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# Time Divided – Time United?

## Temporal aspects of German unification

Henrike Rau

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**ABSTRACT.** To illuminate the persisting division between East and West Germany, this article explores temporal aspects of East German culture and their impact on German unification. Arguing that approaches to GDR time in the contemporary literature border on oversimplification, the article focuses on different layers of time in East Germany. It also deals with possible time-related sources of conflict between East and West Germans, such as contradictory temporal work practices. On the basis of ethnographic and documentary evidence, the article argues that ordinary members of the German public may be more subtly aware of clashes in time cultures than this literature suggests. **KEY WORDS** • East German time culture • German unification • time and conflict

### Introduction

*Ich war schon öfters nach der Grenzöffnung drüben. Die Menschen sind ganz anders als wir.*

I've been over there many times since the opening of the border. The people are totally different from us (Female student, 10th grade, East Germany, quoted in Böhm et al., 1993: 109)<sup>1</sup>

Attempts to understand problems and complexities encountered in the process of German unification, even those which take time into account, characteristically focus on economic and political aspects. It is argued here that this approach fails to grasp central and crucial aspects of the unification process through its disregard for Germany's social and cultural divisions. For example, East and West Germans have been exposed to different societal and cultural paces over a period of four decades of German division (1949–89) and, hence,

understanding German unification also implies the study of two different time cultures and their amalgamation. This article explores dominant and persistent aspects of East German time culture and their powerful and continuous impact on German unification. Making sense of these particular time-related aspects requires a more holistic approach that acknowledges their multifaceted nature and their conflict potential. Analysing apparently small-scale features of time-related behaviour in everyday life allows us to perceive why members of the two cultures continue to see each other as so different – so that the project of German unification remains, at best, ‘work in progress’.

Intensive interaction between people from diverse (time) cultures as well as voluntary and forced acculturation, as in the case of German unification, are often accompanied by both positive and negative implications (Dux, 1998; Levine, 1998; Garhammer, 1999; Klein, 2001). Dümcke and Vilmar (1996), for example, refer to the process of German unification as the ‘colonialisation of the GDR’ to expose the inequalities of the unification process. Hesitation about which is the more salient result of German unification, in particular with regard to persistent cultural differences between East and West Germany, also becomes reflected in the following comment made by a West German secondary level student:

And I ask myself, was this unification really a sensible thing to do? Why didn't they ask both sides whether they want reunification at all? For each side, the other is a completely alien culture. (female student, 9th grade, Gymnasium, West Germany, quoted in Böhm et al., 1993: 40)

In an attempt to understand the ‘otherness’ of these cultures in relation to each other, this article explores their temporal constituents, such as working time regimes and leisure time patterns. People’s work environment, in particular, provides an arena where time cultures often clash and temporal conflicts occur because ‘The control that work exercises over time is not just control over the time actually spent on it. Work dominates everything around it as a mountain dominates a plain’ (Young and Schuller, 1991: 93). We shall, therefore, examine temporal work practices in East Germany – past and present – to contrast them with dominant (and dominating) West German practices. Observable temporal differences and contrasts between East and West, which appear to be very resistant to change, may then be devised as at least a partial explanation for the division that still exists between East and West Germany:

[. . .] the year 2000 marks the tenth anniversary of unification. [. . .] Yet 10 years after unification the new Germany is still socially, economically and politically a deeply divided country. (Thomaneck and Niven, 2001: 1)

Klein’s (2001) examination of differences in East and West German communicative patterns and resulting conflicts, which includes numerous examples

drawn from his coaching experience with mixed work teams, clearly supports the idea of a persistent cultural division between East and West Germans:

Overall, a form of coexistence becomes apparent. People leave each other alone and avoid each other unless they have to come together, such as in Berlin, in former border areas, or in some mixed work teams. (Klein, 2001: 29)

To investigate these cultural differences and their relationship to time, this article draws on different sources of empirical evidence to increase its density and rigour. Excerpts from the author's fieldnotes, which have been collected over a period of three years of cross-cultural comparative work in Germany and Ireland, are used to support some of the suggestions made in this article. Time-related excerpts from essays on German unification written by East and West German secondary level students aged 14 to 18 years (9th to 12th grade) during German lessons were extracted and revised to illuminate different perceptions and conceptualizations of time in East and West Germany. These written accounts, which were collected, edited and published by Böhm et al. in 1993, provide some insight into East and West German youths' attitudes towards unification in general, and temporal aspects of unification in particular. Furthermore, these essays may also be viewed as particularly important because the majority of those attitudes seem to have sustained their influence, reflecting prominent beliefs held by East and West Germans today. Finally, the collection and revision of essay-type accounts may be considered a promising research strategy to gain access to German people's attitudes (see also Moericke, 1991; Simon et al., 2000).

References to academic publications made throughout this article are purpose-centred rather than exhaustive. Some of these publications, however, such as Maier's (1997/1999) view on the dissolution of the GDR and the collapse of socialism, Borneman's (1992/1995) account of everyday life in East and West Berlin before and after unification, and Klein's (2001) experiences with conflicting patterns of communication in East and West Germany may be considered exceptional because they promote a more subtle and multifaceted approach to German unification opposing large-scale political and economic accounts.

Additional informative evidence derives from evocative accounts from witnesses and agents of German unification made accessible to the public through newspapers. It is believed that key witnesses of German unification, such as the politician Bärbel Bohley, co-founder of the GDR grassroots movement 'Neues Forum', Hans Apel and Heinz Dürr, appointed trustees from West Germany responsible for the privatization and restructuring of large GDR companies, or Geert van Istendael, a Belgian journalist reporting on the situation in East Germany before, during and after the *Wende*, may be able to shed some light on the complexities of German unification. Finally, the author's own experiences

as a person born and raised within the GDR system, and during German unification, will be reflected here. This membership of the local setting has itself proved helpful in compiling information provided by other East Germans, whose accounts will be included here, at least to some extent.

### **Inequality and ‘Otherness’**

It is often felt in East Germany that the political and social inequality inherent in German unification promotes the misinterpretation and devaluation of East German values and practices through the inappropriate application of well-established West German conceptualizations in a new context, the resurrection of traditional attitudes towards the East, and the emergence of new, yet unsuitable values and concepts. For example, East Germans continue to complain about the arrogant and patronizing undertone characterizing their interaction with West German superiors and officials, such as bank managers and politicians, which may be partially related to conflicting patterns of communication in East and West Germany (see also Klein, 2001). Moreover, even West German relatives may succumb to such patronizing behavioural patterns through comments passed at family gatherings and reunions (fieldnotes, July 2000). The following quotation derives from a Belgian journalist’s account of East German life after unification, providing some evidence to justify the aforementioned complaints:

[. . .] 1991. We are dining in a restaurant in Erfurt, we three Belgians. All the seats are taken, only one is free – at our table. Yes, Sir, of course, please join us. A businessman from Düsseldorf. Waiters are darting by. ‘I’ll be with you in a minute’ mumbles one of them into the air. The eruption of the West German. Slow! Lazy! Unreliable! All communists! ‘You don’t say’ replies one of us: I was in Mainz the other day and I had to wait for my dinner for two hours’. (Geert van Istendael, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 29 September 2000, p. 6)

Here, West German depictions of attitudes towards time and differences in time use in the East may be interpreted as an attempt to deal with the formerly antagonistic ‘other’. As Borneman (1993: 111) points out rightly, German unification has also destabilized the West German identity; to counteract the dissolution of their identity, West Germans have utilized ‘[. . .] a successful projection of the East Germans as *inferior* in space and *behind* in time’ (emphasis in original).<sup>2</sup>

Conflicting cultural values and practices in East and West Germany are also embedded in western political vocabulary used to describe the former GDR. Negative terminology such as the notion of an ‘old burden’ [Altlasten] that became ‘unreeled’ [abgewickelt] graphically illustrates the dominant western way of dealing with anything East German:

*Abwickeln* means to unwind or unreel. Thus imaged like an antiquated clock whose internal coils have sprung, the former GDR is being unwound, set back in a prior time. [. . .] the GDR as a social formation, with its own set of practices and dispositions, will be unrolled and deconstructed to its thinnest, most unadorned and elementary units. (Borneman, 1992/1995: 314)

The devaluation of the GDR past continues to colour everyday life in Germany. However, attempts to create an East German tabula rasa which can then be filled with western concepts and values persistently endanger the unification process: ‘Only if this policy of rejecting all things eastern is modified will there be a serious prospect of east and west growing together’ (Thomanek and Niven, 2001: 74ff.). This may be particularly applicable to East German working time culture and continues to influence the cooperation between East and West:

Everywhere you look [in the workplace], time plays a role. And there is nothing as fiercely debated as this point. Here, a blatant contradiction appears to coin Western criticism of Eastern communicative culture: On the one hand, there is the accusation that people from East Germany are still much too slow overall. On the other hand, the wish for more time, more rest, and a different pace of life becomes reflected in every other sentence. (Klein, 2001: 129)

These western depictions of East German culture as ‘too slow’ may well expand beyond the work setting thus influencing the perception and evaluation of seemingly mundane aspects of everyday life, such as delivery times, patterns of consumption and traffic problems:

We had ordered something for the kitchen once. They exceeded the delivery date by almost two months because it was still in the former GDR. We were DOWN-RIGHT FURIOUS but these things don’t bother them at all. (female student, 9th grade, West Germany, quoted in Böhm et al., 1993: 26)

Naturally, there is a palette of responses to these inequalities and inaccurate depictions of East German culture. In many cases, annoyance and anger prevails among East German people:

And one can’t help but explode when ‘Wessis’ come up with slogans like ‘We’ll teach you how to work’ or ‘You can’t even drive a car’. We didn’t climb down from the trees yesterday, in fact we’ve been able to walk upright for some time. (male student, 9th grade, East Germany, quoted in Böhm et al., 1993: 27)

However, the devaluation of East German time culture is no longer a West German domain. Instead, younger people in East Germany may also adopt dominant western views of East German work practices. For example, an East German man in his late 20s who worked for a large home-electronics company in Dresden complained about the East German work attitude of an older colleague. He stated that this man, who was recently hired to help other members of staff in dealing with the increasing workload, continued to exceed his break

times to read the newspaper or do the shopping. Moreover, he criticized his general slowness (fieldnotes, July 2001). Ironically, this example may be used to illustrate one aspect of successful German unification where western views of the former GDR overwrite East German cultural values.

Finally, typical problems of acculturation may occur in response to the cultural clash between East and West, in particular among the apparently 'inferior' East Germans. Exaggerated nostalgia [*Ostalgie*], that is, people's uncritical retreat into all things past may be considered a manifestation of culture shock. For example, some regions in East Germany particularly exposed to severe economic and political disruptions after unification, such as the coal mining areas near Bautzen and Hoyerswerda, appear to have been more susceptible to 'ostalgic' sentiments:

Over the past few years, a structural change has taken place in the Lausitz whose brutality could not have been foreseen. As a result, memories of an idyllic life in the GDR emerge and they land on fertile soil. (*Berliner Morgenpost*, 10 September 2000, 'Umbau durch Abbau' by Peter Gillies)

Traditionally, nostalgic views are often reserved for the elderly in western countries whereas East German nostalgia cuts across different age groups. The following account by a secondary level student exemplifies this point:

I want to achieve something too, but I wouldn't put a friendship at stake for it. In this regard, from the point of view of private matters, things were much better in the past. There were cliques and people were all the same, they went out together, had fun and shared everything. [. . .] I really miss the old times. (female student, 11th grade, East Germany, quoted in Böhme et al., 1993: 112)

Her statement clearly resembles popular 'ostalgic' views of solidarity and community spirit, possibly put forward by her parents, or some other person with an educational impact, while disregarding any negative aspects of social life in the GDR. Still, there is a possibility that she may have experienced the deterioration of close social relationships herself. Either way, we need to expect rather diverse accounts of the same aspects of social life in the GDR. East Germans' conversations illustrate sharp breaks in how they relate to their own memories and it seems difficult, if not impossible (in particular for those who did not experience the GDR system), to critically assess their content:

Listening to conversations between former citizens of the GDR, one sometimes gets the impression that the people speaking to each other had been living in different countries. Some of them remember the repression, subordination, surveillance, the inadequacies of the economy and the poor provisions, the countless restrictions on freedom, the stupid and dishonest SED propaganda and an education system which, from Kindergarten to University, was designed to elicit the obedience of corpses. The others think back to job security, clear professional prospects, individual welfare, crèche places guaranteed by the state, low rents and

a bread roll costing five pennies. (Mitter and Wolle, 1993: 7, quoted in Fulbrook, 1995: 21)

Here, East German narratives clearly reflect significant differences in people's treatment of their own past, with certain anomalies emerging on a larger societal scale. For example, people in East Germany may eventually give in to the pressures of the West that encourage them to erase their own memories and discard their cultural habits and traditions. As a result, they are beginning to forget, which, with dominating western influences advancing, results in an accelerated dissolution of East German memories.

### **East German Time Culture in the Literature**

Some recent publications concerned with temporal aspects of German unification and the collapse of the socialist system in Eastern Europe resemble 'western views' in their disregard for concealed aspects of East German time culture. These 'hidden times' are often considered to be of little relevance to large-scale analyses of economic and political unification and their continuous exclusion from academic treatment appears to propel them into oblivion. In other words, some effects of treatments of East German time culture in the literature may actually exacerbate the problem of 'societal amnesia'. By failing to respond to the complexities of the cultural values and practices in question, it helps to erase their memory. Hence, academia may actually contribute to the dissolution of the GDR through complacency and negligence.

A frequently promoted concept is that of time standing still in East Germany, which is then equalled to backwardness, stagnation and a lack of future orientation. Macnaghten and Urry (1998: 147), for example, suggest that the collapse of the socialist system in Eastern Europe was partially due to its inability to deal with 'instantaneous' and 'glacial' time respectively:

Eastern Europe was stuck in modernist clock-time. It was unable to respond either to the long-term concern with nature, the environment and the reassertion of history and place, or to the extraordinary speeding up of time and space especially as represented by instantaneous fashion, image and the microcomputer.

Borneman (1993: 103) postulates that since the mid-1960s time in the GDR '[. . .] was experienced as petrified or artificially slowed down. Both the state and the citizen had good reason to reject the modernist vision of industrial time, the vision that presupposed an unstoppable race toward a progressive future'. He argues that the state deliberately slowed down production because further competition with the West seemed increasingly futile. Furthermore, the economic slowdown was utilized by the state to monitor and control people more efficiently. Citizens in the GDR, on the other hand, '[. . .] also wanted to slow



down time, partly because they had no incentive to speed it up' (1993: 104). Acceleration at work did not yield any rewards and opportunities to acquire status through consumption were limited due to the controlled allocation of products.

Both accounts provide illuminating insights into the subject matter, but they also seem to overlook more concealed dynamics of East German time culture. First of all, it may be more useful and appropriate to view people in the GDR as active agents rather than passive recipients of temporal constraints because they constantly sought for solutions to overcome natural and societal restrictions of time, for example, by means of extending the lifespan of consumer products in an innovative way. Hence, emphasis was placed on the development of strategies and abilities for repair and maintenance such as *flicken* [to patch] and *ausbessern* [to mend] and their continuous improvement (see also Reith, 1999). For example, it was common knowledge in the GDR that a torn fan belt could be temporarily replaced with a pair of durable nylon tights, at least until a proper replacement was organized. In other words, people were not trapped in any given temporal frame but actively tried to overcome (sometimes inevitable) temporal restrictions imposed on them. 'Fiddling time' was common practice, with people taking time off work to organize such things as goods and labour. Hence, official working time regimes were systematically undermined to free up time required for more essential unofficial jobs. These examples of creativity, flexibility and innovation cast serious doubts on the projection that East Germans were 'behind in time'.

Second, to understand East German culture, we must acknowledge that it cannot be characterized in terms of one particular attitude to time only. For example, GDR time cannot possibly be summarized under the heading 'modernist clock-time' without cloaking its multiplicity and diversity. Furthermore, East German time culture did incorporate 'instantaneous' and 'glacial' aspects of social time that existed alongside modernist clock-time. On the one hand, public time in the GDR often bore a future component. For example, a comparatively progressive waste management and recycling system (SERO) was put in place in the GDR to tackle environmental and economic problems such as increasing deforestation and the finitude of fossil fuel. Admittedly, the overall scope of environmental pollution in the GDR through nuclear and chemical waste rendered these modest attempts futile. However, environmental pollution was, and is, certainly not a problem exclusive to former members of the Eastern bloc, deriving from their disregard for the future.

In addition, other future-oriented issues such as the ever-present threat of nuclear war and its implications for future generations formed an important part of both public discourse and ideological propaganda. Advances in computing technology became apparent and triggered (admittedly utopian) ideas of technological progress in the near future<sup>3</sup> while East German students attended IT

classes and were encouraged to take part in the annual innovation competition, MMM [*Messe der Meister von Morgen*]. Finally, the reader may remember Erich Honecker's utterance, 'Vorwärts immer, rückwärts nimmer' [Always forwards, never backwards] in his speech at the 40th anniversary of the GDR (7 October 1989), which reflected a rather utopian orientation towards the future despite highly visible signs of economic and societal disintegration. On the other hand, people's private time inevitably bore a past as well as a future component because it incorporated life plans (Hareven, 1982) and personal history. In short, significant constituents of East German time culture oppose the idea of time standing still in the GDR because they are essentially future-oriented while drawing on valuable experiences from the past.

Finally, those accounts of GDR time culture mentioned above fail to pay attention to constituents of time that are universally influenced not only by social pacers, but also by natural pacers such as the seasons, dark–light cycles or weather conditions, which are also observable in western countries. Farming, agriculture and wine production often depend on these natural pacers, despite attempts to disconnect the production of fruit, vegetables or livestock from seasonal cycles. Hence, East German farmers and vintners had to deal with substantial time pressure during the harvest season. The building industry in the GDR was also vulnerable to seasonal changes and thus to time constraints, such as pressure arising from the need to finish work before the winter. To conclude, salient contributions to the discussion of GDR time culture, while valuable in many ways, often fail to address more concealed and subtle temporal aspects. Therefore, in the remainder of this article, we turn to observations of work, consumption and leisure patterns, which can yield a more varied account of GDR time practices. Moreover, we will examine the institutionalization of time and the emergence of temporal conflict during the German unification process.

### Working Time

Any valid account of East German working time needs to pay attention to the unique social aspects of work in the GDR. It is argued here that extensive social interaction in the workplace emerged as a result of a slower pace and a more porous working day. Paradoxically, western approaches often deny any positive effects of work-related social interaction and free time at work in the GDR. Hence, cooperation, loyalty and 'team spirit', otherwise desirable and advantageous features in the West, became associated with 'hidden unemployment' and the demise of the GDR economy. What is more, the debate obscures the fact that the abolition of free time at work in western countries is relatively recent and did not come about without considerable resistance. Again, this ambivalence in evaluation – good in the West, bad in the East – illustrates the application of

double standards and the introduction of a dualistic bias that often characterizes western depictions of East German culture.

At first sight, working time in the GDR was partially reserved for activities unrelated to the actual work process. An East German hydrological engineer in his early 50s, who was interviewed by the author in preparation for this article, stated that it was common practice for the women to use their lunch break to do the grocery shopping. He was also convinced that there was more time for social interaction between colleagues (fieldnotes, July 2001). Some of these perceptions of East German working time practices also become reflected in the following quotation drawn from a newspaper article. Here, former West German minister Hans Apel, who became actively involved in the 'Upswing East' [*Aufschwung Ost*] in 1990, reports on his experiences as the new director of East Germany's largest brown coal-based power plant, *Schwarze Pumpe*:

From an economic point of view, you would hardly notice that East German brown coal plants, amongst other things, produce coal and energy. People go shopping during working time, attend political meetings and organise their moonlighting. Apel [appointed trustee] writes in his diary: 'People have a lot of spare time in their working time.' (*Berliner Morgenpost*, 10 September 2000, 'Umbau durch Abbau' by Peter Gillies)

However, working time in the GDR was not simply leisurely and slow, but rather variably paced. Very different and sometimes antagonistic temporal structures prevailed, which may be associated with differences in motivation. First of all, governmental propaganda and organizational campaigns to promote positive and meaningful aspects of work, such as cooperation, peace or better living conditions, may have been successful, at least to some extent. Second, the machine-paced production of sought-after items, such as cars and paddles, gave rise to 'western' working conditions, that is, a fast pace, cyclic fluctuations in production, long hours and short breaks (fieldnotes, October 2001). Third, unofficial paid work, such as moonlighting [*Schwarzarbeit*, *Schurwerken*], or private work at home, was characterized by a very different, accelerated time structure. For example, people's desire to build or improve their own home may function as a very strong pacemaker, or accelerator, across different cultures, and people in the former GDR were certainly no exception.

However, widespread economic insufficiency, such as the lack of supplies, or too little work for too many people, have often led to extremely porous working days and 'hidden unemployment' in the GDR (Garhammer, 1999). An engineer in his early 50s who had been working for a large East German manufacturer of printing machines explained that they had to sit through weeks off work because there was literally no work to be done. Moreover, he also confirmed that there were many other activities such as shopping and typical leisure activities such as card games that could be organized and carried out during

working time (fieldnotes, July 2000). Again, Hans Apel's account of his work as appointed trustee in East Germany includes references to the scope of 'hidden unemployment' in GDR coal mining and energy production:

The increase in wages in East Germany also triggered a landslide of staff cuts. The waves of redundancy had already started in late summer 1990. Although the number of employees [in the brown coal industry] dropped by 13,000 in 1990, productivity and turnover remained the same. According to Apel [appointed trustee], this is evidence for hidden unemployment in the GDR. Until 1994, productivity increased from 31 to 73% of the productivity level in West Germany. By the end of 1999, over a period of one decade, the work force had decreased by 62,800, from 75,500 to 12,700. (*Berliner Morgenpost*, 10 September 2000, 'Umbau durch Abbau' by Peter Gillies)

The deteriorating economic situation in the GDR, in particular during the late 1980s, gave rise to a very special working time culture that promoted task-related creativity and cooperation rather than strict adherence to temporal rules. Here, the character of a particular task remained more clearly perceptible as its time-frame was adjusted to accommodate its content:

Accelerated productivity on the job, and thus faster work, was not the principle by which people were rewarded in everyday life in the East. Instead, loyalty, stability, political acquiescence, and team-work formed the bases for rewards on the job, to the extent there were any. (Borneman, 1993: 104)

Interestingly, this task orientation contradicts the essentially temporal principles of a centrally planned economy, namely strict adherence to schedules, or five-year plans. Moreover, this inherent temporality also determines currently dominant western time-frames where the nature of the task seems diminished by the importance of keeping up the pace. The discrepancy between official GDR worktime policies and actual working time practices partially derived from the fact that utopian assumptions of the status quo of the GDR economy did not resemble reality (see also Maier, 1997/1999). Instead, pressing economic problems such as a lack of spare parts and replacements promoted special abilities such as skilful patching and creative mending. Heinz Dürr, former chief executive officer of the Deutsche Bahn AG (German Railways, a merger of Bundesbahn [West] and Deutsche Reichsbahn [East]) from West Germany, acknowledges the significant role of creativity and innovation in the East German railway industry:

'GDR – 10th-largest industrial power of the world': This figure was mere deception. But the scarcity promoted creativity and a wealth of ideas. [. . .] For example, defective railway switches could often not be replaced; they were mended instead. Spare parts were produced in-house because they could not be got anywhere else. (*Frankfurter Rundschau*, 2–3 October 2000, p. 9)

This need for creative solutions and organizational skills, however, was certainly not restricted to public work settings; it also spilled over into the private sector where people generally put immense efforts into organizing scarce items such as building material:

I am writing to you today because you may be the only person who can help me. My problem is that for the past twelve months I have been trying without success to get building material (30 bags of lime and 6 compound windows 75×90). Our cottage is in much need of repair. I cannot believe that forty years after the war it is still not possible to obtain building material. (Christian U. from Schlegel to Erich Honecker, received 8 June 1989, quoted in Glaser, 1999: 17)

Here, the full meaning of the term 'organizing' becomes apparent, which can only be described as inherently East German. 'Organizing' represents a planned and well-structured pursuit, a skilful activity, which eventually leads to the purchase, or exchange, of the desired consumer product, such as an essential spare part for the car, or a batch of window frames. It contrasts with the western notion of 'picking up' something which implies the rapid and straightforward acquisition of a readily available item. In the GDR, indeed, it may have been more important for the acquisition of status to be able to organize a product than actually to possess it. The capacity to organize demonstrates a lasting social competence which is more permanent than the items it deals with. The fact that one is in a position to do somebody a favour means more than the actual favour itself because it implies social power, an essential feature in times of economic scarcity.

Many of these East German abilities and skills appear to have lost their meaning after German unification. Instead, East Germany's sudden exposure to western capitalism with its fast, money-based solutions to work-related problems triggered the disintegration of slow-paced, task-oriented creativity and innovation. Garhammer's (1999) secondary analysis of large-scale quantitative data clearly illustrates the impact of this process of deterioration on the perception of work-related stress in East Germany:

The 1996 study of the European Foundation indicates that in 1996 28% of employees in Europe complained about work stress. Symptomatically, this concern was the strongest in East Germany. While in the past, workers in East Germany could work slower or attend to private matters during working hours, these workday gaps have now been closed. Elimination of the so-called 'hidden unemployment' intensified occupational pressures. It is therefore understandable that 31% of East Germans, compared to 23% of West Germans complained in 1996 about work stress. (Garhammer, 1999: 7)

To conclude, East German working time cannot be described as uniformly slow-paced and leisurely without obscuring some of its essential characteristics, such as a strong task orientation that coincides innovation and creativity.

### Consumption Time

The apparent lack of western patterns of consumption in the GDR (Borneman, 1993), which tend to shape working time and leisure time alike while serving the acquisition of social status, deserves particular attention. However, it is argued here that people in the GDR did use qualitative differences in consumer products available to acquire status. For example, a car was certainly defined as a status symbol in the GDR, which closely resembles western patterns of status acquisition through purchase and consumption:

Sometimes, our parents had to drudge for a year or two to be able to afford a decent TV. Those who had a car back then were considered better off. Do you think we were lounging around sleeping? No, you are mistaken. (male student, 10th grade, East Germany, quoted in Böhm et al., 1993: 69)

Moreover, rudimentary expressions of social stratification through consumption practices and purchasing power emerged even in an apparently classless society like East Germany. It was possible to buy different types of cars for different prices with young families and people with lower income purchasing cheaper brands such as Trabant and people with higher income buying more expensive cars such as Wartburg and Lada.

Furthermore, some people had the opportunity to 'organize' western products such as coffee, chocolate, cocoa, clothes, toys, records and print media through their relatives and friends in the West. This, in return, led inevitably to an (at least temporary) increase in social status, because those people became the subject of enhanced interest by friends and neighbours. Here, the author can recall numerous occasions in secondary school where classmates invited others to visit them to see the new Barbie or to play with Lego. Jeans and other typical western items were sought after and students equipped with such items were often either admired or envied.

Borneman (1992/1995: 143–4)<sup>4</sup> provides some interesting evidence here that illustrates how western consumption patterns influenced everyday life in the GDR and how the capacity to organize sought-after items served the acquisition of social status. He argues that retired people in the GDR were able to enhance their social status because they were allowed to travel to the West after 1964:

This immediately elevated the status of 'being retired' for two reasons: first, retired people were now responsible for maintaining contact between kin in East and West. Second, retired people were now able either to obtain information on, to purchase, or to transport Western status goods for their kin in the East. [. . .] Omas [*grandmothers*] in the eighties often obtained the desired new pair of jeans, jeans jacket, Sony Walkman, a Swiss-made Swatch, or pop-music records.

However, these occasional opportunities to purchase western products did not

suffice. Instead, waiting and queuing for scarce GDR consumer products, such as cars, spare parts for electrical devices, building materials, special types of fruit and vegetables, particular sweets, records or holiday accommodation formed an important part of everyday life in the GDR:

People had to wait for years for their next turn to go up to the Baltic Sea. (female student, 9th grade, East Germany, quoted in Böhm et al., 1993: 59)

As a result, the image of seemingly endless queues of people waiting for bananas outside shops and supermarkets became ingrained in East German people's memories, and coloured western images of GDR life. Even today, the mundane act of queuing to get into a concert may trigger humorous comments from East Germans such as 'Do they have bananas?' A possible explanation for these vivid memories may derive from the fact that queues free up time for social interaction. Moreover, a queue was an appropriate setting to discuss and criticize the economic conditions: 'a problem shared is a problem halved'.

As stated above, the scarcity of consumer products forced people to develop very particular organizational skills. Hence, a considerable amount of time – working time as well as leisure time – was spent on organizing essential products and necessary repairs and services. As a result, many informal transactions took place and an unofficial market developed, which was not exclusively based on monetary exchange. Instead, people also exchanged goods and labour time to 'purchase' scarce articles. Some people have even admitted petty crimes such as theft at work where building material was available (fieldnotes, 2000/2001). Moreover, people developed innovative and creative techniques to improve readily available products of poor quality, which were also passed on to other members of the family and neighbours. For example, it was often the case that proper Christmas trees were difficult to get. Instead, only weak and meagre-looking trees were made available for purchase in the GDR at a very low price. As a result, some people bought two trees and cut off the branches of one of them. They then drilled holes into the stem of the other tree to stick in the extra branches to make the tree look fuller (fieldnotes, December 2001).

### **Leisure Time**

- 1) Every citizen in the GDR has the right to leisure time and recreation.
- 2) The right to leisure time and recreation is guaranteed through the statutory restriction of daily and weekly working hours, fully paid annual holidays and the planned extension of the network of state-owned and other holiday and recreational centres. (Article 34 of the GDR Constitution, 1974)

In western countries, a close link between work and leisure time is created through the consumption of products ranging from food items to the provision

of leisure activities and the usage of services (Gershuny, 2000). Similarly, work and leisure time in the GDR appear to be inextricably intertwined but for reasons other than consumption. First, working time in the GDR was also filled with typical leisure activities. As stated above, 'hidden unemployment' and pressing economic problems may be held responsible for an extremely porous working day in many GDR organizations that allowed for frequent social interaction and leisure activities. Second, people in the GDR spent much leisure time in work-related settings. Close social contacts between work colleagues often extended into people's leisure time. For example, many East Germans spent their free time collectively in clubs and societies, such as *Kegelvereine* [bowling clubs]. In addition, larger GDR companies were often equipped with sport and leisure facilities such as football pitches, gymnasiums and bowling alleys. It was therefore very common for people to avail of these leisure facilities in close proximity to their work place. Third, politically relevant leisure activities such as mass sports became promoted in the workplace as well as in other work-related organizations, schools and colleges.

The work setting constituted the main locus of political control and surveillance. However, since work-related matters permeated people's private lives, governmental control also extended into people's leisure time:

There was to be no area of 'civil society', no 'public sphere' beyond the reach of state control: every aspect of life, work, and leisure in East Germany was to be under control, ultimately, of the communist state. (Fulbrook, 1995: 58)

Mass organizations, such as the trade union body FDGB (Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund), were founded to exercise effective control over people's leisure time. The FDGB, for example, owned holiday accommodation all over Eastern Europe and therefore had the opportunity to influence people's time off work, at least to some extent. To counteract the state surveillance, people may have tried to segregate private time from public time because the former seemed to offer invaluable 'free' time that could not as easily be controlled, invaded or restricted by the political system. Still, people appear to have underestimated the extent to which their private time was invaded by the state security system. For example, it was only after the collapse of the GDR and the establishment of the Gauck agency that people realized the full extent and nature of MfS (*Ministerium für Staatssicherheit*, state security agency) investigations which penetrated literally every aspect of people's private time (see for example, Gieseke, 2000).



### **Temporal Social Structures and the Institutionalization of Time**

Many East Germans lived with a sense of oppression and fear, although – perhaps even because – they did not know the extent of surveillance and interference in their lives. [. . .] [However] The climate of fear was the outer parameter of existence within the total Überwachungsstaat; it did not have to be a feature of everyday life. (Fulbrook, 1995: 55)

The extent to which people's time in the GDR was structured by ideological postulates and restricted by the political system deserves particular attention, because it shows the impact of large-scale social influences on time-related aspects of everyday life. Like many other aspects of day-to-day life in the GDR, East German people's time was always subject to societal constraints and repressive political regulations:

There was to be no area of society uncontrolled by the state, [. . .] the structures of domination, government, coercion, and control were to extend [. . .] into all areas of life which, under a less invasive, more pluralistic form of state might be deemed to belong to a 'private sphere'. [. . .] The regime was in part so stable for so long because of [. . .] this sending of roots and tentacles into every area of social life. (Fulbrook, 1995: 19–20)

People's life plans (Schütz and Luckmann, 1974; Hareven, 1982) as well as the timing of major private events, such as engagement and marriage, were influenced by political decisions and societal conditions in the GDR. For instance, there is evidence to suggest that many young couples may have married because reasonable living space was scarce and being married made it easier to have a flat allocated to them (Kopp and Diefenbach, 1994). According to Borneman (1992/1995), divorced men in the GDR remarried quickly and more frequently than men in West Germany because of housing constraints and state favouritism to single women with children and married couples in the competition for accommodation.

However, despite the oppression and control imposed on them by the political system in the GDR, people may have always tried to actively shape their life-courses and find their (temporal) niche in society. This may have initiated the emergence of a very particular approach to uncertainty and planning where people accepted and integrated the inevitable into their belief system and focused on the 'positive' aspects of such a 'temporal dictatorship', such as the orderliness of the working day. As a result, East German people struggled enormously to come to terms with the new temporal system imposed on them, a system which seemed to lack any comforting order and reliability:

[. . .] the rupture in the institutional life-course regime which followed unification was more marked than expected. Individual patterns of behaviour and assump-

tions about life did not keep up with the speed of change. (Leisering and Leibfried, 1995/1999: 222)

Naturally, the many facets of working time and their regulation are particularly relevant here. As in many other societies, work constituted a main pillar of everyday life in East Germany and working time was always subject to temporal restrictions, such as the implementation of extensive planning strategies. Here, detailed planning may have been perceived by some people as a positive strategy to reduce uncertainty, at least to some extent. Moreover, the right to work was incorporated in the constitution of the GDR. As a result, a secure job became an essential and unquestioned part of people's life plan which continues to exercise its strong influence: 'The model of a life course distinguished by uninterrupted employment is still retained as an ideal' (Leisering and Leibfried, 1995/1999: 209). This may be one of the reasons why East Germans found it so difficult to adapt to the western system where job security did not exist and which brought along mass redundancies and high unemployment figures. The following statement made by a East German student may be considered a prime instance of viewpoints that continue to penetrate East German public opinion:

Actually, I liked it much better back then. People enjoyed social security, they had no problems with skinheads etc. and they did not have to worry about the future. (female student, 9th grade, East Germany, quoted in Böhm et al., 1993: 57)

Naturally, one might expect people's response to growing uncertainty to vary considerably as a function of demographic features, such as age, gender and profession, or psychological variables, such as individual coping strategies developed in the past. For example, there is evidence to suggest that East German people's reaction to the sudden disintegration of familiar temporal structures depended strongly on their age group:

The changes in the conditions of life in East Germany are multifaceted, as are the criteria by which the citizens judge them. In particular, different generations perceive the opportunities now open to them in quite different ways. (Mayer, 1994, quoted in Leisering and Leibfried, 1995/1999: 210)

Some significant generational gaps and age-related differences became apparent, which are described in manifold ways in some of the student essays collected by Böhm et al. (1993). For example, many young people from the former GDR were expected to be better prepared than their parents to handle the newly gained (temporal) freedom, which is reflected in the following statement:

I feel the changes are quite good for us as pupils. Our parents, on the other hand, have had to come to terms with the system very rapidly. (female student, 9th grade, quoted in Böhm et al., 1993: 61)

Moreover, some young people may have appreciated new possibilities to actively define their identity and structure their life plan, such as through educational opportunities and professional choices, whereas these opportunities may have been much more restricted for their parents:

Because of the Unification, everything in my future is possible. Nowadays (in this state), it is entirely up to me to decide whether to go to college or not. In the past, people were selected specially. (female student, 11th grade, East Germany, quoted in Böhm et al., 1993: 112)

Still, even young people experienced considerable difficulties in dealing with the 'new temporal freedom' that inevitably led to the abolition of previously valued temporal frames. Here, expressed worries about the future may be considered an important response to rapidly changing temporal conditions and dissolving time structures:

I am glad that the unification happened but I did not want to be annexed. We had good things here and they still exist. Not everything was bad! I am worried about the future like many other people. (female student, 11th grade, Gymnasium, quoted in Böhm et al., 1993: 88)

During the last decade, the transition from a highly restricted societal time-frame to a 'free' and unrestricted temporal realm has been very difficult for many people in East Germany. However, there is the possibility that younger generations will eventually make use of the temporal freedom, flexibility and uncertainty to actively determine their own biography and to resist any form of restricting institutionalization of the life-course.

### **German Unification: Time and Conflict**

Unification happened much too fast. People did not have enough time to prepare for it, or to think about it, especially here in the new states. It all came too suddenly. (female student, 9th grade, East Germany, quoted in Böhm et al., 1993: 25)

The unification of the two Germanies, with their contrasting (time) cultures, has led to unprecedented complications and cultural conflict (see also Dümcke and Vilmar, 1996). Moreover, these complications seem to be characterized by a certain recursiveness, which could partially derive from the stability of some cultural traits. Klein (2001), for example, suggests that relatively stable communicative patterns, which are passed on from one generation to the next, may be held responsible for the persisting differences and conflicts between East and West Germans. Either way, these difficulties appear inevitable because the two Germanies, despite their geographical closeness, were radically culturally dis-

tant from each other. A frictionless (re-)unification of the two Germanies appears to have been impossible:

The speed and facility of this fusion seems to undermine my statement that the people in fact constitute two nations, not one. If this were the case, then why should unity have been perceived and presented initially as so natural and unproblematic? Built into this breakneck pace to political unity lies a riddle of a more profound character, for the unity consummated at the state level by a simple, swift annexation must now produce a cultural unification that will be anything but quick. Within six months of unity, the assumption that a uniform, undifferentiated policy could unify such differently made peoples proved bankrupt. (Borneman, 1992/1995: 315)

The process of German unification incorporates at least two temporal aspects worth discussing. First, as stated above, German unification may be described as the clash of two very different and unequal time cultures (see also Klein, 2001: 125ff.). Second, the unification process itself appears to be inextricably time-bound and exposed to strong temporal patterns and constraints. The following quotation illustrates the conflict potential deriving from the abrupt fusion of different temporal values and practices in East and West Germany as experienced by people travelling between the two Germanies prior to unification:

For GDR citizens of Generation I [those who reached adulthood before WWII] travel to the West often increased their general dissatisfaction, at least for the immediate period following their return. [. . .] They uniformly criticized the 'hectic' life in the West: its fast pace, the advertising, loud youths, and the overabundance of stimulating signs. Likewise, they often praised the slower pace and more predictable course of events in the East, as well as its friendlier atmosphere and general lack of pretentiousness. (Borneman, 1992/1995: 145)

Here, it may be questioned whether the person's short-term stay 'on the other side' [*drüben*] may have led to more 'touristic' and therefore more distorted or exaggerated impressions. However, German unification appears to have resembled on a national scale the experiences described above where East German time culture became dominated by western pacers. Some of the temporal changes involved were evaluated as positive:

In my opinion, the city has become much cleaner, more interesting and relaxing, and everything moves so fast suddenly and is cleaner than before. (male student, 9th grade, East Germany, quoted in Böhm et al., 1993: 16)

Yet others appeared to promote the development and manifestation of prejudicial and stereotypical reflections in East and West Germany respectively. Interestingly, some of the western opinions seem to contradict and overwrite

previously described notions of East German time culture characterized by a slower pace and people's patience and perseverance:

First and foremost, I can recall the rude behaviour of former GDR citizens who, as far as I can see it, just wanted to reach the prosperity levels of the FRG in one week or, even better, in just one day. Obviously, this was impossible and these slackers began to mutiny on the grounds that 'In the GDR, back then, everything was better'. (male student, 9th grade, West Germany, quoted in Böhm et al., 1993: 20)

Here, the fall of the Berlin Wall seems to have initiated an abrupt and unprecedented acceleration of East German time that reflects the idea of catching up with the West as quickly as possible. However, this accelerated tempo may be defined as a new quality of time altogether, which could not be synchronized with well-established patterns of western time either. As a result, many West Germans may have reacted to the haste and acceleration with resentment:

I don't think it's right for these people to be so impatient. They probably thought that six months after reunification East Germany would live on the fat of the land like West Germany. They don't realise you can't get over 40 years of drifting apart in such a short time. Our new citizens don't want to admit that this change will demand a lot of time and effort. (male student, 9th grade, Gymnasium, West Germany, quoted in Böhm et al., 1993: 28)

Additionally, an analysis of the pace of the unification process itself may provide invaluable information about dominant attitudes towards time in East and West Germany. Initial euphoria in 1990 about the pace at which German unification took place was soon replaced by a more realistic and partially pessimistic opinion:

One year is quite a long time. A lot of stuff has happened but, somehow, everything has happened too soon. Admittedly, things had to change a year ago. [. . .] It's true, you have to change sometimes. But did it have to be so fast? It came down on us like a thunderstorm. (female student, 10th grade, East Germany, quoted in Böhm et al., 1993: 90)

The German singer and author Wolf Biermann also acknowledges the necessity of adopting a long-term perspective on German unification because '*Vernarb ist die Ost-West-Wunde noch lange nicht*' [The East–West wound has not scarred over yet] (Biermann, 1993: 8). Even 10 years after German unification, people in East and West Germany may not have fully understood the ambivalence of the consequences and implications involved:

It seems as if neither East nor West Germans have realised that they have hit the jackpot without really deserving to. Maybe more time needs to go by before we can understand this rupture in history. (Bärbel Bohley, co-founder of the GDR grass-roots movement 'Neues Forum', *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 2–3 October 2000, p. 8)

It thus seems necessary and legitimate to pay particular attention to temporal factors of German reunification and their conflict potential. Accounts and narratives by people in East and West Germany often refer to temporal aspects that determined the political and economic reunification, such as the incomprehensible pace, or the scarcity of time:

I overall believe that reunification happened much too fast. There was no time for the two different ways of life and for the different social structures to converge. [...] Two economic and social systems just couldn't adapt to each other in such a short spell. It was irresponsible to expose the East Germans to a completely new system from one day to the next. (male student, 10th grade, East Germany, quoted in Böhm et al., 1993: 75)

Here, the speaker acknowledges the fact that a mutual approach [*'sich einander anzunähern'*] may require a particularly large amount of time. However, the initial scarcity of time during unification did not provide for any temporal leeway. Moreover, the exhilarating and incomprehensible pace at which unification took place did not give people the chance to comprehend and make sense of the changes involved:

On the 3rd of October, not everybody agreed with each other any more because many people, in particular the former GDR citizens, had doubts whether the whole thing was not happening a little bit too fast. (female student, 9th grade, Gymnasium, West Germany, quoted in Böhm et al., 1993: 54)

In particular, significant negative implications of German unification, such as the mass redundancies in East Germany, became attributed to an artificially created pace incompatible with natural processes, such as two peoples growing together:

Many people lost their jobs and this might not have happened if there had been more time to grow together. (male student, 10th grade, East Germany, quoted in Böhm et al., 1993: 73)

What is more, people may have had very different reasons for requesting more time. On the one hand, some people in East Germany may have been looking for a feasible 'third way' between (pseudo-)socialism and western capitalism which needs time to be developed. On the other hand, some people in East and West Germany may have been generally interested in German unification and the adoption of the western system but would have preferred a later point in time. The following quotation also reflects a public awareness of different layers of time that permeate German society. Here, the narrator distinguishes between economic time and cultural time and acknowledges possible differences in East–West synchronization between these layers:

I assume that these economic problems can be solved and sorted out, even if

experts don't expect that the standard of living in the new states will reach the one in the old states in the next few years. However, mutual 'getting to know each other' and the consciousness of being 'one people' will not come about automatically. I consider these cultural deficits – along with the economic difficulties – the biggest problem in German unification. (male student, 12th grade, West Germany, quoted in Böhm et al., 1993: 118)

The clash of East and West German (time) culture and the conflict potential embedded in German unification may be perceived as a serious obstacle to unity. Once again, the narrator is questioning here whether such a hurdle can be mastered in a short period of time:

The unification they wanted came about very rapidly on the outside but, in reality, there are extraordinarily blatant and potentially explosive discrepancies between East and West. (male student, 11th grade, Gymnasium, West Germany, quoted in Böhm et al., 1993: 108)

Finally, some witnesses of German unification may have developed serious doubts that the fusion of East and West German culture can be achieved at all:

All in all, it will take much longer before East and West Germany will be united, if an integration is at all possible. (female student, 9th grade, East Germany, quoted in Böhm et al., 1993: 62)

To summarize, empirical evidence seems to indicate that ordinary participants in everyday life in East and West Germany have been aware of cultural problems of German unification, in particular with regard to its temporal patterns and constraints. They also seem to have developed an understanding of the importance of time and its impact on German unification, at least to some extent. Moreover, these quotations illustrate the fact that time cultures and distinct layers of social time are conceptualized in contrasting and often incompatible ways in the two cultures. This may provoke us to ask whether the significance of time as an element of the cultural environment is more wholly acknowledged in daily life than conventionally supposed.

### Notes

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1. Any German material in this article has been translated by Dr Ricca Edmondson, Dr Barry Gleeson and Henrike Rau.
2. At this point, the reader will notice the parallels between these West German projections of East Germany and views that proclaim the 'pastness' or 'backwardness' of

particular types of society, or a particular profession. Traditional rural communities, for example, are often suspected of being stuck in the past (see Edmondson, 2000). The claim that East Germany was 'behind in time' imposes the very same argument on an entire country with nearly 17 million inhabitants while disregarding any regional, economic or social peculiarities. It thus seems necessary to point out the danger of oversimplification.

3. For example, the IFIP (International Federation of Information Processing) TC-2 (Technical Committee 2) working conference on programming and system design took place in Dresden in March 1983. Moreover, Maier (1997/1999) reports on economic visions of the GDR playing a leading role in the computer technology sector.
4. Borneman's work *Belonging in the Two Berlins: Kin, State, Nation* (1992/1995) provides invaluable insight into people's everyday life in both Berlins. However, East Berlin was always considered a privileged region compared to the rest of the GDR (see also Simon et al., 2000). This was due to two main factors: (1) its close proximity to the West and, as a result, its status as '[. . .] economic showplace of the European socialist world' (Borneman, 1992/1995: 20); and (2) the fact that the East German government resided in East Berlin which resulted in a more advanced infrastructure as well as a better provision of consumer goods. The author recalls one occasion in the late 1980s where a relative returned from East Berlin with a box of 100 (!) fresh marshmallows [*Negerküsse*] because they could not be bought anywhere else in the GDR. West Berlin, on the other hand, became the figurehead of western capitalism and wealth and as a result acquired an equally exceptional status.

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