about an order that would be most helpful for their future tasks. They took as much time as they could for this task, and fortunately for me, there were many opportunities to talk. In view of the piles of documents and the limited time, it was sometimes they and sometimes I who was overwhelmed or lost the overview (field notes, e.g. 13.04.2021).

Historic, Timeless and Old Pasts

Field notes, 28.04.2021:

We go through documents from one of the cupboards together.
P1 said that only historic things should be kept and then also things like 'Hotel Neustadt'; actually, just things that are current or 'nice' or that are historic [...]
What can go: printed-out basic plans, on the basis of which something was once planned or considered.
P2 joins us. P2 had already started to sort out everything; today P2 also says 'if there are historic photos, I keep them' [...]
I ask: until when is historical? P2 laughs, good question; [...]
'I am painless with such things,' says P2. 'At the beginning I wanted to keep everything, but then we don't need to sort,' says P2 and laughs.
'This here, this is from the *Kolorado* project' [...];
'*Kolorado*,' says P2, 'that was at least once one of the things that were thought more long-term'; P1 looks at P2, surprised;
P2: 'at least that's how it was perceived' 'historic, one could say'– they pick this up again and again, joking
→ fig. 35

My question about when something was to be classified as 'historic' may have somewhat puzzled my informants. In fact, however, I ask this question at a moment when my informants seem to agree without much conversation on what can be sorted out and what should be kept, and I do not share this knowledge. In fact, however, they also go through a process of socialization in which they learn which events
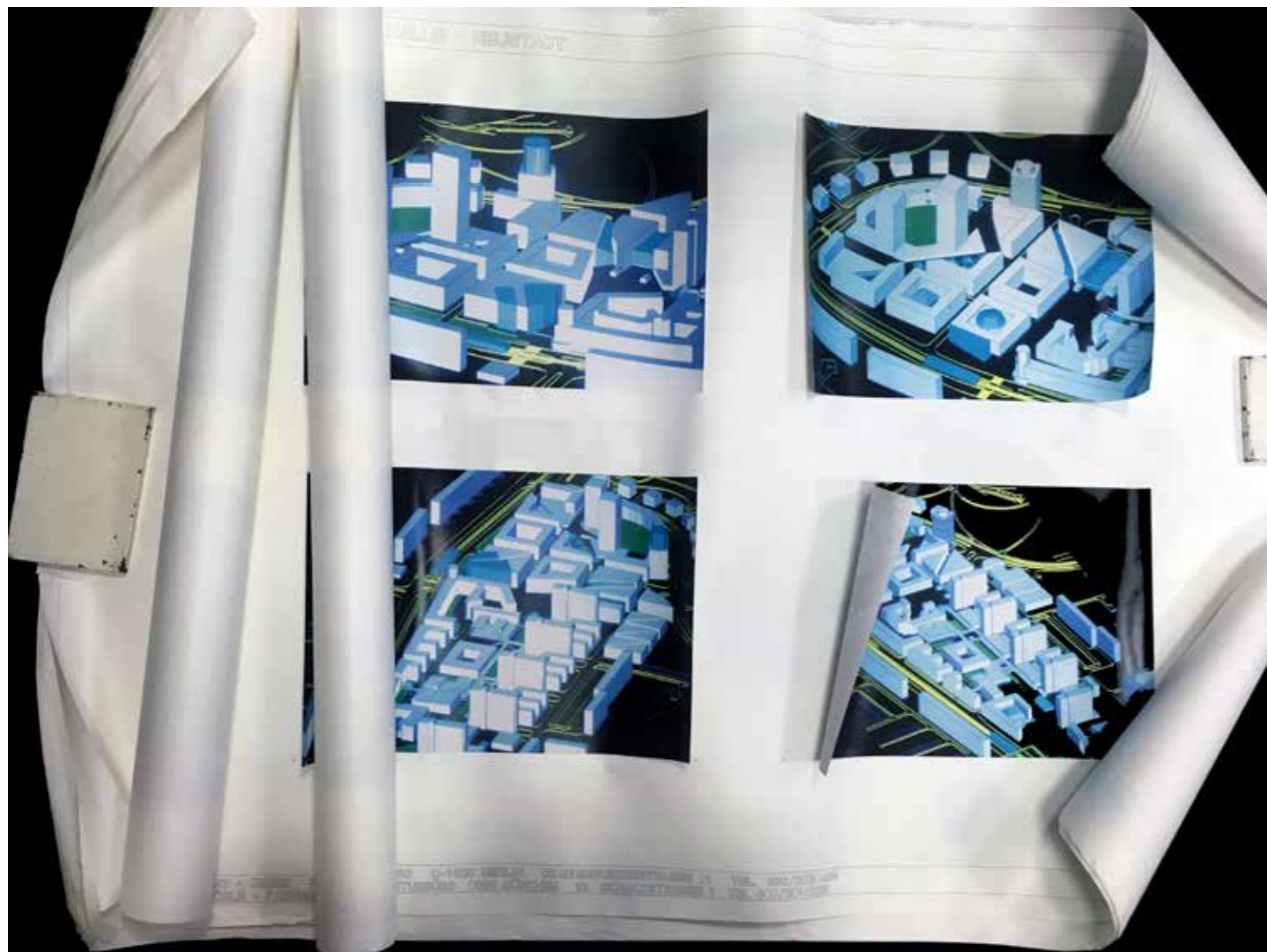
Fig. 35
Visions for Halle-Neustadt: 'Kolorado'.
Raumlabor Berlin, 2004.

Fig. 36
In order to sort the plans, we go
through them one by one to then take
decisions on whether to keep them.
Here the centre modelling by ARGE
Graul and Partners from the 1990s.
The author, 25.06.2019.

Fig. 35   Fig. 36

and processes were and are relevant and important for the administration. As the notes make clear, one colleague who has been working here a little longer explains to the other what the *Kolorado* project was and why it was important. And why it is therefore important to keep the documentation of this project. Their reasoning in this case is that this is a historical event, as the project received a lot of attention at the time and was perceived as a sustainable concept. Besides what were rather clearly important things and events to them on the one hand, like posters for the anniversary celebration '40 years of Halle-Neustadt' or famous concepts like the one by Lacaton and Vassal from 2015 for the revitalization of Scheibe C, and on the other hand duplicates of emails that were likely to go, there is a range of documents whose classification was easy neither for me nor for them. Something can be historic if there is a change associated with it, or if something has attracted attention and interest – either in the past and, because of an importance in the past – it should be awarded attention in the present, or not in the past but today. Often, my informants justified keeping something 'for historical purposes only' – that is, in the event of there being an epistemological interest in the past. While we were sorting out together, one of the planners said one day:

> We only pick up from probabilities; how high is the probability that someone will come and want to do research on it?
>
> That you are here with your interest, that is already very extraordinary. Of course, if someone wants to know how it was with the citizens at that time, then you might need it again; but in this case ... we keep it because it interests you and me, but it wouldn't be necessary for the administrative work.
> field notes, 29.04.2021

As the number of events without an eventful character is high, the number of documents that do not fit (Bowker & Star, 1999, p. 9) is high, too. It turned out that different colleagues had different strategies for sorting things out and that we, too, first had to develop a strategy of collective sorting. We usually proceeded as follows: I would go through the folders, putting sticky notes on the files to document their content. When I came across duplicates of emails or letters, I would sort them out immediately and put them on a pile on the floor of the office. I also went through many folders at home and then showed what I had found the next morning. Likewise, the employee showed me their findings from the afternoon. We exchanged ideas and decided together what could be thrown away and how we should reorganize if necessary. Often, the task seemed overwhelming for both them and me, as we were not only dealing with masses of documents that were not easy to classify and relate to one another, but also the usefulness of our work was not always evident. In the end, we would have gone through many folders several times (field notes, 21.04.2021; 28.04.2021). Sorting the documents belonging to events that are not easy to order in time was not an easy task in a context in which all events risk losing their 'eventfulness', sizes of events and reasons and effects blur.

Two reasons – the recognition of a historical value and the recognition of a possible use in the future – crystallized (field notes, 26.04.2021). Interestingly, this distinction resonates with the two modalities of being of archives that Yaneva (2020) distinguishes and that I have mentioned earlier: 'the archive *of*', containing specific events, plans and concepts from the past that my informants value as 'historic' and therefore worth keeping and 'the archive *for*' (Yaneva, 2020, pp. 131–132), containing things that may be used for purposes in the future.

This distinction between documents that could be used in the future – for example, for an exhibition, a brochure or the like – and documents that would not be used again but still have historical value because they document an event or a process that was important for history, crystallized but was not easy to determine in relation to each document. Which documents, which processes and events from the past were to be considered 'historic' remained unclear and had to be reconsidered for each folder or even for each document. → **fig. 36** And as we will see later, the evaluation of the past naturally changes depending on a current present that involves certain questions being asked of the documents by certain people at a particular moment in time.

Next to 'historic' documents, there are, as my informants say, 'timeless' documents that should be kept. These include, for instance, contracts, details of money spent and measures imple-

mented. One of my informants commented on these as follows: 'Contracts, etc., that's important, that's timeless; there may be times when someone still comes and wants to know something' (field notes, 28.04.2021). Here, too, the criterion is the probability of future use, traceability and account-ability. Even if the circumstances in which these documents were embedded during their creation no longer exist, these documents have a stabilizing effect as they ensure traceability and allow for accountability. Among the timeless documents are mostly documents with numbers (costs, prices, measurements, etc.). These are important pasts in the eyes of the administration, as they show the commitment of the state towards the area. Furthermore, they are important from today's perspective because they include funding commitments which should not be called into question within the com-mitment period (field notes, 18.05.2021). Among them are, for example, plans in which the measures undertaken are noted, including the date of the final invoice and the commitment period: for the *Neustädter Passage*, for example, this is 25 years, and the renovation was completed in 2006. No public money should be spent on this place for the next 25 years, and that also means that the planning decisions of these places should not be questioned.

For the high rises, however, as we realize while sorting and tracing, many events didn't make a change, and therefore documents were difficult to link to others. Many of these unrealized, old pasts have no date and are therefore not easy to sort and trace (field notes, 13.04.2021). In a standby mode that is driven by active inactivity and where cause and effects are not easily drawn, chronology gets lost, as building step-by-step was difficult. It is, for example, the contracts, land register excerpts and owner plans that continue to cause us difficulties while sorting. Not only have house numbers changed in the centre of Halle-Neustadt, but the high rises have been sold so many times that the land register entries seem to lag behind the sales. We throw away some old owner plans – contracts, however, have a different status as documents as they bear the stamp of a notary; they are timeless not because they would as events and documents have effects on present action or allow for continuity, but because of their intersubjective recognition as important documents. The same recognition pertains, for exam-ple, to floor plans (field notes, 26.04.2021). As one of the employees explained, they wanted to keep everything that has a 'public character' – for example, decisions that are, as they said, 'the results of an administrative act'. Also, building permits, grants, taxes, etc. – the results of administrative acts and decisions – are legally binding documents which can, in case of doubt, be used in court. Documents documenting these processes need to be kept, as they assure accountability (field notes, 27.04.2021).

Our joint task of sorting was not always easy; I sometimes had difficulty understanding the planners' way of making the past and the questions they did or did not ask. As I realized, the planners were mostly looking at the past historically, but not 'genealogically at the conditions of possibility of how and why things happened' (Hillier, 2011a, p. 31). While I was interested in why the high rises had remained in place but vacant for over 20 years and to what extent this could be explained by administrative practice, my informants evaluated the past by its historicity or from its use for the present and the future. Processes from the past and unrealized futures were not of the same interest to them as to me. An example would be the preparatory investigations for the redevelopment area from the early 2000s that the planners considered 'old' or outdated. My informant commented: 'the old is not interesting, the *VU* [Abbr. for German: *Vorbereitende Untersuchungen*, English: preparatory in-vestigations] for example – we have a valid VU today, the old ones are really only kept for historical purposes' (field notes, 28.04.2021). In fact, the documents on the Preparatory Investigations were a valuable discovery for me. Fourteen years lie between the attempts to establish a redevelopment area in the centre of Neustadt. In 2002, investigations were carried out for this purpose, which identified an urban planning grievance with regard to the vacant high rises, and in 2016 as well.

When I found the documents, I wondered whether and who witnessed or knew the processes of that time and whether these processes were remembered. I wondered what role these 'things' from the past really played in my informants' present. As the Preparatory Investigations are concerned, un-dertaken to evaluate whether the instrument of a redevelopment area was useful to initiate change, it seems that they are more a repetition of administrative processes than a past that people relate to and that they think to learn from. For my informants, caught up with new presents, these things are 'out-dated'. As I came to understand, the past only matters when it still exerts agency over the present, or when it becomes valuable for the sake of remembering and a narrative present action builds on. In my interactions with them, I partly blame them for not taking a different interest in the past, and one such

example was the 2002 Preparatory Investigations. I realize that I am convinced that it would be possible to think differently about the future if one were to ask the question about the conditions of possibility (Hillier, 2011a, p. 31). In that sense, they stabilize a form of practice rather than knowledge that future consideration would be built on. My notes in my field diary testify to the fact that I was partly frustrated by how the planners made the past, but how I was nevertheless striving to remain in a research-ob-serving role with regard to *their* ways of making the past. I probably have to ask myself whether it is I who cannot bear to remain in the in-between and would like to see change. What do I expect from the unrealized futures of the past, and what can be learned from the impossibilities of the past? It was only when I reflected on my own frustration related to my impression they weren't interested in highlighting past impossibilities, that I was able to realize that this is probably also a core of standby in the sense of an in/active mode (see Kemmer et al. 2021). Standby in this sense nonetheless appears as a carrying on, sustained in part by the stabilization of administrative practice and the selective production of the past.

My informants contrast 'historic' with 'old'. Old things are things that are no longer needed from the perspective of a current present. One day, one of the planners came in and asked me what I planned to do with the old plans. They asked me what time I was interested in and what was old for me. And when I told them that I was mainly interested in plannings since 1990, they shrugged, saying dismissively: 'you will see, there were many plans, but the realization was always lacking'. I noted in my field notes about this encounter: 'I think they can't imagine what might be interesting about old, unrealized things' (field notes, 19.06.2019). As I understand them, 'old' and 'unrealized' are then not worth a note. 'Historic', in contrast, equally unrealized, was considered worthy of being remembered as a past. Some colleagues were radical in treating the old and decided that, for example, everything older than 20 years could go (field notes, 21.04.2021). In this case, their criteria were not based on the significance of an event, but on the accountability of administrative action, which fades with time. The category 'historic' served in the process of sorting things out to classify that something should be remembered, or that it should or must be possible to access something from the past in the future. As we have seen, my informants were also interested in what has been realized and the corresponding 'facts' – that is, mainly testimonies of ownership, realized measures and costs.

As we will see in the following section, we should not underestimate the effects of this ar-rangement of the past. Not only are they a production of knowledge about a past, but as I will argue, this produced past has an effect back on present action. Sorting the past plays an important role, as it will form the basis for the alignment of these pasts into a common narrative on which to build when working towards the future.

Alignment: Reproducing the Past

An important part of the time work related to buildings on standby is to align past events in a 'correct order' (Abram, 2014, p. 135) and form a shared set of knowledge that will allow the development of a common vision not only on the past, but also the future.

One of my tasks during the second internship was to write a text on the 'History of the *Zentrum Neustadt* and the *Hochhausscheiben A–E*'. The task was to bring knowledge on the past into a text form for purposes that we cannot yet determine exactly, as they told me (field notes, 02.03.2021).

Initially, I had assumed that I would write a text of about ten pages, based on the material and reading I had already collected. It turned out, however, that something else was expected: an overview of the history based on the political decisions made about the centre and the high rises. Here again, it becomes clear that we have a different interest in history. For while I base my research on what was planned but not realized, my informants working as civil servants have a need for the production of knowledge on materialized 'facts', on (political) decisions taken and what was realized. In addition to going through the documents, concepts and plans in the office, I thus researched all the City Council res-olutions that had been passed on the site. Ideally, we agreed, these political decisions should in the end be linked to information from the documents on concepts, measures and costs. Resolutions in the City Council are the authoritative basis for all their work, as one informant explains (field notes, 02.03.2021), adding that the publication date in the official gazette (*Amtsblatt)* was important as, after publication, these are legally binding (field notes, 05.03.2021). Therefore, it should be recorded whether or not it

was approved with the date of the publication; then, the main content of decisions, estimated costs and funding, and how much was used and what measures were finally implemented with final costs (field notes, 02.03.2021). What they were interested in was: which of the political decisions were ultimately implemented? by what means and at what cost? What they were looking for was records of what had been realized in the *Zentrum Neustadt*, how much it had cost and which political decisions had been made. As they told me, what they needed were text modules summarizing these decisions and events from the past for different occasions, occasions that cannot be fully known (field notes, 02.03.2021). Such an occasion could be a text they need to produce for the City Council and that must include the state of knowledge of the city administration (knowledge they have assembled and knowledge of their own past actions) (field notes, 02.03.2021). Or, someone might ask something specific about the development of the centre and they would need to be able to find this information easily. The text modules on past events were thus produced for different possible occasions in the future.

In order to find the right information within the online archive of political decisions, I first needed to understand the procedures connected to these documents. As Harper notes,

> documents are bound up with certain kinds of organizational practices. Users need to have some kind of background knowledge, or a set of expectations and assumptions which enables them to approach documents intelligently. It is for this reason that newcomers to some organisational setting will have difficulty understanding 'just what' some document is intended for, even though they may be able to read that document again and again. (Harper, 1998, p. 38)

Indeed, my field notes show expressions of my difficulties at first understanding the different versions of proposals, the minutes from the meetings and requested changes, as well as the archiving logics. After feeling very slow in researching the online archive and feeling overwhelmed from time to time (field notes, 04.03.2021), I became increasingly familiar both with the procedures within the planning department for elaborating a resolution proposal for the Council and with its trajectory once it left the department and was discussed within the council committees. What impressed me here above all was the collective effort and simply the number of hands a bill passes through before it is presented to the political body. And for that large number, the process of revisions did not seem necessarily fast to me, but efficient in the sense that there is harmonization at the end. Once all involved departments have signed it, a proposal is to be discussed within different committees before being voted on. All versions of a template and discussion formats are stored online with the associated meeting date (field notes, 10.03.2021).

Finally, I produced Excel tables and various Word documents: overviews in the form of simple lists with the date, title and final decision, overviews including text modules that I copy-pasted from the resolution proposals and, finally, I wrote a continuous text, in which I summarized the content of political decisions and their (non-/ or partial) realization.   → Fig. 37

Resolution	Number	Date	Vote
Urban Restructuring Concept for the Halle-Neudstadt District	III/2001/01469	20.06.2001	Approved by Majority (after amendment)
Decision in Principle to Preserve the Scheiben Ensemble in the Centre of the Neustadt District	VI/2015/01130	25.11.2015	Approved by Majority
Formal Designation of the Redevelopment Area, No. 3, 'Neustadt District Centre'	VI/2017/02763	31.05.2017	Unanimously agreed
Structural Concept Neustadt District Centre	VI/2018/04708	24.04.2019	Unanimously agreed

Fig. 37

Fig. 37
Extract from the created table. Included in this extract are the City Council resolutions frequently mentioned in this work (selection). Research by the author, spring 2021.

Between 1990 and 2021, almost 60 political decisions and inquiries (mostly inquiries) have been discussed within the City Council of Halle on the centre of Halle-Neustadt: 19 treated the high rises specifically (naming one high rise or the ensemble in the title; 4 of them after I had completed my second internship in 2021) (Neuordnungskonzept für den Stadtteil Halle-Neustadt 2001, III/2001/01469; Integriertes Stadtentwicklungskonzept 2007; IV/2007/06567; Beschluss zur Sicherung des Integrierten Stadtentwicklungskonzeptes (ISEK) für den Standort Halle-Neustadt unter besonderer Beachtung der Hochhausscheiben, V/2009/08266; 2. Fortschreibung des Integrierten Handlungskonzeptes „Soziale Stadt" Neustadt 2025, VI/2015/00557; Grundsatzbeschluss des Stadtrates zum Erhalt des Scheiben-ensembles im Zentrum des Stadtteils Halle-Neustadt, VI/2015/01130; Bericht zu den vorbereitenden Untersuchungen gemäß § 141 BauGB für das „Stadtteilzentrum Neustadt", VI/2017/02810).

Whether in an urban development concept from 2001 or in the preparatory studies for the redevelopment area in 2017, the Hochhausscheiben were and are named as the biggest problem of the Neustadt centre. The same wording can be found again and again in the resolution papers with regard to the identified problems and the formulated goals. They recognize the importance of the Hochhausscheiben for urban development and see the buildings, and their vacancy in particular, as one of the biggest problems and challenges for the development of Halle-Neustadt as a whole (I will discuss this point in **chapter 5** in more detail). Most of the concepts therefore formulate the goal of working toward revitalizing the buildings.

The vacancy of the high rises as a problem for the centre or the entire district and the goal of eliminating the deplorable condition caused by their vacancy form the first element of a shared body of knowledge within the city administration that has been reproduced in city administration documents since the early 2000s. The fact that the identified problem persists refers here to the standby mode, which despite changes and numerous activities, has a continuity: the persistence of the vacancy, which carries the risk that activities undertaken to eliminate it will be called into question and which keeps the buildings and all those who deal with them in an in-between.

Reproducing the past is an elementary part of resolution papers and other written texts of the city administration. Central to this is the meaningful sequencing of past events, steps building on to each other, and connected in cause-effect relations. As I have argued, however, these relations are not easily drawn as standby is to be understood as a non-linear process, an in-between where directions are not at all clear. The problem at the core for my informants is that the majority of events have not had the desired effect – at least not on the vacant high rises that are, as they agree, the major threat to the area. As all activities from the early 2000s onwards have not provoked the intended end of standby in the form of a demolition or revitalization of the high rises, they get listed, but their effectiveness is questioned as they get measured by their effect in relation to the Hochhausscheiben. The fact that all concepts mention the high rises and formulate the end of standby or even revitalization as a goal may be more of a political obligation than a goal to be achieved at all costs. A goal that is stabilized with each new decision, but not necessarily more likely to be achieved as long as waiting is a legitimate answer to the impossibilities of the present (backed up with arguments that made it into the common feeling at the public administration, such as the non-possibility of investing large amounts of public funds into the Hochhausscheiben). But now that it has been formulated, all measures are also measured against this goal and lose their luminosity in the face of the final goal not being achieved.

In the early 2000s, the city of Halle redesigned and renovated the public spaces around the high rises with funding from the state's 'Urban 21' programme. These measures were also intended to make revitalization of the high rises more likely. The documents always list the measures, showing the public investment in the area. Furthermore, private sector investments are listed, which have led to structural changes in the immediate surrounding of the Hochhausscheiben. Then, the construction of a skate park is mentioned, realized in the course of the International Building Exhibition (IBA 2010). This is finally followed by the statement that no longer-term use could be found for the high rises themselves. A second element of the narrative of the past is thus the enumeration of activities that have not, however, led to a long-term use being found for the high rises themselves. The regret that no future could be determined for the Hochhausscheiben despite the steps taken, such as the revitalization of the passage or the construction of the skatepark, is a central part of the narrative of the past. However, the planners do not want to give up the belief that they can bring about a future through upgrading measures in the surrounding area (field notes, 25.01.2023).

Not listed are, however, the numerous additional efforts, negotiations and interactions of state and non-state actors that the documents in the folders of the city administration testify to and that particularly interest me. These disappear in the public papers as they have not led to any determination of the future and therefore remain unmentioned, or are buried under the framing 'status quo' that I discussed in the first chapter.

Since 2013, numerous studies have been commissioned and activities involving the public have been undertaken. These undertakings of the years 2014 and 2015 are: an international urban design workshop with students, a citizens' conference in Neustadt for the update of the ISEK 2025, the so-called 'Future Workshop Neustadt', the study on a potential covering of the Hochhausscheiben, a report on the value of Halle-Neustadt from the perspective of its historical and architectural significance (Baukultureller, stadtbaugeschichtlicher und denkmalpflegerischer Werteplan), a study by the Competence Centre Urban Redevelopment of the State of Saxony-Anhalt for the revitalization of building C, and the realized update of the concept for a 'Social City' (VI/2015/01130, 2015, p. 4). These studies and discussions of possible futures happened almost simultaneously, with multiple possible futures co-existing in the discussions (I will discuss this aspect below). A resolution text from 2015 says: 'Decisive for the preparation of the present draft resolution were the following current measures for the analysis and promotion of the development possibilities for the *Scheiben* ensemble in 2014 and 2015, which, in addition to professional expertise, relied on a broad participation of the citizenry' (VI/2015/01130, 2015, p. 4).

From 2013 onwards, we find many documents, including the resolution papers, but also brochures and concepts and studies that the city administration mandated, containing similar wording and the same past references. It concerns, on the one hand, the presentation of the origins and original use of Neustadt, its centre and the high rises, as well as a description of the place. Working on a common narrative of the origins of the buildings plays an important role in underlining the authenticity of the place. Thus, some emphasize the Swedish model and refer to the internationalization of GDR architecture to highlight its importance. Others, however, focus on the local specificity and emphasize that the Swedish model was further developed according to a specific construction method from Halle (the so-called *HMB – Hallesche Monolithbauweise*). In the process of creating public documents, administrators must strive and agree on the correct representation (field notes, 15.04.2021). These discussions are reminiscent of what is treated in the anthropological literature after Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) as 'inventing traditions'.[37] As I said, I will go into more detail elsewhere on the evaluation of the architectural form of the buildings and their assumed importance for the district (**see chapter 5**). However, I want to underline that these investments in tradition are also important in the shaping of a narrative (Ringel, 2014, p. 56). A common narrative on the origins of the high rises becomes increasingly stabilized from 2013 onwards and will form a third central element of a shared set of knowledge on the past that allows the city administration to work on the buildings' future.

Since a political decision from 2015 to preserve the buildings was taken, the alignment of past events will become part of a harmonized vision of the past to build activities on. The 2015 decision for preservation no longer officially permits simultaneity, but was the impetus for a process that once again requires linearity, continuity and a harmonization of the past. The correct order of events can now be established from the point of view of 2015. This order subsequently becomes the fourth element of the harmonized narrative. As we will see, however, this order is still to be understood more in the sense of a pool of a canon from which one can choose, depending on the situation. As described at the beginning of this section, my informant needs these to be flexible text modules, coherent in themselves but multiply composable, as a basis for situations that we cannot foresee.

The alderman responsible for urban development pointed out in the interview how important internal harmonization was. While some projects would take 15 years before they could be realized, they said, continuity is needed within the administration during this time, which also lasts beyond election periods (interview, 28.05.2021). They were speaking here of more than a common set of knowledge

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37   The large body of literature on inventing traditions and the narrative construction of the past, predominant in history and anthropology would be an interesting source for reflection within this chapter, but would go beyond the scope of this dissertation. It also focuses less on mundane practice and more on representation, power and discourse. The main lesson I learned from this literature is the selective adaptation and transformation of elements of the past from a present.
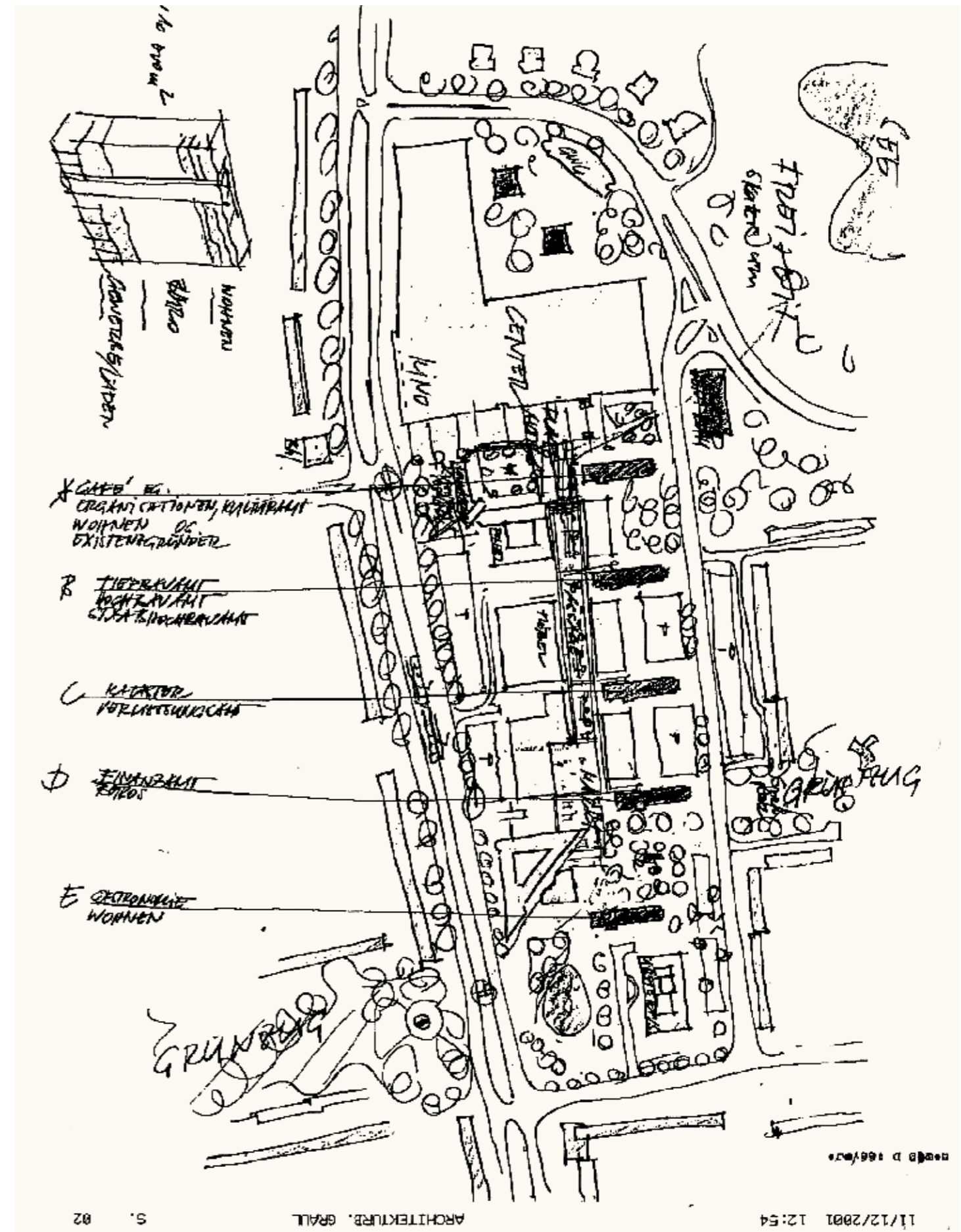

Fig. 38

Fig. 38
Revitalization concept for Halle-Neustadt Centre, including proposals for the Hochhausscheiben, here a mix of uses. ARGE Graul and Partners, 2002.

of the past, but of coordination and shared visions for the future, but as I see it, a harmonization of the past is an important element within the process of coordinated collective action towards the future.

The decision in principle in 2015 was followed by the investigations to define a redevelopment area, and in 2017 the decision was made to define the redevelopment area as 'Stadtteilzentrum Neustadt'. The renovation of public spaces and private investment in the centre from the early 2000s would be included in the Preparatory Study from 2017 in what is called a phase of 'Rehabilitation and Stabilization', starting from the year 2000. Finally, a point of view has been found from which past events can be incorporated into a narrative that – at least according to the political will – has a goal. Linearity finally seems possible. And this is important for the accountability for its commitment that the city owes to its citizens. The report distinguishes different phases: '1964–1990: construction and growth'; '1990–2000: fusion and shrinkage'; and then the mentioned phase 'since 2000: reorganization and stabilization' with regard to the effects of these investments on Neustadt as a whole (Plan und Praxis, 2017, p. 7). What I would like to show with these examples and remarks is that depending on the present, different events from the past are selected and integrated into a narrative. This narrative can always change and be adapted to the situation, but since 2015 it has been increasingly harmonized in the light of increased hopes that a future for the buildings could actually be made and determined in the form of preservation and revitalization. Bourdieu once defined the present as 'the set of those things to which one is present, in other words, in which one is interested (as opposed to indifferent, or absent)'(Bourdieu, 2000, p. 210). For its relation to the past and the forthcoming, he notes that the present is not a single moment in time but that 'it encompasses the practical anticipations and retrospections that are inscribed as objective potentialities or traces in the immediate given'. Often, the past comes into the present through periodization, such as the periodization of one of the city administration's planners. They said in the interview: 'we are clearly further along than we were in the quite sad 2000s and in the 2010s, which were obsessed with ideas but little with realization, [but today] it could be something'(interview, 02.10.2018). Periodizations of the past are always made from a current present, equally so in research. In a lecture in Halle in 2019, sociologist Pasternack presented a timeline for the history of Halle-Neustadt and characterized the beginning of the 2000s with 'administrative perplexity' and recognized a 'solution approach to Scheiben' from 2010 and an 'objectified view' from the mid-2010s (*Conference: Das andere Bauhaus-Erbe. Leben in den Plattenbausiedlungen heute | HoF*, 2019).

As a consequence of assumed changed conditions of possibility after 2015, not all of the possible futures of 2014 and 2015 will henceforth be lined up as events in policy papers, but individual ones will be selected and highlighted. In the report on the preparatory study for the establishment of a redevelopment zone, it says: 'A broad spectrum of options was examined by the city of Halle (Saale) or commissioned offices prior to the decision in principle to preserve the high rises. Demolition, temporary covering and structural development options were all up for discussion' (Plan und Praxis, 2017, p. 23). It is then going into detail only for three studies/concepts: a concept by the architects Graul and Partner from 2002; → **fig. 38** the visualization of options for demolition by KARO architects from 2009; → **fig. 39** and a study by Lacaton and Vassal, together with Fischer from 2015. → **fig. 40**

In this context, it is particularly interesting that a 'forgotten' concept was rediscovered in the presence of 2017. Only after 2015 did a concept developed in 2001–2003 by the architects Graul and Partners for the high-rise buildings receive renewed attention and was added to the alignment of past events.

The architects Graul and Partners were all connected to the Neustadt in different ways, e.g. development of the shopping centre built in 2000, the hotel, and residential buildings in the direct surrounding in the case of architect Hermann (Vienna); preliminary designs for the redesign of the Neustadt Passage (gallery redevelopment) for architect Graul from Halle and the design of the high rises in the 1970s in the case of Morgner who was also responsible for the renovation of Scheibe D *(*minutes from a meeting on the revitalization of the district centre, 23.01.2002; notes for press inquiries, urban planning department, 31.01.2002). This group of architects elaborated first a 'Study on Urban Planning Concept for the District Centre 'Halle-Neustadt'' from 2001. This urban design concept examined the removal of one building (building E) but then argued for the preservation of the ensemble and for the demolition of two surrounding buildings. Later, the architects were also mandated for the Preparatory Investigations evaluating the possibility and reasonability for the estab-

Fig. 39

Fig. 40

Fig. 39
Visualization of demolition variants
in Halle-Neustadt's district centre.
KARO Architekten, 2009.

Fig. 40
Design draft for the Passage.
Lacaton & Vassal+ Fischer, 2015.

lishment of a redevelopment area (2002). In the report on the Preparatory Investigations of 2017, the conceptualizations of the architects Graul and Partners are discussed. Here it says under 'studies and concepts for individual properties':

> As early as 2002, the Graul architectural firm elaborated an urban development concept with various development options.
>
> — Removal of building E and the market hall
>
> – Preservation of the Scheiben and removal of the medical centre and the market hall
>
> In the result the second variant with preservation of the Scheiben and the demolition of the medical centre and the market hall is recommended.
> Conceptual work was also done for the high rises. The office sees various possible uses due to the condition of the supporting system and the functionally neutral structure. By complete or partial removal of the floors, full variance can be brought into the objects, double-storey rooms and gallery floors complement the space offered and increase the quality.
> Plan und Praxis, 2017, pp. 23–24

In an interview I held in 2019 with representatives of a citizens' initiative that had fought for decades to preserve the Hochhausscheiben, they cited Graul's concept as a central reference. They referred to it as it spoke out in favour of preservation and, in their eyes, showed ways in which this preservation could be secured and that the buildings could be revived in a variety of ways. They believed that the city of Halle had lost the plans and only in recent times requested them again from the architects (field notes, 15.05.2019). In the city administration nobody would confirm this, although one of the co-workers did not consider it completely improbable. In their view, this was linked to the fact that nobody knows exactly what plans exist (field notes, 17.06.2019). Whether the concept was actually lost or not, intentionally not mentioned until after 2015 or not, cannot be verified. What I would like to emphasize, however, is that the view on the past is clearly (re)evaluated from the present. I want to argue that this particular concept is mentioned after 2015 and becomes part of the 'canon of events' because it harmonizes with today's dominant narrative of the importance of the buildings and efforts to preserve them.[38]

What we observe is how at different moments in time, different events and possible futures from the past come to matter more than others. They come to matter in the present as they become things to which we are present (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 210). They will then get aligned with other events that together form a narrative of the past, seen from the present and enabling collective action towards the future. In their everyday administrative work today, my informants mostly refer to the detailed preparatory study from 2017 (field notes, 20.05.2021); furthermore, to the political decisions taken from the decision in principle from 2015 onwards. My informant collects text modules summarizing past events on their computer. They tell me that they need these text modules regularly, when they have to write statements or prepare documents for the City Council. The ordered past events and possible futures, taking on the form of variably usable text modules and pictures, form an archive that serves as a repertoire for future occasions that are not yet determinable. However, the repertoire of versatile modules remains, to some extent, an ideal. While I do observe repetitious reproduction of the same or

almost the same wording within documents, imagining how these modules have to look to fulfil the purpose of being stable and transferable is not that easy. Depending on the situation and the type of text, the language has to be adapted for the reception, and different aspects and perspectives on the past become relevant (field notes, 29.03.2021). I want to suggest that standby as an intermediate and intermediary stage allows for exactly this as none of the past possible future actually materialized: specific ways of making time, including the selection from pasts, cutting them from other pasts, (and as we will see in the next section, multiplying and opening the future). As I see it, it is the non-materialization of these possible futures 'out there' on the buildings on a mode of standby that allows for ignoring them or selecting from them according to the present conditions of possibility. The selection of activities that are materialized in the form of selected documents becomes, in this sense, a pool of elements from the past that they are able to align into a narrative, enabling them to work on the future. From my research on the City Council decisions, those political decisions that included materializations in the urban space and public investments were particularly interesting. These include the redevelopment measures of the Neustädter Passage, for example. And all those resolutions after 2015, which, according to the planners, form the basis of their actions to this day. What is important to note here is that by reproducing these text modules on selected pasts and past processes – political decisions and the corresponding reports and concepts as well as concepts of possible futures, they are reproducing the past in order to assure continuity and traceability.

As my informants say, they 'cannot ignore findings from the past', adding that it is 'important to know, there are concepts available that we can fall back on' (field notes, 18.03.2021) and that it is equally important 'to know what has been done in the past so as not to make the same mistakes over and over again' (field notes, 21.04.2021). Knowing the past, it seems, is important to them, but mainly in the form of 'facts' rather than genealogies of conditions of possibility, as I realize while sorting documents together with them. What is important is knowing and developing a common set of knowledge on the past to stabilize a process that, as I argue, is much less chronological and evolutionary than it first seems or as it seems in retrospect. Coming from the outside, I felt at times, as I mentioned earlier, that there was a shared body of knowledge within the administration that I was only gradually gaining access to. Interestingly, with two new colleagues, I was able to follow their own socialization process to some extent. Newer colleagues attended the interviews I conducted with older colleagues at the beginning of my research project. One of them later told me that they listened to the recording of one of the interviews on car trips to familiarize themselves with Neustadt. In two to three years, they will be the person to ask on Neustadt, so they want to memorize everything, as he told me (field notes, 19.06.2019).

Forming a common representation of the origins, what were historic events and the alignment of a selection of these events in a shared set of the past, is important for them in acting on the future. As I find out, it is within texts for resolutions, official statements and brochures that the past plays a major role in their everyday work. Through repetition and reproduction of selected pasts in these texts, a harmonization of collective knowledge and action is enabled. It is not only the successive resolutions, but also the shaping of a narrative of the past as different from the present, which are to form the basis for collective action towards a determination of the future and, as my informants hope, towards an end of standby.[39]

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[38]   I do not want to leave unmentioned that the visualizations of deconstruction variants from 2009 (KARO Architekten) are also mentioned in the report from 2017 (Plan und Praxis, 2017, p. 25). As a result of the visualizations it is stated: 'Overall, the visualization has shown that all variants, albeit to varying degrees, have a significant impact on the urban character of the centre' (Plan und Praxis, 2017, p. 24).

[39]   In this section it became clear that the political decision to preserve the buildings has changed the way people look at the past and how it is re-(made) in documents. The canon seems to have been consolidated and a harmonization of the selection of past events is possible. In this context, the question arises (and I keep asking myself this question) whether one can still speak of a standby mode at all after 2015. I will keep asking this question in various places, but for me I answer it with (a cautious) 'no' and I will explain why at various moments throughout this work. One reason is that the future remains uncertain and thus the past remains contingent and made (see Ringel, 2016b, pp. 392–393).

3.2   Navigating and Being Prepared

Assuming that planning futures are '*concretely* and *materially* crafted, enabled, and actively reclaimed' (Ringel, 2014, p.68; emphasis in original), this chapter analyses practices of making the future in planning, engaging with possible building futures for the Hochhausscheiben.

Planners produce knowledge on the future and work on the future as they prepare for pathways to take action towards the future (Ringel, 2016a, p. 25). While planners do not make political decisions, as my informants underline, they prepare them as they make recommendations based on the information they assemble. As one planner explains, the administration has an advisory character and receives mandates from the political institutions: 'It is clear that the decisions are made by the politicians and the intentions of the politicians, so to speak, are a task for us at this point and they have been very clear, at least on the part of the mayor' (interview, 08.07.2020). The interviewed planner remembers how they came to Halle in 2012 and how they got the mandate to develop a solution to the enduring problem of the vacant high rises in Halle-Neustadt:

> I came here to Halle in 2012 and the 50th anniversary was just around
> the corner. And a welcome topic was in Halle, yes, we have these
> Scheiben and that is a problem and that must be solved. And the mayor
> put this on their agenda before the election, right at the top, and they
> said to the city planning, 'you have time now, just under a year,' I
> think, 'and then you will provide me with a solution'. And we have then
> started the process [...] which actually tries to answer your question,
> so what part in the future can then such structures from the past play
> for Neustadt.
> interview, 08.07.2020[40] [41]

Commonly, the planners' task is described as to 'foresee future scenarios, and to try to pursue the best among the options' and 'thinking about ways and strategies to avoid unwanted, undesirable outcomes' (Pizzo, 2015, p. 137). To this end, 'planning entails a broad set of tactics, technologies and institutions to try to control the passage into the future, including practices and ideas' (Abram & Weszkalnys, 2013a, p. 2), 'ascertaining predictabilities and attempting to secure them by design' (Abram, 2017, p. 66). Many authors have noted a transformative and mobilizing effect of designed futures for present action (Wallman, 1992; Anderson, 2010; Abram, 2017). Yet, ethnographies of city administrations and planning have demonstrated how planning embraces complexity (Peters, 2019), entails a dialectic interplay of both 'modern' (e.g. standardization, objectivity, and numeration) and (embodied, relational, and intersubjective) 'premodern' knowledge practices (Valverde, 2011, p. 280) and how future-making practices are 'linked to a multitude of day-to-day ad hoc decisions, stopgap solutions and detours' (Farías, 2020b, pp. 177–178). Recent studies have questioned the future-orientation of planning altogether, as they argue that planning paradoxically pushes the future further and further back (Abram & Weszkalnys, 2013a; Färber, 2019) and has been giving answers to the past rather than the future (Farías, 2020a; Valverde, 2011). Some of my informants from Halle are equally concerned that they are busy with mending the mistakes of the past, and that society as a whole and planning today are lacking ideas (in contrast to the idea of socialism, for instance, that guided the planners and architects during the building of Halle-Neustadt). Such answers to the past, as I see it, are, however,

still always future-oriented in the sense that they anticipate future uses and ways of living together, targeting improvement. I thus see planning as rooted in ideas of progress and step-by-step improvement of what is defined as deficits within the present, aiming at a better future (see Beauregard, 2018, p. ix for similar assumptions related to the urban). Guiding ideas for the making of the future among my informants are, for example, the European city and the 'naturally grown' city, which is understood as a contrast to the modern, planned city. Therefore, a basic goal with regard to the future is the partial undoing of modernity, or at least, as they put it, the 'transformation of modernity', to think modernity further, with the mobilization of the past, the historical European city (e.g. group discussion, 06.02.2020; field notes, 26.11.2018; Schönborn Schmitz Architekten, 2018; field notes, 02.03.2021).[42]

I understand the making of the future as being fuelled by ways of relating to the future and acting upon the future in the present. My special interest is in the ontological status and form that is given to the future (Anderson, 2010, p. 778) in a mode of standby, in the effects of the future in a standby-present and practices of making the future.

Within this section, we will first examine how futures are made in scenarios developed by the city planners from Halle's administration. Then, how distant futures (in the form of long-term visions) and near futures (in the form of short-term measures) are related in practice and, third, how indeterminacy in the present is produced in line with efforts to keep the future open to a certain extent. As we will see, uncertainty is embraced within the practices of anticipating and making the future (Anderson, 2010, p. 782). Furthermore, shifts are made between nearer and more distant futures to navigate the ship to 'safe ports'. The safe port will be defined after 2015 as preservation; it remains unclear, however, how preservation could be ensured and how a revitalization of the high rises could be organized and what it might look like. We will see that, in relation to the future of the towers, even though preservation has been set as a goal, the future remains uncertain and keeping the future open becomes a necessity in the eyes of the city planners.

Scenario Building

My informants from the planning unit are involved in several types of future-making, one of which is scenario building. Scenario building is a central practice of planners, making the future present (Adams et al., 2009, p. 249; Anderson, 2010, pp. 784–785) and an integral part of (un)making possible building futures. Scenarios are plausible descriptions of possible futures – of what '"could" and "might" happen' (Anderson, 2010, p. 785), thought up or designed on the basis of the present as well as anticipated changes in the future. These expected changes are based on 'assumptions about key relationships and driving forces (e.g. new technological developments, CO_2 emissions, prices)' (Adam & Groves, 2007, p. 202) that are plausible on the basis of a shared set of knowledge. Rather than being predictions of future events, they 'enable the exploration of possible, probable and preferable futures' (Adam & Groves, 2007, p. 202) through '"what will happen if …" query' (Yaneva, 2009, p. 164). In contemporary planning theory, such inquiry is understood as '[a] practical "thinking otherwise" in an experimental activation of potentiality. A "what might happen if …?" approach, not so much to predict, but to be alert to as-yet unknown potentialities' (Deleuze, 1988; as cited in: Hillier, 2011a, p. 32). Through these 'what if' stories, the unknowability of the future is met with several possible futures. As Albrechts puts it: 'The scenario derives from the observation that, given the impossibility of knowing precisely how the future will play out, a good decision or strategy to adopt is one that plays out well across several possible futures' (Albrechts, 2005, p. 255). The opening of the present for the potential – believing that potentiality will arise from the opening of the present towards multiple possible futures, has become a normative goal within which not only planning theorists and poststructuralist researchers[43] join, but so do planning practitioners. What we observe is, 'the significance of the future in contemporary rhetoric and practice' (Abram, 2017, p. 78). According to

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[40]   I do not say at that moment of the interview that I myself do not claim to find out what future the structures from the past can play in the future, but that I want to find out what role they attach to the buildings and how they design and discard futures for them. Their assumption is a very common assumption of my informants in the field, despite my attempts to explain my positioning and perspective.

[41]   In 2012, a new mayor was elected in Halle and this was also the year in which the planner I interviewed took up their position within the city administration. The new-formation of a set of knowledge and an increasing harmonization of the past in the years after 2015 is certainly related to these personnel changes.

[42]   These are linked to current wider trends in the aftermath of the Leipzig Charta, but also discussions around the 'New Bauhaus' (field notes, 12.03.2021).

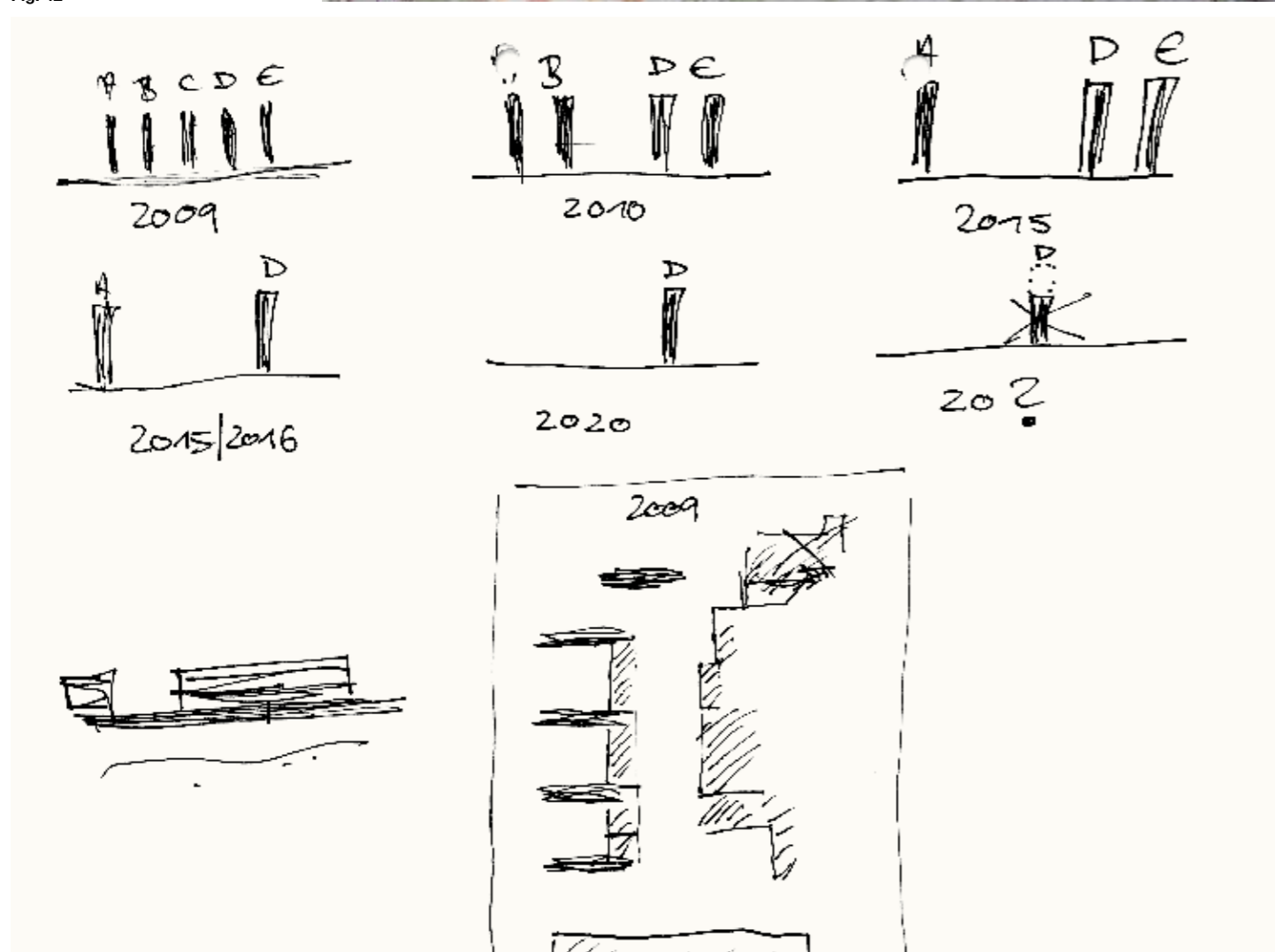[43]   For a critique see Ringel (2014, p. 56).

Fig. 41

Fig. 42

Fig. 41; 42
Scenarios for the Hochhausscheiben.
Sketches from city planners, n.d.
[early 2000s; 2009].
Source: Halle City Administration.

Abram, this is evident, for example, in the fact '[t]hat the future can be used to justify present action – a forward-looking version of mythical charter', but also in that '[s]cenarios of the future function to illuminate the present and/or to offer at-a-distance and so politically (and emotionally?) safe ways of criticizing it' (Abram, 2017, p. 78).

For a long time, my informants' search for potentiality in the present is linked to a present of the high rises that is considered deficient and a situation of impossibility rather than of possibility. Looking for possibilities thus becomes a necessity, and they hope to discover potentials and to be able to point out possible trajectories towards the future. → **fig. 41; 42**

Within scenario planning, city planners assemble multiple building futures consisting of a number of elements such as material form, property relations, costs, architectural value, etc. Over the period of more than 20 years that the high rises in Halle-Neustadt remain vacant, these possible futures are multiple, but not endless – most of the time three (demolition, status quo and preservation), sometimes two (demolition and preservation) – coexisting and competing.

This was also the case in 2013, when the planning unit from Halle, together with the so-called Competence Centre for Urban Redevelopment of the state of Saxony-Anhalt, developed a brief for an external architectural office. Different possible building futures have been included in the planners' first draft of May 2013: → **fig. 43**

The possible building futures that they call 'fundamental variants of use' in the draft include: 'preservation' and 'demolition', each of them again subdivided into 'securing (covering)', 'interim uses' and 'new uses' as options within preservation, and 'reorganization' after demolition. → **fig. 41** As the accompanying text states, the starting point for examination was meant to be the existing architectural form (18 floors). Variants should be presented along the parameters of economic feasibility and demand identified in the present. However, if a future is identified that demands an adaptation of the built form, this should also be considered. It says: 'partial use of the building (e.g., decommissioning of floors via high-rise guidelines) or partial deconstruction would also be conceivable, as would mixed-functional use. The costs for safeguarding measures, interim uses and possible new uses should be compared with the costs for demolition' (draft, 03.05.2013). Possible futures here are strongly linked to the question of anticipated future use, based on data from the present on demography and the housing market in Halle (Saale). An interesting scenario is the 'securing' scenario, as it is thought of somewhat independently from anticipated futures and aims at preservation, despite non-use in the present and in the near or predictable future. But in each case the futures are brought into the present in practice. As said, rather than being predictions of the future, the scenarios enable an evaluation of what appears to be probable, but also preferable.

In the draft for the brief, different variants are contrasted, the possibility and impossibility of which will then be evaluated in the study of the architects. We see here an opening of the future, but within the framework set in the present. From these variants for Scheibe C, which should be transferable to all buildings, conclusions for further action should be determined. However, the city and the state of Saxony-Anhalt, collaborating here on the brief, do not agree on the way to approach the future and the way the future gets linked to the present.

During revisions of the draft by the state of Saxony-Anhalt, the scenarios pre-designed by the city planners were modified and the scheme deleted (Saxony-Anhalt State Office for Construction and Real Estate Management, 20.06.2013).

In a letter to the state, the city agrees to delete the diagram, assuming that the architectural firm should be given the opportunity to think freely of previously imagined scenarios. The head of the planning department wrote that 'it is certainly advantageous not to specify particular uses for the study so as not to limit the results' (letter, 04.07.2013). The state was, as I see it, however, more concerned with ruling out certain futures than with enlarging the scope of the possible, as in the text 'fundamental options' was changed into 'realizable options' according to economic assessment, pushing towards the best solution in economic terms (Saxony-Anhalt State Office for Construction and Real Estate Management, 20.06.2013). While the city argues that it should be the future determining the present, the state of Saxony-Anhalt argues that existing conditions in the present should dictate the impossibility and possibility of trajectories towards the future. These are, after all, very different approaches to time and the future. The city wants to illuminate the future, which should then create the orientation in the present; an achievement of this ideal should be *made possible*; the state, on the

Fig. 43
Fig. 44
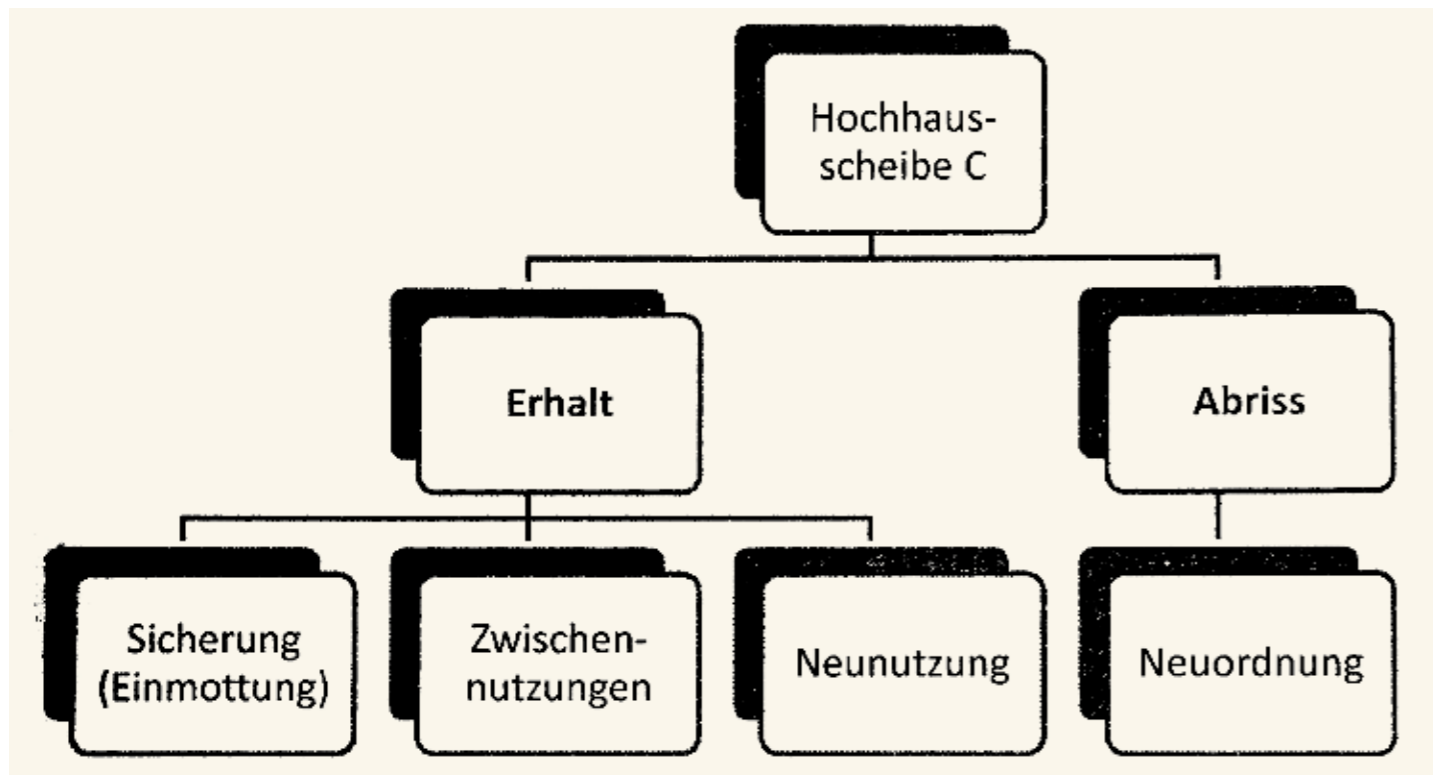
Evaluation criterion	Status Quo	Demolition and Reorganization	Preservation and Development
Urban design/architecture	✗	✗ ✗	✗ ✗ ✗
Necessity of unified action	✗	✗ ✗ ✗	✗ ✗
Opportunities	✗	✗ ✗	✗ ✗ ✗
Risks	✗ ✗	✗ ✗ ✗	✗
Costs	✗	✗ ✗	✗ ✗ ✗
Costs for one building			
	Securization €100.000/high quality covering €2,2 million	Demolition €3,4 million	€15 million

Fig. 43
Terms of Reference, Feasibility Study of the State of Saxony-Anhalt in Cooperation with the City of Halle (Saale), draft by the city administration, 03.05.2013: Investigation of variants: Prospects for the use of Hochhausscheibe C (German: 'Variantenuntersuchung: Nutzungsperspektiven Hochhausscheibe C'). Source: Halle City Administration.

Fig. 44
Replica of a power point presentation slide. Planning Department, Halle City Administration, 31.03.2015.

other hand, relies on the *already possible* or impossible as an orientation within the process of future-making. Rather than being an 'open debate about future ideals', scenario planning as a collaborative act appears in this case more as 'a battle over the here and now, and between different continuities' (Abram, 2017, p. 74) and discontinuities, respectively. Drawing on this situation, we might suggest that within scenario building, coexisting futures 'are similarly scaled and contested, filled with competing notions of idealism and pragmatism' (Abram, 2017, p. 66; 77).

The city's aim of anticipating several futures is to open up the present for (new) possible 'courses of action in the face of ongoing contingency and ambiguity' (Adams et al., 2009, p. 255). Anticipating the future will, in the best cases, create possibilities in the present where there was impossibility. According to Adams et al., this is a general characteristic of anticipatory practice today: 'anticipation brings in its wake new kinds of engagement with "possibility." Anticipation predicts where there is opportunity now for what was previously impossible' (Adams et al., 2009, p. 258).

Anticipation is a common and widely discussed way of relating to the future today (Abram, 2014; Abram & Weszkalnys, 2013a; Adams et al., 2009; Alvial-Palavicino, 2016; Anderson, 2010; Kemmer & Simone, 2021). It is often seen to be tied to optimization (Adams et al., 2009, p. 258), neoliberal regimes and the unknowability of the future (Anderson, 2010). As Adams et al. argue,

> anticipatory regimes create spaces for 'ratcheting up' our technologies, economies and politics in response to our urgent need to be prepared, such as injunctions to 'grow' economies by expanding anticipation into new domains and registers. These leverage new spaces of opportunity and also reconfigure our sense of 'the possible.'
> (Adams et al., 2009, p. 258)

In our case, too, it is about exploring new spaces of possibility. The future for the high rises will depend on new possibilities as, for example, only new uses and demand might be able to meet the oversupply in the housing market in the event of a renovation being realized. Or, only new financing opportunities might be able to attract investors. What we observe here is thus something similar to what Adams et al. describe – that is, the striving to open up new spaces of possibility.

In line with the scenarios the city had considered in 2013, an international urban design student workshop was held, showing that a transformation of the buildings was generally possible (interview with the leading professor, 27.11.2018). Then, studies were commissioned, investigating wrapping and rehabilitation as possible futures.

In 2015, the scenarios initially elaborated for building C were transferred to all five high rises and transformed into 'possible solutions' within the planning unit of the city administration and integrated into considerations that were to result in an 'overall concept' (14.01.2015).
These included again a multiplicity of possible futures, but here even more tightly linked to the present, as scenarios for which opportunities and risks, as well as costs, were then identified and calculated for each attempt[44] but also an assessment of the parameters of urban design/architecture as well as the need for concerted action by all owners.

In an internal document from January 2015, the following scenarios were drawn up: a scenario referred to here as the 'zero variant', in which the city concentrates on the 'day-to-day business of the administration' and private investors are to be found and supported in the development of concepts. The chances for this scenario were assessed by the city planners as 'low'; costs for the city were predicted for securing and possibly demolishing the buildings. The second scenario from January 2015 was called 'demolition and reorganization'. From the planners' point of view, an urban development target concept and a City Council resolution would be necessary here. The costs for the demolition of Scheibe A–C and E, amounting to approximately 13 million euros, would have to be included in the planning. It was expected that a profit of about 0.5 million euros could be made from

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44 Different terminologies are mobilized by the city planners within the different documents, without clear identifiable boundaries, e.g. 'scenarios', 'variants', 'options' and 'solution approaches' that I have in this case translated as 'attempts'.

the sale of the plots (100,000–200,000 euros per plot). The third scenario, 'preservation and development', would equally require a political decision and an urban development concept for the area. The planners based their calculations on 12 to 18 million euros being needed for the development of one building; furthermore, the preservation and development would require a whole number of accompanying plans and measures in the surrounding areas. This document also contains information on 'measures and instruments' with which the municipality could support or bring about the respective scenarios. These include, for example, a development plan, which would be necessary in the case of a reorganization, or sovereign measures according to the building code of Saxony-Anhalt for securing buildings, up to the use of an estate liquidator for building A, or the modernization and repair requirement according to §177 of the Building Code (internal document, 14.01.2015).

In 2015, some of the options, such as interim uses or partial use, but also partial demolition, were no longer considered options. Upon completion, the planners had prepared a Power Point Presentation (supposedly for a meeting with the mayor and/or the City Council) within which the internal 'zero variant' became the 'status quo', and the two other scenarios were called 'demolition and redevelopment' and 'preservation and development'. These were no longer presented as scenarios, but had with the moment of 'going public' transformed and emerged as 'possibilities' (PPT presentation, 31.03.2015, city administration). → **fig. 44**

The scenarios of 2015 served to prepare the political decision to keep the high-rise buildings. Thus, the impression could well arise that the city wanted not only to illuminate several possible futures, but to determine a future. The 'status quo' was found to be the least favourable scenario overall, 'preservation and development' the most favourable even though it might be the most cost-intensive scenario, as one of the slides suggests. This slide of the presentation contains a table that evaluates the three approaches according to the criteria 'urban design/architecture', 'necessity of unified action by all owners', 'opportunities', 'risks', 'costs' and finally a concrete value – 'cost of one Scheibe'.

Within the resolution paper from 2015 opting for the preservation of the high rises that I have already mentioned several times, the listing of past events, concepts and studies is followed by the section 'options for action'. These options are specified as three scenarios: 'scenario demolition', 'scenario conservation' and 'scenario preservation and renovation' (VI/2015/01130, 2015, pp. 5–6). Here, scenario conservation would be the status quo that would, however, include the necessity to secure the buildings by (temporarily) covering them and thus conserving them. These are followed by a recommendation for one of the scenarios: preservation.

It should be noted that, in parallel to the elaboration of the scenarios and the determination of preservation as the preferred scenario, the state of Saxony-Anhalt had sold Scheibe C. Interestingly, at the beginning of the marketing process in 2014 – initially an unsuccessful attempt – the state had already mentioned in the real estate offer that the city of Halle welcomed a revitalization of the building:

> The city of Halle (Saale) supports efforts by the owners to revitalize the empty Hochhausscheiben in the centre of the Neustadt district. New perspectives for use are to be found for the modernist ensemble that fit into the most important secondary centre of the city of Halle (Saale) in terms of urban development and function. [...] We hope that we have aroused your interest in this potential and would be pleased to welcome you to our office for a site visit and a further personal discussion.
>
> real estate offer by the state, 23.06.2014

Of course, this somewhat calls the meaning of the scenarios into question, because it is not clear whether the scenarios were ever actually to be understood as multiple options. In fact, sources of internal communication and communication between the state and the city, but also the housing companies in Halle, suggest that the scenarios of 2015 and the decision for preservation are characterized not only by potential, but also by impossibility. Because after marketing initially failed, the state initially preferred demolition and initially gave it top priority (email, 19.08.2014). As said, the building was then sold in 2015. The price the private company had to pay was one symbolic euro and the only obligation for the buyer was to proof that they were able to finance the purchase price. There has been,

however, no obligation to actually realize the use concepts the investors had presented and discussed with both the state and the city administration (letter by the state, 11.05.2015). From the written communication between the state and the city administration, it is clear that the city administration was not sure the investors would actually be able to realize a revitalization. As stated in an email by the city, 'a coordinated approach […] is urgently needed here, as otherwise these concepts [meaning the revitalization concepts by investors that they are presenting to the city in order to receive state funding] will be neither economically viable nor sustainable and thus will not alleviate the problem situation' (email, 27.03.2015).

Even though both the present and the future of the high rises are perceived as rather uncertain and ultimately unknowable, the planners (in collaboration with the mayor) believe that in 2015 a chance for a specific future – preservation – has arrived. A local newspaper writes in an article from 2015 that the 'time is better than ever before' (Prasse & Schumann, 2015). In such context, scenario planning is here to be understood as a conceptualization of 'the possibilities that time offers space' (Abram & Weszkalnys, 2013a, p. 2). Planners thus self-identify as managers of change, having a relational understanding of the city as an 'interplay of economy, technology, society and politics. No longer the "big plan" but control, regulation and planning will be evaluated with success controls and monitoring' (Schubert, 2015, p. 145). It has been described that in a liberal ontology of planning, 'the urban, which is understood here as a primarily privately managed and market-regulated process, thus forms an independent milieu that can only be indirectly steered in certain directions by the state through planning regulations' (Farías, 2020a, p. 177). In 2015, while different possible futures were sketched out in scenarios, the city administration proposed a way forward to the City Council – a way that seemed feasible given the conditions in the present. They thus want to make use of the momentum of the moment, acting towards what they considered a preferable future among the scenarios.

In 2015, it appeared that the city of Halle was going beyond what was described for anticipatory practice today. Anderson has noted that the ways the future comes to be known in anticipatory practices are interwoven with the 'spatial-temporal imaginary of life as contingency', prominent in contemporary liberal democracies (Anderson, 2010, p. 780). As he argues, it is within that contingent present that anticipatory action in the form of 'preemption, precaution and preparedness' emerged. The contingency of life is within anticipatory action 'the occasion of threat and opportunity, danger and profit' (Anderson, 2010, p. 782). I understand the moment 2015 to be somewhat different from this, but motivated by the need to take advantage of the opportunities that do not appear to be predictable and influenceable, if they present themselves. The city of Halle wanted not only to be prepared for the future, but also to determine it – in line with the opportunities they thought to have seen coming. In fact, 2015 seems to be a special moment when the future remained not known for certain, but when a future was meant to be determined in the form of a political goal. However, this is not in contradiction, but inscribes itself in 'a particular self-evident "futurism" in which our "presents" are necessarily understood as contingent upon an ever-changing astral future that may or may not be known for certain, but still must be acted on nonetheless' (Adams et al., 2009, p. 247).

In the years after 2015, the possibility of securing the preservation through a renovation project became (again) increasingly uncertain. While the anticipated future continued to serve as a legitimizing basis for the actions of urban planning (as the political decision has a binding character for their action), doubts and critique increased among the urban planners (see Abram, 2017, p. 78). In particular, the subsequent designation of the redevelopment area seemed to be a suitable instrument for attracting investors at the time, because it included easier tax depreciation. From the alderman's point of view, it is therefore suitable to, as they say, 'somehow fuel the whole thing'. They add: 'In retrospect, it has to be said that there was already a construction boom in Germany, but in Halle it was still a bit slow. But we got our foot in the door in time – I don't want to say that they're busting our balls right now, but it worked then; it worked then' (interview, 28.05.2021). What they meant by the last statement is that although they are optimistic, they do not want to venture any definite predictions. Only a future evaluation of steps taken today will be able to show whether the way they chose to go was right. The statement speaks of uncertainty, despite the optimism the planner expressed. It is not yet clear at the time of this research whether the decision to preserve the buildings will become a promise that cannot be kept under the present conditions. As of 2022, plans are being maintained, but

the future is uncertain and it is not impossible that the preservation of the whole ensemble will be kept as a determined future, even though one of the four vacant high rises was renovated in 2021. Bear has shown that speculative plans, drawing on temporal logics of the not-yet, may also disappear. As she notes concerning planning projects in India, their realization remains impossible 'as long as extreme budgetary restrictions, resource grabs by other predatory bureaucracies and outsourcing to networks of informality continue' (Bear, 2013, p. 176). The preservation of the high rises in Halle-Neustadt does not seem to be a speculative future at first, but one that focuses on endurance and continuity between the present and the future. However, the possible future preservation, anticipated in 2015 and politically determined, relies on the speculative futures of investors. Whether it is a political goal that is unattainable and therefore becomes a speculative goal that paves the way for the undermining of state plans by private actors and inequality, as in the case studied by Bear, cannot be conclusively assessed at the time of this research. However, the fact that this danger is seen by planners becomes clear in conversations with me. Moreover, in 2021, at the insistence of the administration and the mayor, the City Council stopped the extension of state funding for the redevelopment of Scheibe C, pointing to the risk that the public sector runs when it gives in to the demands of private investors (VII/2021/03346, 2021).

What is, however, of special interest for me in this chapter is the fact that with growing uncertainty that preservation through a renovation was an actually achievable goal, the role of scenario building in planning also changed. New scenarios now correspond more to what is described in the literature, and the future took on the form of multiple 'alternative potential futures that may, or may not, be actualized' (Hillier, 2011a, p. 26). They point to possibilities in order to have a sense of being prepared for all contingencies. Today, anticipation is thus not necessarily a way of knowing or even determining the future, but rather

> a strategy for avoidance of surprise, uncertainty and unpreparedness, but it is also a strategy that must continually keep uncertainty on the table. […] More than actual possibilities of action, the possible here is preserved by the fact that we get a sense that everything will be fine as long as we anticipate it.
> (Adams et al., 2009, p. 259)

Once the scenarios are built, the planners from Halle feel confident that they can respond to whatever events occur. Scenario building lets them make sure there *is* a future. Asked about the role of designing possible futures, one of the planners answers: 'we have everything ready, we are prepared for every eventuality'. In their understanding, the development is not in their hands, but they can react to any change (field notes, 18.08.2020; 14.04.2021).

In a group discussion, the city planners assume that the next generation of planners (at least for the next ten years) will still have to deal with towers A–E. Perhaps, they say, by then laws and resolutions, the market and the symbolism of the buildings will have changed and will allow action (field notes, 29.03.2021). Today, my informants consider flexibility to be the only practical answer to the future (Pizzo, 2015, p. 136). Flexibility characterizes the planning activities, being prepared and contributing itself to the continuation of an open future, for it remains uncertain, impossible to fully know and determine. Scenario building within urban planning has yet another 'function': being prepared and able to navigate the future.

Navigating Distant and Near Futures

In the second section, I want to study how different futures, near and far, get related in planning and how my informants navigate through and along these futures.

Various concepts such as the 'Retail and Centre Concept' (*Einzelhandels- und Zentrenkonzept*), the 'Integrated Urban Development Concepts' (*ISEK*), the concept within the framework of the Socially Integrative City programme (*Soziale Stadt*, since 2021 Social Cohesion, *Sozialer Zusammenhalt*), which are designed at the level of the city as a whole, formulate goals that affect the Neustadt centre and more or less specifically the high rises. A concept for the centre of Neustadt, and the high-

rise buildings specifically, is the so-called *Strukturkonzept Zentrum Neustadt* ('Structural Concept Neustadt District Centre'), developed by a Berlin-based architectural office on behalf of the city administration.

In April 2019, the City Council adopted the 'Structural Concept Neustadt District Centre' as a concretization of the redevelopment goals for redevelopment area No. 3 'Neustadt District Centre' (VI/2018/04708, 2019). The concept, as the text says, is meant to fill defined goals for the set redevelopment area (decided in 2017 for the centre of Neustadt) with 'life' – that is, concrete ideas and forms.

Concepts such as the ones mentioned above do not have an immediately binding character, but provide orientation for action in the here and now. On a day-to-day basis, planners have to be careful that long-term visions and shorter-term, ad hoc measures, do not contradict each other or get in the way. As an example, I was able to observe discussions that revolved around the fact that short-term measures – in the case in question, the design of the entrance area of building A – should not get in the way of longer-term goals for the revitalization of the area and the high rises. And we have seen in **chapter 1** and in the previous section, how, in the opposite case, long-term visions and ideals or goals risk blocking trajectories towards the future, in the event of these being unattainable.

Which of the defined goals are achievable, which measures can be implemented, depends on a specific moment – a future present, which can only to a limited extent be planned or foreseen. For my informants, coordination of long-term goals and short-term actions is desirable but cannot necessarily be brought about, especially when implemented by third parties (private actors) (field notes, 01.03.2021; 04.03.2021). Ultimately, both scenario building and navigating are acting on the relation between distant and close futures and objectives. However, as these steps depend on moments of possibility (through the willingness to invest by private parties or through subsidies available for certain measures), navigating is, above all, about not blocking the way for the defined long-term goals and keeping scenarios open.

The concept for Neustadt's centre was adopted by the City Council in 2019. Within the concept, broader visions such as the adaptation to climate change, variants and suggestions are included that the planners divide into long- and short-term measures (field notes, 05.05.2021). As objectives for the future, the concept names the preservation and further development of the ensemble and the architectural heritage; furthermore, the revitalization of the high rises, a revitalization imagined as composed of repair, energetic refurbishment and adaptation to climate change. During a presentation of the concept by the architects to a larger group of administrative staff, the architects explain that the concept could be completed step-by-step. The concept is designed for year after year, decade after decade; it offers ideas for a long-term upgrading of the passage at the foot of the high rises, divided into options (Schönborn Schmitz Architekten, 2018). → **fig. 45; 46**   Listening to the architects' presentation, the city employees laugh, but appreciate the ideas – ideas that they think are dreams. Far away as this future seems, they nevertheless hope for a long-term development (field notes, 03.07.2019).

During my stay in Halle in 2021, my informants were busy translating and working towards some of the desired futures set in the concept. They divide them into different levels, staggered in terms of both time and space (field notes, 07.06.2021). As they explain to me, they are now working one level 'below' the overall concept and on several first steps simultaneously. Together with landscape architects, they are developing ideas for the public spaces surrounding the high rises, which they say can again be thought of as both temporal staggering and spatial modules (field notes, 08.04.2021). My informants mainly see themselves as those responsible for visions, and distinguish themselves from those colleagues responsible for implementation, who in their daily lives start from the now, from what must be done urgently or what can be done. However, this separation of tasks within the administration, of vision and implementation – in future and present – is often much softer and also controversial. In the idea of the alderman, the rigid division of responsibilities within the administration should be dissolved in favour of better coordination and thus a better chance of feasibility. Suggesting a restructuring of the administration from 2020, they opt for uniting planning and practical implementation in one unit (interview, 28.05.2021).

One of the elements from the concept they started with is the reorganization of the parking situation in the centre. As the concept says, for the revitalization under consideration of the requirements of future users, the reorganization and redesign of the parking situation is, among other things, necessary (Schönborn Schmitz Architekten, 2018, p. 6). In meetings on the next steps for the Neustadt centre in
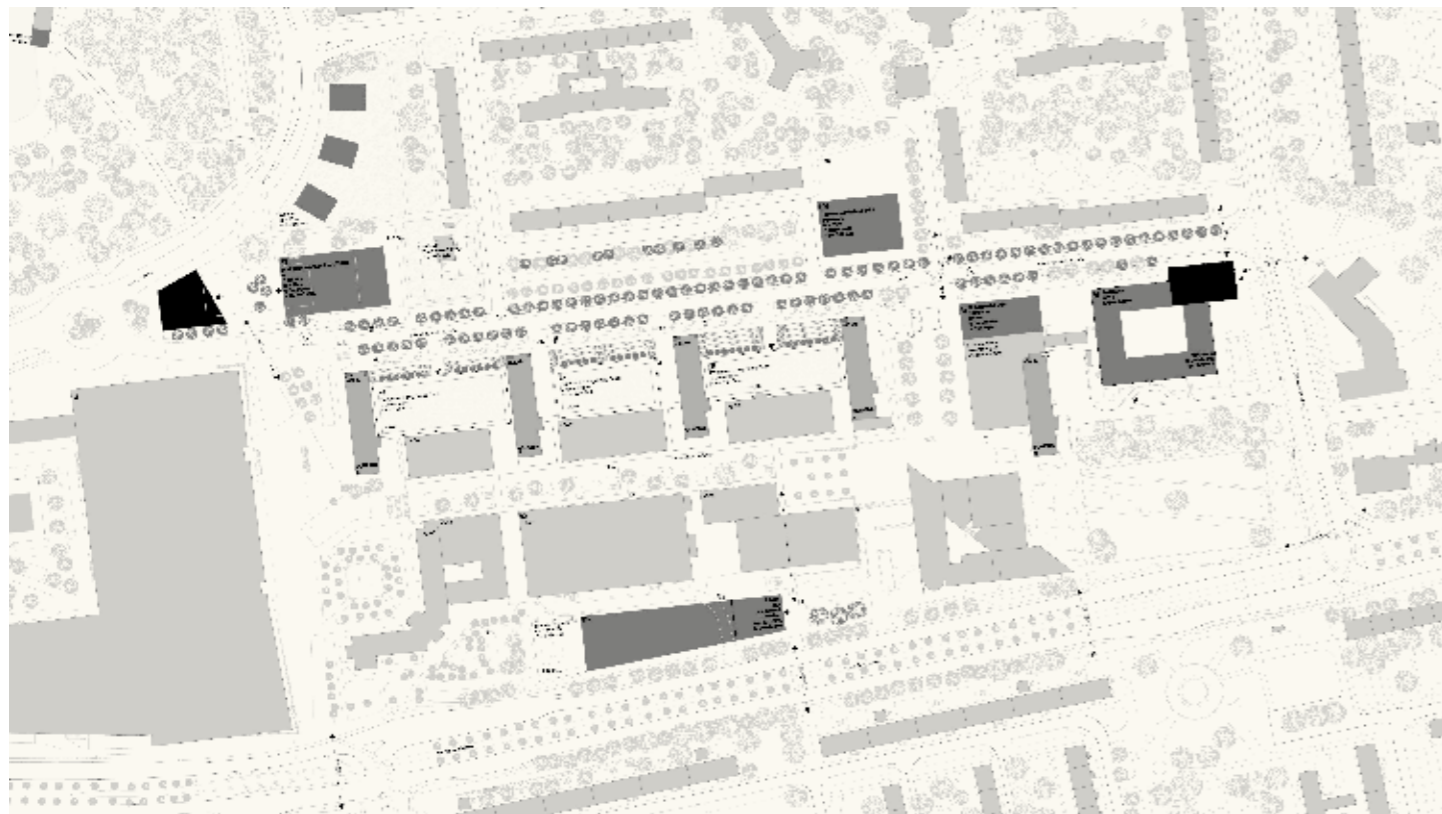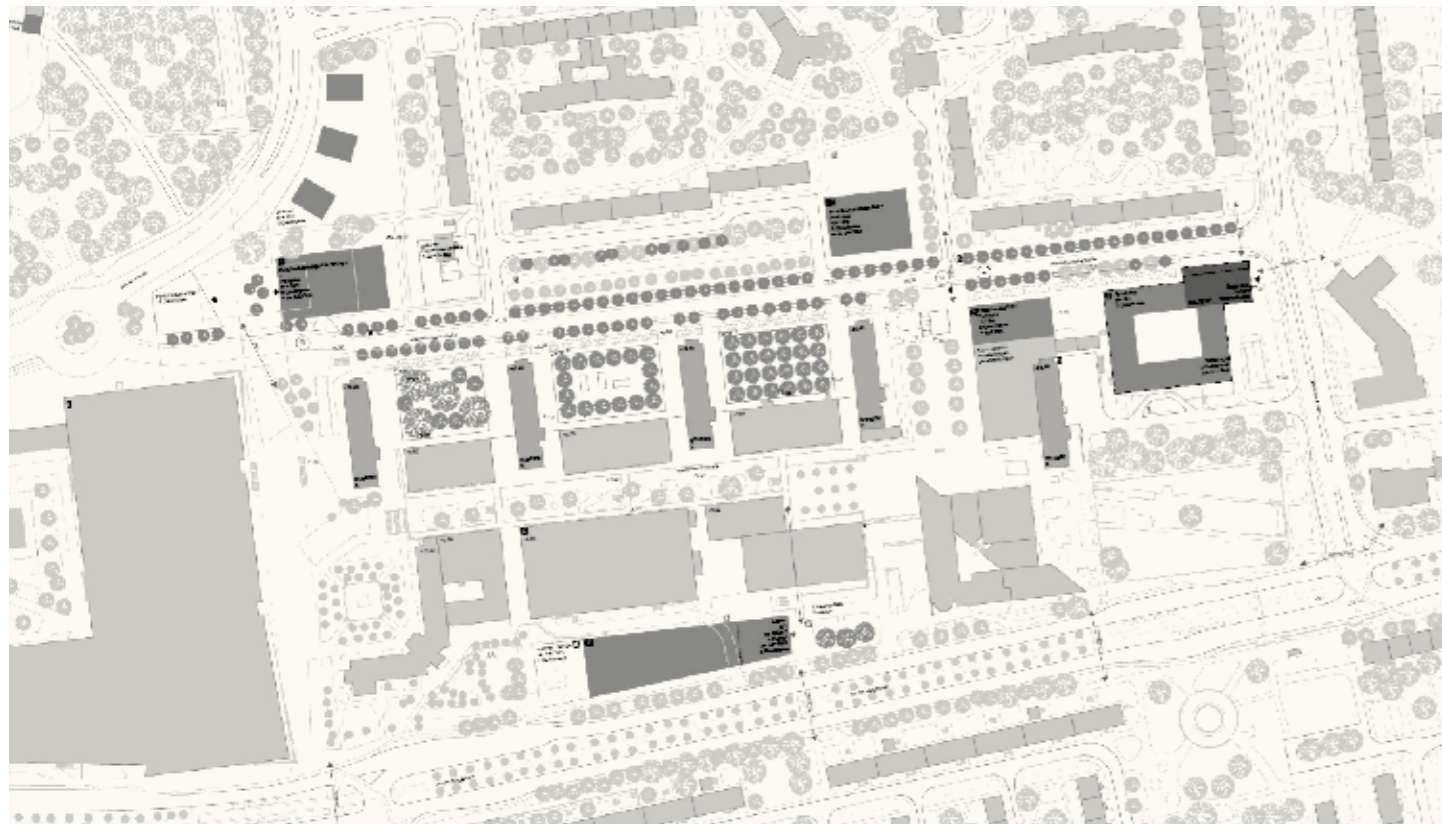
Fig. 45
Fig. 46

Fig. 45
Structural Concept Neustadt. Step I.
Schönborn Schmitz Architekten
for the City of Halle, 2018.

Fig. 46
Structural Concept Neustadt. Step II.
Schönborn Schmitz Architekten
for the City of Halle, 2018.

relation to the organization of traffic, the questions are which measures should and could be realized first and which later. Representatives of other departments suggest starting with elements that were envisaged in the city planners' planning for the very end. Both could make sense: starting from the biggest and latest, they could make sure that intermediate steps taken do not lose sight of the goal, while starting with elements from the final goal entails the risk that the overall plan will fall apart if intermediate steps cannot be realized (field notes, 08.04.2021). For my informants, aligning current measures with long-term goals is linked to issues of credibility, as I draw from discussions within the city administration. They discuss at another moment how shorter-term measures would indicate how serious the city is about the long-term goals and how much it believes in their achievability (field notes, 18.06.2019).

Long-term and short-term futures are interrelated in interesting ways in the case of standby as distant futures often seem unachievable or unknowable. In such cases, short-term measures are fuelled with hopes that they might bring changes that would, in the long run, enable revitalization of the Hochhausscheiben. Staying with the example of the concept and the reorganization of parking in the area, the reorganization is necessary *for* the revitalization of the high rises. The reorganization of parking is then meant to *enable* the revitalization, but it is also something the city may be actually able to direct. In the event of the high rises being revitalized and housing and office space being created, more parking space will be needed. On the other hand, a reorganization of parking might increase the attractiveness of the buildings and might, they hope, attract investors to realize a revitalization of the high rises. Interestingly, this reorganization is thus to be oriented towards the anticipated future – the Hochhausscheiben in use. At the same time, the reorganization of the parking space ideally works towards a preferred future.

In the planners' everyday, the question is always whether to act for the short or long term, one planner told me. This depends on whether they find the time for long-term thinking (field notes, 20.04.2021). But it also depends on the personalities and, especially, of future presents that they can only anticipate to a limited extent and that will determine the money available: for what kind of temporary, short- or long-term projects are there grants? what are the terms of grants? (for example, the time horizon for planning grants is five years, divided into budget years), etc. (field notes, 20.04.2021; 27.05.2021). The planners' challenge is thus to navigate between long-term and short-term panes, taking into consideration the multiple temporalities of the governance of the site.

Albrechts writes that 'planners are not only instrumental, and their implicit responsibility can no longer simply be to "be efficient", to function smoothly as neutral means to given (and presumably well-defined) ends. Planners must be more than navigators who keep their ship on course' (Albrechts, 2004, p. 750). The image of the planner as navigator has been shaped in planning theory from the early 2000s. Besides Albrechts (who first mobilized the metaphor of navigation in 1999), other planning theorists, such as Hillier and Forester (1989), also use the image of planners as navigators to call for their active role in the development of a 'course' to take. In his suggestion for 'strategic planning as strategic navigation' (2011), Hillier refers to Foucault's 'metaphor of ships and navigation (pilotage)' (Foucault, 1982) and Deleuze and Guattari's 'conceptualization of space as a passage' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994; as cited in: Hillier, 2011a, p. 25). Hillier translates Foucault as follows:

> The metaphor of navigation […] comprises several components. Firstly, the obvious idea of a journey (trajet), of effective movement from one point to another. Secondly, the idea of navigation implies that this movement is directed towards a certain goal, that it has an objective. […] During the journey one encounters risks, unforeseen risks which may challenge your course or even get you lost. Consequently, the journey will be one which leads you to the place of safety through a number of known and little known, known and unknown, dangers. (Foucault, 1982; as translated by and cited in: Hillier, 2011a, p. 25)

Hillier thereby suggests that there was a 'need for development of a new, more flexible, form of strategic planning which "if there is to be one, must advance towards a future which is not known, which cannot be anticipated"' (Derrida, 1994; as cited in: Hillier, 2011a, p. 25).

Gewachsene historische Stadt
Große Ulrichstraße Halle (Saale)

Magistrale
Karl-Marx-Allee Berlin

Promenade
Hansering Halle (Saale)

Freitreppe
Spanische Treppe Rom

Fig. 47

Fig. 47
Inspirations for a city of 'human scale'.
Schönborn Schmitz Architekten, 2018.

The suggested conceptualizations of planning have been identified as liberal ontologies of planning. I have shown in the section on scenario planning how planners as navigators self-identify as 'managers of change' that is driven mainly by private investment (see Farías, 2020a, p. 177 and Schubert, 2015, p. 145 above). Such planning, according to Hillier, would be more concerned about trajectories than about outcomes; it becomes a site of experimentation (Hillier, 2011a, p. 25). On that site, planners navigate between long-term and short-term 'planes', a term that Hillier takes from Deleuze and Guattari (1994) (Hillier, 2011a, p. 27). Whereas long-term strategic plans and trajectories contain 'multiplicities of ideas, many of which never come to actualization' (Hillier, 2011a, p. 27), short-term planning such as '[l]ocal area action plans, design briefs, detailed projects is acting on the local or micro-level and is content specific'. According to Hillier, such plans resonate with Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) 'planes of organisation' and 'facilitate small movements or changes along the dynamic, open trajectories of planes of immanence' (Hillier, 2011a, p. 27). These two planes of planning on which planners act simultaneously are interwoven and are sometimes more harmoniously knit together, sometimes rather loose (Hillier, 2011a, p. 27). In theory, long-term visions such as 'sustainability' or 'a good place to live' guide and legitimize 'short-term and medium-term substantive actions – such as major projects – which mark small movements and changes' (Hillier, 2011a, p. 27). As Abram rightly points out, however, 'existential imagination is also neither linear nor consistent: changes can be traced in the concepts of future that emerge in planning over time' (Abram, 2017, p. 76).

Indeed, the vision of Neustadt's centre as developed in the concept today is quasi-diametrically opposed to the idea of the centre and Neustadt in its original modern conceptualization, as becomes clear in the meeting I have with the architect; the vision according to Schmitz, is not the modern vision of 'buildings in flowing space', but 'buildings shaping the space' such as in the European city, as they explain to me (field notes, 27.11.2018). In the committee meeting on the concept, the core concerns for the centre are the 'activation of the Scheiben' and the elimination of an 'enormous urban planning grievance'. A 'spatially defined public space, similar to that in *Gründerzeit* quarters', is to be created (Ausschusssitzung zum Strukturkonzept, 22.11.2018). Working towards a realization of this vision, planners at the city administration are looking for inspiration in books, Halle's old town or other European cities that suggest ways to move away from the modern city and towards a city of 'human scale' in the design of public spaces (field notes, 04.05.2021). → fig. 47

I understand these planes with Abram as different forms of the future, taking the form of abstract visions 'around which to articulate hopes and fears for collective life, for ideals […] and moral standpoints' (Abram, 2017, p. 73) and the form of comments 'on the world as it is today, and how we would prefer that it was' (Abram, 2017, p. 73). In the latter case, the future becomes an alternative to the present and, as such, comes into practice in the now, e.g. in design drafts. In practice, many gaps exist between the two. For visions not becoming 'just words', links between these two are indispensable, as Abram notes: 'These gaps between ideology and practice lead inexorably towards pragmatic attempts to tackle overloads in demand, and a corresponding disillusion with the making of visionary plans. If we can have Utopia Now, why wait? Without the rational link between future vision and action, long-term planning is easily seen as "just words"' (Vike, 2013; as cited in: Abram, 2014, p. 130). Yet, a plan that 'operates as a kind of promise that requires validation, […] may live for a long while without being fulfilled, as long as their fulfilment can be imagined' (Abram, 2017, p. 64). As Abram and Weszkalnys note in their book *Elusive Promises* (Abram & Weszkalnys, 2013b), 'The future promised in plans seems always slightly out of reach, the ideal outcome always slightly elusive, and the plan retrospectively always flawed' (Abram & Weszkalnys, 2013a, p. 3). In this context, monitoring 'that the longer-term vision remains relevant' (Hillier, 2011a, p. 35) and maintaining the status of a plan as a relevant 'statement about the future' with 'some credible chance of becoming' (Abram, 2017, p. 66) becomes an important task of planners, as planning is meant to secure and enable preferable futures. However, as I argue above, within the frame of their role as managers of change rather than change-makers. Facing the uncertain future, planners from the city administration have to navigate in their everyday, acting on different short-term futures simultaneously while trying to keep the vision alive.

Steering the right course between flexibility in facing the unknown and uncertain future while respecting the principles of public administration can at times be challenging. As Healey notes, planning understood as navigation '"involves taking risks, the consequences of which can be thought

about, but cannot be known'" (Hillier, 2011a, p. 25). As public servants, however, my informants are encouraged to keep the risks for the state as small as possible and safeguard the public good (see Bear, 2013, p. 174). Today, the role of public servants is changing, as configurations acting on the future are changing. Bear, in her study on public servants in India becoming public entrepreneurs, shows how bureaucrats find themselves in dilemmas and contradictory tasks today. In order to cope with plans and connected promises made in the speculative city and being obliged to respect budgetary restrictions, the bureaucrats she studies become involved in 'unaccountable behind-the-scenes negotiations' within public-private partnerships (Bear, 2013, p. 163). These may, however, result in transformations or even disappearance of initial plans (Bear, 2013).

As said, the concept suggests, for example, a redesign for the spaces between the high rises in the form of green spaces after demolition of the existing parking garages as a first possible step and, as a second, the construction of terraces with the same height as the pedestrian passage connecting the high rises (Schönborn Schmitz Architekten, 2018, pp. 21–22). Concerning the parking garages, the report of the preparatory study of the redevelopment area collected concerns and ideas from the public, among them the owners of property in the centre. The report summarizes what Owner 5 (as of 2017), who is the owner of the parking garages and other property in the centre, had to say about the plan for a possible redevelopment area in a telephone conversation (on 4 January 2017):

> This owner stated that he welcomed the city's redevelopment plans, but did not have any conversion or redevelopment measures planned for his own properties [...] The parking garages have a good occupancy rate (short-term and permanent tenants) and are technically in good condition (confirmed by a study in 2015), no structural measures are planned.
> Plan und Praxis, 2017, pp. 109–110

In view of these statements, it can be assumed that there is probably less motivation for the owner to work towards a change together with the city. And my informants are aware that the path towards the future will 'emerge as a dialogue between people's attempts to plan and shape futures and contingent events beyond their control' (Alexander & Sanchez, 2018b, p. 5).

Being aware that the suggested redesign will depend on the private owners' will to collaborate on the revitalization of the centre and that the future remains very difficult to determine, the deputy mayor told me in an interview that the question of the parking garages remains 'exciting'; they assume that 'it won't look identical [to the concept], that's also clear, but that was just a clue, you have to get to the topic and think about it' (interview, 28.05.2021). Furthermore, my informants know that they won't be able to transform visions into action within the 15 years that are the set horizon of redevelopment areas and that are the horizon city planners from Halle are thus going by (field notes, 08.04.2021; 27.05.2021). Nevertheless, longer-term visions provide them with some continuity, also beyond election periods (interview, 28.05.2021).[45]

As we have seen, the concept for the Neustadt centre develops a rather vague overall idea – a space defined by larger building volumes – and formulates longer-term goals as variants and possibilities. In the translation of the concept into everyday planning, my informants oscillate back and forth between the visions of the concept and different measures that need to be in line with the overall vision, but always remain variable themselves. They are used to thinking in spatial and temporal modules. However, navigating between distant and near futures, and with the gaps between vision and action, becomes an important and at times challenging task. For my informants, the question becomes what promises planning could or should make, and whether the risk of planning is almost too high, given the uncertainties and unplannability of the high rises' future. In theory, laws and regulations allow planners to tighten the frame for a course towards the future. The risk, however, that comes with this is that the frame might become an obstacle to the future rather than enabling it, as they fear (field notes, 28.06.2021).

Production of Indeterminacy

Part of navigating the future is the production of indeterminacy – a final aspect that I want to discuss. With this, we turn in more detail to an aspect that was already mentioned in the previous section. As we have seen, planners must keep the vision alive and keep adjusting to the possibilities future presents have to offer. It is not only the oscillation between the near and distant future that is crucial, but also how the vision is translated to a broader public that needs to be convinced. The production of indeterminacy is, as I understand it, an effect of the open future in the present. We have seen in the previous section that a vision may have a transformative effect, as it can be the plan itself that will lead to behind-the-scenes negotiations that will then result in a transformation of the plans as the state does not have the means to realize the plans. In this process of translation, it is crucial to find the right balance between determining the future in the form of a concretization of the vision and keeping it open so as to allow for a co-creation of the future. They do this, as we will see, through the production of an indeterminate present.

In 2021, I assisted a discussion between a planner and a speaker of the mayor of Halle about a brochure developed by the city of Halle and based on the structural concept for Neustadt's district centre, adopted in 2019 (and discussed above). During the meeting, the speaker says:

> This is a brochure that shows someone wants to develop something here; and not: we have accompanied this for 25 years, as such brochures usually are; 'we have done this and this' and they start with: '25 years ago x and y met...' – no! this one shows a vision.
> field notes, 12.05.2021[46]

As the quote shows, the brochure's intention is to show the potential, facing the future. As much as the harmonization of the past is important internally to make sure that one has been active and to ensure continuity, mobilizing the future, as I understand it, becomes a main objective here, addressing a broader public and especially potential investors. A key move in the making of the future on standby is, as I will argue in this section, the production of indeterminacy.

For this section, I am mainly drawing on the book *Indeterminacy: Waste, Value, and the Imagination* (Alexander & Sanchez, 2018a) and Ringel's contribution to it. Ringel, in his study on streets and other infrastructures in Bremerhaven, Germany, points to 'such moments, when we are forced to reconsider the present and future of these objects of thought and adjust our expectations anew' (Ringel, 2018b, p. 69). Whereas the future of one of the streets that he studied – Bremerhaven's main street, Columbusstrasse, has been partially devalued in the last decades, it became the subject of urban planning with an expert report developing ideas for new connections in the city, including ideas for the transformation of this particular street. Columbusstrasse in Bremerhaven had an important role in the industrialization of the city and had been devalued with deindustrialization as a mismatch between the number of users and the size of the street had occurred. The street was subsequently even considered a 'material obstacle to the city's future' (Ringel, 2018b, p. 75) and a failure of the promises of urban planning from the 1970s. After it had long been an urban infrastructure from the past and without a future, Columbusstrasse was surprisingly revalued in the course of recent attempts to reinvent Bremerhaven. Ringel argues that, with the problematization of the street in the present, 'referring its contemporary existence to the past while excluding its present from the future' (Ringel, 2018b, p. 75), its existence had been rendered indeterminate. At another moment, Bremerhaven's mayor said about an urban planning report, pointing out the potentialities of the site, that it was enabling a 'totally new perception of the possibilities in our city' (Ringel, 2018b, p. 76). Drawing on such moments from Bremerhaven, Ringel suggests that the future is not per se indeterminate, but indeterminacy is pro-

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45   During my last visit to Halle in January 2023, one of the planners even doubted the usefulness of formulating long-term goals in general, as they would have to question the goals they had set themselves once again, as these proved to be unattainable. Here they explicitly refer to the reorganization of parking spaces. While funds had already been made available for the demolition of multi-storey car parks, realization seems impossible in 2023 because the owners do not consent (field notes, 25.01.2023).

46   The concept and the brochure do not develop ideas or a vision for the high rises themselves, they are urban planning visions. As the architect of the concept explains to me, the high-rise building sections were not particularly considered in the planning (field notes, 27.11.2018). However, since one of the main goals for the centre is to work towards revitalizing the buildings, this concept should always be thought of in relation to the buildings, because all volumes that are proposed are proposed in relation to the volume of the high rises.

duced in these moments 'of (temporal) revaluation' (Ringel, 2018b, p. 74). Taking Ringel's argument here, one may suggest that the moment the (temporal) existence of an infrastructure is called into question and possibilities get staged, indeterminacy is produced. In such moments, 'when we are forced to reconsider the present and the future of these objects of thought and adjust our expectations anew' (Ringel, 2018b, p. 69), as Ringel puts it, the 'ideas of the future already roam the present' (Ringel, 2018b, p. 86).

Following Ringel here, I argue that, in the brochure of the city of Halle, the indeterminacy of the site in the present is made as the future vision roams the present. I am deliberately exaggerating the message for investors that I see connected to the brochure for Neustadt in order to highlight a first point I want to make here: 'This is the site where you can realize any of your dreams'. What I want to draw attention to is what we have seen with Ringel's findings from Bremerhaven – that is, the buildings' (as well as the centre's as a whole) 'existence in time' is actively 'rendered indeterminate' (Ringel, 2018b, p. 76).[47] Within the brochure for Neustadt's district centre and the high rises, indeterminacy is produced as 'an imaginary state that provides the precondition for certain value-creating interventions' (Alexander & Sanchez, 2018b, p. 2), that's at least the hope of the city administration. In order to produce indeterminacy, they will cut the buildings from their recent past and point at possibilities of the future.

In the brochure, making the indeterminacy involves the inclusion of a narrative of the past highlighting the origins of the Hochhausscheiben (as this is seen to be historical, and therefore valuable, as discussed above), and the exclusion of the recent past that the present is intended to be cut off. What we see here is similar to the status quo of the first chapter. Here, too, in order to transform the present into an activating moment, turned towards the future, the near past was largely flattened. The brochure aims to highlight the potential, and refers to the future that is meant to be about to begin. Thus, the subheading reads: 'The redevelopment has begun' and finishes with current renovation projects on two of the four empty high rises: 'In the meantime, changes of ownership have taken place in the four unrenovated Scheiben. Partial redevelopment has begun' (City of Halle, 2021, p.6). Indeed, the alderman of the city was actually very optimistic during our interview in 2021 that a future would be defined for all high-rise buildings in 3 years (interview, 28.05.2021).

Other actors must first be convinced of this potential – one goal of the concept and the brochure. The brochure stresses potentiality and develops ideas for possible futures. Having developed visions and visualizations of these visions allows the city to enter conversations about the future, as the city planners explain. In addition to the elaborated vision, the city's aim today is to 'give an impetus' (interview architect, 27.11.2018). Subsequently, the subtitle of the brochure is 'Impulses from the New Centre' (German: '*Impulse aus der neuen Mitte*'). One of these impulses is the relocation of the administration to building A, which is highlighted in the brochure. Shortly before the editorial deadline, photos were therefore quickly taken of the façade that had just been completed; as they agreed, it should be a photo with good weather – one highlighting positivity, showing that the future had actually already begun. It then took a few more days before the weather was good enough for a nice photo. However, the planner preferred to wait those few days rather than edit a photo on the computer. They had already taken photos some time before, but the crane was still standing and Scheibe A was still covered with tarpaulins. The longer the elaboration of the brochure lasts, the more likely it is that the photo can be replaced by one of the completed building and one with good weather (field notes, 12.04.2021; 12.05.2021; 17.05.2021).

Images are central to entering into a discussion about a vision for the future, bringing future ideas into the present and making them available to present negotiations. Showing what it could look like can become an important part of showing potentiality. As the alderman told me, investors may initially have difficulty imagining what is possible. They said: 'I've also noticed that they [investors] can't imagine some things and when you've had the conversations and the examples and when you've tried it, there's a kind of "aha effect"' (interview, 28.05.2021).

Fig. 48
The architects chose a black- and-white representation for the concept in which the Hochhausscheiben become neutral volumes. 'Kunst' is German for art. Structural Concept Neustadt. Hallorenstraße. Schönborn Schmitz Architekten for the City of Halle, 2018.

Fig. 48

To create these images, facing potentiality and the future, the city together with the state had commissioned studies in the years 2014 and 2015 that show that a transformation of the buildings is possible. The leading professor of an international urban design student workshop from 2014 told me that the international students – unlike the East Germans – saw only the (good) structural substance of the building. They saw the problem solely in the absence of people. And so, they said, it was possible to prove in the workshop – and that had also been the goal – that a conversion of the buildings was possible. The situation at that time regarding Scheibe C, which still belonged to the state, was: either the state would find a buyer, or the building would be demolished (field notes, 27.11.2018). While the state considered demolition and even actually decided on it, but then withdrew because of the high costs, the city of Halle advocated preservation and hoped for years that the state would at least renovate and use Scheibe C itself **(see chapter 2)**. In order to counteract the demolition, the city subsequently supported the land in the marketing attempts and at the same time wanted to ensure that a private investor would also transform and revitalize the building.[48] In order to find a buyer and craft a future, indeterminacy was produced in the present, pointing at the potential of both the present and the future.

With the visualizations created during the workshop, representatives of the Land's Competence Centre for Urban Redevelopment then went to real estate fairs to find potential buyers. These show utopias (for example, the transformation of a tower into an urban farm), but the feasibility of these visions has not been investigated. Based merely on the structure of the buildings, reducing the buildings' complexity, they are able to underline the flexibility of the structure that can provide the basis for all possible futures. What is produced here, as I see it, is indeterminacy. In a similar vein, the preliminary study by Lacaton & Vassal + Fischer from 2015 on the economic and sustainable development of high-rise C (although it is meant to be applicable for all high rises, see Plan und Praxis, 2017, p. 25), equally commissioned by the Competence Centre for Urban Redevelopment of the State of Saxony-Anhalt, proves potentiality that was to be coming with the flexibility of the buildings. However, this study also referred to the need to work with the building and not against it, as emphasized by Halle's city planners (field notes, 19.03.2021; 29.03.2021; 20.04.2021; 07.05.2021; 17.05.2021).[49]

Embracing uncertainty and in order to work towards a securing of the future of the buildings, the buildings themselves are to be given an indeterminate existence. While the preservation of the towers has been defined as a political goal, the city administration stresses that the actual form of the future remains open. In order to translate this message to potential investors, the present of the buildings is rendered indeterminate.   → **fig. 48**   The production of indeterminacy can be understood as a deliberate move to better guarantee a possible future for the existing buildings. In order to do so, it is the future (albeit not fully determined in its actual form) that is brought into the present to open the present to the future and potentiality. Furthermore, and I will elaborate on this aspect in the following **chapter 4**, the production of this indeterminacy can be seen as an action of blurring or erasing certain material characteristics of the building. My informants are hoping for something *new*, for change to come in order to be able to preserve the existing. They are thus pointing at the indeterminacy of the present structure of the buildings as well as their existence in time (cutting it from the recent past and current conditions of impossibility) and the openness of the future. They don't hope for preservation in the form of conservation, but for developing the existing further, together with private actors, as they emphasize (field notes, 12.04.2021).

3.3   Synthesis

The chapter addressed practices of making the past and of making the future in a mode of standby. I showed how both the past and the future come to play a role in present practices of (un-)making possible futures for the high rises. I studied practices of archiving, sorting and alignment and reproduction with regard to the past, and scenario building, navigating and the production of indeterminacy with regard to the future. The archives of urban planning are, as I have argued, a materialization of standby. They are not only the source of knowledge for me about past futures and the administrative processes in which they are embedded, but also an important source for the planners themselves – for example, when they produce brochures on the Zentrum Neustadt and the Hochhausscheiben. Knowledge of the past is important for the planners, including for their socialization and collective work towards the future, but finding one's way around it is not easy. Since we are dealing with possible but unrealized futures of the past, categorizing and evaluating past processes and events from a present is not easy, as became apparent when sorting through the documents together. I have presented in the categorization of the past that the planners make and argued that standby allows and even calls for 'time work' (see Flaherty 2003) as its instability renders temporal relations difficult, but provokes a need for positioning and action (Ringel, 2018b, p. 71).

Through the different sections of the second subchapter, we have come across different practices of making the future and the different forms the future takes within these practices. I studied how city planners from Halle elaborate scenarios for the Scheiben between demolition and preservation. I found that, while in 2015 scenario building helped planners in preparing the political decision to preserve the buildings, the role of scenario building changed with the growing uncertainty over whether preservation could actually be achieved. Today, as I found, it allows planners to have a sense of being able to respond to and be prepared for all eventualities. Knowing the possible futures is enough in a situation where the future is unknowable. The other practices of future-making – navigating and production of indeterminacy also refer to the presence of the uncertain future in the present on standby.

I found that planners divide visions for the centre into long-term visions and short-term measures, developing spatially and temporally distinct modules. The realization of these modules will depend on future presents that are difficult to predict or unpredictable. In their everyday, embracing uncertainty, city planners need to navigate between different planes (see Hillier, 2011a, p. 27). It is crucial for planners not to lose sight of the vision and to keep it alive, taking care that neither the long-term vision gets in the way of the concrete steps, nor do the steps lead away from the vision or even make it impossible. Planning is only possible if they convince third parties, i.e. primarily private investors, of the vision and get them to realize it for them or with them. I have highlighted how rendering the present indeterminate was part of the city's efforts to get private investors involved. In a brochure the city of Halle elaborated in 2021, possible new buildings are indicated as abstract cubes, and the vision is set out in possible stages. In principle, the centre appears as an undefined place with infinite possibilities. Equally so do the buildings themselves in studies developed by urban design students and architects around the years 2014 and 2015. These studies contributed to the future being kept open.

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48   There was (and still is), however, a great deal of disagreement within the city administration as to which uses would make sense after revitalization. I will come back to this aspect later, also because even if the city is generally in favour of revitalizing the buildings, it will become clear later that it does not welcome a revitalization in every case.

49   I will come back to this in the following **chapter 4** where I will be discussing material resistance to renovation.

Fig. 49

Part II:
Material Matters

Fig. 49
Material Matters (Scheibe C).
Grimberg, 25.01.2023.

Fig. 50

Fig. 50
'Where does the ruin start, and where does it end? Is a well-preserved but empty building already a ruin because it has lost its practical and social function?' (Hell & Schönle, 2010, p. 6). The very first picture I took of the Hochhausscheiben. In the foreground: Scheibe A. The author, 12.07.2018.

Fig. 50

Fig. 50
'Where does the ruin start, and where does it end? Is a well-preserved but empty building already a ruin because it has lost its practical and social function?' (Hell & Schönle, 2010, p. 6). The very first picture I took of the Hochhausscheiben. In the foreground: Scheibe A. The author, 12.07.2018.

been described and investigated. What all of these works share is the engagement with 'urban and quasi-urban terrains' (Cairns & Jacobs, 2014, p. 182) that have lost their 'function or meaning in the present, while retaining a suggestive, unstable semantic potential' (Hell & Schönle, 2010, p. 6) and 'where agencies of decay and deterioration are still active and formative' (DeSilvey & Edensor, 2013, p. 466).

The description at the beginning, however, is only partially that of the sensory experiences of an 'outsider' entering a ruinous building and wandering around. The encounter goes beyond the visitor's sensations and contains details about the material characteristics of the building that the exploring person had obviously collected beforehand: information on the structure of the building, its length, width and height, the room sizes and layout of the rooms. The description above is that of an architect who was going to work with the building: 'One of my tasks,' the author then also wrote at the end of his text, 'is to reactivate Scheibe A and get an impression of the substance and its usability. A seemingly almost impossible task lies ahead of me' (Rick 2004, p. 136; own translation). This engagement with the 'substance' and the 'usability' of the building is necessary in order to be able to address the 'almost impossible task' of reusing it, as the architect writes. It is such practical engagement with the buildings' materiality as part of the engagement with their possible future that interests me in this chapter. And as I argue, the buildings themselves shape the processes of material engagement with them. Their materiality challenges, as I will show, their reactivation, but also contributes to the fact that the buildings avoided demolition. To explore and elaborate on material processes and practices of material engagement within standby, I will refer – in addition to ruin literature – to conceptions of material stability and fragility as well as of material agency from science and technology studies and sub-fields such as repair and maintenance studies and cross-fertilizing studies between urban and architectural studies and ANT.

With Latour, we may suggest that buildings shape human action as material objects with agency (Latour, 1996, 2005). It should be emphasized that the agency of actants is not given – in contrast to often false accusations directed toward ANT – but to be understood as an effect of associations within networks or assemblages. McFarlane notes for actors within assemblages: 'This means that urban actors, forms or processes are defined less by a pre-given property and more by the assemblages they enter and reconstitute' (McFarlane, 2011, p. 208).

From the newly emphasized role of objects as actants by actor–network theory, many authors have studied the material agency of cities and buildings within urban development and the transformation of buildings (Beauregard, 2015; Guggenheim, 2009a, 2016; Latour & Yaneva, 2017; Yaneva, 2008). As Yaneva explains, 'Using an STS perspective would not mean to tackle buildings as technical or scientific artefacts, but rather mobilize the ANT tools and its persistent ambition to account and understand, not to replace, the objects of architecture, its institutions and different cultures' (Yaneva, 2008, p. 9). In contrast to conceptions of artefacts in studies of material culture (J. Bennett, 2010; Ingold, 2012), materiality from this perspective is not understood as inherently stable. Nevertheless, it is ANT and related approaches that have taken material agency and 'technical limits to what is possible' (Hommels, 2005, p. 330) seriously. The effects of the materiality of cities and buildings in relation to change are contested. For Beauregard, the museum building's obduracy which he studies is, on the one hand, relational. On the other hand, Beauregard observes that 'matter also has intrinsic properties independent of relationships' (Beauregard, 2015, p. 541). Guggenheim shows how buildings allow different things for different actors. In his study of a building transformation, the building is 'a blank slate' for municipal authorities that can be 'used for anything'. For owners and the administrative court, the building 'resists being used for habitation and can only be made to do so by the unlikely combination of huge expenditures, an integrated concept and the cooperation of the owners'. As Guggenheim finds, the 'case is not only about a specific building but has become a setting to negotiate what buildings can do' (Guggenheim, 2009a, p. 161).

For researchers in the field of repair and maintenance studies, these differences are to be found in practice. Within the subfield of repair and maintenance studies, authors have rendered those 'operations' (D. J. Denis, 2019, p. 283) visible that are 'the main means by which the constant decay of the world is held off' (Graham & Thrift, 2007, p. 1). Repair and maintenance ethnographies study how the 'status of the object' (Pels et al., 2002), its stability and fragility is made in practice – the object itself is understood as a 'practical question' (Fürst, 2019, p. 63). From this perspective, both stable

and fragile versions of objects are matters of 'performance, enacted with tools and specific techniques [...], but also via the very gaze of' – in their case 'maintenance workers' (J. Denis & Pontille, 2015, p. 17).

Inspired by such thinking, my attention will in this chapter be directed towards socio-material processes and practices related to the material objects of standby – specifically, buildings on standby.

I should also mention in regard to the description above that it is that of an architect dealing with Scheibe A in preparation for a *temporary* use for a youth theatre project from 2003 called *Hotel Neustadt*. Such temporary transformation and use of the Hochhausscheiben happened only this one time; the event thus represents the extraordinary. What I consider specific for a mode of standby is, however, the ordinary engagement with the buildings' materiality and futures. As I argue, the Hochhausscheiben have, in contrast to ruins, not been dropped from stabilizing networks (Edensor, 2005b, p. 313). Instead, I observe multiple forms of engagement with the buildings – imagining, designing and negotiating possible futures for them. As I argue throughout the thesis, the specific relationship of the Hochhausscheiben to the future is characterized by a continuous (however intermittent) engagement with their (possible) future. It is this continuous engagement which is turning the Hochhausscheiben from waste material or obsolete buildings into sites of standing by, facing uncertainty (see Beveridge et al., 2022). The authors argue for urban voids in Berlin to be understood as waiting lands rather than wastelands). Even if ruins can remain stabilized for a long time 'between wholeness and complete dissolution' (Cairns & Jacobs, 2014, p. 172), they face either the end (Cairns & Jacobs, 2014, p. 167) or a (creative) conversion that is a resurrection in a new form and different use. When we read about the reuse of ruins, it is usually about industrial ruins that are transformed into creative places or lofts (Göbel, 2020; Lees, 2001), or museumized if they are valued enough and embody a valued past (DeLyser, 1999; DeSilvey, 2006; Edensor, 2005b; Landau & Pohl, 2021). Often, it is the material of ruins that is going to be reused and reassembled in new forms (Gordillo, 2014, pp. 37–38). However, the situation is different here – the architect speaks of reactivation, and the Hochhausscheiben are more often described as dormant than as dead. In contrast to ruins, buildings on standby are not dead and 'grown over' (Stoler, 2008, p. 194). And in fact, I have never come across the word ruin in relation to the Hochhausscheiben – the main reason I realized that calling them 'ruins' would be inappropriate. As I understood it, calling them ruins would mean that the buildings' potential 'is reducible to what happened there in a distant, long-dead past' (Gordillo, 2014, p. 21) and would be less likely to be found in the present. The core of the urban planners' engagement with the Hochhausscheiben that is at the heart of my research, however, was and is the discursive and material maintenance of the potential of buildings in the present in order to allow a future to emerge. This includes, but is not reduced to, the valuation of a distant past (see **chapters 3.1** and **5**).

Buildings on standby, it seems, are better compared to half-built or unfinished infrastructures (Carse & Kneas, 2019), empty buildings (Batty, 2016; Pelkmans, 2003), or even interstices (Tonnelat, 2008). These works share with the research on ruins an interest in 'materials and time – with what was, what might be, and what might have been' (Carse & Kneas, 2019, p. 12). Even though in-betweenness and also potentiality (DeSilvey & Edensor, 2013; Gupta, 2018) have been observed for ruins as well, these material forms point more than ruins to what 'comes next' (Kemmer et al., 2021, p. 15). In contrast to these, however, the Hochhausscheiben are built and have been used. People always refer to the buildings' past in relation to their possible future. The characteristic they share with half-built or unfinished infrastructure is not therefore that 'rise into ruin before they are built' (in contrast to ruins that fall into ruin after they have been built and after they have been abandoned) (DeSilvey & Edensor, 2013, p. 469), but the way they are encountered. Similar to ruins, buildings on standby are objects of ruination after construction. What is at stake here, however, is that processes of ruination, such as neglect and decay preventing a potential 'on', coexist with processes of maintenance, including securing and standing by the buildings' potential, that stabilize the buildings' materiality and prevent an 'off' (that is, the status of the ruin). I would answer the question posed by Hell and Schönle (see caption) as to whether well-preserved, empty buildings should be understood as ruins, referring to my case with a 'no'. In my view, the fact that buildings are well-preserved testifies to the fact that there are networks that maintain stability and these networks are oriented towards a future, as they problematize and counteract the loss of use and function in the present. But I would go even further and argue that buildings do not even have to be well-preserved in order not to be ruins. What

matters, if we understand objects in practical terms, in the case of buildings on standby as opposed to ruins, is that there are future-oriented networks surrounding these buildings. The mode of standby of buildings, whether well-preserved, vacant, one of these or none, is ongoing search for a future. I suggest a distinction between ruin as an object and ruination as a process to understand that buildings in a standby mode are objects that are affected by ruination, but without being ruins. Both processes of ruination (*making* of ruins, see M. M. Bennett, 2021, p. 333) and those that renew, prolong, reproduce a material in-between, can be in my view understood through the notion of standby. From an external view on its material state, it is difficult to determine whether a building is a ruin or not. Nevertheless, a building's materiality – its stability and fragility, its resistance and flexibility – plays an important role in processes of standby and I will shed light on this in this chapter.

Questions forming the basis of inquiry for this chapter are: How does the buildings' materiality come to matter for the (un-)making of possible futures? What forms and intensities of engagement do buildings on standby require? What actions do they impose and what actions do they prevent? How are we able to understand standby as a mode of in-betweenness in material terms?

There are three main arguments that I want to put forward in this chapter: it is the buildings' material presence and persistence that imposes an engagement with their possible futures (Macmillen & Pinch, 2018, pp. 290–291); there are material limits to the possible (through decay, but also material resistance – both material fragility and stability) (Hommels 2005) that contribute to a prolonged in-between in the present; and, finally, that standby requires maintenance (Wiedemann 2021; Denis and Pontille 2015), even though at a minimum level, not only to prevent material collapse but also to secure the potentiality (see Ringel, 2020) that is nurturing standby.

4.1   Presence

During an online panel discussion on the built heritage of the GDR around the question of whether it 'can go' in April 2022, the opening speaker Florian Mausbach, former president of the Federal Office for Building and Regional Planning, pointed out that we are *confronted with* this heritage (Bundesstiftung Aufarbeitung Brand, 2022).

The terminology of 'being confronted' with built heritage suggests that architecture is coming to us, that it consists of 'physically imposing structures' (Macmillen & Pinch, 2018, p. 290), and that those responsible for urban development, planning and renovation have to deal with them – whether they want to or not. In fact, as Macdonald notes, the German term 'heritage' itself can even 'refer to the negative, or what we might wish not to have had passed down from the past' (Macdonald, 2009, p. 119). Due to their obduracy and in contrast to other objects, however,

> buildings cannot be put away in a cupboard, easily binned, or taken to the charity shop. Obsolete architectures remain tenaciously present in the place they began, and because of that it is very hard to exercise the kind of amnesia, or 'economy of ignorance,' with respect to them as we do with more transient objects in our lives. (Cairns & Jacobs, 2014, p. 111)

In my view, the terminology of 'being confronted with' reflects the relationship Halle's city planners have with the Hochhausscheiben in Halle-Neustadt quite well. In fact, one of my informants said during a discussion we had on the Hochhausscheiben that, right from their construction, they had been 'an act of violence', as they are 'just oversized' and 'not human'. They perceive the buildings as 'a heavy legacy' and a 'built ideology' with which they have to contend (field notes, 12.04.2021). What is interesting is that here the size of the buildings is related to the perception of the buildings as built ideology. My informants see ideology taking on form in the Hochhausscheiben; they perceive

their size and massiveness as a 'socialist gesture'[50] that their builders wanted to be eternal.[51] One of the planners put it as follows:

> If you could go back in time, you might wish that the architects, Richard Paulick and consorts, who planned Neustadt back then, hadn't been so cocky. Because the Scheiben were already too big back then, that's a gesture. And it's always difficult when urban planning becomes a gesture, because then there's no use behind it. […] So that was the urban planning attitude of that time, which has now left this gesture and which I find ingenious from an urban planning point of view, undisputed, but which…I would say there would have been other gestures that would not cause us such problems today; that is also a child of its time. And we are now faced with the problem that, on the one hand, it's a gesture that's great, but it actually entails far too much volume for Neustadt.
> interview, 25.10.2018

The planner problematizes the size of the buildings, linking it to planning decisions from the past that they think were ideology-driven rather than use-oriented, leaving oversized and non-used buildings behind. These buildings cause them problems in the present. As DeSilvey and Edensor note for ruins, they 'testify to what has been left behind by creative destruction and collapsed regimes with their unfulfilled dreams' (DeSilvey & Edensor, 2013, p. 471). According to Stoler, imperial debris, as it remains, continues to have an impact in the present: 'Imperial effects occupy multiple historical tenses. They are at once products of the past imperfect that selectively permeate the present as they shape both the conditional subjunctive and uncertain futures' (Stoler, 2013, p. 10). As Stoler states, the main objective of researching ruins and ruination should not only 'turn to ruins as memorialized monumental "leftovers" or relics […] but rather to what people are *left with*: to what remains blocking livelihoods and health, to the aftershocks of imperial assault, to the social afterlife of structures, sensibilities, and things' (Stoler, 2013, p. 9; emphasis in original). Bennett has highlighted that it is common, especially also in relation to post-Soviet architecture, to equate buildings with a political ideology and system. What is problematic in this context, as Bennett argues, is not so much that the origins of the buildings lie in a time long past and quite different from the present, but that their abandonment and neglect are also often associated with the disintegration of this past system. In such conceptualization, the ruination of buildings is often dated to the disintegration of the Soviet system in 1991; it ignores processes of 'ongoing ruination' in the present. She writes: 'Given their close association with Soviet collapse, ruins in contemporary Russia tend to be presented as architectural artefacts rather than contemporary objects' (M. M. Bennett, 2021, p. 336). What studies linking ruins in post-Soviet space merely to the Soviet era neglect is, according to Bennett, that 'forgotten' structures 'are temporally situated in the past, but they are very much woven into the fabric of the present', are 'often products of contemporary decisions, too' (M. M. Bennett, 2021, pp. 333–334). Bennett suggests understanding ruins in contemporary Russia as ruins of 'ongoing ruination', of decisions to not maintain and construction elsewhere, neglecting certain infrastructures (M. M. Bennett, 2021, pp. 336–337). The point she makes here is a very important one from my perspective, as it allows us to question political decisions linked to abandonment and ruination in the present. While Bennett is

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50   The emphasis on the ideological basis of GDR architecture is typical of a Western assessment of architecture that de-emphasizes ideology in capitalist architecture. The place of GDR architecture within modernism (which could possibly be an alternative category) was and remains controversial to this day. Among other things, the term 'East Modernism', German Ostmoderne (Butter & Hartung, 2004), has been proposed as a special form of modernism, which has both a positive emphasizing its particularities, but also makes it 'the other modernism' and denies it its place in modernism (see **chapter 5** for valuations of the Hochhausscheiben).

51   Interestingly, an exhibition in Halle-Neustadt in 2016 was entitled 'BIG HERITAGE. Which monuments of which modernity?' and the catalogue of the exhibition shows the Hochhausscheiben as the cover picture (Hasche & Scheffler, 2016). The perception of Hochhausscheiben as primarily 'big' was shaped here, among other things.

Fig. 51
Fig. 52

Fig. 51
Presence. You cannot miss them.
Hühne, 30.08.2017.

Fig. 52
Presence. Passage.
Hühne, 02.05.2016.

interested in the abandonment of infrastructure, my work, and so this chapter, focuses on the question of what happens after abandonment and why the Hochhausscheiben have remained in place and in an in-between for over 20 years. To answer that question, however, and that is why I refer to Bennett here, it seems to me that a focus on present processes is equally important. I, too, see the Hochhaus-scheiben as buildings on standby in the *present* as they are 'objects of debate and consideration in the present' (Ringel, 2018b, p. 70). These considerations are, as I want to suggest here, enforced by their material presence.

The buildings 'have an active presence that shapes the configuration of the present' (Gordillo, 2014, p. 32). In the process of dealing with the empty high rises, public discourse, individual experience and memory, and pragmatic considerations merge. Whether or not buildings are seen as, for example, 'dead matter or remnants of a defunct regime' (Stoler, 2013, p. 11) or as 'postindustrial excess' (Ringel, 2018b, p. 69) will have effects on the ways we deal with buildings in the present. It has been described for remains of Second World War and Cold War military infrastructures, for example, how these 'linger in a state of limbo, not allowed to be demolished but not considered valuable enough to merit expenditure on stabilization' (DeSilvey & Edensor, 2013, p. 473). The Hochhausscheiben, because they belong to and were built in a past system as a demonstration of power rather than oriented towards a use, seem obsolete to the planners from Halle today. The planner saw the size of the buildings as an expression of a demonstration of power and an embodiment of the socialist ideology. Buildings, one may suggest, come to us and affect us and exert some power, as they are embedded in conflicts over power and identity (P. R. Jones, 2006) (see **chapter 5** for a more detailed analysis of valuations of buildings on standby). What I am interested in here is less the discursive power of architecture than the effects of their material presence. While the planner recognized the architectural value of the buildings, they are pointing to the fact that their size is challenging them, as the buildings' volume appears to be an obstacle for the buildings' futures to transpire (Ringel, 2020). The planner understands the Hochhausscheiben as 'remnants of earlier planning decisions, the logic of which is no longer applicable' (Hommels, 2005, p. 324). Such urban forms may become obdurate, as Hommels notes, and 'may prove to be annoying obstacles for those who aspire to bring about urban innovation (Hommels, 2005, p. 324). For the planners from Halle, there is no alternative to engaging with the buildings as their presence causes their reaction (Beauregard, 2015, p. 541). Rather than being able to choose *whether* one wants to deal with them, they have to define *how* to deal with them. As one of the planners said, 'the Scheiben will occupy future generations one way or another, simply because they are there, they have to be used and because it is a great effort to renovate or maintain these Scheiben […] because they are just so massive (field notes, 27.05.2021). → **fig. 51; 52**

The planners explain their massiveness with their concrete-steel construction. When I asked them for how long one could leave a building unused and whether they saw a risk that the buildings might collapse one day, they replied: 'There's no danger of that, the guys won't leave us, these monoliths; even if they were to set them on fire, which is a popular method of renovation, they won't have much success with these things; they're German bunker architecture, they hold' (interview, 02.10.2018). The fact that the planners consider the buildings' presence as materially stabilized seems to inspire a kind of awe (both honour and fear) in them. Facing the buildings' presence, as one of them explained, they are 'doomed to success' as they 'can't just let it vegetate there, we have to make it an integral part of the city, simply at that point' (interview, 08.07.2020). Whereas the buildings seem 'too big to fail', they might become a risk of failure for the city planners. Engaging with the buildings is not a choice for the planners, it seems, but rather a task that comes to them as the buildings exist. They are decaying and located in a prominent location in Halle; therefore, they have to engage with them. In a conversation with one of the planners, they said: 'we have to deal with it now somehow' (field notes, 12.04.2021). In another interview, one of the planners drew my attention to the fact that their own success or failure as planners was equally linked to the ensemble's size. In one of our conversations, they compared the redevelopment area with other areas they aim to redevelop in Halle and explained that 50 per cent renovated buildings meant completely different things in different parts of the city. While the buildings and also the ownership structure in Halle's old town are small-scale, the high-rise ensemble consists of five 18-storey buildings. These different material contexts bear an unequal relation of risk and failure, as the planner explained: 'If there are 30 empty and unrenovated buildings [in the old town] and I manage to get 15 of them renovated, then I have an incredible result,' they said. 'In

the case of the Scheiben, […] 50% non-refurbished means nothing' [laughs] (interview, 03.06.2021). It becomes clear that the buildings' material presence – their size and massiveness force them to engage with them and, as the planner above said, integrate them.

Following from this, I suggest calling the Hochhausscheiben on standby 'challenging objects'. A perspective that places the object at the centre allows us to understand how the problematized materiality of the object demands the engagement of a range of actors in varying degrees of intensity and requires organization. Inspiration for such a conception of the objects on standby comes in part from Schürkmann, who suggests the term 'toxic objects' (Schürkmann, 2021) for such produced objects that, after having been produced in the light of progress, oblige actors to develop strategies of regulation and ways of dealing with them. She is referring here to nuclear waste, for example, that is considered a 'critical toxic object' in the context of nuclear waste management '– an object with an activity identified and problematized as toxic and with the potential to challenge human agency or human action' (Schürkmann, 2021, p. 66). Toxic objects, according to Schürkmann, 'have the potential to intoxicate humans and more-than-human life due to their material activity that in turn requires an apparatus of legal regulations and further investigations' (Schürkmann, 2021, p. 66). As the author states, nuclear waste is not simply 'there', but it 'rather appears as a critical and confrontational object' (Schürkmann, 2021, p. 76).

In the case of the Hochhausscheiben, it is only asbestos that is toxic in the true sense of the word. In fact, as I will also mention later, asbestos is also a concern when it comes to possible futures for the buildings, though to a lesser extent than in some other buildings, where asbestos became such a powerful element that it contributed significantly to demolition – for example, in the *Palace of the Republic* controversy (Dellenbaugh-Losse 2020) or in the case of Red Road High Rises (Jacobs et al., 2007, p. 619). Although not being toxic waste, the high rises in Halle-Neustadt equally risk becoming threats, and they impose action. In this regard, the buildings on standby act, in the words of Latour and Yaneva, as a 'productive force in spacetime' (Latour & Yaneva, 2017, p. 109). Objects on standby, even if they are not needed and may even be ignored for some time, can become challenging objects through their materiality that is taking on a certain agency in practices of (un-)making possible building futures. And, as I will show, it is both their stability and fragility that regulate standby's in-/activity as they regulate 'different intensities of engagement' (Latour & Yaneva, 2017, p. 109).

4.2   Resistance

> Building data: 'Scheibe C' is a monolithic transverse structure with 18 storeys on a double ground floor and a basement. It is around 59 m long and 16 m wide. It has 4 lifts and two safety staircases (east and north side). The system width is 3.40 m (between the transverse walls), the system length (between the outer walls) on both sides is approx. 8.00 m including approx. 1.70 m central corridor and loggias.
>
> Year of construction: 1974
>
> Size of the plot: approx. 1,406m² measured
> Useful/residential area: main usable area approx. 9,526 m2 (estimated).
> Building and Property Management Saxony-Anhalt, 2013

The material characteristics of the buildings are listed in the building profiles such as this one, elaborated by the state of Saxony-Anhalt in preparation for a planned sale of Scheibe C. It is some of these structural characteristics in particular, such as the monolithic construction, long corridors, the number of lifts and safety staircases, or simply the size, that have been discussed, negotiated and problematized over the years, as possible futures for the high rises have been made and unmade.

The materiality of the buildings plays a decisive role, because it will be reflected in the form of costs and in the form of discussed (im-)possibilities, as we will see in what follows, where

I will be arguing that the materiality of the buildings resists certain actions and is challenging those engaging with them. I will explore material constraints and see how the materiality of the buildings itself contributes to the buildings' obduracy in configurations that ensure the continued existence of the ensemble on standby. In order to better capture the role of the material, I base my analysis on a relational understanding of obduracy as it has been developed within the fields of STS and ANT and that Hommels characterized as 'embeddedness'. In such a perspective, obduracy of technology and artefacts

> can be explained precisely because of technology's embeddedness in sociotechnical systems, actor-networks, or sociotechnical ensembles. […] The extent to which an artifact has become embedded determines its resistance to efforts aimed at changing it. Such efforts may be prompted by usage, societal change, economic demands, zoning schemes, legal regulations, newly developed policies, and so forth.
> (Hommels, 2005, p. 334)

An example for how we can understand obduracy relationally would be (and Hommels equally refers to this example) the Parisian subway Latour studied in the late 1980s. Politically motivated, the socialist city government of Paris had, as Latour describes, built narrower subway tunnels and developed smaller carriages to prevent private companies taking the system into their own hands in the event of a right-wing government coming to power. As Latour finds, the city '"shifted their alliance from legal and contractual ones, to stones, earth and concrete"' (Latour, 1988; as cited in: Hommels, 2005, p. 335). By doing so, the subway system got stabilized by being embedded in a whole range of elements, among them material ones. With the years, the subway's design became less reversible. The merit of ANT is that it has opened sociology and other disciplines to the recognition of the heterogeneity of multiple elements – and explicitly also material elements, that have an influence on the social and on practices (Schäfer, 2013, p. 348). ANT scholars developed a *relational* understanding of materiality, underlining that there is no such thing as the 'purely social', suggesting that 'stability resides in material heterogeneity', within the relations of multiple elements constituting material objects. They write: 'the bits and pieces achieve significance *in relation to others*: the electric vehicle is a set of relations between electrons, accumulators, fuel cells, laboratories, industrial companies, municipalities, and consumers; *it is nothing more*' (Law & Mol, 1995, pp. 276–277; emphasis in original). From a relational perspective, obduracy thus 'is the resistance that humans and non-human things pose to each other. Something is obdurate when it is difficult to change or compel to act' (Beauregard, 2015, p. 541). While ANT explains obduracy merely through networks, others have highlighted how materiality takes on an obdurate form and agency as it becomes enacted in practice. As Woolgar and Lezaun argue, 'the physical identity, durability, obduracy and recalcitrance of material objects – in short, all the traits that would qualify a certain entity as "material" – should in principle be treated as practical achievements, as qualities that are also "enacted in practices"'(Woolgar & Lezaun, 2013, p. 326).

Svabo rightly notes that 'the relationships between materiality, doing, order and change are complex and are viewed as such' (Svabo, 2009, p. 368). According to Svabo, studies on the role of artefacts in organizations and organizational knowing

> show that material artifacts and objects play crucial roles as 'stabilizers' – they stabilize action, give it something to evolve around, and to engage in activity with, and they give meaning to action. At the same time objects may 'destabilize'; they may breakdown, get lost and malfunction. Or they may even just be new and thus demand new forms of doing – new practices. Material artifacts may order and fixate action, but they may also make practice move in new ways.
> (Svabo, 2009, p. 368)

Paying attention to the agency of material artefacts, I will be able to study 'how objects form the more resistant part of a chain of association' (Schäfer, 2013, p. 354; own translation), imposing itself,

demanding, allowing, or preventing certain actions. I am following Edensor here, who notes that the engagement with space depends not only on cultural understanding and representation, but also upon materialities of space – 'those qualities which are spatial potentialities, constraining and enabling a range of actions' (Edensor, 2007, p. 225). According to Hommels, 'one characteristic of technology seems obvious, it is its obduracy and stability. […] once a city's downtown area, including all its buildings, roads, and distribution networks, is there, it displays obduracy and offers resistance to change' (Hommels, 2005, p. 329).

Drawing on these notes from the literature, I assume that material resistance contributes to the emergence and prolongation of standby as an in-between and will explore in the following section material elements that have refused possible futures, how they are embedded and how their effect on standby is to be understood. Beveridge et al. have recently shown how urban waste lands as 'waiting lands' 'can be seen as a condition of both possibility and impossibility: the possibility of space (Stavrides 2016) and the impossibility of realising innocent or conflictfree visions of it' (Beveridge et al., 2022, p. 284). As the following examples will show, buildings on standby share such ambivalences of material (im-)possibilities.

Demolition Impossible?

'By the way,' a planner from Halle writes in 1999, 'the high rises are not prefabricated buildings; the deconstruction of one Scheibe is estimated at DM 9 to 10 million' (draft for a letter to the Ministry, 09.09.1999). Large housing estates in East Germany were mainly built in prefabricated concrete slab construction and are therefore often referred to as 'Plattenbaugebiete' (slab-built areas). And in Halle-Neustadt, too, most of the residential buildings were constructed this way. The Hochhausscheiben in the centre are, however, an exception here and, as I have already mentioned above, their construction method is referred to when people talk about their massiveness and imposing material presence of the buildings. And in contrast to the 'Platte', the steel-concrete construction may prevent demolition.

The reference in the letter that the buildings are not prefabricated constructions sounds like a threat. The sentence, as I see it, is supposed to mean: think twice – demolition is (almost) impossible. This threat is embedded in the process of possible future 'governmental use and revitalization', the rhythm of which I traced in **chapter 2**. In 1999, as I described it there, the state of Saxony-Anhalt as the owner and the Student Union (Studentenwerk) as the operator announced that they would close the student dormitory in Scheibe C. Against this background, the city of Halle brought in the possible future use by state authorities in the building to secure its future. As described, the city planners saw governmental use as the only way to prevent years of emptiness, and thus destabilization of the building and the emergence of standby. Emptiness and a lack of use perspective would, in the long run, as the city argued, force the state to demolish the building at its own costs. That the state would neither use the building nor demolish it, but leave it abandoned, was something that the city did not dare to think about, at least not publicly.

What is interesting here is the reference to the fact that the cost of demolition would be extremely high due to the construction of the Scheibe. In fact, the design and structure of the buildings are repeatedly cited as reasons why demolition was not a real option. It wouldn't be technically so easy to demolish them, as one planner explained to me in an interview: 'actually, you would have to blow them up – as I said, [it would have been a] spectacle' (interview, 25.10.2018). While prefabricated buildings could be demolished relatively easily, the Hochhausscheiben are concreted into place and reinforced with steel. This actually makes demolition a complex task and, above all, the construction method drives up the cost of demolition. In a letter to a citizen from 2002, for example, the impossibility of demolition is then also justified by Halle's city planners with the '*Ortsbeton*' (in-situ concrete). The letter said: 'Demolition of the Hochhausscheiben is not possible because they are structures made of in-situ concrete and the cost of demolition of a Hochhausscheibe is estimated at 5 million' (letter, 10.09.2002).

However, there is a remarkable difference between the 9 to 10 million and the 5 million mentioned here, and so I would like to point out that cost calculations and the 'concrete threat' are each to be understood as embedded in specific relations and depending on how these articulate in an event.

I have put together some of the cost calculations for demolition, and it turns out that they vary considerably over the years:

1999:	DM 9–10 million
2011:	€1.5–2 million
2013:	€2 million
2015:	approx. €3.3 million
2015:	approx. €4 million
2015:	€1–1.5 million [52]

The varying numbers are embedded in certain strategies and objectives that are pursued at different moments. I already mentioned the calculations from 1999. They and the estimation from 2013 come from Halle's city administration and are to be understood in the context of a threat to convince other actors to consider revitalization. In 2011, equally mentioned above, the calculation is part of considerations of different planning alternatives and scenarios; so are those of January 2015. Concerning the €1–1.5 million, this is from a study by an architectural office that was investigating conservation through a wrapping of the building as a possible future; finally, the almost 4 million was estimated by an architectural office studying a possible revitalization. It is not my interest here to understand the embedding of these figures in the respective concrete situation. What I would like to emphasize, however, and I think this is very clear here, is that the calculated costs should always be understood relationally. And this also shows the relationality of the materiality of the buildings themselves. What is particularly striking is that it is not the specific amount of the costs that matters, but rather the fact that no matter how high the costs were specifically calculated, they were in any case deemed to be too high. No one, no owner, nor the city of Halle could or wanted to bear these costs.

When asked about possible futures for the high rises in 2013, the mayor pointed to the high costs of a potential demolition and, as there was no political decision that would allow for the allocation of public funds for demolition, revitalization would have to be the goal: 'After all, demolition also costs money. An estimated two million euros per Scheibe. Without a fundamental decision, however, no subsidies could be allocated for this.' They consequently resumed that 'revitalization should be the goal' (answer to the press by the mayor, city administration, February 2013). Is revitalization then emerging as a preferable future from the impossibility of demolition? In an internal letter, a planner wrote to the alderman in 2011 that, theoretically, there would be public funds, but that it was politically not an easy decision, because of the high costs. They wrote:

> The demolition of the Hochhausscheiben is certainly a planning alternative. After consultation with the State Ministry of Construction, subsidies from the Stadtumbau Ost program (demolition subsidies) can be used for this. However, the demolition costs per Scheibe are estimated at approx. 1.5 to 2 million €. This means that, on the one hand, the subsidies are unlikely to be sufficient for the demolition, so that the respective remaining costs have to be borne by the owner. This should hardly be possible or realistic.
> letter, 10.08.2011

It seems that revitalization was to become the preferable future partly because demolition proofed impossible to be realized as the high costs that the deconstruction of the massive steel-concrete buildings turned out to be too cost-intensive, demanding a sum that was politically impossible to pass. Next to costs for demolition that are explained by the buildings' construction, also other reasons for the impossibility of demolition related to the materiality of the buildings crystallize.

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52   Sources: Memo City Administration, 22.06.1999 and letter to the Ministry of Finance, 14.09.1999; concept Köck, 20.03.2010 and internal letter, 10.08.2011; answer to the press by the mayor, city administration, February 2013; scenarios city administration 14.01.2015; study by Lacaton & Vassal + Fischer, 2015; concept by Frießleben Architekten, 2015.

Next to the buildings' structure and massiveness, their height (18 storeys) and the small plots of land they occupy can be seen as material elements resisting demolition. The property boundaries were after 1990 with a distance of about half a metre from the buildings. This circumstance, as a planner explained to a citizen in an email in 2008, contributes to the fact that an owner would not have the buildings demolished. The planner wrote: 'The Hochhausscheiben remain standing. The Scheiben are not municipal property' (email, 21.04.2008). When the citizen did not accept the answer that the buildings would remain standing because they were not municipal property (they wrote: 'Not municipal property – well, that is surely not everything and cannot be the final statement for us, let alone the solution', 06.05.2008), the planner explained in another email that the small size of the plot was the reason why demolition was not possible as it was not reasonable for an owner. In their email, they replied: 'What can I tell you? No owner will demolish the Scheiben, because they are built on such a small plot of land that the vacant lot does not allow for a subsequent profitable use' (email, 06.05.2008).   → fig. 53; 54; 55

While the plots on which the Hochhausscheiben are built are very small and demolition is therefore unprofitable from an investor's point of view, the value is in the height of the buildings, as a planner explained to me. According to her, the usable space that the ensemble contains and the price for which the buildings were traded have for many years been disproportionate. While there is theoretically great economic potential in the height of the buildings, their economic value, for which they were traded, plummeted in the early 2000s. The planner explained: 'in this respect, of course, existing properties like this, which have such an incredible density on such a small plot, are already valuable purely in terms of property value. And the fact that they were sold for a song and dance over the years was due to the lack of perspective' (interview, 03.06.2021).

In 2002, for example, Scheibe B was presented at an auction in Leipzig by the Treuhand that administered the building from the late 1990s on. At the time, it was described as 'predominantly vacant', as the ground floor was still occupied by commercial uses at that time. A previous auction in Berlin in 1998, at which the Treuhand had hoped for more than one million for Scheibe B, had failed. The minimum bid stated for the auction in Leipzig was €100,000. Another compulsory auction of Scheibe B followed in 2008. The market value fell from €360,000 to €1,00 (set symbolically as market value) between the auction in 2002 and the forced sale in 2008.

Meanwhile, the buildings have become objects of property speculation and are sold today for around €7 million. In 2021, I understand from a discussion with the planners from Halle that private property and the impossibility of demolition are linked again in a different way. As they told me, the privatization of the building and circles of buying and selling that characterize private property speculation make demolition increasingly unattainable. The planners from the city administration are aware of this. My field notes show records from the discussions we had around this issue during my internship at the planning department:

> Demolition, [...] – it's not an issue at the moment; if the land costs are in the 7-figure range and then the demolition costs come on top – forget it.
> In the first round of the demolition discussion, the prices were in 5 figures [...] maybe in 10 years, [...] but now demolition is off the table.
> field notes, group discussion, 29.03.2021

The material I have gathered here shows the more or less open debate on the impossibility of demolition. In the reading I would like to propose, the Hochhausscheiben on standby challenge us through their materiality and they resist demolition due to their size and massiveness, which drive up the cost of demolition. Furthermore, demolition is rendered unattainable as the plots of the Hochhausscheiben are too small and the buildings are too high (their value lies in their height) for a demolition to become interesting for their private owners. As Cairns and Jacobs equally note, a decision for demolition 'is not made in isolation. A decision that appears to be the end of the story must also be stitched into a new story of redevelopment or regeneration' (Cairns & Jacobs, 2014, p. 128). A possibility for redevelopment of the site was, however, not in sight. Even though the city actually considered buying and demolishing one or several Hochhausscheiben (e.g. in 2000 and again in the 2010s), high costs
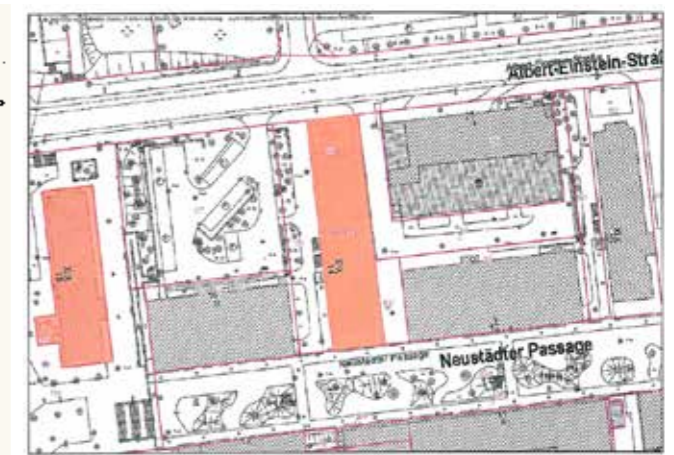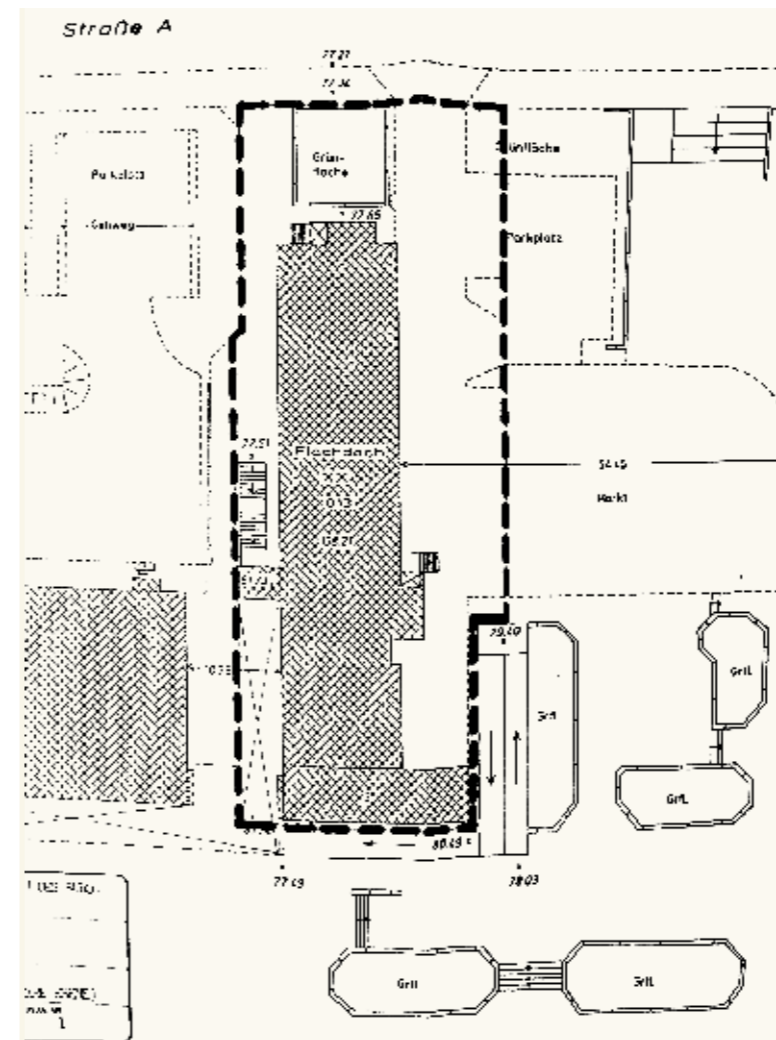
Fig. 53

Fig. 54

Fig. 53
Extract from the land register, with the plot of Scheibe B in the centre. In 1994, the boundaries were drawn just around the building. Source: Halle City Administration.

Fig. 54
The property lines around Scheibe D. Source: Halle City Administration.

Fig. 55
Tall buildings, small plots. Dorenkamp, ca. 1976. Source: Geschichtswerkstatt Halle-Neustadt.

Fig. 55

and lacking political legitimacy hindered it from doing so. Instead, it was decided that 'The decision on renovation and classic re-use or final demolition is postponed to a later date and can then be decided under the framework conditions of urban development at that time' (10.08.2011).

Today, however, demolition becomes even less possible as the price investors pay for them increases and as this economic value – because of the small size of the plot – relies on the buildings' height. [53]

As it turns out, the materiality of the buildings on standby resists demolition through the embeddedness of certain characteristics such as height, type of construction and plot in urban development, agency of public actors and logics of property speculation. Standby, here as a status of the object in-between, of buildings that are there but not needed, gets stabilized through material resistance. On a mode of standby, the logics of 'property rights, market forces and state planning become loosened' (Beveridge et al., 2022, p. 285) and a gap emerges, as has also been found for urban wastelands, for example. However, in contrast to other cases, namely that this gap opens up the possibility for temporary, alternative practices (Andres, 2013; Beveridge et al., 2022; Tonnelat, 2008) or for people to stay (Ringel, 2020), I note here, with a focus on material matters, that this gap ensures the material continuity of the buildings, but also their in-betweenness.

Demolition does not seem to be an option as the buildings' construction and massiveness contribute to high costs and become obstacles for the legitimacy of demolition. Furthermore, the buildings' height and the small plots of land, as they get enacted in speculative investment, make demolition unlikely. As much as demolition proved/s difficult, so too does renovation, as the examples in the following section will show.

Renovation Impossible?

From my field notes, 26.06.2019:

'Swiss,' the architect says to me and points to the scene upwards: the Swiss constructors of the wooden module, which is being introduced into building C on this sunny day in 2019 as a first test, hang from climbing ropes on the façade.
We are all standing on the parking deck opposite building C, invited by the investor to be part of that great moment that is supposed to be a milestone in the course towards innovative renovation of building C.

However, the rails to slide the module in were to narrow and had to be pushed apart with a steel pipe earlier, now they can't get the pipe out and the module in – it's stuck.

They try to prise it out, sawing and jiggling – it takes forever. Again and again, people start filming (me too), the module moves a bit and then comes to a halt again.

Among the public, there is the investor, donors from different ministries as well as the investment bank, the architects, engineers, and representatives from the city administration in Halle.

At some point, everyone starts to get nervous as the module isn't moving. The building seems to baulk and the nervousness visibly increases.
field notes, 26.06.2019
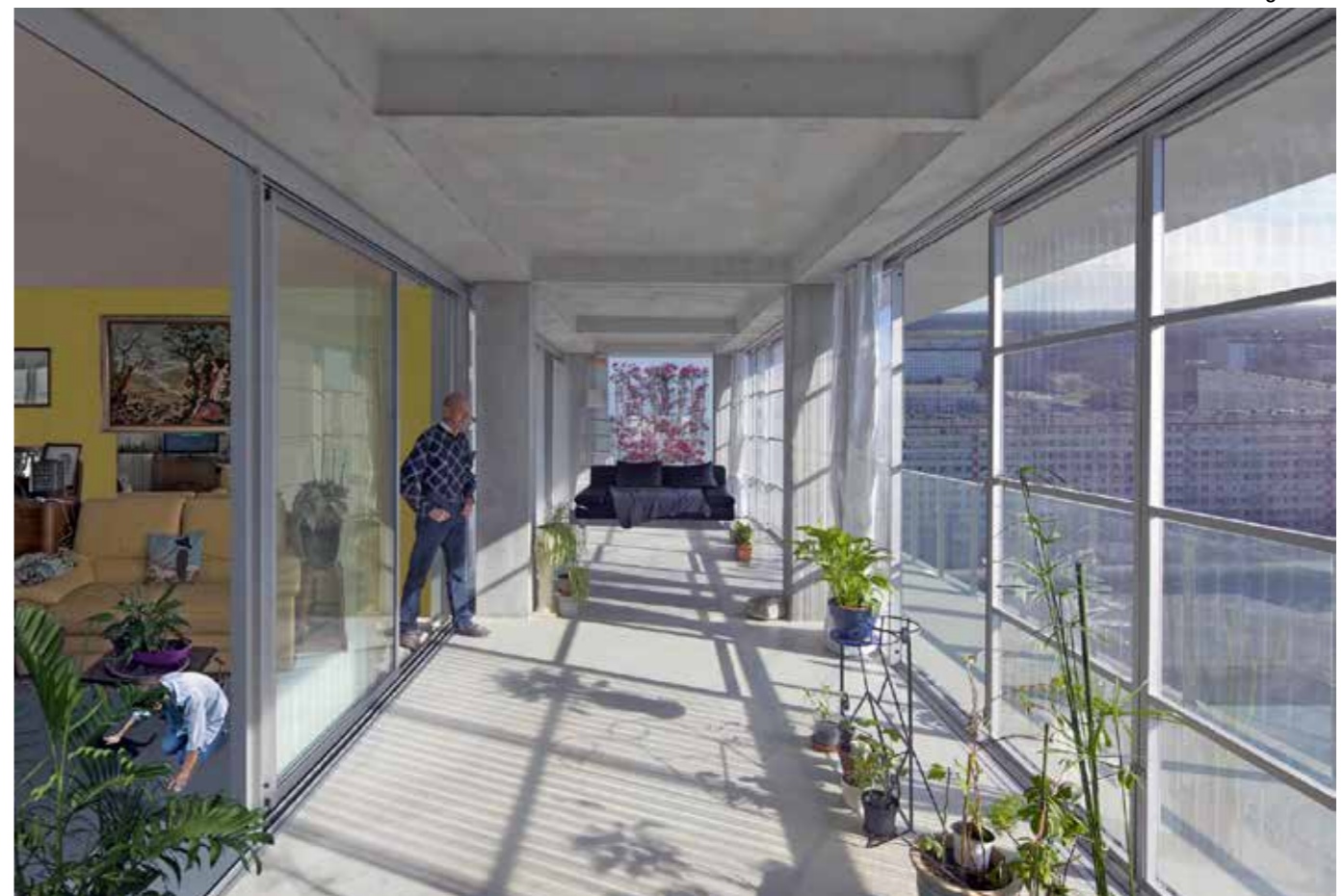
Fig. 56; 57; 58
Working with the structure and not against it. The architects Lacaton & Vassal + Fischer suggested an extension of the building. Preliminary Study. Towards an economic and sustainable development of Hochhausscheibe C.
Lacaton & Vassal + Fischer, 2015.

Fig. 56

Fig. 57

Fig. 58

In summer 2019, I had been invited by the investor of Scheibe C to attend the event of the so-called 'test module insertion'. The investor believed in the 'neutral structure' of the high rise and had developed an innovative revitalization concept. Their plan was to remove all balconies and façade sections and insert micro-apartments as prefabricated modules into the basic structure that then emerged. The concept was considered innovative and was awarded public funds for experimental construction in existing buildings.

The funding programme for experimental building in existing contexts also includes scientific support. A scientist from the field of heritage conservation accompanied the process over the years in order to find out, as they told me in conversation, 'how one can proceed with the existing building stock, what is possible in the existing building stock at all' (field notes, 26.06.2019). I think about them now as I write this and wonder how they would answer this question today – because almost three years have passed since 2019, and the construction site has not progressed much. The scene above from the construction site on Scheibe C in 2019 hints at how the building is resisting the planned renovation. Not everything seems possible, as the notes above show. On that day, the module didn't fit, and the leading architect standing next to me while we were watching the insertion of the module explained it by the odd structure of the building. The building is not constructed as the drawings on the plans suggest, the investor explained at another meeting: 'My aspiration', they said,

> has always been to make something special, something unique, something sustainable, also ecologically sustainable, and also to show what you can really do with these Scheiben. So not just taking a bucket of paint and painting it, but something with all the challenges that I certainly didn't see in 2015 [the year the company they are working for purchased the building] as they turned out at the end of the day, which is primarily due to the fact that at the time, one thing was planning and by that I mean at the time when the buildings were erected and the other is what was actually built because the materials weren't there or for some other reason. So, we simply had to deal with a lot of things that we had planned and then had to adapt because we realized that in the end it was implemented differently when the building was constructed.
> interview, 18.05.2020

A year later, when estimated costs for the project had increased by several million, I asked about the status of the renovation, and they said they were now planning with four or five different sizes for the modules instead of the initially planned one-size-fits-all module (interview, 22.04.2021). Yaneva, in her study on the renovation of a historic building in Vienna, the *Alte Aula*, observes how the building 'had no scruples in objecting to the architects' and builders' claims and actions by behaving in undisciplined ways, blocking the renovating operations, obstructing the client' plans, suspending the builders' deadlines' (Yaneva, 2008, p. 24). She finds that certain material elements of the building, such as 'magnesit and natural stone also took active part in the discussions at ministries and in the building site, and imposed their specific material requirements over the renovation process' (Yaneva, 2008, p. 16). These requirements made the renovation in the making a process of 'unpredictable turns, also because a building that undergoes renovation is not a fully masterable object: It often resists to interventions and shows itself as a disobedient object' (Yaneva, 2008, p. 16).

The 'vagaries' of the Hochhausscheiben were also encountered by the investors in the D building who had purchased and renovated building D in the early 1990s. The renovation of the Hochhausscheiben, according to their experience renovating building D, 'cannot be calculated exactly due to the peculiar nature of such objects and involves a considerable risk of cost overruns' (letter, 30.03.1999). In addition to the peculiar nature of the buildings, contemporary demands and regulations had raised the costs for the renovation of building D, and they had difficulties finding enough tenants for the offices they had created after having completed the renovations.

Neither the cost of demolition nor the cost of renovation had seemed to be reasonable investments for any actor for decades. In an interview, the deputy mayor of Halle said:

> No one really knew what to do with this special topic of the Hochhausscheiben; the money that has to be put into it – that is, only if I do a normal renovation, fire protection, heat protection – I have to take all that into account; even if I don't even intend to make a profit – it was clear from the start that the renovation of one thing costs 30 million euros. Broken down to the square metres, there has to be a sum of x in the end as the rental price.[54]
> interview, 28.05.2021

Among city employees, 30 million euros seems to be the anticipated sum needed for renovating one of the buildings. That is the figure mostly circulating in the city administration in 2021, even if some planners believe that it should be possible to renovate a Scheibe with only 20 million (field notes, 19.06.2019). At a meeting, one city employee said: 'You also have to say that there are holes worth millions if you want to renovate them, you can't do that privately […]; you can't do anything under 30 million, you always have to calculate that.' And another planner responded: 'Yes, that has been calculated; between €20 and €30 million is needed' (field notes, 12.05.2021).

The costs of revitalization, like the costs of demolition, have been calculated at many times, with different intentions and within all kinds of architectural studies and concepts. These concepts were also elaborating on the structural conditions of the buildings that were either favouring or opposing certain transformations. The basis of the calculations varies, but one figure is known and that is the sum the investors paid for the renovation of Scheibe D to simple office standards (completed in 1997): approximately DM 19 million. An initial study for a transformation of Scheibe C into a high-rise office building from 2000 ('study commissioned by the Halle State Building Authority for the use of Scheibe "C" by state offices') calculated that about DM 22 million would have to be invested.

In a Cabinet submission of the state of Saxony-Anhalt from 28.08.2009, it was suggested including the amount of 500,000 euros in the budget for 2010/2011 for the demolition of Scheibe C after the state authorities had recalculated the costs for a revitalization of the building. The initially calculated 20.24 million euros would, according to the recalculation, not be able to be met as costs for fire protection, for example, had to be adjusted according to new regulations (Cabinet submission, 28.08.2009, p.3). The different calculations of the necessary costs for a refurbishment of the Hochhausscheiben are to be understood in the same way as those for demolition mentioned above, through their embeddedness in specific situations.

Whether a renovation appears possible will also depend on whether the buildings are found 'suitable' for certain uses or 'flexible enough' for all possible future uses. In **chapter 3**, I argued that indeterminacy is especially also produced in images and concepts. I have indicated that an open future can become a necessity in order to be able to face uncertainty. The easier it is to adapt the buildings to today's needs, the lower the construction costs, and a renovation project can increase in profitability and potentially also in attractiveness for future tenants. Thus, the flexibility of the structure has repeatedly and controversially been evaluated and debated among planners and architects. In 2002, a group of architects working on a redevelopment concept for the centre of Halle-Neustadt, and also studying the Hochhausscheiben specifically, found that

> If it is stripped clean and cleaned, skeletonized, so to speak, the naked structure of the stacked levels remains, it remains usable cubature. It is existing capital that merely needs to be reinterpreted. The functionally neutral structure allows for various possible uses.
> ARGE Graul and Partners, 2002, Preamble to Part 4, the Concept

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54   In 2014, economic considerations were made by the state of Saxony-Anhalt. According to the calculations, a rent of €7.31/m2 would be economical at a net sum of €100/m2 (including a profit of €200,000 per Scheibe; at construction costs of €1,500 it would be €9.73/m2 and at €2,000 €11.25/m2 (letter, 20.08.2014). In the Nördliche Neustadt area, where the buildings are located, the average cold rent per square metre was €6.33 in February 2023 (Immobilienpreise Regional Analysiert, n.d., *Mietspiegel Halle Saale Noerdliche Neustadt Mietpreise Stand 03.02.2023*, 2023).

It thus suggested that 'The volume [should be] "blown out" and the "wounds" […] filled with new content' (ARGE Graul and Partners, 2002, Preamble to Part 4, the Concept). The flexibility or so-called redevelopment capacity of the high rises would, of course, vary depending on different uses and the transformations that are envisioned. The architects thus calculated the investment costs needed according to different uses, but also the costs for the demolition of individual parts to reduce the total surface. For example, converting a building to housing would cost around DM 21 million, according to the architects. They based their calculations on the experience of converting Scheibe D to basic office standards, accomplished in 1997 at a cost of DM 19 million, and on the calculations by the state of Saxony-Anhalt for the conversion of buildings C into offices from 2000 that came to DM 22 million (ARGE Graul and Partners, 2002). Based on their concept, the city administration from Halle investigated in 2003 the possibilities of use by state authorities. In a PowerPoint presentation from 2003, it was said that flexibility in the newly created content was to be achieved through converting full floors into galleries, installing additional access systems, and changing the floor plan by merging individual rooms into large rooms.

In their concept from 2015, Lacaton & Vassal + Fischer found that 'The Hochhausscheiben have a high degree of flexibility due to their monolithic construction. Additional openings in the walls and ceilings are therefore possible in principle' (Lacaton & Vassal + Fischer, 2015, p.4). The famous architectural firm from France, known for their successful rehabilitations of industrial housing, had been commissioned (here in collaboration with a Berlin-based colleague) to examine a study on the economic rehabilitation of Scheibe C with the option of transferring it to the other buildings. The architects showed with their study that an attractive and economically feasible transformation of the high rises was possible. However, as the 'in principle' in the quote above already suggests, they saw structural limits to flexibility. In particular, the bearing walls, long corridors and very small rooms were seen as structural limitations to a revitalization (Lacaton & Vassal + Fischer, 2015, p. 15).

They noted, for example, that 'removing individual transverse walls to widen the living spaces is difficult and cost-intensive due to the horizontal forces that occur and the necessary load support during installation'; They also rated the installation of additional doors or wider doors (for example, for disabled access) as difficult. The study also lists the limits of a transformation with regard to fire protection, statics and pollutants. Unlike with demolition, structural characteristics of the building, such as bearing walls made of in-situ steel concrete mentioned above, are likely not only to engender increasing costs, but may risk static or other security-related issues (fire protection, toxic materials, etc.) (Lacaton & Vassal + Fischer, 2015, p. 15).

My informants, the planners of the city administration, are convinced, with reference to the study by Lacaton & Vassal + Fischer, that a revitalization of the Hochhausscheiben is only possible if one works with and not against the structure (field notes, 19.03.2021; 29.03.2021; 20.04.2021; 07.05. 2021; 17.05.2021). → **fig. 56; 57; 58**   It becomes one of the main arguments why not the buildings but the investors and their project are to be blamed for skyrocketing costs of the renovation of building C around the year 2020. During a group discussion at the city administration, one of the planners explained to another planner that it was a 'monolithic building that is extremely inflexible. It is built to last, but that's it. That's why monoliths were only in vogue for 5 years, they have simply too many load-bearing walls, their statics are difficult' (field notes, group discussion, 29.03.2021).

Several dilemmas arise in the case of the revitalization of the Hochhausscheiben. On the one hand, high costs for renovation argue against extensive structural changes to the building. However, while renovation is only profitable if you work with the structure (so you don't cut a lot of concrete, for example), you risk on the other hand the resulting spaces not being attractive. The dilemmas that arise from material constraints have become a political issue with the renovation projects of Scheibe A and Scheibe C in 2021.

After confirmation by a referendum in 2017, the city and its mayor had decided to rent Scheibe A as a seat of administration. In 2018, a representative of an international investor who had purchased the building and started the renovation told a local newspaper that '"The building is perfect. Everything is concrete, there is no mould […] Redevelopment is not difficult because the city has not planned many changes to the building. It would cost too much money"' (*MZ SaaleKurier* 10/11.02.2018). The investor quoted here said something crucial: the city did not want many changes to the building. In addition to the long-term rental commitment by the city of Halle, this may have

been a fact that made the project interesting and relatively safe for an investor (at least before the actual renovation began – the investor actually sold the building shortly afterwards, and a local bank together with a local engineering company completed the renovation). At the opening of the building in the summer of 2021, the lead engineer said that renovations were always more challenging and that it was especially the loggias that were challenging to handle (Eseppelt, 2021b). What the city wanted to prove with the renovation of Scheibe A is that it was possible to make something out of the Hochhausscheiben and to do so within a 'reasonable frame', economically speaking. From the city's point of view, they have achieved this (Halle (Saale) Händelstadt, 2021, p. 69). Critical voices say that this was only possible because only the most necessary changes were made to the building, and they question its attractiveness (e.g. discussions in the online forum, Eseppelt, 2021). A local politician called it a 'minimum variant' and emphasized that the renovation had to be completed as the administration's moving into Scheibe A had been decided in a citizen referendum and going back was therefore not an option (interview, 09.04.2021).[55]

As mentioned at the beginning, the investor in Scheibe C did not have the same aspirations. They claim to be realizing an innovative project, a revitalization of an existing built structure that has never been undertaken before and that might be able to attract new tenants for Neustadt – students, according to the initial plans. As quoted above, their intention is to transform the building, not just paint it (interview, 18.05.2020). As also said before, they are, however, struggling and the project may fail, due to 'exploding' costs. According to the investor, costs are exploding due to the unpredictability of the building that 'surprises' (Yaneva, 2008) as it not reacting to the plans as expected. One of the reasons they gave me for this was that the real building differed from the original planning. During a tour through the building, they showed me, for example, that the basic structure is not quite straight (field notes, 16.05.2019).

In 2021, when the renovation of Scheibe C becomes a 'politikum' (political issue), as my informants told me (field notes, 02.03.2021; interview, 28.05.2021), the statics of the buildings become politicized technology. As said at the beginning of this section, the private investor renovating building C is asking for more public funding to complete the project.

As the revitalization project on building C depends to a large part on public funding, elected representatives in Halle's city council as well as employees from different departments within the administration have to make up their minds whether it is the building itself or the investors and their project that are to 'blame' (Beauregard, 2015). The minutes from a council meeting from 17 February 2021 record the political debate over the material resistance to renovation: The alderman of the city administration explained to the deputies the existing differences between theory and the actual technical implementation on the building that was causing rising costs of the revitalization of Scheibe C. In response, a deputy wanted to know whether a reinforcement of the concrete structures was then also necessary for the revitalization of Scheibe A – trying to find out whether it is the investors or the building to be held responsible. According to the alderman, the statics of building A is okay after the revitalization and for its intended use as an office tower. The problem with Scheibe C, according to them, was that the project involved making 'massive interventions', 'by taking out ceilings, by adding additional loads, and by with these boxes that are to be pushed in, and that means that the entire statics of Scheibe C will have to be completely redone, resulting in these enormous additional costs' (Halle (Saale) Händelstadt, 2021, pp. 64–65). → **fig. 59**   What becomes clear here is that political issues such as support for a renovation project are also based on material arguments revolving around the (in)flexibility of the buildings' structure. The political question surrounding the state funding of a renovation project forces the representatives of the city parliament, as well as the employees of the city administration, to deal with the building in its materiality and with the (im)possibilities it offers. Representatives of another party saw the project currently underway as the only chance that the building would be renovated, and they accepted the investor's statement that the skyrocketing costs were linked to the material imponderability of the building. To them, the most important objective was to put an end to standby and get rid of what they consider an 'eyesore' – that is, the ruinous appearance of the building. With a renovation, they were hoping for an increase in attractiveness not only of the building, but of the district of Neustadt as a whole. As one of the party's representatives said, the

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55   I will come back to political pressure and the referendum in **chapter 8**.

alternative to this project that has the potential to become attractive and a flagship project would be the minimal variant as with Scheibe A, with moderate satisfaction and acceptance (interview, 09.04.2021).[56]

The material presented here has shown the discussed possibilities and impossibilities of future renovation. Similar to those concerning demolition, these are embedded in urban change and political will, and the costs calculated and variants shown are each embedded in specific configurations. The materiality of buildings plays an important role in these debates, because it is certain material characteristics – from load-bearing walls and long corridors, to the size of the building and the site – that influence feasibility, cost and profitability, and attractiveness. Unlike demolition – where there is only demolition or no demolition (with the exception of partial demolition, which has actually also been discussed) – the controversies surrounding renovation are more complicated. Different variants, depending on financing and intended use, are debated in relation to the materiality of the buildings. The more concrete you cut, the more attractive the project could become, but the more expensive the costs will be. Material resistance that needs to be understood relationally made renovation seem impossible, in the sense of unthinkable, for many years. In fact, renovation is not actually materially impossible. This has also been shown by the completed renovation of Scheibe A. But as I was also able to show, here too the materiality of the building resists, because in the case of Scheibe A only minimal changes were made to the structure in order to prevent the project from failing. The investor wanted to take a different path for Scheibe C but, as they themselves point out, was surprised by the materiality of the building and its resistance.

The numerous examples within the section have shown how the materiality of the buildings on standby resists both demolition and renovation and thus contributes to the prolongation of an in-between. In contrast to the case of the American Folk Art Museum (Beauregard, 2015), the Red Road in Glasgow (Jacobs et al., 2007) or again the 'Palast der Republik' in Berlin (Bartmanski & Fuller, 2018) (and this list could be continued with many more examples), the 'incompatibility' (Beauregard, 2015, p. 538) of the buildings' present with the transformations designed for them, did not, however, lead to the buildings' demolition. In a mode of standby, possible futures – demolition included – are calculated, negotiated and discussed but not realized, and the buildings' materiality itself plays a role here. Standby is, as I argue, remade in such moments and gets stabilized as certain material aspects, such as the price an investor pays for the plot, but also processes of decay, might increase these impossibilities. As Beauregard equally notes, the buildings 'materiality limits how they can be used, adapted and even demolished; changing them poses technical challenges and imposes financial costs' (Beauregard, 2015, p. 546). It is certain material properties that, in conjunction with regulations, with market mechanisms, investor and planning logics, are able to prevent possible futures from demolition, but also renovation. The possible futures were negotiated against the background of achievable prices or against the background of urban development and development possibilities, and always also in relation to the (in)flexibility of the buildings' materiality and structure. The obduracy of buildings contributed to the stabilization of standby. As Ringel notes for 'scrap houses' in the German city of Bremerhaven, these

> are not just expressions of this standstill; they also help to produce and maintain it. By doing so, they are not simply to be seen as (passive) material obstacles, preventing a change for the better. Rather, I see their stubborn persistence in the present as a productive force in the current peculiar temporal pause, in which the gentrified future is continuously deferred. (Ringel, 2020, p. 569)

In the case of the Hochhausscheiben, the buildings' materiality equally acts as a 'productive force' of standby. Instead of contributing to a standstill and deferring gentrification, however, the buildings on standby contribute to the recurrent (re-)making of possible futures for them. Similar to the scrap houses, the impossibilities of the site contribute to the buildings' persistence in an in-between and also, as I will further explain below, to the endurance of relations between people and things and to an open future.
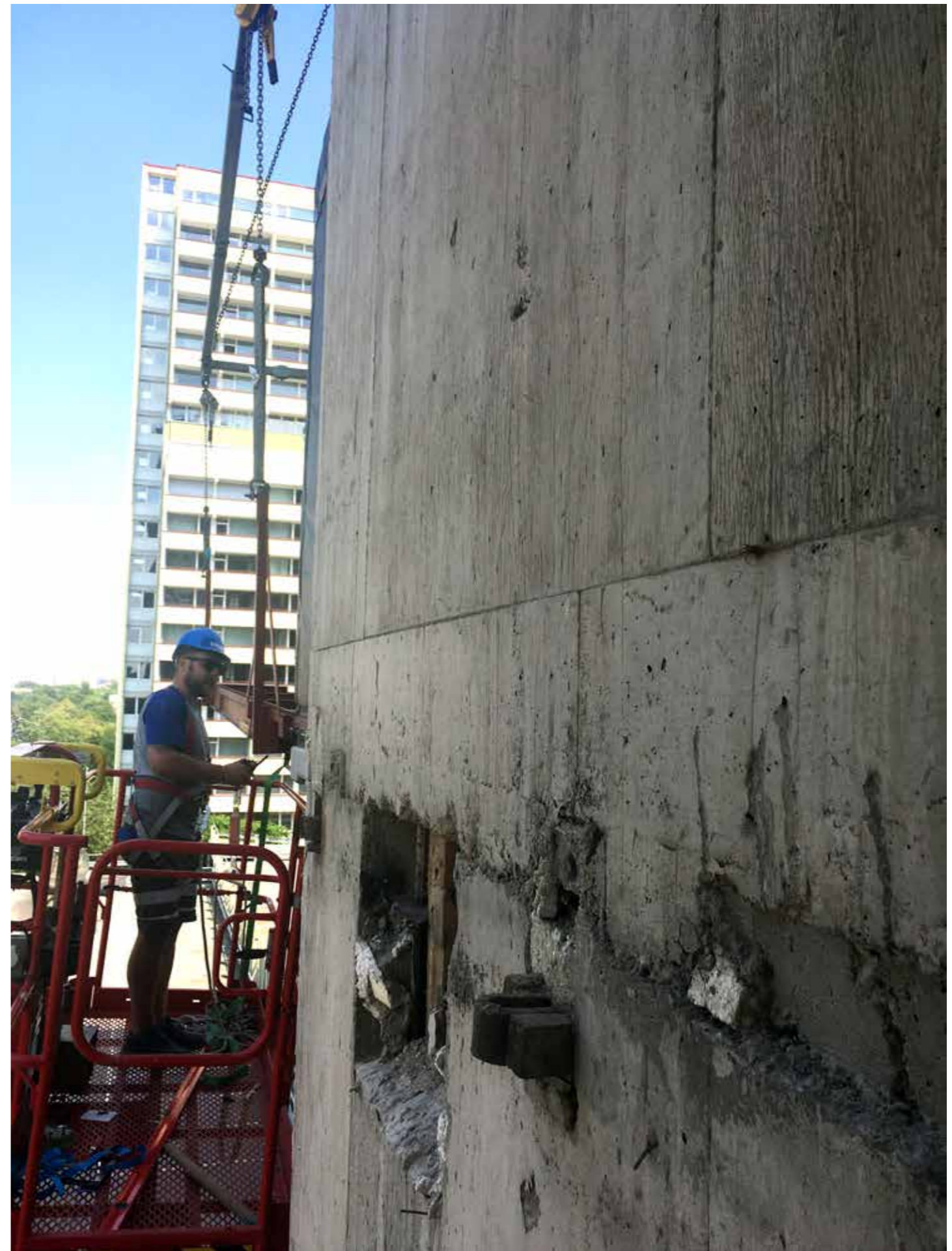
Fig. 59

Fig. 59
Workers pushing the module
into Scheibe C.
The author, 26.06.2019.

4.3   Decay

Having demonstrated in the first section the view of the planners that they will have to take care of the buildings because they are there and will stay there, and then how the buildings resist certain actions and futures, I will now show how the municipality engages with the buildings in moments of material rupture and in the face of increasing decay. Materiality on standby is, as we will see, not only stable but also fragile. While its stability ensures the potential 'on' in a mode of standby, its fragility risks turning the buildings 'off'. In the latter case, they transform into ruins if they are neglected, or they are maintained as museumized versions of themselves (Dawdy, 2010, p. 772). Buildings in a standby mode, however, continue to exist neither through a narrative nor through use, and so the in-between is threatened at all times by a potential 'off'. Standby is not only a mode between possible 'ons' and 'offs', but equally an in-/active mode (Kemmer et al., 2021). While the buildings have increasingly fallen into disrepair, possible futures for the Hochhausscheiben have been repeatedly sought but without materializing, and the city has been forced to intervene.

On 31 July 2015, the local newspaper reported: 'Window crashes from Scheibe. Extreme wind in the past week makes the façade of the high-rise building crumble. Woman injures her head':

> Falling shards of glass yesterday morning injured a passerby in front
> of Scheibe C in Neustadt on the head. [...]. Residents reported that
> it had been raining shards there for several days. [...]. Emergency
> workers storm-proofed window panes inside the building. Balconies
> had been swept and the façade secured. Now it must be decided how to
> continue to deal with the building [...]. This is the responsibility of the
> new owner [...]. The vacant Scheibe could either be permanently blocked
> by construction fences [...]. Alternatively, a complete structural
> security by nets on the façade is being discussed. [...]. With the sale
> of the Scheibe to a private investor, the state has relieved itself of its
> security obligations. So far, about 45,000 euros have been invested in
> the maintenance of the building.
> *MZ, 31.07.2015*

What is described in the newspaper article is a moment of material rupture or breakdown – breaking shards of glass have injured a person walking by as a storm hit. The newspaper article shows that Scheibe C has become a public safety hazard. Parts of the façade and windows having already fallen in the past, as residents reported, a woman has now been injured and the local fire department had to be called to provide security in this emergency. As the article reveals, different options to secure the building are now being discussed. Responsibility for actually taking these measures rests with the owner.

It is in moments of rupture such as the one described above, and with increasing decay, the buildings are imposing themselves (Macmillen & Pinch, 2018, p. 290), enforcing action such as security measures, repair and (even though at a minimum level) maintenance. This confirms to some extent what is repeatedly emphasized in repair and maintenance literature – namely, that technology and infrastructures are only no longer 'taken for granted' and ignored in the event of a breakdown, (Guy et al., 1997, p. 196). It is in these moments, one may suggest, that they require an engagement with them. Jackson, comparing caring for the human body with caring for things, notes:

> the care of things may involve a staying with in time and place, a subjecting and
> reorienting of one's own time to other temporal flows and processes, including
> the temporalities of breakdown and decay (long and slow, sudden and protracted)
> that must be accommodated and adjusted to in the ongoing doing of repair work.
> (Jackson, 2017, p. 183)

The Hochhausscheiben are abandoned buildings and they are falling apart, even if not all parts of the buildings become dangerous or deteriorate to the same extent and at the same time (Appel et al., 2018; Brand, 1995). While parts of the façade, windows and balconies are made of asbestos and are increasingly deteriorating and at risk of falling, the structure of the buildings themselves is remarkably stable. The different material temporalities generate not only rhythms and different material threats, but also different forms of engagement, varying in intensity and in the actors involved (Edensor, 2011, p. 243). Conceptualizing infrastructure, Star and Ruhleder suggest not asking *what* but *when* an infrastructure was, as they see infrastructure emerging from the relationship of work, practice and technology (Star & Ruhleder, 1996). An object, understood as infrastructure in this sense, '*becomes* infrastructure for someone' within processes of making and maintaining relationships (Carse & Kneas, 2019, p. 13; emphasis in original). It turns out that standby as an operational mode includes a whole range of actors, including owners, but also residents, emergency services and municipal authorities – although not to the same extent. As I will argue, standby as an ordering mode enforces different degrees of engagement, and I will therefore investigate these different forms, widening my focus from the municipal planners as the city's material engagement is only to be understood in relation to the (non-) engagement of others.

The article above suggests that maintenance has become a financial burden for the former owner, the state of Saxony-Anhalt. Indeed, the required costs for building security were rising for the state over the years. In 2010, a member of the DIE LINKE party in the Saxony-Anhalt state parliament, who had their electoral office in Halle, asked a question about the running costs of maintaining Scheibe C. According to the state government's answer, an average of 13,909 euros per year was paid for the building's security. In addition, there are costs for traffic safety, rainwater and street cleaning. Since 2004, according to the state government, costs for building security and traffic safety have totalled 92,352.56 euros. Income from renting an antenna site to a mobile phone company, on the other hand, amounted to 3.94 euros per year, but an end to the lease was set for the spring (Saxony-Anhalt State Parliament, 15.09.2010).[57]

According to the Ministry of Finance of Saxony-Anhalt, the annual costs had until 2015 increased and reached 45,000 euros for security measures and property tax per year and contributed to the state's plan to sell the building (Saxony-Anhalt State Parliament, 11.05.2015). The state of Saxony-Anhalt is the only owner of a high rise that maintained the building at least minimally. Apart from this, a 2014 compilation by the city planning department of the city of Halle shows that only the owner of building E had done a safety report throughout the years and had also implemented some safety measures. The owners of Scheibe A and B, however, had disappeared – abroad and into liquidation. In preparation for a meeting with the mayor of Halle, employees from the Halle city administration compiled current information on the condition of the Hochhausscheiben in January 2014. Here is what they recorded for Scheibe A:

> Scheibe A: unrenovated and completely empty. The owner, Alster
> Office Ltd, London, has been dissolved. The municipality currently has
> no contact person who can speak on behalf of the owners.
> The building was still fenced in by order of [Alster Office Ltd]; due
> to wind and vandalism the fence often fell down and was thankfully
> put up again by the Eigenbetrieb für Arbeitsförderung.[58] Problematic
> at the building are the parapet plates, whose fastenings are defective,

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57   From 2005, national funding for safeguarding measures was included in the 'Urban Restructuring East' ('Stadtumbau Ost') programme in order to prevent the demolition and support the preservation of historically valuable residential buildings in inner cities. As it is written in a report on the programme from 2006, '[B]uildings at risk can now be secured for the time being. The final decision on their long-term future can thus be made at a later date' (Liebmann et al., 2006, p. 71). As far as I know, however, the securing of the towers was not financed through this.

58   A city-owned institution to promote employment (Stadt Halle (Saale), *Halle (Saale) – Händelstadt: EB Arbeitsförderung*, n.d.); see further down in the main text.

whereby plates fall down. Currently, security measures are being carried out as part of a replacement project by the company GHS Halle GmbH & Co. KG Halle (Saale). The estimated costs amount to €85K. These costs will be borne by the city for the time being. The Building Department is currently examining the extent to which the costs incurred can be passed on due to the difficult ownership situation.
city administration, 21.01.2014   → **fig. 60; 61**

According to the report to the mayor, Scheibe B was also completely vacant and unrenovated, as were Scheibe C and E (except for a snack store on the ground floor). The owner of Scheibe B was in liquidation, and after a fire in 2009 the building was emergency secured for about €22,000 by the Department of Construction at the expense of the city. The employees furthermore assumed that a safety measures would have to be undertaken in 2014, at a similar cost as for building A. Scheibe E was, according to the report, safety-checked by the owners in 2013 and loose parts of the structure were secured. At the time of 2014, the owner was seeking to sell the building (city administration, 21.01.2014).

From a real estate perspective, vacant property and interstices are either an opportunity for profit accumulation or they are not (Beveridge et al., 2022, p. 289). Obviously, the Hochhausscheiben did not hold much promise for profit accumulation, because in that case – as one might assume – the owners would have protected the buildings at least minimally to preserve their potentiality.[59] However, they obviously neglected the buildings, and so it is the city of Halle that will secure the buildings while it is neighbours who follow them closely.

Standing By

It becomes clear from the report that, while the increasing decay of the buildings posed an increasing threat to security, it was not the owners of the buildings – although theoretically obliged to by German law – that were securing the buildings, but the city. In 2014, the following article appeared in the newspaper: 'High-rise building becomes an acute danger. Administration must secure "Scheibe A" at its own expense', a local newspaper headlined in 2014. The article goes on to say:

> Neustadt's biggest problem is 18 storeys high. Wobbly balcony cladding, smashed windows, pigeon droppings, dilapidation: four of the five enormous Hochhausscheiben in the centre of Neustadt have been empty for 20 years. Because parts of the balcony cladding are threatening to fall off, the city has to secure the façade of the so-called 'Scheibe A'. According to the building regulations office, this could cost a five-figure sum. Although none of the five high-rise buildings, spelt out from A to E, belongs to the municipality, 'Scheibe A' in particular is increasingly becoming a financial burden for the municipality. Because if there is danger for passers-by, the city has no choice and must secure buildings if their owners remain inactive. The chance for the city to recover the costs of this protection is extremely small. [...]. In addition to its own security costs, the municipality thus also continues to miss out on property tax.
> *MZ*, n.d. [2014]

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59   I will further develop the role of the owners and the relations between actors in the third part of this work, where I will explain how standby is to be understood 'as a mode of organization' (Latham & McCormack, 2004, p. 707). Obviously, the owners' neglect contributes to standby, because if we understand standby as an in-between between 'on' and 'off', the owners make a significant contribution to the buildings not switching to 'on'. At this point, however, I will focus on different forms of engagement in relation to processes of decay and related forms of engagement.

Fig. 60
Fig. 61

Fig. 60
Scheibe A with dismantled balcony parapets. Hühne, 20.04.2016.

Fig. 61
Entrances to the centre along the Hochhausscheiben. ARGE Graul and Partners, n.d. [ca. 2000].

That it is the city that is taking care is primarily due to the fact that the owners did not comply with their obligations, even after many requests by the City of Halle, and they also ignored the invoices issued by the city. In addition to this, however, the city also had a double obligation here, because it is the owner of the public land on which the parts of the buildings fell (as said before, the plots are extremely small) and it is generally obliged to protect the public. The land area and boundaries are thus a material concern that can play a significant role in the organization of standby.

In an email to her colleagues from 2004, a city planner asked to include the topic of the structural condition of Scheibe C and security measures in the agenda of the next Jour Fix of the administration – a meeting serving the coordination of tasks among different departments and units within the city administration, established here in the context of the so-called URBAN 21 urban re-development programme. In the explanation, they pointed out to their colleagues that the building's condition had 'drastically deteriorated' and informed them that a fence had been erected around the building by some city department, but it reached far into the urban city space and made it impossible for pedestrians to pass. This measure was intended to protect passers-by from falling parts of the façade. But this could not be the solution, they wrote, because the city was planning to develop the public spaces surrounding the buildings. As the planner wrote, the goal was therefore 'to quickly obtain structural protection from the owner, the state of Saxony-Anhalt. The topic was also raised at the last meeting of the Halle-Neustadt Association, and those present were understandably unenthusiastic' (email, 01.04.2004)   → **fig. 62; 63**

The simplest, cheapest and therefore preferable action in reaction to material ruptures and decay is erecting fences around the buildings. This was realized in 2004 and, as the report from 2014 (see quote above) mentioned, on many other instances throughout the years as well, sometimes by the owners of the buildings but mainly by the city administration. Erecting fences around the deteriorating buildings has brought, however, many new problems with it: having blocked passages and becoming material obstacles to renovations in the surrounding area in 2004, the report quoted above mentions as well that the fences often fell down due to vandalism and wind and had been put up again by the 'Eigenbetrieb für Arbeitsförderung'. This municipal employment promotion programme pursues, as it says on the website, the social integration of the unemployed benefiting from financial aid by the state through small job opportunities (Stadt Halle (Saale), *Halle (Saale) – Händelstadt: EB Arbeitsförderung, n.d.*). From my perspective, this image – unemployed citizens, presumably from Halle-Neustadt (the unemployment rate in Halle-Neustadt is, depending on the individual parts of the Neustadt, between 13.5 and 17.4) (Stadt Halle (Saale), 2015, p. 16), put up the fences after every storm around private-owned buildings but on municipal land, shows ambivalences of the materiality of relational gaps when it comes to buildings on standby. What I want to highlight is that incidents like the one described in the newspaper article concerning the falling window panes do not affect and disrupt equally, and the tasks of standing by buildings on standby are not equally distributed. Rather, it becomes clear that standby acts with distance and proximity (see for a similar observation Macmillen & Pinch, 2018, p. 301). While most of the owners are entirely absent, but contributing to standby through neglect and preventing a realization of a future in the form of a revitalization, the municipality becomes involved in the event of breakdown or when the danger becomes acute. The city administration, as owner of the public space surrounding the high rises and in relation to their commitment to public safety needs to be prepared 'to (possibly) re-stabilise and re-organise' (Wiedemann, 2021, p. 32) order.

Wiedemann, studying modes of 'being on standby' and maintenance practices related to living with diabetes and automatic insulin delivery systems, finds how 'Patients constantly need to be in a state of readiness in order to repair, replace, recharge or reconnect the devices that help attend to the disease' (Wiedemann, 2021, p. 33). I see the municipality taking a similar position in regard to buildings on standby here. In the event of an incident like falling façade parts, it has to be ready to coordinate different departments, put up fences and restore order and avert danger. Standing by the buildings on standby means, in this case, being prepared and in a '*state of readiness*', but 'without being immediately engaged' (Wiedemann, 2021, p. 44; emphasis in original). The 'sphere of operation' of readiness that I understand as a state of preparedness is with Anderson 'a series of events after a precipitating event. Unlike precaution or preemption, preparedness does not aim to stop a future event happening. Rather, intervention aims to stop the *effects* of an event disrupting' (Anderson, 2010, p. 791; emphasis in original). Standby demands from the city administration a certain degree of readiness (Wiedemann, 2021)

Fig. 62
Fig. 63

Fig. 62; 63
The Passage before and after the renovation.
Schmuhl, n.d [late 1990s; 2005].

as organizing the securing of the building and intervening in the event of breakdown requires coordination. While readiness includes a certain engagement in the form of staying with, it does not require proximity all the time. This is to be distinguished from a state of '*vigilance and alertness*' (Wiedemann, 2021, p. 44; emphasis in original) through which citizens of Halle get involved, as I will show now.

The erection of fences is a measure that goes hand in hand with an acute breakdown. However, due to the various new problems it brings with it, this measure is not a sustainable solution. It is a measure that catches falling parts and prevents damage to the public, but it doesn't stabilize the buildings. In another article, citizens of Neustadt are informed that the work that will be done on building A in the coming period is not renovation work, but securing by the city. This will take about three months and involve closures of pedestrian passages (*MZ Saalekurier*, 18/19.01.2014). This information is in my reading intended to prevent speculation about what the construction measures might mean. It was intended to prevent citizens getting their hopes up that construction work might be linked to a renovation of the building.

There are, in fact, citizens who follow the Hochhausscheiben and also the city's activities closely. They are physically closest to the buildings and they are following the buildings vigilantly. Macmillen and Pinch equally observe how it is citizens who keep an eye on school buildings in a state of ruin in Detroit. The authors, similarly to my own distinction between buildings on standby and ruins, see the practices of keeping an eye on the buildings and staying with them as contrasting with 'unsurveilled ruins'. They note:

> In marked contrast to Edensor's unsurveilled ruins, nearly all the residents that
> the planners spoke with throughout the day stated that they 'keep an eye' on the
> buildings (see Jacobs 1961). They were concerned both for their own safety and
> the welfare of the buildings – anxious to protect the integrity [of] the schools from
> scrappers and arsonists, prevent 'young kids' from trespassing, and ensuring the
> schools could not be used for sexual assaults.
> (Macmillen & Pinch, 2018, p. 301)

In Halle, the monitoring of standby's material integrity relies to a large extent on the citizens, because it is mostly they who report the incidents to the city administration and urge the city to avert danger. The city administration's files contain numerous reports from citizens about fires, pigeon infestations, vandalism or falling balcony and façade parts. As neighbours, it is the citizens of Halle-Neustadt who are on the alert. In a fax message from 2003, for example, the Halle-Neustadt district office reports that citizens have reported parts of balconies falling down:

> Based on information from citizens, we would like to inform you that
> the balcony balustrades of the high rises A, B, C and E, which are
> usually made of asbestos sheets, are partially dilapidated. According
> to citizens' reports, parts of the balustrade slabs have fallen down
> during heavy storms. In our opinion, the owners should be informed
> so that the appropriate safety measures can be initiated. Due to
> changes in ownership, we do not have the latest status of the current
> responsible persons.
> fax, 03.06.2003

In 2009, for example, a citizen from Halle-Neustadt – according to a letter from the head of a group focusing on city development within the citizens' initiative 'Initiative Pro Halle/Neustadt' – contacted the city administration, sending pictures they took of building B following fires they had observed in the building.

The pictures had been taken of the façade after the fires, and the citizens were raising security concerns. They knew of an assessment commissioned by the city of Halle related to fires but complained that an assessment of the security measures on the façade had not been undertaken. As this letter shows, citizens were not only in a mode of alertness towards the buildings, but were also closely following the (re-)actions of the city of Halle. Unlike the city, standing by buildings on standby in the case of the neighbours includes being close to them physically and emotionally.

In an online forum of a citizens' association fighting for the preservation of the Hochhausscheiben, a user referred to Scheibe C as a 'patient' and made the following 'diagnosis: somnolence (disturbance of vigilance (wakefulness); underlying condition: lack of use, vacancy, dilapidation, neglect' (Bürgerverein Stadtgestaltung Halle, 13.01.2015). Lapiṇa has also described urban spaces on standby (in her case, half-built construction sites in Copenhagen) as 'passive, dormant, hibernating'. However, she describes them as 'at the same time, under tension, available, ready to be activated: a site of "active inactivity" both outside and within spatiotemporal logics of gentrification' (Lapiṇa, 2021, p. 231). She proposed the term 'dormant' to underline that these spaces are 'not just on hold for something to happen', but characterized by 'active inactivity' (Lapiṇa, 2021, p. 244).

In the case of the Hochhausscheiben, the citizens involved attest to a lack of vigilance on the part of the buildings, but it is they who are involved in monitoring material integrity, vigilantly. The vigilance of the citizens is to be distinguished from the readiness of the city administration that is prepared to intervene in the event of a rupture and has to pay for security measures. Both forms of standing by are needed in order to keep the buildings on standby. In the case of the Scheiben, they are adopted by different actors. While it is mainly citizens who report incidents and are physically and emotionally present, the recipient of these reports is the city (Wiedemann, 2021, p. 44). Both forms are part of a monitoring system emerging with the increasing material vulnerability of the Hochhausscheiben on standby.

The process of decay is made of recurring moments of rupture in the form of material breakdown that will demand the municipality to be ready, as in moments of breakdown, several departments of the city administration will have to cooperate. The decay of the buildings imposes reaction and organization within the city administration that will be responsible for trying to identify the responsible owners and for taking immediate measures as the buildings risk becoming a threat to the life of pedestrians. The buildings on standby (and of course one must always bear in mind that, should decay lead to the buildings falling into disrepair, there will no longer be a standby – because standby thrives on the potentiality of reactivation) impose themselves and force humans to *stay with* them (Jackson, 2017). The material fragility of standby, tangible through material ruptures and decay, enforces certain actions and coordination between actors. In this way, neighbours and the city form a monitoring system, with one side following closely and ringing the alarm bell in the event of a breakdown and the other receiving these notifications and reacting.

Over the years, the increasingly decaying buildings risk becoming an obstacle to their own future and also to the development of the district (Ringel, 2020). A planner from Halle explained:

> The pitiful condition of the Scheiben is the negative image for the
> whole of Neustadt, we know that; and as long as the Scheiben stand
> there in this miserable condition, the image of Neustadt is ruined
> – because: they have such a force, they have such a mass, no matter
> where you are in Neustadt, at some point you always see the Scheiben
> and at some point every normal person asks the question: 'hey, what's
> going on here?' Nets on them, balustrades crashing down, and no
> matter how much funding of 6 million euros we can put into the
> Broadway [the pedestrian passage on the feet of the high rises], as
> long as that wretched stuff is standing next to it, it is not a completely
> wasted effort, but it does not take hold; we won't be able to get to grips
> with this absolute urban deplorable state through urban greenery.
> interview, 02.10.2018

Decay was perceived by planners as 'both a herald of death and evidence that death, functionally speaking, has already occurred' (Cairns & Jacobs, 2014, p. 70) and a material state that would make it impossible to resurrect the buildings through private investment in the future. In the case of most waiting lands and sites, city councils and owners are believed to be waiting for the opportunity of gentrification (Beveridge et al., 2022; Lapiṇa, 2021; Ringel, 2020; Tonnelat, 2008). However, the buildings' materiality and, most notably, their decay may contribute to this future's failure. Following Ringel, the buildings are 'not simply to be seen as (passive) material obstacles, preventing a change

for the better.' Rather, we might see 'their stubborn persistence in the present as a productive force in the current peculiar temporal pause, in which the […] future is continuously deferred' (Ringel, 2020, p. 569). For the city of Halle, increasing decay represents a risk, because if a future is closed by the material condition of the buildings, its own obligation to take responsibility increases as it is obliged to secure public order and safety. While the city had no choice but to secure the surrounding public land, it would not have been able or willing to budget for maintenance beyond securing it in an emergency. Therefore, from the perspective of one of the planners, 'The calls for the municipality are completely inappropriate.' They explained to me in the interview that the municipality is not able to maintain schools and playgrounds, repair roads, and so on. They added:

> How then am I supposed to make anyone understand that we are
> entering into the safeguarding of these Scheiben with an uncertain
> future? If I were a politician, I don't know why I would raise my
> hand for getting engaged here [...] Either I see it as a task for society as
> a whole, keyword subsidies, or I enable the municipalities to
> be equipped in such a way that they do it on their own; this is not
> possible from their own income.
> interview, 02.10.2018

Although the city administration intervened in the event of a breakdown, securing windows, for example, would have been unthinkable, as they told me (interview, 02.10.2018).

In fact, the city's main concern is to attract private investment as they were lacking agency and facing an uncertain future. With increasing decay, however, private investment became increasingly unlikely as the buildings' potentiality risked dwindling. Realizing the fragility of the buildings' future, members of one of the citizens' initiatives blamed the city administration in 2015 for remaining inactive when it came to the stabilization of the buildings' future: '"The pedagogic conversation" alone (as the past has shown) won't lead anywhere; rather, the years-long tolerance might be a main reason for the dilapidation of the buildings' (letter 30.03.2015). (I will address political matters in the third part of this work.) Facing political pressure but also having to bear increasing security costs led to the city realizing around the year 2015 that securing the future 'can't be done without much money, but we also know that if we don't do anything now, it won't get better' (interview, 25.10.2018). I see here a link between the material decay of the buildings and an intensification of the city's commitment. As it turns out, the city is primarily concerned with maintaining the potentiality of standby, from which they hope to attract private investment that could secure the future of the buildings. The fact that this potentiality is also maintained materially has already become clear here, and I will explore this further in the following section.

Maintaining Potentiality

As Dawdy points out, modern ruins are 'continually re-created out of a conjunction of imagination and materiality' (Dawdy, 2010, p. 772). The same is true for standby, which can be understood as a configuration stabilizing the potentiality of the future. The hope for future development ties the city administration to the buildings in the form of a promise that is not, however, binding, but rather an 'organising agencement that is only somewhat monitored. This almost uncontrollable presence in absence (or virtuality) of the promise attunes the time-space in a perhaps reliably loose way – and demands endurance to keep it staying' (Färber, 2019, p. 267). In order to keep the future open, the city administration got involved in the maintenance (of the potentiality) of standby.

Maintaining the potentiality of standby in the case of Halle's city administration is to be understood as a material practice between 'curated decay' and conservation. Whereas conservation aims at preventing processes of 'mouldering and disintegration' and keeping the object 'in a state of protected stasis' (DeSilvey, 2006, p. 326), 'curated decay' suggests '[l]etting "nature take its course"' (DeSilvey, 2017, p. 179) and is thought of as a 'postpreservation model of heritage' that 'would open up many more, and many of them in an active rather than a passive mode of engagement – creation, cultivation, improvisation, renewal' (DeSilvey, 2017, p. 187).[60]

Part of the maintenance of standby is the rejection of what is considered inappropriate uses to preserve their 'availability' for future development (Tonnelat, 2008, p. 303). In the case of the Hochhausscheiben, this includes not only vandalism but also non-human use.   → **fig. 64; 65**

On 02.06.2013, a local newspaper ran the headline: 'Now nature is intervening: Jackdaws occupy Scheibe C.' It said, ironically, that 'Finally – a utilization concept for the Halle-Neustadt high-rise building Scheibe C has arrived!' (*SonntagsNachrichten*, 02.06.2013). Whereas the jackdaws' presence appeared to be not very disturbing, the settlement of pigeons was more so. A month later, to prevent pigeons from taking over building C, employees of city planning and of the department of veterinary services as well as of the state office for building and property management exchanged the eggs of pigeons for plaster eggs (letter to the mayor, 25.07.2013). In 2013, several newspaper articles had problematized non-human uses of the Hochhausscheiben and the city administration had been obliged to act. One of the articles states:

> Halle's city administration now wants to do something about the
> pigeon droppings in the Neustädter Passagen – at least as far as it
> is within its power. [...] 'The empty high-rise buildings provide an
> optimal habitat for pigeons. Only one of the unused high-rise buildings
> has had nets installed to prevent pigeons from flying into it' [...].
> The future of the prefabricated building ensemble has been unclear
> for years. 'Only with the renovation or demolition of the buildings
> will there be an end to the pigeon droppings problem,' said x
> [the spokesman of the city].
> *MZ Saalekurier*, 25.04.2013

In fact, the city initially spoke out against safeguards when the state left Scheibe A and C. In the late 1990s, when the state announced the closure of the student dorms in Scheibe A and C and handed the buildings over in a 'secured condition' (letter, University of Halle-Wittenberg, 09.09.1998), the city administration initially rejected measures including 2.5-centimetre-thick wooden plates in front of windows and metal plates in front of the doors. On the letter from the university, there is a pencilled note from the deputy mayor: 'I don't want to be responsible for not finding a buyer' (letter, 04.12.1998). Materializations of securing the buildings were seen by city planners as signals of an 'end of functioning', and the city feared that these signs would deter investors. Over the years, however, the city realized that neither demolition nor renovation was likely, at least in the near future. This is how the city changed (involuntarily) from refusing to secure the buildings to supporting their securing as a means of stabilizing the potentiality of standby. At this stage, around the year 2010, the Hochhausscheiben seem not only to challenge, but they might even become a risk, both in an actual material sense and in the sense of a planning failure the planners want to prevent and in a political sense as people might blame the state for not caring (enough). As said, the only conveyable way to preserve the buildings was through private investment. And in order for this potentiality not to get lost, it must be materially secured, and this comes with relatively high costs and work load. I may thus suggest with Wiedemann that standby is '*not energetically neutral*' (Wiedemann, 2021, p. 44; emphasis in original). The high costs of securing became an increasingly pressing problem, and so a material stabilization of standby in the sense of preserving the potential by protecting the materiality of the buildings was considered.

In 2010, the possible future of a temporary conservation of the Hochhausscheiben and, more specifically, of Scheibe C was suggested by a deputy of the political party DIE LINKE. They called for a 'paradigm shift' in the concepts for Hochhausscheiben based on the principle that preservation of the Scheiben was only possible by way of use (concept, 20.03.2010) and in view of the fact that they considered 'all hopes for a redevelopment of the Scheiben in the course of a residential or office use' to be 'illusory' (minutes from a meeting with representatives of the city planning and municipal housing cooperation, 08.07.2010). Their proposal was to convert Scheibe C into a 'solar tower' – that

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60   DeSilvey acknowledges, however, that it was 'perhaps unlikely that a shift toward curated decay will displace the preservation paradigm anytime soon' (DeSilvey, 2017, p. 187).

is, to cover the building with solar cells and thus conserve it (Köck, 20.03.2010). The conservation they suggested would, as the minutes from a meeting with representatives of the city planning and municipal housing cooperation reports, not exclude 'traditional uses' on the lower floors or in the future (minutes from a meeting with representatives of the city planning and municipal housing co-operation, 08.07.2010). Whereas the idea was found innovative by the city, it was, however, rejected for practical and financial reasons (internal letter, city administration, 28.04.2010). → fig. 66

The idea of the possible future 'conservation', however, persisted in various forms over the coming years. In an interview with the local newspaper from 2014, for example, one of the municipal planners from Halle said that considering other possible futures than demolition or privatization was new for the state of Saxony-Anhalt. As part of an international urban design student workshop, a group had developed a concept for the realization of 'vertical farming'. The planner said in the interview: 'With vertical farming, you could possibly secure the structure with much less money, because housing people is no longer in the foreground. […] I would see it as a temporary mothballing ['Einmottung' in German] until another use is possible again' (*MZ Saalekurier*, 16.05.2014).

In 2015, the city followed this idea further and considered stabilizing the in-between condition. It commissioned a study to investigate the possibilities of temporarily covering the buildings. The intention of such a measure was to conserve the current material state of the buildings and to safe securing and maintenance costs.

The intention of this study was to investigate the possibility of arresting decay – a mode 'where buildings are stabilized but not restored' (DeLyser, 1999, p. 614). As described by DeLyser, the policy of 'arrested decay' has been established for the conservation of the ghost town of Bodie, California. In correspondence from 1955 quoted by DeLyser, the idea of what would become the policy of 'arrested decay' is exemplified as follows:

> Stabilization of the existing scene should be followed instead of a development or restoration program …[T]he general appearance [of the town should be] retain[ed] … [Buildings should be] stabilize[d] structurally [in order to] retain all exterior appearance and charm of the *authentic ghost town*,… [the] curved walls, sagging roofs, broken windows, etc. (DeLyser, 1999, p. 602; emphasis in original)

According to the policy of 'arrested decay' for Bodie, 'neither the artifacts nor the dust on top of them can be disturbed' to give the site, as DeLyser notes, based on the explanation of a visitor, a natural appearance, '"natural, like it was left"' (DeLyser, 1999, pp. 615–616).

In contrast to policies of 'arrested decay' that DeLyser analyses for the ghost town of Bodie, California, where arresting decay served the construction of authenticity, arresting decay in the case of the wrapping of the Hochhausscheiben was meant to serve the conservation of the material in order to enable later development. The goal of studying the wrapping of one or several high rises in Halle reads as follows:

> In this way, it would be possible to preserve the buildings for an indefinite period of time, to stop the decay and to preserve the urban identity of this place. […] The remaining lifespan of the monolithic reinforced concrete buildings would allow for sustainable use. […]
> As an alternative to a likewise costly façade protection by removing all balcony floor slabs and balcony parapets made of asbestos that continue to disintegrate, the protection of all desolate wooden window constructions by panel materials or new windows, etc., the technical feasibility of the façade protection is examined. The covering with a windproof and rainproof, non-combustible, membrane construction is being investigated.
> Frießleben Architekten, 2015 → fig. 67

Fig. 64
Fig. 65

Fig. 64
Pigeons are permanent residents of the ensemble.
Grimberg, 25.01.2023.

Fig. 65
Metal and wooden panels have been installed to secure Scheibe B and protect it against intruders.
Grimberg, 25.01.2023.

More than with the construction of authenticity and in the light of creating a 'living-history museum' (DeLyser, 1999, p. 604), the idea was to institutionalize standby and keep the buildings in a state of limbo, awaiting their reawakening (see Lapiņa, 2021, p. 231). The high rises as places in-between are, however, not the 'margins of maneuver' that Tonnelat writes about in the eyes of the city administration for many years, nor interim spaces awaiting gentrification as in the cases of Copenhagen or Bremerhaven (Lapiņa, 2021; Ringel, 2020) (they might become some, however). In the eyes of the planners, 'the stupid thing is that I have a product that is not in demand – too bad!' (interview, 02.10.2018). The buildings on standby are awaiting development, but development that has no clear form or time (Lapiņa, 2021). In between embracing and curating decay and conservation, stabilizing the buildings' materiality by covering it would have meant – in a similar way to conservation technologies – to 'slow or halt physical decay' (DeSilvey, 2017, p. 32), but without attributing it the 'status of museum object' (DeSilvey, 2006, p. 326) or fixed heritage.[61]

However, wrapping was finally rejected and not realized. Thus, conservation of the buildings, in the sense of a material stabilization of standby, became part of the possible futures that have been negotiated, but finally rejected. Instead, the city continued securing standby by intervening in the event of material breakdowns, (un-)making possible futures and hoping for development through private investment.

Maintenance here will serve not predominantly to stop decay, but to maintain the 'potentials of the future' (Ringel, 2020, p. 571). Ringel describes how 'By preventing gentrifications due to their material – if somewhat fragile – robustness these scrap houses depict a kind of agency that allows the district's current inhabitants to stay'. He notes how 'these houses' material and legal limbo creates hope for those living in and around these ruins of pre-gentrification' (Ringel, 2020, p. 574). In contrast to the buildings Ringel studies, the high rises in Halle-Neustadt are not inhabited by people, and their mode of standby thus doesn't allow anyone to stay in them. But the prolongation of the standby mode allows the buildings themselves to remain. With the buildings remaining on standby, the future remains open – giving the citizens organized in a collective to fight for a future to standby the 'promises of standby' (Färber, 2019; Kemmer, 2020; Kemmer & Simone, 2021), that is its persistent potentiality to be preserved.[62] Standby ties people around the buildings to their future. Consequently, maintaining standby means maintaining relationships between people and things and between the present and the future. To contribute to enduring potentiality, the city planners will continue to highlight the buildings' importance and argue for their preservation, as I will show in the following chapter that studies practices of valuation.

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61   Landau and Pohl note that also 'museumified ruins' might be understood through the lense of standby, noting that 'are often carefully restored and preserved to stay in shape, to represent a specific notion of a past, just as museums which exhibit artefacts of the past. One could also argue that they are lifted into a mode of standby (i.e. not fully functioning or 'on', but also not entirely abandoned or 'off')' (Landau & Pohl, 2021, p. 210). I would, however, draw an analytical line here, arguing that museumified ruins are rather 'on'. What characterizes buildings on standby in my view is that they are there, but not demanded. But of course, even with a museumified ruin, material care must be taken to ensure that it does not become a danger.

62   Nevertheless, I would like to mention that there are also many citizens in Halle who do not care what happens to the buildings, but they demand that something happens to them. For them, it is unbearable that the buildings remain in a standby mode and they would rather have seen them demolished. Such voices can be heard especially in online forums (see, for example, Eseppelt, 2021a).

Fig. 66

Fig. 67

Fig. 66
After failing with their plans to save the Hochhausscheiben by converting them into solar towers, a politician from Halle not only left the city council in protest, but also had the words 'trotz alledem!', German for 'despite it all!' affixed to the façade of Scheibe C. Obviously, they weren't willing to give up on finding a way to maintain the buildings' potential. Schmuhl, n.d. [2010].

Fig. 67
Visualization for the study of a possible wrapping for the conservation of the buildings. Frießleben Architekten, 2015.

4.4   Synthesis

As we have seen in this chapter, the engagement with the buildings' future highly depends 'upon materialities, not merely the cultural understandings that emerge out of broader discursive and representational epistemologies' (Edensor, 2007, p. 225). Buildings on standby do more than activate memory and sensation (DeSilvey & Edensor, 2013, pp. 471–472): they challenge those engaging with them (and I again focused here on the city planners from Halle's municipality). As I have argued, drawing on this basic assumption, the buildings on standby are resisting some actions, while generating others. On the one hand, within the last 20 years, small moments of rupture, such as falling parts of balconies and the façade, repeatedly enforced action and also a '*certain degree of vigilance and alertness*' (Wiedemann, 2021, p. 44; emphasis in original). On the other hand, the buildings are equally challenging surrounding networks mostly through material 'obduracy' (Hommels, 2005). The main argument I want to put forward based on the observations in this chapter is that beyond dichotomies of stability and fragility, the buildings on standby are challenging precisely through both material resistance and fragility. As I found, the buildings' increasing decay does not necessarily – and in contrast to ruins – lead to a status of the object as a ruin. Reducing the Hochhausscheiben to processes of ruination, would mean to neglect that the buildings are '*not disconnected*' (Kemmer et al., 2021, p. 6) – it would neglect the processes of engaging with the buildings' possible futures and it would also neglect their material resistance. And while it remains unclear where decay and ruination will lead, I have observed how material dimensions of standby are forcing people to engage with the buildings and their future. As I have shown, standby – through its materiality between stability and fragility – demands specific forms of engagement and organization. As for the city administration, I have identified readiness as a form of material engagement that I have distinguished from the citizens' vigilance. I found that the city administration stays both distant and close to the buildings. The city administration reacts in the event of breakdowns and participates in maintaining standby that I understood as being in line with those citizens fighting for the buildings' preservation and in line with the material requirements and limits to possibility. One basic condition for standby is that there will be or can be an 'on' or at least the possibility for a decision in the future. Buildings are on standby only if they can potentially be reactivated. As it turns out that both demolition and renovation proof impossible, standby becomes an acceptable option – an option that has to be materially ensured.

In this chapter, I have explored the ways in which the buildings physically impose themselves (see Macmillen & Pinch, 2018, pp. 290–291), how possible futures clash with the realities of the Hochhausscheiben and how they require organization around them. In that sense, standby in the form of its objects, the buildings on standby, can be seen as buildings that are available but nevertheless resisting the materialization of possibilities (Beveridge et al., 2022, p. 284). In fact, I am not far from noting that the Hochhausscheiben, like Edensor's industrial ruins, resist modern order (Edensor, 2005b). However, in my view, one should be wary of romanticizing this resistance and pre-judging the people who are working for a future for the Hochhausscheiben. Rather, and in line with Macmillen and Pinch who 'strive to balance a respect for nonhuman artifacts with empathy for the professionals who engage with them' (Macmillen & Pinch, 2018, p. 287), my concern was to describe these efforts and to ask questions starting from there.

5   Problem and Value

Building on the previous chapter, I propose as a starting point of this chapter that the imposing material presence of the Hochhausscheiben also influences how they are (e)valuated (Macmillen & Pinch, 2018, pp. 290–291).

My interest in questions of value and valuation derives predominantly from the fact that they appear to be empirically relevant.[63] I have mentioned questions of valuation at different moments already. For example, I have come across valuations of the past, the evaluation of possible futures and the re-evaluation of the present as it is rendered indeterminate. Whereas I have noted that valuation plays an important role in the making of possible futures in a mode of standby, I would like to look more closely at *how* valuation is done with regard to the buildings' materiality. In fact, I also referred to questions of value in relation to cost calculations for demolition and renovation and to the (im)possibilities of the thinkable and the realizable. It became clear in this context how the calculation of costs for the demolition or renovation of buildings is embedded in configurations that change according to different situations. Now, I will explore both '*evaluation* (the process of assessing)' and '*valuation* (the process of giving worth)' (Beljean and Lamont, in: Kjellberg & Mallard, 2013, p. 20) of the buildings' material form. More specifically, I will be investigating evaluations of emptiness, valuations of significance and the negotiations of worthiness related to the two processes. The analytical distinction between 'evaluation involving a second level of judgment, i.e., comparison of this value with an objective to be achieved or the estimated value of something else (for example, a benchmark)' and the 'process of worth attribution' is also suggested by Chiapello. The author rightly notes, however, that the two processes are empirically 'often impossible to separate' (Chiapello, 2015, pp. 16–17).

In recent years, a promising interdisciplinary field of study (including sociology, anthropology, science and technology studies, cultural geography, market studies, and philosophy) has emerged: valuation studies (Alexander & Sanchez, 2018a; Berli et al., 2021; Cefaï et al., 2015; Greeson, 2020; Helgesson & Muniesa, 2013, p. 3; Nicolae et al., 2019). In their introduction to the first issue of the journal *Valuation Studies*, Helgesson and Muniesa note that

> Valuations appear to be performed almost everywhere. Countries, restaurants, schoolchildren, damages, pets, waste and indeed academics, appear all to be subject to a wide variety of valuations to assess such things as creditworthiness, performance, aesthetics, or return on investment.
> (Helgesson & Muniesa, 2013, p. 2)

Valuation studies take a look at the 'ways actors assign meaning to what they do, and to their transactions with things and people' and ask how 'people organize their meaning-contexts' and how 'they define, categorize, measure, compare, valuate, and evaluate situations around' (Cefaï et al., 2015, p. 2). As the range of objects of study and disciplines is very large, Cefaï et al. have suggested that it could also be understood as a '*focus of perspective*' (Cefaï et al., 2015, p. 2; emphasis in original). Research within newer studies of valuation[64] investigate, for example, economic value assessment, categorization in public action or again valuations within education systems, but also constructions of gender (for an overview with a focus on valuation studies in France and Germany, see Cefaï et al., 2015).

One of the biggest achievements of recent valuation studies is that they moved beyond value as a noun and thus beyond essentializing conceptions of value (a point Dewey emphasized as well) and

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63   Another impetus to think about questions of valuation came with and after my participation in a conference at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin entitled 'Sites of Value: architecture and valuation' (3–4.12.2020). Some of the reflections in this chapter go back to my presentation 'Relational Modes of Valuation and Building Futures in Halle-Neustadt' (given in German).

64   In fact, many people have been interested in value and valuation long before it emerged as a new transdisciplinary field. Dewey's *Theory of Valuation* (1939) and Schütz' *Equality and the Meaning Structure of th*e Social *World* (1964), for example, appear to be important pioneering works.

towards value as a verb, towards processes and practices of valuation (Kjellberg & Mallard, 2013, p. 15). Valuation studies not only recognize the multiplicity of values, but also examine, for example, how processes of valuation are interrelated or how certain values, such as economic value, are favoured over others in practice (Kjellberg & Mallard, 2013, pp. 18–19; 21–22). As Chiapello notes, the concept of valuation 'draws attention to the fact that value is non intrinsic to the object but produced in the relationship between the object and the person who considers it valuable, and results from practical valuation activities' (Chiapello, 2015, p. 16). The movement towards valuation as a verb aims to better understand the 'dynamic and processual nature of valuation, as opposed to static conceptions considering mainly the implementation of already given sets of values' (Kjellberg & Mallard, 2013, p. 15).

It is furthermore widely acknowledged that value gets performed differently at different sites (Law & Mol, 1995; Mol, 2002). According to Jones and Yarrow, 'Different expert practices, mediated by specific tools and materials, literally create different objects of attention, for instance through drawing, documentation, stone cutting and various other forms of "skilled vision"' (S. Jones & Yarrow, 2013, p. 22). The production of value has, as STS research has shown (particularly interesting is here the work of Michel Callon (e.g. 1998)), a socio-technical dimension to it. Economic value, for example, is found to be 'performed through the mediation of economic models' (Greeson, 2020, p. 171). The observation that evaluations are always situated, mediated and context-dependent and encompass different forms and practices of knowledge production is arguably the essential starting point for an account of valuation processes. Greeson writes: 'It is now accepted within valuation studies that performances of value are highly situated, and that spatial, temporal, and social specificity are not incidental or trivial in the outcomes of valuation processes' (Greeson, 2020, p. 168; Kjellberg & Mallard, 2013, pp. 20–21).

Valuation in that sense can be defined as a process of ordering and it is closely related to classification, as valuation is concerned with 'how people, things and idea(l)s are ordered in relation to one another' (Sjögren, in Kjellberg & Mallard, 2013, p. 17). The difference between the two, as Kjellberg and Mallard point out, is that valuation is mainly concerned with significance, while classification is concerned with representation (Kjellberg & Mallard, 2013, p. 18; Bowker & Star, 1999, might disagree). What the focus on valuation therefore allows is the examination not only of how different objects are produced, but what effects the ordering of these objects entails. Valuation studies recognize that 'valuations are […] often performed by highly complex socio-technical orderings involving several actors and instruments' (Helgesson & Muniesa, 2013, p. 3). Strebel and Jacobs (2014) show, for example, how science contributed to standards in housing design. The facts produced in scientific practices and published in reports, as the authors observe, concentrated on certain 'objects (such as lifts, windows or air currents) being linked to selected other objects, while ignoring others' (Strebel & Jacobs, 2014, p. 453; see also Bowker & Star, 1999). Following from this, one might suggest that what gets seen and how things get linked to each other is part of an expertise that will decide on proportionality and appropriateness (Strathern, 2005).

Particularly interesting for me in this chapter is the valuation of architecture and buildings, as this may determine whether a building is preserved if found 'worth keeping', or demolished if not. A criterion for architecture and buildings that is common in valuations of architectural 'heritage' in particular is 'authenticity'. The criterion was first used in the 'Venice Charter' (International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites, 1964). According to this criterion, value is linked to the original materials of a building or site, and it is proposed to follow the principle of minimal intervention (Schäfer, 2016, p. 364, own translation). As Jones and Yarrow note, the assumption that the value of an object lies in the material object itself is common within conservation theory (S. Jones & Yarrow, 2013, p. 6). In contrast to such a 'material-oriented' understanding of authenticity (Schäfer, 2016, p. 364, own translation), the authors find in their own study that

> authenticity is 'crafted' through different forms of expert practice. Tracing the different forms of expertise that mediate heritage conservation shows that there are different views of the building, but more profoundly there are also different ways of enacting the Cathedral as an object of intervention.
> (S. Jones & Yarrow, 2013, p. 22)

Within the process of production of authenticity, questions of whether or not architectures are 'an expression of a specific urbanity', whether they are 'seen as "fitting" into the image of a city or as being well "integrated" into a certain urban ensemble', and whether they are or not 'worthy of protection' are negotiated (Reckwitz et al., 2020). Along these parameters, architectures are 'evaluated as successful or unsuccessful. These evaluations refer to socially circulating, more or less implicit social criteria of "success" or "failure" that organize the planning and use of buildings' (Reckwitz et al., 2020).

Authenticity is, however, not the only parameter along which the success and failure of buildings and architecture are (e)valuated. From an STS perspective, success means more broadly that an object 'works' or that it 'fits' and it includes that it isn't questioned. Latour (1987) uses the concept of the 'black box' to explain how things become unquestioned. One example Latour gives is nature. It became a black box through its objectification in 'modern' practice. Anyone who questioned this objectification was, as Latour notes, considered dangerous and immoral (Latour, 2008, p. 186). From an STS perspective, technologies or all kinds of objects are successful when they are stabilized by associations in such a way that those associations become invisible. In contrast, these associations come to light in the case of failure (Jacobs et al., 2007, p. 613). For the failure of the large housing complex Red Road, for example, Jacobs et al. find:

> In the 'death' of Red Road we saw the way in which its designation as a housing 'failure' and the announcement to demolish reconfigures its socio-technical network, dropping away old allies and bringing in new ones, producing new translations of its worth and intensifying efforts variously to 'close' or 'open' this leaky black box. (Jacobs et al., 2007, p. 627)

In such a view, success is attributable to networks that hold together rather than an evaluating instance. Nevertheless, it is recognized that it is a range of translations in, e.g. scientific studies, regulations or material forms that make an object successful (Jacobs et al., 2007, p. 613) and that these elements get assembled in specific sites, through the 'work of collection' (Latour, 2013, p. 351) that is a step-by-step process. Furthermore, it is highlighted that such stability is ephemeral and that, consequently, success and failure can easily turn into the opposite. In their study of the Red Road housing estate, Jacobs et al. examine how the high-rise was intended to be stabilized as a 'successful housing solution' (Jacobs et al., 2007, p. 616) but was later translated into 'a fact of failure' (Jacobs et al., 2007, p. 621). One of the game-changing moments, as Jacobs et al. find, was when the buildings' steel construction – once presented as a promising building technology– was questioned (Jacobs et al., 2007, p. 619). Material elements, such as the steel-concrete construction, but also asbestos, can in this way become a 'mediator' (Latour, 2005) for a building being performed as success or failure. As we can see from this, evaluations of a building as a success or failure depend on the associations of multiple (human and non-human) elements that perform it as valuable and therefore worth preserving, or destabilize it and turn it into a failure. In both cases, (non-)value gets translated and produced in reports, plans or policy formulations. These artefacts play an essential role (they, too, act as mediators with Latour) in (e)valuation processes that stabilize objects as an unquestioned black box or, on the contrary, open these black boxes and lead to the objects being questioned or even result in demolition – as in the case of the Red Road complex.

The Hochhausscheiben, as I will show in this chapter, are not performed as 'success' and 'failure', but as 'problem' and 'value'. The performance of the buildings as problematic is mainly supported by evaluations of emptiness, while the performance of the buildings as valuable is based on valuations of their significance. Both performances are, however, themselves contested and unstable. I assume that the planning office can be understood as a site of valuation where emptiness and significance are mediated and translated with the help of specific instruments and in relation to other places and buildings, and I will trace (e)valuations made in planning within this chapter. I will show how evaluations of the buildings' emptiness and their significance have stabilizing and destabilizing effects for the buildings, and argue that both constitute standby as both play a central role in why the buildings have neither been renovated nor demolished. What I will show in this chapter is the instability of standby, and that problem and value (in contrast to success and failure) do not oppose each other. The specificity of the in-between with regard to valuation is therefore not characterized by the fact that it is 'neither nor', but rather 'both at the same time'. Furthermore, and more precisely, its negotiations of worthiness within both render them 'problematic, but not problematic enough' and 'valuable, but not valuable enough', and it is these that form the socio-material coordinates of standby as an in-between mode.

5.1   'Emptiness'

Almost all planning for the centre of Halle-Neustadt over the last decades mentions as its greatest problem the '*emptiness*' of the Hochhausscheiben. But how do urban planners get to such an evaluation? What relations come to matter within the performance of the 'empty' buildings on standby as a problem?

Before I examine this, I would like to give a few examples from the literature on how emptiness is perceived and (e)valuated as emptiness is not necessarily seen as problematic. And I will explain why I use 'emptiness' in inverted commas.

'Empty' as an adjective describes an absence: 'firstly, containing nothing and emptied (e.g. vessel), secondly, free and unoccupied (e.g. place), and thirdly, without content or void (meaningless)' (Pfeil, 2014, p. 35). 'Empty' can consequently describe a place in spatial terms, but it can also describe a place that has lost its use and / or its meaning (Pfeil, 2014, p. 38). As it is freed from fixed ascriptions, emptiness, as several authors have argued, leaves space for differing interpretations. DeLyser, for instance, studying ghost towns such as the ghost town of Bodie in California, finds that such places, their artefacts and landscapes, 'are reinterpreted by each generation of viewers, they can convey new meanings and new associations far from what their original users had in mind' (DeLyser, 1999, p. 606). What DeLyser observes is that the material state of the ghost town allowed for multiple interpretations and was challenging perceptions not only of the past but also of the present. Pelkmans notes of empty buildings in Adjaria, Georgia, that their (half-)emptiness allows for multiple interpretations and aspirations for the future (Pelkmans, 2003). He notes how these buildings have become 'signs' for a

> turn for the better, of a future of fulfilled dreams. That the buildings were empty was perhaps even a precondition of the maintenance of that dream, because as long as they were empty they belonged to the future and therefore remained potentially accessible to everyone. (Pelkmans, 2003, p. 129)

Mostly critical academic analyses and creative imaginaries highlight the potential of emptiness, where empty space becomes a resource and a chance for alternative urbanity beyond state-driven and capitalist city development (Beveridge et al., 2022, p. 282). In such a view, 'the void is not pure nothingness, an emptiness defined by sheer negativity', but may be a place of emergence (Gordillo, 2014, p. 57). Färber, for example, shows how 'Creative City Imaginaries' have 'turned shrinking Berlin into a city full of "empty space"' that has become attractive explicitly '*because of* the spatial testimonies (industrial wasteland) of its poor economy' (Färber, 2014, p. 131; emphasis in original). What this shows in my understanding is that valuation of emptiness shapes and transforms space. Rather than being static space upon which different interpretations are projected, valuation understood as socio-material practice allows us to consider the material effects of interpretations and imaginaries. A creative reinterpretation of empty space can thus transform space into economically re-evaluated space when creative emergence becomes a strategy of urban policies, for example. Often however, empty buildings are seen as problematic spaces, and especially so in urban policies, as they are perceived as 'signs of urban degeneration and blight' (Beveridge et al., 2022, p. 282). This is particularly observed in shrinking cities where emptiness is generally perceived as alienating as they signal decline (Dissmann, 2014; Pfeil, 2014). Dzenovska suggests the term 'emptiness' to describe processes of material and social 'emptying', as well as of a loss of meaning in postsocialist spaces (Dzenovska, 2020). As Dzenovska describes it, emptiness is the experience of material and social undoing without knowing the outcome, without replacement or a sense of 'what's coming next' (Dzenovska, 2021). According to Dissmann, 'the dominant practice for encountering this alienation aims at *making the emptiness disappear*' by *filling* the emptiness (Dissmann, 2014, p. 11; own translation; emphasis in original).

I do not actually see the Hochhausscheiben as 'empty' – as to me they are 'filled' with 'specific processes, resistances, imaginaries, images, dreams but also designs' (Krivy et al., 2011, p. 245; see Kemmer, 2020, p. 168 for a similar observation). Nevertheless, I acknowledge that they get performed as 'empty' and that within such performance the buildings become opened black boxes. Abandonment and the performance of the 'empty' buildings as a problem call the existence of the buildings into question and leaves them with an uncertain future. But in the case of the Hochhausscheiben on standby, their 'emptiness', as I argue, is better understood as 'presence of absence' (Krivy et al., 2011, p. 244) than as 'emptiness' that suggests a material and social void and meaninglessness. Although Dzernovska and Knight point out that empty does not mean empty in an absolute sense as the space-time of emptiness is 'crammed with speculation and anticipation' (Dzenovska & Knight, 2020), the term might be somehow misleading.[65] While emptiness in my understanding refers to an afterlife,[66] standby refers to the contested in-between. In what follows, I will use 'emptiness' with inverted commas to underline that 'emptiness' becomes a socio-material driving force and an 'active moment' (Krivy et al., 2011, p. 247) as it sets processes in motion and generates controversies. As I see it, the buildings get performed as 'problem' through processes that evaluate emptiness as problematic. At the same time, the performance of the buildings is embedded in the general endeavour of planning to fill emptiness with meaning and with use, or else to make it disappear through demolition.

Evaluating 'Emptiness'

'Emptiness' as Decline

One of the ways the 'empty' buildings get performed as a problem is that for the planners and other actors from Halle, they signal decline. As part of the analysis of the current state of Neustadt's centre (report 2017), strengths, weaknesses, risks and potentials are identified (SWOT analysis). Among the weaknesses noted in the preparatory studies in the category 'Urban landscape, building cultural quality and building fabric' are:

> — Emptiness of four high-rise buildings
> — Desolate condition
> — Stigmatization
> — Negative appearance
> Plan und Praxis, 2017, p. 49

Within the report, 'emptiness' gets translated as a signal for stigmatization and decline.[67] This could, as is assumed, affect future development opportunities and investment, but also opportunities to save the buildings. As the employees of Quartiersmanagement also told me, the 'emptiness' of the Hochhausscheiben is believed to contribute to the stigma of Neustadt (interview, 13.07.2020).

In German urban redevelopment policies, emptiness in the housing stock in Eastern German cities and towns has predominantly been problematized as an effect of urban shrinkage and decline. In the study by Berlin architects in cooperation with the Halle city administration 'Neustadt Kolorado. Perspectives for Halle-Neustadt', it says: 'The term "shrinking cities" is used to describe the phenomenon of an (enormous) loss of inhabitants. As a result, there is a high degree of housing vacancy' (Bader et al., 2004, p. 11; own translation). In the aforementioned study, 'Kolorado', Neustadt's ar-

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65   The authors themselves have considered 'to dismiss the language of emptiness and show that in conditions perceived as empty things happen and nothing is empty' as an analytical option (Dzenovska & Knight, 2020).

66   In relation to ruins, several authors write of the 'afterlife', e.g. Gordillo of the 'afterlife of destruction' (Gordillo, 2014), or Gupta of the 'afterlife of construction' (Gupta, 2018, p. 68).

67   In fact, scholars have long argued that the presence of vacant buildings can have the effect of contributing to the decline of an area 'by lowering nearby property values, promoting criminal activities, and posing fire safety hazards' (Han, 2019, p. 773). The so-called 'broken windows' theory developed by Kelling and Coles (1997), which established the connection between material decay and non-maintenance and crime, has become particularly well known. Empirically, however, the correlation between loss of value and emptiness, and also with social problems could not always be proven this directly.

chitecture is problematized not only because of high vacancy rates, but also because of its outmoded form. It says that 'The typified buildings because of their standardized form no longer correspond to today's housing concepts. The majority of the existing flats are designed for the socialist nuclear family' (Bader et al., 2004, p. 15; own translation). In another publication, one of the architects asks: 'How could what was once good, suddenly become so grey and empty, unloved and uncomfortable? […] How could the zombification in Halle-Neustadt spread?' As an answer to these questions, they find: '[t]he demands of humans, their dreams and ideals change. If our cities do not react accordingly, then they will become worthless and void. At this point, something has gone wrong in Halle-Neustadt' (Foerster-Baldenius, in: Kompetenzzentrum Stadtumbau in der SALEG, 2014, pp. 14–15).[68] While 'emptiness' was seen as an effect of shrinkage, 'empty' buildings emerged as the main problem of shrinkage and even as materialization of urban decline.

In the case of the Hochhausscheiben, one can trace how their 'emptiness' has been perceived as a signal for decline. First and foremost, in public discourse, supported by the media. A newspaper article from 1997 refers to the buildings as '18-storey monstrosities', when cockroaches, decreased interest and the high refurbishment costs are written about (*MZ*, 04.08.1997). The problematization even went so far that a tabloid headlined in relation to Scheibe A: 'The drug house'. The article reports on how the corridors are strewn with pieces of aluminium foil on which heroin addicts heat their substance and on drug addicts who spend the night in the kitchens and corridors. One reason for these conditions, according to the article, is that many students move into 'real flats' out of fear, and therefore 40 per cent of the rooms are empty. Because of the emptiness, 'no one notices' if drug addicts and dealers live there, the article finds (29.05.1999). In media discourses of this kind, buildings that are unused or misused, from the writer's perspective, risk becoming a signal for social and moral decay. 'Emptiness', as I see it, destabilizes the buildings' existence as when it gets evaluated as a signal for decline, the buildings themselves become problematic objects that might risk demolition.

Relational 'Emptiness'

The buildings' location in the centre of Halle-Neustadt is the second lens through which the 'emptiness' of the Hochhausscheiben appears problematic to city planners. Munn distinguishes between a location in the sense of a 'physical "position" or "emplacement"' and 'location in the sense of its variable spatial relations (near, far, north of, etc.) with other places (or relevant reference points)' (Munn, 2013, p. 141). As Guggenheim notes, buildings define themselves more than other objects in relation to their surroundings (Bartmanski & Fuller, 2018, p. 205; Guggenheim, 2009a). He calls them 'mutable immobiles'. 'Since buildings, other than artworks and scientific objects, occupy a stable location, they are singular and they are used' (Guggenheim, 2009b, p. 46). While a building's relationship to its surroundings and its use changes, its location does not. The relation between buildings also has a major impact on how 'emptiness' and ruination are perceived (Macmillen & Pinch, 2018, p. 306). As I will show, the location of the 'empty' Hochhausscheiben is therefore central to the planners' evaluation of the buildings as they (e)valuate 'emptiness' in relation to other buildings and urban development.

As Macmillen and Pinch note,

> Planners are trained to evaluate holistically, to pay wide and close attention
> to cities. They are more like geographers than architects in this respect. […]
> planners pay more attention to projects' surroundings and context than to aesthetic
> considerations. (Macmillen & Pinch, 2018, p. 306)

The authors observed how planners in Detroit were paying great attention to the relation between individual buildings and their surroundings when evaluating the buildings' potentiality for reuse (Macmillen & Pinch, 2018, p. 307).

In Halle, the city tried to convince the state of Saxony-Anhalt to continue using the buildings after the state had announced their abandonment. One of the city's major concerns was the presence of 'emptiness' *in this location* as it was perceived as particularly problematic. The 'emptiness' in the centre was as particularly problematic in relation to other empty buildings. In a letter to the ministry, the alderman of the city of Halle wrote:

> I appeal to everyone's responsibility to look intensively for ways and
> possible solutions to avert the further threat of emptiness.
> letter, 14.09.1999

In fact, the Hochhausscheiben were not the only 'empty' buildings in Halle-Neustadt. Rather, they were surrounded by many other vacant buildings at that time, and the emptiness of other buildings (often with no networks to protect them from demolition, so here emptiness has actually often become the decisive factor in processes of devaluation) in the surrounding area has a reciprocal negative impact on their development opportunities and thus on their value (Macmillen & Pinch, 2018, p. 302). In 2000, the mayor of Halle wrote to the Ministry of Saxony-Anhalt concerning the planned abandonment of Scheibe C:

> What is particularly important to me here is the fact that a virtually
> hopeless marketing of Scheibe C or accepting years of empty housing
> in the middle of the largest large housing estate in our state would be
> in stark contradiction to the declared urban development goals of the
> state.
> letter, 13.06.2000

What the mayor emphasized here is that the Hochhausscheiben are located in 'powerful centrality' (Murawski, 2019, p. 26) and therefore the buildings' emptiness is seen as particularly problematic from the city's point of view. The centre here is both a physical location, but also a site of specific functions and meaning. City centres in socialist cities were meant to be multi-functional, and explicitly also residential (Dellenbaugh-Losse, 2020, p. 104). Residential use and short distances were crucial features of Halle-Neustadt, mainly to achieve an employment rate of women of 80 per cent, enabled through short distances to kindergarten, school and supermarkets. Every activity outside the home should be easy to accomplish on your way to and from work (Dralle, 2013, p. 79; referring to Bräunig, 1969) by passing through the centre (interview, 02.10.2018). The city planners feared that the 'emptiness' of the Hochhausscheiben would lead to a loss of the central function of Neustadt's centre.

This concern that the centre could lose its central function was also expressed in 2017. A City Council's decision from 2017 sees 'the emptiness and the desolate condition of the four unrenovated high rises has been identified as the main problem' (VI/2017/02810, 2017, p. 3) of Neustadt's district centre. It summarizes the central findings of the report from preparatory studies that have been commissioned beforehand to find out whether or not the centre of Neustadt was showing structural deficiencies that could be met with the establishment of a redevelopment area (and instrument in German building law). And indeed, the study stated that 'fundamental design and functional defects have been found' (Plan und Praxis, 2017, p. 3) and names the 'emptiness' of the Hochhausscheiben as the main problem.[69]

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68 As Gribat and Huxley show, the large housing estates in East German cities were problematized as unnaturally grown or artificial, and demolition was thus legitimized as 'correction' (Gribat & Huxley, 2015, p. 173). The authors point out that shrinkage as urban policy was built on a specific problematization of housing estates built in GDR times and of their inhabitants and legitimized demolitions (Gribat & Huxley, 2015).

69 According to German Building Law, 'urban deplorable conditions' (German 'städtebaulicher Missstand') (§136 (2)) exist when '1. existing buildings or other characteristics of the area do not meet the general requirements for healthy living and working conditions […] or 2. the area is significantly unable to fulfil the tasks imposed on it by its location and function' (German Building Code §136 (2)). Vacancy and emptiness are thus not explicitly defined by law as 'urban deplorable condition', but often – and equally so in the case of the Hochhausscheiben – 'emptiness' is seen as such as its effects are predominantly seen as threatening positive development of both the buildings and their surroundings.

The report from 2017 says that the buildings' 'emptiness' threatened not only the ensemble's existence, but also the future of the centre of Neustadt as a whole through its negative effects on the surrounding areas:

> The negative effects of the structural deficiencies of the Scheiben high-rise buildings (Scheiben A, B, C and E), which have been empty for many years, prevent a qualified revitalization of the Halle-Neustadt district centre [...]. The emptiness also means a lack of footfall in the Neustädter Passage. This results in a lack of purchasing power for the existing retail uses [...]. Thus, the urban planning deficiencies in the Scheiben high-rise buildings also lead to functional deficiencies in the Neustadt district centre, since the long emptiness and the appearance of the high-rise buildings, [...] could cause the Neustädter Passage to lose its function as a central service area.
> Plan und Praxis, 2017, p. 54   → fig. 68; 69

For Neustadt's district centre, the analysis of the present state is made along the categories of 'cityscape, architectural quality and building fabric', 'ownership', 'uses', other parameters are the 'public spaces' as well as 'transport and accessibility' (Plan und Praxis, 2017, p. 7). As a sub-category of the 'use' parameter, the point 'emptiness' is mentioned. To my first surprise, it says that the buildings' 'emptiness' 'has until today, however, had little effect on the use in the Neustadt Centrum [the shopping mall] and the shop units along the Neustädter Passage. Only a few units are vacant and this is due to fluctuation, they don't point to structural vacancy issues in the area' (Plan und Praxis, 2017, p. 37). The problematization of 'emptiness' and its effects on the surrounding shopping areas are, as I realized, not necessarily currently measurable effects, but also from anticipated effects. The evaluation of 'emptiness' involves the future as, from the planners' point of view, there is a danger that the 'emptiness' and deterioration of the Scheiben could deter potential investors (interview, 02.10.2018). As Macmillen and Pinch also note, central questions for an evaluation of an empty building are thus what the future potential for an area and for a specific building was. The authors note that although '[e]stimating the schools' condition and significance helped [...] they faced chronic uncertainties about the future of the schools' surroundings, which bore heavily on the schools' potential marketability to investors' (Macmillen & Pinch, 2018, p. 304). Although the 'emptiness' of the Hochhausscheiben does not have negative effects on the function of the area as a central supply zone at the time of the preparatory studies in 2017, the planners are concerned about its potential negative effects if it remains. Furthermore, as the employees of the so-called '*Quartiersmanagement*' for Neustadt told me, the 'empty' high rises are believed to harm economic development and the perception of Neustadt as a potential and liveable urban space (interview, 13.07.2020).

As these first findings suggest, 'emptiness' is evaluated and problematized in planning along temporal-spatial relations. The 'empty' Hochhausscheiben are performed as a problem in relation to their surroundings and to future development opportunities that could be inhibited by their 'emptiness'. In the evaluations, 'emptiness' gets predominantly translated as 'lack of footfall' and 'obstacle' to the future (cf. Ringel, 2018, p. 75) in the sense of development.

In the letter I have quoted from above, the alderman wrote to the state of Saxony-Anhalt that accepting vacancy in the centre of Neustadt would contradict the urban development goals that the city of Halle had defined and that had actually been agreed with the state that was funding urban redevelopment programmes in Halle-Neustadt. And indeed, the defined goal within the planning for Neustadt was to demolish 'empty' housing estates from the fringes to strengthen the centre. Thus, when evaluating the Hochhausscheiben, their relationship to 'emptiness' elsewhere in Neustadt (beyond its centre) also plays an important role.

In response to the announcement by the state of their intention to abandon buildings A and C, the alderman asked the staff of the planning department to prepare a 'line of argument' for why the city wanted to prevent vacancy of the buildings and their demolition. They wrote:

Fig. 68
Fig. 69

Fig. 68
The vacant high rises frame the shopping arcades (passage). Grimberg, 25.01.2023.

Fig. 69
In an analysis of the weaknesses and risks in the centre, lighting bolts symbolize the 'severe impairment of image and function' that planners see for the retail zone. In their analysis, this risk is due to the buildings' vacancy.
Plan & Praxis, 2017, p. 56.

> In this context, the critical question [...] might be helpful as to why we
> wanted to preserve the high-rise or the high-rises at all costs. As you
> know, I am certainly in favour of careful and differentiated demolition
> concepts, but I think it is wrong at this location. This is precisely
> what needs to be justified in detail now.
>
> internal letter, 21.04.1999

In the years that followed, the city of Halle drew up a comprehensive urban development concept that focused primarily on the elimination of 'emptiness' in Neustadt. The demolition of a total of about 5,000 flats was planned. The declared strategy was to demolish from the outside in – from the edges to strengthen the centre: from the large housing estates such as Halle-Neustadt towards the old town, but also from the edges of Halle-Neustadt towards the centre of Neustadt (III/2001/01469, 2001).
On the edges of Neustadt, demolition areas were to be replaced by small-scale housing construction, while other areas were to be revalued through green spaces. In the urban development concept for Halle-Neustadt from 2001, the centre with the high rises was designated as a preservation area. As is written in the legend of the map below, the upgrading of the centres and the central axis and the pres-ervation of the space-forming buildings were to be set as objectives. Possible, the legend says, would be the destruction of several floors.   → fig. 70

The evaluation of the centre and the Hochhausscheiben as elements worth preserving in Neustadt is based on a relational understanding of 'emptiness'. With the help of different maps and considering the demands of the municipal housing companies, but also the state urban redevelopment programmes, an assessment of the existing buildings in Neustadt was made, and a demolition strate-gy developed. With the urban redevelopment concept of 2001, it has been decided that the centre of Neustadt should be preserved and revitalized.

From the early 2000s on, urban policies in Germany 'have attempted to deal with the causes and effects of shrinkage, principally through programmes for the demolition of what was considered 'excess' housing and infrastructure and the regeneration of the traditional urban cores' (Gribat & Huxley, 2015, pp. 164–165; see also Bernt, 2009, 2019; Gribat, 2012). In the official concepts of the city of Halle this also meant the Neustadt centre,[70] but whether the centre of Neustadt should really be strengthened in this way or whether Neustadt should become a district aligned with the centre in the old town is still a matter of dispute.

While eliminating the 'emptiness' in the Hochhausscheiben through renovation and use was defined as a planning goal, there were also other voices, both inside and outside the city planning department, that were against eliminating the 'emptiness' through use. In evaluating 'emptiness' and finding ways to eliminate it, controversies arose over the question of 'worthiness' for the city and its planning department, as I will now show.

Negotiating Worthiness

By no means everyone in Halle agrees that eliminating the buildings' emptiness through use was the 'right' way to go. A planner told me:

> There were also really heated discussions in the department, that
> is, it is not that often that people really rub up against each other
> professionally, because the urban development department was very
> worried and still is, because they are still the great masters of the
> housing strategies, that a use of the Scheiben that is too residential
> leads to either the Scheiben standing empty, because there is not

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70   This was confirmed in a comprehensive urban development concept in 2009, for example. There, the deconstruction from the outside to the inside and the strengthening of the urban cores, especially the centre of Halle-Neustadt, is explicitly mentioned. It also states: 'Without functional strengthening of the centre, it must be assumed that the centre of Neustadt has no long-term development prospects' (V/2009/08266, 2009).

Fig. 70

Fig. 70
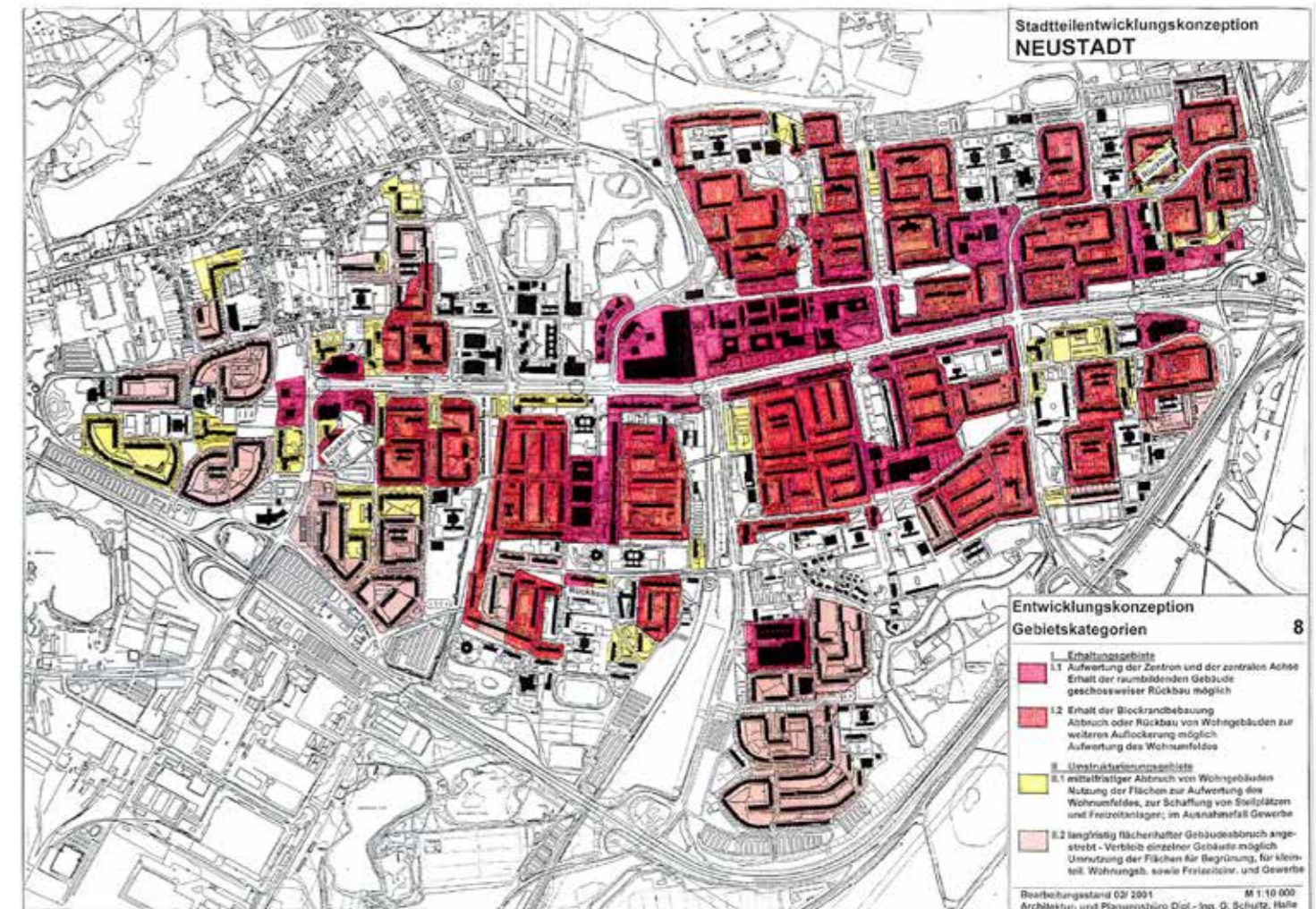The concept for the Halle-Neustadt district is mediated through different maps. The map shown here distinguishes preservation areas (two different shades of red) and restructuring areas (yellow and rosé) for which either medium-term or long-term demolition was planned. Schultz for the city of Halle. Neuordnungskonzept für den Stadtteil Halle-Neustadt, 2001, map 8 of 10. Source: Halle City Administration.

> that much demand, or [...for example] the Y-houses[71], [...] which of
> course nobody wants. Neustadt has done well without the Scheiben for
> all these years, purely in terms of use.
> interview, 25.10.2018

When the municipal housing companies learned in the early 2000s that the city wanted to apply for funds for a revitalization of the buildings and a subsequent residential use, they turned to the city planning department and protested. The managing director of one of the municipal housing companies wrote in a letter to the city of Halle, after learning about the application plans under the URBAN 21 programme for the establishment of young and age-appropriate housing through the press, that they considered residential use to be very questionable,

> because the cooperatives and the municipal companies have immense
> income losses due to empty flats and do not know how to finance a
> possible demolition. On the other hand, private investors are to be
> subsidized with sums in the double-digit millions in order to bring
> more flats onto the market.
> letter, 17.02.2000

A representative of another housing company told me in an interview that 'you only do high-rise housing when you have to, not because you want to'. They were generally very sceptical about any form of high-rise housing and explained that their company had mainly demolished multi-storey buildings (i.e. 11-storey buildings) in Halle-Neustadt. When they were offered to acquire and develop the Scheiben, they refused mainly because the buildings were already 'empty'. 'Emptiness', to them, was for them a signal that the buildings were not in demand. Regarding the Scheiben, they said:

> These Scheiben [...] should be examined very critically and their
> necessity should be questioned; they were built at that time in order to
> create as much living space as possible for workers and students with
> as little land as possible; we no longer need this living space in Halle-
> Neustadt today. [...] For us, it was clear that residential use in the
> Scheiben would not make sense. [...] since the demand pressure is not
> there, we still have enough vacant living space in conventional housing
> types, so we don't need another 1,500 or 2,000 flats on the market. 1,500
> or 2,000 flats on the market that would simply drive or exacerbate the
> vacancy situation.
> interview, 14.01.2019

As they are not in demand from an economic perspective, the question of whether they are worth preserving is all the more an urban planning and a political question. As Kraftl notes, 'economic systems surrounding buildings are nearly always accompanied by something *more*' (Kraftl, 2010, p. 406; emphasis in original). In Halle it is a question of prioritization at the beginning of the 2000s, as eliminating 'emptiness' in one place may provoke 'emptiness' in another (M. M. Bennett, 2021).
→ fig. 71; 72
Some planners and the public housing companies see Neustadt generally, but also its centre, as oversized (personal conversation, 09.06.2022).[72] A board member of the housing cooperative Bauverein Halle & Leuna eG, for example, wrote in a building journal (online) that the 'proportions' in Halle-Neustadt were no longer right:

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71   The socalled Y-houses (named like that due to their shape) are closer to the centre of Halle.
72   In fact, it is not clear and, as one of the planners told me, also difficult to prove whether the centre was already too big for Neustadt at that time (personal conversation, 09.06.2022). But of course, from the sceptics' point of view, it is all the more so now that the number of inhabitants and also the number of housing units have fallen, partly and somewhat ironically due to demolitions.

Fig. 71

Fig. 72

Fig. 71; 72
The surroundings of the Hochhausscheiben as seen from the roof of Scheibe A. Grimberg, 25.01.2023.

> The Neustädter Passage was designed for significantly more residents
> than live in Neustadt today. [...] It seems important to me to discuss a
> future appearance: How many high-rise buildings could one do without
> in the worst case? Kil, 2014

How to evaluate 'emptiness' and whether the buildings are needed actually differs depending on which parameters one applies for the evaluation. Of course, it should not go unmentioned here that such a number of flats, should they be activated, could also have a price-reducing effect on the housing market in Halle-Neustadt. Moreover, if the flats were possibly more attractive than those in the existing buildings, where tenants only stay because of a lack of alternatives that meet their wishes and price possibilities, tenants might possibly move.

Evaluation of 'emptiness' differs depending on an emphasis on economic parameters, political, urban planning or architectural parameters. From a position that aims to reduce vacancies, has housing stock in the entire Neustadt in mind and puts economic criteria in the foreground, but also makes a distinction between municipal housing companies and private investors, will come out against using the Scheiben. A perspective that focuses primarily on urban planning aspects, but also on the symbolic and urban planning significance of the centre, will come to a different evaluation. In fact, there are different positions on this, even within the city administration. And the question of how to eliminate it has become, above all, a political question in Halle. The city itself had repeatedly considered acquiring one or more buildings, either to demolish them afterwards (as in the case of Scheibe E in 2001) or to use them as a seat for its administration. In an internal email on the subject, one of the administration's employees pointed out that, from an economic perspective, the buildings are not needed and moving in as city administration would not be a reasonable option as the costs for redevelopment are too high. Political objectives, however, as the email notes, may differ from such reasoning (email, 16.08.2013). Within the planning department, as its head told me in an interview,

> There are one or two questions: can we afford this? Don't we have
> other tasks? This is a debate that I would also like to stimulate, but
> it must be substantiated. It must also be made clear at this point
> what our priorities actually are and where we, as the administration,
> can contribute if it has a preparatory political advisory character or
> mandate. [...] So that's certainly a question, because we now have many
> large construction sites where we also work with public money from
> the state, the federal government or the EU.
> interview, 08.07.2020

Furthermore, there is disagreement within the planning department as to what would justify prioritizing the towers and thus devoting large amounts of public funding to the buildings that could equally be needed elsewhere in Halle. As Chiapello points out, economic valuations have become a core of public responsibility (Chiapello, 2015). Since the state is required to spend public money for the common good, the question arises, however, as to what it should spend it on. Moroni et al. point out that in answering the question of whether and why empty buildings are a problem, a distinction must be made between state-owned and privately owned buildings (Moroni et al., 2020, p. 1302). While empty state-owned buildings are always a problem because they represent unused resources, 'empty' privately owned buildings are not a problem per se from their point of view. As the authors note, they only become a problem when they are completely abandoned and are 'attracting unlawful activities', are becoming a threat to public safety (see previous chapter) and are signalling decline and moral and material decay (Moroni et al., 2020, p. 1303). Even though this is the case for the Hochhausscheiben, what speaks against revitalization and use, but also against the use of public money, is above all, that there are other 'empty' spaces at other sites in Halle and Halle-Neustadt that the planners are hoping to develop. In processes of evaluation of 'emptiness', the city's own formulated goal to strengthen the centre, and performances of the Hochhausscheiben as the main problem are internally contested. The 'emptiness' of the Hochhausscheiben is found to be problematic in all plans and concepts of the city of Halle. One of the main reasons is that 'emptiness' is generally framed as an effect of shrinkage

and has itself become a signal of decline. In planning, 'emptiness' is evaluated by placing individual buildings in relation to their surroundings and evaluating the effects of 'emptiness' on the surroundings in the present and in the future. In fact, my investigation of evaluations of 'emptiness' has shown that the buildings get performed as a problem due to their 'emptiness', which is perceived as particularly problematic as the buildings are located in the centre of Neustadt, and as empty buildings are believed to signal decline and consequently hinder the development of the buildings and their surroundings. What I have equally come across, however, is that they do not appear 'problematic enough' to justify the use of large sums of public money to eliminate 'emptiness' through demolition or the use by public institutions. While 'emptiness' is seen as an obstacle to (the future of) the centre of Neustadt and all concepts formulate the objective to eliminate it, the means to actually do so are contested. The elimination of 'emptiness' in the high-rise buildings could, some fear, bring 'emptiness' elsewhere (and in the stock of municipal housing companies).

As I will show in the following section, value is attributed to the buildings' form, and these processes of valuation will also play an important role in considerations as to whether the Hochhausscheiben are 'worth' one or another future. The distinction between the evaluation of 'emptiness' and the 'valuation of significance' is in fact difficult to make (cf. Chiapello, 2015, pp. 16–17) as these two are closely interrelated, and both support and counter each other. In this first section, I have shown that the high rises are a problem due to their emptiness, but not as problematic as to accept any measures to eliminate emptiness via demolition or revitalization with public funds. In what follows, I will show that they are valuable, but not valuable enough.

5.2   Significance

Notes from a group discussion, urban planning department, city administration Halle, 06.02.2020:

> Planner 1:   So this question, why were these buildings preserved,
> why was it never decided to tear them down, has something to do with
> the fact that these are simply symbols. And that there was always
> the fear on all sides, no matter from which planning perspective or
> other perspective one looked at it, that one thought one was destroying
> a symbol that one could not get back and where one was never sure
> whether one was allowed to do so.
>
> Planner 2:   But is it really just a symbol? So do you now take it as a
> symbol for a form of society that once existed, or is it not ... [several
> participants contradict each other, talk at cross purposes]?
>
> P1:   no, as a structural symbol, like with churches ...
>
> P2:   like a city centre
>
> P1:   that's why this comparison with a church. At the end
> of the day, if we were to have the discussion about the 'Marktkirche'
> [church in the centre of Halle's old town]
>
> Planner 3:   it's also empty ...
>
> P1:   ... it is also empty, costs a lot of money, and yet one would
> never come up with the idea of saying, 'yes, it's all no longer profitable
> and you have to tear it down' [P2: 'yes, okay'] and I have a bit of a
> feeling that it's completely detached from the political system and the
> urban development goals, and so on. We're dealing with a symbol here,

where I don't think we can really define what the symbolic power is and how much it has to do with the spirit of optimism of the 60s/70s, how much of it can change over the years … […]

P3:   That's where I say, regardless of social order (P2 speaks with P4 aside, comments), the symbol of the centre, the centre itself, whether East / West, nostalgic socialism, 'I helped build it' or nowadays a reflection of socialist urbanism, which is today no longer politically led, but back to a professional level, always comes to the conclusion, 'if you take away all that now, you create a hole, then it's worse'. That's actually the chance why the Scheiben survived and why they still survive. […] And for the planned removal, […] there will probably be no social consensus, even in the next 10 years. […]

P2:   But I think that's half the battle. It's true that everyone has dealt with it at one time or another, but there are just as many planners, at least in this city, who hate the Neustadt and the Scheiben. And who would like nothing better, I'll say, than to take it all away. So that's, so to speak, those who deal with it and push these projects forward, I do believe that this emotionalizes. […]

P1:   but nevertheless, in my experience, when people deal with it more intensively and the crème de la crème has also dealt with it, […] everyone has to admit that it [removal] is reasonable from a market economy point of view, but that it is still difficult somewhere. To find the justification, and indeed the technical-professional justification isn't given from a planner's point of view, which is not market-economic, why the Scheiben can be removed – at least I haven't come across that.

group discussion, 06.02.2020

From the discussion with a group of planners at Halle's city administration in 2020, different coordinates of the in-between and related to valuation emerge. The evaluation of the Hochhausscheiben and their significance for the urban landscape are subjects of controversial discussion among the planners, as is the question of why the buildings have not been demolished before today – despite being 'empty'. What are the differences between the church in the old town and the Hochausscheiben? Are they significant as symbols of a past or as vertical accents? Is there a consensus regarding their significance? To what extent are valuations related to generations or to the intensity of engaging with the buildings?

The report of the preparatory studies from 2017 finds that the Hochhausscheiben were both the main weakness of the centre of Neustadt, but also its main strength. While 'emptiness' is evaluated as a problem, value is attributed to the buildings' form in processes that attribute both historical and architectural significance and significance with regard to urban development (German: städtebaulich) to the buildings. Within processes of valuation, the buildings are performed as potential, as I will show in the following section.

The relation between architecture and meaning is a matter of controversy in the literature. Often, one is given more weight than the other, or the two are seen as 'mutually exclusive' (cf. Bartmanski & Fuller, 2018, pp. 204–205). As I see it, however, buildings and architecture become significant when they carry meaning that is attributed to them. In such cases, they are made to relate something about a situation. At the same time, architecture itself has an effect on a situation as it can modify the meaning it is supposed to carry (in such a case, architecture may be understood as a 'mediator'; cf. Rydin et al., 2018, p. 54; Latour, 2005). While materiality and meaning have often been treated as two separate things, I see them with Bartmanski and Fuller as 'mutually illuminating' (Bartmanski & Fuller, 2018, p. 205).

A work that also stresses the interlocking of valuation and materiality is Macdonald's study of the National Socialist built heritage in Nuremberg. With an approach that understands heritage as assemblage, Macdonald traces how Nazi architecture was incorporated into Nuremberg's heritage through processes that destabilized these sites and inscribed them in the city's heritage as places of learning. She shows that the valuation of architecture as historically valuable and as aesthetically valuable need not overlap, and the material effects of negotiating heritage value. This was particularly evident in Germany in the evaluation of National Socialist architecture. Macdonald found that, while Bavarian heritage law would potentially allow all architecture built before 1945 to be recognized as 'buildings of "historical significance"', a 'judgment still had to be made' (Macdonald, 2009, p. 124). Judgements about the inclusion of this architecture, Macdonald states, were made in negotiation processes. What she brings out with the assemblage approach are the 'mediatory effects of materiality' (Macdonald, 2009, p. 131). Through its materiality, heritage, as she notes, itself acts as a mediator in the process of assembling the heritage of Nuremberg. In such a view, buildings are not only significant as they represent value and meaning, but value is constantly (re-)negotiated and mediated through materiality. Following from these insights and with DeSilvey and Edensor, I suggest understanding 'significance as material and social effect' (DeSilvey & Edensor, 2013, p. 479) rather than a given value. Value, in such perspective, becomes an effect of 'multiple sociomaterial "negotiation"' (Färber, 2014, p. 122).

Valuating Significance

Valuating their History and Form

The Hochhausscheiben are performed as value with regard to their historical and aesthetic significance. These emerge from the significance ascribed to them in the original planning, their importance as representative buildings of so-called Eastern Modernism and as a legacy of Bauhaus architecture, as well as their technical and structural uniqueness.

In its original planning, the high rises were intended to provide a vertical frame to the otherwise rather flat functional buildings and facilities and to create a concentration in the centre by combining living and working. → fig. 73; 74; 75   They are located north of and at right angles to the main axis, the so-called *Magistrale*, which marks the end of the centre on the opposite side. They are perpendicular to it (Bürgerverein Stadtgestaltung Halle, 2012).

The composition of residential high-rise buildings, the pedestrian mall and functional buildings, as well as a railway line under the central square, were taken over from the 'highest-rated competition design and further developed in the subsequent work' (Thöner & Müller, 2006, p. 221). In addition to the five residential high rises, the initial planning for Neustadt's centre also included a single high-rise building called 'Hochhaus der Chemie' (at the top left in the image above), emphasizing the importance of the chemist industry, but it was never realized.

The city centre of Halle-Neustadt can be traced back to designs by Joachim Bach, among others, deputy chief architect of the chemical workers' city 'Halle-West', the initial name of Halle-Neustadt, and his team. All of them were members of the 'office of the chief architect' Richard Paulick, a graduate of the Bauhaus, who was called to Halle to be able to use the scientific potential of the *Bauakademie* (the central scientific institution for architecture and construction in the GDR) for the development and industrialization of building and to have a person with influence and authority as chief architect on site. Paulick was called in for a reason: Halle-Neustadt had meanwhile been chosen to become a showcase city with a metropolitan character. Existing plans for Halle-West were then almost completely thrown overboard, resulting in disagreements between the old team and Paulick's new, young and international team (Dralle, 2013, p. 143).[73] Paulick led the construction of Halle-Neustadt

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[73] One of the team members remembered the work in the team as 'interesting from a human point of view, because new people came every now and then. Emigrants, globetrotters, foreign colleagues who had heard that there was something big going on here, or students doing an internship, or a comissionless artist who had run into Paulick somewhere. But, […] we were never much more than two dozen people' (Bach, 1993, p. 33).
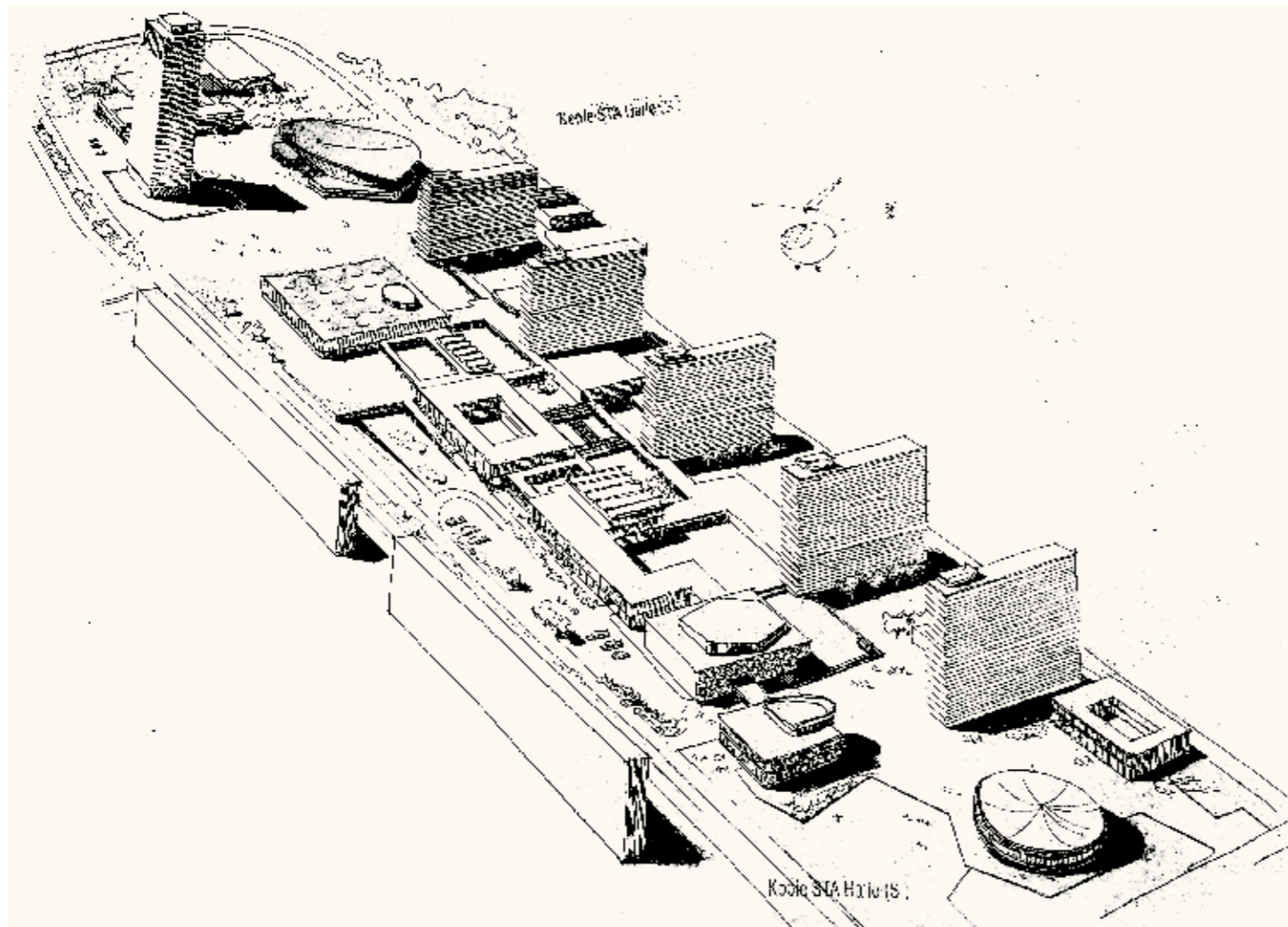
Fig. 73

Fig. 73
The Hochhausscheiben in
their original planning and under
construction: vertical accents
to mark the centre.
An early draft, n.d. [late 1960s].
Source: Halle City Archive.

Fig. 74
Dorenkamp, ca. 1971.
Source: Geschichtswerkstatt
Halle-Neustadt.

Fig. 75
Building A–D and the flat
functional buildings between them.
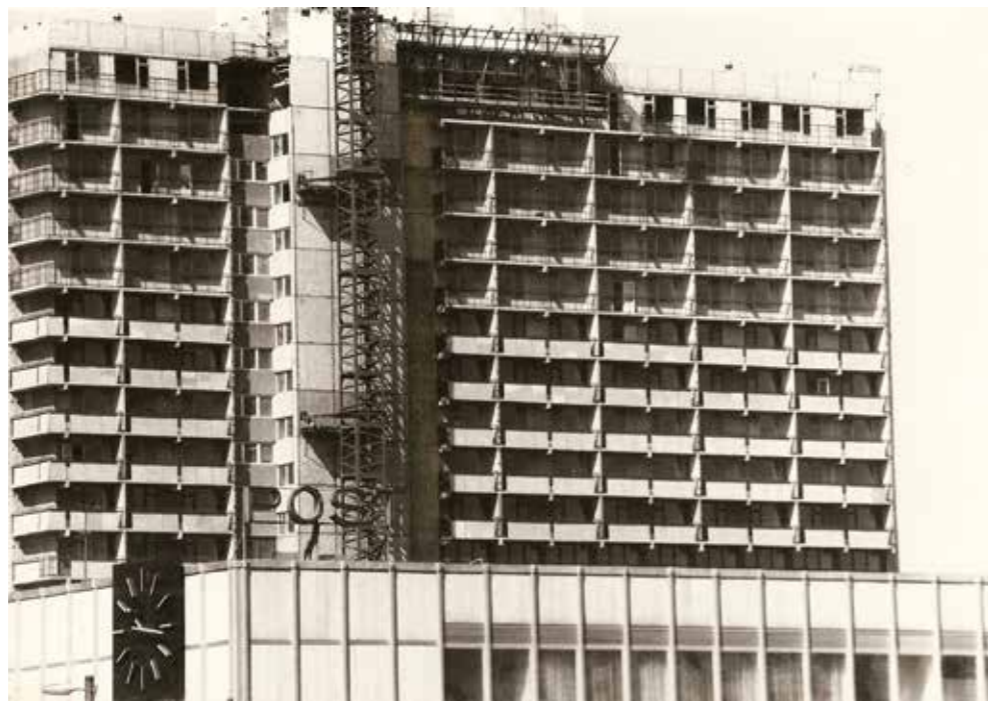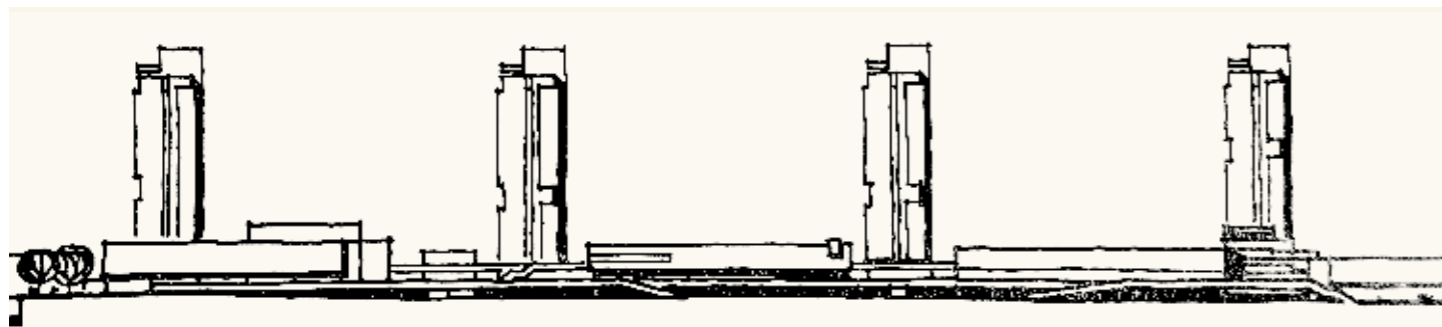(Schlesier et al., 1972, p. 115).

Fig. 75   Fig. 74

for five years and ended his work in Halle at the age of 65 as rationalization pressures and shortages increasingly emerged. It was his successors who were responsible for the planning and implementation of the Hochhausscheiben.

Today, the Bauhaus school is valued in German discourse, and so the reference to the architect Paulick is also particularly emphasized in the context of a valuation of the Zentrum Neustadt. For example, the urban development concept from 2017 refers to the district centre as 'part of the "Paulick core"' (Stadt Halle (Saale), 2017, p. 297). The figure of Paulick was also highlighted in the frame of an exhibition on his life and work that was shown in the foyer of Scheibe A in winter 2021/22; a street in Halle-Neustadt commemorates his work in Halle; and there is a page dedicated to him on the website of the city of Halle (Saale). A rediscovery of the origins of the Hochhausscheiben can be observed with new attention being paid to Bauhaus architecture today. This was particularly evident in 2019, when '100 Years of Bauhaus' was celebrated with appreciation for the Bauhaus in numerous events and exhibitions all over Germany. That year, an event took place in Halle that I was also able to attend on the 'other Bauhaus heritage'. The organizers of the conference noted that an important aspect had been omitted from the commemoration of the Bauhaus: the industrial housing construction that had already been laid out in the Bauhaus and followed it. The announcement emphasized that 'former Bauhäusler [Bauhaus-trained architects] were at the forefront of the movement of industrialized building after the end of the war, for example Richard Paulick in the GDR' (*Conference: Das andere Bauhaus-Erbe. Leben in den Plattenbausiedlungen heute | HoF*, 2019). Although the large housing estates such as Halle-Neustadt were subjects of controversial discussion during the event, a reconsideration of Neustadt's origins can be observed here as well. Halle-Neustadt is today valued as a 'modern city'. The managing director of the Competence Centre for Urban Redevelopment of the State of Saxony-Anhalt – publisher of the brochure 'The Future of Modernity' with the Hochhausscheiben as the cover image, write in their foreword that the 'pendulum has now swung in the opposite direction' for Neustadt after the migration and deconstruction of the city. As they write,

> Today many clubs and initiatives have sprung up to improve the
> image and identity of the largest area of the city of Halle (Saale) for in
> spite of the sinking star Halle-Neustadt embodies all the significant
> and positive elements of a modern city.
> Kompetenzzentrum Stadtumbau in der SALEG, 2014a, p. 2

The city's website also states that Paulick promoted industrial housing construction and also used the experience gained on a research trip to Sweden (1964) for this purpose (Stadt Halle (Saale), *Halle (Saale) – Händelstadt: Persoenlichkeiten,* n.d.). In fact, architects and engineers from Halle also travelled to Sweden in 1971, were inspired and bought the licences for the all-concrete construction method developed by the company Skånska Cementgjuteriet. This explains why similar ensembles can be found in Stockholm and Gothenburg. → fig. 76 [74]   Swedish architects and engineers, in turn, came to Halle and, together with local experts, built the first Scheibe E. In addition, parts of the panels that were hung on the façade were imported from Sweden. This cooperation testifies to an internationalization of urban planning in the GDR in the 1970s, an important fact and an argument of those who would like to see the Hochhausscheiben listed as monuments, attributing to them historical value (Pasternack, 2014b, p. 238). The Betonkombinat Halle then further developed the so-called Schotten mixed construction method, in which the load-bearing walls and ceilings are cast on site and the façade elements are merely curtained, into Halle's monolithic construction method. As Escherich notes, 'Numerous innovations were tested in the field of urban engineering, building construction and technology alone. Some of them began their triumphant run through the GDR here, such as the "monolith concrete construction method" of the Hochhausscheiben' (Escherich, 2017, p. 211).

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74   The staff of the Geschichtswerkstatt and citizens fighting for the preservation of the
Hochhausscheiben like to draw comparisons with the buildings in Stockholm, which are in use.
Municipal staff also mention the buildings, which are recognized as important architectural
landmarks, but in Stockholm they are in the centre of the city (field notes, 23.07.2018;
interview, 02.10.2018; field notes, 15.05.2019).

Fig. 76

Fig. 77

Fig. 78

Fig. 76
Picture of the 'Hötorget' buildings in Stockholm, collected at the Geschichtswerkstatt Halle-Neustadt.
Source: Bauverein Halle & Leuna, Geschichtswerkstatt.

Fig. 77; 78
Postcards of the Hochhausscheiben from the 1970s collected at the Geschichtswerkstatt Halle-Neustadt.
Source: Bauverein Halle & Leuna, Geschichtswerkstatt.

During my internship at Halle's city administration in 2021, they discussed the correct term for the construction technique as they wanted to include it in the brochure for the centre's restructuring concept. After the planners first wrote 'Swedish construction method', one of the heads pointed out that the correct terminology for the construction method of the panes was not Swedish shell model, but '*HMB – Hallesche Monolithbauweise*' (field notes, 15.04.2021). Today, after publication, the brochure states: 'The largely identical buildings were constructed between 1970 and 1974 using the Halle monolithic construction method (*HBM*), a modification of the all-concrete construction method developed in Sweden' (Stadt Halle (Saale), 2021, p.4). These aspects of the buildings' origins and form are regularly highlighted, when the buildings get performed as potential. Either especially because of international cooperation, or especially because of local specificity – in the performance of the buildings as potential, uniqueness is central.   → fig. 77; 78

As I want to suggest, highlighting the origins and structural specificity can be understood as part of a 'production of the valuable' (Schäfer, 2016). As I may suggest with Munn, valuations 'give time a specific form – in general, making absences and new pasts, as they make new forms of the present and, consequently, alter future potentials' (Munn, 2013, p. 142). As Göbel notes of ruins, 'Their cultural past is their key aesthetic feature, which generates logics of its own cultural and economic value making. This acts according to aesthetics of urban ruins, which are specifically designed and fabricated, and not *naturally* given as it is often assumed' (Göbel, 2020, p. 2; emphasis in original). Valuation goes hand in hand with a commodification that operates primarily in the arena of the attention, where certain aspects are highlighted while others are not. The emphasis on the past is part of the production of significance and the process of revaluation of the buildings that become valuable and a potential (Göbel, 2020, p. 3). Macmillen and Pinch note that 'communicating buildings' historic significance could be a prudent strategy for adaptive reuse. Once translated into the real estate lexicon of "character," "uniqueness," and "original features," significance could make resale more plausible' (Macmillen & Pinch, 2018, p. 293). What I observe with regard to the Hochhausscheiben is similar for in fact, the valuation of the Hochhausscheiben is embedded in the city's attempts to market the buildings and bring them to revitalization and use through private investment.

One way of stabilizing the valuation as architecturally and historically significant buildings would be to give the Hochhausscheiben the status of a monument that deserved protection. This has indeed been discussed again and again over the decades (Escherich, 2017; Pasternack, 2014b). Already at the beginning of the 2000s, the architects Graul und Partner suggested an 'ensemble protection' for the Scheiben. They saw Halle-Neustadt as an urban planning example of European standing (Graul et al., 2002).[75] Following the concept, the city's design advisory board, which advises the city administration on architectural valuation issues, found: 'The presented new perspective on the urban significance of the 1970s architecture, in particular the sculptural significance of the ensemble of Hochhausscheiben, is to be emphasized' (Opinion of the Design Advisory Board, 18.03.2002). However, although the significance of the architectural form of the Hochhausscheiben has been recognized over the years (e.g. at a conference on the 'Ostmoderne' held in Weimar in 2014, Escherich, 2017, pp. 213–214), protection through the instruments of listed building protection has been rejected by urban planning. There was concern within the planning that transformation and renovation of the buildings would be made more difficult by listed building status (according to Escherich, however, such concerns are based on an outdated concept of monuments (Escherich, 2017, p. 214)[76]. The commissioned shrinkage plan drawn up by the architects of the Berlin Raumlabor in the early 2000s emphasized already that 'Halle-Neustadt (must) not become a museum' (Bader et al., 2004). One of the architects still adhered to this position. And while he argued that the Hochhausscheiben should

75 An appreciation of the buildings' architecture as 'important for Europe' could also mean that supra-local actors could be involved in its protection.
76 Büchler and Zasada note that in the valuation of the architecture of socialist modernism from the perspective of monument protection, aesthetic parameters have dominated up to now, but an evaluation would have to go beyond purely aesthetic valuation. The authors note in 2008 that is increasingly being done, however contested among experts. According to them, 'documentation aspects of technological, political, cultural, economic and socio-historical dimension […] as well as criteria of innovativeness and uniqueness […] are also increasingly included in the evaluation' (Büchler & Zasada, 2008, p. 102).

be preserved, he wrote: 'Perhaps it will be possible to find contemporary remodellings in which the original idea remains visible. Residential and commercial buildings look different today. But you can rebuild anything. […] I fear, however, that it will hardly be possible to renovate the Scheiben profitably' (Förster-Baldenius, in: Kil, 2014).

In 2015, the city planning department, in cooperation with the Saxony-Anhalt State Office for the Preservation of Monuments and Archaeology, commissioned a so-called 'building culture, urban development and monument preservation value plan' for Halle-Neustadt from an expert in monument protection (footnote in: Escherich, 2017, p. 214). The 'value plan' was intended to form the basis for discussions on which instruments can be used to preserve what was found valuable and still allow for further development of the buildings and the urban structure. The report stated that in the past there had already been so-called 'over-forming' in the centre through additions of storeys and extensions, 'which adversely affect the spatial qualities in the area. Provided that the area is to use its urban architectural quality as a location factor for future development, a more restrictive approval practice is required in this respect in the future' (Plan und Praxis, 2017, p.54). On the one hand, the potential is seen in the authenticity; on the other hand, planning documents emphasize that changes should be allowed in order not to put obstacles in the way of redevelopment. The institutionalized classification as 'historical monuments' was seen as one such obstacle by the urban planners. Urban planners are required to consider their own valuation in relation to other valuation processes, such as those of heritage conservation, but also of architects, citizens and politicians. For the planners, the valuation from the perspective of monument protection is one of several valuations that they consider in relation to the objective of the redevelopment of the area. The revaluation of the buildings' origins is central in processes of making the future in planning.

Valuating Urban Significance

Another way the buildings get valued is by recognizing their significance for Neustadt's urban landscape and that something would be missing if they were gone (see also discussion above).

Already in the 1990s, planners from Halle found that the Hochhausscheiben were important for Neustadt's 'skyline'. I quote from a 1999 letter from the alderman of the city of Halle to the state of Saxony-Anhalt regarding the announced closure of the student dormitory in Scheibe C in Halle-Neustadt:

> Even if, for economic reasons and due to lack of demand, this hall of residence cannot be kept in the long term – the indications were known to me as well – I have repeatedly tried to make it clear that the preservation and redevelopment of these *striking* Hochhausscheiben is absolutely necessary for the district centre. The buildings decisively shape this centre and are prominent landmarks in the city skyline that cannot be dispensed with without further ado.
> letter, 14.09.1999; emphasis added

The representative of the city of Halle argued for the preservation and development of the buildings as they saw them as indispensable for the centre of Neustadt due to their function as vertical accents in Neustadt's cityscape. In an urban restructuring concept for Neustadt from 2001 that included the plan to demolish up to 5.000 housing units (see section above), the Hochhausscheiben are explicitly highlighted in the legend as 'large structures to be preserved'.   → fig. 79

In fact, plans for Halle-Neustadt repeatedly concluded that demolition of the buildings was not to be advocated, as in this case the centre would no longer be recognizable and thus its function as a centre would be endangered. While their 'emptiness' was seen as particularly problematic because of their size and central location (see above), the buildings themselves are ascribed importance here. As said above, evaluation and valuation often go hand in hand.

In 2009, the architectural office KARO from Leipzig was commissioned to visualize different deconstruction variants as a basis for Halle's city planners to evaluate the importance of all of the buildings and each of them for the ensemble, for Neustadt's centre and Neustadt as a whole. The
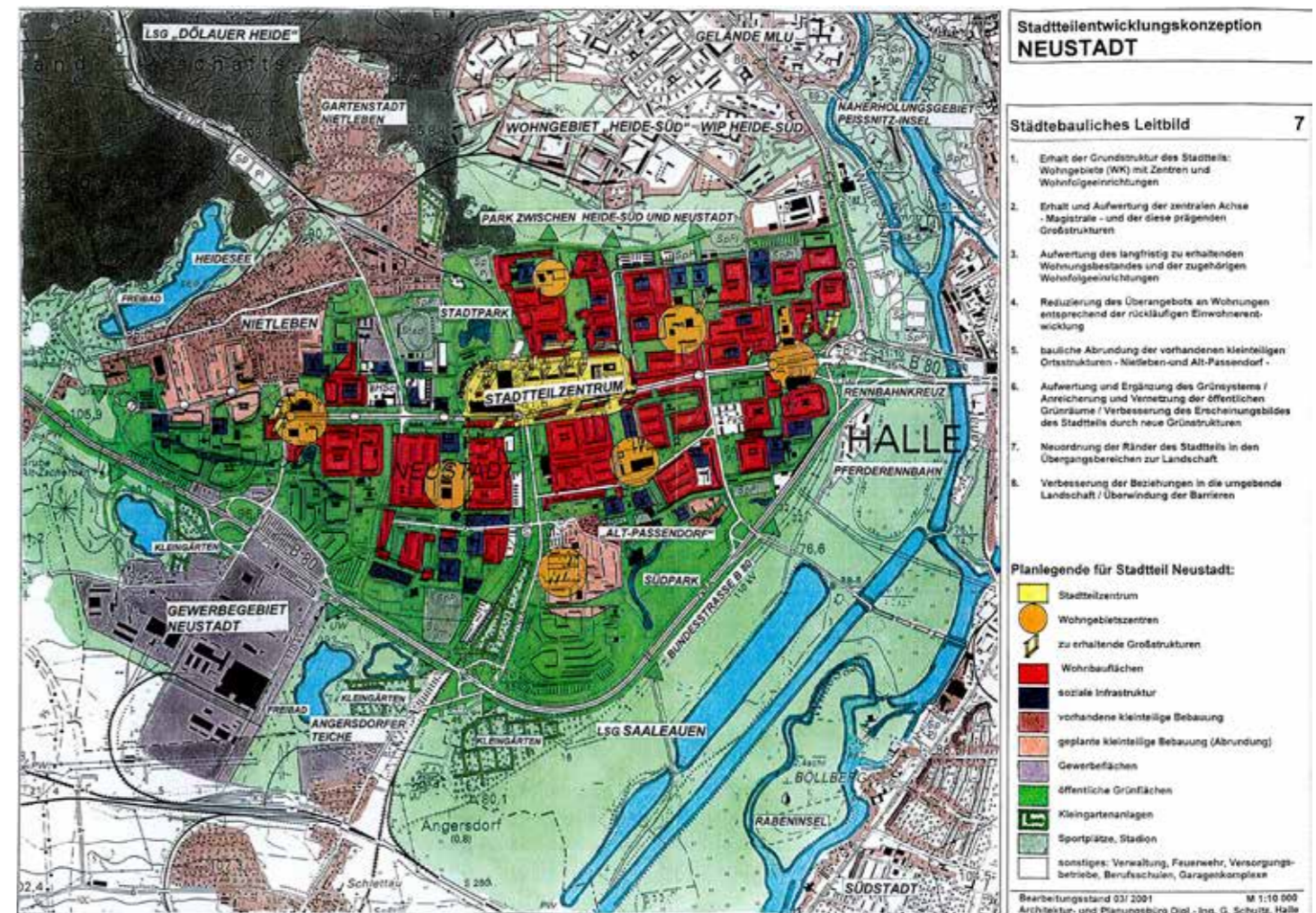
Fig. 79

Fig. 80; 81
Demolition variants developed by KARO Architekten in 2009. All variants were ultimately found not to be viable solutions. KARO Architekten, commissioned by the City of Halle, 2009.

Fig. 80

Fig. 79
This map shows Neustadt with its main centre and the smaller centres of the different neighbourhoods. Also, the new constructions at the margins are clearly recognizable. The centre is highlighted as to be preserved, and the Hochhausscheiben are particularly highlighted as 'large structures to be preserved'. Schultz for the City of Halle. Neuordnungskonzept für den Stadtteil Halle-Neustadt, 2001, map 7 of 10.

Fig. 81

question the visualization aimed to answer was: 'What happens if a development occurs at one or more Scheiben that leads to demolition?' (KARO architects, 2009).[77] Four scenarios have been visualized: the demolition of Scheibe C, the demolition of all Scheiben apart from the renovated Scheibe D, the demolition of three Scheiben, and the demolition of Scheibe E. The study found, however, that the buildings were significant as an ensemble. What the visualizations showed, according to the architects, was that the buildings were important as volumes, and their legibility as an ensemble of the centre would be lost if one or more buildings were demolished. The visualization found that the buildings had 'urban symbolic power' (KARO architects, 2009). 'The credo' of all considerations, as one of the planners from Halle said referring to the elaborations of KARO architects, 'was that these five things are really important for Neustadt'. According to them, all considerations of taking them away had shown that the centre of Neustadt would be lost (interview, 02.10.2018).   → fig. 80; 81

As turns out from the valuation of the Hochhausscheiben as significant buildings from the planners' point of view, the buildings are accorded significance as prominent buildings in the centre as vertical accents that mark the centre. If they were demolished, something would be missing, the planners and official plans largely agree.

Negotiating Worthiness

As the transcriptions of the discussion held at Halle's city administration at the beginning of the chapter show, the planners see the Hochhausscheiben as a 'symbol', although there is disagreement about whether they are 'only' a symbol of a past (political and planning) system or a symbol for Neustadt because of their size and their significance as vertical accents of the centre of Neustadt. In the discussion, the planners compared the Hochhausscheiben with churches, which also normally mark a centre with towers, and which also mostly remain 'empty'. In contrast to the Hochhausscheiben, however, the planners agree that the church in the centre of Halle would never be discussed for demolition, even if its use is questionable. Since the IBA (International Building Exhibition, 2003–2010), which had the theme 'Balancing Act Double City – Communication and Process', the image of the five towers of the old town and the five high-rise towers as their counterparts in the new town has been shaped and it was believed to serve the 'balancing' between Halle and Halle-Neustadt (Escherich, 2017, pp. 213–214). In conversations I had with planners from the city administration, citizens and politicians, this image is regularly mentioned. It has become, according to a local politician, an image that 'touches many people' (interview, 28.11.2018).   → fig. 82; 83

The main question of the IBA at the time was: 'How do you deal with this urban heritage?' and it 'showed that there are still no unanimous answers to this question'. Whereas the IBA's original intention was to comprehensively upgrade Neustadt – to the point of equivalence with the old town, this objective was, as is written within the documentation of the process on the city's website, 'abandoned in favour of a more realistic approach' (Stadt Halle (Saale), *Halle (Saale) – Händelstadt: IBA-Thema*, n.d.). As Pasternack notes, the city administration had actually withdrawn from the IBA process in 2007 as it did not have the capacity to elaborate and defend a position (Pasternack, 2014c, p. 430) with regard to the Hochhausscheiben and another site in Halle where, in the frame of IBA, two high-rise towers have actually been demolished after long debates. These high-rise buildings are repeatedly cited by some of the planners as a reference and comparable process. In relation to these high-rise buildings, the question 'what are the high-rise buildings worth to us?' was decidedly posed. 'A great deal' was the verdict at the time, 'but the economic viability was paramount'. The prerequisite for the agreement to demolish the two towers was the prospect of new constructions (Stadt Halle (Saale), 2009). Demolition often becomes an option when there is a prospect of replacement (a point I made in the previous chapter where I show that the lack of a prospect for replacement of the Hochhausscheiben contributed to the fact they remained in place). In this case, it is not so much the buildings as the site that is significant. This was also what Bartmanksi and Fuller found for the centre of Berlin where the GDR built Palace of the Republic was demolished, but the site was '[b]y no means […] to be abandoned. Another building was planned to fill the void, a replica of the Prussian palace that is currently under construction' (Bartmanski & Fuller, 2018, p. 203).

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77   It was emphasized that this was not planning as the buildings were privately owned.

Fig. 82
Fig. 83

Fig. 82
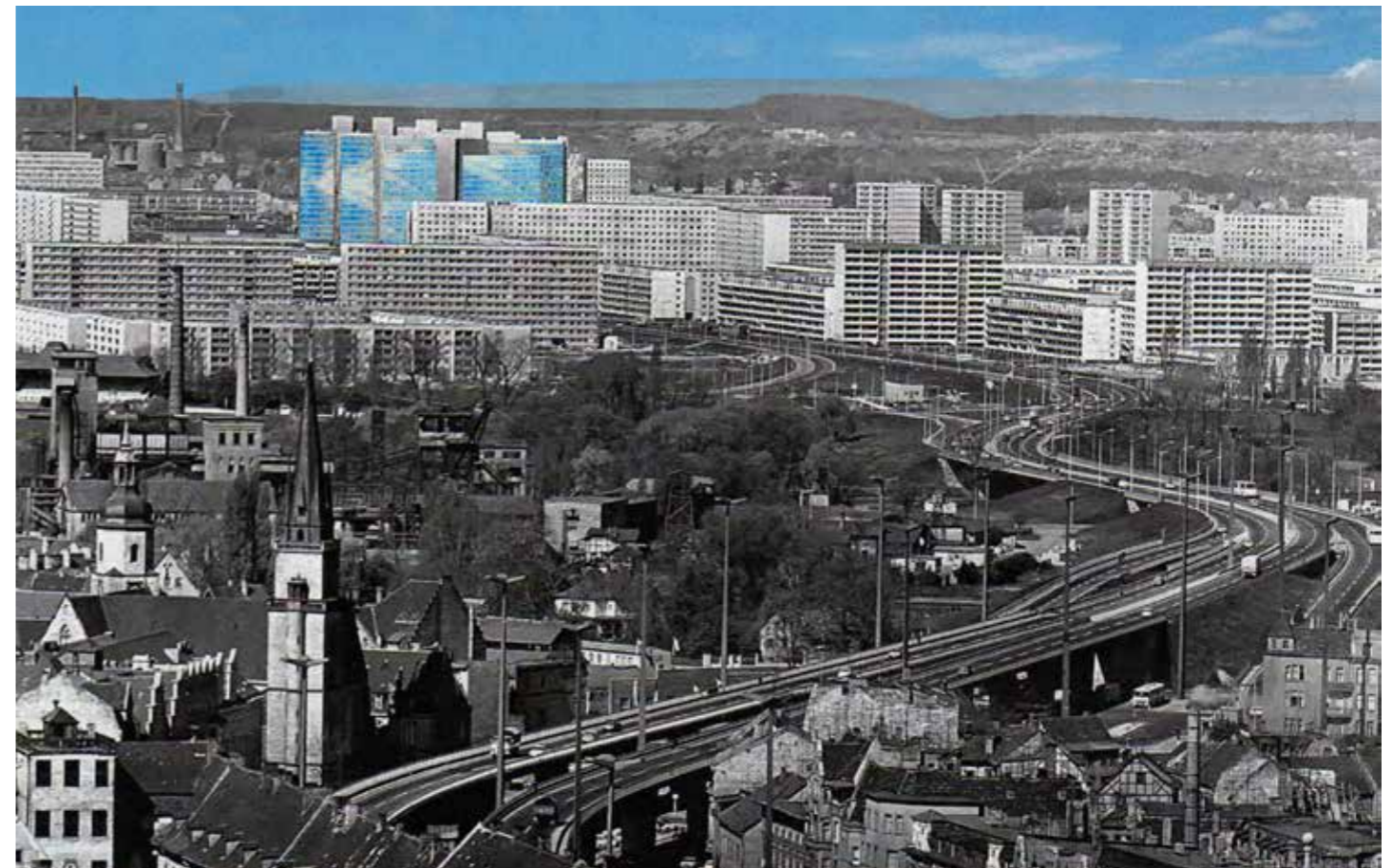'The Double City': Halle's old town in the foreground and Halle-Neustadt in the background with the Hochhausscheiben in its centre. Lacaton & Vassal + Fischer, 2015, commissioned by the Competence Centre for Urban Redevelopment of the state of Saxony-Anhalt.

Fig. 83
Mural 'A City with a Future' from 2005. To be seen: the towers of the old town and Neustadt facing each other. Grimberg, 25.01.2023.

By the time of the IBA, no agreement could be found on an 'upgrading' of the Neustadt as a counterpart to the old town of Halle and an 'upgrading' of the Hochhausscheiben as equivalent symbols of the city to the towers of the old town in the form of an image campaign that would include public funding for the revitalization of the towers. One planner remembers:

> At that time [they are here referring to the discussions in the frame of the IBA] we let the renovation of these high rises fail because of a sum of, I think, 1 million euros, which we did not pay. 1 million, which we as a city did not want to make available through subsidies, whereas today we say that the renovation of the Scheiben is worth 3.5 million euros per Scheibe.
> interview, 25.10.2018

The valuation of the buildings and of their possible futures is thus changing (more on this below). At the time of the IBA, 'indifference' has been noted for the city's positionality (Pasternack, 2014c, p. 430) and in my view, this is due to the fact that the significance of the buildings (and Neustadt more generally) was contested. It has been found that 'ambiguous remains of Second World War and Cold War military infrastructure' in the UK were 'not allowed to be demolished but not considered valuable enough to merit expenditure on stabilization' (DeSilvey & Edensor, 2013, p. 473). The findings help me understand that the Hochhausscheiben have been found valuable but not valuable enough and how this contributed to the fact that the buildings stayed in place, but also that they stayed on standby – between 'on' and 'off'.

The difference between the church in Halle's old town and the Hochhausscheiben is, as I see it, that the buildings' value is still contested today among the municipal planners. As one of the planners said, there are quite a few in the City Council who actually 'hate' the buildings, as one of the planners said during the discussion quoted above. And when it was decided that the technical city hall (including the planning department) would move to Scheibe A in 2021, there were voices, according to the alderman for urban development, who said they would look for another job rather than moving here. From the alderman's point of view, however, the use by the city administration is an unconditional step. They told me:

> In Halle-Neustadt, the city itself will have to get involved permanently, there's no other way; because there, with a few exceptions, I can hardly get any private investor seats, that will be very difficult, because the ICE [Germany's fastest train, the Inter City Express] stop at the main station is always much more attractive [this is actually at the site where the two other high-rise buildings have been demolished] and I won't get an ICE stop in Halle-Neustadt either. I know that I had to do a bit of convincing and still have to do it, I will probably write another personal letter to all employees when the move enters the hot phase and I have a weekend to spare.
> interview, 28.05.2021

Nevertheless, the preparatory studies from 2017 identified the 'historical value and uniqueness of the ensemble as an important starting point for identification of the district's residents and attraction for visitors' (VU, 2017, p.49) as one of the main strengths. Today, the identification with the buildings is taken by the city administration as a clue to perform the buildings as potential. It is assumed that the Hochhausscheiben form a strong object of identification for the people of Halle-Neustadt. As a politician from Halle (who has their electoral office in Halle-Neustadt) told me, 'many people in Neustadt are attached to this ensemble and I can understand that very well' (interview, 28.11.2018).[78]

78   To my knowledge, among those who speak out loudly on this issue are those who are involved in associations and those who express themselves in internet forums and comment columns in local media. While some have been committed to preservation for years and are mostly engineers and architects themselves, some of whom were involved in the creation of Neustadt, many online are in favour of demolition or demand that something happen here, no matter what. What they all have in common is that they perceive the 'empty' and decaying Hochhausscheiben as a problem. This was

The planning department often refers to this aspect – that demolition is not possible because it would not be accepted by the local population, especially the so-called 'first occupants'. In 2015, different possible futures for the Hochhausscheiben were considered within the planning department and the City Council (see **chapter 3.2**). For the 'demolition and reorganization' scenario, it is emphasized that this would involve the 'loss of a landmark and an architectural-historical value' and that this would mean the 'solution with the most resistance among the population and the greatest accompanying organizational effort by the city of Halle (Saale)'. It is noted here: 'Definitely no acceptance and tolerance among Neustadt's first residents' (PPT, city administration, 31.03.2015).

Stability and Change

Especially the founding generation is believed to be emotionally attached to the buildings, but valuations of future generations remain to be seen, as one of the planners told me (field notes, 27.05.2021). Several planners from Halle see valuations of the Hochhausscheiben linked to the emotional attachment of the older generation of Neustadt residents, but also of city planners. One of them saw what they called the 'permanence' of the buildings as related to a persistence in the mind. They told me that people who had worked for the city administration for a long time had made them part of what they called a 'dogma', and they were sticking to it. Being convicted for too long that the high-rise ensemble was of great quality, no one would be ready to think further or differently, to think of the possibilities to reinterpret the ensemble (field notes, 20.04.2021). They said during the group discussion in February 2020 that

> These are people who built this city, and for them the symbol and the emotional value manifests itself in this district centre. And there is also the question of taboo [...] what is allowed to be touched, what is not allowed to be touched, time has to pass, a generational change has to pass, so that we can say that we can shake taboos. For example, we take something [one or more Hochhausscheiben] back. [...] These are really questionings that take place on a subconscious level and push the discussion in a certain direction without the actors themselves perhaps being aware of it.
> group discussion, 06.02.2020

The valuation of the Hochhausscheiben, as they said, became stabilized in such a way that it isn't easily questioned today. According to the planner, the valuation can be explained by the emotional attachment to the buildings of those planners who were already involved in their creation or have simply been dealing with them for a very long time. The knowledge of the importance given to the buildings in the original planning of Halle-Neustadt and a positive evaluation of this past lead to some of the older planners being emotionally attached to the buildings. In Halle, the planners told me that no one ever 'dared' to suggest the demolition of the ensemble of the Hochhausscheiben. Indeed, Macmillen and Pinch have also noted a sometimes ambivalent relationship between significance and permanence. The knowledge that the school buildings they were asked to evaluate were built for a specific purpose and a sense of responsibility on the part of the planners towards the stock they cared for have also contributed to 'a sensitivity inseparable from judgments of aesthetic value' (Macmillen & Pinch, 2018, pp. 297–298). Furthermore, it has been found that shared values and 'persistent traditions' influence the development and obduracy of technology (Hommels, 2005, p. 338; this has been described, however, for situations transcending a local context or a group).

the result of a survey of citizens on the design of the centre, where the majority named the towers as a priority and expressed their agreement for a revitalization (Stadt Halle (Saale), 2019, p. 5; 9). I will discuss the role of doubt for standby, which is to be found among engaged citizens, in **chapter 8**.

Besides the affective relations of some of the planners and the shared values of a generation of planners (which I have actually not explored further in my research), I see the holding of a valuation within the administration as also linked to a commitment to continuity in administrative practice (an aspect that I have discussed in **chapter 3** as well), and I want to illustrate this again with reference to the report from the preparatory studies from 2017: specific procedures and criteria were developed

for the studies through and along which valuation is enabled. Part of this proceeding is, as the report says, to investigate to what extent identified 'deplorable conditions' in the area of Neustadt's centre 'contradict the urban development plans and objectives, existing plans, concepts and empirical data were analyzed in both the final and draft versions' (Plan&Praxis, 2017, p.7). Under strengths, the report from 2017 says, among other things: 'Commitment of the city to the preservation of the ensemble through a decision in principle by the City Council'. Under 'potentials', it says, for example: 'redevelopment and preservation of all Scheiben high-rise buildings as a common goal of several concepts currently being developed (ISEK 2025, integrated action concept "Socially Integrative City", Future City 2030+ competition, basic evaluation of the Halle-Neustadt value plan)' (Plan und Praxis, 2017, p. 49). Referring to previous decisions and formulated goals plays an important role in administrative valuation. As I see it, the valuation of the Hochhausscheiben as buildings worth preserving has been stabilized within political decisions and concepts throughout the years as these are committed to continuity (an aspect that I have equally highlighted in **chapter 3**). A deplorable condition can also be one if it contradicts the formulated goals. Similarly, something can be valuable because it was also valuable in previous concepts and plans. Valuations become reproduced and stabilized through decisions and concepts, and I see valuation as inherently linked to administrative planning practice. The recurrent valuation and its stabilization in plans and concepts, in my opinion, contributed to the persistence of the buildings.

Furthermore, they became valuable objects, I would argue further, precisely because they were preserved. This is where I see a 'dialectic between significance and permanence' (Macmillen & Pinch, 2018, p. 297). DeSilvey refers to archaeologists Holtorf and Ortman, who found that 'archaeological sites are not being saved because they are valued, but rather they are valued because they are being saved' (DeSilvey, 2017, p. 178). However, while DeSilvey attributes this to a 'preservation paradigm' within most heritage practice today (DeSilvey, 2017, p. 178), I see the dialectic as linked to the fact that the buildings themselves have agency, as described in the previous chapter. As I argue, valuation can also come with the impossibilities of the realization of demolition that I have described in the previous chapter. The valuation of the Hochhausscheiben can be understood as embedded in attempts to fill 'emptiness' and in a strategy of the city administration facing a number of constraints when it comes to the making (design and realization) of possible futures. Obduracy, as has been found, may indeed emerge from local interactions, strategies involved actors develop and 'the constraints posed by the sociotechnical frameworks within which they operate' (Hommels, 2005, pp. 330–331). As I argue in reference to such an understanding of obduracy (and in line with findings from the previous chapter), the city administration performs them as value in part because there were numerous constraints that hindered their demolition. From my point of view, the key moment here was around the year 2000, when it became clear that no demolition funds would be available for the Hochhausscheiben and that demolition could not be financed through the city's budget. Following from this, and in the first overall concept for the development of Neustadt from 2001, the strengthening of the centre and the preservation of the buildings was established for the first time.

At the same time, it becomes clear from the findings within this chapter that valuations are never fully stable, but always contested. Furthermore, valuations need to be actualized, and they change over time. As Alexander and Sanchez note, all kinds of objects have the potential to lose their value at any time, or the other way round, to be performed as value (Alexander & Sanchez, 2018b, p. 17). As I note, not only is the value controversially discussed within Halle's planning department, but it remains unclear how the buildings will be (e)valuated in the future.

I have already shown that the assessment is also controversial within planning. I have also already mentioned that valuations are changing, and I would like to shed more light on this. As one of the planners explained to me, valuation takes time. For example, monument status is today given to

structures from the 1960s. They themselves, as they explained, are part of a generation that has little regard for modernity and it took him a while to understand its value (interview, 02.10.2018). In fact, there are different positions within urban planning, which are also related to different generations of planners. Besides those who are close to retirement today, there are those who (partly coming from West Germany) experienced the divided Germany, and those who did not experience it. It is believed in monument protection that a 'generational gap' of 25 to 30 years is needed for valuation (Büchler & Zasada, 2008, p. 104). (In the USA, buildings are considered 'significant' if they are older than 50 years and in good condition (Macmillen & Pinch, 2018, p. 293). Some of the experts interviewed by Büchler and Zasada also pointed to a generational change in the valuation of socialist modernism in Germany in general and, with it, a changing valuation from a very negative evaluation of architecture in the 1990s, to a re-evaluation. According to one of the experts the authors interviewed, 'a young generation, […] rediscovered not only functional aspects but also the aesthetic values of modernism, such as purism and clarity'. The authors read this as an 'objectification of the debate' that can be observed away from 'political-ideological argumentation' (Büchler & Zasada, 2008, pp. 95–96).

Escherich notes that with the year 2014, in which Halle-Neustadt's 50th anniversary was celebrated (the brochure mentioned above was also developed in this context), Neustadt's material existence in time was no longer fundamentally questioned (Escherich, 2017, p. 213).

It was around this time that the Halle municipality deliberately invited young planners to see how they would react to Neustadt and its centre. As the head of the planning department told me, great hope was placed on the younger generation of planners to develop new perspectives and bring new dynamics into debates that they perceived as polarized (interview, 02.10.2018). In 2014, for example, an international workshop on the Neustadt Centre was organized in cooperation with the state's Competence Centre for Urban Redevelopment, and in the same year the planning department cooperated with a monument preservation seminar at the Bauhaus University in Weimar (interview, 08.07.2020).

While the buildings had already been performed as value in concepts and plans in the early 2000s, the dynamic changed in 2015 when the City Council decided to preserve them and the city showed itself willing to co-finance a revitalization with subsidies. With this City Council resolution (I have already discussed it in different places), Halle's City Council recognized the Hochhausscheiben as a significant ensemble and decided to preserve it (VI/2015/01130, 2015). This new step in the production of value is related to the commissioning of an internationally renowned office (Lacaton & Vassal) for a study on possible futures for the Hochhausscheiben in the same year, whose principle is the valuation of the existing buildings ('»Niemals abreißen«', 2021; Weißmüller, 2014). The study by Parisian architects (in cooperation with Fischer) found that the ensemble of high-rise towers was an 'ensemble of urban significance' (Lacaton & Vassal + Fischer, 2015, p.66). They pointed out in their comparison of different solutions for the high rises that the option 'demolition and reorganization' would not only mean a large financial outlay, but an identity-forming landmark would also be lost. The 'development' option, on the other hand, would make it possible to preserve a landmark of Halle (Saale) (Lacaton & Vassal + Fischer, 2015, p.66).

What remained, however, is that the search for possible futures for the buildings as 'emptiness' risks acting as an obstacle to the potential of the buildings to be turned into actual cultural and also economic value. While the buildings are increasingly performed as significant and valuable, which is also reflected in political decisions and government funding and the use of Scheibe A as an administrative location from 2021, the future remains uncertain and the debates over worthiness continue as long as they remain 'empty'.

The study by KARO architects from 2009 that I have mentioned above found, in addition to the statement that the buildings had symbolic power, that 'the urban symbolic power of the five Scheiben is not the only criterion for their significance. In their used condition they would be:

> — backbone of the centre,
> — sign of the recognizability of the place,
> — edge of the space,
> — frequency bringer for all shops and services in the passage.
> KARO Architekten, 2009

In the study, the potential of the high rises was emphasized. This potential, however, was linked to the condition that the buildings were used. The symbolic power that the study described risks being lost if the buildings were not sold and used (cf. Macmillen & Pinch, 2018, p. 293). Their significance is determined by their potential use, but less along criteria of design, for example. The buildings are thus enacted as 'containers' for potential uses. As I understand it, it is not the empty space itself that is seen as potential here; it is rather that the buildings could achieve significance in a used state from the perspective of the architects. While the buildings are considered worthy of preservation and the buildings are performed as potential, their 'emptiness' prevents their potential from gaining momentum and may even destabilize them in such a way that demolition is considered, even though the buildings' significance is emphasized. I have already mentioned above that not all planners share the view that a use of the Hochhausscheiben is to be aimed for if one considers the urban area beyond the centre (which this study obviously does not do). Thus, there are debates about what could be a 'reasonable use' for the Hochhausscheiben. With the redevelopment statutes of 2017, mixed use was set as a condition for the revitalization of the buildings. In the redevelopment statutes, it has been stated that the lower six floors of the towers should be used commercially in the future, and only the floors above should be made available for residential use. The plan is to 'locate shops, businesses and services on the lower six to seven floors of the Hochhausscheiben to revitalize the passage and make it more attractive' and 'expand the residential function as an important contribution to a lively mix of uses'. Especially for students and for employees of the technology park and the university, and generally 'for broad sections of the population', different types of housing should be set up on the upper floors of the Hochhausscheiben. It is emphasized that the revitalization and establishment of housing in the buildings should be designed to meet demand (VI/2017/02763, 2017; excerpts from 'Sanierungssatzung Nr. 3'). Despite this decision, however, controversies about the 'reasonable use' of the Hochhausscheiben continue. What uses actually allow the buildings to become potential? This question is controversially discussed in relation to different scales (building, centre and Neustadt as a whole, or even Halle as a whole). In relation to the centre alone, several studies and concepts emphasize a potential for the centre that can arise from reuse.

5.3   Synthesis

Particularly before 2015 (and I have already asked myself elsewhere whether 2015 can be considered the beginning of the end of standby), but also today, although to a lesser extent, the Hochhausscheiben as 'empty' and 'physically imposing' buildings have been contested. To this day, they are considered on the one hand the biggest problem of Halle-Neustadt's centre, and valuable buildings on the other. In my view, this coexistence and the debates surrounding the evaluation of 'emptiness' and the valuation of buildings as significant from an urban, historical and architectural point of view, form important coordinates of standby.

It has been written that in-between objects are to be located between 'waste' and 'value' (Alexander & Sanchez, 2018b). According to Alexander and Sanchez, the 'question of value and waste' is central to classification, and they suggest 'indeterminacy' as a term challenging this binary and to describe a third space that resists classification (Alexander & Sanchez, 2018b, pp. 1–2). In her book *Purity and Danger* (Douglas, 2002[1966]) which studies rituals of (dis-)order, Douglas looks at a range of objects and subjects that are 'unclassifiable' such as marginalized people that are 'placeless' or unborn children that are 'treated as both vulnerable and dangerous'(Douglas, 2002, p. 96), but also dirt in different stages. These things do not fit into the order, and their '[f]ormlessness is […] credited with powers, some dangerous, some good' (Douglas, 2002, p. 96). As she notes, 'things that have been incompletely absorbed into the category of waste' might, as has been observed, pose a threat because they are undefinable (DeSilvey, 2006, p. 320). According to Douglas,

> This is the stage at which they are dangerous; their half identity still clings to them and the clarity of the scene in which they obtrude is impaired by their presence. But a long process of pulverizing, dissolving and rotting awaits any physical things

> that have been recognised as dirt. In the end, all identity is gone. The origin of the various bits and pieces is lost and they have entered into the mass of common rubbish. It is unpleasant to poke about in the refuse to try to recover anything, for this revives identity. So long as idenity [sic] is absent, rubbish is not dangerous. (Douglas, 2002, p. 161)

Alexander and Sanchez distance themselves from a development from form to formlessness that they see in Douglas' conception, and propose for the in-between the concept of 'indeterminacy' 'as something that remains between or has an undetermined future'(Alexander & Sanchez, 2018b, p. 8; they see herein a difference from 'ambiguity'). Standby also appears as something that remains and is characterized by an uncertain future. Their existence is destabilized as they are 'empty'; standby is an unstable state in the present and with an uncertain future. Will they no longer be performed as value with people dying who are attached to them and with the buildings themselves deteriorating, as we might suggest with Douglas? In fact, it cannot be determined for the standby mode, because besides the loss of meaning, a re-evaluation and revaluation are equally possible and can be observed from 2015 until today, although they are unstable.

Alexander and Sanchez see both value and waste as forms, and indeterminacy as 'formlessness' (Alexander & Sanchez, 2018b, p. 2). The in-between I am investigating is, however, not formless. First, because as described in the previous chapter, standby's materiality between fragility and stability has its own agency, demanding certain actions while resisting others. And it equally plays a role in processes of (e)valuations that can be understood as socio-material negotiation (Färber, 2014, p. 122; Macdonald, 2009) within which material form plays an important part. For planners, the buildings are the biggest problem of Neustadt due to their 'emptiness', but they are also valuable as the buildings' form and origins are valued as 'significant'. The performances of the buildings as problem and value, within processes of evaluating their 'emptiness' and valuating their 'significance', form an essential part, coexist in a standby mode and give the in-between its own form that has power (cf. Douglas, 2002; see above). It is this form which challenges those engaging with it as it is able to 'haunt the planners' vision of what the city should be' (Edensor, 2005a, p. 62), but also what it could be.

As I showed in the first part, 'emptiness' is evaluated as problematic, mainly in relation to 'emptiness' in other parts of Neustadt and its development, as well as to defined objectives to strengthen Neustadt's centre. At the same time, the possibilities of filling it are limited and controversial. 'Emptiness' also stands in the way of valuation, as I have further shown, because it destabilizes standby's potentiality. Buildings on standby are valued as potential because, in the event of use, they might contribute to a revitalization and revaluation of Neustadt and its centre. They are performed as value as their significance for Neustadt's urban landscape is highlighted, and their architectural form becomes linked to a valued past or at least historically relevant. However, while the buildings are performed as valuable in official documents and by some planners, others question such valuation. While buildings on standby are both problem and value, a closer look at evaluations and valuations shows that the problem presents as 'problematic but not problematic enough' and the value as 'valuable but not valuable enough'(DeSilvey & Edensor, 2013, p. 473). The in-between is thus not only constituted by the coexistence of problem and value alone, but by the non-directional socio-material negotiations of worthiness (Macdonald, 2009) that form coordinates of, and contribute to the endurance of, an in-between in material form and meaning.

Fig. 84

Part III:
Political Matters

Fig. 84
Political Matters (Passage).
Grimberg, 25.01.2023.

6   Detachment

In the previous part of this work, it has become clear not only how the buildings challenge those engaging with them, but also that the buildings' existence depends on relations. The in-between of the Hochhausscheiben, as I found, is for example prolonged by the obduracy of (individual features of) their materiality, but also by the fact that citizens and the city administration are involved in the maintenance of the availability and potentiality of buildings on standby.

Buildings on standby exist through networks (cf. e.g. Jacobs, 2006; Jenkins, 2002; Law & Mol, 1995) and they form these networks as their materiality challenges actors and binds them to them. In that sense they can be understood as 'a network node', existing in interaction and changing with changing relations (Jenkins, 2002, p. 230). We may suggest that if the networks are stable – that is, if elements are 'gathered' in them to 'make it exist and to maintain its existence' (Latour, 2003, p. 246) through use, maintenance and legitimization – buildings themselves are stabilized. In the opposite case – that is, when networks disintegrate or buildings get 'dropped from stabilizing networks' (Edensor, 2005b, p. 313) – buildings decay into ruins.

I have argued at different moments in this work that the Hochhausscheiben are not fully disconnected (cf. Kemmer et al., 2021, p. 6) as there are people who prevent them from becoming ruins and maintain their potentiality (see **chapter 4**). Although buildings on standby share features with ruins, I have observed practices of engaging with the buildings' deteriorating material and maintaining standby. Furthermore, and central for standby is, as I found, the fact that actors continuously (however intermittently) engage in searches for possible futures for the buildings.

Here, I aim to study the quality of relations in networks of buildings on standby. What I am interested in in this chapter is not mainly how many and what elements are or are not gathered in standby to give it a certain stability, but how they are related and relate to each other (cf. Hommels, 2005, p. 334). In general, the quality of relations and actual practices of making relations remain underexposed in recent conceptions of infrastructures and buildings that emphasize relations and connections (Kemmer, 2020, p. 17). For buildings on standby, I assume that it is specific qualities and specific practices through which their networks are shaped, and I would like to explore these for the Hochhausscheiben here.

What can be said about relations in networks that keep buildings in an 'intermediate stage' (de Laet and Mol, 2000; as cited in: Wiedemann, 2021, p. 44) and hold with them the potentiality for an 'on' or 'off'? This is the question guiding my explorations in this chapter.

I will address this question in line with ANT's general objective to understand arrangements 'through illustrating *how* it has come to be' (Müller, 2015b, p. 68) and the attention that 'ANT scholarship pays […] to the dynamic processes by which networks of relationships become formed, shift and have (or fail to have) effect' (Rydin & Tate, 2016, p. 9). I assume that tracing relations allows for important insights into the production and sustention of urban in-between spaces such as the Hochhausscheiben on standby (cf. O'Callaghan et al., 2018). How relations articulate, are formed and negotiated, come under pressure and fail to stabilize is the subject for this first chapter addressing the politics of standby. The following chapters of this third part will then continue these investigations with a focus on struggles around things and questions of accountability. The objective will be to trace and describe the links, gaps and relations (Abram, 2017, p. 67) between elements that shape, destabilize and sustain standby. As in other parts of this thesis, the focus of this chapter is on relations in which urban planning of the municipality is involved.

As the main argument of the present chapter, I take up an argument made by Kemmer et al. – that looseness acts as an '*ordering principle* in standby' (Kemmer et al., 2021, p. 14; emphasis in original), as I will find my material from Halle confirming what the authors have found for relations in standby in general. Buildings on standby, as I want to suggest, are neither fully connected nor disconnected, but embedded in networks within which relations are loose.

As I see it, the buildings are held in an in-between as materializations of possible futures are not achieved. 'Conditions of (im)possibility' for building futures to materialize are, as I would like to suggest here, to a large extent, shaped in relations and networks that span the Hochhausscheiben, and they may change with shifting relations. Or, in other words, whether possible futures will find mate-

rialization depends, I assume, largely on the quality of relations and the abilities of actors to create associations that make action possible. Even though, as I noted in **chapter 2**, possible futures may outlast networks and could survive in the 'heaven of ideas' (Latour, 2002, p. 68),[79] I believe that their materialization can only be achieved through the alignment of both human and non-human actors. This assumption also goes back to a basic assumption of ANT – namely, that action can only happen and actors only become 'capable of action' if they succeed in forming alliances (Müller, 2015a, p. 31). Processes of getting elements involved and keeping them, paying attention to the work needed and difficulties, therefore seem important to research for an understanding of standby.

What I will show is that not only is alignment difficult to achieve and that it fails to be achieved, but also which relations urban planning strives for and which it keeps loose. Standby, as Kühn suggests, 'requires the work and techniques of loosening and tightening, of unweaving and weaving' (Kühn, 2021, p. 129). In fact, standby challenges relational thinking and a network approach. As important as the network perspective is for understanding standby – as it allows, for example, dissolving the dualism of a macro and micro scales (Gad & Bruun Jensen, 2010, p. 58), such approach is challenged by the looseness of relations and detachment (Candea et al., 2015). For, as will become clear, actors do not necessarily strive for the strengthening of relations and it is precisely 'weak ties' (Granovetter, 1973), that give standby a certain stability as an in-between.

While in current research and in particular also in ANT, the focus is on the work of alignment and the formation of networks through alignment, recent literature on detachment in anthropology points to the importance of detachment in social and socio-material relations. As Candea et al. argue, detachment as an empirically observable practice and the meaning that disconnection can take on in specific contexts has been lost with the emphasis on relations that research stresses in turning away from the separation of subject and object, culture and nature and further separations associated with modernity (Candea et al., 2015, p. 1; Yarrow & Jones, 2014, p. 260). The recent literature on detachment, however, argues that 'in a wide range of settings detachment is still socially, ethically and politically valued, and the relationship between detachment and engagement is not simple or singular' (Candea et al., 2015, p. 1). Candea et al.'s aim is not to counter 'legitimate concerns about the politics and ethics of detachment in particular contexts'. Their aim, is, however, to open 'conceptual and ethnographic space allowed for the study of detachment as an actual or potential phenomenon' in a moment in academic research giving priority to the 'relational over the non-relational' (Candea et al., 2015, p. 19). In their proposal to pay ethnographic attention to moments of detachment, Candea et al. refer to Strathern, among others who suggests that 'every cut is revealed as also a relation, every relation is also a disengagement from something else' (Candea et al., 2015, p. 24).

As I will show, looseness in standby becomes tangible in in a process of drifting apart of buildings, planning, owners and the future and in moments when actors detach themselves and alignment is not coming about. We will furthermore see that planners at Halle's city administration are not only involved in practices of building relations, mediating, networking and stabilizing, but also in detachment or the loosening of relations. The city keeps especially its own relation to the buildings loose and aims to take on the role of mediator rather than that of a steering centre as keeping relations was for long perceived a necessity. However, I will show that it cannot fulfil the self-assigned role of mediator, and neither alignment nor a re-formation that the materialization of a building future would require comes about. The city only strengthens its own relation with the buildings, as I will eventually show, after 2015, when it sees the opportunity for shifting relations and for an alignment.

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79   In **chapter 2**, I studied how possible futures and networks 'diverge, reassemble, and diverge again' (Rankin, 2017, pp. 372–373). I also found that building income can remain in the realm of ideas if the buildings are not fully disconnected.

6.1   Drifting Apart

By 1999, three of the five high-rise buildings were privately owned, largely vacant, and, as the alderman of the city of Halle wrote in a letter to the state of Saxony-Anhalt, 'there is no prospect of redevelopment. One is already in receivership by a bank, another is currently being offered for sale on the property market' (letter to the Ministry of Finance, 14.09.1999). In the words of one of the planners from Halle, German reunification 'twisted all the economic conditions' for them as planners and turned the Hochhausscheiben into obsolete buildings. What would a university that had to manage numerous student halls of residence be doing with high-rise buildings in Halle-Neustadt? Why would chemical plants, which are being 'shrunk healthy' from 32,000 to 3,000 employees, need apprentice dormitories? Why would office space of a housing combine be needed? Why should office space of a housing combine be needed after the restructuring of the state and with the end of state housing construction? These were the questions asked by one of the planners of Halle's city administration during an interview. 'Sell it! Get rid of it!' was the answer they then gave themselves (interview, 02.10.2018).

From the point of view of city planners at Halle's city administration, as can be seen from an email from 2008, planners 'have tried with all the means at our disposal to make a difference where it was possible to make a difference. […] Unfortunately, however, we do not have unlimited influence and financial means at our disposal to change the situation in the short term' (email, 06.05.2008).

From the late 1990s onwards, multi-storey car parks were built between the Hochhausscheiben, a shopping centre was built in the centre of Neustadt, and the Neustadt was connected to the old town by tram lines. → **fig. 85; 86**   Referring to the shopping centre, the planner told me that this 'exorbitantly accelerated the decline of the actual passage. […] And the whole thing then pretty much went out of our hands' (interview, 02.10.2018). As they told me, the shops at the foot of the Hochhausscheiben became less frequented, and the centre threatened to fall into disrepair. To counteract this, the passage was renovated in the early 2000s, the public spaces redesigned and trees planted with the help of public urban redevelopment funds. The planner said: 'we invested many millions into this inner part [referring to the passage]. That hasn't necessarily turned out badly, but it doesn't reverse other trends in any way (interview, 02.10.2018). The planner's phrase that the situation was going out of their hands suggests that the relation between urban planning and the Hochhausscheiben had, as I want to suggest, become *loose* as all kinds of relations, including those between the city and owners or the buildings and the future, were loosened (cf. Kemmer et al., 2021, p. 6) (see also **chapter 1**[80]). I argue with Kemmer et al. that 'looseness functions as an *ordering principle* in standby' (Kemmer et al., 2021, p. 14; emphasis in original).

Standby, as I would like to suggest, needs to be understood as embedded in complex processes of reconfiguration with unclear roles and futures that include the 'thinning of social and material relations' (Dzenovska, 2020, p. 19) and that hold 'in tension the old world that is ending and the new world that is not yet visible or intelligible' (Dzenovska & Knight, 2020). Dzenovska and Knight see what they describe as emptiness and of which the thinning of relations is a constitutive part, as 'a spatial-temporal coordinate of suspension indexing disruptive transition toward indeterminate futures' (Dzenovska & Knight, 2020). People the authors encountered in the field spoke of 'emptiness' when describing how 'places lose their constitutive elements' such as 'people, schools, services, social networks, and jobs'. In their view, 'today emptiness is emerging as a concrete spatial-temporal coordinate in the global landscape of capitalism and state power, and a heuristic device of political struggles' (Dzenovska & Knight, 2020). For Pelkmans, who also uses the term 'emptiness', the latter is characterized by ambiguity, by struggles, but also by an uncomfortable drifting apart between reality and imagination. As Pelkmans notes for buildings in Adjaria, Georgia, their emptiness is difficult to

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80   In **chapter 1** I traced how planners were increasingly overwhelmed by the multiplicity of time and the future seemed to get lost. There, it became apparent that with a loss of control and the loosening of the prospect of extending the present as a form of securing the future of the buildings, the future itself was in danger of getting lost. The aim here is to better understand how the experience of a dwindling of the future is embedded in reconfigurations within arrangements of the production of the urban.

Fig. 85
Fig. 86

Fig. 85; 86
The main axis with Scheibe A before and after the construction of the shopping centre and the tram line. Schmuhl, n.d. [1990s and early 2000s].

explain as their 'status or ownership is as unclear as the politico-economic context is, or as the direction of the transition' (Pelkmans, 2003, p. 127). Pelkmans turns to the contradictions of postsocialist transformation and notes that

> What is called transition is actually a process in which the space between images and realities is reconfigured. This uncomfortable space, and the many links that connect the two, need to be explored to grasp the processes of change taking place in post-Soviet countries. (Pelkmans, 2003, p. 132)

Similar to 'emptiness', the 'grey zone' suggested by Frederiksen and Knudsen (Frederiksen & Knudsen, 2015) as both empirical object and analytical lens describes a 'permanent stage of being with no end point in sight' prevalent in Eastern Europe and conceptualizes it as being fuelled with 'various forms of uncertainty, ambiguity and turbidity' (Frederiksen & Knudsen, 2015). Their conception of the 'grey zone' emerged from a critique of the transition paradigm that was dominant in the description of postsocialism. One criticism of the authors of this conception is that 'it [also] overlooked the local-level uncertainties that accompanied the everyday management of changing social and economic landscapes' (Frederiksen & Knudsen, 2015, p. 9).
While emptiness is associated with endings, and grey zones highlight ambiguity, looseness as an 'ordering principle' (Kemmer et al., 2021, p. 14) of relations in standby suggests that such relations are neither solid nor completely disrupted (Kemmer et al., 2021, p. 6). The fact that relations are loose does not mean complete dissolving of relations. As Kemmer et al. highlight,

> standby can be understood as an infrastructural state of planned detachment. During standby, the withdrawal, reduction, or impassibility of some components – that is, workers, energy flows, or techno-material elements – points to modes of (partial) disconnectivity without necessarily implying dysfunctionality. (Kemmer et al., 2021, p. 6)

In the following fig section I would like to trace first how relations between buildings, city, owners and the future were loosened.

Speculation and Losing Track

The city lost track of who owned the buildings and failed to contact the owners of what had, as planners noted, become objects of speculation. In an email from 2004, a city planner wrote to their colleagues that Scheibe E had become an 'object of speculation' that, as they wrote, 'constantly changes hands and is mostly bought out in a foreclosure sale. The open space around it also belongs to a dubious private company that cannot be reached in any way.' The city administration was overwhelmed with the many purchase transactions (see **chapter 1**) in Halle, so that the planner's request that buyers and their intentions be examined went unheard. The relevant office replied that they had 30,000 transactions a year on their table. The planner therefore asked their colleagues: 'what can we do here?' and 'who is inviting the buyer to get a picture of the current situation […]?' (email, 08.06.2004).[81] As I

explained in **chapter 1**, the Hochhausscheiben were privatized at a time when the liberalization of the housing market in Halle-Neustadt had reached a new stage. A planner had reported, and this can be traced in more structural analysis, that between the 1990s and the early 2000s there was a change in Halle-Neustadt's ownership situation in connection with the liberalization of the housing market. The new investors who invested in Halle-Neustadt and also in the Hochhausscheiben were, as Bernt et al. note, 'integrated with global financial channels and their business involved funneling capital into undervalued assets. For them, property acquisitions were not seen as a long-term business activity, but as part of a portfolio managed with the goal of maximizing revenue in the short to medium term' (Bernt et al., 2017, p. 560; see also general introduction).

I am able to trace for Scheibe E that the owners changed several times in the early 2000s. From 1999/2000 onwards, the building was administered by a mortgage bank in Berlin as the owner was in bankruptcy proceedings (notes, 08.03.2000). It was put up for auction, but no buyer could be found, which actually did not surprise anyone at Halle's city administration, as they saw little hope for the buildings at the time. I have recorded this in **chapter 1**, where I also noted that the alderman of the city was concerned that an auction on the part of the city was out of the question, because whoever bought Scheibe E at auction would have to bear the demolition costs. In the aftermath, the building was foreseen for demolition, but no funding for the demolition of one or several of the Hochhausscheiben was granted in the frame of the governmental urban development programmes.

The building was then sold off at a new auction in 2001. The company that had bought the building in 2001 filed for insolvency in 2002, and when the city contacted the new owner, who had bought the building from a forced auction, they only answered on the phone: at the moment they had no time and in August there were company holidays in Bavaria. A planner commented cynically on the telephone transcript: 'how nice!' (22.07.2003). The investors could no longer be reached afterwards.

In 2005, a spiritual community named after an Indian guru offered to take over the Hochhausscheiben (for free) and use it by setting up a private university in the buildings. After a conversation with the so-called 'Maharishi World Peace Foundation' and subsequent research, one planner wrote to her colleague: 'Our research on the internet revealed that the peace palaces presented are rather *Luftschlösser* (literally translated 'castles in the air')' (internal email, 20.06.2005).   → **fig. 87**

Even if this is probably one of the most curious examples, the intensions of potential investors and owners of the time in actually developing the buildings should be questioned. This also becomes clear by an incident from 2008 which concerns the incident of a sale of Scheibe E. A newspaper article reported that building E had a new owner, but that

> Actually, the impression is given that the property is still for sale or is currently in the hands of an estate agent. For some weeks now, a large tarpaulin has read 'For sale…'. But this is not the case. At least not necessarily, Neutecta managing director [...] reveals to SN: 'We bought the property because we consider the location worthy of development. [...]' However, with the sales offer not to be overlooked, Neutecta does not want to close itself off to possible offers. After the professional safeguarding, different utilization concepts are now being examined without any time pressure.

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81   As Kuhlmann and Bogumil find for East German municipalities, 'dramatic structural changes in personnel and adjustment processes that took place in the East German municipalities after the change of system are evident in the fact that the number of municipal employees fell by a third between 1991 and 1995 (from 662,000 to 438,000) and the "employee density" fell from 42 to 28 employees per 1,000 inhabitants between 1991 and 1995' (Kuhlmann & Bogumil, 2019). Given the enormous administrative burden that the post-1990 transformations brought, including the privatizations, this is an astonishing fact in my view. The comprehensive reforms within the administrative structures are an interesting topic, which certainly also contributed to standby, as new forms

of working together had to be found within the administration as well. As Kuhlmann and Bogumil note 'East German municipalities had to cope in a few years with processes that had taken forty years in the West German municipalities' (Kuhlmann & Bogumil, 2019). Difficulties that persist to this day and that my informants mentioned were caused, for example, by the fact that West Germans were assigned to central positions in the administration, but they did not have the necessary qualifications for administrative tasks (field notes, 20.04.2021; Kuhlmann and Bogumil equally highlight this fact). However, a detailed treatment is unfortunately not possible within the framework of this work.

Fig. 87   Fig. 88   Fig. 89

Fig. 87
Advertisement in the newspaper *Die Zeit* from 2005
by the Maharishi World Peace Foundation, which, according
to its own information, wanted to establish so-called
Peace Palaces throughout Germany in 2005. The spiritual
institutions, which were to offer herbal preparations,
meditation and the like, were to be financed by wealthy families
in the respective city. The foundation also approached the
city of Halle in the same year and proposed to take over the
Hochhausscheiben to house a 'university' for up to 3000 students.
Source: Halle City Administration.

Fig. 88
'For Sale'. The author, 08.07.2020.

Fig. 89
Façade of Hochhausscheibe E.
The 'for sale' banner which had been
hanging on the building since 2008
and was getting on in years,
had been removed shortly before my
last visit to Halle in January 2023.
Grimberg, 25.01.2023.

Online research by city planners on the owning companies ended with no results and, in view of wide-ly ramified and non-transparent corporate structures, letters were returned and considered undeliver-able due to wrong addresses. In an email from 2013, for example, it was stated that the city has been unsuccessfully trying for years to send notices to the owner of Scheibe A as letters were returned as undeliverable (email, 13.11.2013). What this shows is that relationships between the building and the city drifted further and further apart, but so were those between the city and the owners. From owners who answer the phone but are unwilling to meet with the city and then disappear into insolvency, to offers from dubious associations, to newspaper ads and 'for sale' banners that are never taken down, to letters that the city sends to owners but which are returned, it is clear that the materialization of a building future, and even the prospect for a materialization, became unlikely.

From the point of view of urban planning, the 'property and ownership situation' of the Hochhaus-scheiben turned out 'extremely complicated in several respects' (letter, 10.08.2011). In numerous letters and minutes, this is mentioned as one of the main reasons for the uncertain future of the build-ings and one of the main obstacles to development. As early as 2000, the city found that the own-ership situation made the future of the buildings uncertain. A planner wrote to the couple who had proposed a staggered reduction of the buildings in 2000:

> Unfortunately, it is impossible to say at the moment where the
> development will go with these buildings, especially since these
> buildings have different owners. Both redevelopment and a removal of
> floors require a financial outlay, only affordable if there is a demand
> for use by suitable tenants.
> letter, 09.08.2000

In a letter to the city's alderman from 2011, the planning department wrote:

> Only the owner of Scheibe E is available as an interlocutor. The owner
> of Scheibe B has become insolvent and the creditor has been pursuing a
> compulsory auction for some time, but without success. For this reason,
> the compulsory auction has been reinstated. The owner of Scheibe A is
> a company which has been dissolved in the meantime.
> To the best of our knowledge, the property has fallen to the company as
> a private individual. They [referring here to owners of both
> Scheibe A and B] are not domiciled in Germany.
> letter, 10.08.2011

While in 2000 the planners' concern was that these were different owners who would be difficult to persuade to come to an agreement, by 2011 the city had partially lost track of the owners. In addition, as stated in a resolution from 2015 that I discussed in **chapter 1**, 'speculation, resales, mortgages and foreclosures had led to owners who were unable or unwilling to act in the case of three high-rise buildings' (VI/2015/01130, 2015, p. 3; see also **chapter 1**).

What I have been able to find here in tracing the relations between the city, the buildings and the owners over time is that looseness is to be understood as the 'outcome of processes that complex-ly enjoin a range of people, materials, and technologies in shifting configurations' (Yarrow & Jones, 2014, p. 260).[82] Above all, the relation of urban planning to the buildings has become loose, between the city and the owners, who are difficult for the city to reach. The fact that the city's overview of the ownership situation and control over the future of the centre of Neustadt and the buildings has

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82   Yarrow and Jones examine detachment in relationship in craftwork and in particular how the relationship between craftworker and object – in this case a cut stone, changes at the moment the stone is inserted into the building. In the case described by Yarrow and Jones the moment when a cut stone is incorporated into a building, a detachment takes place that rather 'transforms the nature of the mason's connection to the object of his work' rather than cutting it (Yarrow & Jones, 2014, p. 270). While the case they study is quite different from the one described here, it helps to understand that relations shift without disrupting entirely.

moved out of their hands, as the planner put it, indicates that relations between the city, the buildings, the owners and also the future have been stretched. However, the drifting apart of actors does not mean 'non-relation'. With Yarrow and Jones, I rather suggest that '[a]cts of disconnection, severing, and distancing create new entities, and reconfigure the relationships between these' (Yarrow & Jones, 2014, p. 272). In the process of actors drifting apart, a formation emerges, I would suggest, whose organizing principle is looseness. I understand standby as this socio-material formation in which relations are neither completely torn down nor stable, but are instead connected in loose ways. For this, of course, the buildings themselves play a decisive role, as it is relations of actors with the buildings that will affect their relations with one another. Loosely connected, people and things remain somehow connected, not least through the buildings themselves for whom in particular the city planners aim to find a future.

6.2   Attempts at Alignment and Detachment

Whether or not a future can be found and will eventually find a materialization, will depend on the alignment of actors. Generally, as the planners from Halle explained to me, 'this is […] how urban planning works, many people come together and try to realize the city' (group discussion, 14.05.2019). What I will find, however, is that actors, including the city of Halle, are involved in attempts at alignment and detachment simultaneously.

In a letter from 2009, the city planning department made it clear to a citizen who had proposed the demolition of individual Hochhausscheiben that its implementation would require not only public funding from urban redevelopment programmes approved by the state of Saxony-Anhalt, but also the consent of the private owners (letter, 10.12.2009). In this way, while the city planners found the citizen's proposal worthy of consideration and invited the citizen to discuss the idea at a joint meeting, they also pointed to the complexity of such an undertaking, as it would require a coming together of elements such as state funding, the city, the state, and owners.

The role that planners assign to themselves is that of a mediator who steers 'things in the right direction'. Urban development, as today's alderman for city development called it in an interview, is

> an incredibly tough and exhausting process and I still enjoy it because you have to hold dozens of individual discussions and convince many people to participate in order to steer things in the right direction – because each of them has their own idea, but I always see my task in this way, I have to make the big brackets around it.
> interview, 28.05.2021

'Because', they add, 'one thing I've noticed is that it doesn't work as it did in a centralized system, like it did in the GDR' (interview, 28.05.2021).

Alignment not Coming About

Standby can be understood, as I argue, as a situation in which alignment is sought but does not come about.[83] Empirically, this can be observed in situations from Halle-Neustadt where joint efforts fail and commitments have no permanence. I would also like to remind the reader of **chapter 2** here, in which I showed how standby as a process is determined by the un/making of possible futures emerging at one moment, moving on non-linear trajectories, and finally disappearing to enter the body of unrealized futures. **Chapter 2** showed how the city of Halle tried to convince the state of Saxony-Anhalt to

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83   The quest for alignment and the difficulties of such an endeavour have also been encountered in another form, namely the arrangement of past events (see **chapter 3**).

use Hochhausscheibe C and thus secure the future of the building. While I examined the rhythms of standby in **chapter 2**, I would like to focus here on relations in attempts at alignment.

What I will base my analysis on is Callon's proposal to understand the workings of power in translation processes. Going back to Callon, power is in ANT understood as 'the formation of a common interest and single will through the translation of initially disparate entities that stabilises an actor-network' (Müller, 2015a, p. 33). Callon's concept of translation is often used to analyse processes of relating, in particular also in planning research (Rydin & Tate, 2016, p. 7). Callon describes a process of translation in which, as a first step, a problem is identified and actors are related to it, who are then to be brought to participate through 'interessement', 'enrolment' and last by 'mobilization' (Callon, 1984). Through enrolment, new actors enter the network, while through mobilization a 'common cause of the network' (Rydin & Tate, 2016, p. 7) becomes stabilized so that each actor may represent the network as a whole (Callon, 1984, p. 196). Less frequently – but Callon also emphasized this possibility – the focus is on failed attempts at relating. However, this is precisely what I will observe below, together with efforts to keep relations loose.

Relating Actors

How difficult it is to get actors to align in collective efforts for a revitalization of the centre of Neustadt and the Hochhausscheiben (the alderman in the quote above calls it an exhausting process) will become clear through two examples from the early 2000s. Back then, the city was trying to get the owners of the Hochhausscheiben and businesses at the foot of the towers to cooperate in the revitalization of the centre. In particular, the city saw the state of Saxony-Anhalt, as owner of Scheibe C, as having a responsibility to work on a future for the Hochhausscheiben.

In **chapter 2**, I mentioned the Round Tables, which emerged as an institution in the 1990s in East German cities, initially and predominantly to allow for civil society groups to get involved in the transformation processes. I described how the city of Halle's alderman for urban development initially saw the state as responsible for preventing the vacancy of Scheibe A and C. The city then assigned the state the responsibility for finding a solution to the pressing problem of the impending vacancy, together with the student union, and to secure a future for the buildings.

When the talks with the state failed, however, as I also explained, the alderman convened the first Round Table. They expanded the number of actors associated with the 'problem' of the Hochhausscheiben by 'representatives of the City Council, the press and also the affected neighbours of the Neustadt centre (the merchants have joined together to form a community of interests in the Halle-Neustadt-Verein)' (letter, 14.09.1999). As I wrote there, the Round Tables are in part to be understood in line with attempts to link the future of the Hochhausscheiben to other futures on different scales by getting the largest possible number of actors involved in the 'gathering' (Latour, 2003, p. 235) behind the future it proposed at the meeting – housing government agencies in the building. I mention this example here once again, and in what follows would like to point out further how the city wants to bring actors together, but fails to do so. As I will show, the city aims to take on the role of a mediator, but struggles to fulfil its self-appointed role.

On 20 December 2001, the head of the planning unit invited representatives of the regional state, among them a representative of the ministry for finance of Saxony-Anhalt to a consultation scheduled for 23 January 2002 in the city hall in Halle. The programme for the meeting included a presentation of ideas for the development of the centre of Neustadt by the city and architects commissioned by the city (letter, 20.12.2001). This caused displeasure on the part of the representative of the Ministry of Finance, who wrote to the city's alderman one week later to say they regretted not being involved in choosing the architects working on the redevelopment plans (letter, 27.12.2001). They cited scheduling difficulties as the reason for their inability to attend the meeting. The city then postponed the meeting because, as seen from a planner's note on one of the letters sent on the issue of the Hochhausscheiben, the Finance Ministry appeared to the city to be 'almost the most important' actor (letter, 16.11.1999). Several emails were sent back and forth, until finally the minister agreed to attend the meeting.

From the point of view of the planners, the consultation went very well. The Finance Ministry representative held out the prospect of use by the state, or so the planners believed after the meeting. Two days later, one of the planners informed the mayor of the city of Halle in an internal letter:

I am pleased to inform you that we have justified hopes of initiating
the revitalization process of the Neustadt district centre [...]
At the same time, a request was made to support the State of Saxony-
Anhalt in that the land in Barabarastraße, which would then no longer
be needed, would be put to a subsequent use.
internal letter, 25.01.2002

Escaping Fixity

It seems that it was a bit too early to spread the word. On 31 January, the representative of the Minis-
try asked for the protocol to be 'corrected': 'Please correct the consultation protocol on page 2, last
paragraph, as set out in the annex' (letter, 31.01.2002). They had the protocol changed in two details
with quite big consequences. Whereas the protocol said in the earlier version, they assured their
support as a person, they had it changed into an impersonal support of the state of Saxony-Anhalt.

The second aspect they asked to be changed is that it should not be, in contrast to the first
version, the responsibility of the city to find a potential use (or support the state in doing so) for
the property that would remain vacant in the event of a use of Scheibe C. They pointed out that
in opposition to that, the Land must be given a 'free hand' for the subsequent use of the property
in Barbarastraße. Even though they asked for the city's support in thinking about potentialities,
they made clear that it would and should be in the hand of the Land to decide upon the later use
of the property. They were in this regard marking the 'property line' (L. Bennett & Layard, 2015,
p. 411). Whether the city tried to put a commitment into the Minister's mouth cannot be clearly
said. What is clear from the situation, however, is that the state, as owner of Scheibe C, rejected
any interference of the city in its decision-making on the future of its property and reacted by de-
taching. In my interpretation, the city tried here to tie the state to the issue of the subsequent use
of Scheibe C, trying to make the Land assume its responsibility and prioritize the building for the
accommodation of governmental institutions. The state, however, escaped fixity, and detached itself.
The aforementioned framework that Callon proposes for the study of power (on the basis of a study
of scallops) has found its way into planning research to investigate 'the dynamic processes by which
networks of relationships become formed, shift and have (or fail to have) effect' (Rydin & Tate,
2016, p. 9). What Callon observes for scallops, among other things, is an extreme sensitivity to all at-
tempts at manipulation and a reaction by detachment (Callon, 1984, p. 212). His observation serves
me here to understand that the state of Saxony-Anhalt refused working with the city in the search for
a possible future for Scheibe C, as the city seeks to increase its influence and strengthen its relation
with the state and the building. What I want to suggest based on the example is that commitments, if
not avoided altogether, have no permanence in standby; on the contrary, they can become detached
from any commitment, just like the actors who express them. The actor who shows commitment in a
web of relations loses some of their autonomy, because a strengthening of one relation inevitably has
an impact on all other relations. How elements escape fixity also becomes clear from the following
example:

Failing Alignment

On the same day of the changed minutes, the city underlined the importance of cooperation between
all actors in a statement to the press (press release, 31.01.2002). In the press release, the city announc-
es its intention to create incentives for investment by designating a redevelopment area and, at the
same time, to involve the property owners in the revitalization through an 'urban development con-
tract' and to bind them to the goal of a joint effort to revitalize the centre (press release, 31.01.2002).
According to the city administration's plan, owners in the centre would 'commit themselves to a
symbolic cost contribution of 1,000 euros' by signing a joint agreement. The agreement between the
city and the owners (first version of November 2001) formulates a 'commitment to cooperation' in
the revitalization of the centre with 'an appropriate cost-sharing by the owners concerned, which is
still to be specified in detail' after the planning has been completed. The costs and benefits of public
space renovations would be shared among all involved, it says here. While the owners should par-

ticipate in the planning, as they would also profit from it, they should in return be supported in their
projects by public funds. The agreement said: 'owners should pledge support to finance expected high
unprofitable costs; these should be distributed as appropriately as possible' (agreement, version as of
18.06.2002). During a meeting on the agreement, the owners criticized the city for not contributing
itself, feared encroachment on their private property and complained that banks would not attribute
grants for projects in Neustadt, including the city's own bank. The city planners replied that the city
itself was also involved in the planning and that the agreement was necessary in order to acquire state
subsidies for the revitalization. According to the city, the banks should be included in the dialogue to
convince them to support investment in the centre of Neustadt (minutes, 18.06.2002). In the end, only
four owners out of thirteen signed the agreement and the plan for concerted action and a sharing of
responsibility failed – to the frustration of the city that expressed its disappointment: 'This is a very
questionable result', wrote a senior planner of the city. And further:

I continue to adhere to the goal of bringing together all conceivable
efforts of property owners and the public sector for the district centre
of Halle-Neustadt and continue to offer to lead the discussion together
with the planners commissioned by us, in order to ultimately get a
feasible planning concept off the ground.
letter, 19.06.2002

The planners' attempt to align actors in collective efforts for the revitalization of Neustadt's centre
failed, leaving city officials frustrated as they did not see any possibility of getting the owners in-
volved. Here, too, it became clear how an alignment did not come about, as actors escape fixity. As
planners from Halle explained to me, it is particularly difficult in the Neustadt centre to form net-
works that enable joint action. In contrast to the old town of Halle, for example, there are only a few
owners here who own large building complexes. If some of the actors detach themselves, nothing
moves forward. Moreover, some of the actors are connected in other associations in which the city
does not participate, which makes the role of the city as a mediator even more difficult (field notes,
20.04.2021). These are very delicate negotiations and conversations they have to have here as a city,
they explained (field notes, 24.06.2021).

In the situation described above, owners refused cooperation as they feared the city could
interfere with their property and impose its 'rules for cooperation' with the signed agreement. Where
the city wanted to create security and strengthen relations through a declaration of commitment, the
owners wanted to maintain flexibility and looseness. At the same time, they blamed the city itself for
not sufficiently engaging, as well as banks that were not willing to give credit for any projects in the
centre of Neustadt.

The Absence of a Centre

The city planners, seeing themselves in the role of a mediator, were left disappointed and without
any possibilities to achieve collective efforts for a revitalization. Obviously, however, the city cannot
fulfil the role of mediator in such a way that collective efforts would enable the realization of possible
futures. As shown, owners and commitments escape fixity and no alignment is achieved. As long as
owners do not wish to participate, the city is unable to take on the role it has given itself of media-
tor between buildings, owners and the future. Subsequently, the city itself financed concepts for the
revitalization of the centre and hoped to attract investment from private investors by pointing out
possibilities. Furthermore, as written in the beginning, it continued to work on the development of the
centre of Neustadt where action was possible.

What can be observed is that the power of command is shifted away from the city after so-
cialism (cf. Bernt & Haus, 2010, pp. 19–20). In fact, in an analysis of urban governance in the east
Germany of the early 2000s, the absence of a steering centre has been identified (Bernt & Haus, 2010,
p. 19; own translation). It has been found that the loss of tax revenue coming with deindustrialization
and depopulation created financial gaps that made it impossible for municipalities and local housing
companies to take an 'independent approach to the problem' (Seelig, 2007, p. 21; own translation).

Bernt states that cities risk 'find[ing] themselves trapped in a cycle of abandonment and decline' with high unemployment rates and depopulation as these lead to 'a downturn in the income available for the maintenance of urban infrastructures'. The lack of maintenance and often abandonment of infra-structures contribute, on their side, to decreasing living conditions and further out-migration. The vi-cious circle Bernt draws closes with the fact that, due to a lack of tax revenue, 'the ability of local gov-ernment to cope with the difficulties is seriously impaired' (Bernt, 2009, p. 755). With the experience taking hold 'that the state can no longer simply be entrusted with the solution of our problems', the state has 'increasingly been given a "guaranteeing" or "activating" role' (Bernt & Haus, 2010, p. 14; own translation). As Bernt et al. note, underlying post-1990 approaches to shaping urban transforma-tion is a 'cooperative optimism', 'which sees the role of the state primarily as a facilitator, bringing together the different interests and thus ensuring win-win solutions for all parties involved' (Bernt & Haus, 2010, p. 23; own translation). In the literature on political restructuring and planning in east German cities after 1990, it has been found that reconfigurations after socialism and in times of urban shrinkage led to new complexities and interdependencies within the networks shaping urban devel-opment and required new forms of organization that have yet to be found and that are often unstable (Bernt & Haus, 2010, p. 19; Haller & Altrock, 2010, p. 160).[84] According to Bernt and Haus, the ab-sence of a steering centre needs to be understood against the background of financial constraints, but also of today's dominant principles of privatization and market orientation, pluralism and cooperative political styles (Bernt & Haus, 2010, p. 20). This would mean that gaps also arise from an optimism of cooperation, with which the city in turn tries to meet these gaps.

　　This is also what I can observe from the examples above. In fact, owners avoid committing and detach themselves at moments when relations risk becoming too tight. And the city is not able to fulfil the role of mediator that it has given itself. It attempts to align actors, but is no longer in the centre of networks. If we look at the relations, the present configuration can be described with Guggenheim as one 'which contains many actants that neither belong to a specific network nor link to another network' (Guggenheim, 2009, p. 171). The case he studies is that of a building change in Zurich where the court ruled that conversion was possible in principle, but that it 'would require a new network to be put in place, consisting of cooperative owners, a lot of money and an "integrated concept"' that would allow the industrial building to be turned into housing (Guggenheim, 2009a). Guggenheim notes for his case study, and this resonates in my view with a standby mode, that 'the building is not totally materialized or muted either. [It] can be muted in principle, but only at a very high cost: namely, the insertion of a new network' (Guggenheim, 2009, p. 171). The situation he de-scribes is that of an in-between where the (re-)formation of a stable network is not achieved. I under-stand it as a situation of mismatch of elements that cannot be put together to form a new whole. This

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84　It has been found for the realization of demolitions that cooperation was far from easy. Haller and Liebmann, but also Bernt, describe how while demolitions were the common goal of both hous-ing companies and municipalities, 'achieving collective action is far from easy. The main reason for the difficulties is a classic "free rider dilemma"', as Bernt calls it (Bernt, 2009, p. 761). Haller and Liebmann also observe how difficult local cooperation is when it comes to the realization of demo-litions: 'Here, no one seems to have really got beyond the fateful "Mikado game": "Whoever moves has already lost". Housing companies that are prepared to implement necessary demolition meas-ures may have to cope with the loss of tenants and thus rent payers in addition to the demolition costs, because in the meantime these tenants fill the empty flats of other providers on the housing market' (Haller & Liebmann, 2002, p. 43; own translation). In many cases, companies were waiting for others to move and for their own profit from other's demolitions. As Haller and Liebmann note one year after the start of urban redevelopment policies in 2001, 'implementation requires a high degree of cooperation and networking between the various relevant actors' (Haller & Liebmann, 2002, p. 34; own translation). The authors, who accompanied the urban redevelopment programmes scientifically, observe the occurrence of numerous conflicts, as cooperation and coordination proved complicated in practice (Haller & Liebmann, 2002, p. 38; own translation). According to Bernt, it is in this way that 'a general blocking of any action occurs' (Bernt, 2009, p. 762). In the case of an unwillingness to cooperate, as Bernt shows, the city's plans could consequently not be realized. Bernt et al. have argued that this situation is to be understood as 'a state of limbo in which public planning remains theoretically in place, but its implementation is impossible' (Bernt et al., 2017, p. 567). According to a report on the implementation of measures from 2006, many municipalities were using 'working groups, steering or even steering committees' to 'coordinate joint action with the other actors in urban redevelopment'. It finds, however, that '[I]n some cities, those responsible are called upon to become more aware of this steering and coordinating role in the urban redevelop-ment process' (Bundestransferstelle Stadtumbau Ost, 2006, p. 75; own translation).

is, from my perspective, partly because city planners are unable to form alliances that would enable them to act as mediators. However, I will show in the following section that the city itself holds rela-tionships loosely, particularly with the buildings themselves.

Detachment: Dealing with Complexity

What became clear in the previous section is that looseness in standby is embedded in a 'state that results when things do not quite "add up"' (Law & Mol, 2002; as cited in: Knox et al., 2008, p. 871). This is how Law and Mol describe complexity, and I want to suggest in this section that keeping re-lations loose is a 'way of dealing with complexity' (Kühn, 2021, p. 129).

　　As I will show, loose relations between the city and buildings allow the city to keep responsibil-ity away from itself, which appears as a necessity to the city as it would not be able to 'step in' (Bernt et al., 2017, p. 566). Due to its financial difficulties, the city of Halle would not be able to acquire the buildings itself or pay for their demolition or revitalization. Neither would it be able to oblige owners to demolish or renovate the buildings, because in this case it would have to bear part of the costs itself, should the owner be able to prove the unprofitability of demolition or renovation.[85]

One Problem Less?

Although the ownership situation was perceived by planning as complicated and obstructive, the city was nevertheless grateful for any investor interested in the buildings. Since buildings A, B and E had been offered again and again at auctions, but no buyer could be found, the city administration was happy if there *was* a buyer. In 2015, for example, the sale of Scheibe B to an investor was presented as a solution, although the investor was hesitant when asked about their plans for the building by a local newspaper. A newspaper article reported:

> When the auction hammer fell, the city of Halle had one problem
> less. The auction of the Neustadt Hochhausscheibe B plays into the
> cards of Halle's city administration. After all, a coherent concept is
> still being sought for the dilapidated high-rise giants, which were
> previously considered unsaleable. Now the future of one of the four
> decaying blocks is in the hands of the new investor. [...] for 300,100
> euros. [...] The investor was cautious about the future use of the
> 18-storey building. [...] According to the appraisal, the auctioned high-
> rise was worth one euro, experts estimated the demolition costs at 1.06
> million. Several auctions have already failed. The city administration
> continues to ponder the future of the dilapidated buildings that
> characterize the Neustadt. [...] In Neustadt, the latest sale is a source
> of optimism. 'We hope for a revival of the Scheibe', [...] from the
> Bürgerverein Stadtgestaltung.
> *MZ*, 07.03.2015

Before the auction date, hopes that there would actually be bids were very low. From a newspaper article on 5 February it can be seen that the building was to be auctioned off for one euro, as the title of the article states. It was found that the building was not economically usable due to its structural condition and that the land value of the property was estimated at 267,900, but the demolition costs of

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85　Kemmer and Simone also note that looseness can be a necessity. However, in a completely different context. For residents in Rio and Jakarta, looseness can become a necessity as it might allow them to 'refigure themselves, to find new ways of operating under the radar, and thus to persist' (Kemmer & Simone, 2021, p. 11). In a way, however, this ironically also applies to the city here, because it can thus uphold the image of the mediator and maintain its legitimacy. As Abram and Weszkalnys point out, and I will return to this point in subsequent chapters, 'it has become increasingly imperative for municipalities to present themselves as though they were effective actors despite the threats to their autonomy and accountability' today (Abram & Weszkalnys, 2013a, pp. 12–13).

the building were estimated at 1,065,982 euros. In addition, it is reported here that previous attempts to auction the building had fallen through because there were either no bids or the bids were too low for a creditor, as in 2009. Another auction in 2010 was withdrawn (*MZ*, 05.02.2015).

In fact, not only the city but also initiatives like the citizens' association Stadtgestaltung hoped that the investor would renovate the building and put it to some use. Even though hesitant about a future use, they are pinning their hopes on them. Better one buyer than no buyer because, as the quoted article says, the buildings had long been considered unsellable.

When asked about the future of the buildings, a planner wrote in 2013 that it seemed 'almost impossible' to them 'to find an investor on the open market in the moment who can cover the relatively high refurbishment costs with a profitable subsequent use and still achieve sufficient returns' (letter, December, 2013). In 2013, the city had 'about two to three concrete discussions per year' with interested parties. These usually had 'housing, senior living or student housing in mind, but then do not get back in touch after checking the concrete investment costs and the needs in Halle', as a planner reported in response to a request from the press (email, 13.11.2013). As the newspaper article points out, the city had a problem if no buyer could be found, and it had one less if the building was sold, even if the future remained unclear. In fact, of course, the city only has one fewer problem if the owner takes care of the building, and it only has one problem fewer for a short time if the owner does not.

Loose relations between the city and the buildings were perceived by planners as problematic as they prevented development. At the same time, the city was happy to welcome any new investor and tried to support them. Responsible for the non-realization of possible futures are in that case the owners, while the city planners are engaging in searches for possible futures but without being obliged to fully engage (and invest, for example). The city repeatedly emphasized that it was not the owner and 'can therefore only offer assistance and make suggestions where these are needed' (letter, December, 2013).

Opportunity for Alignment?

This attitude changed around 2014 when the city saw an opportunity for alignment due to a change in the real estate market. Interestingly, at that moment it also increased its own engagement and strengthened relations with the buildings. Speculation in particular was now recognized as a problem, and the city aimed to tighten relations to prevent it and instead steer investment.
Planners saw the end of speculation as a prerequisite for exploiting this momentum and directing investment in a way that would make reactivation of the Hochhausscheiben more likely. As they wrote in a letter to the mayor,

> the 'speculation scenario' can, as nationwide examples show, mean
> even significantly higher costs for the city, since owners unwilling
> or unable to act can stand in the way of any overall development
> strategy and make their willingness to cooperate pay dearly.
> draft letter, October 2014

In the resolution text from 2015, which declared the preservation of the buildings to be the goal of the city of Halle, it is said:

> In order to promote private investment, to control urban and functional
> development, to preserve the Scheiben ensemble and to prevent
> uncontrolled speculation and mortgaging and other developments
> damaging to the B-Centre Neustadt, there is a need to install a suitable
> promotion and tax regime in the area of the Scheiben ensemble in the
> centre of Halle-Neustadt. Which urban development statute is most
> suitable for the Hochhausscheiben is based primarily on the urban
> development goals [...] that are to be achieved.
> VI/2015/01130, 2015, p. 10

In fact, it appears that shifts within all relations occur with one element changing (cf. Hommels, 2005, p. 334) – that of private investment in a revitalization of the Hochhausscheiben appearing to become a realistic option as potential profit from an investment in the Hochhausscheiben becomes more likely. As an article with the title 'New chances for the Scheiben' says:

> A final solution for the four vacant Scheiben in Neustadt is getting
> closer. And the chances for new flats in the centre of Halle's district,
> as Lord Mayor [...] is aiming for, are good. [...] The time for a solution
> to the Scheiben is better than ever. This is mainly due to the
> cheap money available and the low interest rates. "Many investors are
> currently desperately looking for investment properties".
> *MZ Saalekurier*, 09.06.2015, quoted here is a representative
> of the Centre for Urban Redevelopment of the State of Saxony-Anhalt

As a newspaper article in a building journal from 2016 comments, the decision to preserve the buildings from 2015 is to be understood as 'putting the first positive signals in order' (Scheffler, 2016). With the decision, the city has 'finally taken an active role in the development of Neustadt', says the author (Scheffler, 2016). That looseness may lead to new formations (Kemmer, 2020; Stäheli, 2018) and destabilizing effects of elements may make things move in new directions as new knowledge is acquired (Svabo, 2009, p. 368) has been argued by several authors. That this was also the case here is shown for the time after 2015. As a city representative said in conversation with me, the city of Halle finally realized 'that the problem was not the building structure, but the ownership structure [...] But you also have to say that there are holes worth millions if you want to renovate them, you can't do it privately. You can't just go there as a single person and say, I want to acquire and redevelop them' (field notes, 12.05.2021).

However, according to the planners, the steps that the city took after 2015 were only made possible by the interaction of various elements – first and foremost, economic development. In a media report on the Hochhausscheiben from 2014/2015, leading planners of the city administration and political actors from the city and the state are quoted as saying that '"everything depends on the economic development. If it is positive, the demand for housing in Halle will also increase, including in Neustadt". What can the city do for Neustadt in terms of planning? "Of course, we hope the funding agencies will give us intelligent tools for urban redevelopment. But of course, we are also investing in Neustadt"' (*MZ*, 16.05.2014). In an interview with me, the same planner replied to the question of what agency planning had towards the Hochhausscheiben that 'one has a few'. They said: 'I am not a supporter of the thesis "we can't do anything, we have to wait and see what the market will bring"', but they refer to the time after 2015. They emphasized: 'Of course, you have to say that the situation in the years before came about in an economic downturn, where you can't work magic. [...] [It has] certainly also helped us now that we have moved in positive waters as a city. And also as a region' (interview, 08.07.2020) (see also **chapter 1**[86]).

In 2015, the city took advantage of the momentum and, when interested parties were ready to invest in the Hochhausscheiben, strengthened its own relation to the buildings and its role in configurations. However, the effects of the shifts on all necessary relations and for the future of the Hochhausscheiben remain to be seen. One cannot necessarily speak of stabilization of an alignment today that would secure a realization of possible building futures.

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86   In **chapter 1** I found that the focus on the (real or perceived) missing element – in this case growth or the 'economic element' – can lead to a feeling of stuckedness and contribute to the endurance of the in-between that appears as alternativelessness.

6.3   Synthesis

The planners from Halle explain the non-alignment of actors with the metaphor of a puzzle. We talk about this in retrospect because, while over the years the pieces of the puzzle did not fit together, as they explain, on the day we talk about it in their office in 2019, they feel that

> the moment when suddenly, like in a puzzle, everything suddenly fits and then it's like the project can be successful and that's when you really need all these preliminary stages, because only then can you see that the pieces of the puzzle fit; and then there are also projects where this moment simply doesn't come because one element is missing.
> group discussion, 14.05.2019

For many years, the Scheiben represented just such an incomplete puzzle from the planners' point of view. I see the picture of the puzzle as too rigid to describe standby. For, as we have seen, looseness manifests itself in processes of drifting apart, while it is attempts at alignment that fail. As shown, commitments do not last, actors detach themselves and components are loosely connected but do not match. It is these loose connections, articulated in attempts at alignment and simultaneous detachment, that constitute standby and lend a certain stability to the in-between. Instead of just practices of 'doing relation', we are also dealing with the loosening of relations, which in the network perspective proposed here is not to be understood as a scalar dependency of the local level on supra-local levels, but rather from the concrete actions of the actors and their relations. A certain stability in standby is then also to be found in the quality of relations (looseness) and in practice (Gad & Bruun Jensen, 2010, p. 61). However, the chosen approach and the empirical material here also reach their limits, which is why I have at times also drawn on different literatures to support aspects I saw in my material. What has become clear, are the links between processes of spatial-political reorganization and practices of aligning and detaching. This is how standby turned out be a configuration, in which relations are loose and elements are unable to form a whole in the sense of an alignment.

The examples above testify to the fact that standby is not simply non-alignment or non-relation. Rather, as I may suggest with Law, it is looseness, 'like a Foucauldian mini-discourse', 'which runs through, shaping, and being carried in the materially heterogeneous processes which make up the organisation' (Law, 2003, pp. 1–2) of standby. According to Law, all 'organisation is a materially heterogeneous process of arranging and ordering' (Law, 2003, p. 1). And if it is understood in this way, 'that process may be understood as **strategy**: not, to be sure, necessarily (or indeed often) an explicit strategy but rather an as implicit strategy' (Law, 2003, p. 1; emphasis in original).

My objective for this chapter was to examine how people and things are related in standby. As I was able to trace, relations got loose as the city lost track of the sales and resales of the buildings when these were becoming objects of property speculation from the early 2000s. Not only did the relation between the city and the buildings become loose, but so did relations between the city and the owners, as well as between the buildings and the future. Then, I showed how owners detached themselves from commitments in moments when the city administration tried to achieve alignment and get actors involved by demanding they co-finance a plan for the centre and the buildings. Interesting insights are gained through examining how looseness became a basic principle of standby and how actors dealt with gaps and mismatches. I have argued that keeping relations loose was a way of dealing with complexity. Planners repeatedly cite the unclear ownership situation and the city's lack of contact with the owners as the main reason for an ongoing in-between of the Hochhausscheiben, with an unclear future. At the same time, it became clear that the city hoped for investment from private owners, also in order not to be forced itself to take on (more) responsibility for the future of the buildings and a more active role. As Abram and Weszkalnys note, however, impossibilities of 'making brackets around' things, as the alderman of the city called their 'exhausting' but pleasant job, often come with struggles and frustration, in particular also for planners (Abram & Weszkalnys, 2013a; Beveridge et al., 2022, p. 292). The example of the agreement for the centre planning has also shown that. I will shed further light on these struggles in the next chapter, where I will be looking at how 'dis/connectors' act on loose relations and how standby can be understood through the 'modes of struggling' within which agency and responsibility are negotiated.

7   Struggling

The starting point for this chapter is the formulation of one planner from Halle, according to whom the 'struggling of the city with a place' can be read in the Hochhausscheiben (field notes, 14.05.2019). The planner experienced and continues to experience the un/making of possible futures for the Hochhausscheiben as a conflict-laden, difficult process, as I gather from the wording, and one in which not only the city administration or the planning department but the entire city of Halle is involved. Following the formulation, the buildings on standby become 'witnesses' of processes of struggling that manifest themselves in them. The understanding of buildings as a process of 'struggling' resonates with conceptions of (urban) infrastructures not only as technical artefacts, but also as 'organizational arrangements, sociocultural practices and meanings, and political struggles' (Farías, 2016, p. 43). Drawing on this, I began to investigate who was struggling with whom and what and what for. The question for me was how to understand such a process of struggling that keeps buildings in the in-between. The in-between of the Hochhausscheiben points to the fact that the processes of struggling had to be processes from which no organizational arrangements emerged that would have enabled the realization of a possible future. In standby as an in-between, the provisional remains provisional (cf. Kemmer et al., 2021, p. 6) as no 'organizational arrangement' is found that would allow for the alignment of actors and thereby enable the realization of a future for the Hochhausscheiben.

With Farías, we must understand struggles 'as an ontological politics, in which what is at stake is the construction of a common world' (Farías, 2016, pp. 48–49). However, with regard to the Hochhausscheiben, the more I studied these processes the more I got the impression that it was not all that clear what that 'common world' could be. The missing common world is not necessarily a common vision or end, but modalities of coming together. While an end to the in-between was the declared goal and revitalization became the dominant option, uncertainties and conflicts about how revitalization could be organized pushed a common goal into the background. Consequently, I understand standby as a process of struggling *with* (instead of *for*). I understand standby in this chapter as a conflict-laden process in which agency and responsibility are negotiated. As for buildings on standby, I see them embedded in processes of struggling over the abilities to shape and shift the conditions of (im-)possibility for building futures to materialize.

7.1   Dis/connectors
and Modes of Struggling

I would like to propose two notions that will help me understand standby as a ring process: 'dis/connectors' and 'modes of struggling'.

I assume that things play a central role in the processes of struggle and argue that they act as 'dis/connectors' and thus regulate loose relations in standby (see **chapter 6**). Around these things, as I will further suggest, 'modes of struggling' revolve. In these, standby becomes tangible as a process of in-between, and through them, standby organizes the loose relations between actors in networks surrounding the Hochhausscheiben. In order to define dis/connectors as I understand them, I will first explain the conception of agency and of agency of things in particular on which I base my investigation. I will then come to a definition of dis/connectors. After that, I will define modes of struggling.

Dis/connectors
One of my informants from Halle's planning department saw the case of the Hochhausscheiben as a 'drama' or a 'criminal act' in which all actors have different possibilities to assert their interests. And then, they told me, there are the possibilities, the available means, the potentials, but also the disadvantages (field notes, 11.03.2021).

The perspective I want to suggest for studying the politics of standby is inspired by actor–network theory (ANT) and turns away from the idea of the interaction of actors with presumed interests and within a given framework. Rather, it is concerned with the possibilities of actors to have effects, or in other words with 'the *capacities* of entities […] to affect and be affected' (Farías, 2016, p. 42).[87] However, I am equally interested in what they call a 'drama' that I understand as interactions within which the above-mentioned capacities become tangible and are negotiated. If agency and responsibility are negotiated in the process, actors do not own them, but agency arises from relations and interactions.[88] According to Latour,

> we should begin, here again, not from the 'determination of action by society',
> the 'calculative abilities of individuals', or the 'power of the unconscious' as we
> would ordinarily do, but rather from the *under-determination of action*, from
> the uncertainties and controversies about who and what is acting when 'we' act.
> (Latour, 2005, p. 45; emphasis in original)

Instead of taking path dependencies and the power of certain actors over others for granted, scholarship within ANT and urban assemblage thinking that found inspiration in ANT studies 'how agency is distributed within the socio-material situations of creating a city and highlights the contingency and multiplicity of these socio-material situations' (Färber, 2019, p. 264).

The merit of STS and of ANT in particular is that it has opened social sciences to the recognition of the heterogeneity of multiple elements that have an influence on the social and on practices (Müller, 2015b, pp. 67–68; Schäfer, 2013, p. 348). Latour pays particular attention to the contribution of non-human things, even ascribing agency to them. A perspective inspired by Latour suggests that '[a]ll things are what they are in relation to other things, not because of essential qualities […This] means that dualisms dissolve: well-known examples are the distinctions between humans/nonhumans, truth/false and micro/macro' (Gad & Bruun Jensen, 2010, p. 58). In his relational conception of agency, Latour explicitly includes non-human actors who enable actors to act.

> In addition to 'determining' and serving as a 'backdrop for human action', things
> might authorize, allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, influence, block, render
> possible, forbid, and so on. ANT is not the empty claim that objects do things
> 'instead' of human actors: it simply says that no science of the social can even
> begin if the question of who and what participates in the action is not first of all
> thoroughly explored, even though it might mean letting elements in which, for lack
> of a better term, we would call non-humans. (Latour, 2005, p. 72)

Latour called for an openness in the field for social science research, which does not exclude certain actors from the outset and already classifies others in superordinate categories. In contrast, Latour suggests a 'generalized principle of symmetry' (Latour, 1994). According to Latour, 'Society is not stable enough to inscribe itself onto anything. On the contrary, most of the features of social order – scale, asymmetry, durability, power, division of labor, role distribution, and hierarchy – are impossible even to define without bringing in socialized nonhumans' (Latour, 1994, p. 793). Such reconsideration of the social coming from STS and ANT, which is not conceivable without the

material and technical artefacts, inspired Woolgar and Neyland to pay attention to non-human things in the study of politics as well. 'It is clear,' Woolgar and Neyland write, 'that an understanding of governance and accountability in contemporary life requires a focus on ordinary, everyday, pervasive objects and technologies' (Woolgar & Neyland, 2013, p. 14). Not only politics towards objects, but through artefacts and with technologies, are the focus of their interest (Woolgar & Neyland, 2013, p. 14). In line with them, I assume that politics revolve around 'ordinary stuff' and agree here with Woolgar and Neyland, who write that 'It is not that politics swirls around, so to speak, the otherwise mute, obvious, objectively given things (Woolgar & Neyland, 2013, p. 13).[89]

Within research that also focuses on the agency of things, more attention has been attributed to their stabilizing effects. The assumption that all kinds of relation gain stability through the delegation in 'more durable materials' (Law, 2003, p. 3) is one of the fundamentals of actor–network theory and a central object of study (see, e.g. Latour, 1994; 2008). For example, Latour and Woolgar showed the importance of 'inscription devices' for the production of facts and reality (Latour & Woolgar, 1986). The role of non-human actors in processes of ordering was highlighted here. Another focus is the role of things to 'help bring actants into association with each other' (Rydin & Tate, 2016, p. 8) – acting as intermediaries and mediators (I have mentioned these in earlier chapters). Intermediaries and mediators can actually be both human and non-human. As shown in the previous chapter, planners see themselves as such as their self-ascribed task is to bring people things and people together. Mediators, in Latour's understanding, do more than connect actors. They can 'transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry' (Latour, 2005, p. 39). This differentiates mediators from intermediaries for Latour (2005, p. 39). It has been found that mediators play an important role in planning, for example, in that planning strongly depended 'on mediators such as communication devices, models, photographs and site visits' for enrolling actors (Rydin & Tate, 2016, p. 8).

But it is not only in their role as mediators that things can bring people together. As Kemmer shows for '"promissory things" such as stop signs and train schedules' (Kemmer, 2020, p. 168), things can bring promises with them and thereby connect and make connections endure. Kemmer notes with regard to the suspension of a tram line called 'bonde' in Rio de Janeiro, that promises, desires and expectations distributed across a cluster of 'promissory things' (Kemmer, 2019, p. 61; referring to Ahmad, 2010) can bind people and things together across gaps and thus fill these gaps. However, promises are often far less binding than is commonly assumed; they are 'elusive', as Abram and Weszkalnys find. As Abram and Weszkalnys argue, 'between ideal, ideology and practice fill themselves with things unplanned, unexpected and inexplicable, and with things that get overlooked and forgotten' (Abram & Weszkalnys, 2013a, p. 22). This makes promises unpredictable, as they can be forgotten or change. Drawing on such a conception of promise, Kemmer assumes that '[b]ecause of their unpredictability, then, promises also seem to articulate rather volatile, fragile, and "loose" relations between people and things' (Kemmer, 2020, p. 171). Kemmer explores how gaps between the present and a potentially better future were, in her case, filled by elastic 'affective bonds', spanning between residents (Kemmer, 2019, p. 60).

It is in line with such an understanding of the role that things take in the production of the urban that I propose 'dis/connectors' as a concept. As the term implies, however, I assume that things can not only bring together but also separate, stretching relations or keeping relations loose, or even

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87   A relational understanding of power was also proposed beyond ANT. Geographer Raffestin, for example, refers to Foucault, who understands power as something that one does not have or acquire, but that is exercised in relations. The idea that the actions of actors and their power can thus only be understood in a consideration of relations is also found here. As Raffestin states, 'Power manifests itself on the occasion of the relation, a process of exchange or communication' (Raffestin, 1980, p. 45; own translation).

88   To underline that it is not only people who inscribe something into things, but that things also prescribe something to people, Latour proposes the concept of 'interchange' (Latour, 2002, p. 213). Barad, on the other hand, uses the term 'intraaction' to emphasize co-constitution. Barad writes: 'In contrast to the usual "interaction", the notion of *intra-action* recognises that distinct entities, agencies, events do not precede, but rather emerge from/through their intraaction' (Barad, 2010, p. 267). While I support such concern, I have chosen to keep 'interaction' for this work.

89   The proposal of understanding agency as distributed among both human and non-human actors has made the ANT equally famous as it has brought it criticism. Especially by critical urban researchers, ANT and assemblage research were accused of neglecting power. According to its critics, the aim of (critical) urban research should be to uncover power asymmetries and structures, and they accuse assemblage research of naïve objectivism and question a wider applicability of the approach (Brenner et al., 2011). Defenders, on the other hand, argue that structural analyses do not do justice to the complexity of the production of the urban (Färber, 2014; McFarlane, 2011). It is true that assemblage thinking questions 'pre-existing power asymmetries among actors deriving from underlying socio-economic structures' (Farías, 2016, p. 45) and refuses to assign power to particular actors or actor-configurations per se (Graham & Marvin, 2001, p. 11). It should be emphasized, however, that even though ANT proposes a 'generalized symmetry' (Latour, 1991) of all elements (human and non-human) involved in a practice, they are not to be regarded as equal. Rather, the aim is 'to force a detailed empirical account' of asymmetries and, for example, black boxed elements and 'obligatory passage points' in networks (Farías, 2016, p. 45).

disconnect. While they have the potential to bring people and things together and thus contribute significantly to a realization of a future for the buildings, they can also divide, depending on the relations in which they are embedded but also on relations that are inscribed in them. Beyond ANT, things are often perceived as 'instruments' for creating order. Studying urban voids, von Schéele, for example, sees laws and institutions as instruments in the striving for order and mastering uncertainty (von Schéele, 2016, pp. 15–17). That disorder can emerge from processes of ordering, however, is shown by Weszkalnys (Weszkalnys, 2007, p. 221). As she finds related to plans for Alexanderplatz in reunified Berlin, '[p]lan and failure, order and disorder were entwined: Just as the new plans appeared to produce more disorder, the perceived disorder was productive of order' (Weszkalnys, 2007, p. 226). Following Weszkalnys, and in contrast to conceptions of things as 'instruments' for creating order, I argue that the dis/connectors I will identify, namely subsidies, donations and regulations, do not serve the production of order in a standby mode, but they are regulators of an in-between, of simultaneous ordering and disordering (Knox et al., 2015).

Beyond an understanding of these things as 'frameworks' or as 'instruments', I would like to examine the role they play in processes of struggling in which agency and responsibility and, with them, the possibilities of alignment are negotiated. Concretely, I am interested in how, for example, 'humans delegate responsibility to non-human things and how these non-human things then function as actors within heterogeneous settings' (Beauregard, 2015, p. 533). As I assume, dis/connectors act in loose relations in standby and thus contribute significantly to standby's in/activity and 'simultaneous on-offness' (Kemmer et al., 2021, p. 1). What I assume is that things act in relations and thereby also on the (im-)possibilities for building futures to be realized. Negotiations of agency and responsibility address these things and derive from them, thus revealing the tensions between relating and entangling and unrelating or keeping at a distance and differentiating (Barad, 2010, p. 244; Lapiņa, 2021, p. 246) that are characteristic for standby. Each dis/connector constitutes 'politics in its own way' and I will examine how it (trans-)forms capacities to act, how it enables or delimits 'particular sort of engagement' (Gomart & Hajer, 2003, pp. 36; 47) and alignment. What I will be looking at in this chapter is the 'actual work carried out' (Abram & Weszkalnys, 2013a, p. 4) by them in struggles over agencies and responsibilities.

Modes of Struggling

In fact, not all dis/connectors have the same capacity to act in relations and they do not come to matter in equal ways for standby. Since things have the potential – real or in the form of a promise, to bring people and things together and thus enable a realization of a future, I think it is important to examine why it is not fulfilled. The key to this will be the ways in which these things are struggled with.

Inspiration for the notion of 'modes of struggling' equally comes from ANT, namely the notion of 'modes of ordering'. From a classic ANT perspective, 'things are what they are because they are *done* that way by actors relating to other actors. It is only as a result of such performances that fixation, relative stability, and so forth, exists' (Gad & Bruun Jensen, 2010, p. 58; emphasis in original). It was actor–network theory, among others, that from the 1980s onwards, challenged the order of things by portraying reality as 'historically, culturally and materially located' (Mol, 1999, p. 75) and by taking apart the elements that held a particular reality together. As Mol writes,

> If the term 'ontology' is combined with that of 'politics' then this suggests that the conditions of possibility are not given. That reality does not precede the mundane practices in which we interact with it, but is rather shaped within these practices. So the term politics works to underline this active mode, this process of shaping, and the fact that its character is both open and contested. (Mol, 1999, p. 75)

According to Law, for our exploration of how reality is made, 'we need to study relations, networks and webs of practice' (Law, 2004a, p. 42) and we need to find ways to understand not only how knowledge is made in practice, but also how through these practices 'a hinterland of pre-existing social and material realities' is equally 'built up and sustained' (Law, 2004a, p. 13). He finds that

'Perhaps there is ordering, but there is certainly no order. […] Instead there are more of less precarious and partial accomplishments that may be overturned. They are, in short, better seen as verbs rather than nouns' (Law, 1994, pp. 1–2). In the same vein, Mol states that

> In ANT (as in various other theoretical traditions) it makes little sense to separate out an object called 'society' and to then say that this has 'an order'. […] Modes of ordering may be the better term. Shifting away from the noun, order, it contains the gerund of a verb, ordering, thus stressing that ordering involves work. The plural modes indicates that more than one 'mode' is relevant in any given time and place. (Mol, 2010, p. 263)

At stake, in such view, are 'different ways of handling problems, framing concerns, enacting reality' and the coexistence of different modes of doing so (Mol, 2010, p. 264). As Gad and Jensen note, 'a classic ANT tale might be concerned with how certain groups of actors succeed in constructing a sociotechnical network stronger than their competitors, and thereby gain a monopoly' on a definition. The approach of Mol is different as she studies the 'understanding any specific actor has of a phenomenon' (Gad & Bruun Jensen, 2010, pp. 65–66). According to Gad and Jensen, 'An emerging post-ANT insight is thus that many different networks exist and produce multiple versions of phenomena' (Gad & Bruun Jensen, 2010, p. 66). The perspective and methodology proposed by ANT has inspired researchers across the social sciences in recent years, and especially also scholars investigating the urban. What ANT's proposal to follow actants and relations allows for, as Abram notes in regard to her own study on planning disputes and the temporality of plans, is, for example, 'to dig below the policies and institutions and understand how each element was interpreted by the actors involved' and by this '[t]o get beyond the performative conflictual language of "nimbyism" or "selfish capitalists", and the manipulative PR [author's note: Public Relations] strategies of the professional participants' (Abram, 2017, p. 67).

The notion of 'modes of struggling' proposed here is inspired by 'modes of ordering', as I too understand the conditions of possibility – in this case of building futures being realized – embedded in complex processes and socio-material arrangements in which they are made. My own concern is not primarily how things are interpreted or enacted differently in different places, but what happens in the encounter – that is, in interaction and confrontation. What the struggling is meant to point to is that the negotiations of agency and responsibility that accompany the making of conditions of possibility are conflictual and experienced as such (see the beginning of this introduction). Moreover, as mentioned above, these processes do not produce, or only temporarily or rarely produce, organizational arrangements that would constitute an order that would enable the alignment of actors. As stated at the beginning, standby as a process of in-between is to be understood as a struggle with and not for something and so I assume that modes of struggling, of which dis/connectors form the centre, do not bring order but, as it were, order and disorder that I see coming together in standby. As I understand it, buildings on standby (as opposed to ruins, which Edensor understands as 'dis-ordered and messy sites [that] provide a contrast to the increasingly smooth, highly regulated spaces of the city' (Edensor, 2005a, p. 53) are not disordered spaces. Rather, they are in-between spaces that are characterized by order and disorder, places that are permeated by institutions, regulations and laws, but which are struggled over instead of serving the production of order. In fact, while there is an understanding of an 'ordered' space, in which in-between spaces do not have a place and are unwanted, it is unclear what 'order' in organizational terms would mean. Modes of struggling, as I will show, will predominantly revolve around agency and responsibility that cannot be and does not want to be taken and is pushed around. Taken together, these 'modes' shape standby as a process of struggling with, as I understand standby in this chapter. They ensure that the provisional remains provisional, but might be stabilized or changed at any moment. While standby always means being 'on the edge', where potential 'ons' and 'offs' are always near and far, as it were, things and modes of struggling emerging around these things ensure that it is extended and that a certain stability is achieved.

I will identify three different modes of struggling in this chapter: de/activation, manoeuvre and mattering. These modes revolve around, as said, the three dis/connectors I identified – namely, subsidies, donations and regulations.

7.2   De/activation, Manoeuvre, Mattering

Subsidies // De/activation

As we know, none of the possible futures has been realized, and this is also due to the way subsidies operate as regulators in loose networks of standby. On the one hand, they promise to fill gaps and connect actors. They have activating effects, especially on the city, since it is the city that decides on the granting of subsidies for individual projects on the city level. At the same time, however, they also have deactivating effects, since conditions are written into funding programmes that the city cannot fulfil. As I will show, funding is struggled with and de/activation is the first mode of struggling, which I will describe below.

Promise

In 2000, the city of Halle applied for state funding for revitalization and for the demolition of one or several of the Hochhausscheiben. Then, however, funding for neither became likely and the city administration had to face questions about what priority the buildings had in their plans for Neustadt. A city councillor asked the city administration: 'What is the priority of the high-rise buildings […]?' And: 'In the case of an application for funding not being approved at the second attempt, what impact would this have on the future of the high-rise buildings?' (City Council, question, 06.09.2000). The copy of this question was stamped by a city planner with the image of a ticking bomb – the topic obviously had explosive political power and, with the question, a finger was put into a wound, as the realization of any future for the Hochhausscheiben appeared to be unlikely without subsidies.   → fig. 90

In its response, the city administration assured that the buildings had the highest priority in planning concepts, but that the city assumed that if a renewed application was rejected, private investment would become unlikely (city administration, 19.08.2000). Indeed, subsidies were seen as the only way to promote private investment. Subsidies were believed to be able to fill the gap resulting from a lack of profitability. In turn, the refusal might be, as the city feared, a signal that an investment in this location might not be worth it. Back then, chances for a renovation and a reuse of the buildings were low, and so the subsidies seemed to the city to hold the promise (and the only possibility) of finding a future for the Hochhausscheiben. Subsidies promised activity where there seemed to be no possibilities for action. As one of the planners from Halle told me, they began to realize in the early 2000s that no use would be found through market forces alone. According to them, in such a case the option remains to say that this is a problem for society as a whole and consequently promote redevelopment with public money. The other option that the planner saw was to provide municipalities with financial resources to enable them to take care of what is built (interview, 02.10.2018).

Public funding equally appeared to private investors as a promise: creating potentiality where it seemed absent. Throughout the years, developers contacted the city before or shortly after acquiring one of the buildings and asked for possibilities of public funding for revitalization projects. For example, the new owners of the high-rise building E contacted the city planning department in 2002 to inform the city that they had purchased the building, adding:

> Since we are planning extensive modernization and renovation measures, we would like to inform us to what extent subsidies will be granted for the individual parts (façade, windows). [...] Please let us know in writing at short notice what information you require in order to specify the possible subsidy measures.
> fax, 27.02.2002

Potential investors tied their interest in developing the buildings to the possibilities of state funding. In the notes of an employee of the city planning department from 1999, for example, it is noted that Scheibe B had been purchased privately and a use concept was being worked out. Since, according to the owner, the banks were not willing to finance the refurbishment of the high-rise building and they, as one

of the notes says, 'did not want to put everything into it himself', the new owner did not pay the purchase price in full and waited for information on state subsidies for refurbishment (notes, 25.05.1999; 08.06.1999). When the planners told the investor that subsidies for innovative construction and housing might be available, but only to a limited extent (2000 DM/m²), the investor withdrew from the contract that had not yet gained legal force (notes, 10.11.1999). They told them that they would 'buy only if funding is possible' (notes, 11.11.1999). Another example from 2000 is DEXIA Hypothekenbank from Berlin, which presented a 'utilization concept for Scheibe E after refurbishment and modernization', lacking, however, important information on financing. The reason given by the developer was that the entire volume had not been calculated and that they were waiting for promises of public subsidies from the city, state and federal governments. It says: 'the economic operation of the property after refurbishment is only possible with the support of public refurbishment funds' (concept, 21.07.2000).

From these observations, one may suggest that state subsidies acted as a promise and created expectations to fill gaps (Kemmer, 2020, p. 168) such as the local state's inability to act and the absence of demand and profit options. Subsidies became one of the central elements in relations between buildings, the state, investment and private investors, and the future as they promise to fill gaps. Haller and Altrock call urban development funding a 'supplement' that has a 'repair' function (Haller & Altrock, 2010; own translation) and Bernt calls subsidies from the programme Urban Restructuring East[90] 'windows of opportunity' (Bernt, 2009, p. 762). Bernt shows how housing companies and city governments in East German cities formed '"grant coalitions"' (Cochrane et al., 1996; as cited in: Bernt, 2009, p. 765) to funding for the demolition of housing stocks. In his analysis of urban development in Halle-Neustadt, Bernt emphasizes the dependence of local actors on the supra-local state levels via public funds as well as on public-private cooperation. As he highlights, local governments searched to reduce their dependence on their own small budgets by attempting to 'mobilize the taxing powers of the central state through a system of intergovernmental grants and try to shift responsibilities to the upper levels of government' (Bernt, 2009, p. 760). Studying East German urban transformations in the early 2000s, Bernt observes a growing influence of private actors and of supra-local policy levels in urban development from the 2000s onwards. These coalitions, as he notes, were rather unstable partnerships as they mainly emerged in response to requirements of funding programmes and in contrast to other public-private partnerships gaining importance around the world, the coalitions were 'bargaining over a bill that is paid by somebody else' (Bernt, 2009, p. 765). While many studies of the implementation of the program Urban Restructuring East also note difficulties in the realization (see Haller & Liebmann, 2002, as one of the first; see previous chapter), this research shows how subsidies acting as a promise enable alignment and collective action.[91]

Activation

Subsidies activate actors such as the municipality that decides which projects are eligible and applies for the funds to the state. Municipalities have the competence in implementation and must ensure that projects are embedded in the urban development concepts they have developed and that all key stakeholders are involved (Liebmann et al., 2006, p. 75). While the general objectives and funding priorities for the funding programmes are defined by the federal government and the Länder, a city applies for funding for specific projects and selects the funding criteria accordingly. Projects a city aims to support must, for example, be in line with an urban development concept, and cities have to ensure that all 'key actors' participate (Liebmann et al., 2006, p. 75). Such a concept is also a prereq-

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90   This is also the programme I will be focusing on here. The programme was launched by announcing a competition. According to a press release from 2001, the competition 'is the starting signal for the East German municipalities to tackle the difficult process of urban redevelopment'. For the first programme period between 2002–2009, a total of 5 billion DM was made available, 2.2 billion from the federal government. As the press release states, the 'objectives of the programme are […] an upgrading of urban neighbourhoods, the improvement of the quality of living and life, the creation of owner-occupied housing in the existing stock and the demolition of housing that is no longer needed in the long term' (Oebbeke, 2001).
91   However, the majority of these observations relate to the cooperation between the municipality and municipal housing companies. Naturally, municipalities have an interest in stabilizing the companies' budgets as well.

Fig. 90

Zur Bearbeitung

HALLE ✶ Die Stadt

STADTPLANUNGSAMT

Anfrage

Eing: 1 1. SEP. 2000
Lfd.-Nr.: 5488

19.9.00

Nummer	III/2000/00964
TOP:	
Datum:	06.09.2000
Wiedervorlage	
Aktz.	. .
Bezug-Nr:	
Abteilung/Amt	Mieter- und Bürgerliste

T: 20.09.

Fig. 90
The fact that a topic of explosive political power is being addressed here is shown by the ticking bomb stamped on the document by a planner from the city of Halle. Source: Halle City Administration.

uisite for a municipality to participate in the competition for participating in urban development programmes in the first place. 'We need good urban development concepts. They are the stage on which the different interests in urban redevelopment and especially in demolition are discussed and fought out,' the Federal Minister is quoted as saying in the press release on the launch of Urban Restructuring East (Oebbeke, 2001). As one of the planners from Halle explained, while funding programmes are made at the supra-local level, the federal state does not interfere in local funding policies. In each individual case, it is a discretionary decision that the city administration and politicians must make.[92] What has to be ensured, as they explained to me, is that proper use and compliance with the law are ensured and, they stressed, there has to be a product at the end (field notes, 01.03.2021). Public funds, as a planner from Halle noted in a press release in 2002 already, are scarce and therefore 'will only be able to be used with priority where they promise high efficiency' (press release, 31.01.2002). In order to leave planning sovereignty to the municipalities, municipalities are responsible for requesting and receiving the funds, while it is the city that distributes them to applicants (Seelig, 2007, p. 33). In this way, they have control over the funds being used in the sense of the concepts they have prepared, appropriately and quickly. Prior to application, it is also the municipality that checks the eligibility for funding, including, in the case of an existing redevelopment statute, compliance with the objectives and also the financial concept (Seelig, 2007, p. 33). Another condition is, for example, that urban development funding is only possible if the costs are unprofitable; and it is on the city to ensure this (email, 11.12.2015). The city examines the unprofitability and whether public money would be used sensibly, economically, timely and expeditious (group discussion, 29.03.2021).

Since 2015, it has been widely recognized among planners that it is somewhat impossible to refurbish one of the towers and then get it rented on the rental market in Halle-Neustadt without subsidies. One of the planners told me: 'It's true that it quickly becomes unprofitable and it was always said that it wouldn't work without subsidies; with the €9.90[93] you can just about make a profit, but it quickly becomes a risk if I don't rent it out; it's just so much space, so you can quickly make a profit and quickly make a loss' (field notes, 29.03.2021). In connection with the development of a city strategy on preservation options in 2015, the planners determined that what was the 'basic problem to date' was that 'realistic prospects for use in the classic sense (e.g. residential, office) have not yet developed from market demand'. City planners calculated that the needed funding for the reimbursement of unprofitable costs in the case of a realization of refurbishment would be €1.5 to 4.5 million (PPT, city administration, 31.03.2015). As the explanatory text to the resolution deciding on the preservation of the Hochhausscheiben from 2015 says, the owners of Scheibe B, C and E had asked the city to support them in finding public funds for the realization of revitalization projects for the towers. Owners had estimated that approximately 1 to 3 million euros per Hochhausscheibe would be needed to support the unprofitable costs (explanatory comment on draft, 24.11.2015). In 2015, this need was acknowledged, and it was found that subsidies could indeed fill the gap of rentability and allow for a revitalization.

Before 2015, however, the city held that the buildings had to be self-sustaining and that if they were not, any funding would be inefficient. In an email to the investor, the municipal employ

92 Federal funds are distributed to the Länder using 'indicator-based distribution keys' as is said on the Ministry's website (Bundesinstitut für Bau-, Stadt- und Raumforschung (BBSR), *Ziele, Finanzierung und Mittelverteilung*, n.d.). These differ according to the urban development programme and include, among other things, the number of inhabitants, vacancy rates, etc. The distribution of funds from the federal government to the Länder is determined annually in the so-called Administrative Agreement on Urban Development Promotion. The basis of this administrative agreement is
the support of urban development projects in cities and municipalities. The funding guidelines of the Länder define 'the more detailed requirements for the eligibility of measures and projects, funding priorities and more detailed selection criteria'. The administrative agreement and funding guidelines thus control the programmatic objectives of urban development funding (BBSR, *Rechtliche Grundlagen der Städtebauförderung*, n.d.).

93 This corresponds to the net cold rent that the city of Halle (Saale), as today's tenant of Scheibe A, pays per square metre and month for office spaces. The rent for the total net rental space is 7.25 euros per square metre, of which 9.90 euros for office space, 0.67 euros for ancillary space. This is how it was decided in a referendum in 2017 for use from 2021 and for a duration of 30 years. I will come back to the referendum in **chapter 8** below.

ee wrote that the city's financial councillor had also confirmed that 'a municipal guarantee for this property is very unlikely to be considered […] Nevertheless, we hope that you will be able to close the financing of the property in another way' (email, 04.10.2011). When in the same year, the State Development and Transport Minister had visited Halle-Neustadt, the minister agreed with one of the planners, saying that 'the operation of the towers would have to be financed from their own income after the conversion'. According to the newspaper article on the visit, the minister then promised to talk to the Minister of Finance about whether the country could cover the costs of an economic feasibility study. The newspaper article commented under a photo of the minister standing with his back to the buildings: 'Minister [name] only turned his back on the problem of Hochhausscheiben for the time being' (*Wochenspiegel*, 27.07.2011). Over the years, the city either saw revitalization projects as profitable, or the profitability was seen as so hopeless that not even subsidies could fill the gap or at least were not seen as efficiently spent.

In its answer to investors' requests for public funding, the city planning department in most cases over the years emphasized that the city would like to support them in their project, but that subsidies for redevelopment would not be available. As I see it, the fact that no subsidies were granted throughout the years was also due to the fact that the city of Halle could not and did not want to bear the costs that funding would mean for its own budget. In fact, the political commitment to the Hochhausscheiben through the 2015 decision forms the basis for applying for funding, as it legitimizes the use of public funds. However, there is a problem: if funding is granted, the city must pay its own share. When an investor considered renovating Scheibe E in 2014, they asked about funding opportunities. As they told the planning department, they were prepared (as they points out with reference to their experience with other properties) to invest €900/m2 themselves, while they would expect that everything above this amount should be covered by subsidies (letter, 25.07.2014). In its response, the city of Halle wrote that a solid financing plan and a detailed description of the measures were necessary to apply for funding and that an application could be made for 2016 at the earliest, as budget planning up to 2018 was already advanced. Theoretically, up to 50 per cent of the funding gap could be covered by one of the two funding programmes 'Social City' ('Soziale Stadt') or 'Urban Restructuring East'; the city's own contribution might also have to be covered (one-third of the funding amount). Finally, it says here: 'Unfortunately, a guarantee for the approval of urban development funding cannot be given' (letter, 03.09.2014).

Deactivation

In fact, the necessary funding for one Scheibe would, according to these calculations from 2015, comprise up to one-third of the total annual funding for Halle. The draft from the 2015 resolution contrasts the funds needed by investors with the 'average approval framework of upgrading funds per year for the city of Halle (Saale) (subsidies Urban Restructuring East, federal/state + own funds of the city, average of the last 5 years)' consisting of €3.4 million' (PPT, city administration, 31.03.2015). As the draft says, 'The funding of the unprofitable costs for the refurbishment of the Hochhausscheibe (one Scheibe per year) would mean that no other urban development project could be financed from own funds in these years' (explanatory comment on draft, 24.11.2015).

As a precondition for the funding through 'Urban Restructuring East', municipalities have to make a contribution of their own to finance revitalization. The programme aimed at helping municipalities 'to reduce parts of the housing vacancies and at the same time to invest in the upgrading of urban districts' (Seelig, 2007, p. 34; own translation). According to the programme regulations, both demolition and upgrading were supposed to be realized equally. In practice, however, demolition measures dominated in the following years. As numbers for Saxony-Anhalt from 2006 show, the discrepancy between demolitions and upgrading grew already during the first years of the programme. While the funds for upgrading in 2002 were almost equal to those for demolition (around 12 million euros), in 2004 there was a difference of over 20 million, with about 22.2 million for demolition and 1.8 million for upgrading (Liebmann et al., 2006, p. 33). As Seelig points out, this can be explained by the fact that demolition measures were financed differently than revitalization. In general, all measures were to be financed equally by the federal government, the state and the municipalities, but 'an exception to this principle was allowed for deconstruction: While all three partners must contribute equally to the funding of upgrading measures, the funding of demolition is borne by the federal and

state governments alone' (Seelig, 2007, p. 30; own translation). The logic of equal shares, however, holds for revitalization measures: 33.3 per cent are to be financed by the federal state, 33.3 per cent by the state and 33.3 per cent by the municipality (Seelig, 2007, p. 32). The first status report on the Urban Restructuring East programme from 2006 points out that municipal administrations have 'the essential steering competence in the implementation of the urban redevelopment programme'. However, the authors also state:

> In many cases, the situation resembles a quandary. On the one hand, local governments are interested in supporting the stabilization of large housing companies. On the other hand, they are often hardly in a position to raise the necessary municipal share for the implementation of upgrading measures. This often leads to municipalities reacting to demands from the housing industry rather than actively shaping the urban redevelopment process themselves. In such a climate of cooperation, the danger of uncontrolled actionism is great. The integrated urban development concepts easily lose their significance as a steering instrument.
> (Bundestransferstelle Stadtumbau Ost, 2006, p. 75; own translation)[94]

The funding of a revitalization project of one Scheibe with 1 million euros would thus include 333,300 euros of city-own funds. However, according to the budget from 2015, 'approx. 263,300 euros of own funds were available for the Planning Department for the years 2017 to 2019 to co-finance all urban development funding programmes in Halle' (explanatory comment on draft, 24.11.2015).

As Seelig states, 'If the budget situation is tight, it may not be possible to raise the required municipal share of own funds. As a result the implementation of upgrading measures fails' (Seelig, 2007, p. 36). And my material also confirms that a revitalization failed, among other things, due to the city's inability to contribute its part. In 2011, for example, and in response to an enquiry from a private owner, the city administration examined whether and which funding programmes would be available to support the Hochhausscheiben. The answer:

> The examination showed that the relevant programmes will expire in the future or have been exhausted (e.g. Social City programme). In addition, there is the problem that the city is currently not in a position to pay its own share of funding programmes, which makes it difficult or impossible to access such programmes.
> email, 19.10.2011

The city was and is in a predicament here, where the anticipated future and the conditions to shape it are drifting apart. On the one hand, the subsidies have an activating effect on the relationships between the city and buildings, between buildings and private investment and the future. They also lend agency to the city in particular, but equally weaken it through the requirement of a contribution, which the municipality cannot and does not want to bear, as attributing funds to a revitalization of the Hochhausscheiben was not found to be efficient spending. Bernt and Haus see in the simultaneous 'self-modification and self-aggrandizement' of the state a contradiction in which 'the probability of failure is built in, as it were' (Bernt & Haus, 2010, p. 18; own translation).

Struggles around subsidies arise, as I want to suggest from the findings in this section, from the de/activating effect of subsidies that – as a promise, are supposed to fill gaps of municipalities' inability to act and the absence of profit options and enable action. On the one hand, the funding has an

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94   The report shows that in the years 2002 to 2004 in all Länder and on average 'about 60% of federal and Land funds were used for deconstruction and about 40% for upgrading'. However, the authors point out that the actual amount for upgrading exceeds the amount for demolition on average, since in upgrading the municipalities bear one third of the costs (p.33). For Saxony-Anhalt, however, a table in the report shows that in 2002 the sum of upgrading and demolition subsidies was roughly equal, but that this balance dissolved in the following years. In 2004, about 22.2 million in funds for demolition were offset by about 1.8 million for upgrading (Liebmann et al., 2006, p. 33).

activating effect, in that it allows municipalities to decide which projects are funded in which places in the city through control over the funding. Furthermore, the vast demolitions in Halle-Neustadt were financed through urban development programmes. At the same time, and in the case of the Hochhausscheiben, however, they have a deactivating effect, because the requirement of financial participation reduces the city's options for action and may prevent revitalization, even if it is the shared goal of the city and investors. Struggles over the question of the profitability and availability of funding, as can be observed, are in fact struggles over agency. For city officials, the political goal remains a privately funded revitalization. When during the years of my research an investor stated that they wanted to renovate one of the buildings without funding, they were welcomed with open arms. As the alderman told me, they are very happy with that,

> because you don't always have to call on the state, but it's good to show that it also works in the private sector and that you can get to results with such a difficult issue, so I'm really confident that they'll manage it and try to support them as much as possible.
> interview, 28.05.2021

As the example above shows, subsidies in my case not only have deactivating effects, but also come with an activating of the local level, which has the power of control over the allocation of funding. Struggles in the in-between entwine around this simultaneity. While the promise of funding gathers actors (federal state, city, investors and buildings) and is not lost as long as gaps persist, these have de/activating effects that stabilize an in-between of the Hochhausscheiben and enliven processes of 'struggling with'.

Donations // Manoeuvre

As the problem of financially poor municipalities became a well-known problem in the 2000s, the so-called 'experimentation clause' (which allows the city to apply for a discount on its own contribution vis-à-vis the state and the federal government and for the assumption of part of the municipality's own contribution by an investor) and the possibilities of private donations have been added to the Building Code under the term 'relief of the municipality's own contribution'. With these changes in the law, possibilities were created of having the city's own share replaced and thus increasing the possibility for revitalizations to materialize. Discounts, payments by the investor and donations were thus supposed to close the gap of the fixes that subsidies were supposed to be – namely, in this case, the gap in the municipal budget. They are supposed to do so, however, not through tightening the loose relation between state and buildings, but through extending the networks. Especially the donations become, as I will show in this second section, central elements of 'manoeuvres' that I understand as a second mode of struggling within standby.

In addition to an extra pot for the Hochhausscheiben that should be created in the city's budget, the resolution draft from 2015 says: 'the basic aim should be for the investors to take over part (23.3% of 33.3%) of the city's own funds by applying the experimentation clause. The city would thus only have to spend 10% of its own funds' (explanatory comment on draft, 24.11.2015). This remaining 10 per cent would then ideally be covered by a private donation.

In the case of Scheibe C, fierce conflicts are unravelling over the application for funding. As will become clear in what follows, the investor and the city are fighting over the assumption of the city's own contribution.

The building had been acquired by a private investor in 2015 from the state of Saxony-Anhalt (for the price of €1) and its owner planned a revitalization with the help of €3 million in subsidies that they demanded for 2016 (explanatory comment on draft, 24.11.2015).

Shortly after, a dispute between the city and the investor started over the funding application, as different media reports show. An article in the tabloid *BILD* from 7.12.2015 headlined: 'Millions scandal around the Scheibe C. Investor wanted to start renovation in 2016. City administration put the brakes on the project'. The article argues in favour of the investor and closes with the quote of the angry investor saying: 'Nobody should tell me that the city hall works in an investor-friendly way' (Leopold, 07.12.2015).

Another article reported in more detail that, according to the investor, the city administration had changed its attitude and gone from initial support of the project to a 'blockade'. As the investor told the newspaper, in their view the administration was deliberately working slowly, making an application in 2016 'almost hopeless'. In the article, the investor threatened that if the city hesitated any longer and did not apply for the funds, it would have to pay for the demolition of the buildings itself in the last instance. Furthermore, they let the public know via the newspaper article that 'previous political statements on the desired redevelopment of the Scheiben in Halle-Neustadt' would remain 'only lip service' in the event of the funding application being refused. They were questioning whether 'the city's political leadership [was] seriously looking for a solution to the problem that has been hindering the development of Neustadt for years' (*MZ*, 07.12.2015). Again another newspaper reported: while the investor accused the city of not adhering to agreements and refusing to apply to the state for funding for no reason, the municipality accused the investor of not fulfilling the obligations required for an application, such as the submission of a complete overall concept (*MZ Saalekurier*, 21.01.2016). Among other things, this involved the financing concept. The city saw the financing as not secured and was therefore hesitant to apply for the state subsidies. In addition to scepticism towards the investor, internal documents also show how the city and the investor were in negotiation about how the city's own contributions could be taken over.

Blackmail

A few months later, the *BILD* tabloid headlined: 'Way for subsidies suddenly clear. Investor pulled a joker out of his sleeve' (Leopold; n.d. [2016]). It reported that the owner of Scheibe C had leverage over the city of Halle through a clever move – the purchase of the outstanding debt of one of the creditors of Scheibe A. As the article reported, the city planned to turn Scheibe A into an administrative location and was trying to find an investor who could act through compulsory auction. In order to prevent the plans of the city and its mayor and get the city to submit the application for funding quickly, the investor of Scheibe C had acquired debt shares from a creditor of Scheibe A (whom the city itself had not located) and now let the auction of Scheibe A fall through. As in the first article on the issue, the magazine quoted the investor who accused the city administration of deliberately delaying the funding application for the redevelopment of their property and thus letting their project fail. According to the *BILD* article, the investor now threatened that 'nothing at all' would happen, neither with Scheibe A nor Scheibe C would the city administration continue to 'trick' with the funding application – apparently with success: the deadline for the funding application was extended, and was planned to be included as an urgent application in 2016.

After the funding of the project was included in the budget planning in 2016 through an addendum, the funding was decided in 2017. However, with some reservations as a confirmation of the replacement of the city's contribution remained pending:

> The City Council resolves, subject to the confirmation of the application for relief of the municipality's own contribution, subject to the conclusion of a donation agreement for the remaining municipal own contribution, to grant a pro rata subsidy of a maximum of € 3,697,500.00 for the above-mentioned measure.
> VI/2017/03260, 2017, p. 1

The explanatory text for the decision to fund Scheibe C through federal funding programmes stated:

> This means that the city itself does not have to raise any funds for financing. Subject to approval, 2/3 of the funding for the urban redevelopment measure will come from federal and state funds (€2,465,000), and 10% from a donation from a third party (€369,750). The difference is paid by the last recipient as part of the relief of the municipal share (€862,750). The city's own contribution is reduced to €0.00. The measure is budget-neutral for the city of Halle (Saale).
> VI/2017/03260, 2017, p. 4

Lastly, it is noted: 'The funding agreement will not be signed until the donation agreement has been signed' (VI/2017/03260, 2017, p. 5).

In fact, the story did not end there at all, but picked up speed again and drove wedges between the mayor of Halle and the City Council, but also between city politics and the administration when (as described in **chapter 4**) the costs of the renovation drastically increased after 2019 and the investor demanded another 7 million euros in state funding. The same chicken-and-egg dilemmas as in 2017 arose in 2021 because, while the city demanded secure overall funding and a donation commitment, the investor needed the funding commitment for their planning. From my point of view, what I am able to observe here are struggles over agency and responsibility, at the core of which lie, among other things, questions of trust and belief that public money would be rightfully invested here. As one planner told me,

> no one has the competence to say something clear here, because it's like this: basically, every owner can do what they want with their building; [...] [However,] we have to make sure with public funding that it happens cost-effectively and that it's not about a private person achieving a high return on investment.
> field notes, 29.03.2021

While, according to the media reports, the investor blackmailed the municipality, the city representatives stuck to their statement that the applicant had not correctly fulfilled the requirements. And while the city insisted on a coherent overall concept, including a complete financing plan, the investor, according to their own statement, needed commitments to subsidies in order to be able to secure the overall financing (an argument that politicians repeat during a City Council meeting, minutes 17.02.2021). Here, the takeover of the city's contribution through a donation is the crux of the matter, raising the question of trust. As one of the planners said: 'this is politics, it is about whom you trust' (field notes, 29.03.2021). The donation was the subject of negotiations behind the scenes, contradictory results of which leaked out to the public. Sometimes it was said that there was no donor at all, or that the donor had withdrawn, while sometimes the question of the legal admissibility of an earmarked and an unearmarked donation was discussed; for if it is a free donation to the city of Halle, there are enough sites in this city, such as schools, that are waiting for renovation and into which the city should first pour donated money. Also debated were tax write-off possibilities associated with donations and cases that had been decided on this in courts in other cities and for other places in Halle where the donation became a decisive legal wedge in the non-realization of a project (Halle (Saale) Händelstadt, 2021). As the investor told me in an interview, there was no chance of understanding the statements made in City Council meetings without knowledge of what was going on behind the scenes. When I asked them, what was going on behind the scenes, they only replied that the city of Halle was 'special' and that the mayor and the City Council were against the project. The donation, they assured me, was there (interview, 22.04.2021).[95]

In fact, information did not necessarily get through to my informants at lower hierarchical levels in the administration either. A planner once said, 'at first [...] you only hear something by chance if you happen to be in the right place at the right time [...then], what used to be deals made only in secret at the highest levels now becomes visible in everyday administrative life' (group discussion, 29.03.2021). This also meant that planners sometimes were preparing something that had long been overtaken by the negotiations 'behind the scenes'. One planner told me that they had no contact with the people and that their personal influence on the Hochhausscheiben was small, however fitting the position they had within the hierarchy of the administration (field notes, 27.05.2021). They told me that the case of the Scheiben had to be decided by upper levels in the administration, by the mayor and the alderman, as these buildings had great importance for the district and the city as a whole, not least because of the amounts of money that would flow there. Involved in decisions over the Hochhausscheiben are, as they told me, the City Council, the mayor and the alderman (field notes, 27.05.2021).

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95 I personally do not have any further information on who potential donors were and what they requested in compensation.

Blurring Boundaries

As said, the financial hardship of municipalities can be countered by having the municipality's own contribution taken over by third parties: the developer, the state and a third private party donating to the city. However, as I see it, what should be a relief and enable alignment and close gaps in fact fragments responsibility and leads to manoeuvres in the struggle over agency and responsibility at the margins of legality. As Bernt and Haus note for urban development programmes and problems of their implementation, the

> limits of control [are] at least partly homemade in urban redevelopment [the authors see the state and federal levels responsible for that]. They are the result of 'non-decisions' in which the existing ownership and actor structure under which urban development takes place is no longer addressed, but accepted as given and unquestionable, and responsibility is fragmented and shifted to negotiation rounds that are hardly recognizable to outsiders.
> (Bernt & Haus, 2010, p. 27; own translation; in the original it also says 'non-decisions')

The authors see urban development programmes as institutional fixes that, instead of reorganizing the making of the city, try to meet gaps with institutional fixes that come, however, with new problems. I have already mentioned above that from my perspective, the possibility of donating expands networks instead of tightening relations. With the possibility of filling financial gaps in the city's budget through the possibility of assuming the costs with private money, a room for manoeuvre opens up that to one of the planners from Halle appears necessary but feels extremely uncomfortable, they told me (interview, 03.06.2021). They saw a risk of their obligation for equity being threatened as, within this room for manoeuvre, individual negotiation and trust become more important than regulations. Furthermore, they saw a risk in the fact that people might expect directly ask services by the city administration in return for donations (field notes, 19.03.2021; 29.03.2021). In fact, I see the principle of reciprocity and 'greyness' (Frederiksen & Knudsen, 2015, p. 13; see above) as constitutive for the organization of loose relations. Frederiksen and Knudsen note that greyness may lead to blurred boundaries of good and bad, and weight being given to informal practices and personal ties (Frederiksen & Knudsen, 2015, p. 13). Greyness, the authors note, may play an important role in 'relations of exchange, patronage and favours', but also intimate relations (Frederiksen & Knudsen, 2015, p. 13). My informants explained to me that donations come with 'a legal grey area' and that it was a 'matter for consideration' (field notes, 29.03.2021). As was clear from the example above, these are not considerations of an individual or within institutions alone; neither are they simply negotiations (that one may suggest applies to law in general as it is open to different interpretations and different ways of making reality, Abram, 2017, p. 67; Mol, 2010, p. 264), but what I call manoeuvre.

Manoeuvres revolve around things that act as regulators in gaps of 'institutional fixes'. At the heart of manoeuvres is the danger that the city might be accused of not even wanting to achieve the goals (revitalization of the Hochhausscheiben being a central one) it has set itself. This becomes clear in the political debate about further funding for the revitalization of Scheibe C in 2021: if the City Council does not approve the use of subsidies, it risks creating an investment disaster and its own goals of preserving the Hochhausscheiben are put in jeopardy. However, it equally risks an investment disaster if it does grant subsidies to the investor and they still do not realize the revitalization. In this case, millions of public money risk being lost. As the alderman of the city told me: 'there must not be an investment ruin at the end, there must not be a statically cracked ruin; [...] it must actually work now' (interview, 28.05.2021). After the additional funding of another 7 million had been decided (VII/2021/02131, 2021), it was withdrawn again in the autumn of 2021 (VII/2021/03346, 2021). The City Council members had been convinced that the risk and responsibility for the city were too high the question of the private donation could not be resolved. As the planners explained to me, if, for instance, the donation did not come, the city would have nothing in its hands, no 'means of pressure'. As they highlighted, they were not against donations in principle, and there are indeed good examples where buildings could be revitalized with the help of donations (field notes, 29.03.2021). As a disadvantage of cancelling the extra funding, the proposal for cancelling the funding said: 'The implementation of the

contractually agreed modernization and rehabilitation is not secured' (VII/2021/03346, 2021, pp. 6–8). As I understand it, an admission of it would have ultimately meant that the city of Halle would have been obliged to take on responsibilities that it did not want to take on and was not able to take on.

The price and the risks of a revitalization of the Hochhausscheiben are not fixed (and cannot be fixed as the buildings might resist), but a matter of manoeuvre. Donations and other things nourish such manoeuvres, as they extend the number of actors involved, making individual negotiations the basis of a revitalization project without questioning the conditions of (im-)possibility of collective action within loose networks. The 'danger' of the space between objective and realization became increasingly relevant after the 2015 resolution in which the city declared itself politically in favour of preservation. This was reinforced in subsequent years by the redevelopment statutes (whereby the city committed itself to the revitalization) and a referendum in 2017, in which the people of Halle voted for the city administration to move into Scheibe A as a tenant (see **chapter 8** below). In 2020, an investor of Scheibe A abandoned the redevelopment despite a signed lease agreement with the city. Afterwards, the municipal bank acquired the building and continued working towards a revitalization with another (local) construction firm. A newspaper article reported:

> The Saalesparkasse wants to buy Scheibe A in Neustadt and thus close a chapter that must have caused a lot of turmoil *behind the scenes*. The [investor] has not shown itself to be a *reliable partner* for the city of Halle and has not started the redevelopment of Scheibe A as discussed and – hopefully – contractually agreed. It was also of no use that Lord Mayor Bernd Wiegand repeatedly referred to a valid lease agreement. It is hardly possible that this can be fulfilled by 1 January 2021. What is certain, however, is that with Saalesparkasse as a contractual partner, the city now has a reputable company it can *trust*. It remains to be seen whether the city will learn from this development. After all, a referendum, the first in the history of the city, was the background for the conclusion of a lease agreement with the [investor]. The *citizens must be able to trust* that the city will also implement the result.
> MZ, 16.01.2020; emphases added[96]

The examples within this section are characterized by the fragmentation of agency and struggles over agency around things that are supposed to fill gaps but open room for manoeuvre. The examples show how 'political action […] takes place *next to* or *across* institutionalised political orders' (Gomart & Hajer, 2003, p. 34; emphasis in original). In this mode of struggling, I note a 'weaving' (Kühn, 2021, p. 121) of relations. Private investment in situations of loose relations can appear to be a favour that private actors do for the city. In fact, interdependencies lead to a coming together of actors, but also establish the principle of reciprocity in a way that can become a dilemma for the city that is struggling with its obligation of equal treatment and transparency and its declared objective to bring about a revitalization of the buildings.

Regulations // Mattering

Manoeuvres, as described above, apply not only to donations but also to regulations. When in 2006, for example, the owner of building E was hoping that the building would be used by public authorities, they were quoted in a newspaper as saying that the parking question remained unresolved. As the investor told the newspaper, it was crucial that the municipality rent (at least parts of) the building and waive the requirement to create more parking spaces. If the city administration were

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96   Questions of accountability emerge in this quotation, which I will explore in more detail in **chapter 8**.

not to agree that no extra parking spaces would be required, a revitalization would be too expensive and the company would go bankrupt. As a threat towards the city, they said: 'But then the state has to see what happens to it' (*MZ*, 18.02.2006). Behind the scenes, the owner was threatening the city that they would turn to the mayor and the public if the city administration would not be more cooperative on the parking space issue. They asked for an appointment with the head of department (email, 11.10.2006). The investors tied their plans to renovate Scheibe E not only to commitments regarding the use of the building by authorities, but also to the administrative decisions regarding the non-necessity of creating parking spaces. → **fig. 91; 92** Parking spaces, I realize during my research, are an important and complex issue in planning for Neustadt's centre (field notes, 17.05.2021). What I will explore in this section is how regulations come to matter in processes of struggling with. As actors try to fix them in minutes, leave them without fixity and delegate responsibility to them, regulations become objects of struggling with, around which a third mode of organizing loose relations revolves that I will call 'mattering', referring to Barad. As Barad defines it, 'Mattering is about the (contingent and temporary) becoming-determinate (and becoming-indeterminate) of *matter and meaning*, without fixity, without closure. The conditions of possibility of mattering are also conditions of impossibility' (Barad, 2010, p. 254; emphasis in original).

(Non-)Fixity

In 2015, an investor planned the redevelopment of Scheibe E. In an email to the planning department, the investor explained why, from their point of view, no building application was required (email, 19.10.2015). According to the investor, they planned to revitalize the building and create a student residence. Since Scheibe E used to house single workers during GDR times, the investor did not see the need for a building application, even though this use dated back a long time. In their email, the investor referred to laws and a judgement in a similar case from 2013. Particularly relevant for the investor was whether there were any parking space requirements and whether new regulations on noise, sound, heat and fire protection would need to be complied with. He planned to comply with energy and heat regulations, but he hoped, as the email indicates, that no building permit would be necessary (email, 19.10.2015).

The planning department referred these questions to the building regulations department with whom the investor met soon after. Trying to fix the agreements on interpretations of the regulations, the investor summarized the results in an email. Here, he repeated that, as he understood it, no building permit was required if residential use was planned, as residential use corresponded to the buildings' former use. Only a fire protection concept would be needed according to their interpretations of regulations and as they thought to have understood from the meeting (email, 04.11.2015). In its reply, the municipality corrected them on the statements made at the meeting and stated that a building application would be required in the event of structural changes being proposed for the building, regardless of whether the same or a different use was intended. Furthermore, it highlighted that parking spaces would have to be proven (only) in the event of additional demand (email, 06.11.2015). The city administration had also found the same reading in order to promote the revitalization of buildings in the old town of Halle. Applying it to the Hochhausscheiben also meant a form of equal treatment of different sites in the city, in the historical centre and Neustadt, as one planner told me (interview, 03.06.2021).

The minutes of a meeting between the city's planning and building regulation departments with the topic 'general assessment of the Scheiben ensemble in the centre of Neustadt in terms of building regulations' from August of the same year stated yet another interpretation: that a building application was necessary for the reactivation as the buildings had remained empty for at least 15 years and that the 'grandfathering' has thus expired (minutes, 19.08.2015). According to the regulations on the so-called '*Bestandsschutz*' ('grandfathering'), how long a building has been vacant plays, among other things, a decisive role in the decision as to what requirements are placed on revitalization. The 'grandfathering' decides whether reuse is considered a 'continuation' or a 'new use'. If a planned use is considered to be a continuation of the former use, no (additional) parking spaces need to be created. Basically, this is a question of assessing from a building law perspective whether the buildings are 'on' or 'off'. From a regulatory point of view, an expired grandfathering

Fig. 91

Fig. 91
Fig. 92

Fig. 91
After 1990, numerous parking facilities were created in the centre of Neustadt. Yet, parking remains a central issue in relation to a possible re-vitalization of the buildings. Schmuhl, n.d. [1990s].

Fig. 92
Parking deck between building C and building D built in the 1990s. Grimberg, 25.01.2023.

means that a building had seen an interruption equivalent to 'off'. The building would be considered a ruin that can only be set to new use and not reused. In contrast to that, if 'grandfathering' exists, it is easier to allow exceptions regarding thermal insulation and energy, for example, because the goal of preservation outweighs compliance with today's common standards. If this protection does not exist, a new building application is needed and the requirements imposed may in some cases prevent preservation.   → **fig. 93; 94**

Exceptions

The importance of exceptions regarding regulations in order to enable possible futures for the Hochhausscheiben was highlighted as early as 1999. At that time, in connection with the question of the admissibility of state subsidies for the conversion of high-rise buildings, it was discussed whether, for example, exceptions to technical regulations and the minimum size of flats would be possible. Back then, planners from Halle's city administration requested, for example, to allow 1-room flats of less than 35 m2 or to allow single-room flats without a vestibule (letter, 23.06.1999).

These exceptions, according to the justification given to the state, would be necessary in order to be able to continue using the Hochhausscheiben. As a letter from the city administration to the state of Saxony-Anhalt stated, these exceptions are considered 'extremely important' as they would allow for 'planning security' (letter, 23.06.1999). At that time, the exceptions concerned the size of the flats, and technical exceptions were allowed by the state of Saxony-Anhalt. However, it was ruled out that state funding would be possible if flats for students were to be built in the building. A representative of the state of Saxony-Anhalt wrote to the city administration: 'I would therefore recommend that the investor either retain the target group of students for certain flats and not apply for funding for these flats, or change the concept' (letter, 14.09.1999). The investors then asked the city administration's planners to 'clarify these matters in advance and work towards a positive exemption decision so that the chances of success for the redevelopment concept currently being worked on can be increased accordingly' (letter (fax), 27.09.1999).

A City Council resolution from 2009 was intended to secure the goals set for the centre of Neustadt, which had come under threat after the state of Saxony-Anhalt finally decided against using Scheibe C as an office building (see **chapter 2**). As the decision states, the state had based its decision on assumed cost increases associated with new guidelines for high-rise buildings in Saxony-Anhalt adopted in 2008. The resolution, in contrast, states that these guidelines refer to new buildings, but that the Hochhausscheiben, as existing buildings, would only have to comply with some of the fire safety precautions prescribed in the guidelines and that could equally be found in former regulations. Additional lifts and a subdivision of the long corridors were certainly necessary, but in the city's view, regulations were not relevant for deciding whether the buildings could be used as offices (V/2009/08266, 2009). The city makes it clear here that it does not agree with the state's reading of the regulations and suggests that the state shifted responsibility onto regulations to shirk away from its own responsibility for the development of the centre of Neustadt.

Pulling Together

Aware that the buildings challenge existing regulations while regulations challenge their revitalization, the city administration of Halle today found a reading that would circumvent these challenges and that also satisfied both urban planning, which wanted to facilitate revitalization, and the building regulations, which had to ensure compliance with the regulations. Finally, as one of the planners told me, they had agreed within the administration on a hybrid, that actually indicates that the buildings are to be understood as neither 'off' nor 'on': while the buildings 'don't have "grandfathering" in the classical sense' and all issues (i.e. fire protection, escape routes, wiring) needed to be checked, parking spaces would only need to be created in the event of additional needs coming with the intended use (interview, 03.06.2021). One of the planners laughed when I asked whether or not the Hochhausscheiben were considered as 'grandfathered' and told me that they cannot really answer that question as it was 'one of the complex issues' (interview, 03.06.2021); another planner told me 'well, it depends' (field notes, 17.05.2021).

Fig. 93
Fig. 94

In fact, no exceptions regarding technical requirements were allowed per se, nor were they rejected. Likewise, additional parking spaces were not required per se, but only under certain circumstances. In principle, a revitalization of the Hochhausscheiben was enabled as a reading that may interpret a reuse of the buildings, as continuation was allowed. Room was, however, left for multiple interpretations of individual technical aspects and regulations. From my perspective, cooperation is necessary to realize a future for the Hochhausscheiben. For alignment of actors, the non-fixity of some regulations is also necessary. The regulations, which are precise enough for the actors to agree on what is at stake, allow an openness that can make collective work possible, similar to what Bowker and Star found for a 'boundary object' (Bowker & Star, 1999).[97]

What the fixation without fixity furthermore allows for, as I will show now, is postponement. In the case of Scheibe C, provisional building permits were issued in the mid-2010s, while many decisions on details in the construction plans were still pending. This concerned, for example, the distance areas and the associated possible purchase of city-owned land in the vicinity of the building. While this is common practice and non-fixity is, according to one of the planners, necessary to enable action, conflicts might equally be postponed and end up with no one being responsible (interview, 03.06.2021).

The day-to-day work of the municipality is about complying with norms, ensuring that any action is in line with existing law. The principle of administration, as is emphasized again and again by its employees, is 'not to act against a law and not to act without a law'. The laws regulate responsibilities in terms of time and space, but primarily in terms of content (field notes, 05.03.2021; 11.03.2021). → fig. 95   This does not necessarily mean that they would not be willing to take part in changing or adapting the laws. However, they cannot act without a legal basis. If an investor applies for a construction permit, as in the case of Scheibe C, an administrative act is initiated. The basic principle for these acts is always the same and regulated according to the so-called Administrative Procedure Act. The application travels from department to department, there are specific deadlines, and the rules of the procedure have to be kept. Then, the applicant receives a decision which they can either accept or appeal. As a rule, the planner told me, an appeal is usually lodged first and, if no agreement is reached with the administration, the case goes to court (field notes, 11.03.2021). However, despite the fact that planning permission was given, many aspects were left open, to be agreed upon later. In fact, the aspects which were left open involve complex administrative procedures, such as the change of ownership and the re-designation of land. As one planner told me, such a process can take a year or a year and a half (field notes, 18.05.2020). The extension of the building and related re-designations of land are one of the topics that have been discussed quite early in the process and are recurrently brought up. As far as I was able to follow the process, the needed agreement with neighbours for the building to be extended remained pending. Subsidies could accordingly not be disbursed, but this could also be a problem for the city, as the investor would have to take over the interest accruing on the unused money, but they doubted that this would happen. In addition, they feared that the state could approve less money for the city of Halle in the future if it did not manage to spend it.

Compared to other things on the table of the building regulation department, the topic of Scheibe C and its possible extension (requiring that the question of neighbouring plots be resolved) is 'as concrete as I've ever experienced', one planner said during a group discussion (group discussion, 29.03.2021). While the general reading made it possible to start the project, it can be seen here that this is no guarantee that individual aspects can also be easily regulated. The general 'accord' even allows the fixation of individual aspects to be postponed.   → fig. 96

This is also clear in relation to Scheibe A. Here, the reading enabled the revitalization and the postponement of the parking issue. A planner explained to me that in the case of Scheibe A, the

97   Bowker and Star define boundary objects as 'objects for cooperation' (Bowker & Star, 1999, p. 15) and 'as those objects that both inhabit several communities of practice and satisfy the informational requirements of each of them. […] This is achieved by allowing the objects to be weakly structured in common use, imposing stronger structures in the individual site tailored use. They are thus both ambiguous and constant; they may be abstract or concrete' (Bowker & Star, 1999, p. 16, emphasis in original; see also Star & Griesemer, 1989, p. 393).

Fig. 93; 94
Ready for reuse?
Interior of Scheibe C.
The author, 16.05.2019.

parking spaces for the municipality's employees did not necessarily have to be created in order to get the plans approved. However, in fact, in a survey, many municipality employees who moved into the 2021 building said that they would at least occasionally come to work by car. Thus, the parking spaces did not have to be proven for the permit, but when the building went into use, different parking spaces in the vicinity had to be rented and led to expenses that were not included in the initial calculations. The question of the parking spaces, as it turns out, was not resolved but postponed.[98] The revitalization of Scheibe A – 'on time and of excellent quality' – was made possible, as a representative of the bank from Halle that owns the building said at the inauguration in summer 2021, by the

> outstanding work on the part of everyone involved. When awarding
> the contract to GP Papenburg Hochbau GmbH [the building contractor],
> we firmly relied on their performance and were fully vindicated.
> All the other people involved in the planning department and in the
> other departments of the city also pulled together wonderfully.
> One cog in the other worked perfectly.
> Eseppelt, 2021b   → fig. 97

In this section, I was able to show some of the struggles over which regulations applied and how these needed to be interpreted. In my reading, non-fixity is enabling action in present, but also the postponement of potential conflicts. In the case of grandfathering, an open reading even led to the realization of a revitalization of Scheibe A. As the bank's representative pointed out at the opening, all departments of the city administration worked together to make this project a success. By this they certainly meant the cooperation that made permits enabling regulators. In my reading, laws and regulations have dis/abling capacities for the alignment of actors which is necessary for any possible futures to be realized. Whether or not they enable a project will depend on the abilities of actors to negotiate a common reading. If there are no common aspirations of the actors, laws and regulations will in the opposite case have a stabilizing effect on loose relations and thus on the in-between of buildings.

It became clear that in these negotiations the municipality has leeway and is thus able to affect trajectories of possible futures. In comparison with other countries, it has been described for Germany that governmental planning is relatively powerful (Abram & Weszkalnys, 2013a, p. 18) as the law allows the state to oblige owners to redevelop or demolish a building and in theory could even expropriate owners if they do not fulfil these orders. According to one of the planners from Halle, the possibilities of interfering with property that exist in the law and 'one or the other instrument of the building code' 'still clearly speak the language of what was imagined in the 1940s' (interview, 08.07.2020). They consider them as problematic. In practice, however, the hurdles are high. As one of the planners explained to me, the leverage, as they said, is low, because in Germany property is subject to very high protection, in contrast to the GDR, for example; it is a balancing process and in the case of measures that interfere with property, one is obliged to choose the mildest means. One is obliged to talk to the owners and to cooperate (field notes, 05.03.2021). Furthermore, a demolition order can, for example, only be pronounced if the degree of decay makes a revitalization impossible. The other planner equally said that as a planner they were constantly in a 'state of flux' 'in this area of tension between urban development dictatorship and letting people do what they want' (interview, 08.07.2020). In an expert opinion, which the city had drawn up in order to legally illuminate all means at its disposal, it was found that, for example, expropriation is in principle out of the question in the centre of Neustadt, as the legal and financial hurdles are definitely too high (field notes, 05.03.2021). In the case of obligations to redevelop or demolish, for example, the state must then assume unprofitable costs. Instead, 'bids' are issued which, however, as one planner told me, are ignored by owners without consequence. They told me that a question in the Saxony-Anhalt state parliament revealed that no owner in the entire state has ever followed such an order (interview, 02.10.2018; field notes, 05.03.2021). According to another planner, only in one case they knew, the city threatened an owner

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98   In fact, it is unclear whether this was intended or not. As a planner told me, nothing at all has been considered with regard to parking space requirements for the reuse of Scheibe A and in order not to be accused of having failed to do so, the mayor had later come up with the idea of a mobility concept for the centre of Neustadt as a whole (field notes, 18.05.2020).

that it might make use of its right of first refusal to 'get a foot in the door', as they said. However, according to her, no financial means were available to actually make use of it; 'it was an empty threat' (field notes, 17.06.2019).

In fact, we are dealing here with activating and deactivating effects, as I have also found for subsidies. While subsidies have the potential to fill gaps and bring actors together, but at the same time prevent alignment (see above), laws and regulations have the potential to tighten the relations between city and building (a characteristic that donations do not have, as I found above). However, their effect is often to stabilize loose relations.

7.3   Synthesis

The starting point for this chapter was the formulation of one of the planners from Halle that the Hochhausscheiben were able to inform of a process of 'struggling' of a city with a place.

I have identified three modes of struggling with, through which standby organizes loose relations: de/activation, manoeuvre and mattering. The things acting as regulators in the networks of standby connect actors, at least for brief moments, or have the potential to do so. However, they disconnect at the same time, as I notice. In this way, as they are dis/able alignment of actors they are dis/able the realization of any possible future. In the case of Scheibe A in 2021, the reading of regulations for grandfathering has, as I have shown, contributed to its revitalization as it allowed for the parking question to be postponed. As I have shown in this chapter, different modes of struggling revolve around these things, making them central elements in standby, which can be understood as a process of struggle, using the formulation of one of the planners.

Subsidies, as I found, function as promises that are supposed to fill gaps and allow the alignment of actors to realize a future for the Hochhausscheiben. Both the city and investors connected hopes to subsidies. As it turned out, however, subsidies not only have activating but also deactivating effects and they were not granted to the Hochhausscheiben. The city doubted that subsidies could be used efficiently here and was also not in a position to pay the necessary own contribution. Consequently, the political goal remained to achieve revitalization through private financing and the city was thus oscillating about agency and inability to act, convinced that 'you don't always have to call on the state' (quote by the alderman of the city of Halle, 28.05.2021, see above).

The city of Halle is not the only eastern German city that struggled with the de/activating effects of subsidies. Recognizing these difficulties, the possibility of replacing the municipality's own financial contributions by private money was introduced into funding legislation. As I suggested, the gaps coming with things aiming to fill gaps were supposed to be filled this way. Instead of tightening relations and allowing for alignment, another mode of organizing loose relations emerged in the case of the Hochhausscheiben – that is, manoeuvre. There are also many examples where this possibility has enabled the restoration of castles and other buildings, often through donations from foundations or the like. One planner therefore emphasizes that the possibility of replacing municipal funds with donations is not necessarily problematic (field notes, 29.03.2021). Nevertheless, it is important for me to emphasize here that this creates a space for manoeuvre that may, as the example of Scheibe C shows, promote blackmail, for example, by increasing dependence on private third parties. In the case described here, it became clear how donations are supposed to close gaps by involving new actors, but they can become bargaining chips in struggles of agency and responsibility, and in particular can put the city in distress. What became clear from this chapter (but also in part from **chapter 6** and later in **chapter 8**) is a dilemma associated with standby for the city administration as it struggles to find its role in the making of the future for the buildings. How the city asserts its role, despite 'sustained attacks on their autonomy as a result of proliferating neo-liberal politics' (Abram & Weszkalnys, 2013a, p. 12), becomes clear in relation to regulations. Regulations regarding the protection of existing buildings, parking spaces or fire protection are struggled over and with as these can be central regulators in the processes of making the conditions of the (im)possibility for building futures to materialize. While the city has asked the state for exceptions to ensure the future of the high-rise buildings, investors are trying to persuade the city to make exceptions. As written above, the state has in Germany (in comparison to other countries) far-reaching powers according to the law (Abram

Fig. 95

Fig. 95
Deutsche Verwaltungspraxis /
German administrative practice.
The author, 27.04.2021.

Fig. 96
Construction work on Scheibe C is progressing slowly
but steadily, even though many aspects remain unclear
and a further government grant has been withdrawn
by the City Council due to feasibility concerns. The
extensions of the building in depth can also be seen here.
Grimberg, 25.01.2023

Fig. 97
The curtain falls: Scheibe A shortly before its unveiling
and after the façade renovation has been completed.
The author, 20.04.2 021.

Fig. 96

Fig. 97

& Weszkalnys, 2013a, p. 18). The law allows the state to intervene, ranging from obligations to redevelop or demolish to expropriation. In practice, however, these laws are hardly ever applied. As I have shown in the section on mattering, laws and regulations become regulators in the process of struggling.

Studying standby as process of struggle, we see how relations are re-examined, agency and responsibilities are (re-)distributed and negotiated, and these negotiations are often conflictual, as I want to suggest drawing on my findings in this chapter. Standby is a mode that instead of striving for the mastering of uncertainty is embracing uncertainty, and instead of creating order and stability, it is sustaining an in-between where cause and effects are blurred and responsibilities get pushed around. Through explorations in this chapter, interdependencies that are contributing to the in/activity of standby become clear, for example in that while the city has no money and acts around the lack of money, investors are dependent on the city, as it is, for example, via the city that they are applying for funding.

8 Doubt and Accountability

In 1999, different departments of the city administration received an anonymous letter. Under the title 'Stop, demolition is not a solution!' a citizen asked why buildings A and C were empty and what future was envisaged for the buildings. 'Should they be renovated, or are they threatened with demolition? But that can't be the solution (demolition and new construction)'. The writer referred to an example from the capital of Saxony-Anhalt, Magdeburg, where buildings were demolished on the grounds that they would open up the view of the cathedral, only to be replaced by a new building. The citizen felt betrayed in the case of the demolished and replaced building in Magdeburg and their letter can be read as a kind of threat that their trust would be withdrawn if the Hochhausscheiben were to be demolished. Precisely, they wrote:

> 'It would be *mean* if something like that were planned here for profit'.
> receipt date, 05.11.1999; emphasis added

According to the neighbourhood office in Halle-Neustadt, 511 citizens visited the office between January and April 2005. Among these, '19 citizens asked about the future of the Hochhausscheiben in the Neustadt Passage and criticized their appearance or that the city was not doing anything to improve the condition immediately' (Balance Sheet of the 3rd District Conference in Halle-Neustadt of 17.05.2005). At the neighbourhood conference organized in May of the same year, citizens were referring to the Hochhaussscheiben as 'problem children' that were not (properly) taken care of (Balance Sheet of the 3rd District Conference in Halle-Neustadt of 17.05.2005). Initiatives come from neighbours, as a representative of the city of Halle wrote in a letter to the state of Saxony-Anhalt in relation to the owners of the redeveloped Scheibe D, who got involved in the search for possible futures for the other buildings 'because they are naturally concerned about the future of their surroundings' (letter, 23.03.1998).

The starting point for this chapter is my observation that the Hochhausscheiben on standby matter politically, as they become a matter of justification that 'spark a public into being' (Marres, 2005). The buildings have become objects of public consideration and contestation as, while their uncertain future is perceived as a problem, there is no (easy) solution to the problem. They generate publics not only because of their material presence and location (as I have argued in **chapter 4**), but precisely because they are an unresolved matter. As Lippmann wrote,

> it is in controversies of this kind, the hardest controversies to disentangle, that the public is called in to judge. Where the facts are most obscure, where precedents are lacking, where novelty and confusion pervade everything, the public in all its unfitness is compelled to make its most important decisions.
> (Lippmann, 2002; as cited in: Marres, 2005, p. 211)

I suggested above with Kühn that standby can be understood as a 'way of dealing with complexity' (Kühn, 2021, p. 129) and buildings on standby present a complex problem for which there is no ready-made solution. Such problems, which are unsolved, not only generate publics, they require public involvement. As Marres points out with reference to pragmatists Lippmann and Dewey, 'publics are called into being by issues' (Marres, 2005, p. 209). Against a common argument at the time that growing complexity of the twentieth century would make 'democracy *impossible*' Lippmann and Dewey found, 'complex issues actually *enable* public involvement in politics' (Marres, 2005, p. 209; emphasis in original). In 'public debate', as the planning department put it in a letter to a citizen, 'citizens and stakeholders express their concerns, wishes and ideas and enter into a discussion with the city and the state about the actually existing framework conditions and possibilities for action by the public authorities'. Requests by citizens can, as the letter continued, 'increase the pressure to act and can, if necessary, accelerate solutions to problems' (letter to a citizen, December 2013).

It is important to note here, that not all citizens engage in searches for possible futures for the Hochhausscheiben. While in **chapter 4** I showed that the buildings require engagement of those physically close to them – i.e. the city and citizens of Neustadt and neighbours of the buildings – publics are further generated by what have been called 'forms' (Gomart & Hajer, 2003, p. 47) in regard to politics. These public-generating forms include neighbourhood conferences and other events, but also newspaper articles, concepts and referendums. I will pay attention to these forms through which different publics are generated through which they interact with the city. Standby's public, as I will treat it here, consists of those whose caring in the one way or another for the buildings and their future is traceable.

In this chapter, I would like to address ethicopolitical questions in standby by investigating how 'accountability relations are enacted' (Woolgar & Neyland, 2013a, p. 14) in relation to the objects on standby – that is, the Hochhausscheiben. The term 'accountable' has, as Woolgar and Neyland show with reference to various dictionaries, different meanings:

> **accountable**: adj. 1. Subject to having to report, explain or justify; responsible, answerable. 2. That can be explained, explicable. (Random House Dictionary, 1967)

and

> **accountable** (adjective). 1. **responsible**. Responsible to somebody else or to others, or responsible for something 2. **able to be explained**. Capable of being explained .
> (Encarta Dictionary, 2006; as cited in: Woolgar & Neyland, 2013, p. 31; emphasis in original)

As the authors note, 'a first sense' of the word 'connotes moral or ethical compulsion. A second sense connotes technical capability' (Woolgar & Neyland, 2013a, p. 31).

According to them, 'discussions about the moral order of governance – what should and should not be done with ordinary stuff – are populated by a litany of contrasts, nearly always contrasts between what could be done and what was in fact done' (Woolgar & Neyland, 2013a, pp. 6–7). My aim for this chapter is not a moral judgement or to determine the limits of responsibility or when acting responsibly actually means refusing to be responsible (Metzger, 2014, p. 1007). Rather, I will in a sort of 'moral inquiry' (Beauregard, 2015, p. 534) turn to how questions of who is or should be responsible and what it would mean to act responsibly are addressed and negotiated. In the previous chapters, I have shown how distributions of responsibility are unclear and how actors struggle over responsibilities they cannot and/or do not want to bear. Here, I want to explore how actors address moral questions of what 'good' or 'right' ways of caring for the Hochhausscheiben would look like. I consider contestations over who should care and how and what/who is not been taken care of central questions of politics (Gomart & Hajer, 2003, p. 36).

Lippmann and Dewey suggested that public involvement happens when existing institutions are not able to solve problems. While '"manageable" problems can be expected to be taken care of by existing institutions', the 'public can adopt an affair when currently available instances are failing to address it in a satisfactory way' (Marres, 2005, p. 212). In fact, this is the case with regard to the Hochhausscheiben. As I will show, citizens fighting for the preservation of the buildings are disappointed and expect the city to engage further in securing a future for the buildings. Citizens address the city when it comes to the future of the built city, holding it accountable. I assume that the buildings are in this way also a site through which the state is experienced and enacted (cf. Hilbrandt, 2019, p. 353). As I argue, doubts turn standby into a matter of justification, opening new lines of accountability for the city administration of Halle.[99]

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99   I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer of an early state of my reflections on standby in Halle for pointing at this dimension of standby and for encouraging me to pursue this aspect of standby further.

While publics are generated by the fact that the Hochhausscheiben are perceived as an ongoing un-solved problem, their engagement is determined not only by emotional attachment to the buildings but also by doubts about the way the city is addressing the problem. A central role in a situation of un-clear responsibilities, but a situation in which the question of responsibility seems pressing, is played by doubt. As Pelkmans notes, 'doubt points […] to pragmatic referents, to the question "what to do?"' Questions of being, of truth and of action should always be seen in relation to each other' (Pelkmans, 2013, p. 2). As I note, articulations of accountability relations become tangible in moments of doubt. Similarly, Woolgar and Neyland argue that it is in moments of disruption that include for them break-down and failure, but also challenge and contestation, that 'the artful enactment, constitution, display, or concealment of governance and accountability relations are brought to the fore' (Woolgar & Neyland, 2013, p. 221). In each moment of disruption, as the authors argue, 'central and taken for granted as-pects of mundane governance are disrupted' (Woolgar & Neyland, 2013a, p. 221). What comes to the fore in moments of doubt, as I see it, are convictions of how and by whom taking care of the buildings should be organized, interactions over claims show expectations and how (unfulfillable) expectations are dealt with. Rather than disrupting the taken-for-granted, doubts point to the instability of standby while rendering it itself politically unstable. Rather than leading to a new forms of 'caring for place' (Metzger, 2014) in the first place, doubts destabilize 'social and moral order' (Woolgar & Neyland, 2013a, p. 243) that may, however, also lead to the resolution of doubts, commitment and cooperation (contributing to an ending of standby for the buildings). In **chapter 4**, I have shown how the city and citizens are involved in the maintenance of standby, materially securing potentiality. The focus of my analysis here will be on the effects of doubt on relations that are sustaining standby and on processes of un/making possible futures.

Doubt has become an important research interest in relation to experiences of uncertainty, cri-sis, transition or failure (Bear, 2014; Carey & Pedersen, 2017, p. 18; Gladwell, 2013; Janeja & Bandak, 2018; Pelkmans, 2013). Baer, for example, sees doubt in her introduction to a special issue on capitalist time as a central theme in conflicting times (Bear, 2014); Carey and Pedersen, in their introduction to another special issue, outline ways of understanding infrastructures, from social to affective, that are involved in generating and sustaining uncertainty and doubt (Carey & Pedersen, 2017). As Pelkmans writes in his *Outline for an Ethnography of Doubt* (2013), he understands doubt as a 'quality' rather than a clearly definable phenomenon. Doubt for him is part of a series of phenomena that comprise part of 'cycles of hope, belief, doubt and disillusionment' (Pelkmans, 2013, p. 3). Pelkmans' approaches to doubt seem particularly helpful in relation to my questions of accountability and objects of public concern.

According to Pelkmans, uncertainty can activate doubt, but in contrast to uncertainty, doubt always includes an assumed existence of alternatives. 'At least', he notes, 'that is what the presence of the number two in *dubitare* – the Latin origin of the word – suggests, echoed in the German *zweifel* [sic] and the French *doter* [sic]. Doubt, in this sense, is about 'being of two minds', about wavering between one possibility and another'. Furthermore, 'doubt has a complicated relationship with belief [he later writes that 'doubt and belief should not be seen as opposites, but rather as co-constitutive parts' (Pelkmans, 2013, p. 4)], so it does with action: rather than necessarily leading to inaction (al-though that is certainly a possibility), doubt may also be a facilitator of action by triggering a need for resolution' (Pelkmans, 2013, pp. 3–4). Discussing the 'qualities and effects' of experienced doubt, Pelkmans develops four theses: first, he states that '[d]oubt is activated uncertainty', that it both 'at-taches itself to dubious objects' but also transforms these objects; second, and following from this, not only is the doubted object unstable, 'but also that the act of doubting is unstable'. As a third thesis, Pelkmans suggests that 'the effects of doubt [are] difficult to predict' and fourth, 'doubt invokes its opposites, thus implying a relational and temporal dimension in which doubt, certainty, disillusion-ment and resolution feed into and give way to each other' (Pelkmans, 2013, pp. 16–17).
Doubt, following Pelkmans, is a relational phenomenon, changing in time and coming with different possible effects for relations and (in)action. An analysis of the 'role of doubt in everyday life', as Pelkmans suggests, 'needs to do justice to relational as well as temporal connections' (Pelkmans, 2013, p. 5).

Pelkmans interest is mainly on the effect of doubt on people's lives (individual or collective), his aim being to understand how people make choices between alternatives, how they change opinions and 'and how they came to terms with not being certain' (Pelkmans, 2013, p. 16). What I aim to explore is the role doubt plays for the engagement with buildings, in enactments of accountability and for its objects. My aim is thus to better understand how standby affects those participating in it and relations among them. The focus will be on doubt as central affect and how it plays out in relations between citi-zens and the local state. What I will be interested in furthermore is the effects of doubt for the becoming of the buildings.

In a first section, I will show how citizens doubt basic assumptions of the municipality, such as the absence of demand for the buildings in the housing market. The citizens' doubt not only reveals their own convictions, but as they confront the city with their doubts, it also unravels the convictions underlying the city's argument of a lack of demand (Pelkmans, 2013, p. 1). The doubts indicate that, even while both the city and the citizens define revitalization of the buildings as the preferred future, the relationship between the city and its citizens is fragile, making standby itself politically unstable. In a second section, I will show how concepts, commissioned by the city to draw attention to the buildings take on a political role as citizens demand that no more concepts should be elaborated. Cit-izens increasingly doubted that directing attention to the buildings might help securing the buildings' futures. Their doubts place debates over what could be done and should be done by the city of Halle at the centre of debates over possible futures for the buildings. I will show how doubts lead to searches for alternatives and transform into expectations and demands.

In a third section, I will show how the citizens' doubts had finally activating effects and contributed to the fact that Scheibe A is used today by the city administration of Halle. Doubts of which Pelkmans writes that they 'may also be a facilitator of action by triggering a need for resolution' (Pelkmans, 2013, pp. 3–4) increased political pressure on the city of Halle to commit to the buildings. The newly elected mayor of Halle announced during the election campaign that they would manage to find a solution and increased the pressure on planners and the city once again on the occasion of Neustadt's 50th birthday. Here they publicly stated that if a solution was not found within a year, the buildings would be demolished, which caused a public stir and triggered protest. Claims grew louder that the city should at least save one building by using it itself. Through a citizen referendum and by bypassing the City Council, which was not in a position to make such a delicate political decision, a move of (parts of) Halle's city administration into Scheibe A was then decided on.

8.1   Demand: Doubts and Convictions

One of the central controversies in processes of un/making possible building futures revolves around the question of possible use(r)s. In fact, it is impossible to think of building futures without future users. As I will show, the questions of 'who could' and 'who should' live here get answered differently and involve anticipation and speculation. Whereas the city doubted for a long time that there was any demand for the buildings, citizens doubted such an assumption.

Revitalizing for Whom?

During a consultation at Halle's city administration held in 2002, architects Graul und Partner, com-missioned by the city to develop a revitalization concept for the centre of Neustadt and the buildings, suggested preserving all five high-rise buildings and granted the buildings adaptability (and numer-ous other architects have done so after them) (see **chapter 4**). The discussion, however, very quickly led to controversial discussions on the question of *for whom* the buildings would be refurbished.

According to the architects, the preservation of the buildings would be possible if different uses were realized in the buildings, i.e. both office and residential use and 'special' housing, such as housing for students and elderly. In addition, this would be possible, as they suggested, if '[d]ifferent typologies set new standards for flats and offices, they represent alternatives to the monotonous offer of the surroundings' (Graul and Partner, 2002). In this way, the architects suggested that the preser-vation of the buildings could be ensured by an offer which differed from those that already existed in Neustadt.   → **fig. 98; 99**

The perspectives for use presented were controversially discussed during the consultation. Besides the owners of the Hochhausscheiben (most of whom did not attend the consultation), other actors from Neustadt, were invited to the consultation. Many of them were sceptical towards residential use in the Hochhausscheiben. For example, the manager of the nearby shopping centre considered it politically explosive in view of the vacancy problem at the housing companies and a pastor of a local church congregation was 'sceptical whether there would be any demand for this at all'. Another participant, owner of a business in the centre of Neustadt, asked what rent the architects had based their calculations on. As the minutes state, the architects had calculated a rent of DM 9/m2 for housing and DM 12/m² for commercial space, 'which they considered realistic' (minutes, 12.04.2002). What is a realistic price is determined by the necessary investment sum, but also based on assumptions as to which rental prices are within a range at which the flats that are created can then also be rented out. This aspect is central and it becomes clear from the discussion about the use perspectives proposed by Graul und Partner, that questions of who could live here are not easily answerable as the future is uncertain. Looking for answers involves anticipation and speculation, for what is being debated here is whether there could be demand, now and in the future; whether the building could meet current and future housing demands; what could be uses and who could be users. In fact, it is unclear whether and what demand there might be for the buildings in a time marked by population decline in Halle-Neustadt, by moves to Halle's old town and to the outskirts of the city. Would it be possible to create a housing offer here that could attract users? And if so, who could and should that be?

Doubts, as we have seen above with Pelkmans, can be triggered from a 'lack of clarity and absence of certainty' (Pelkmans, 2013, p. 17), but they are at the same time activated by uncertainty (Pelkmans, 2013, p. 16; see above). I would now like to explore the doubts of the city and the citizens. While the city doubted that there was any demand, citizens in turn doubted that such doubts were justified and they started doubting the city's argumentation. As I will show, different convictions and premises become visible in the respective doubts (cf. Pelkmans, 2013, p. 4). Standby, as I suggest, comes with doubts that render it politically unstable, because the city's legitimacy for sticking to the goal of revitalizing the Hochhausscheiben is legitimized through participating citizens. If they now assume that the city will set the goal but not pursue it, a central relationship that gives standby a certain stability becomes fragile.

First of all, it should be emphasized that city and citizens fighting for the preservation of the buildings share is the view that preservation should be the goal and that both considered a (long-term) use of the buildings as a basic prerequisite for a possibility to preserve the buildings. The city in particular emphasized again and again, especially to citizens who inquired about the future of the buildings and participated in the search for possible futures, that demand was the basis of all action. In the city's reply to one of the citizen's association fighting for the buildings' preservation, for example, one of the planners wrote that 'The basic question is always who has a need and what is the need for. The demand is the basis for any further action' (letter, draft, September 2013). However, the city itself assumed that this demand was hardly or not at all present. As the city wrote to a citizen in 2009, 'The most important thing for the preservation of the tower blocks is to find a user. Due to shrinking population figures in the Neustadt district, the need for residential and office space is decreasing' (letter, 10.12.2009). In a letter from the same year to the state of Saxony-Anhalt, the city even wrote that 'The demand for office and residential use is practically zero' (letter, 20.07.2009).

This assumption was challenged by citizens. In a letter to the planning department from 2015, a citizen active in one of the citizens' associations fighting for the preservation of the Hochhausscheiben wrote:

> In the past, the public debate on the Halle-Neustadt city centre and the associated Hochhausscheiben was essentially and recurrently characterized by two main arguments:
> 1. it was assumed that there were no possibilities of use for the buildings at all.
>
> 2. it was assumed that any refurbishment would be uneconomical. We have long doubted the validity of both arguments.
> letter, 30.03.2015

Fig. 98

Fig. 99

Fig. 98
Revitalizing for whom?
The author, 29.11.2019.

Fig. 99
The concept presenting 'use perspective for the vacant Hochhausscheiben' found that 'structural adaptations to contemporary uses are indispensable' in order to be able to secure the buildings' future through use.
ARGE Graul and Partners, 2002.

It is the doubts of the citizens that led the city to specify its doubts that demand exists in this place and for these buildings. On a handwritten note on one of the letters to the citizens' association, one of the planners had written: 'There is need, but not there and like that!' (letter, draft, September 2013). Furthermore, it turned out that the city only considered certain user groups to be useful for the Hochhausscheiben, but had doubts that they would move into the buildings.

Thinking possible uses from the perspective of urban development, residential use is either generally refused (see **chapter 5**)[100] or else, high-priced housing is preferred. From the perspective of urban planning, it is crucial to create more diversity and comfort in Halle-Neustadt, 'not just cheap housing'; 'Ideally', even new construction' should be made possible (interview with a planner in *MZ Saalekurier*, 16.05.2014). Following an ideal of a 'social mix', the middle class and families should be brought to Neustadt to stabilize the district in the long term. As the alderman told me in an interview, they as city administration were interested in 'the middle price segment, because there are far too many cheap flats in Halle-Neustadt and we simply have to make sure that the middle class, i.e. a middle-upper segment, says that they feel comfortable there and would like to move there' (interview, 28.05.2021).

In 2015, the mayor announced that they saw a future for the buildings and that the aim was 'to house high-quality flats, especially for families, in the Scheiben' (*MZ*, 07.04.2015) and the study by Lacaton & Vassal + Fischer

> provided evidence that, with an estimated investment requirement of EUR 17 to 20 million, different housing and use typologies in a higher quality segment could be accommodated in the Scheiben, which would meaningfully complement the offer in Neustadt, and that an economic viability could be achieved without subsidies already with a net cold rent of approx. 7.50 euros per square meter [and month].
> VI/2015/01130, 2015, p. 5

In contrast to that, as can be seen from the resolution text on the preservation of the buildings, '[t]he predominant interest of investors' was to establish 'low-price small flats'. This, however, as the explanations on the draft resolution states, 'speaks against the urban goals of a balanced mix of uses to strengthen the centre function and to supplement the existing housing supply with special forms of housing' (VI/2015/01130, 2015, p. 11). The investor of the ongoing renovation project in Scheibe C told me with regard to discussions on uses for the Scheiben: 'you simply have to know that the city does not want this project – why? because the housing companies say that with this project you are taking away our tenants. We say, no, we won't do it, because what we are doing doesn't exist yet' (interview, 18.05.2020). Here, too, it remains open whether they could succeed in this. While the investor is convinced that they can attract students to Neustadt, the city doubts it, even though the city shares the goal of attracting tenants who do not yet live in Neustadt – however, not for micro-apartments. Another investor saw in 2015 an opportunity to revitalize one of the tower blocks by simply renovating it and setting up accommodation for refugees (VI/2015/01130, 2015). In reaction, planners at Halle's city administration were considering advantages and disadvantages of a use of one or several of the buildings to house refugees. It was feared that there would be a spatial concentration of social problems.

In fact, Halle-Neustadt is already found to be a socially weak neighbourhood. It is included in the National Urban Development Programme 'Social Cohesion' ('Sozialer Zusammenhalt', previously called 'Soziale Stadt'), a programme established in 1999 to foster 'the stabilization and upgrading of economically and socially disadvantaged and structurally weak neighbourhoods' (Ludwig & Epp, 2021, p. 1; own translation). Not only for Halle-Neustadt, but for many eastern German cities and towns, an increasing social differentiation and polarization of urban areas and social segregation in residential areas was observed, with residential areas with high vacancy rates such as Halle-Neustadt

seeing a spatial concentration of social problems (Beer, 2002, p. 53; Haller & Liebmann, 2002, p. 45). Behind the doubts about whether there can be a demand for the buildings, as my results show, is above all a view of the buildings in relation to their social and physical environment (see also **chapter 5**). Furthermore, there is an aspiration for the development of Neustadt and a belief in the ideal of social mix that the settlement of middle-class families should be achieved from the city's point of view. The city's goal is to counteract segregation and a negative image of Neustadt and to initiate a positive development by developing the Hochhausscheiben. The doubts about a demand for the Hochhausscheiben must, in my eyes, be understood together with the convictions and starting points for assumption and anticipation of (the absence of) demand.

Standby and its Public: the Anchor

From the perspective of urban planning, Neustadt has not become a 'banlieue' in the past decades only because of what they call 'anchor tenants', i.e. the first residents of Neustadt, living here for 40 years now (*MZ Saalekurier*, 16.05.2014). Similarly to the planner, the sociologist from Halle, Pasternack, writes that the 'The GDR housing, which was initially intended to be *social* in the true sense of the word, suddenly became a social hotspot, alleviated only by the civilizing effect of the everyday routines of the ageing first residents, insofar as they remained in the suburb' (Pasternack, 2014d, p. 523; emphasis in original; own translation).[101]

Those first-time residents are also the ones who are most involved in the search for possible futures for the high-rise buildings and who participate in events organized by the city on this topic. → **fig. 100**   They also include those who fight for their preservation. Other members of associations fighting for the buildings' preservation were involved in the construction of Halle-Neustadt (among them, for example, a former head of the building department). That is is predominantly the elder residents of Neustadt that are involved, is shown in the evaluation of the questionnaire handed out at the occasion of an exhibition of the structural concept for Neustadt's centre in Scheibe D in 2019, for example. The median of those participating here was 69 years. Most of the visitors lived in Neustadt and had been living there for an average of 40 years (Stadt Halle (Saale), 2019, pp. 2–3). The will to preserve the Hochhausscheiben as it is expressed by the city's concept from 2019 for the restructuring of the centre of Neustadt is perceived as particularly positive, according to the evaluation. As particularly negative about the centre, the buildings' vacancy and the neglect of their surrounding areas were mentioned (Stadt Halle (Saale), 2019, pp. 4–5). Through those events initiated and organized by the city administration, the city saw itself confirmed or called upon to work towards revitalization of the buildings. Discussing with one of the planners in 2019, they told me that it was important to get citizens involved in planning to legitimize the city's projects. However, in the case of the Scheiben, it is difficult to know whom to address, as future users of the buildings were not yet known. Participating are those citizens that are emotionally attached to the buildings (field notes, 24.06.2019). As I would argue, the city relies on the citizens who participate because they legitimize the city's adherence to the goal of preservation and revitalization.

However, as the quote from a letter from 2015 above shows, citizens doubt the argument of lack of demand (and other actions and arguments, as I will show below). While they share with the city

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100   I have described in **chapter 5** in relation to the evaluation of emptiness that housing companies in Halle-Neustadt and parts of the planners did not consider a residential use for the Hochhausscheiben to be reasonable as they feared vacancies in other parts of Neustadt.

101   According Pasternack, Neustadt was controversial from the beginning, as the industrial prefabricated slab construction method 'thoroughly broke with the idea of the grown city'. Halle-Neustadt is presented here as the other city, as artificial and experimental, whereby he points out that there is no uniform assessment of Halle-Neustadt. Rather, as he notes, 'Halle-Neustadt polarizes.' According to him, it did not become a controversial case only after 1989, but was […] from the very beginning. It was a permanent idea and experiment, a place to live and a provocation' (Pasternack, 2014a, p. 11). Pasternack furthermore writes: 'Most foreigners could never quite imagine that one could feel at home in the midst of this architecture' (Pasternack, 2014a, p. 11). In opposition, Gribat and Huxley find, that it is common in urban discourse and policies to problematize the large housing estates in East German cities as unnaturally grown or artificial (Gribat & Huxley, 2015). The authors criticize such view and highlight that shrinkage as urban policy was built on a specific problematization of housing estates built in GDR times and their inhabitants and how these policies thus come with the production of subject and object positions and are driven by unequal power relations (Gribat & Huxley, 2015).

the assumption that the buildings can only be preserved through long-term use, and they even share the city's aspirations to attract the middle class, they are convinced that uses are possible to achieve. Members of one of the associations fighting for the buildings' preservation agreed with planners that mixed use should be favoured, but are convinced that 'business follows tenants, not the other way round' and that '[i]n the sense of a stronger demand orientation, however, one should not focus solely on a trend target group' (letter, 30.03.2015). In fact, they are also not in favour of housing refugees in the buildings, but they are demanding an 'unconditional preservation' and a good mix of age-appropriate and student housing at affordable rents (Stadt Halle (Saale), 2019, pp. 9–10). In a letter to the city administration, a citizens' association wrote that they saw 'innovation potential' in the Scheiben in terms of housing development and that, in their view, 'Halle-Neustadt needs above all young people with an intact social background, singles, students, couples and, above all, young middle-class families' (letter, 30.03.2015). They also saw a potential here for alternative organizational forms of housing, e.g. cooperatives (letter, 29.08.2013).

As they told me in 2019, people in Neustadt are often moving and they would also move into the Hochhausscheiben, they are convinced (field notes, 15.05.2019). In fact, the bad reputation of Neustadt isn't met by residents of Neustadt (Sackmann, in: Kompetenzzentrum Stadtumbau in der SALEG, 2014, p. 30) and the citizens are convinced that people would move into the buildings. According to the neighbourhood manager, the long-established residents show self-confidence and robustness. They are proud of the fact that Neustadt was once the city of modernity (interview, 13.07.2020). They are here referring, however, also to Neustadt residents whom the city clearly wanted to exclude from potential future users of the Hochhausscheiben (see also **chapter 5**).

The less intervention investors make in the building structure, the more certain they can be that they can offer a rent that can also be achieved in Halle-Neustadt. But this would mean possibly attracting a clientele that already lives in Halle-Neustadt or one that the city of Halle does not see as a prefarable target group. While low-cost small flats seem the most suitable to ensure revitalization of the buildings, the city aimed to attract new groups of residents to Neustadt, as there was already more than enough affordable housing there.

Standby's Political Instability

Standby, as I have suggested, comes with doubts of who could, would and should be using the buildings and enable a preservation of the buildings. While the city assumed that there was no demand, the citizens doubted the lack of demand and began to doubt the city's argumentations and actions. In 2015, a citizens' association wrote to the city administration that the municipal housing companies were using the vacancy in one of their own properties in the centre of Neustadt to argue that there wasn't any demand. In fact, a newspaper article from 2014 lists reasons why the biggest municipal housing company called GWG refused to take one of the Scheiben and renovate it. One of the points mentioned here is that the management was 'critical' of 'the argument often mentioned so far that student and senior housing is increasingly necessary in Halle'. The management doubted that the number of students would grow to such an extent, and for the use of the Scheiben as senior citizens' flats, conversions would be necessary that would lead to rent prices that would not be feasible. Office space would also not be in demand, the company declared with certainty.

It is mentioned that GWG has demolished 3,000 flats in Neustadt in recent years in order to reduce vacancies. The company therefore doubts that there is a need for up to 4,000 additional flats in a shrinking market. 'Especially as GWG already owns a vacant eleven-storey building with 260 flats on the Magistrale, for which a solution is also being sought' (*MZ*, 25.02.2014).

The citizens' own research, however, had shown, as they wrote, that the company had previously relocated the dwellers as it planned to demolish the building. In the view of the citizens, the municipal companies were not contributing to searches for possible futures, but instead continued reproducing the same problematizations, in particular the lack of demand (letter, 30.03.2015). Citizens gained the impression that the argument of lack of demand was used by the city and especially by the municipal housing companies not to commit to the preservation of the Hochhausscheiben. They assume that with the argument of the lacking demand,
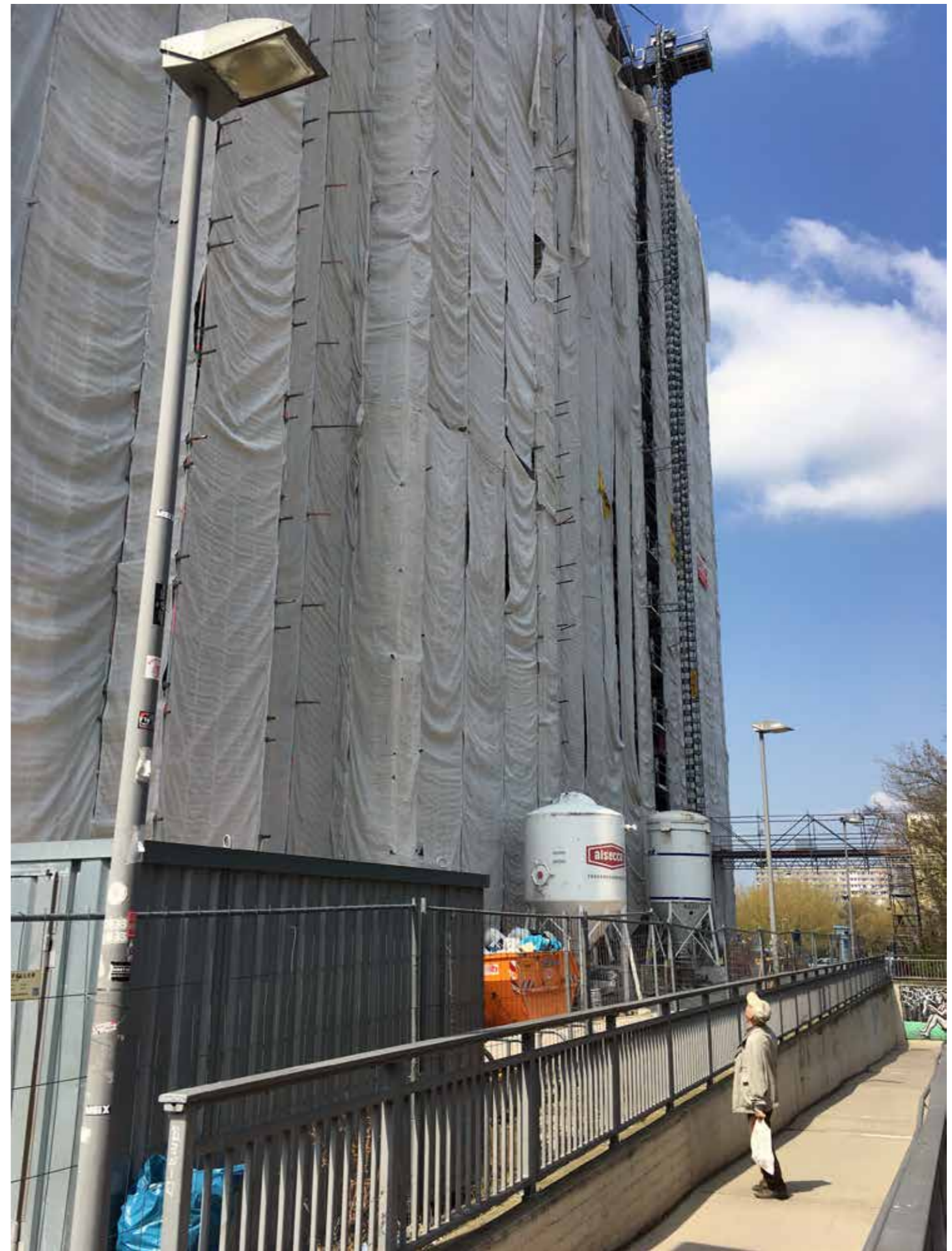

Fig. 100

Fig. 100
It is especially the first generation of Neustadt residents that is standing by the buildings and that is following the city's actions vigilantly and doubtfully.
The author, 20.04.2021.

a discussion of the problem should be kept as far away as possible
from the municipal sphere of responsibility. In our view, the city
and – consequently – its subordinate GWG [note: municipal housing
company] have so far been far from any significant commitment
with regard to the high-rise buildings.
letter, 30.03.2015

What interests me here is not so much the opposing perspectives and positions. I am more interested
in what conclusions can be drawn from this with regard to standby. The controversy shows, in my
view, that standby should be understood as a politically unstable mode. In fact, those citizens who
were united with the city in the goal of revitalizing the buildings began to doubt the city's intentions
to achieve this goal. The certainty that the relationship of Neustadt's first-time residents with the
municipal administration was increasingly crumbled. Some citizens did not want to be part of an
argumentation that no demolition actually materialized because citizens were attached to the build-
ings. When a citizen read in the newspaper in 2010 that the Halle city planning department had told
a federal politician during a visit to Neustadt that the Neustadt residents were in favour of preserving
the buildings, they wrote an email to the city:

can it be true that xy [name of a representative of the city] justified
to the social democrat leader [...] the non-demolition of the battered
and for years vacant Hochhausscheiben [...] by saying that 'many here
are attached to the Scheiben?'
I have lived in Neustadt near the centre since 1971 and do not know
any citizen who could care less about the now deteriorated Scheiben.
If they can no longer be used, they can only be demolished.
email, 02.09.2010

Such an opinion was certainly not shared by those who came together in associations to fight for its
preservation. But what is very clear from this quote (again) is, in my view, that the citizens followed
the actions and arguments of the city very closely and met them with doubt. Their doubts led the city
to have to explain itself to the citizens.

    In its reply here, the city administration clarified that 'not only architects or city planners
[…], but also citizens and local actors from Neustadt […] have so far campaigned for their preserva-
tion'. 'Of course,' it was added here, 'always on the condition that the Scheiben are refurbished and
find a use' (letter, 13.09.2010). Among those engaging in searches for possible futures and fighting
for the buildings' preservation, as shown above, doubts about the trustworthiness of the city's actions
were equally growing regarding the absence of demand.

    In fact, the city's goal was and is to preserve the buildings and find a use for them, but they
assume that this question will occupy generations of planners to come (field notes, 27.05.2021). For
people standing with the buildings, the unclear situation and uncertainty are, however, more pressing;
their doubts are increasing the longer no future materializes. While the city takes seriously that the old-
established residents of Neustadt in particular are emotionally attached to the buildings, they are equally
concerned about developing Neustadt as a whole. In contrast to citizens standing with the buildings, they
are not in favour of an unconditional preservation, even though they generally share the objective of a
revitalization. In terms of accountability, interesting questions arise from the fact that those who partici-
pate in the search are not the citizens who might or should live here one day. While those who participate
legitimize the goal of revitalization, they doubt the city's doubts concerning demand and potential uses.
As I see it, the in-between of the buildings seems stabilized by the drifting apart of goals and their attain-
ability. This stability is supported by the relationship between the citizens and the city who share the goal
of revitalization. However, standby is politically unstable in moments of doubt, when citizens doubt that
the city actually wants to achieve this goal. In the differing doubts of the city and citizens, different con-
victions and priorities become tangible. In the following two sections, I will show how doubts led to the
search for alternatives, concrete expectations and demands, and how doubts led to a commitment by the
city and an alignment with citizens that did in fact bring the materialization of a future for Scheibe A.

8.2   Attention:
Doubt, Alternatives and Expectation

After the buildings became vacant, various attempts were made to
bring the Hochhausscheiben to the attention of people interested in
using them. Spectacular actions such as the 'Hotel Neustadt' theatre
project (2003) as well as demolition variants (2009) and interim
uses (e.g. self-storage, climbing tower, solar cell installation) were
discussed. [...] development possibilities for the Scheibenensemble [...]
in addition to professional expertise, relied on the broad participation of
the citizens.
VI/2015/01130, 2015, p.4   → fig. 101

Directing Attention Outside In

Directing attention to the Scheiben is one of the central strategies of the city of Halle in its attempt to
turn the buildings into attractive objects for investment and use. Concepts and studies, but also work-
shops with experts and citizens were an important part of targeting the attention of investors and the
broader public, as well as politicians from the state of Saxony-Anhalt and the federal state.

    While the concept of the architects Graul und Partner from the beginning of 2000, which has
already been mentioned several times, was intended to encourage owners to work together on revi-
talization and to convince the state of Saxony-Anhalt to approve subsidies, the primary goal of later
concepts and events was to draw attention to the buildings in order to generate private investment.
One example is the International Building Exhibition (IBA 2002–2010), a programme in which the
Hochhausscheiben were to be included, but where it was clear that this would not include any financial
support for the buildings themselves. This is at least stressed by the city in a letter to an investor in 2005.
In the letter, the city highlighted its commitment to revitalization, adding, however, that merely 'attention'
would be able to be created, which should clear the way for redevelopment and use (letter, 15.09.2005).

    One of the projects realized in the frame of the IBA was the construction of a skatepark at
the entrance to the centre (and at the foot of Scheibe E). → fig. 102   It is talked about as being highly
regarded nationally or even internationally. Against the backdrop of such an upgrade of the centre,
however, in the eyes of the planners 'the slowly decaying Scheiben appear even more alarming and
represent not only an image problem, but also increasingly a functional and aesthetic burden for the
owners and users of the adjacent buildings'. The planners wrote to the alderman: 'It is practically
impossible to experience this urban space without the feeling of a "city in decay"' (letter, 10.08.2011).
The city tried to use the attention for the skate park and the associated visits by politicians to once
again point out the opposite of the upgrade, namely the risk for the image of Neustadt that they saw
the Hochhausscheiben posing.

    During a visit of the centre of Neustadt and the skatepark by the Federal President of Ger-
many, the city had also drawn the politicians' attention to the Hochhausscheiben. In a letter to the
Prime Minister of Saxony-Anhalt after the visit, the alderman once again explicitly promoted the
Hochhausscheiben as a potential home for governmental units of the state. In fact, however, hopes for
a future for the Hochhausscheiben with the support of the state were at their lowest point during this
period, after the state finally decided not to use Scheibe C (see also **chapter 2**). And this was, as the
city supposed (but did not entirely know, a fact that may have fuelled citizens' doubts) also due to the
bad image of Neustadt and the buildings. As one of the planners from Halle wrote in another letter,

The actual implementation of the relocation of the tax offices
ultimately failed for financial reasons, according to the official
reading, because a refurbishment of the high-rise buildings could
not be financed. However, it is common knowledge that an important
reason – perhaps even the real reason – was the resistance of the
tax officials against a move to the centre of Halle-Neustadt.
letter, 10.08.2011

It became apparent that, while attention was being created, the buildings and their increasingly de-
caying appearance were somewhat repulsive to actors, including the state who owned Scheibe C but
whose employees were refusing to move to Halle-Neustadt, according to the letter. Following the
IBA, the so-called Competence Centre for Urban Redevelopment was founded, which has set itself
the task of opening up 'new perspectives for urban development'. According to the website, the cen-
tre was founded in 2012 with the objective of '[r]edefining growth and proposing solutions to various
issues' (Kompetenzzentrum Stadtumbau in der SALEG, n.d.). The centre then also took care of the
marketing of Scheibe C.

In 2014, the state prepared an exposé on the building and advertised it for investors at real
estate fairs. After these attempts to draw attention to the building initially failed, the centre was in-
volved in organizing an expert and a student workshop to develop ideas for the buildings. The aim of
the competence centre for an international student workshop in 2014 ('Re-Interpreting Utopia: Haneu
3.0'; Kompetenzzentrum Stadtumbau in der SALEG, 2014b) was to show that a revitalization was
indeed possible and that the buildings had structural and architectural qualities. The master theses
developed from the workshop were oriented towards open use, as no future use was foreseeable at the
time. The feasibility according to legal requirements and possibilities of financing were not examined
here, but a general technical feasibility was proven. With the ideas developed in the form of posters,
buyers were to be found at real estate fairs, as one of the professors leading the workshop in 2014 told
me (interview, 27.11.2018; see **chapter 3**).   → **fig. 103**

There were some heated discussions on some of the ideas. According to her, this mainly
concerned the idea of establishing vertical farming in one of the Scheiben, which was not wanted by
the state and the competence centre (interview, 27.11.2018). The proposal was also debated in public.
Under the title 'Greenhouse of Ideas', a daily newspaper discussed, among other things, the idea of
vertical farming, which, as it said here, is a huge topic internationally. In Halle, some of the ideas
developed during the workshop were considered 'crazy' (*MZ Saalekurier*, 25.03.2014). When asked
about the 'controversial point' to turn the high rises into greenhouses, a leading planner from Halle
told a newspaper this might be an interesting option for the state as an interim solution, much cheaper
than an actual use as it wouldn't put humans at the centre of a use concept. According to them, this
could, however, only be an interim use (*MZ Saalekurier*, 16.05.2014).

Interim uses would have had to be financed by the city as there were no initiatives in Halle
that could have organized and financed such projects. In addition, however, planners feared that inter-
im uses could cause them to lose sight of the actual goal of long-term uses. In a letter to the state from
2012, for example, in which the city once again asked the state to support the city in creating possible
futures, the city deliberately did not mention any intermediate solutions. A note from a planner to their
colleagues on the letter said that only 'If they answer that there will be no "real" use, we can bring up
the intermediate solutions in a next letter and go into more detail. There is now a danger that our real
goal will be diluted by the interim solutions' (draft, letter, September 2012).
Asked about the role of concepts and possible futures, one of my informants from Halle told me that

some concepts were only checking on the 'general feasibility' or
developing ideas, others were realizable, but as always in Halle, things
fail because of money – sometimes also good, so as not to create
million-dollar graves, but it's just not the case that you can put money
in your hands to experiment with other uses or the like.
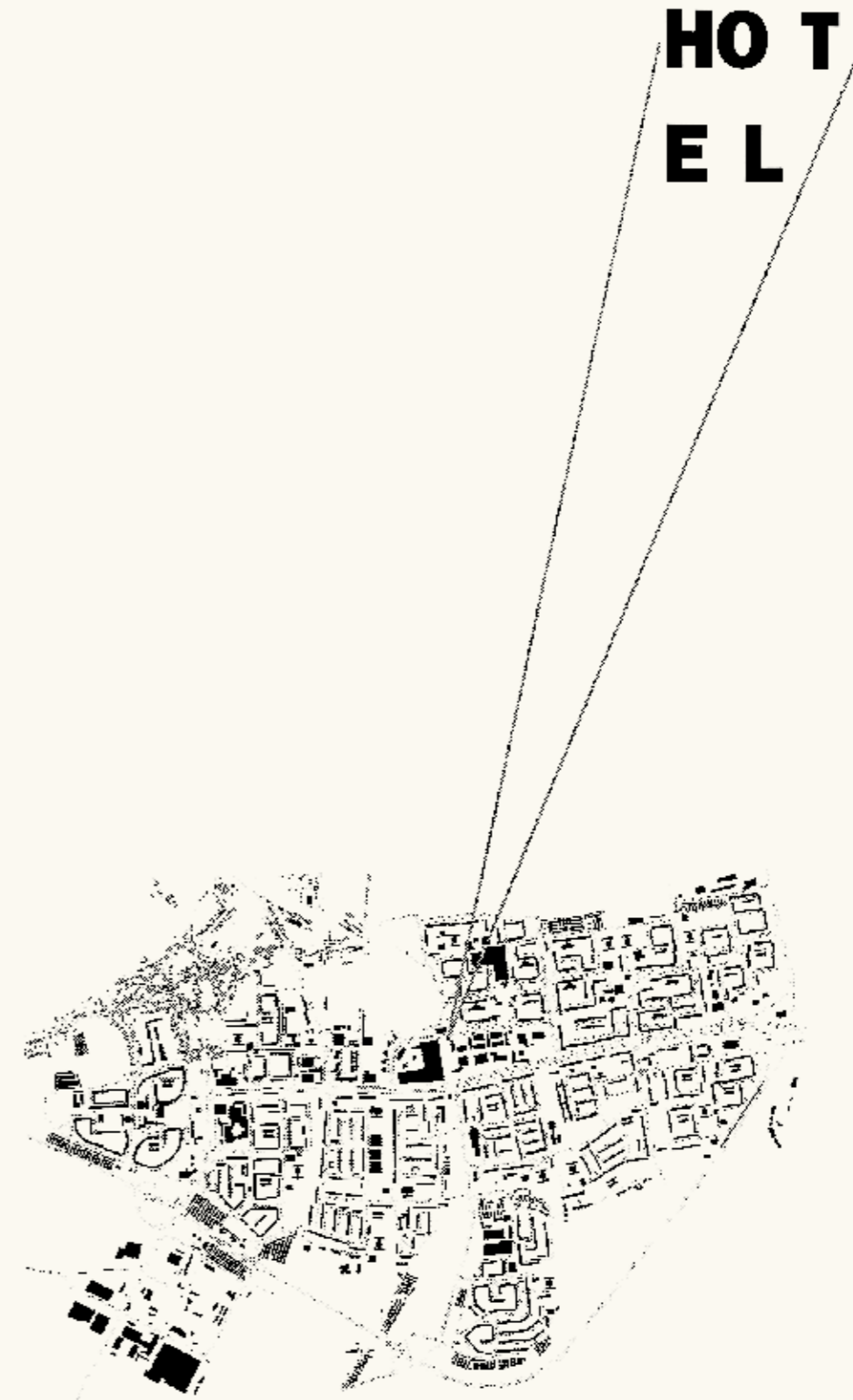field notes, 25.06.2019

Fig. 101

Fig. 101
Illustration from the concept
for the theatre project
'Hotel Neustadt' during which
Scheibe A had been trans-
formed into a hotel in 2003.
Source: Halle City Administration.

In fact, while interim uses were considered, the primary goal was to generate attention as a component of supporting economic development that would, it was hoped, bring use to the buildings. As Hwang and Lee write, this can be seen as a general concern of shrinking cities, while in cities with a tight housing market it is about how buildings should be used (Hwang & Lee, 2020, p. 540).

As I see it, concepts, including those for interim uses, were meant to draw attention to the buildings and open up spaces of possibility. While a 'general feasibility' was shown in the concepts from the student workshop in 2014, the actual feasibility regarding costs, regulations, etc. was not investigated. The subsequent study by Lacaton and Vassal (2015) (financed mainly by the competence centre) then confirmed a general feasibility and demonstrated the economic feasibility of revitalization for residential and office use (Lacaton & Vassal + Fischer, 2015). But again, the study's primary role was to create spaces of possibility and act as a 'device of interessement' intended to generate publics and enable the 'enrolment' of investors (Callon, 1984, p. 211). The head of the competence centre is quoted in an article saying that 'When the study of the architectural office is available in June of this year, it could be used to solicit financiers – for example at Europe's largest real estate trade fair Expo Real in Munich' (*MZ Saalekurier*, 09.06.2015). Concepts were, as I understand it, intended to draw the attention of 'external' (external to Halle-Neustadt and Halle) actors to the Hochhausscheiben and, ideally, to enable futures through private investment. Furthermore, as I understood, commissioning concepts was simply one of the things that *could* be done. Studies and concepts form an important basis for illuminating possibilities.

What's the Problem? Looking for Alternatives

Citizens rejected proposals for temporary uses as unrealistic. In interactions between the city and citizens in Halle, concepts such as the ones developed in the frame of the international workshop suddenly took on a political role (Gomart & Hajer, 2003, p. 54). While these were intended to generate publicity and transform the buildings into spaces of possibility, it is precisely these that are being challenged by citizens whose attention does not have to be generated or directed. The fact that none of the designed futures actually materialized or were considered by citizens to be realizable led to doubt among those emotionally attached to the buildings as they perceived an increasing and harmful gap between visions and reality.

In 2014, it is demanded: no more concepts! In an online forum, a user requests that no more concepts should be developed, writing that 'this is bullshit and probably only serves to gain time for the mayor' (Halle Spektrum, 12.02.2014, city administration). In particular, citizens fighting for the preservation of the buildings became increasingly critical towards concepts as these did not materialize. In fact, processes of interest and enrolment always include the possibility that they will not be successful (Callon, 1984, p. 211). The workshops in 2014, as two of them told me, felt like the tenth event of the same kind, without any progress. Using the buildings for sports, education, or as a slide, 'let's be honest', they said, 'that's not possible to realize there' (field notes, 15.05.2019).

In the citizens' view, studies and calculations also served the city to say that it was doing everything in its power, but that nothing was possible. The argumentation of the city within debates on ownership, demand and use, as the citizens are convinced, was 'deliberately heavy-handed' (field notes, 15.05.2019). They saw the hesitation of investors as related to the fact that the city itself would not do its 'homework' to make a revitalization possible. According to one citizen, this includes above all the development of a feasible, and what they would consider a realistic, concept. As they are quoted as saying in a local magazine, they see

the reluctance of possible investors in the lack of a concept for the Scheiben. The city must name clear perspectives and commit to this location in the centre of Neustadt. But there is not even a preservation statute [...]. At the end of the chain of measures, there could also be an expropriation procedure if an agreement with the owners is not possible. But before that, the city has to do its homework.

HalleSpektrum, 13.02.2014

Fig. 103

Fig. 102

Fig. 102
The skatepark at the entrance to the centre of Neustadt coming from Halle's city centre was built in the frame of the International Building Exhibition (IBA 2010) to enliven the centre and increase its attractiveness.
Hühne, 20.04.2016.

Fig. 103
Vertical farming in one of the Hochhausscheiben? An idea developed within a student workshop in 2014 (Kompetenzzentrum Stadtumbau in der SALEG, 2014, p. 9).

A representative of another association said, according to a newspaper article, that not a utilization concept but a marketing concept was needed promptly, as they saw the 'big problem' in the situation on the real estate market in eastern Germany and the lack of investors that was to be expected for the next years. 'That is the real problem,' they told the newspaper (*HalleSpektrum*, 19.02.2014). In conversation with me, citizens said that they initially supported the city's activities such as workshops and commissioned studies, but then gained the impression that the city was letting ideas develop whose implementation was neither possible nor wanted.

   Citizens were becoming impatient. They participated in the debates and made suggestions themselves, pointing to what they perceived as alternatives. For example, one citizen sent a concept suggesting the establishment of research institutions for robotics in the buildings as 'the struggle over many years to preserve and renovate the Hochhausscheiben, including current international architects and student workshops' had not led to any solution (email 15.10.2014). They called their concept: 'The Hochhausscheiben on the way back to the future? A future concept of use, shaped by the scientific change of modernity and the ever-growing demands of a rapidly developing automated society.' In the concept paper, the citizen asked:

> Would this simple civic concept with this location, which is unfortunately still socially controversial in many minds, correspond to the ideas of the professors and future locations? [...] Is the state government really sleeping through the future now??? With these suggestions in the framework of the ISEK 2025[102], it should demonstrably not have been due to a lack of ideas from the citizens!
> concept, 14.10.2014

The same citizen had developed a concept in 2009 suggesting the deconstruction of individual buildings. In their concept, entitled 'Proposed solutions to the Hochhausscheiben in Halle-Neustadt', the citizen saw the complex ownerships, vandalism and decay, and the fact that the city had no money and that neither the state of Saxony-Anhalt nor the federal state would help the city out, as major obstacles to a development of the buildings. After identifying these obstacles, the citizen formulated 'solutions', including the '[i]mmediate expropriation of the owner of the Hochhausscheibe A, B, and E to eliminate possible dangers or sources of accidents' and '[i]nvolvement of the population, associations, organizations, institutions, etc. in finding a solution to the above-mentioned problem.' They suggested that the city administration would compile all suggestions and take them to the City Council in order to take decisions (proposal, 2009). In fact, the expropriation they proposed was meant not only to stop the decay and accompanying security risks, but to provide an opportunity to look for alternatives with the involvement of the entire urban society.

Doubt and Expectations

These examples (and there are many more, also from earlier years). show that citizens got involved and, in the face of the city's perceived inactivity, looked for alternatives themselves, made proposals and combined them with demands to get involved and to the city to engage in thinking of alternatives. → **fig. 104**   The citizens' association fighting for the Scheiben's preservation expected the city to show a clear commitment to the Hochhausscheiben and set the conditions for their preservation, revitalization and reuse. To them, the city and especially its administration are to blame for the dilemma of the Hochhausscheiben (field notes, 15.05.2019). Their dissatisfaction is discharged at the city because, in their eyes, decisions about the future of the city and thus also the high rises are made by the city (something Ringel equally notes for the East German town Hoyerswerda, see Ringel, 2014, p. 57). In a letter from 2015 (that I have quoted earlier in this chapter), the citizens' association wrote to the city that

Fig. 104

Fig. 104
In search for alternatives. Proposal from the year 2000 by a Neustadt couple concerned about the future of the Hochhausscheiben. They suggested a staggered partial deconstruction, ascending from Scheibe A to Scheibe D.
Source: Halle City Administration.

102   The workshops and events organized by the city as part of the 50th anniversary of Neustadt served, as it were, to prepare the Integrative Urban Development Concept (ISEK) 2025.

> The sincerity of the desire for preservation must not be limited
> to moderation alone [...] The citizens' association Stadtgestaltung
> would like to express two points of view in this regard:
>
> 1. it is not possible to save the Neustadt district centre
> without the use of municipal resources.
>
> 2. investment-oriented investors will have little interest in
> Halle-Neustadt as a whole. There are many more profitable
> real estate locations nationwide.
> This illusion should therefore finally be abandoned.
> letter, 30.03.2015

Here it becomes clear again what I suggested above, namely that citizens increasingly doubted the sincerity of the city in finding a future for the buildings. This happened mainly against the background that no results of the city's efforts became visible. Citizens here refuse that responsibilities get transferred onto corporations as they do not believe that these would actually bring about a future for the buildings. They problematize what has been described as a general trend accompanying the neoliberalization of urban governance – that is, the delegation of responsibilities onto corporations and/or urban communities (see, for example, Hilbrandt, 2019, p. 353).

They are also particularly disappointed with the municipal housing companies. From their point of view, it is incomprehensible that the municipal companies act according to entrepreneurial principles, are also involved outside Neustadt, invest in new construction, and do not take care of the centre of Neustadt (letter, 29.08.2013). From their point of view, that would be their task as municipal companies. In a letter from 2012 they wrote:

> In order to end the current phase of lethargy, lack of ideas for use,
> existing financing concerns and lack of initiatives, the respective
> owners must of course be addressed first. [...] [But] Who is supposed to
> understand that elsewhere in Halle, under far less favourable initial
> conditions, locations are constantly being sought for new building
> expenditure, even though the existing ones could be put to good use.
> letter, 02.07.2012

While the citizens' criticism primarily addressed the owners, whom they saw as having a duty to take care of the buildings, they also saw the city and the municipal housing companies as being responsible. The planning department wrote in its answer to these demands that municipal housing companies were equally following the demand and that there was no significant demand for flats in the centre of Neustadt. From the city's point of view, one of the problems of the in-between buildings is that high initial investment faces uncertain rentability (letter, 24.09.2013). But even uncertainty does not dissuade the citizens from seeing the city relieved of its duty to secure a future for the buildings. They question the city's activities and combine their own proposals with the demand that the city and the housing companies should stand by their responsibility for Neustadt. Insofar as no realization of a possible future occurred, the processes of un-/making the possible futures and the activities of directing attention are seen by citizens as expressions of the in/activity – in the sense of 'doing something without doing anything'.

As I have shown here, the concepts have not so far followed their intended role as generators of attention that would turn into actual investment in the buildings. Concepts are not only an important part of the search for possible futures of the Hochhausscheiben, they also prolong an in-between, as they maintain potentiality and allow the state and the city to hold up activity. The findings in this section show, however, that concepts might change their role in a prolonged in-between as citizens question their ability to open for possibilities. As has become clear in this section, citizens expected the city to engage more actively as they expected the city to secure the future of the Hochhausscheiben. In the next and final section, I will show how the citizens' engagement contributed significantly to a commitment by the city and the reuse of Scheibe A in 2021.

8.3   Claim and Commitment

The political pressure on the city to take the future of the Scheiben into its own hands kept growing. Citizens fighting for the preservation of the buildings, accused the city of trying to get owners to act through 'educational talk' alone. From their point of view, as they wrote in a letter to the city, 'the voluntary renunciation' by the city of measures going beyond the conversation still promoted 'the indifferent attitude of individual owners'. Conversation alone (as the past shows) will not bring about much, but rather the years of toleration may even be a main reason for the neglect of the buildings' (letter, 30.03.2015).

With doubts increasing, claims that the city should at least use one of the buildings itself also became louder. In a newspaper article, a representative of a citizens' association is quoted saying that 'this isn't a question of money, but of positioning – does the city want to preserve the buildings or not' (*MZ*, 25.02.2014). Citizens hold politicians accountable and, in particular, the mayor, who had publicly shown their willingness to engage in the case of the buildings as early as 2013 during the election campaign. In a question in a monthly magazine, a citizen refers to the mayor's statement during an election campaign event and asks: 'What is your position on this issue following your successful election?' (*Zachow Magazine*, 2013 edition).

In 2014, the mayor of Halle then issued an ultimatum on the occasion of the anniversary and this also became the main task for the city planners: a solution should be found within a year, or they would be demolished (interview, 08.07.2020; see **chapter 1**). A newspaper spoke of a 'grace period in the anniversary year' (*MZ*, 25.02.2014).

Events around Halle-Neustadt's 50th anniversary were meant to involve the public in searches for a future for the buildings, and the mayor's statement published in the newspaper led numerous citizens to participate in the events, in online forums and by contacting the city planning department in person. As I understand it, public debates on possible futures for the buildings gained momentum in 2014. One of the mayor's staff members remembers that there was an outcry among the population when they publicly brought demolition into play in 2014. The Scheiben are really the symbol of Neustadt and this is an emotional issue, especially among the old-established, 'you wouldn't believe it', they said to me (field notes, 12.05.2021).

In fact, letters from citizens contain statements such as 'The buildings must be preserved, as they belong to Halle-Neustadt "like the Händel monument for the market square"' (letter, 20.02.2014); or: 'The heart of an entire district beats here' (02.07.2012) and they point out that 'A demolition would not be reversible' (letter, 30.03.2015). As one may suggest from this, standby does indeed generate publics as it provokes emotions. Politics of standby are therefore always also emotional politics touching on beliefs, as will become clear below as well (see also positioning towards demolitions in the introduction to this chapter).

A Need for Resolution

The announcement by the mayor increased expectations and put pressure on the city to actually find a solution. In this context, the long-standing demand of citizens' initiatives that the city of Halle should engage more by using one of the buildings as a seat of administration was given new impetus.

Citizens arguing in favour of such fostered engagement by the city expected an impulse from the use of Scheibe C, as they were convinced it could lead to a revitalization of other Scheiben (letter, 29.08.2013). In a letter from 2013, a citizen proposed the relocation of the administration and also pointed out that it could be assumed that this would mean savings in the municipal budget, because numerous rented office spaces would no longer have to be rented. In its response, however, a city employee commissioned by the mayor to reply, wrote: 'In the course of budget consolidation, I do not see a political majority to buy this building with a very high renovation cost, especially since the city of Halle (Saale) also has no further need for municipal office buildings' (letter, draft, September 2013). Furthermore, the city administration underlined that the state intended either to sell Scheibe C or demolish it. If the city wanted to use the building, it would have to take it over and this wouldn't be possible. Indeed, a newspaper article from

2013 stated concerning the role of the city in relation to the Hochhausscheiben's future: 'The city cannot and does not want to step in – the budget situation forbids it' (*Sonntags Supersonntag*, 30.06.2013). As Bernt highlights, in practice, 'public planning authorities in Germany lack the legal and financial capacities to step in and take over' (Bernt et al., 2017, p. 566). In political science analysis of eastern German urban development after 1990, urban planning has been identified as 'the 'looser' in the game (next to low-income households) – making plans but 'unable to implement its plans' (Bernt et al., 2017, p. 566).

In the case of the Hochhausscheiben, even if the city administration preferred a revitalization of the buildings from the early 2000s on, planners in particular always emphasize that, as the planning department, they ultimately have to live with all options. When asked about their task by a local newspaper, the head of the planning department said:

> Finding solutions is always good, but we should also bear in mind that we are not the owners of the Scheiben and should not necessarily become so. In terms of urban planning, we have to live with all options. This includes demolition, even if that is not our preferred option. The probability that we can completely solve a problem in the one year that has been difficult for 25 years is relatively low.
> *MZ Saalekurier*, 16.05.2014

But the political pressure grew, especially on the mayor who had also put the city planners on the spot with their statement, because after all, they were supposed to develop a solution, with the involvement of the public. As the planners remember, the mayor has in fact taken it upon themselves personally one year later: they have stepped up and said they want to do something with these Scheiben and will manage to do something. A planner commented: 'we have a very dynamic mayor who puts the result before the long term [...]; all of a sudden, the idea came up to establish an administrative centre' (interview, 02.10.2018). The planners consider the step of moving in with the administration to be obvious and quite common. It is a typical step of public administrations to move into properties in order to give them a function and the city of Halle had actually done so in the case of their current offices where the building had been renovated by a private investor and the city moved in as a tenant (group discussion, 28.05.2021). As one of the planners explained 'the Neustadt location is not quite easy, as you can see, it has a rather peripheral location in the urban area. And the city administration would now be an important anchor point' (interview, 08.07.2020). As an administration, moving into one of the high-rise buildings itself became a policy option that could be a strategy to specifically revitalize not only a building, but an area in the city. The city of Hamburg had, as the planner told me, taken for example a similar decision placing the administration in Wilhelmsburg. Neustadt, as they said, is actually quite accessible (interview, 08.07.2020).

In the 2015 resolution on the preservation of the Hochhausscheiben, the possibility to use the buildings as administrative office was found a favourable option. It said: 'From an urban development point of view, such a use is to be supported, as it could sustainably improve the desired mix of living and working in Neustadt' (VI/2015/01130, 2015, p. 7). In the aftermath, a series of studies in 2015–2017 attested to the suitability of the building, economic viability and increased efficiency through a move of the administration to Scheibe A. However, the proposal to use Scheibe A must be seen primarily as a political decision that promoted the prioritization of revitalization of the Hochhausscheiben (VI/2017/02799, 2017, pp. 3–4). Accordingly, there were then also political debates on the proposal. For example, the suitability of the buildings for use as an administrative location was questioned in the Halle City Council (VI/2017/03293, 2017). Other critical enquiries, even after the city administration had already moved into Scheibe A in 2021, concerned, for example, the future of those sites used by the city administration and that would be left vacant after the number of locations would have been reduced from 26 to 17 (VII/2022/04284, 2022). From the point of view of a politician from Halle I met, the step was an intended development impulse that they thought was right because nothing else had happened. However, they pointed out that there were still enough vacant commercial properties in Halle's city centre. They remembered that this was the big point of strife in the City Council, as the administration did not provide any conclusive information on what would happen to those sites across the city of Halle that would fall vacant with a move of the administration to Scheibe A (interview, 28.11.2018).

Circumvention and Alignment

The City Council's decision to move the administration into the building, as proposed by the administration, was postponed twice and then replaced by a citizens' referendum ('Decision in principle on the construction of an administrative centre in a Hochhausscheibe in Halle-Neustadt', VI/2017/02799, 2017). This brings me back to the role that the public plays for the making of possible building futures for the Hochhausscheiben. As I see it, the decision over the future of Scheibe A got shifted onto them, as the city politics were not able to align in a decision. The City Council was caught in a dilemma, because both a yes to the move to Scheibe A and a no could be problematic from a democratic point of view. A yes and thus a prioritization of the Scheiben would be a burden for the city's budget and risk vacancies elsewhere, a no would be able to be interpreted as a failure to take advantage of a unique opportunity and a neglect of Neustadt.

The situation reminds me of what Gherardi writes about decisions surrounding 'artificial nutrition'. Gherardi finds that doctors today refuse to take decisions and how in this way the responsibility to make decisions concerning the life and death of the patient is shifted onto the relatives. Gherardi observes for the domain of care how through 'non-decision-making' non-professionals get involved and see themselves in a role of taking decisions over life and death in the place of doctors (Gherardi, 2017, p. 46). In the case of the administrative use of Scheibe A, it will become clear below that the decision of the referendum was a decision between 'yes' or 'no' to using the building, in which the conditions, however, were not understandable for the deciding citizens, according to the administrative office examining the legality of the proceeding. It was also unclear whether there could be an alternative way to secure a future for the building. Gherardi writes about the decisions surrounding the 'artificial nutrition' of fatally ill patients: 'we witness the emergence of an ethical dimension in the practice of artificial nutrition that is characterised by the difficulty or impossibility of saying "no" to life-extending interventions, without questioning the meaning and the boundaries between life and death' (Gherardi, 2017, p. 46).

In the case of the Hochhausscheiben, the citizens aligned with the mayor of Halle past the City Council, by emotionalizing and involving the public. It also will become clear here once again how the public is generated and transformed through forms of politics, here the citizens' referendum, an argument that Gomart and Hajer equally make (Gomart & Hajer, 2003, p. 37). Looking at the effects for standby of public engagement, I will find that it led to an acceleration and enabled Scheibe A to be put 'on'.

In 2017, a group of citizens petitioned the City Council 'that the citizens of Halle decide for themselves on the matter of Scheibe A' (20.06.2017). As a newspaper article noted at the time, the association was with that putting pressure on the city to rent a high-rise (Eseppelt, 2017a). They had planned for the referendum to be held on 24.09.2017 together with the federal election. The citizens had managed to collect 7,700 (needed would be 7,500) signatures to request a referendum from the Halle City Council. In the debate in the council, the option of replacing a decision with a referendum was controversially discussed. Among other things, it was doubted that the signatures collected would represent the opinion of all citizens. It was also pointed out that a citizens' referendum would have the status of a resolution and no opposing resolutions could be taken. It was also questioned whether it was permissible to let citizens decide on cost issues. The decision had finally been postponed (minutes, City Council, 21.06.2017). The text of the postponed City Council resolution and also of a referendum provided for the citizens to decide not only on the move, but also on a maximum net rent of €9.90/m² per month for a period of 30 years (VI/2017/02799, 2017). As one of the planners explained to me, the different parties in the City Council were mostly in favour of a city's engagement for the revitalization of the buildings, but had different visions of the ways to achieve it. They remembered how, 'In the end, the mayor did not initiate this referendum, but he supported it very much and then his position was confirmed by the citizens. The City Council took a more critical view at this point' (interview, 08.07.2020).

The State Administrative Office approved the holding of the referendum, the first of its kind in Halle. However, according to a newspaper article, 'not without considerable reservations': It found that a 'plausible and comprehensible comparison of variants was missing. Furthermore, information on the costs for the accommodation of administrative staff was not found 'comprehensible for citizens.' However, the state administration put its concerns a part as it found that non-approval would

sink the potential for undertakings that were welcome in principle into a long process of litigation. It gave consideration to the fact that in the subsequent decisions on actual implementation, should the decision be positive, would have to be made on the basis of the Local Government Constitution Act (Eseppelt, 2017c). One of my informants called the referendum a 'leading question' (interview, 02.10.2018) and indeed, the initiators called in a 'decision in principle' (Eseppelt, 2017c). In fact, the emotionality of the citizens was addressed here, because for the citizens the decision appeared to be a question between a 'yes' or a 'no' to the preservation.

While the legal issues were still being clarified at the State Administrative Office, one month before the planned referendum and two months before a compulsory auction of the building, the city's mayor invited the press to a tour of the building in August 2017. A journalist's report says that the mayor used the opportunity to 'once again advertise his plans'. According to the report, which was accompanied by pictures from inside the building and the mayor holding a torch, a handout from the city explained: 'A decision against one of the Scheiben is a permanent decision against the Neustadt-Centrum' (Eseppelt, 2017b).

Was it the mayor's plans? The preservation of the Hochhausscheiben was the mayor's plans, but also those of citizens who had been fighting for the preservation of the buildings since they became vacant. In 2018, one of the citizens involved here sent me pictures from their activities, writing: 'Some pictures as an attachment should show that we had to fight democratically as a citizens' association and individual fighters for the preservation of the Hochhausscheiben' (email, 16.10.2018). Their flyer of their initiative said: 'Your vote for the future of the Scheiben!'.

It is not entirely clear to me whether it was the mayor who mobilized the citizens or whether it was the citizens. What is clear, however, is that the alignment of citizens' initiatives and the mayor had brought about a commitment by the city using one of the buildings and thus enabled Scheibe A to be turned 'on'. On the website of the Bürgerverein Stadtgestaltung (BV) it says:

> After many joint consultations of the citizens' association with the Mayor [...] after 8 years, a very good cooperation can be stated. In particular, the BV Stadtgestaltung's suggestions regarding the revitalization of the Hochhausscheiben in Halle-Neustadt were actively advanced by the Mayor, [...], and implemented with the use of Scheibe 'A' as an administrative location. Of course, the BV is also interested in good cooperation with the City Council groups. However, for a long time some of the councillors showed no interest in the Hochhausscheiben. And two mayors were also too short-sighted to accept an offer from the state to take over and use high-rise Scheibe 'C' free of charge.
> Bürgerverein Stadtgestaltung Halle, Startseite, n.d.   → fig. 105; 106

At the opening of Scheibe A in summer 2021, the mayor (who had in the meantime been suspended from office because of a vaccination scandal during the pandemic) said that '"This is a great day for Halle-Neustadt". It was not the City Council that brought it about, but the citizens. It is important that citizens believe in direct democracy. They could only encourage people to get involved and speak out to the City Council on certain issues.' The press commented that he 'put on his own show here together' behind the construction fence (as he had been suspended) with the members of the citizens' associations (Eseppelt, 2021c).

However, the current mayor also confirmed in their opening speech 'that the decision was significantly initiated by the Halle-Neustadt-Verein and the (currently suspended) Lord Mayor […]. "So we see here and now how a citizens' decision can have a direct influence on the shaping of the city,"', they are quoted as saying, in another article on the event (Eseppelt, 2021b).

As this section has shown, by holding policymakers accountable, following their actions closely and transforming their expectations into concrete demands and backing them up with proposals, citizens helped speed up processes. Their struggle to build networks that would enable a revitalization finally bore fruit in the case of Scheibe A. While their emotions determined their demands, the mayor in particular mobilized these emotions to transform Scheibe A into an administrative location.

8.4   Synthesis

As I have shown above, numerous suggestions, proposals, complaints and enquiries from residents of Neustadt and Halle as a whole have reached the city planners. And the city actually responded to all proposals and letters it received and invited them to the administrative office for consultations. While planners from Halle take this role of being accessible seriously and respond to citizens' inquiries, they have the impression that there is a distorted view in citizens' expectations of their scope of influence. 'I think,' one of the planners said, 'the expectation of urban planning is often that you can influence everything. […] Perhaps this is also a bit of an overload of what we are doing.' What they would like to do when they retire one day, as they said laughing, was to write 'a book about the impossibility of planning a city' (interview, 08.07.2020). While the city of Halle is respectful and open to citizens who want to get involved in the search for possible futures for the Hochhausscheiben, the planning cannot, or can only barely, meet their expectations, as has become clear in this section. In fact, what can be stated is that there was a mismatch of expectations of citizens and what the city planners consider themselves as their role and agency (cf. Woolgar & Lezaun, 2013, p. 12). The mismatch between what the city and urban planning is able to do and the expectations of citizens what the state should do and should be able to do, reveals ethicopolitical questions of standby.

In reference to existing literature on standby, one could say that citizens see the city as 'bystanding' instead of 'standing with.' Standby has in fact, according to Baraitser a 'double meaning of standby – of both active inactivity, but also standing by, or taking up the position of a bystander, someone who witnesses something without intervening' (Kemmer, Kühn, & Weber, 2021, p. 28). McCormack has defined the bystander as 'a stubbornly human figure of ethical and political in/action' (McCormack, 2021, p. 255). While, in some way, the bystander in his conception '*stands with*, aligning and orienting themselves with others', the bystander 'in standing by […] also appears to fail to act. The bystander fails to respond to the ethical or political demands of the event or situation or circumstance as it unfolds insofar as it foregrounds the suffering of another' (McCormack, 2021, p. 256; emphasis in original).

The fact that the citizens accused the city of in/activity became clear, for example, in the situation when they began to doubt the concepts commissioned by the city. According to committed citizens from Halle, having studies done, workshops and concepts, that has always been the chosen way to proceed. After they were in favour of this step during the first years, they were against it at some point, because it was repeated over and over again in the same style, without anything progressing, as they tell me. At some point they had the impression that these steps were only used to say that nothing is possible. The citizens feel fooled, as in their view the city did not itself commit to the place (field notes, 15.05.2019; *HalleSpektrum*, 13.02.2014). After several years of their suggestions and demands having been heard by the city of Halle, but with no visible change having come, the members of the association contact the city in 2015 with a long statement stating that a revitalization of the buildings will not be achieved without public subsidy. They blame the city for its in/activity. From their point of view, no change could be expected from talks with owners and they pointed to the fact that this had been tried extensively in the early 2000s already (letter, 30.03.2015). In fact, also a newspaper article described the city of Halle as 'spectator' of a scenario of speculation and resales. As the article stated, whereas the city was debating over how to deal with the Hochhausscheiben, it wasn't the owner and therefore only held the role of the 'spectator' (Scheffler, 2016).
As McCormack states, the

> bystander reminds us of how, in certain situations, the in/action of the individual can become the focus for an insistent and unavoidable judgement. The possible in/action of the bystander embodies, in turn, the potential failure of standby as a condition of readiness to act. It is a prompt to ask about how standby as a mode of organizing makes action-in the-event possible and about the conditions that make such action less likely.   (McCormack, 2021, p. 255)

Fig. 105
Fig. 106

Fig. 105
Scheibe A shortly before its
reopening as administrative seat
in summer 2021.

Fig. 106
The entrance to Halle's administration in
Hochhausscheibe A.
Grimberg, 25.01.2023.

What the citizens expected from the city is that the future is *made* in the city administration and the City Council, seeing it as the city's responsibility. As Ringel notes, '[T]his is where the public imaginary expects binding future decisions to be made' (Ringel, 2014, p. 58).

Enacting responsibility would mean, in the view of some citizens, taking steps that could go so far as to expropriate the owners as a last option if owners were not caring for their properties. As became evident here, the city took its responsibility of responsiveness seriously, responding to citizens and inviting them to engage in the search for possible futures. Neither should it be forgotten that the city fulfilled its duty over the years to protect public places from danger. It secured the buildings, as I showed in **chapter 4**, and contributed to the maintenance of the potentiality of standby. Furthermore, the city always sought contact with the respective owners, met them and tried to persuade them and support them in the development of possible futures and their realization. However, the city only intervened in the arenas of mortgaging and speculation after 2015 (see **chapter 6**). New forms of organization, such as the takeover by cooperatives suggested by citizens, did not materialize and interim uses were not financially viable from the perspective of the city. Regardless of whether or not the city and the municipal housing companies could actually have become more involved themselves, what has come to light in this chapter is that citizens expected something from the city that it could not and would not deliver – that is, determining a future for the buildings. This mismatch, as I suggest, turns standby's in/activity into politically unstable mode, as it is challenging articulations of accountability.

I have traced the suggestions that citizens were making for possible futures for the Hochhausscheiben, putting impossibility and the conditions of possibility themselves up for debate. The issue of the Hochhausscheiben called the public into being, and it required the involvement of the public to legitimize certain policies. As I was able to show, it was doubts that brought convictions to light, doubts turned into concrete expectations and demands, which resulted in cooperation and a commitment of the city. In fact, the alignment of citizens and the mayor of Halle, as I have finally shown, enabled the realization of a renovation of Scheibe A as it replaced a decision that the City Council was not able to take. Both a prioritization of the Hochhausscheiben over other places in the city could be problematic, but equally so a refusal to move to Scheibe A as the political pressure to get engaged was high and it was unclear whether other possible futures would materialize. The political responsibility that was too high for the City Council was replaced by a citizens' decision that became a choice for citizens between 'yes' or 'no' to the future of the building or even the ensemble.

Conclusion

Fig. 107

Fig. 107
Outlook. Dorenkamp, ca. 1974.
Source: Bauverein Halle & Leuna,
Geschichtswerkstatt.

The central thesis of this dissertation is that the Hochhausscheiben in Halle-Neustadt have been lingering in an in-between since they became vacant around the year 2000, which can best be described as a 'standby mode.' The dissertation has explored how standby is to be understood along three thematic lines: temporal, material and political.

Two questions have guided my research and helped me identify coordinates and modalities of standby in relation to the Hochhausscheiben that I subsequently assembled along the three thematic lines. The first question was: 'How come the buildings stayed (that way)?' And the second: 'How were and are possible futures un/made?' While the first addresses elements and relations between elements that contributed to the fact that the Hochhausscheiben have been neither demolished nor renovated, the second addresses practices and modalities. The elements are numerous and this work does not claim to be exhaustive. Nevertheless, it investigates what predominantly contributed to the fact that the buildings were neither demolished nor renovated. As for how possible futures are un/made, I have focused on planning that I consider in general as future-oriented practice (Abram & Weszkalnys, 2013a, p. 3). Possible futures for the buildings are, as I found, un/made (in relation to) time, in interaction with materiality, and they will depend on the quality of relations between actors. The second question (as explained in the introduction) is in fact a continuation of the first. It allowed for a better understanding of the embeddedness of elements in relations, and of how relations are established and stabilized, or destabilized. In addition, I always asked what the notion of standby helps to understand and explain when it comes to the buildings' in-between and what, in turn, my study of the Hochhausscheiben contributes to an understanding of standby as a concept.

The three focal points of time, materiality and politics emerged from what I encountered as answers to the questions above and subsequent questions that I addressed to the material. As outlined in the introduction, I proceeded by increasingly regrouping and subdividing the material into themes and categories that would serve as a basis for my analysis and help me to get an understanding of standby when it comes to buildings and the Hochhausscheiben in particular. In a first part, I examined time in standby as framed and experienced, in its rhythm and as made in practice. In a second, I examined standby's materiality firstly in its agency and in its role for standby; secondly, I studied practices of (e)valuating the buildings' materiality in planning. And in a third part, I examined politics of standby by looking at relations and actors' abilities 'to affect and be affected; capacities that come to the fore in interactions among components' (Farías, 2016, p. 42), how these capacities are fought over in a process of struggle and how doubt challenges the in-between.

Buildings on Standby: Summary of Findings

I would now like to highlight key findings. While the chapters are arranged along thematic lines, I will present the findings here along tensions and principles of the in-between, ways of understanding standby as a process and through practices.

Tensions

While standby can generally be understood as an in-between permeated by tensions (most strikingly between 'on' and 'off'') which span it and merge in it (Kemmer et al., 2021, p. 1; Wiedemann, 2021, p. 44), I have been able to identify a number of tensions and the merging of what appears as opposites when it comes to buildings on standby.

These include first and foremost the poles of demolition and preservation, between which the buildings and the possible futures that have been and are designed for them can be found. The most prominent tensions I have identified for buildings on standby in the first chapters of each of the three parts, are those between stagnant time and circular time (**chapter 1**), between material stability and fragility (**chapter 4**), and between connectedness and disconnectedness (**chapter 6**). The in-between, however, is not defined by tensions and opposites alone, but takes its own form in 'ongoingness' (Berlant, 2011, p. 99; emphasis added) and as a non-linear process, as *challenging object* and config-

urations of '*loose relations*' (Kemmer et al., 2021, p. 14; emphasis added). I arrive at these coordinates in these chapters by examining how time is framed and experienced, how planners interact with buildings as material objects, and how people and things that participate in standby are related to each other.

Time seems to have stood still in the in-between. None of the possible futures were realized over the period of more than 20 years, and the prospect of a future and an idea for the future were missing, as I state in **chapter 1**. In a resolution passed by the City Council of Halle in 2015, the past years are framed as the status quo. While the term 'status quo' usually describes a momentary description, a snapshot of the here and now, here it refers to a period of 15 years.

The fact that no future has been realized and processes have seemingly led nowhere and have been lacking direction, leads to time being framed as standing still in policy papers. Planners 'on the ground,' however, who have been and are still involved in the processes of searching for possible futures do not perceive time as standing still, but as repeating itself. In fact, not nothing has happened in these years, but again and again possible futures have been drafted, discussed and even decided upon, but for various reasons they were ultimately not realized. 'Stuckedness' – a 'sense of existential immobility' (Hage, 2009, p. 97) – dominated the temporal experience of planners involved in repetitive searches for possible futures. However, in the everyday at work, it is possible to escape the feeling of being stuck by turning to other places. In this way, it is also possible to maintain hope for the future to come. It is this hope for the future that, between stagnant and circular time, drives 'ongoingness' within standby as it makes people go on, 'getting by, and living on' (Berlant, 2011, p. 99) that I understand as characteristic of standby.

Buildings on standby are, as I define them in **chapter 4**, challenging objects. They challenge surrounding networks and the municipal planners in particular through their material presence, their resistance to possible futures and through material ruptures that oblige them to get engaged. Materiality on standby is both stable and fragile and it is both its stability and fragility that make buildings on standby challenging objects. Standby is geared towards potential reactivation, which also distinguishes buildings on standby from ruins, for example, a difference that I elaborated in **chapter 4**. For this potentiality to be preserved, the city and citizens from Halle get involved in the maintenance of availability and potentiality. Material fragility is met, as I described, with different forms of 'standing by' (Kemmer & Simone, 2021; Wiedemann, 2021).

The fact that there are people who deal with the future of the buildings and maintain potentiality points to the fact that they are not fully 'dropped from stabilizing networks' (Edensor, 2005b, p. 313) that hold them. How precisely the relations in networks of standby are shaped is what I asked in **chapter 6**. In understanding the in-between between connected and disconnected as *loosely* connected, I follow Kemmer et al. in this, who conceptualized 'looseness' as an organizing principle in standby (Kemmer et al., 2021, p. 14). I see the fact that relations between actors are loose and have become loose confirmed for the Hochhausscheiben in two observations in particular: that the city has lost control over the buildings and (temporally) lost track of and contact with their owners, and that no alignment of actors in the realization of a possible future has been achieved. While alignment is a prerequisite for the materialization of a building's future, standby is to be understood as an actor-configuration characterized by looseness and failing attempts at alignment. I also explored how looseness has emerged as an organizing principle for the case of the Hochhausscheiben. I see it embedded in the hope for a future for the buildings through private investment and the need for the city to keep its own relations with the buildings loose (cf. Kemmer & Simone, 2021, p. 11), for the city itself could not and did not want to acquire the buildings and take the full responsibility for their future. As I found, owners of the Hochhausscheiben escaped the city's attempts to involve them in joint efforts in the search for a future, while the city struggled with its self-given role as a mediator.

While objects in standby mode appear to be switched off, they are not entirely disconnected. I fact, there is energy that flows and in order to study this energy, I considered it important to examine standby as a process (**chapter 2** and **7**) and to look at practices that maintain and prolong the in-between (**chapter 3** and **5**). From my examination of processes and practices, further coordinates emerged for an understanding of buildings on standby and I will now present them.

Process

As explained above (**chapter 1**), the planners involved in the search for possible futures for the Hochhausscheiben perceived time as circular and the search for possible futures as repetitive, circular movements. I took this as an opportunity to examine the rhythms of standby in the second chapter. As I found, standby has to be understood as non-linear process whose rhythms are determined by the trajectories that possible futures take. Possible futures are brought in at one moment, discussed, calculated and negotiated in different formats and networks; they can then disappear and be brought back to the table after some time. As an example, and to grasp rhythms of standby, chapter 2 investigated the rhythms of standby by tracing the non-linear trajectory of one possible future.

Conceptually, it addressed a number of questions revolving around how to study standby time in its complexity and situatedness (cf. Bastian et al. 2021) focusing on relations between changing networks, events and process. Drawing from observations following the trajectory of one particular possible future (for a period between 1999 and 2009), I differentiated in chapter 2 between different types of events, showed how possible futures may outlast networks and how standby time is often out of joint (Ingold, 1993, p. 161). I argued that we need to think analytically beyond disintegrating networks and beyond individual events and that in paying attention to time and rhythms, we are able to understand standby as non-linear process as which I argue standby needs to be understood. While chapter 2 thus explored the rhythm of standby as a non-linear process, chapter 7 examined negotiations of agency and responsibility in standby, understood as a process of struggling.

Rather than a process of struggling for something, standby appears as a process where the process of struggling over conditions of possibility undermine a possible end. Within standby understood as process of struggling, things like funding programmes are not 'instruments' with which one fights for order. Rather, as I argued in chapter 7, these things act as dis/connectors within standby's networks around which specific modes of struggling take shape. The different modes I investigated revolve around state funding, donations and regulations. Dis/connectors have the ability to 'help bring actants into association with each other' (Rydin & Tate, 2016, p. 8), but they also keep actors at a distance. Each of the things I identified as dis/connectors in a process of struggling, enable or delimit forms of engagement and agency (cf. Gomart & Hajer, 2003, pp. 36; 47). Standby must be understood as a process of struggling over agency and responsibility taking shape in the modes of struggling I identified in chapter 7, namely de/activation, manoeuvre and mattering. Buildings on standby are not disordered places (in contrast to ruins, as Edensor, 2005, p. 314 defines them), nor is clear what the order one would be wanting to fight for, is. Rather, standby is to be understood as process of struggle that includes both ordering and disordering (cf. Knox et al., 2015, p. 12).

Practices

Finally, buildings on standby are to be understood through the practices that are affected by, sustaining, or destabilizing the in-between. I identified practices of making time (chapter 3) and practices of (e)valuation (chapter 5) as such practices.

In a standby mode, it is not easy to order and trace events and processes of past processes of future-making, since none of the designed possible futures was realized.

In chapter 3, I considered archives of possible futures from the past as materialization of standby. Investigating the making of the past on a mode of standby, I found that chronology and a sense of temporal connections, must first be established, but that the harmonization of the past was important for collective efforts in the making of the future. Planners are introduced to their job by being introduced to the past and they have a collection of text modules describing the past that they need to work on the future. Next to practices of making the past, I identified several ways of making the future in standby: scenario building, navigating and the production of indeterminacy. I observed how the role of scenario building changed from attempts to shape the future into a practice embracing the futures' unknowability. Studying scenario building, it turned out that in a mode of standby, the future gets set, but not determined (cf. Barad 2010). Furthermore, I showed how the unknowable future is embraced and how planners navigate between long-term visions and short-term measures when translating visions for the centre of Halle-Neustadt into action. Finally, I showed how in order to work towards a revitalization and to welcome the future, the present of the buildings is rendered indeterminate, as I argued in line with Ringel (2018).

Next to practices of making time, I studied practices of (e)valuation (chapter 5), as I considered them central for an understanding of why the Hochhausscheiben remained non-demolished but also non-renovated. Chapter 5 investigated practices of (e)valuating the buildings' material form in planning. It showed how for planners, the buildings are the biggest problem of Neustadt due to their 'emptiness', but they equally are valuable as the buildings' distinct form and origins are found to be 'significant'. Chapter 5 traced how planners came to such (e)valuations and found that 'emptiness' is perceived as problematic in relation to its surrounding as it is believed to harm development. Furthermore, I was able to trace how the Hochhausscheiben were considered 'significant' buildings. In fact, the buildings are seen as important for Neustadt's urban landscape and as historically and architecturally distinctive. It is in this way that their architectural form becomes an important element in performing the buildings as potential, but such valuation is disputed – as is the evaluation of their emptiness. The buildings' significance is countered by 'emptiness' and the uncertainty of whether and how 'emptiness' could be filled. What can be drawn from the study of practices of evaluating emptiness and valuating architectural form is first that (e)valuations are unstable and changing. Second, as I argued, existing (e)valuations contributed to the persistence of the buildings, but also to their persistence in an in-between as the buildings get performed as objects that are 'problematic but not problematic enough', and 'valuable but not valuable enough' (DeSilvey & Edensor, 2013, p. 473). Against conceptions of objects between value and waste as formless (cf. Alexander & Sanchez, 2018b, p. 2), I argued here that this (e)valuation between problem and value of the Hochhausscheiben is to be understood in confrontation with their form.

The closing chapter (chapter 8), noted that the Hochhausscheiben are an object of public debate and investigated questions of accountability and the role of doubt for standby. The chapter joined chapter 1 as it looks at what standby does to those who are part of standby (as chapter 1 does in relation to the experience of time). It found that citizens' doubts brought assumptions and convictions to the fore and forced the city to explain itself as citizens started to question the lack of demand for the buildings. Furthermore, I found that concepts generated attention but also doubt, which is then turned into expectations, the search for alternatives and demands towards the city. Finally, the chapter showed how committed citizens managed to increase the political pressure on the city to determine a future for the buildings and how they found an ally in the newly elected mayor from Halle. They obtained a referendum through which the people of the city persuaded the city administration to move into Scheibe A as a tenant. The chapter showed that standby is politically unstable and how the alignment of citizens and the mayor finally made Scheibe A 'switch on'.

Throughout the chapters I found answers to my questions about how it came about that the Hochhausscheiben were not demolished and not renovated, but remained in an in-between. Furthermore, how possible futures were made and what stood in the way of their realization and what characterizes standby as a specific form of in-between. Drawing from my study of the Hochhausscheiben and bringing diverse literatures together, I suggest that building futures are un/made in emergent time and specific situations, by bringing the past and the future into the present, in confrontation with the buildings' materiality and in interaction with a number of people and things that risk to escape fixity and disconnect instead of bringing people and things together. The fact that the buildings were neither demolished nor renovated was largely due to the fact that the future was kept open, that the buildings resisted and that the disagreement of their evaluation prevented collective action within the city of Halle. And last but not least, by the fact that an alignment of all elements did not come about and that struggles over the conditions and modalities of the (im)possible dominated searches for a future for the buildings.

The relational approach I applied for this work, allowed me to understand standby as status of objects (the Hochhhausscheiben), process and configuration and as in-between that affects those participating in it. A reactivation of one of the buildings was finally achieved through questioning, new priorities and new alliances, but whether this could secure the future of other buildings remains open. The question of an ending of standby will be addressed in the following section. Then, I will discuss what I believe the study can contribute to academic debates.

The Beginning of the End?

During my first interviews at the city administration in 2018, the planners were cautiously optimistic that a future for the Scheiben was on the way to being found in the form of revitalization. Pasternack, social scientist, historian and commentator on Halle-Neustadt's history, published a book in 2014 on the occasion of the district's 50th anniversary entitled *50 Jahre Streitfall Halle-Neustadt* ('50 Years of Halle-Neustadt Dispute') (Pasternack et al., 2014). This was followed in 2019 by the book *Kein Streitfall mehr? Halle-Neustadt fünf Jahre nach dem Jubiläum* ('No More Dispute? Halle-Neustadt Five Years after the Anniversary') (Pasternack, 2019). Indeed, since 2014/2015, things have changed in Halle-Neustadt and also for the Hochhausscheiben.

Today, demolition is no longer an issue in Neustadt as a whole, because migrants and people displaced from other parts of the city are moving to Neustadt, one of the planners told me. And:

> that also has an effect on 'the five pretty ones'; suddenly you can think about returning them to their original use. And one of them has realized that [...], that is the [owner] of the Scheibe C. At the same time, the city has moved on; we have a very dynamic mayor who puts the result before the long term [...]; all of a sudden, the idea came up to have Neustadt as an administrative headquarters [...]
>
> We had a City Council resolution that said, 'Friends, take care of this', so first of all the fundamental commitment to the centre and to the Scheiben, then there was the political commitment to 'do something'; we had developments from the outside that said, 'well, you're not fighting against cotton wool here, there could certainly be approaches to make it happen' and we have instruments, so we put a redevelopment area over it [...] and there was the first citizens' referendum, who answered a leading question suggestively, so all is well with the world. Now let's wait and see what happens.
> <u>interview, 02.10.2018</u>

The question of whether standby has come to an end today and how safe the 'on' of the Hochhausscheiben is, has accompanied me since the beginning of my research. In fact, the dynamics had changed since 2015, a reactivation of the buildings seeming to have become not only potentially possible, but a tangible possibility.

The mandate from 2015 that the planners had received from the City Council – 'Friends, take care of this' – is a decision in principle that I keep mentioning and that was primarily also intended to herald a new era, but also actually entailed further steps that were intended to work towards the reactivation of the buildings. The resolution from 2015 addressed, if you will, four levers that from the perspective of the city, needed to be turned in order to steer the trajectory of the Hochhausscheiben towards their preservation and reactivation: a commitment, a goal, money, and in particular public money, and a change in the ownership situation. Furthermore, a future use was to be determined. Here, the resolution suggests that one of the buildings could be used by the city administration itself (VI/2015/01130, 2015; I refer to the different aspects mentioned here in chapters 1, 3 and 6, 7 and 8).

In 2015, the chances of reactivating the Hochhausscheibe were found to be unprecedented. The low interest rate, the stabilization of the population, the political will – all required elements seemed to come together. What is interesting is that the city realized that without its commitment, this momentum would probably not take hold. I see in 2015 a change of the city's relation towards the future and to the buildings. The resolution reads from my view as the aim to regain control.

Around the year 2015, before the resolution and in its aftermath, investigations on different ways to achieve the goal of a revitalization were studied, internally by the city administration and by a commissioned planning office. The preparation of a redevelopment resolution and the establishment of a redevelopment area in a simplified procedure were identified as the best options and

then also decided by the City Council in 2017. In weighing up the possible paths to the preferred future, the question of a suitable middle way between freedom and incentives for private investors and control and the city's own commitment also played an important role. The redevelopment statute provides, inter alia, incentives through tax write-offs, and control for the city by reviewing sales and projects in terms of compatibility with the defined goals. The simplified procedure was chosen because it was not expected that there would be a large increase in value (interview, 03.06.2021). The planners I talked to see the development positively, because the political commitment and the redevelopment statutes allow the use of subsidies and as one of them told me, it changed their role as city planners as well as 'you can say what you are doing and then ask the others to do something too, instead of always asking "what are you going to do?"' (interview, 25.10.2018).

Since 2015, the dynamics have changed, demolition of the Hochhausscheiben is ruled out for the years to come (field notes, 29.03.2021), and an 'on' of the buildings seems more likely. Is this the beginning of the end of standby? Did the life of the Hochhausscheiben finally get the direction that planners and citizens were hoping for?

In 2018, when I started my research, there were only two 'problem children' (interview, 02.10.2018) left, two buildings that were still 'completely hanging in the air' (field notes, 23.07.20218): Scheibe B and E.

But since 2018, things have continued to turn: the future of Scheibe C has become uncertain as even though the investor continues the renovations, costs increased and the investor is in a legal dispute with the city. And there were hopes for Scheibe B in the meantime, but these have already been dashed again in 2021. Nevertheless, at the city of Halle, people were optimistic. The alderman, responsible for city development told me in an interview in May 2021: 'as far as the Scheiben are concerned, I personally am actually in a positive mood now, it is actually almost just working off the tasks that are there' (interview, 28.05.2021). Whether they would still say so at the end of 2022, I can only speculate, but the situations around Scheibe B and Scheibe C have become more uncertain rather than more secure in the meantime. Only Scheibe A was actually renovated and the city administration and also my informants from the city planning department moved into their offices here in the summer of 2021. The alderman for urban development also hopes for new impulses and innovation from the relocation of the technical town hall to Scheibe A for Halle-Neustadt: 'if I walk past certain corners every day, at some point it will get on my nerves – not just personally [...] and then you start to develop ideas [...] – I expect a lot from that' (interview, 28.05.2021). That the reactivation of Scheibe would bring new impulses for the area, is one of the great hopes of the city, but it can of course not be said for sure that the redesign of its surroundings, new clientele for lunchbreaks and other things would really change the course of life for the other buildings.

One of my informants is convinced that generations of planners will have to deal with the Hochhausscheiben, because as long as they are there, they have to be used and it is a great effort to renovate or maintain them (field notes, 27.05.2021). An end of standby would for my informants be the use of the Hochhausscheiben and owners taking care of the buildings; it would come with an end or at least remarkable decrease of their own engagement with the high-rise buildings' future. Standby ends when the Hochhausscheiben are actually 'on' or 'off'. Even if a use does not protect buildings from being the object of controversies and considerations that can lead to demolition, I nevertheless assume that the changes in the networks that care for and maintain the buildings, inhabit them and feel connected to them, would change with a use in such a way that we no longer speak of a standby. However, this time has not yet come and even if demolition is currently off the table, redevelopment statutes can also be revoked as objectives may change and goals can turn out unachievable; furthermore, valuations may change with the first generation of Neustadt dying off and new residents for Neustadt arriving, but also with changing discourses around GDR architecture (field notes, 09.06.2022). The interest rate situation has changed, uncertainty has increased due to further global crises since 2018, and at the same time many refugees from Ukraine and other parts of the world have arrived in Germany in 2022 – dynamics that have effects on the possible futures of Hochhausscheiben. How changes in networks will turn into materializations of possible futures, remains however, open.

'Everything changes while all remains the same': this is how one of the planners also describes what is going on within the planning department. Not only the buildings, but also the administration is in a period of transition during the years of my research, as the planners explain to me.

Several leadership positions have to be filled, a vacuum has emerged between people leaving and new ones to arrive, with much ambiguity as to responsibilities. Until it becomes clear what will actually change, if that is what will happen, everything will remain the same for the time being, people will work together with those they usually work well with, follow processes and routines as usual, even if these are about to be questioned. That all remains the same and changes constantly, seems to have taken hold of both the administration and the buildings and continues to do so. The future will tell whether 2015 really was the beginning of the end of standby for the Hochhausscheiben. What is certain is that we are dealing here with a turn in the process of a special kind as for the years after 2015, I observe an iterative process where steps are taken that were considered undoable during the years of my research. In fact, the week I finish this manuscript, the planners meet to discuss whether they need to abandon the goals they have formulated because of the hopelessness of realizing them. Under certain circumstances, this would also mean undoing or changing City Council resolutions and concepts. During my last visit to Halle in January 2023, one of the planners even doubted the usefulness of formulating long-term goals in general, as they would have to question the goals they had set themselves once again, as these proved to be unattainable (field notes, 25.01.2023).

After Scheibe D, Scheibe A has since found a future. As of 2022, construction continues on Scheibe C. But while material steps have been taken towards a future since 2015, the outcome remains uncertain. The future of Scheibe B and E is completely open and uncertain and thus, the search for possible futures continues here.

Contributions and Outlook

This thesis identifies a standby mode of buildings in the interplay of buildings, planning and urban transformation. The relations between these three is very complex and the aim for this work was to study some of this complexity for the case of specific buildings – the Hochhausscheiben. Due to the selected case study, urban transformation after socialism and the role of governmental urban planning are more specifically meant here.

A conceptualization of buildings on standby is new and is able to contribute to the ways we understand buildings in three ways. First, it brings new light to the socio-material life of buildings 'post-use'. Second, it contributes to an understanding of buildings in-the-making through the focus on the un/making of their possible futures. The focus here was on how possible futures are made in urban planning. And third, the study sheds light on what makes the buildings remain in an in-between. The approach chosen for the study of buildings was a relational approach to buildings influenced mainly by actor–network theory, and as it has been proposed in recent social science architectural research and especially also in newer geographies of architecture. It sees buildings embedded in relations and practices that produce, maintain and repair them, and eventually bring them down. While some foreground the embeddedness of buildings in global relations or political-economic processes, others focus on buildings as architecture and architectural practice. What most of the literature I referred to shares is a non-representational approach to buildings, whereby their materiality gets new attention, but the givenness of materiality's stability is questioned. For example, Jenkins studies the boundaries of buildings not as given, but as network effect and draws attention 'to the links between the actual material process of urban change […] and the ways in which this has affected and altered architectural space' (Jenkins, 2002, p. 223). In continuity of Jenkins' proposal to think buildings together with their production and use, Jacobs suggests thinking of a building as 'a *building event* rather than simply a building. Conceived of this way, a building is always being "made" or "unmade", always doing the work of holding together of pulling apart' (Jacobs, 2006, p. 11; emphasis in original). Using the built as an entry and focal point of analysis of urban assemblages is suggested by urban scholars such as McFarlane for whom 'A focus on the city's fabric provides one key site for theorizing urban change, politics and possibility' (McFarlane, 2008, pp. 1–2). McFarlane stresses the socio-material interactions between material and other elements. What he opens his way of conceptualization to is, however, not only the actual interactions, but also the possible. Hommels, for her part, brings together urban studies and STS to think change and socio-material resistance to such change, thus also impossibility in the city (Hommels, 2005). From a pragmatist perspective, architectural theorist and anthropologist Yaneva studies how buildings are brought into being in architectural practice (Yaneva, 2009) and how buildings surprise in attempts at changing them (Yaneva, 2008). Such conceptualizations of buildings and studies focusing on the relationality of buildings, the agency of materiality and practices of building-making served me as main analytical reference. This is also the literature to which this dissertation predominantly speaks and contributes.

I hope to have brought new insights to our thinking about buildings through the study of buildings after their (initial) use. Studying buildings 'post-use' shifts the focus of attention to the question of their future and the processes and practices of future-making. I understand buildings on standby here as existing buildings that have lost their (human) use, whose future is being struggled over and has yet to be found. What is new in my study is the focus on the planning of the city administration, a site of future-making that has so far remained understudied in the making of buildings. This inevitably also raises the question of what role a municipality can and wants to play for the lives of individual buildings.

This thesis contributes to the literature on urban in-between spaces through the conception of buildings on standby that I understand as specific urban in-between spaces. One feature that distinguishes them from other urban in-between spaces is that they do not live a quiet and little-noticed existence in ruination, but that many possible futures have been un/made for them. My research stands out through the in-depth study of possible futures from the past. Buildings on standby are the subject of debates about the future of the city and they challenge those involved in the production of the city. In the studied case, urban planners cannot avoid them when thinking about the future of Neustadt. It is the repetitive, recurring efforts and the confrontation with the buildings in these efforts that I have come to understand as characteristic of buildings on standby. Buildings on standby are stable and fragile; their evaluation is controversial, and they are not spaces of order or disorder but of constant processes of ordering and disordering. The thesis contributes to conceptions of in-between spaces with a focus on the work needed to maintain their availability and potentiality. In the case studied here, this task is taken on by the city and by citizens, and the reactivation of one of the buildings also goes back to years of commitment by citizens. What role citizens play for buildings on standby and for the reactivation of vacant buildings beyond interim uses, could certainly be investigated more systematically in further research, for example by looking at a greater number of cases.

In general, a study of other buildings in other locations would certainly be useful to identify the specifics and further elaborate a conceptualization of buildings on standby. This would help to identify whether we would be able to think of buildings on standby as a building type. Examining individual coordinates of the in-between identified here individually and in more depth could also be promising, but my concern here was how the individual coordinates (although I do not claim completeness) combine to form standby.

I am also examining standby as a socio-material situation after socialism. This is due to the location of the Hochhausscheiben. The standby mode of the Hochhausscheiben must, in my view, be thought together with the reconfigurations after 1990 – a time when the future and the present were uncertain, buildings were abandoned and the state was in search of a new role for itself. Examining the Hochhausscheiben with the notion of standby, as I have done here, can in my view contribute to the study of urban transformation after socialism. A parallel emerges between my analysis of the buildings in the in-between and the description of the life of people and things after socialism in other places, which is also described as in-between (cf. Dzenovska, 2020, p. 11). Standby could therefore be a useful analytic here to study socio-material entanglements of the in-between. Furthermore, standby directs the gaze to the non-linear, open process of engagement with the buildings in changing presents: to the energy that flows, to the connections that still exist, and to what standby does to those who participate in it. In research on societies after socialism, there are currently lively debates around the term 'postsocialism', because in the perspective of many it has lost or failed its initial claim (Müller, 2019). Once introduced to describe an 'ongoing and uneven process of transformation' (Cima & Sovová, 2022, p. 1370), this term is increasingly rejected – among other reasons, because it suggests that an entire region cannot get rid of its past (Müller, 2019, p. 537). While I understand the reservations about a term that perhaps overemphasizes the role of the past for the present, the process I have been exploring presents itself to me as precisely that non-linear process and as a process of the in-between. From my perspective, it

would be wrong to take out the in-between as an analytic because my study shows that the life of the buildings after socialism is determined by tensions. Standby appears as a concept that recognizes that the provisional is a lived reality and has been extended (Dzenovska, 2020; Kemmer et al., 2021, p. 6). Studying buildings after socialism with the notion of standby includes then to look for the in-between's own qualities, some of which I have traced as coordinates of standby. However, the present study did not claim to contribute to the research field of postsocialism in the sense of regional research. In my view, this would be possible if the lives of other buildings in other places were examined, which would be conceivable for future research.

Last, the thesis contributes to the literature on standby through the study of buildings. The definition of standby that served me as starting point and with which I entered into dialogue is that developed by Kemmer et al. in their introduction to a special issue on standby, published in 2021. The special issue proposes understanding standby as an 'ordinary *mode of organizing* sociomaterial lifeworlds' (Kemmer et al., 2021, p. 1; emphasis in original) and explicitly addresses questions of time-space, materiality and organization. The issue came out at a time when I had been already thinking for a while about the in-between of the Hochhausscheiben, describing them in presentations as in-between, between demolition and preservation, or as 'pending'. The present study explored how standby manifests itself when it comes to buildings. In order to arrive at an understanding of buildings on standby, this dissertation used existing literature and concepts from different fields of research and brought them together, always striving to carry existing thoughts forward. The main inspiration and reference points were science and technology studies, especially actor–network theory that emerged from it, and in part also urban assemblage research. Basic assumptions and foci, such as those on processes, practices and non-human agency, as well as individual concepts, were brought together with concepts and case studies, especially from anthropology and geography. Smaller contributions to these literatures, such as ANT and the anthropology of time and the future, are to be found in individual chapters.

I also hope to have contributed to the understanding of standby as an in-between mode. Those elements mentioned above that have contributed to the buildings not being demolished and not being renovated are elements that maintain and prolong standby. My project placed a particular emphasis on this. Next to 'looseness' identified by Kemmer et al. as an organizing principle in standby and that I count among the elements sustaining standby, my research identified the fact that the future is kept open and the ambiguity in the valuation of buildings on standby as elements that sustain and prolong standby. In addition, this thesis helps to better understand materiality on standby. Of course, this is first and foremost linked to the object chosen. The buildings on standby require an engagement with them through their material presence. As I found, materiality on standby challenges, is resistant and fragile. I was particularly interested in abilities to challenge the in-between and generate action. As this study shows, it is only possible to a limited extent to ignore buildings on standby, because they themselves deteriorate and provoke costs. It furthermore shows that it is capable of becoming a danger not only in the actual material sense, but also when their in-between becomes the bargaining chip of trust, responsibility and accountability. The precariousness of standby can even lead to a risk of loss of trust among citizens who stand by buildings on standby in the local state, as in my case. How questions of responsibility and accountability related to standby are negotiated and fought over within the networks of standby is another of the contributions to a conceptualization of standby.

Outside academia, I am often asked whether my work makes suggestions on how to deal with vacant buildings like the Hochhausscheiben in Halle-Neustadt. The answer is in principle no, because this work's intention was to analyse what and how possible futures were un/made and what contributed to the buildings not being demolished or renovated. Nevertheless, this work might be able to sensitize for the energy that has flown and continues to flow into the Hochhausscheiben and that is stored in them. I personally am pleased that the buildings are still standing and are on their way to being reused. This is also due to the commitment of those who have been involved in the search for possible futures for over 20 years. Standby as a concept enabled me to focus on this commitment in all its ambiguities and ambivalences.

Today's long-thought-impossible dynamics invite us to ask whether and under what circumstances *setting* buildings on standby could become a strategy in dealing with the built. After all, it is never impossible that a future could be found for buildings at a later date, that something new emerg-

es from an in-between or that new prospects for a future prevail. In view of the sometimes painful experiences of standby for those who are attached to the buildings, but also those who are entrusted with the search for possible futures, it seems necessary to think about possible forms of standby beyond the waiting for growth and private investment that I observed.

This thesis has shown that standby does not leave those who are involved and standing by untouched. If we want to think about whether setting buildings that are currently without demand on standby could be a strategy, we should consider the energy that goes into the buildings. By this, I am thinking of money, emotions and work to maintain their potentiality. We might think about how this energy could possibly be used in more productive ways and shared differently. For example, could the cost of securing be used to enable uses that could secure the buildings? Or could owners be brought to commit to their property in a different way? Would municipalities need to be empowered to look after buildings in other ways? This dissertation invites further questions of this kind that go beyond what I think an academic work can do.

Investigating buildings in an in-between seems relevant as vacancies will increase in areas beyond big cities and debates over how to deal with them are on the rise. Current forecasts predict for Germany that the housing vacancy rate could increase (without deconstruction) to almost 4.6 million dwellings by 2030, 'which corresponds to a vacancy rate of 10.7 per cent (more than six percentage points higher than in 2011)' (BBSR 2014; as cited in: Nelle, 2015, p. 62; own translation), and there are growing vacancy forecasts for many towns in Europe.

For Germany, the fact that the topic of how to deal with vacancies is a topical issue is also shown by a brochure published by the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety in 2017. In the brochure, representatives of East German municipalities report on their experiences from the urban redevelopment of the 2000s and that vacancies in large housing estates are on the rise again, even though migration to these neighbourhoods is occurring. The plans of many East German municipalities envisage further deconstruction, but they are also looking for alternatives. Besides the category of demolition properties, there is, as a representative of one municipality is quoted, 'the category of observation properties, where in principle only maintenance is done' (Röding et al., 2017).

In these cases, one could probably speak of a standby mode into which the buildings are put. But there is much to suggest that there will be many buildings in the future where the future does not arrive as envisaged in plans and concepts. It can be assumed that the future of numerous buildings will continue to be fought over and that they will become objects on standby. If our goal, as has been promoted for some years and is currently widely discussed, is to 'change the existing' and 'prolong the life of existing buildings' (Licata, 2005, p. 17; own translation), we should also address the conditions for reactivation. An engagement with experiences of maintaining the potentiality of reactivation, but also resistances, seems very relevant also in the future. I am convinced that an examination of what contributed to the fact that the Hochhausscheiben have neither been demolished nor renovated, and of how possible futures were and are un/made for them, can teach us something new for our thinking.

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