

Who Are We?
Who Are We Supposed to Be?
Thinking About Current Identification
Processes Among East Germans

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There is no shortage of analyses, even of mutually exclusive ones, concerning the identities of the East Germans. Social scientists as well as journalists find enticing the phenomenon of a society that is in the midst of a transformation;¹ a society that experiences the (national) unification between a part of society that is revolutionary with another part that is geographically separate and non-revolutionary while undergoing a process of social blending. This examination is accompanied by constant exhortations from the politicians – who, as if appealing to themselves, have the task of representing German unity in nationally conceived institutions – to surmount the mental trenches that have arisen. This article tries to discuss some aspects of the processes of identification that are either unfolding in East Germany or are failing to materialize. In this connection we are concerned with interpretations of social and political transformations on the part of the individual, but also with the “impositions of the Western paradigm,” both of which generate norms of behavior and language through which the East Germans must find their own language when describing their situation.

There is probably no other society in which the ambivalence of “occidentalization” is more tangible than in the former German Democratic Republic and in which the tension is greater between a redefinition of one’s own identity after the collapse of the communist system and of seemingly well tested solutions offered by the West. The struggle over the most valid interpretation takes place simultaneously both within the (partial) society of East Ger-

many and between East and West. The large variety of answers to what is indigenous and to what are the norms by which a coming to terms with the past (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*) and expectations for the future should be defined makes it doubtful whether we can speak of a single identity at all. Instead the constant talk about the need to let grow together “what belongs together” leads us to the disquieting question as to what might be the interests that lie behind this compulsive idea of unity. This talk certainly hinders the unfolding and articulation of divergent interest situations that emerge (I would almost have said: inevitably) from the ambivalent situation in which East Germans find themselves.

Etienne François has recently submitted an essay on the German political system and its acceptance by the population.² In it he highlighted the dualism that most people in East and West Germany support the traditional structures of the West German system of parties and institutions, while the political landscape between East and West continues to be inhomogenous – superficially evident above all in the electoral successes of the PDS, the successor of the former Communist Party, and, at a deeper but less visible level, in the insuperably low membership figures of all parties. Thus the “creative integration” that was supposed to have accompanied the eastward extension of the political system of the old Federal Republic remains exceptionally fragile, making prognosis difficult. At this time continuity by far outweighs change; however, “to the degree that the German political system is open and flexible, there is nothing to prevent us from thinking that the evolutions and transformations that have already set in will accelerate in the near future, thereby fundamentally modifying the givens of the political game.”³

There is a wealth of surveys investigating identity characteristics and the value systems on which they are based, unsettling those analysts who had thought that the Western system could be extended without many problems into the terrain of a socialist regime that had vanished almost without protest. The findings of the weekly magazine *Der Spiegel*, published five years after unification, were particularly shocking to the public, i.e., that the East Germans continued to see socialism as a good idea and were not at all prepared to delete it from their system of values. Are we deal-

ing here with a deeply rooted identity that neither feelings of gratitude for the post-1990 transfer of wealth nor the knowledge of the repressive character of erstwhile communism that had meanwhile been publicly pinpointed were able to cover up? Or are these as well as other statements that seem to be defiant related to the fact that the terminologies that the interviewers offer are designed to rationalize new processes of identification? If we tilt toward the latter answer, the question arises why there is no language yet that, freed from the terminological antinomies of the past, is capable of expressing the contradictions that are actually being felt.

The difficulties to determine identities generate more general doubts concerning this notion. The ambivalences of identity⁴ time and again raise the danger – especially when it is intended to act as a political rallying point – of using it as a vehicle of solid and historically legitimated characteristics that becomes a guide for action because it aims at the mobilization of imagined collectivities. The term is ambivalent because it easily leads to a confusion of the definition of self on the basis of experienced history (“*je suis mon passé,*” as Satre put it)⁵ with the dynamic of selecting from several narratives that are available to the individual and, even more so, to collectives. On the one hand, there is the idea that identity is something that has been acquired over a longer period and that, though certainly expandable and within limits correctible, remains untouched by fundamental ruptures; but this notion collides with the observation that even the upholding of received value systems gains a different function in a new context. And this context in turn influences identity and thus leads to changed behavior patterns which in their turn have repercussions upon identities.

A third aspect relates to the fact that, contrary to what the unifying term seems to suggest, by no means each and every individual participates equally in the formulation of collective identities and their translation into behavior patterns as well as their discursive transformations. However, in so far as elements of identity are being offered in a highly complex (media)society, we are less and less successful in shaping identity in terms of a relatively coherent ensemble of value decisions and their realization in discourses and non-linguistic acts, except as patchwork. In daily social language identity thus changes from a seemingly descriptive category to an

instrument used to construct "*Gemeinschaft*," whose loss is be-moaned by various people in juxtaposition with "*Gesellschaft*."⁶

The question of identity that was being posed ever more frequently aims to veil these ambivalences. It does so with the intention of reinforcing the notion that a greater homogeneity is possible and that collective identities can be mobilized. From the historian's perspective, however, when dealing with divergent processes of identification, it is more important to investigate this dynamic, and to pursue the constant topicality and expansion of knowledge and emotional dispositions. If the determination of identity is about the construction of unity and cohesion, the analysis of processes of identification concerns the privileging of such controversies within society on the basis of which the individual locates him/herself in that society and, in opposition to others, arrives at a definition of self. The priority that certain themes and the search for answers are given within the most important of these processes will reveal to us how we are tied to interest patterns and imaginary worlds from which will emerge the capacity to solve problems. The dispute over these priorities structures the transition of an individual's identity to politics within the institutional structures of a society.

The sum total of all historical experiences of another person and thus the totality of all the potential elements of his or her identity is no less unintelligible to us than the complete biography of a human being. We can merely gain access to the psychic-intellectual preconditions, to the linguistic and symbolic forms of his or her self-definition and the exclusion of competing, but discarded (i.e. unrealizable), identifications via the manifestations of experiences in his or her actions and statements, i.e., to the active processes of identification.

This room for maneuver becomes particularly evident in times of upheaval that challenge us to redefine our relationship to the past and to the choices for action that we have for the present and future. It is the space in which processes of identification will either unfold or be stymied. No doubt East Germany is currently undergoing such a break (*Umbruch*), or more precisely several such recastings (*Umwälzungen*) that are being telescoped. In facing this array of transformations people can and must take recourse

to a past that is no less contradictory and from which concepts of the future will be forged that form the horizon before which the question of the actual scope for action will be answered. After all, we do not have unlimited paths of identification. Rather their number is determined by the limits of what is imaginable. How far it is possible to move these limits toward new questions due to experiences of exceptionality and to the recognition that some old answers have become obsolete, is an aspect of the rich opportunities that historic upheavals provide – upheavals that for this reason turn into contingent processes.

At this time there are three processes of identification that determine public and private debates in East Germany. They are all concerned with determining one's relationship with the past: with the GDR's industrial past and the weighing of risks and opportunities connected with it in terms of the on-going process of transformation; with the threefold and nowadays polemically intertwined history of the Nazi dictatorship, the West German success story, and the experience of the GDR; and finally with the rupture of a generational model that was developed under protected social conditions and reflected divergent levels of perception.

As the Soviet zone of occupation and later as GDR, East Germany was part of a power bloc for 44 years whose unity was to be secured through a unifying model of politics and a common ideology. Via a system of reparations payments to the Soviet Union and later through the COMECON, it also belonged for almost as many years to an economic zone which, protected by the non-convertibility of its currency and a systematic expansion of trade within this bloc to the detriment of world trade, tried to remove itself from the differentiating pressures of the "world system"⁸ in order to pursue an internal modernization strategy. Michael Geyer has rightly emphasized that an interpretation of these socialist modernization strategies in the sense of a form of forced innovation (development dictatorship) must be expanded by pointing to the consequences of stagnation and immobilism that stemmed from these strategies.⁹

That East German history paralleled that of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Rumania, and Bulgaria and – due to her own position within the system of political hegemony – *mutatis mutandis*

that of the USSR may be seen from the fact that the East German “October Revolution” of 1989 has been integrated into the sequence of the Polish dissident movement, of perestroika, of the “velvet” revolution in Czechoslovakia and the fall of Ceausescu in Rumania. This parallelism has not come to a standstill even today; the society of East Germany displays many features of those processes of transformation that ran their course between Moscow and Sofia, Budapest and Warsaw, where there existed political direction, even if temporarily differentiated, together with generally analogous growth rates in productivity and in Gross National Product as well as with the collapse of old industries and the rise of social tensions.

However, the story of how the East Germans experienced the community of a political bloc dominated by the Soviets was a different one, and acculturation remained superficial, notwithstanding innumerable professions of support and many tangible connections. Structural differences between them played an important role in this process. At least in the southern parts of the former GDR there existed ancient industrial traditions with a disciplined workforce and a developed infrastructure; Berlin was a center of the process of urbanisation in the 19th and 20th centuries. Most of the other countries of the so-called East Bloc represented agrarian, at most industrial-agrarian, countries. Above all, the (per force) totally different relationship of the East Germans to the idea of “nation” resulted in constant mutual misunderstandings. Whereas in East and Central Europe the revival of national traditions promised at least partially to be given special treatment within the Soviet Bloc and ultimately the regaining of sovereignty, promoting dissidence and opposition, the GDR embarked upon a path that was markedly more complicated. Among the neighbors who, until 1945, had been the victims of German expansionism, the GDR was sometimes suspected of putting its own chosen movement for claiming sovereignty against Soviet interventions above the emphasis on “national peculiarities.” Yet the fear was that German nationalism, with which one had had many bad experiences, might see a revival.

Since the mid-1970s the all-German rhetoric of the 1950s and 1960s no longer appeared to display any relation with reality, and the chance of inventing collectively a new, socialist nation was lost. Meanwhile the counter-strategy of the GDR elites was bound

to meet with marked incomprehension, considering the role that national traditions played for both communists and their opponents in Poland and Hungary, Rumania and Czechoslovakia in preserving their own claims to sovereignty. The mutual misunderstanding was not just confined to the upper levels of decision-making and resulted in very differing ways through which meaning was given to the notion of international cooperation among socialist states and of proletarian internationalism. This misunderstanding was thrown into sharp relief in the conflict between the GDR leadership and that of the Hungarian CP as to how a right to national self-determination might be handled that manifested itself in the opening of borders in September 1989. It was at this point at the latest that the paradigm of a separate, de facto "non-national" definition of the nation that had been made the cornerstone of GDR politics, could now no longer be realized. The policy of the Soviets for whom the division of a nation had evidently always remained incomprehensible,¹⁰ put an end to this paradigm with their decision not to intervene and through the Two-plus-Four negotiations. It is only against this background that we can begin to understand the shift in the demonstrators' sloganeering in the winter of 1989 from the notion of "We are the people" to "We are one people."

The paradigm of a "non-national nation" failed to generate sufficient momentum that was capable of creating identity once it existed in an environment that took the opposite paradigm to be self-evident. Following the removal of the communist regime, there was no space, in the imagination of the participants in this change, for the continued existence of a newly defined East German nation. However, let us not be deceived. The idea of a socialist nation that had been developed as an alternative to the traditional nation state could still be reconciled – as Western Social Democrats argued in the 1970s and 1980s – with the notion of a German *Kultur* nation, though not with that of a state based on ethnic foundations. However, the rejection of this socialist nation does not imply that East Germans now subscribe, without reservations, to the idea of the nation that has been rediscovered in the West. What is significant is the intensity with which regional identifications have filled the vacuum of a larger territorial identity. Witness the renewed

enthusiasm for Saxony, Thuringia, Prussia, and Mecklenburg as reference points.

There is yet another element: the U-turn of 1989 did not result in the political sovereignty of the society that experienced the fresh start. Rather it was incorporated into the Federal Republic. There is the embittered dictum of the East Berlin artist and dissident Bärbel Bohley that people wanted justice and were given the rule of law (*Rechtsstaat*) instead. Bohley expresses the ambivalence that is raised by the idea of wishing to create new legal norms of one's own through a revolutionary act. They were to be norms that emerged from the East Germans' own experience with communism; but instead they were confronted with the norms of a reformist West German society that already had secured its internal peace through the rule of law. Here lies a fundamental difference between East Germany's revolution and that of other East European countries (and most other revolutions in modern history).¹¹ No less important, it has serious implications for the processes of identification. Exceptions always granted that merely confirm the rule, the post-revolutionary elites will not be recruited from the milieu of the pre-revolutionary opposition and the revolutionary activists themselves; nor will they emerge from the transformation of the old elites that were not compromised by their involvement in the counter-revolution; rather these elites will be constituted of people transferred from the larger Western half of the newly born Germany.

Even where, for a variety of reasons, this does not occur, the changed society of East Germany has so far failed to produce its own autochthonous spokespersons, except for a few artists and very few politicians and journalists who stem from the former dissident movement. The society that is undergoing this revolution is therefore also under no pressure to "terminate" it and to contemplate how its former opponents might be reintegrated, as can be witnessed in most East European countries where this has become a painful process that has powerfully moved the public.

All these special characteristics have led the overwhelming majority of analysts to avoid or even openly to reject the term "*revolution*" – a situation which is very different from four or five years ago. This attitude corresponds to the popular mood in East

Germany where “revolution” is associated with a self-confidently enjoyed victory and march toward progress after the violent removal of the previous regime. It is an association that is a legacy of the rhetorical revolutionary enthusiasm of Marxism-Leninism and largely influenced by its notion of revolution. That many East Germans claim to have brought about the U-turn on their own initiative and yet deny that it was a revolution in the above-mentioned sense points to a collective distancing from the results of a self-liberation whose results continue to be welcomed. However, the two processes of identification that tend to move in opposite directions – i.e., the identification with the demolition of communism, on the one hand, and, on the other, with the mobilization of concepts that run counter to the newly emergent reality and result in the self-image of being “losers” in the transformation process – do not end up with a total rejection of the new society. No doubt this is partly due to the bonding capacity of the national paradigm that the East Germans have rediscovered. We are dealing here not so much with a revival of an aggressive nationalism, however dismayed we may be by the recklessness with which youth protest is being articulated in chauvinistic slogans, just as the spontaneous reemergence of xenophobia among parts of the older generation is a response to a perceived danger that is assumed to threaten recently acquired privileges. Instead many East Germans have internalized the experience that the relinquishing of sovereignty claims for completing their own revolution can be helpful in reminding the West Germans of the need to develop a sense of national solidarity. The intoning of the national theme thus presents itself as the attempt to insist on compensatory transfers as a way of redressing the unequal distribution of burdens stemming from the division of Germany. In this connection the choice, during the 1990 elections, between Oskar Lafontaine and Helmut Kohl represented a choice between an opponent of unity (Lafontaine) and the guardian of national, i.e., all-German responsibilities; more importantly, the results showed that a majority could be found for the claim that transfer payments were due. The integration of a society that found itself in a process of revolutionary change into the larger and economically more powerful West Germany thereby put many unresolved tensions into the cold storage

of a consolidationist policy that was not orientated toward change, but toward the affirmation of a path that had proven to be a recipe for success once before.

East Germany's ambivalences concerning social rupture and its structural embeddedness in both West and East that have been outlined here produce an explosive mix of collapse and reconstruction. On the one hand we witness the demolition of core elements of the old industries that has been pushed very far. This is particularly true of the textile industry with a share of female labor that is well above the average. There is also the decline in raw materials production, especially lignite, in manufacturing industry, in chemicals and metal bashing as well as machine tools in the densely populated parts of the former GDR. Next to it we witness the building of the most modern communications infrastructure in the whole of Europe. Common postwar experiences exist with the reformist nations of East Central Europe, just as they have all seen serious limits to their prosperity. The transfer of capital and labor across this prosperity line and the competition for Western investments have accentuated the ambivalence of a similar past that they all share and new situations that are to some extent extraordinarily divergent.

In the face of an unemployment rate of around 15 percent it is understandable that processes of identification in East Germany assume the shape of a narrative of loss rather than being seen as elements of reconstruction. In the popular imagination one "advance payment" has tended to play a decisive role that may be explained against the background of the GDR's guiding principles for the economy after 1945: "East Germany's industrial policy failed because the communist party leadership acted as if it represented a Greater Germany whose essential character had survived and had merely been improved by socialist practice. And yet the GDR never developed alternatives to the large-scale industrial organizations that are typical of the imperial territorial state. Economic innovation remained chained to the ideal of a homogenized production society and its large-scale industrial organizations. Industrial policy remained a policy of structural changes within large-scale industries instead of raising the question of what might be the alternatives to this system. The country was shaped by a

big-industry nostalgia – by a longing to repeat the whole exercise successfully. As far as we can see, this nostalgia was shared not only by East Germany's economic elites, but also by the majority of the population."¹²

To this day this dream that relies more on the rebuilding of traditional styles of life and labor than on the innovative power of a new society that has been recast, can be seen to form the basis from which economic policy is being judged. The systemic change that many define in terms of the old notions of capitalism and socialism reaches considerably beyond the conditions of ownership. What is at stake is the risky transformation of a large-scale industrial system that was permeated by an ideology of measuring everything in tons ("*Tonnen-Ideologie*") and a society that was relatively egalitarian and that had tried to save itself by promoting, through educational opportunity and the attendant processes of professional differentiation, the inflation of highly advanced (tertiary) educational qualifications that were then deployed in underqualified jobs in large-scale industry. This type of society was now expected to change into one that was highly segmented and internationalized and relied on service and high tech; a society that was characterized by opportunities for education, upward mobility, and prosperity that was highly unequal. This process of transition is risky not merely because of its dependence on the ups and down of the global market, but also because it is based on a precarious acceptance of a corresponding job mobility due to the widespread belief that East Germany presented a scenario comparable to that of the Italian Mezzogiorno.

It is against the background of these confusing mixtures that a variety of identifications are being offered that many people in turn find disorientating. What emerges is a vast array of preconditions that contain "special challenges to organize one's own life. ... The ordinary person's biography thus becomes a 'biography of choices,' a 'reflexive biography.' This may not be what is wanted; nor is it designed to succeed."¹³ However, this conclusion would be no more than half-complete, if it fails to consider that these choices encounter traditional ideological paradigms on the way. Replacing them by means of a renewed structuring of how society is being perceived may well become a precondition for seeing

opportunities for decision and for basic processes of identification upon them.

If we follow the ideas of Robert Reich, the American political economist and Labor Secretary in the Clinton Administration, the recasting of the postindustrial economies leads to a fundamental restructuring of society. Three ideal types of groups can be discerned: there are those who stay in routine industrial production and who will experience a continuous loss of status as a result of an enormous pressure on wage costs in the wake of globalized labor markets; secondly there are those performing personal services or working as publicly paid employees who will not be fundamentally affected by the growth in mobility; thirdly there are the symbolic-analytic service workers who, in terms of the job culture and life styles belong rather more to a global network than to particular nation states.¹⁴ Seen in this perspective, the struggle to preserve jobs in routine production with its concomitant protectionist strategy, that dominate the East German imagination today, appears backward-looking. But it is also in tune with reality as long as a new structure has not yet emerged in which next to services and public employees, the analysts of symbols have also assumed their place. The breaking with traditional ideas therefore depends to a large degree on the direction that the process of transformation is going to take. It also depends on how far the perception of new trends gains the upper hand in the debate of societal questions – a debate that is currently still largely determined by the problems of the old Federal Republic. A good example of this is the growing *Standort-Debatte* in which a further reduction of social welfare benefits is being promoted as a means of preventing a flight of capital to production bases overseas because of the resultant decline in employers' non-wage costs.¹⁵

By focusing on *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, on coming to terms with the communist past, the division in this debate between East and West is being stabilized. No spokespersons from East Germany who have gained a national audience have appeared so far. This means that processes of identification are more likely to emerge from public opinion surveys than from their condensation into concrete political ideas. Embedded in a more long-term process, going back to the mid-1970s, that rediscovered History

and made it part of an active policy of supporting historical consciousness in the shaping of the political cultures of the two German states,¹⁶ several other debates can be found. In the second half of the 1980s, the West German *Historikerstreit* ("War of Historians," as an American observer called it) raised the problem of the possibility and limits of relativizing the uniqueness of Nazism and the Holocaust and of whether the two can be historicized.¹⁷ It then turned out that the general consensus that was reached at the time against relativizing German guilt (as had been argued with reference to the threat posed by Russian bolshevism) might not necessarily be permanent within the different political-cultural context of the years after 1989/90. Among the protagonists of the first *Historikerstreit* we have seen the unfolding of a second dispute. Their number has been augmented by several younger historians and journalists whose attacks upon taboos that have been observed until now have given them increasing attention in the media.

There is also the metamorphosis of earlier dissidents. Wolfgang Engler, who knows the milieu in Berlin particularly well from first-hand observation, described the "Eastern intellectual U-turn fate" ("*geistiges Wendeschicksal/Ost*") rather sarcastically in the following words: "The majority of the dissidents continues to be somber and excitable, trying to remain loyal within a changed environment [and acting as] judges of good and evil. In order to complete their project of moral cleansing, these *angry intellectuals*, these *enragés* require *archives* [and] a reserve army of guilty persons who can be recruited haphazardly and who are worried about their 'coming out'."¹⁸

In providing the rhetorical justification of a new German identity for whose the national grounding one invokes the return to normality politics becomes the avantgarde. It is seconded rather than carried forward by historians in East and West who offer different arguments, but ultimately have a joint impact on the culture of historical consciousness. Some are raising doubts about the bases of legitimacy of West German postwar policies. They wonder if German guilt necessitated the country's Westernization and anchoring in the West since it would have led to the recognition of a divided Germany and the abandonment of sovereign policy-making.¹⁹ Others stress the character of the GDR as a state without

justice (*Unrechtsstaat*) in which anti-fascism was used primarily to prop up a dictatorship that was doomed at the latest since the 1953 Uprising.²⁰ It is striking how the two debates are unconnected. East Germans do not participate in the renewal of the 1987 *Historikerstreit* in its post-1989 guise. In the heated debate concerning the character of the former GDR the East Germans fail to discuss its consequences for an interpretation of German postwar history and hence for the shaping of an identity that is founded upon it.²¹ There only appears to be a *single* reinterpretation of the German past. In fact there are many indications that the attempt to define one's relationship to one's own Eastern or Western past is given priority; the assessment of the history of the other half that has recently been added is merely deployed as an instrument in the internal disputes of one's own half. And yet we can recognize in this pattern how the construction of traditions develops an identity-creating thrust, even if it is rather more the rejection of an interpretation of History that is considered as alien. The majority of East Germans do not know what to do with the reconstruction of national traditions in order to provide a foundation to a new sovereignty; nor do they know what to do with a closed-circuited cementation of their experience under the catchword of the "GDR state without justice." Their own creation of tradition will remain enshrined defensively in the defiant notion that their life under the dictatorship has nonetheless been meaningful;²² for as long as they refuse to contemplate the implications of their own interpretation of History for the identity of the new Germany.

It must be said that, to a large extent, this has not happened until now. In order to clarify the reasons for this, it seems advisable to me to draw upon a third process of identification, i.e., orientation in terms of different generational experiences in the old Federal Republic and the former GDR. This in turn leads to various dislocations, which enable us to identify expectations that were fulfilled or were disappointed. The year 1990 not only saw the unification of two divergent pasts but also of the generational sequences that were cemented within them. During the first five years after 1945 there occurred, in tandem with a violent structural change, a far-reaching exchange of elites in East Germany. However, the small layer of communists who had returned from

exile and the camps together with their allies was not large enough to assume all the executive positions in the new society. In this situation the generation of those born around 1930 gained almost unlimited opportunities for upward mobility, provided they were prepared to fit themselves into specific career patterns. A similar rise of the younger generation, accompanied by a cultural shift, took place in the West only during the 1960s, while the era prior to this change was experienced as "leaden period" of the rule of an Establishment that would not fade away. A confluence of these two divergent processes can be detected for the first time in 1968 when a reformist zeal combined on both sides of the Iron Curtain, though in very different ways, with the opportunity to achieve generational change.²³

What happened in 1968 was constituted by the logic of the sequence of generations. In the West it was the generation of the sixty-eighters (and by this we do not mean just the Left that is usually associated with that year) that saw the opportunity of a "march through the institutions." It was juxtaposed in the East by a generation that had grown old in precisely these institutions that were now being challenged, hoping that they would be relieved. Subsequent generations, having just come out of their long-term traumatization due to the lack of opportunities for self-realization, felt betrayed. It found the "ordinary path" of generational change blocked at the very moment when it emerged from its ironic rejection of a culture that it did not understand. Just when it became crucial to replace their opportunist wait for the retirement of their elders by the combative assertion of their own claims to leadership, this generation *as generation* proved incapable to shape themselves and their identity in accordance with their needs.

The asymmetry of this situation hence also stops the forging of horizontal solidarities between East and West. East Germans between 25 and 40 retreat frustrated by having missed their own best opportunity. Meanwhile their Western counterparts who had been hoping for their chance to replace, without much conflict, the generation of 1968 within their own society, look with suspicion upon their unwelcome competitors from the new Federal states.

Looking back on the variety of factors that we could do no more than outline in this article and under whose influence processes of

identification evolve in contemporary East Germany, our first overall conclusion must be that the situation is confused. This confusion, which is the confusion about what opportunities that people have for successful social action, represents a dramatic break with the experience that the inhabitants of the former GDR had with a stable identity in a rather more static society. The transfer of resources between generations, whose minor losses are reflected in the longevity of dynasties of industrial workers, in middle class families with a sense of tradition and in peasant clans, has now become risky. Young people as well as generations of adults (and this is an East German peculiarity) find themselves in search of new patterns of behavior and worlds of ideas which would allow them to put some order into the confusion. Contrary to what (post)modern theories predict, they do not engage in this in a playful way. Identity formation is "rather more a calculated crisis management which avoids risks. Experiments are made only in individual spheres of life ... [and led] by the safety-rope of a comprehensive identity that is geared to *normalcy*."²⁴ This claim to normalcy in a world that is objectively disparate points to a confluence of an independent search for a self-definition and a preparedness to permit oneself to be determined by foreign ideologies that have not been shaken.

This has far-reaching consequences for milieu-specific processes of identification within a (partial) society in which emancipation from the past and integration into existing structures coincide within the, historically speaking, extremely short period of five years.

Notes

1. A recent bibliography listed more than 720 projects; to these must added an even larger number of specialized studies that are part of a program to promote scholarship under the heading of "transformation research." No national newspaper or journal misses the opportunity, week after week, to offer items concerned with the Germans' growing-together and its difficulties. Is this proof of a growing interest or an indication of a deep-seated insecurity? Claus Offe, now professor of Political Science at Berlin's Humboldt University, suspects that Western societies are fundamentally incapable "of offering effective assistance even to the attempt at copying" by other countries". It seems that we are dealing with the attempt systematically to copy another building whose blueprint has been lost." Quoted in: W. Engler (ed.), *Die ungewollte Moderne*, Frankfurt, 1995, p. 60.

2. E. François, "L'unité dans la diversité," in: G. Casarus, S. Lemasson and S. Lorrain (eds.), *L'autre Allemagne, 1990-1995. L'unification au quotidien*, Paris, 1995, pp. 33-40.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
4. A good survey of the debate on identity in the humanities is to be found in: O. Marquard and K. Stierle (eds.), *Identität*, Munich 1979. For references to recent directions in cultural studies, sociology and social psychology see, e.g., M. Kohl and G. Robert, *Biografie und soziale Wirklichkeit*, Stuttgart 1984; H. Bilden and H. Keupp (eds.), *Verunsicherungen. Das Subjekt im gesellschaftlichen Wandel*, Göttingen 1989; I. Mörth and G. Fröhlich (eds.), *Das symbiotische Kapital der Lebensstile. Zur Kulturosoziologie der Moderne nach Pierre Bourdieu*, Frankfurt-New York, 1994.
5. J.-P. Sartre, *L'être et le néant*, Paris, 1943, p. 159.
6. L. Clausen and C. Schlüter (eds.), *Hundert Jahre "Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft"*, Opladen, 1991, with a summary of the current social-political debate that Ferdinand Tönnies had first raised in his juxtaposition of these two concepts. See also G. Vobruba, *Gemeinschaft ohne Moral. Theorie und Empirie moralfreier Gemeinschafts-Konstruktionen*, Vienna, 1994, with additional relevant literature.
7. This aspect is being covered in several contributions to: M. Middell (ed.), *Welt-system und Globalgeschichte*, Leipzig, 1994 (*Comparativ*, vol. II, No. 5 [1994]).
8. I. Wallerstein, *The World System*, 3 vols., New York, 1974, 1980, 1989.
9. M. Geyer, "Industriepolitik in der DDR. Von grossindustrieller Nostalgie zum Zusammenbruch," in: J. Kocka and M. Sabrow (eds.), *Die DDR als Geschichte. Fragen-Hypothesen-Perspektiven*, Berlin 1995, p. 132.
10. According to retrospective statements by leading figures such as Portugalov and Falin, the German Department of the USSR's Central Committee had for some time, though never persistently, viewed the GDR as an "unnatural" consequence of a division of Germany that would not last forever.
11. See M. Kossok (ed.), *Revolutionen der Neuzeit, 1500-1917*, Berlin, 1982; C. Tilly, *Die europäischen Revolutionen*, Munich, 1993.
12. M. Geyer (note 9 above), pp. 133f.
13. U. Beck and E. Beck-Gernsheim (eds.), *Risikante Freiheiten. Individualisierung in modernen Gesellschaften*, Frankfurt, 1994, pp. 11ff.
14. R. Reich, *The Work of Nations*, New York 1992, pp. 294ff.
15. From a critical perspective, see the contributions to: W. Fach and F. Geissler (eds.), *Standort-Argumente*, Leipzig, 1995.
16. See E. François, "Nation retrouvée, 'nation contre-cœur': l'Allemagne des commémorations," in: *Le Débat*, No. 78 (1994), pp. 62-70; idem, H. Siegrist, and J. Vogel (eds.), *Nation und Emotion. Deutschland und Frankreich im Vergleich, 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, Göttingen, 1995.
17. For summaries see R.J. Evans, *In Hitlers Shadow*, New York, 1988; C.S. Maier, *The Unmasterable Past*, Cambridge, Mass., 1988.
18. W. Engler (note 1 above), p. 162.
19. See, e.g., K. Weissmann, *Rückruf in die Geschichte. Die deutsche Herausforderung: Alte Gefahren – Neue Chancen*, Berlin-Frankfurt, 1992; R. Zitelmann, *Adenauers Gegner. Streiter für die Einheit*, Erlangen 1991; R. Zitelmann, K. Weissmann, and M. Grossheim (eds.), *Chancen und Risiken für Deutschland*, Berlin-Frankfurt, 1993; A. Baring, *Deutschland, was nun?*, Berlin 1991.
20. This hypothesis pervades A. Mitter and S. Wolle, *Untergang auf Raten. Unbekannte Kapitel der DDR-Geschichte*, Munich 1994. For a debate on this notion that

constructs the inexorable collapse of the GDR's development and leaves no room for alternative possibilities see the panel discussion about the place of the 1953 uprising in: J. Kocka and M. Sabrow (eds.) (note 9 above).

21. The charge that hypotheses concerning the character of the GDR have precisely such implications is therefore being refuted as an unjustified conspiracy theory. Thus quite explicitly with reference to the dispute over the Potsdam Institute for Research on Contemporary German History: A. Mitter and S. Wolle, "Der Bielefelder Weg. Die Vergangenheitsbewältigung der Historiker und die Vereinigung der Funktionäre," in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 10 August 1993, p. 23.
22. See the 15,187-page minutes and the final report of the Bundestag enquête commission, entitled "Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur in Deutschland." Here the history of the East Germans, in so far as it does not touch upon the central concern of "satisfaction for the victims," is reduced to a brief and generalized moral value judgment: a condemnation of the SED dictatorship does not imply a condemnation of the men and women subjected to it; "on the contrary, the Germans in the Soviet Zone/GDR have had to bear the more onerous part of Germany's postwar history."
23. For a detailed discussion in comparative perspective see: E. François, M. Middell, E. Terray, and D. Wierling (eds.), *1968 als europäisches Jahr*, Leipzig, 1996.
24. Thus the results of an empirical study on Leipzig adolescents of both sexes between the ages of 17 and 21 in: T. Ahbe, *Transformation – Identität – Ressourcen*, Leipzig 1996 (*Comparativ*, No. 6).