

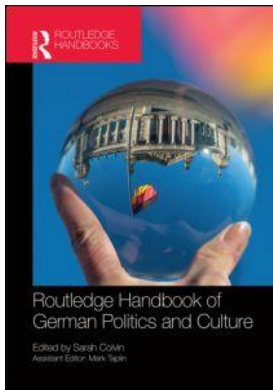
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Being East German in the Berlin Republic

*Laurence McFalls with Alexandra Hausstein*¹

‘Artikel 23 – Kein Anschluss unter dieser Nummer’ (Article 23 – no connection/annexation at this number). Back in 1990, with this telephonic play on words, left-leaning Germans, mostly from the East but also from the West, criticised the use of Article 23 of the Federal Republic’s Basic Law to expedite the incorporation of the newly formed Federal states or *Länder* on the territory of the defunct German Democratic Republic (GDR) into the Federal Republic. After all, Article 146, they rightly pointed out, foresaw reunification along with Germany’s return to fully sovereign status and prescribed the replacement of the provisional Basic Law with a permanent constitution to be adopted freely by the entire German people. Mainstream politicians, pundits, and professors in the West, aside from invoking the need for a quick unification process in light of the international context of instability (in the Soviet Union in particular), generally opined that the Basic Law had proven historically and uniquely successful in guaranteeing the Federal Republic a stable liberal democratic constitutional order and therefore did not require replacing. They assumed that the failure of the GDR due to its apparently obvious lack of popular legitimacy meant that the eastern German minority would not be bringing in any new or alternative expectations or ideas for an all-German constitutional order.

Even at the more informal level of political culture, western Germans did not expect easterners to contribute any democratic values, despite their experience as the authors of Germany’s only successful democratic revolution (and a peaceful one at that). If anything, it was assumed, they would require democratic re-education within the systematically transferred framework of the Federal Republic’s provisional constitutional order. While Jürgen Habermas labelled the collapse of communism a ‘nachholende [catch-up] Revolution’ (Habermas 1990), the well-known political scientist Kurt Sontheimer (1990: 87) wrote that East German political culture would not be a factor ‘that could independently influence the political culture of the Federal Republic’; instead, the revolution had ‘left behind a political and intellectual vacuum that [would] now be progressively filled from the West’. Such self-satisfied western arguments resurfaced the following year during the so-called capital city debate (*Hauptstadtdebatte*) in the Bundestag, which led to a narrow vote in favour of moving unified Germany’s seat of government from Bonn to Berlin. The proponents of Bonn invoked the if-it-ain’t-broke-don’t-fix-it argument, claiming that Bonn’s quiet provincialism had played a key role in fostering the Federal Republic’s pacific, Atlanticist, pro-European democratic culture, whereas Berlin backers argued that precisely because the

democratic credentials of the Bonn Republic were so well grounded, something as cosmetic as a move to Berlin could not shake them. Berlin would be neither Weimar nor even Bonn plus Pankow: Berlin would be Bonn – with a bit of harmless historical memory and metropolitan flair thrown in.

Few Germans now remember Article 146 and its promise of a democratic constitution for a sovereign reunited Germany, but most intuitively recognise or speak of the Berlin Republic as something qualitatively different from the old Bonn Republic. Institutionally very little has changed. By the late 1990s, the institutional logic of the old Federal Republic had made politicians and voters in the new Länder behave much like those in the west, even if the relative success of successor parties to the communist SED (Socialist Unity Party) in their various manifestations has left some local colour (Yoder 1999; Davidson-Schmich 2006; and see Chapter 7). At the level of political culture, however, Germany qua the Berlin Republic has changed dramatically – at least if we understand political culture in the broad anthropological sense (as opposed to the narrower one of opinion pollsters, who tell us that democratic attitudes and values remain well implanted, generally stable, and broadly similar between east and west; see Petersen 2011). In this chapter, I shall examine the politically relevant cultural transformations in the Berlin Republic through: (a) a review of ethnographic and other social scientific studies of German (political) culture, with particular reference to the eastern context and to the questions of cultural rapprochement and rupture; (b) my own observations as a North American political scientist who has followed some 200 ordinary eastern Germans' adaptations to their new polity and society since 1990; and (c) a theoretical reflection on the new forms of subjectivity and power within Germany, forms that suggest that eastern Germans after the great experiment of unification may stand at the vanguard of the contemporary neoliberal order. I shall argue that, despite political and institutional continuities with the old Federal Republic, the Berlin Republic has brought a radical social and cultural break not only in the life histories of East Germans but for Germany and Europe as a whole.

The ethnography and social science of unification

In the early 1990s, when culture clashes between 'Ossis' and 'Wessis' (as former East and former West Germans now called each other) cast doubt not only on whether, in Willy Brandt's words, 'what belonged together was growing together' ('was zusammengehört, wächst zusammen'; Garton Ash 2001) but on whether the 'two Germanies' even belonged together, an American political scientist proposed considering East Germans an ethnic minority in reunited Germany (Howard 1995). At the Berlin conference where he defended his thesis, few of even the most embittered East Germans and none of the West Germans present were willing to entertain the idea. Some 15 years later, in April 2010, a Stuttgart labour court ruled that East Germans did not constitute an ethnic group within German society. The decision put an end to the claim of an East German accountant who had sued a West German company, which had chosen not to hire her on the grounds that she was an 'Ossi' (the company had neglected to erase a remark to this effect in the papers sent back to the unsuccessful candidate). If the court had considered East Germans an ethnic group, the plaintiff's claim might have been successful, as the case could have been judged as a violation of the General Equal Treatment Act (*Allgemeines Gleichbehandlungsgesetz* or AGG). In the media stir that followed, several anthropologists were asked for a statement and, of course, they disagreed on the case. Yet that they, like the court, took the case seriously indicates that the question is still open: do the East Germans have a particular collective identity/ethnicity that distinguishes them from the West Germans? No, said anthropologist Wolfgang Kaschuba (Prase 2010), 50 years of common experiences as citizens

of the German Democratic Republic were not sufficient to create an ethnic identity. Yes, said anthropologist Thomas Bierschenk (2010), the East Germans have developed their own cultural particularities that distinguish them from West Germans.² Twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the accession of the former GDR to the Federal Republic of Germany, these issues obviously still mattered and raised the question whether the gap between East and West had closed in favour of a common German cultural identity.

Much has been written on the processes of not only the political, but also the social, cultural, and mental transformation of the new Federal states (*neue Länder*) in the wake of reunification. My own research on these processes has included an ongoing panel study that began in 1990 with biographical interviews of 202 randomly selected 'ordinary' eastern Germans. Despite significant attrition over the decades since, the continuity of my sample has allowed me to track the dynamics of cultural change. Before presenting some of my findings, however, I would like to provide a non-exhaustive overview of the state of research on culture and identity in eastern Germany since unification. The Federal Ministry of the Interior (Bundesministerium des Innern), for example, publishes an annual analysis of the advances and the status of German unification. In 2009 the Federal Ministry of Transport, Building, and Urban Development (Bundesministerium für Verkehr, Bau und Stadtentwicklung) launched a study of the perception and interpretation of German unification, basing its conclusions on studies in social sciences, politics, media, surveys, polls, and a cyberconference with 230 participants (Innovationsverbund Ostdeutschlandforschung 2009). Beyond such governmental evaluations, several joint research projects (such as the collaborative research centre SFB 580 at the universities of Jena and Halle) have studied the transformation processes in the eastern German Länder.³ Media reports on surveys by the Emnid and Allensbach polling firms regularly stir up dust (e.g. the recent Emnid survey on behalf of the Federal Government that showed that most East Germans have a positive image of the GDR). The Innovationsverbund Ostdeutschlandforschung founded in 2005 (Innovation Network East Germany Research; www.ostdeutschlandforschung.net; Busch and Land 2006) provides a platform for young researchers with an interest in East German issues. Among the publications in sociology, psychology (Silbereisen *et al.* 2006), communication studies, economics, political sciences, history, and anthropology, qualitative and quantitative studies or second-hand analyses of empirical research abound.⁴

Ethnographic studies that inquire into the perceptions and representations of the transformation process in the life world of East German society remain scarce. Some autobiographical accounts from mostly East German writers provide – rather subjective – insight (Bisky 2005; Franck 2009; Maron 2010; Rusch 2009; Wolf 2010). Most autobiographical writings describe experiences in the former GDR, but stop short of discussing what it means to be East German in unified Germany (Bisky 2004; Hensel 2004; Rusch 2003). Only slowly have autobiographical writings on East German life in the 1990s appeared on the book market (Hacker *et al.* 2012; Hünninger 2011; Ide 2007; networking initiative www.dritte-generation-ost.de). Several writers and researchers have written political essays but without systematic empirical evidence or a clear research methodology (Ahbe 2005; Engler 1999; Engler 2002; Kollmorgen 2005; Wagner 2006). Some non-scientific, satirical reports of the experiences of West Germans in East Germany can be a fun read but again do not live up to scholarly standards (von Uslar 2010; Sonneborn and Coerper 2010);⁵ and some accounts of the professional experiences of West Germans in East Germany read as if an international organisation had sent the authors to some wildly exotic country (Endlich 1999; Wolff 2012). Ethnographic studies were conducted early on until the late 1990s (Bittner 1998; Müller 2002), some by foreign researchers. Among the most interesting is the study of a Thuringian village in the restricted western border zone undertaken by Daphne Berdahl in the early and late 1990s (Berdahl 1999a). Despite the particularities of her case and

her informants' retrospective accounts of the past, Berdahl's classic ethnography teases out the textures and ambivalences of daily life under authoritarian rule and during the often traumatic transformations of unification.

In addition to ethnographies, a vast social scientific literature on the transformation process in the new Länder offers analyses not only of the probabilities and improbabilities of unification in the social and cultural sphere, but also of the impact of social transformations on the psychosocial sphere (identity ruptures and their mending, the emergence of nostalgia or 'Ostalgie' and of distrust, fear); of the devaluation of old and the development of new competencies, skills, and coping strategies; of social innovations; of the formation of a collective memory, or of the culture of remembering and commemorating the GDR; and last but not least of public and private representations and stereotypes of East German reality in media discourses, political discourses, and private conversations.

This chapter cannot even begin to offer a systematic review of the research on East German social change under the Berlin Republic (nor can it consider the more subtle, almost imperceptible but nonetheless real changes that affected West German society). The research points to a social landscape in the East that has been changing so rapidly and with such drastic shifts, alterations, and displacements that in some regions East Germans must be seen as struggling to survive in the midst of abiding uncertainty. A 'failed state' had bestowed devalued social and cultural capital on its former citizens, and unification demanded a quick adaptation in learning new skills, competencies, tastes, and behaviour for a desired upward social mobility; but East Germans in most cases do not show failed individual biographies, nor could the East German population as a whole be considered a failure in the new system. On the contrary, 20 years after the accession of the GDR to the Federal Republic, eastern Germans enjoy a comparably high living standard and share similar values, tastes, and behaviours with western Germans. Still, there is a culture of remembering the GDR, as positive perceptions of the GDR and identifications as East Germans prevail: self-labelling as East Germans (*Ostdeutsche*) has replaced the 'former citizens of the GDR' (*ehemalige DDR-Bürger*) that was common through the 1990s. In this chapter I therefore use the designation East German to describe citizens of the Berlin Republic who were once citizens of the GDR.

This persistent mode of remembering the past is even more striking now that East Germans seem to have arrived fully in the post-Fordist, post-industrialist consumer culture of late capitalism.⁶ The culture of the GDR lives on in the collective memory of eastern Germans as a counterculture to the present, as a culture of an idealised past, as a memory play, but it does not materialise in the present. GDR material culture ceased to exist in the early 1990s, when former East German production finally petered out and East German products were no longer available in the supermarkets and shops. Only a few brands continue to exist and almost exclusively East Germans consume these. Some engage in practices of re-enactment of an imagined GDR past using fragments of East German culture – consumer goods, clothes, music – to perform, publicly or privately, acts of mourning, shame, or pride (Hodgin and Pearce 2012; Rechtién and Tate 2011; Neller 2006; Clarke and Wölfel 2011; Saunders and Pinfold 2012).

East German material culture as an expression of identity constitutes a special case in contemporary capitalism, not only because of its pre-history from 1945 to 1990 but also because of the unique way it has been exposed to transformative social processes in the last 20 years. Those have taken place at much higher speed than elsewhere in Western Europe or in the post-communist East. During the last 20 years, East Germans were first exposed to a post-socialist transformation, and then (while still in the midst of radical restructuring) were hit by the next wave of social transformation. Deindustrialisation and the rise of service industries, unemployment, labour migration, the demographic challenges of an ageing society, and recurrent financial

crises followed quickly upon reunification. Whereas the post-socialist transformation was limited to the eastern part of Germany, the transition from an industrialist, Fordist economy to a post-industrialist, post-Fordist economy concerns the whole Western world. In the West German Länder this process has been evolving since the late 1970s, but the East German Länder experienced the change much more immediately and with hardly any preparation, falling from the promised heavens of 'soziale Marktwirtschaft' (social market economy) and 'blühende Landschaften' (blooming landscapes) into the purgatory of neoliberal political economy. These two transitional processes brought about not only political and economic change, but upheaval and a marked diversification of East German society due to different experiences of the unification process (according to gender, generation, and region) and the development of different coping strategies as well as different levels of adaptation to the new system.

As decades of individual life arrangements became devalued after the Berlin Wall fell, biographical scripts were revised in response to the demands of a life in the shadow of growing uncertainty. In these scripts, labour and consumption play a significant role. Even though they can be considered essential values of high modernity, they were of importance in the GDR, too, and continue to be in late modern unified Germany. The destruction of its industry and the abolition of jobs and related social networks hit East Germany especially hard, not only because a 'right to work' had been inscribed in the GDR constitution, but also because professional life in the GDR had been the most important source of collective identity and interests, and quintessential to the notion of equality. In a society with almost zero official unemployment, to be actually unemployed, or rather not to work, was considered a sign of complete personal failure or social self-exclusion. To receive social welfare today is not a personal failure, since in some regions up to half of the population depends on welfare benefits. Ethnographic studies show that being a recipient of the welfare payments now called 'Hartz IV' and being unemployed does not mean that people do not work. Incidental earnings through illicit employment and multiple jobs are increasing. As the welfare state itself transforms, increasing labour migration, precarious living conditions, changing jobs, and phases of unemployment become the normal lot for substantial parts of the middle class, too. The research project *ÜberLeben* (Bude 2011a) as well as observations in Brandenburg by the journalist/author Moritz von Uslar (2010) confirm the importance of these transformations. While these transformations affect Germany as a whole, they are especially pertinent for peripheral towns and villages in East Germany. There, they require individuals to develop new attitudes and behaviours relative to their health and bodies, to their physical environment, to their social networks, to time management, and to communicative skills both as coping strategies and as markers for a proactive attitude towards life under conditions of constant uncertainty (Bude and Lantermann 2010). Von Uslar vividly describes the polished, even overblown appearances of Brandenburg's small-town citizens: the metrosexual men, the stylish 'Proll-Fighter' (proletarian fighters), their tidy cars and apartments, their socialising in pubs, boxing clubs, in front of the dairy bar, their hyperactive manner of speech ('Top-Speed-Labern'). East Germans on Hartz IV welfare support receive it only temporarily, therefore they do not see themselves as typical welfare recipients: 'Somehow we manage to get our money. We are Osis, you see, we are smart at making money' ('Unser Geld kriegen wir immer irgendwie ran. Wir sind Osis, verstehst du, wir sind tüchtig mit Geldmachen'; Von Uslar 2010: 107). And they reject the label of the lamenting East German stereotypical to some in the West: 'Whining? Not us' ('Jammern ist mit uns nicht'; von Uslar 2010: 108).

Under post-industrial conditions, consumption and the ability to consume replaces the world of work in building community, enabling socialising, and mastering social and communicative networks. Consumption and the acquisition of status markers in the form of material goods

were important in East Germany, despite or precisely because of its economy of scarcity. What changed after unification was not the need for strategies for handling scarcity then and precarity now, but the consumer skill set. Previously that involved using social networks – within the GDR or beyond its borders to the West – to procure whatever the market did not offer; today those skills include finding deals, comparing prices, and making consumer decisions in the face of an overwhelming diversity of goods and insufficient monetary means to procure them. The challenge today is to develop a taste and to consume coherently according to one's self-positioning in a certain milieu. The researchers on the project *ÜberLeben* describe how discount markets, among the very first flowers of the 'blooming landscapes' of the new Länder, became the local crossroads for communication for a population that quickly made consumption part of its daily agenda and for which consumption evolved into a strategy of social integration where unemployment had caused disintegration. In such circumstances, even being a 'Nazi' can be a matter of style rather than a political attitude (Bude 2011a). The mode of consumption occupies not only the social sphere of networks and communication, but reaches into the private sphere of sex (consumed over the internet), especially in regions where young women emigrated and left behind an overpopulation of unemployed, angry young men. The degree of integration into the labour market and the different ability to consume differentiates eastern German society along the lines of age, gender, generation, and region.

Experiencing the twofold process of internal post-socialist and global post-Fordist transformations, East Germany was and still is the 'Lab East Germany': a site of experimentation and avant-garde for social innovation (Martens 2010; Engler 2002). Some innovations, especially in urban planning, stand out positively, such as Leinefelde, a restructured cityscape where socialist concrete high-rise buildings were transformed into an ultramodern architecture (Kil 2008). Under late capitalism, eastern Germans seem to have taken on the role of the avant-garde quite easily, even though West Germany's Christian Democratic Party (CDU) won the first free elections in the GDR with a recycled slogan from the 1950s: 'Keine Experimente' (no experiments). Social innovations, however, are taking place under present conditions of deindustrialisation, decline of the welfare state, capital flight, and a shortage of public funds, particularly under the most recent policies of austerity. The term 'avant-garde' should therefore be read as a euphemism for new coping strategies in the face of declining and shrinking opportunities that sooner or later will affect the West, too (Hein 2004). The difficulties and the many failures of the transformation process in East Germany must certainly be viewed in the context of considerable challenges for the Western industrialist nations as a whole.

Contrary to the literature published in the 1990s and 2000s that discussed the losses and costs of German unification for the eastern German Länder (especially perpetual inequality between East and West regarding economic power, level of prosperity, allowances and benefits, environmental issues, emigration, unemployment, demographic decline, and shrinking cities), recent social science literature looks at the signs of upward mobility, the return of East German migrant labourers to their home towns, successful coping strategies that build on transfers, and social innovations in times of uncertainty and scarcity. Innovations are evident in the fields of cultural policy, recultivation of landscapes, energy policies, urban planning, and restructuring (Bauer-Volke and Dietzsch 2003).

The example of East German transformation, both post-socialist and post-Fordist, is unique as it evolves within a discourse on 'being East German' and refers to a collective identity of East Germans. As sociologist Heinz Bude (2011a) argues on the basis of his field work in Wittenberge, East Germany does not exist any longer, but being East German is still an emotional and political reality. It is a reality that is constructed with reference and in contradistinction to the West Germans. Moritz von Uslar (2010) experienced this when, in what was supposed to

be a friendly sparring match, his East German opponent beat him black and blue and in the end called him a ‘western pig’ (‘Westsau’). This sense of belonging, though based on a common heritage, expresses itself variously. Bude analyses different strategies of distorting or confirming East German identity: total distortion or making oneself unrecognisable (as modelled by Angela Merkel); dosed distortion (television presenter Maybritt Illner); and open, deliberate provocation (the writer Heiner Müller). Paradoxically, even concealing an eastern identity, as opposed to playing it up strategically or provocatively, reaffirms that identity: Merkel’s neutral blandness inevitably prompts reminders of her eastern origins (Bude 2011b). Speaking about a collective identity as East Germans therefore does not necessarily refer to social homogeneity or to a common East German subculture. Rather, as the transition process has come to an end, multiple ways of remembering the GDR and of coping differently with a new system have emerged.

It is precisely the invocation of an East German ‘we’ that caused anger, especially among East Germans, when Jana Hensel’s book *After the Wall (Zonenkinder)* was published and catapulted to the top of the German bestseller list in 2002. Her literary account of life in the GDR was accused of being an uncritical narrative of the triviality of daily life in the GDR, which ignored that the GDR was an *Unrechtsstaat*: a state without rule of law. Reactions to movies like the telenovelas *Weissensee* and *Deckname Luna* (codename Luna) and to the film version of Uwe Tellkamp’s novel *Der Turm (The Tower)* (Tellkamp 2008) caused similarly strong and diverse reactions: some East Germans applauded these representations, some consumed them as stories of their distant past, some criticised them, and others refused to watch them at all on the grounds that they were just more stories about the GDR written by West German scriptwriters and performed with West German actors. The pan-German mediatisation of the East German past and the fall of the Berlin Wall, largely controlled by West German authors, editors, or film industries, can be blamed for obstructing a public, diverse culture of remembrance particular to the East Germans, and is also making it harder to tackle the challenges of East Germans’ post-unification experiences from a social anthropological perspective. According to Jana Hensel, the East has become ‘foreign matter,’ an exoticised subject in unified Germany, without its own public voice, judged and described by West German standards and categories, and by the West German media. The East German is thus characterised by voicelessness and invisibility (Hensel 2010). East Germans who have made a successful transition into the new system tend to deny their origins, migrants to the West⁷ to remain silent about their provenance and overperform their adaptation by distorting their East German identities.

There is no literary or documentary account of the experiences of East Germans in the unified Germany. Those experiences are unique to East Germany, and the impossibility of authentically portraying and representing them in the context of an enforced West German view on things (‘aufgezwungener fremder Blick’) causes a certain kind of melancholia among East Germans, often dismissed as kitschy nostalgia (Hensel 2009a). That many have successfully survived the breakdown of the state and compensated the loss of status and deficiencies or differences in education, institutional knowledge, competencies, and habitus does not mean that there is not also a culture of evoking the East German past that involves pessimism, resignation, depoliticisation, and a general critique of capitalism.

A small dose of nostalgia and counter-discourse⁸ regarding the hegemonic representations of the East German past is tolerated in reunified Germany, if not encouraged. On occasions like anniversaries (of German unification, for example), publications swamp the book market. They include literature of remembrance (Franck 2009), but hardly any political essays that present a specific East German identity as a central theme (Hensel 2009b; Maron 2010). These books and their topics no longer cause controversies. They reflect a political atmosphere of constructive debate in the Western political system with its culture of consumption and labour relations. In

the eastern Länder there is no latent desire to challenge the *status quo* of democratic liberal capitalism from a socialist perspective. The real counterculture that severely challenges the system was and still is the politics and culture of the far right. In the context of high rates of unemployment, of limited career prospects, and of unstable identity due to the rapid succession of social transformations, radical right-wing gangs have carved out no-go areas: so-called zones of fear (*Angstzonen*) and lawless spaces (*rechtsfreie Räume*). Since the beginning of the 2000s, however, these zones have grown rarer.⁹ Thus in 2006, in preparation for the soccer world cup in Berlin, the publication of a map indicating these areas was considered but then dropped as no longer really necessary. Still, the lure of the radical remains attractive in the East, if only as a provocation.

Being East German does not only mean a commonality in experiences of the GDR as political and social system, but in current discourses refers to a common tacit knowledge concerning East German material and immaterial culture, language, humour, and symbolic systems. Social change in eastern Germany has not led to more homogeneity in common experiences of the present and common evaluations of the past. On the contrary, it has caused a fragmentation and differentiation of East German society along the lines of generations, classes, regional origins, and gender. The activation of a sense of belonging as East German and the phenomenon of ‘ostalgia’ (*Ostalgie*) appears in different social settings, fulfils different social functions, and is related to different emotions and sentiments – mourning, withdrawal, justification for failure, and longing for an imagined past, but also pride, avantgardism, and ironically evoking the past as a celebration of faded youth culture (Ahbe 2005).

Thus remembering the GDR can take the form of consumption (buying East German consumer goods for different reasons), ironic play, or persistence in valuing the personal past against a West German hegemonic discourse of representing and remembering the GDR. It is a strategy of inclusion and integration by refusing to totally devalue one’s own biography or to present oneself as a failed person who cannot offer anything valuable to the present society. ‘Es war nicht alles schlecht’ (not everything was bad) is the key expression of this sentiment. It can be used on a sliding scale between irony and seriousness, but only an East German is allowed to use it. The East German past is enacted by using elements of material culture (goods, food, clothes), and *Ostalgie* carries a certain pride in consumer goods as the product of the work of one’s own hands in recollection of times when the workplace was the central site for social life (Berdahl 1999b). With the passage of time, though, the revival and reproduction of consumer goods as material culture and part of East German identity becomes less and less significant. *Ostalgie* refers primarily not to an idealisation of innovative life practices in times of scarcity but rather to an idealisation of a form of *Vergemeinschaftung* (communalisation) in contradistinction to West German society, where individualisation is the dominant strategy of resistance to totalising *Vergesellschaftung* (societalisation).

Even though detailed evaluations of the GDR may differ, the overall perception of the GDR among East Germans remains positive, even 20 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Several empirical studies come to this conclusion, for example the longitudinal study of Saxony from 1987 to 2007 (Berth *et al.* 2009),¹⁰ the Emnid survey of 2009 (Petersen 2011),¹¹ and the Allensbach survey of 2009 (*Die Zeit* 2009).¹² The positive image of the GDR is not limited to social welfare, education, and medical care, but refers first and foremost to aspects of social life like social cohesion, solidarity, and cooperation, even among young East Germans who do not have concrete experiences or memory of the GDR. Cultural standards, communication patterns, and role models continue to exist despite colossal social changes. And the debate about whether the GDR was a state not based on the rule of law (*Unrechtsstaat*) shows that perceptions differ according to personal experiences with the system. Most young eastern Germans express uncertainty about

the dictatorial nature of the GDR, probably out of loyalty towards their parents and their parents' remembrance of the past. Because the state was such a strong part of the parents' identity, it is difficult for them and for their children to distinguish their personal or family history from their collective past as citizens of the GDR, so that East Germans feel compelled not to condemn the GDR past as easily as their western compatriots do. Nevertheless, the surveys mentioned indicate that unification itself and the fall of the Berlin Wall are perceived as positive events in both east and west despite enduring differences in mentality, language, and religious attitudes (Petersen 2010). The Germans thus seem to be able to live with their differences, or at least do not want to put them on the agenda any more.

(Auto)biographical testimonies

My own research into life in the Berlin Republic's east as a North American who has followed the life stories of some 200 East Germans since 1990 largely concurs with the general cultural and social scientific findings sketched out so far. Indeed, it informed the preceding summary and in some ways contributed to those scientific discussions and debates. The results of my oral history project (McFalls 1995, 1999a, 1999b, 2001, 2002a, 2002b) caused some surprise in the late 1990s when I argued that the cultural unification process was already complete. Contrary to the then-dominant social scientific view that the long-lasting effects of socialisation in the GDR meant that cultural unification would take generations, I contended, on the basis of a third round of interviews with my random sample of ordinary East Germans, that they had undergone a radical metamorphosis of the most fundamental anthropological categories of their life world. Their understanding of and attitudes to their own bodies, to their fellow humans, to time, and to space, all of which categories had shaped their experiences in a manner consistent with 'real existing' socialism, had become coherent with the exigencies of life in a late capitalist consumer society. I argued, moreover, that this rapprochement with the norms and attitudes of West Germans had gone largely unnoticed precisely because the mechanism of change had lain in the cultural clashes of the 1990s that had suggested irreconcilable differences between 'Ossis' and 'Wessis'. This symbolic sparring, which I theorised in Gramscian terms as the dialogic moment of hegemonic subordination, had incited East Germans to surpass the westerners in their performance of norms they ostensibly attacked, be they of body image, labour flexibility, conspicuous consumption, or mobility.

To be sure, cultural differences between east and west persisted well into the 2000s and persist up to the present. As the social scientific literature I have summarised indicates, however, the dramatic upheavals and differentiation in East German society over the past generation make it difficult to speak of a common East German culture, except in the realm of collective memory of an increasingly fictionalised GDR past and its intergenerational transmission – in positive terms to children born in the now-not-so-new Länder and in negative terms, if at all, to children born into otherwise entirely similar lifestyles in the 'old' Länder. As I found in a new round of interviews with some of my East German subjects in 2012, the retreat of marked cultural differences into the realm of memory – individual and collective – does not reduce it to 'mere' folklore. Collective memory and officially commemorated public memory carry high political stakes not only because hegemonic representations of the past have (dis)enfranchising effects in struggles over collective goods but because memory itself has become big business, particularly in places like Berlin, Leipzig, or Dresden.

In a dozen interviews conducted in 2012, I found my interlocutors simultaneously ready to withdraw into private thoughts and to fall into public stereotypes. That is, inasmuch as they still cherish past values, they have given up on defending them publicly, or, alternatively, they

do not hesitate to resort to stereotypes propagated in the media. A woman from a small town near Jena, who in 1991 had told me how her disgust with public deceit had motivated her to take an active role in the citizen movements of 1989 and during the transition years in unified Germany, now felt just as angry with public hypocrisy but no longer wished to seek justice for past or present wrongs, saying, ‘Each of us must make peace with ourselves’ (‘Jeder muss alleine seinen eigenen Weg finden’). When I showed her the video clips excerpted from a previous interview with her that, like those of 60 of my other research subjects, had been built into a museum exhibit on GDR history, she found the clips reductionist but said that she would not want to bring too much nuance into the public discourse. Another interviewee whom I accompanied to the museum exhibit so that she could see how her own testimonials had been incorporated was quick to concur with the master narrative of oppression and resistance that the exhibit necessarily entailed. What is more, she fell into familiar tropes that the narrative structure of the exhibit suggested, repeating stories that seemed to respond to expectations of what the GDR had been like. Certain visual artefacts, however, spurred memories that strayed from the beaten path of common post-unification discourses. This experience of finding my interview partners unwilling or unable to articulate private memories beyond public memory within the narrative framework of both the biographical interview and the public commemoration encouraged me to develop new research methods drawing on visual and other sensory cues in order to investigate the subjective place of the past in present East German culture.

From past imperfect to future conditional

East Germans may not constitute an ethnic minority within unified Germany. They may not even constitute a distinct community of memory, for in a sense the memory of the GDR, just like that of Nazi Germany, lies at the heart of the entire Berlin Republic, east and west. The city-state of Berlin, the Federal capital, resembles almost immediately for any visitor a *lieux de mémoire* theme park. Visitors cannot escape the past, rather they wallow in it, as they putt-putt around the Holocaust Memorial in a stinking vintage ‘Trabi’, contemplate the photo exhibit on the Reichstag fire inside Norman Foster’s transparent dome, sing karaoke in the former Norman’s-land of Mauerpark, or run to admire the East Side Gallery before foreign investors build luxury condominiums in the former death strip to cater to the macabre-chic tastes of global elites seeking a pied-à-terre in Europe’s unofficial capital. In Berlin, the slippery slope running from historicisation to memorialisation to commercialisation and on to trivialisation is particularly steep, lending salience to Perry Anderson’s (2004) critique of Pierre Nora’s (1984) concept of the *lieu de mémoire*. Whereas Nora himself recognised the danger that memorialisation could crowd out actual active memory, Anderson denounced historians’ recent preoccupation with social practices and concrete places of memory not only as faddish and uncritical but as a specifically neoliberal ploy to turn history into a consumer good and to fabricate consensuses that evacuate politics from history and history from politics.

Indeed, it is possible to read Berlin qua *lieu de mémoire* as a metonymy for the Berlin Republic’s retreat from history; that is, as a depoliticising neoliberal strategy for disarming criticism of the market-driven present and for foreclosing alternatives. Just as Berlin has transformed its horrific history into a highly marketable present, so too has the Berlin Republic succeeded in neutralising Germany’s imperfect past and turning the country into Europe’s conditional future. This premise no doubt appears paradoxical in light of postwar Germany’s reputation as an international role model for confronting if not mastering an ‘unmasterable past’ (Maier 1998). Following Michel Foucault’s remarkable analysis of the postwar German political economy (Foucault 2004), however, I contend that the Berlin Republic has completed and perfected the Bonn Republic’s

neoliberal break with the past, not only making German conditionality into Europe's new governmentality but concomitantly introducing new forms of subjectivity for which East Germans have served as the experimental vanguard.

In 1979 Foucault devoted more than four weeks of his annual lecture course at the Collège de France, published as *Naissance de la biopolitique* (Foucault 2004), to a critical analysis of German ordoliberalism and its policy translation into the postwar Federal Republic's *soziale Marktwirtschaft*. Foucault's rare scholarly incursion into contemporary political economy was motivated both by his genealogical interest in liberal theory's 'statophobia' (fear of state authority) and by France's initial reorientation, in the context of the economic crisis of the 1970s, of its traditionally statist, or *dirigiste*, economic policy towards the alternative model of its largest trade partner, West Germany. I cannot go into greater detail here (compare McFalls and Pandolfi 2014), but suffice to say that Foucault's analysis of the West German *Wirtschaftswunder* offers original insights into 'miracle-worker' Ludwig Erhard's 1948 currency reform and subsequent implementation of a 'social market economy' roughly in line with interwar ordoliberal economic theory. Foucault summarises his assessment: 'Germany's real miracle is to have made the jurisdiction of the state derive from the veridiction of the market' (Foucault 2004: 96). That is, Foucault goes beyond the usual claims that the Federal Republic's political legitimacy depended on its economic performance, or that the economic miracle coupled with the myth of *Stunde Null* (hour zero: the idea that the destruction of war gave Germany a fresh start) absolved West Germany of war guilt. He affirms instead that the Nazi state's absolute discrediting of a juridical/legal/constitutional foundation of political authority necessitated the introduction of a new form of political reason (or 'governmentality') in historical rupture with previous German states and based exclusively on the empirical truth regime of the market. Thus, the 'social market economy' does not refer to a political tempering of market effects on social relations, or to their decommodification, but rather to a complete subordination of social relations to the perpetuation of a competitive free market. The Bonn Republic thus became the first truly neoliberal state in the sense that neoliberal governmentality does not dismantle the state to let markets spontaneously thrive but uses and legitimises a new state authority, without regard for historical or cultural continuities, to mould social relations and individuals into competitive market forces.

In a brief comment on the GDR in one of his 1979 lectures, Foucault offers insight into the political logic of postwar East Germany when he remarks that state socialism cannot survive for long because it lacks its own form of governmental reason and must revert either to authoritarian reason of state or collapse under the weight of market veridiction (Foucault 2004). Foucault's unprepared lecture comments prove even more prescient when he notes that debates on socialism revolve around its authenticity, or truth to founding principles or doctrinal texts, whereas liberalism is judged not by its inherent truth but by its efficacy in conformity with the independent, empirical truth of the marketplace. Foucault's observations implicitly foresee the form that the collapse of state socialism took in the GDR in particular. Whereas the critical dissident movement, whether on the margins of the party or in the citizens' movements (*Bürgerbewegungen*), decried the regime's betrayal of socialist principles, the bulk of the population ultimately succumbed to the logic of the market. To be sure, the substantive causes of the mass mobilisations that brought down the GDR were multiple, complex, and not primarily material (McFalls 1995). Still, the form that the popular revolution took was neoliberal in the sense that the movement lacked ideological leadership as well as content, and its targets and goals were largely impersonal and institutional as East Germans primarily sought freedom of movement and access to convertible hard currency – 'if the D-Mark does not come to us, we'll go to it (kommt die D-Mark nicht zu uns, gehen wir zu ihr)'. The key slogan of 1989 – 'Wir sind das Volk' (we are the people) – was a perfect empty signifier, revolutionary form without

content, a mechanism for social exchange where each can find her or his own, as in the marketplace.

Born of the Bonn Republic and the unidealistic revolution in the GDR, the Berlin Republic has brought German neoliberalism to full fruition, and not just in Foucauldian theory. The empirical post-unification life experiences of ordinary East Germans suggest that they are indeed in the vanguard of emergent forms of subjectivity in line with neoliberal market-governability. As we saw in the review of ethnographic and social scientific observations of life in the new Länder, East Germans have had constantly to redefine themselves in a context of radical uncertainty, mobility, dismantling of the welfare state, and perpetual crises of deindustrialisation, globalisation, tertiarisation, and financialisation. They have had to learn to retool, retrain, and recast themselves on the labour market and to redefine and to re-remember themselves on the consumer market. They have had to become, as Foucault anticipated, entrepreneurs of the self. Whereas the modern subject of classic as well as welfare-state liberalism enjoyed a transcendent essence as a universalist bearer of reason and rights, and an immanent essence as a socially and historically contingent bearer of particular interests (Dillon and Reid 2009), the neoliberal – or perhaps even post-liberal (McFalls and Pandolfi 2012) – subject must constantly (re)construct her- or himself as a simulacrum, to position him- or herself in unstable labour and consumer markets.

East Germans are, of course, not the only contemporary neoliberal simulated subjects to define their lives through the constant marketing of their selves (we need think only of our own virtualised life-forms to recognise the both tragic and trivial nature of the East German experience of the present). East Germans, however, do have the privilege of being among the first in Europe to experience the remaking of their lives according to the neoliberal model made in Germany. On the one hand, the lifestyles of those in (parts of) east Berlin, Leipzig, and Dresden who, for the time being, have managed to plug themselves into world-class, high-performance, productive but mostly artistic and service industries have become the envy of the well-connected (in all senses of the word) in Düsseldorf, Munich, and Stuttgart, as young *Schwaben* ('Swabians', as the locals indiscriminately describe well-heeled migrants from the West) flock to inhabit hip urban centres in the east. On the other hand, the equally improvised, adaptive, but less fortunate lifestyles of those in the east who have not moved upmarket have migrated west: the discount supermarket and the street-side beer kiosk are no longer the preserves of the 'Ossi' losers of unification. Hartz IV welfare recipients and so-called one-euro jobholders (i.e. those with temporary, part-time subsidised jobs) in North Rhine-Westphalia and in the backwaters of all the Länder share the same habitus. The tattooed, tanned, shaven-headed 'Proll-Fighter' whom von Uslar describes can prowl the streets of Idar-Oberstein in Rhineland-Palatinate as easily as those of Oberhavel in Brandenburg.

The details of the social and cultural costs and consequences of the 'Agenda 2010' reforms, which in the approving neoliberal assessment of *The Economist* transformed Germany from Europe's 'sick man' into its role model (Siegele 2004), go beyond the scope of this chapter. Suffice it to say that the reduction of welfare benefits and of labour costs brought on by the nominally Social Democratic Government of Gerhard Schröder in 2003 not only set up Germany to profit most from the European single currency and to dictate the terms of reform in response to the financial and fiscal crisis that the euro subsequently prompted (Giesen 2012): they also generalised the market flexibility and associated lifestyles that had emerged from the laboratory of socio-economic transformation in the new Länder. Insofar as the German neoliberal model can thrive on a continental scale, the East German life experiences described here may well prove premonitory.

Notes

- 1 I wish to thank Dr Alexandra Hausstein for her assistance with the research and writing of this chapter's review of the relevant literature.
- 2 Bierschenk argues that East Germans have an ethnic identity because they create boundaries between themselves and the West Germans (and vice versa). A symbolic delimitation combined with specific practices (*Jugendweihe*) and cultivation of material culture (*Ostprodukte*) results in a collective identity as East Germans that is further fuelled by inequality and lack of recognition.
- 3 Research results are available at www.sfb580.uni-jena.de and, for a broader audience, at the knowledge portal 'German Unification' at www.bpb.de/themen/FXJA2R,0,Lange_Wege_der_Deutschen_Einheit.html.
- 4 A comprehensive collection of bibliographical information on literature published on the topic is available; see Wilde and Mallock 2009.
- 5 Sonneborn and Coerper's (2010) laconic summary of their findings is that there are two types of Osis: the younger ones ('Die DDR hat es nie gegeben und sie war besser'); and the older Osis ('Ich war DDR und ich bleibe DDR. Ich kann mit diesem Staat nichts anfangen').
- 6 We distinguish between post-Fordism and post-industrialism since Fordism refers to standardised mass production and consumption and since industrialism can be post-Fordist with flexible, vertically disintegrated production of specialised consumer goods.
- 7 Toralf Staud proposes that we view the East Germans as migrants to the West, which could explain the gap between the West German expectations for assimilation and the East German willingness to integrate (Staud 2003).
- 8 Such as the following identified by the project SFB 580: GDR nostalgia, the price of unification, shrinking processes, unjust state, social justice, unification as experiment.
- 9 Also according to von Uslar's informants: 'Der Reporter verstand, dass es nahelag, jene Zeiten, in denen es Angst und Gewalt auf den Strassen von Oberhavel gegeben hatte, heute als Abenteuer-, als Helden-, als Angebergeschichte zu erzählen. Jene eisenharten Nazizeiten, die es in Oberhavel offenbar echt gegeben hatte, durften heute aber nicht als Heldengeschichte erzählt werden. Das wäre dumm, falsch, unerträglich, das wäre widerlich gewesen' (Von Uslar 2010: 344).
- 10 Positive perception of the GDR refers to medical care, youth work, education and training, social welfare, security, child care, and social justice. The positive evaluation of the present system is restricted to personal freedom, democratic participation, and the housing situation.
- 11 'Ostdeutsche haben positives DDR-Bild', in *Die Zeit*, 26 June 2009; 49 per cent of East Germans said that the GDR had more positive than negative aspects.
- 12 Survey findings show that the Germans are predominantly optimistic regarding the process of unification. Also, the feeling of being second-class citizens has diminished in recent years (Petersen 2011).

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