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The Collapse of Time: Decennial Anniversaries and the Experience of Time in the German Democratic Republic

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## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

I have the feeling of striding down a large street, with my friends, my bosom buddies, and then: “You know what? We can be so happy, we have the future in front of us.” ... That was the future for me.

—Irmtraut Petersson, 2007.<sup>2</sup>

The German Democratic Republic (GDR) was born on October 7, 1949—and what a party it was. Less than half a year after the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) was founded on May 24, 1949 in the Western zones of occupation, the German People’s Council of the Soviet Occupation Zone in the East was formed and formal power was officially transferred to the new state on October 10.<sup>3</sup> One night later, “immense crowds of people”<sup>4</sup> gathered at Berlin’s August Bebel Platz to catch a glimpse of the new leadership.<sup>5</sup> The newly appointed leaders of the Republic—President Wilhelm Pieck, Prime Minister of the Council of Ministers Otto Grotewohl, Walter Ulbricht, among others—stood on a grandstand festooned with banners declaring THE GERMAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC and waved triumphantly to the torchlight procession of socialist youth carrying banners emblazoned with Karl Marx and Josef Stalin. “We stand today on the turning point

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<sup>1</sup> I would sincerely like to thank the Office of Student Research at UC Berkeley for granting me the Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship that allowed me to travel to Berlin to begin this study of East Germany. I would also like to extend my gratitude to the History Department at UC Berkeley for their generous travel grant, which enabled me to follow up on the research I did during the summer with a trip back to Berlin in October 2007. Lastly, I would like to thank Yuliya Goldshteyn and Chad Denton for their enthusiastic support.

<sup>2</sup> From an interview I conducted with Irmtraut Petersson in Berlin on October 14, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Throughout this essay, the German Democratic Republic will be referred to as GDR or East Germany, while the Federal Republic of Germany will be referred to as FRG or West Germany. Although I will not utilize the terms, it may be helpful to know that the GDR is DDR (*Deutsche Demokratische Republik*) and the FRG is BRD (*Bundesrepublik Deutschland*) in the original German. (Today, unified Germany [in existence since 1990] goes by the name *Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, as well.)

<sup>4</sup> All translations are my own, except when otherwise noted.

<sup>5</sup> From an article in the Soviet Occupation Zone newspaper *Tägliche Rundschau*, cited in Monika Gibas and Rainer Gries, “Die Inszenierung des sozialistischen Detuschland: Geschichte und Dramaturgie der Dezennienfeiern in der DDR,” in Monika Gibas, Rainer Gries, et. al., *Wiedergeburten: Zur Geschichte der runden Jahrestage der DDR* (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 1999), 16. The only source documenting anniversary celebrations in the GDR, *Wiedergeburten: Zur Geschichte der runden Jahrestage der DDR* (“Rebirths: On the History of Round Anniversaries in the GDR”) is a collection of articles, propaganda posters, and photographs that discusses the anniversaries in varying contexts. I will draw heavily on this source in my discussion. To clarify, specific articles are cited when referring to information, whereas only the book and a page number are cited when referring to illustrations.

of German history,” President Pieck declared in his inaugural address.<sup>6</sup> The future was as bright as the torches that lit up the night.

But before this future could become reality, time needed to be codified. History would be adapted to the Marxist-Leninist tune, which in turn would justify the present: the communist resistance had succeeded in destroying Nazism with the help of the Soviet Union, and the “Party of the New Type”—the Socialist Unity Party (SED)—would lead the socialist nation toward communism. To do so, the state’s past, present, and future all needed to be shaped to fit the SED’s particular notion of progress. Indeed, the struggle for the construction and maintenance of SED control can be seen as the struggle to “synchronize” individual subjective understandings of time with the SED’s own politically-charged temporal narrative. “Like a test liquid which flows through the body to detect particular substances and their courses,” Helga Nowotny writes, “‘society’ and social time run through a life, however individually distinctive and equipped it is.”<sup>7</sup> As part of its larger campaign of complete social control, the SED sought to become the “test liquid” that coursed through individual understandings of time to reorient them to the party’s will. Indeed, to control time was to secure the future of the communist project: if the GDR population could be convinced of progress, it could be convinced of a viable future.

Considering time’s importance as a cultural construct, however, it is surprising to note that studies of the control and experience of time in the German Democratic Republic are few and far between.<sup>8</sup> The discussion of time in East Germany has been nearly entirely confined to the discussion of the political use of historical time; little attention has been paid to the political use of time in general. Yet, the control of all elements of time—the past, present, and future—was crucial to the communist project. Stephen Hanson, author of a thorough examination of the theoretical basis of Marxist-Leninist time and its practical application in the Soviet Union, argues that “we can see the entire history of Marxism and of the

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<sup>6</sup> Gibas and Gries, 16.

<sup>7</sup> Helga Nowotny, Neville Plaice (trans.), *Time: The Modern and Postmodern Experience* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1994), 8.

<sup>8</sup> Some of few studies to specifically address the political control and/or experience of time in East Germany include: Martin Sabrow, “Time and Legitimacy: Comparative Reflections on the Sense of Time in the Two German Dictatorships,” *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 6.3 (2005); John Borneman, “Time-Space Compression and the Continental Divide in German Subjectivity,” *The Oral History Review* 21.2 (1993); Elizabeth A. Ten Dyke, “Tulips in December: Space, Time and Consumption Before and After the End of German Socialism,” *German History* 19.2 (2001); and Rainer Gries, “Die runden ‘Geburtstage,’ künstlicher Pulsschlag der Republik: Zeitkultur und Zeitpropaganda in der DDR,” in Gibas and Gries, *Wiedergeburten*. Soviet political time, however, is addressed thoroughly in Stephen Hanson’s book *Time and Revolution: Marxism and the Design of Soviet Institutions* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), and summarized in Costica Bradatan, “A Time of Crisis—A Crisis of (the Sense of) Time: The Political Production of Time in Communism and its Relevance for the Postcommunist Debates,” *Eastern European Politics and Societies* 19.2 (2005). All these works will be discussed later in this study.

Soviet Union, from the writing of the Communist Manifesto to the disintegration of the Soviet bloc, as constituting an unprecedented, often highly coercive, and ultimately unsuccessful 150-year revolutionary experiment in reordering the human relationship to time—an experiment whose history from beginning to end displayed a remarkably consistent developmental logic.”<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the German Democratic Republic can be similarly described. Of course, the failure of the SED to successfully reorganize time in its Marxist-Leninist political vision did not singularly cause the state’s collapse. Yet, the attempt should not be neglected. Like the Soviet Union and other communist regimes, the East German leadership “made tremendous propagandistic efforts to maintain control over this sense [of time], to alter or divert it so as to be able to use it most profitably in their own political interests.”<sup>10</sup> In East Germany, controlling the perception of time was both a political tool and a political necessity.

As Stephen Hanson clarifies, this “tremendous propagandistic effort” found its basis in Marxist-Leninist theory and ideology. Securely under the influence of Soviet power, the East German state exhibited the same ideological strain of Marxism-Leninism as in the Soviet Union, which “acted as a kind of bridge between the regime and the people, across which the regime approaches the people and the people approach the regime.”<sup>11</sup> And this ideological “bridge” was based in a specific Marxist-Leninist conception of time—that is to say, stages of time. According to both Marx and Lenin, the revolutionary workers’ movement had to proceed through several intermediate stages before “full communism” could be attained.<sup>12</sup> Characterized as “the construction of socialism” in East German rhetoric, the SED attempted to reorganize subjective individual time in the vein of its Marxist-Leninist ideology. The GDR’s economy was ruled by temporally-defined Five and Seven Year Plans, announced by Party Congresses which themselves operated within a distinct temporal framework; the state holidays—May 1, May 8, and

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<sup>9</sup> Hanson, *Time and Revolution*, x.

<sup>10</sup> Bradatan, “A Time of Crisis,” 265.

<sup>11</sup> Václav Havel, *The Power of the Powerless* (London: Hutschinson and Co., 1985), 29.

<sup>12</sup> These included: “First, the establishment of a political ‘revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat,’ then a lengthy battle with residual capitalist elements in the management of socioeconomic affairs, and then finally a struggle against ‘survivals of capitalism’— and indeed, against ‘survivals’ of the whole period of human ‘prehistory’—in mass culture” (Stephen Hanson, 204). Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels themselves described “full communism” in such a manner: “In communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can be accomplished in any task he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic” (Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “The German Ideology,” in *Karl Marx Friedrich Engels Collected Works*, vol. 5 [London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1989], 47, cited in Bradatan, “A Time of Crisis,” 267).

October 7—were all anniversaries<sup>13</sup>; the anniversaries of the births and deaths of prominent labor activists and German cultural figures were often marked and celebrated;<sup>14</sup> and, most importantly, the GDR's socialism was by definition a temporary, temporal stage before reaching communism, the “highest level of human development.” The GDR was structured by a series of temporally defined entities, ranging from the very nature of the development of the state to the smallest rituals of communal bathroom breaks among toddlers in socialist crèches. The political control of time was crucial to the East German vision of achieving communism.

Lacking a democratic mandate, the SED located its legitimation in an understanding of time in which the past, present, and future progressed toward an ultimate, enlightened goal. Admittedly, time is intangible, and its experience doubly so; but it is a cultural phenomenon that no person can escape. Hence, a society's perception of time can be regarded as a fundamental part of its collectivism—though it is a collectivism that is individually experienced. It is not surprising, then, that the SED tried to “synchronize” their citizens' understanding of time with their own. In this sense, the SED's attempts at controlling time reveal much about their attempts at constructing the larger project of socialism. Indeed, the SED's propagandistic attempt at reorganizing time in their ideological image—and what it reflects about the relationship between state and society—is the subject of this study. It must be emphasized, though, that even the SED itself was not immune to the collective nature of time, illustrated by the fact that the SED's portrayal of time actually reflected the temporal experience of the people it attempted to control, even when it ran counter to the party's socialist project. The ideological Marxist-Leninist “bridge” spanning “the abyss between the aims of the system and the aims of life,” then, was not solid. Rather, it represented more of a simple suspension bridge, with state and society on either end. As each entity took a step in the direction of the other, a ripple effect ensured that each felt—and often responded to—the other's movement.

For though East German attempts at controlling the perception of time shared qualities with the Soviet efforts outlined in Hanson's book, the singularity of

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<sup>13</sup> May 1 was International Workers' Day, whose festivities encouraged identification with international socialism and the decisive historical progress of humanity (this international labor holiday was initially established to commemorate the Haymarket Riot in Chicago in 1886); May 8 was commemorated as the Day of Liberation, marking the end of World War II and the GDR's eternal solidarity with the Soviet Union as gratitude for the chance for a new beginning after liberation from Hitler's fascism; the Day of the Republic, on October 7, celebrated the founding of the regime and the calling to build a new economically and socially sound society. This study will focus on the latter. Gibas and Gries, “Die Inszenierung” in *Wiedergeburten*, 13.

<sup>14</sup> These included Stalin (ending in the late 1950s, after Nikita Khrushchev's denunciatory “secret speech” in 1956), Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, and Karl Liebknecht. Cultural figures, like Goethe and Schiller, were also honored. For more information about the use of such historical and cultural figures in establishing political myths, see Alan Nothnagle, *Building the East German Myth: Historical Mythology and Youth Propaganda in the German Democratic Republic, 1945-1989* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999).

SED time propaganda<sup>15</sup> is evident in that it actually reflected and responded to the general temporal experience among the greater East German population. The SED's attempts at structuring time—and the grass-roots experience of and reaction to these efforts—are revealing in trying to understand the nature of state and society during the GDR's existence. Especially interesting, however, is the overlap of state and society. The SED did not live in a temporal vacuum—the changing nature of its propaganda echoed the changing temporal experience of the population as a whole. As the GDR progressed from its hopeful beginnings in 1949 toward its collapse in November 1989, the propaganda surrounding each of the state's four decennial anniversary celebrations in October 1959, 1969, 1979, and 1989 expressed the optimism, stagnation, and finally the ultimate futurelessness that characterized the GDR's progression. Indeed, the analysis of the time propaganda surrounding these four anniversary celebrations in context of societal trends suggests that state and society were neither mutually exclusive nor mutually antagonistic, but rather that each accommodated and reflected the tendencies of the other. As state and society aged together, so too did their perception of time: the analysis of anniversary celebrations suggests that state and society were not separate entities, but rather participants in a type of symbiotic relationship whose contours were blurrier than is commonly thought.

### **Time and the Relationship between State and Society**

The future is simply an extension of what has happened or is happening just now. Roessler just needs to go on doing what he has been doing day after day...to go on sitting on his chair, and his future is safe, bright and clear.

—Christoph Hein, *Der Tangospieler*, 1989.<sup>16</sup>

But let's take a step back. Why should the experience of time even be considered as a topic of study? In light of the scarcity of historical scholarship, it could be rightly assumed that the study of time should be relegated to the disciplines of anthropology, sociology, philosophy, and psychology, not pursued in the historical vein. When time is considered historically at all, it is most often found in works of historical methodology, with many scholars arguing for a more conscious

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<sup>15</sup> I will be using the term “time propaganda” to designate state propaganda involving attempts to control time.

<sup>16</sup> Christoph Hein, *Der Tangospieler: Erzählung* (East Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1989), 37f, cited in Sabrow, “Time and Legitimacy,” 366.

consideration of the nature of time in historical writing.<sup>17</sup> But these methodological entreaties do not translate into a call for the study of the experience of time, but rather the study of time's presence and effect. Historiography tends to focus on the effect of the rise of "atomized" time—that is to say, the beginning of "living by the clock," which emerged with the marriage of the Industrial Revolution to technological advances that made the measurement of (world-wide) time more precise. Alternatively, the experience of time is studied in circumstances of great social upheaval, like the French Revolution, the American Civil War, and the German revolutionary era of the late 18<sup>th</sup> to mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>18</sup> As described earlier, consideration of theoretical and practical communist time exists, but it remains scarce. All in all, historical scholarship is not ignoring time, but it is certainly giving it a wide berth.

Indeed, this is understandable. Individual, subjective experience of time is difficult to describe, let alone measure. Time is intangible—a feeling, not an event—and broad. Anthropologist Nancy D. Munn describes the scholarly hurdle: "The problem of time in anthropology, as in other disciplines, is subject to the Augustinian lament: how difficult to find a meta-language to conceptualize something so ordinary and apparently transparent in everyday life."<sup>19</sup> But still, time provides the basis of human experience, "an inescapable dimension of all aspects of social experience and practice."<sup>20</sup> In his essay on historical method, Peter H. Smith describes how historians use time "as a construct."<sup>21</sup> But really, that task is not reserved to historians alone—"everyone is a practitioner and theoretician of time."<sup>22</sup> Time's importance is clear, but its study elusive. Psychologists quantify

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<sup>17</sup> The examples of such methodological arguments are numerous and multifaceted. For an introduction, see Peter H. Smith, "Time as a Historical Construct," *Historical Methods* 17.4 (1984); John R. Hall, "The Time of History and the History of Times," *History and Theory* 19.2 (1980); David Carr, "Place and Time: On the Interplay of Historical Points of View," *History and Theory* 40.4 (2001); and Eelco Runia, "Spots of Time," *History and Theory* 45 (2006).

<sup>18</sup> For example, see Gary Cross, ed., *Worktime and Industrialization: An International History*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988); Lynn Hunt, "The World We Have Gained: The Future of the French Revolution," *The American Historical Review* 108.1 (2003): 46 pars, 8 Oct. 2007 <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ahr/108.1/ah0103000001.html> and Mona Ozouf, "Space and Time in the Festivals of the French Revolution," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 17.3 (1975); Cheryl A. Wells, *Civil War Time: Temporality & Identity in America, 1861-1865* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2005); and Ernst Wolfgang Becker, *Zeit der Revolution!—Revolution der Zeit? Zeiterfahrungen in Deutschland in der Ära der Revolution 1789-1848/49* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999).

<sup>19</sup> Nancy D. Munn, "The Cultural Anthropology of Time: A Critical Essay," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 21 (1992), 116.

<sup>20</sup> Munn, 93.

<sup>21</sup> Smith, 182.

<sup>22</sup> Nowotny, 6.

time in terms of human biology and anthropologists qualify time in regards to human culture, but my goal is to contextualize time in its particular historical moment.<sup>23</sup>

But admittedly, measuring the experience of time among the broader East German society is exceedingly difficult, especially within the limits of my current undertaking. While the SED's propaganda can be subjected to analysis, tracking general temporal trends in the East German population is less straightforward. No large-scale oral projects about the experience of time throughout the GDR's history have been pursued,<sup>24</sup> and although the state did compile occasional studies of workers' moods, these are buried in regional archives to which I do not have access. To this date, only a handful of studies have made use of them, further decreasing their availability for my research.<sup>25</sup> However, I did have the opportunity to conduct an interview with Irmtraut Petersson in Berlin, a former citizen of the GDR born in 1943.<sup>26</sup> It should be noted, though, that the interview is not intended to be representative of the entire East German experience. But I will draw on it on occasion in my discussion.

Now, though, let's examine what scholarship does exist. In one of the few works examining the experience of time in East Germany, Martin Sabrow contends that a "paralyzing sense of futurelessness" played a role in the GDR's rapid crumble

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<sup>23</sup> Anthropologist Munn touches on another valid conundrum in describing time: "Like all other discourses, those about time themselves take temporal form. We cannot analyze or talk about time without using media already encoded with temporal meanings nor, in the course of doing so, can we avoid creating something that takes the form of time—as I am doing here. We and our productions are in some sense always 'in' time (the socioculturally/historically informed time of our activity and our wider world) and yet we make, through our acts, the time we are in" (94).

<sup>24</sup> GDR oral history is mostly confined to personal histories of state functionaries and the stories of dissident movement and society personalities. Grass-roots oral history centers on specific political movements (like the youth organizations, *Junge Pioniere* [Young Pioneers] and *Freie Deutsche Jugend* [Free German Youth], for example) and specific political moments, such as the uprising in July 1953, the building of the Berlin Wall in August 1961, and the experience of the events of fall 1989.

<sup>25</sup> These include Corey Ross, *Constructing Socialism at the Grass-Roots: The Transformation of East Germany, 1945-65* (Great Britain: MacMillan Press Ltd., 2000); Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR 1949-1989* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Clemens Vollnhals and Jürgen Weber, eds., *Der Schein der Normalität: Alltag und Herrschaft in der SED-Diktatur* (Munich: Olzog Verlag, 2002); Richard Bessel and Ralph Jessen, eds., *Die Grenzen der Diktatur: Staat und Gesellschaft in der DDR* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996); and Konrad Jarausch, ed., *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR* (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999). The first two are more general studies, whereas the latter three are collections of specific articles relating to social history and the history of everyday life in the GDR. For my purposes, the more general studies prove more effective, though the other three compilations are very helpful in understanding the GDR.

<sup>26</sup> Irmtraut Petersson was born in Silesia but spent her childhood in Dresden, moving to Berlin after finishing secondary school. In 1980, she moved to Sweden, later moving to Bonn in the mid-1980s. She currently lives in the Prenzlauer Berg district of Berlin.



from within.<sup>27</sup> He writes that the SED's early obsession with the future had largely disappeared in the state's later rhetoric. Beginning in the 1970s and continuing until the state's eventual collapse in 1989, he argues that "a growing sense that there was no future was in keeping with a sense of the present standing still."<sup>28</sup> According to Sabrow, the GDR political leadership created a temporal culture in which the concept of the past was disempowered through political manipulation and the future was deadened as a result of over-use. The past existed only in modification, and the future only as an empty propagandistic catchphrase. Citing a radical linear interpretation of time that combined the irreversibility of the past with a maniacal dedication to progress, Sabrow concludes that the present entered a state of suspended temporal insignificance. Entering the 1970s, the SED had created a socialist society that "was so strongly over laden with the 'future' that it was in danger of losing its identity"<sup>29</sup>; eventually, the growing sense of futurelessness was experienced as the sense of the present standing still. By 1989, he argues, the future had lost its significance as factor of motivation.

Sabrow relies on an explanation that attributes this futurelessness to both the GDR populace and the SED leadership, though he does not explore the possibility of overlap or accommodation between the two. Although he does not assume that GDR citizens experienced time exactly as the party leadership propagated, as would befit totalitarian explanations of the GDR, he still ascribes to the general trend of viewing "state" and "society" as different entities. Directly after the disintegration of the GDR in 1989-90, scholarly activity often focused on theories of totalitarianism in order to explain the state's longevity. Within this framework, the historical interpretation of the regime focuses on organs of political control and repression, nourished by revelations after 1990 about the startling scale of *Stasi*<sup>30</sup> surveillance.<sup>31</sup> Yet in this view, "the would-be 'totalitarian' party's ideological claims serve as the primary measure of reality rather than the actual social conditions and mechanisms of rule."<sup>32</sup> Ignoring the nature of popular reception, this vein of totalitarian theory tends to assume that the personal experiences of GDR citizens corresponded with state policy at its very ideal.

And although there is good reason to emphasize the repression, control, and dictatorial power of the SED, totalitarian theories fall short of explaining the

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<sup>27</sup> Sabrow, 365.

<sup>28</sup> Sabrow, 366.

<sup>29</sup> Sabrow, 362.

<sup>30</sup> *Stasi* is a shortened name of the *Ministerium für Staatssicherheit* (Ministry for State Security), the secret police of the GDR.

<sup>31</sup> Corey Ross, *The East German Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives in the Interpretation of the GDR* (London: Oxford University Press, 2002), 21.

<sup>32</sup> Ross, 34.

particular experience of the millions of individuals who lived under the GDR's socialist system. Even while arguing for the use of the term "modern dictatorship" instead of "totalitarian" to describe the GDR, Jürgen Kocka concedes that such terminology results in a top-down perspective which does not take into account many aspects of life, daily experience, and socialization in the GDR.<sup>33</sup> He calls for the study of "social structures and processes, perceptions, actions and encounters which—although seldom entirely untouched by the dictatorship—nevertheless possessed their own inner logic, and often their own intrinsic value."<sup>34</sup> In this, Kocka builds on Alf Lüdtke's concept of the GDR as a *durchherrschte Gesellschaft* (thoroughly-ruled society) populated by people who nevertheless retained a measure of *Eigen-Sinn*.<sup>35</sup> A hyphenated version of the German word for "stubbornness," the term *Eigen-Sinn* evokes both a sense of resistance to state policy and the way in which people gave policies individual meaning.<sup>36</sup> Lüdtke and later proponents of *Alltagsgeschichte* challenge the dichotomous idea of totalitarian rule by arguing that the SED influenced a great deal of society but that this influence was not integral to all societal interactions.<sup>37</sup> One step further, Richard Bessel and Ralph Jessen argue that the relationship between state and society was actually dialectical—the state influenced society but was also duly influenced itself by the society it sought to control.<sup>38</sup> The time propaganda communicated during the GDR's anniversary celebrations reflects such a relationship. The state did not exist in a vacuum, ceaselessly promulgating the cult of progress until the bitter end. Rather, its propaganda was influenced by the general temporal reality of the society it sought to control.

Before continuing in the analysis of the anniversary celebrations, though, it would be useful to discuss the basis of the state's temporal representation of the past, present, and future in more depth. Although the SED styled the GDR as an anti-fascist state, similar aspects of its adaptation of history to the present can be seen in fascist philosophy. In his article on Giovanni Gentile, the "philosopher of Fascism," Rik Peters describes the notion of the "presentification of the past," or

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<sup>33</sup> Jürgen Kocka, "The GDR: A Special Kind of Modern Dictatorship," in Konrad Jarausch, ed., *Dictatorship as Experience*.

<sup>34</sup> Kocka, 24.

<sup>35</sup> See Alf Lüdtke, ed., William Templer, trans., *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

<sup>36</sup> Gregory Witkowski, "The German Democratic Republic: State Power and Everyday Life," *History Compass* 5.3 (2007), 938.

<sup>37</sup> Witkowski, 937.

<sup>38</sup> Richard Bessel and Ralph Jessen, "Einleitung: Grenzen der Diktatur," in Bessel and Jessen, eds., *Die Grenzen der Diktatur*.

reality as history.<sup>39</sup> According to Peters, Gentile philosophized that “the past only exists insofar as it is ‘realized’ or ‘actualized’ in the present.” From this, he argues, “it follows that history belongs to the present.”<sup>40</sup> The SED was, however, selective in its “presentification” of the past: by adapting the past to agree with Marxist historical materialism, the SED used the past as a tool to legitimate their antifascist role in the present. For them, the fascist past was alive and well—and just over the border in the West. By designating West Germany as the continuation of the imperialistic monopoly capitalism that had twice plunged the world into war, East Germany “actualized” the past by locating it in the present. Pointing to the failure of Western denazification, and expanding anti-fascism to include all citizens of the GDR among its adherents, East German leaders directly contrasted their own anti-fascist republic with the “fascist” Federal Republic of Germany (*Bundesrepublik Deutschland* or FRG) in the West.

Significantly, it was also a very selective history that the SED sought to immortalize through Peters’ notion of presentification. In the GDR, history was inseparable from an analysis situated in Marxist economic reductionism—the GDR was declared the *Vollendung* (“completion”) of Germany’s revolutionary legacy, describing the 1848 March Revolution and the so-called “interrupted revolution” of the Spartacus Revolt of 1918-9 as its precursors.<sup>41</sup> National Socialism as an ideology was unimportant; its significance rested rather in its status as the highest form of capitalism and thus the last economic manifestation before the inevitable socialist revolution. Although the destruction of Nazi Germany did allow for the transition to the socialist society, it was only part of a definable process of history that counted the failed revolutions of 1848 and 1918 as equally significant in the German transition to socialism. Indeed, Walter Ulbricht,<sup>42</sup> First Secretary of the SED from 1950-1971, described the aftermath of the “defeat of Hitler fascism” as “a matter of

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<sup>39</sup> Rik Peters, “Actes de Presence: Presence in Fascist Political Culture,” *History and Theory* 45:3 (2006).

<sup>40</sup> Peters, 366.

<sup>41</sup> According to Andreas Dorpalen in *German History in Marxist Perspective: The East German Approach* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1985), GDR historians described the revolution of 1848, in which both bourgeois and working class Germans called for freedom, national unity, and a German parliament, as a turning point in the transition from feudalism to capitalism (203). The Spartacus Revolt of 1918-9—spurred by the mutiny of German sailors in Kiel—was “welcomed as accelerating the historical process” toward socialism and “raising it to a higher plane” (313).

<sup>42</sup> Following the arrest of Ernst Thälmann (1866-1944), the leader of the KPD during the Weimar Republic, Wilhelm Pieck and Walter Ulbricht became leading figures of the communist exile in Paris and then in Moscow. Returning from Moscow at the end of the war, Ulbricht became the most powerful member of the KPD and later of the SED. On his return to Germany after the war, Ulbricht led the East German government from 1950 to 1971 as First Secretary of the SED Central Committee (Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997], 13-14).

drawing the historical conclusions.”<sup>43</sup> Ulbricht’s “historical conclusions”—that the founding of the German Democratic Republic was a fulfillment of the laws of history—simplified the ideology of National Socialism in accordance with historical materialism.

Developed in the Weimar Republic and continued in exile during the Nazi era, German communism drew on an intact antifascist political tradition that in turn directed the future of the German socialist state.<sup>44</sup> Most influential was the 1935 Communist International’s declaration that fascism is “the open dictatorship of terror of the most reactionary, chauvinistic and imperialistic elements of finance capital.”<sup>45</sup> According to the “laws” of Marxist historical materialism, fascism was merely the last political manifestation before the triumph of socialism. Fascism was seen “as a phenomenon of the late phase of capitalism, by which that historically obsolete and declining system seeks to preserve and strengthen its weakened rule and roll back the inevitable transition to the socialist order that began with the Bolshevik Revolution.”<sup>46</sup> Capitalism’s attempt to stem socialism was fated to fail. To resist fascism, then, was to accelerate the unavoidable transition to socialist society.

And this was exactly the temporal significance of antifascism. By purporting to continue to resist fascism in the present, the SED engaged in a conscious effort to “presentify” the past. The past—or, more accurately, the SED’s specific version of the past—gave temporal purpose to the present at the same time as it justified the future. But the future it justified—the highest stage of human fulfillment achieved in communism—became increasingly distant as time progressed. According to John Borneman, the author of one of the few articles discussing the experience of time in East Germany, the mid-1960s marked the point when the idealistic future collapsed into the reality of an unfulfilling and futureless present. Because the state “had exhausted its economic base in a policy that favored the building of heavy industry over investment in domestic infrastructure or consumption,” the modernist vision

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<sup>43</sup> Walter Ulbricht, “The Present Situation and the Struggle for the New Germany,” in *Whither Germany? Speeches and Essays on the National Question*, compiled by the German Institute of Contemporary History in Berlin (Dresden: Zeit im Bild Publishing House, 1966), 161. *Whither Germany?* was compiled from Ulbricht’s *On the History of the German Workers’ Movement*, which offers the canonical texts and major themes of the postwar Communist narrative. This excerpt is from a report given to the Fourth Congress of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, occurring from March 30 to April 6, 1954 in Berlin.

<sup>44</sup> See chapter 2, “German Communism’s Master Narratives of Antifascism: Berlin-Moscow-East Berlin, 1928-1945” in Herf, *Divided Memory* for a more detailed discussion of the pre-1945 development of the antifascist narrative.

<sup>45</sup> Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED, VII Kongreß der Kommunistischen Internationale (Berlin: Reports and Resolutions, 1975), 75, cited in Siobhan Kattago, *Ambiguous Memory: The Nazi Past and German National Identity* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2001), 85.

<sup>46</sup> Dorpalen, *German History in Marxist Perspective*, 393.

that “presupposed an unstoppable race toward a progressive future” had become obviously unattainable.<sup>47</sup> By the mid-1960s, Borneman argues, East Germans “wanted to slow down time, partly because they had no incentive to speed it up.” Time in the GDR was experienced as “petrified” and stagnant.<sup>48</sup> It follows, then that state and popular notions of time were not diametrically opposed, but rather influenced each other in a dialectical relationship. Accordingly, the specific past that the SED “presentified”—and for what purposes—changed, reflecting and influenced by the perception of time among GDR citizens.

### The Anniversary Celebrations

Flags in the city  
and in the whole land. –  
He who has a birthday,  
wears party clothes.

Joyous music,  
bright in the morning wind;  
our Republic  
is the birthday kid.

—Willy Layh, from a 1957 3<sup>rd</sup> grade schoolbook<sup>49</sup>

After 1949, every October 7 in East Germany was marked by a celebration. But the *Tag der Republik* or “Day of the Republic” festivities choreographed by the SED at five-year intervals were markedly different than the smaller-scale annual celebrations. Larger in both a physical and temporal sense, these celebrations were staged on a grand scale and became increasingly longer. By 1979, the “Day” of the Republic had become a 10-day “week” of festivities that had begun to be planned 17 months in advance.<sup>50</sup> The GDR’s first anniversary celebration in 1950 was rather humble, however—the concept of the anniversary as a mass production of reasserting the state’s identity and legitimacy had not yet arisen at a time when most people still regarded the division of Germany as temporary. Published on the occasion of the “return” of the GDR’s founding day in 1950, a small commemorative

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<sup>47</sup> Borneman, “Time-Space Compression,” 43.

<sup>48</sup> Borneman, 44

<sup>49</sup> *Unser Lesebuch für das dritte Schuljahr* (Berlin: Volk und Wissen Volkseigener Verlag, 1957), accessed at the Georg-Eckert Institute for International Schoolbook Research in Brunswick, Germany.

<sup>50</sup> Gibas and Gries, “Die Inszenierung,” in *Wiedergeburten*, 18.

book offered only a short statement by President Pieck, reports on new laws and the constitution, and various poems.<sup>51</sup> October 7, 1950 was marked only by an unostentatious ceremony in Berlin's state opera house. Just two years later in 1952, however, the building blocks of all coming anniversary celebrations were established, regulated by the Ministry of the Interior: decorations of deserving citizens and institutions, commemorative speeches and torchlight processions, mass demonstrations, rallies, and fairs—all broadcast live over the radio and later also on television.

The SED planning commissions were however by no means original in staging such celebrations. The GDR leadership drew on a tradition of political mass demonstrations rooted in revolutionary France and later incorporated into the international communist movement in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Writing during the French Revolution, Jean Jacques Rousseau recommended the mounting of new state-sponsored festivals to “deepen the human relationships between citizens to cement national unity.”<sup>52</sup> Later, the politicized festival culture of the French Revolution would become the example for the Soviet Union's own mass demonstrations after such a festival framework was employed by the Communist International beginning in the late 1800s.<sup>53</sup> During visits and exile in the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 1930s, the future leaders of the GDR—Wilhelm Pieck, Walter Ulbricht, and Erich Honecker—experienced and “internalized” these celebrations, and sought to establish them as tradition in their own socialist state.<sup>54</sup>

These political celebrations represented attempts to collectivize and socialize everyday life to ensure that political tenets were kept alive and thus retained their legitimating factor.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, they served to evoke enthusiasm for the coming of the “new” time while simultaneously instructing how that future should be experienced.<sup>56</sup> Thus, the GDR's decennial anniversaries were not just celebrations of the past, but also offered the opportunity to adapt history to the requirements of the present and future. In turn, looking toward the future gave the GDR leadership the chance to compensate for the deficiencies of the present with hopeful expectations for tomorrow.<sup>57</sup> Though the nature of its representation changed, history too never disappeared from the propaganda. But with each decennial

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<sup>51</sup> *Ein Jahr Deutsche Demokratische Republik* (Berlin/Leipzig: Volk und Wissen Verlag, 1950).

<sup>52</sup> Gibas and Gries, “Die Inszenierung,” 14.

<sup>53</sup> Michael Hoffman, “Mit uns zieht die neue Zeit’: Zur Programmatik sozialistischer Massenfeste,” in *Wiedergeburten*, 45.

<sup>54</sup> Gibas and Gries, 15.

<sup>55</sup> Hoffman, 41-43.

<sup>56</sup> Hoffman, 43.

<sup>57</sup> Gries, “Die runden Geburtstage” in *Wiedergeburten*, 287.

celebration the concept of the future became increasingly limited, ultimately disappearing altogether as a motivating notion of a “new” time and a hopeful tomorrow.

### 1959: “The Victory of Socialism at Rocket Speed”

On September 22, 1959, *Neues Deutschland* (New Germany), the Berlin-based SED newspaper, published the “Law of the Seven Year Plan and the Role of the Party in the Realization of the Plan in Industry.”<sup>58</sup> Riding on the coattails of Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev’s July 1959 Kitchen Debate statement that “in another seven years [the Soviet Union] will be on the same level as America,”<sup>59</sup> First Secretary of the SED Walter Ulbricht declared that “within a few years, the superiority of the socialist social order of the GDR will be undoubtedly proved in comparison to the imperialist dictatorship in West Germany.”<sup>60</sup> Specifically, “the per-person consumption of our working people will reach and overcome most industrial consumer goods and foodstuffs of West Germany.” One week later, a photograph of crowds of people carrying banners boasting *Der Sozialismus siegt!* (Socialism will win!) flanked Ulbricht’s assertion that “through the construction of socialism, the people will get everything it expects from life.”<sup>61</sup>

And the optimism was not just restricted to the party apparatus. In the eyes of both the GDR’s political leaders and the large majority of the population, a veritably “new” time seemed to be on the horizon in the years 1957-1959: war rationing had finally been discontinued after 19 years, the economy seemed more favorable than ever before, and the Soviet Union had just shocked the West by sending the first satellite into space.<sup>62</sup> As illustrated by a late 1950s propaganda poster, the GDR was entering “the new time with rocket speed,” blasting off into the “era of victorious socialism.”<sup>63</sup> Indeed, just two days before the GDR’s first decennial anniversary, the front page of *Neues Deutschland* on October 5, 1969 was dedicated to a photographic report of a Soviet rocket’s upcoming flight around the

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<sup>58</sup> Walter Ulbricht, “Das Gesetz über den Siebenjahrplan und die Aufgaben der Partei bei der Durchführung des Planes in der Industrie,” *Neues Deutschland*, 22 Sept. 1959.

<sup>59</sup> Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 393.

<sup>60</sup> “Das Gesetz,” *Neues Deutschland*, 22 Sept. 1959.

<sup>61</sup> “Der Siebenjahrplan ist der Weg zu Frieden, Wohlstand, und Glück,” *Neues Deutschland*, 1 Oct. 1959.

<sup>62</sup> Gries, “Die runden Geburtstage,” in *Wiedergeburten*, 287.

<sup>63</sup> *Wiedergeburten*, 285.

moon.<sup>64</sup> In light of the technological advances of the Soviet Union and the industrial output of the GDR, optimism in a time of progress did not seem entirely out of place.

It was in this greater context of economic optimism and technological achievement that the GDR celebrated its first decennial anniversary. Commemoration of the anniversary began in March that year, when GDR citizens—workers, engineers, scientists, cooperative farmers, craftsmen, industrialists, teachers, students, artists, and writers—were directly challenged by the SED party apparatus to fulfill their duty of “accomplishing good deeds” to mark the anniversary.<sup>65</sup> In this “Appeal,”<sup>66</sup> the GDR leadership summoned each citizen with regard to their economic role in society, calling on workers, engineers, and scientists, for example, to “make the year 1959 into the year of technical-scientific progress through socialist teamwork!”<sup>67</sup> Each individual in his or her different capacity was invoked to actively contribute to the realization of the SED’s economic goals in honor of the “birthday of the Republic.” In this, GDR citizens were asked to become exactly that which the anniversary set to celebrate: the progressive movement of economic betterment. Indeed, as the poem at the beginning of this section illustrates, the state was actually personified as a “birthday kid”—in posters and in magazines, young, smiling children were juxtaposed on the GDR flag with captions that proclaimed: “I am ten years old!” These posters exuded the optimism and opportunity of youth, not unlike Irmtraut Petersson’s childhood notion of the future—“we can be so happy, we have the future in front of us.”<sup>68</sup> In the spirit of the socialist youth organization *Freie Deutsche Jugend* (Free German Youth or FDJ) song “Build Up”—which Petersson suddenly began singing when discussing the GDR’s early years—the people of the GDR were implored to “build up, build up for a better future.”<sup>69</sup>

This youthful vigor and hope for the future was primarily expressed in the possibility for limitless industrial production. In the lead-up to the week of festivities on October 4-10, for example, *Neues Deutschland* published a four-part, full-page series about the world record production level of 600,000 tons of a carbide

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<sup>64</sup> “Weltraumstation wird Mond umfliegen,” *Neues Deutschland*, 5 Oct. 1959.

<sup>65</sup> Gibas and Gries, “Die Inszenierung,” in *Wiedergeburten*, 19-20.

<sup>66</sup> The full name of the document was “Gemeinsame Kommission ’10 Jahre DDR’: Aufruf der Regierung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik und des Nationalrates der Nationalen Front des demokratischen Deutschlands und Beschluß des Präsidiums des Ministerrates and des Präsidiums des Nationalrates der Nationalen Front des demokratischen Deutschlands über die Vorbereitung des 10. Jahrestags der Gründung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik,” cited in Gibas and Gries, “Inszenierung,” in *Wiedergeburten*, 21.

<sup>67</sup> Gibas and Gries, “Inszenierung,” 20.

<sup>68</sup> C.f. quote at the beginning of this paper.

<sup>69</sup> Irmtraut Petersson, Personal interview, 14 Oct. 2007, Berlin.



factory in Nienburg.<sup>70</sup> Each day of the feat was documented from the perspective of the factory workers with a drama befitting the optimistic period of the time. The theme of the series was industrial production—indeed, overproduction—necessary for the victory of socialism that the new Seven Year Plan promised. The slogan of the 1959 anniversary celebration was “We Set the Table of the Republic for People’s Prosperity, Peace and Happiness,” visually juxtaposed with images of people engaging in industrial, agricultural, and scientific pursuits.<sup>71</sup> Taken together with the “I am 10 years old!” posters, the slogan suggests that the GDR was on the cusp of great economic growth and that its citizens would soon be able to sit down and fully enjoy the fruits of its labor—though only after the table had been “set.” Moreover, it implies a comparison between the empty and set table, alluding to the progress the GDR had already achieved.

Indeed, the decennial celebration constituted the first time that the GDR could legitimately claim a history of its own. This was not lost on the planners of the anniversary celebrations. Indeed, the achievements of the present and the future were explicitly contextualized in the terms of the recent past. As part of the festivities, the SED organized an exhibit in the Museum of German History to illustrate the GDR’s progression from 1949. Under the title “250 Deutsch Mark once and now: What could we buy for ourselves in 1949 and what in 1959?” museum visitors were invited to directly compare the economic situation of 1949 with that of 1959.<sup>72</sup> With the walls decorated with large-scale photographs of mass rallies and life-size photomontages of GDR leaders standing under the slogan “Forward Together to the Victory of Socialism,” the political purpose of the exhibit was by no means hidden.<sup>73</sup> Clearly, the exhibition was designed to portray progress by virtue of a comparison with the post-war hardships of ten years prior as justification for the present and future construction of socialism. History was molded to fit the image of progress that the SED aimed to project. In his anniversary address, President Pieck declared: “The history of our people knows no happier day than this October 7, 1959...The 10th birthday of our Worker and Peasant State is a meaningful cornerstone on our unstoppable advance into a bright future.”<sup>74</sup> The progressive force of socialism could not be checked.

All in all, a sense of expectancy permeated the anniversary. The promised future seemed to be within reach—if everyone would just work a bit harder and a bit more, the construction of the socialist project could be fulfilled. According to the

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<sup>70</sup> “10 Jahre DDR: Als der Funke übersprang,” *Neues Deutschland*, 29, 30 Sept. and 1, 2 Oct. 1959.

<sup>71</sup> *Wiedergeburt*, 20.

<sup>72</sup> Gries, 288.

<sup>73</sup> Dieter Vorsteher, “‘Ich bin zehn Jahre’: Die Ausstellung im Museum für Deutsche Geschichte anlässlich des zehnten Jahrestages der DDR,” in *Wiedergeburt*, 136.

<sup>74</sup> “Aufruf des Präsidenten zum 10. Jahrestag,” *Neues Deutschland*, 7 Oct. 1959.

Seven Year Plan, the GDR of 1965 would be a land of plenty, the victory of socialism undeniably achieved. Riding on this wave of optimism, the media declared that communism would be fully instituted in the GDR between the years of 1980 and 2000.<sup>75</sup> The idea of the communist utopia was never more propagandistically present in the GDR's entire history than it was during the late 1950s.<sup>76</sup> Exemplified by the anniversary propaganda, the end of the 1950s saw the communication of ever more charged horizons of expectation that would be fulfilled by modern technological improvements to the process of industrial production. "Virtual horizons of time, undiminished euphoria of technology and a breathtaking propaganda of 'speed'" combined to create the sense of unstoppable progress.<sup>77</sup> In his anniversary speech, First Secretary Walter Ulbricht declared that "there is no way back, there is only a way forward,"<sup>78</sup> and the headline of the October 8 *Neues Deutschland* boasted, "Assured of victory, millions celebrated their country for the German future."<sup>79</sup>

The weekly television news program *Der Augenzeuge* (The Eyewitness) showed throngs of people gathered in Marx Engels Platz, clapping, smiling, and waving small GDR flags under clear skies on the Day of the Republic.<sup>80</sup> Beginning during the day and drawing late into the night, thousands of people enjoyed a fair on Alexanderplatz, complete with music, book signing, a fashion show, Russian ballet, and Hungarian folk dancing, all capped off with an impressive fireworks display that lit up the night sky behind the outline of the Berliner Dom. As the fireworks exploded above, the camera zoomed in on a young couple with their small child, looking forward on the "birthday of our state" toward the bright future President Pieck had spoken of only the day before.<sup>81</sup>

But the question remains as to whether the people of the GDR actually believed in this vision of unstoppable progress. It had come at the price of a crushed uprising on June 17, 1953, in which numerous protesters were killed while demonstrating for better pay and democratic rights.<sup>82</sup> Indeed, Petersson remarked that her own hope for the future—so palpable in her early life—was destroyed by the experience of June 17, 1953 and later that of August 13, 1961, the day the

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<sup>75</sup> Gries, "Die runden Geburtstage" in *Wiedergeburten*, 290.

<sup>76</sup> Gries, 290.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Walter Ulbricht, "Eine schöne Menschengemeinschaft," *Neues Deutschland*, 7 Oct. 1959.

<sup>79</sup> "Siegesgewiß feierten Millionen ihren Staat der deutschen Zukunft," *Neues Deutschland*, 8 Oct. 1959.

<sup>80</sup> "10. Jahrestag der DDR," *Der Augenzeuge: Die DEFA Wochenschau*, DEFA, Berlin, 9 Oct. 1959.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship*, 178.

Berlin Wall was built.<sup>83</sup> The building of the Berlin Wall itself was testament to the extent of emigration to the West—between 1945 and 1961, three million people left the GDR.<sup>84</sup> And as historian Corey Ross documents, widespread resentment followed all of the SED's attempts at industrial and agricultural control.<sup>85</sup> It is clear that the SED's rhetoric of optimistic progress did not reflect the experience of large numbers of the GDR population.

With this in mind, the end of the fifties revealed the beginnings of a “temporal disconnect” between the state and its people. The 1959 anniversary can, in a way, be seen as the last effort of the SED to harness the reconstructive spirit of the war's aftermath to its current goals. But a decade of dictatorship under the SED had engendered a nascent resentment that would color the rest of its existence. More often than not, people perceived the state's pronouncements of the bright future of socialism as the precursor of another effort of complete social control. Ten years later, in 1969, this unbridled rhetoric of future and progress had given way, in the face of an obvious lack of a “victory” of socialism, to a more concerted effort to portray the virtues of the present.

### **1969: “Further Ahead on Our Good Socialist Path”**

“Modern” was the catchword of the period, a word that contains a progressive element but ultimately expresses the nature of being up-to-date in the immediate present. At the same time as the Seventh Party Congress of the SED established the five-day-workweek in 1967, “modernity” was being cast as the ability to enjoy more free time.<sup>86</sup> A 1969 advertisement for an electric blender declared “Modern housekeeping—more free time,” asserting that the product would allow the modern woman “more time for time.”<sup>87</sup> In contrast to 1959, the present—not the future—had assumed central prominence in the GDR's cultural dialogue. Moreover, the present was being privatized and commoditized—with the state's approbation. Time's collective element was no longer emphasized; instead, the free time of the individual, and the commodities that could help fill it, became paramount.

Perhaps most representative of the state's role in the creation of this new temporal framework was its self-styled gift to the people of the Republic in honor of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the GDR. “Präsent 20” or “Present 20”—a

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<sup>83</sup> Petersson, 14 Oct. 2007.

<sup>84</sup> Corey Ross, *Constructing Socialism at the Grass-Roots: The Transformation of East Germany, 1945-65* (Great Britain: MacMillan Press Ltd., 2000), 143.

<sup>85</sup> See Ross, *Constructing Socialism*.

<sup>86</sup> Gries, “Die ‘runden’ Geburtstage,” 291.

<sup>87</sup> *Wiedergeburten*, 291.

play on words which incorporates the notion of “present” as both the period of time and the gift—was a fully-synthetic material resembling polyester meant to epitomize modernity.<sup>88</sup> In fact, it did not represent the first time that synthetic material was popularized during an anniversary celebration: in 1959, the GDR leadership touted the production of “Dederon,” a thinly veiled play on the name for nylon combining the initials of the GDR (DDR in German) with the German word for nylon, “Perlon” (DeDeR-on).<sup>89</sup> But while the Dederon of the 1950s was meant to represent the progressive face of the GDR chemical program in the construction of socialism, Präsent 20 was intended to convey that the GDR had reached the status of a world-class consumer society. Although it was a celebration of progress, it was specifically a celebration of progress of the present rather than that of the future. Advertisements featuring the material show young, stylish individuals enjoying their new clothes in an environment completely divorced from representations of work.<sup>90</sup> Präsent 20 was a present for the present, a synthetic material meant for private consumption rather than to showcase the glories of socialism.

Indeed, privatization and consumption were the two major themes of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary propaganda. Unlike the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, which appealed to workers’ duty to work, the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary appealed to the inclination to consume. “Chic for the birthday of our Republic” was the woman in one Konsum advertisement, who looked not forward but wistfully to the side.<sup>91</sup> Another advertisement features a man’s hand carrying a shopping bag with the slogan “with progress hand in hand: 20 Years GDR.”<sup>92</sup> Both advertisements suggest the celebration of the GDR’s 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary through consumption. Moreover, the advertisements exhibit a growing privatization in contrast to the collective optimism of the 1950s. Although the Republic is still “our Republic,” the woman stands alone in her chic clothes, and the body of the man is reduced to a hand carrying a shopping bag. The idea of collectively working toward the goal of communism is all but absent. According to Rainer Gries, “progress and socialism were now no longer bold visions of some distant future, but rather ‘progress’ described a tangible horizon of the present in 1969, that is to say the sum of that which was accomplished: history and the future should solely demonstrate the functions of a successful present by virtue of...the material successes achieved by the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary.”<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Gries, 293.

<sup>89</sup> Stefan Paul, “1959: Die Geburt des ‘Dederon’ aus dem Geiste des Kapitalismus,” in *Wiedergeburten*, 91.

<sup>90</sup> See advertisements in *Wiedergeburten*, 98-102.

<sup>91</sup> *Wiedergeburten*, 97.

<sup>92</sup> *Wiedergeburten*, 96.

<sup>93</sup> Gries, “Die ‘runden’ Geburtstage,” 295.

In 1969, the anniversary slogans were “20 Years GDR—Further Ahead on our Good Socialist Path” and “Our Path is True,”<sup>94</sup> but it was a path projected only into the next decade rather than into the “future” in general. Like 10 years before, the SED chose to represent itself in “young and dynamic” 20-somethings; “realistic and confident, joyful and consumer-oriented,” these youths were “aware of the past and secure in the socialist future,” but “very alive in the present.”<sup>95</sup> Throughout 1969, these posters of photogenic, ebullient 20-year-olds decorated cities<sup>96</sup> in much the same fashion as the “I am ten years old!” posters of a decade earlier, but this time the naïve hopefulness of youth had disappeared in favor of a more dynamic image of the confident present. A similar construction can be seen in *Der Augenzeuge*’s coverage of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary: instead of a mass festival with jazz and Hungarian folk music, young twenty-somethings relax in a smoky bar with drinks and cigarettes listening to the band *Oktoberklub* (October Club) praise the state in rock n’ roll.<sup>97</sup> The state, like the twenty-somethings that it used to represent itself, tried to present itself as an assured, developed society that no longer needed to refer to a distant future to justify the present.

But the propaganda revealed insecurity as well. That the state continually referred to its path as “true” hinted at a deeper sense of unease that permeated the time. The headline of the October 8, 1969 edition of *Neues Deutschland* proclaimed “Forward into the third decade! We are on the true path!”<sup>98</sup> which mirrored the banners trumpeting “Our Path is True” seen in the anniversary rally on Marx Engels Platz.<sup>99</sup> But if the state were so assured of progress on the “good path of socialism” why would it even need to declare that its system was true? In context of the 1968 Prague Spring and student revolts throughout Europe, however, this subtle insecurity seems plausible. The unrest and the uncertainty of the time period found expression in the GDR’s propaganda. This demonstrates that the state was not impervious to outside forces, a notion that becomes important when considering that the temporal constructs of the GDR leadership and the general population became increasingly more aligned as the regime progressed. The seeds of this alignment can be glimpsed in the 1969 anniversary, however subtle it was.

Indeed, the reorientation of time from the collective to the private sphere and the emphasis on the present in the 1969 propaganda actually reflects general trends of temporality in the society at large. With the “construction of socialism”

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<sup>94</sup> Gibas and Gries, “Inszenierung,” 24.

<sup>95</sup> Gries, “Die ‘runden’ Geburtstage,” 294.

<sup>96</sup> Gries, 293.

<sup>97</sup> “20. Jahrestag der Republik,” *Der Augenzeuge: Die DEFA Wochenschau*, DEFA, Berlin, 8 Oct. 1969.

<sup>98</sup> “Vorwärts ins dritte Jahrzehnt! Wir sind auf dem richtigen Weg!” *Neues Deutschland*, 8 Oct. 1969.

<sup>99</sup> “20. Jahrestag,” *Der Augenzeuge*.

largely complete by the 1960s, it was clear that Walter Ulbricht's boastful claims about the victory of socialist production over capitalist economic output were indeed empty. Capitalism had been good to the Federal Republic of Germany; by the 1960s, West Germany's *Wirtschaftswunder* ("economic miracle") had permanently overtaken that of its eastern neighbor. In an attempt at economic reform, however, the SED implemented the "New Economic System" in 1963. Yet afraid that economic decentralization and the introduction of market elements into the pricing system would jeopardize state power, the SED limited the original scope of the reforms, and the GDR's economic position failed to improve.<sup>100</sup> In 1970, faced with the failure of the "New Economic System," the SED chose to return to its original centrally-organized and bureaucratically-controlled economy.<sup>101</sup> As noted earlier, Borneman dates the collapse of the idea of a viable socialist future to this time period, and asserts that an increasing bureaucratization of life followed on the part of the SED in an attempt to "slow down time."<sup>102</sup> Unbridled progress had become an untenable, indeed embarrassing, concept for the SED. Unable to illustrate the economic success promised by the increasingly distant communist future, the SED turned to "modern" consumer goods in an attempt to extend the present. Free time and private enjoyment were commoditized and sanctioned in an attempt to cushion the effects of the realization of an empty future.

Like the state, many people in the GDR also began turning inward to the comfort of the present, withdrawing to what Günter Gaus called the "niche society."<sup>103</sup> The niche society, which Mary Fulbrook dates to the early 1970s, allowed East Germans to "come to terms with the pressures and demands of their regime by leading a double life of outward conformity combined with private authenticity."<sup>104</sup> Describing niche society as a combination of *Anpassung und Meckern*, or conformity and grumbling, Fulbrook concludes that over time the East Germans developed a *modus vivendi*, or "patterns of behaviour which allow[ed] them to live within constraints which they [could not] realistically hope to alter."<sup>105</sup> In such a way, niche society conforms to the idea of futurelessness: because they could not "realistically" alter the state of society and thus control their own future,

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<sup>100</sup> Thomas A. Baylis, "Explaining the GDR's Economic Strategy," *International Organization* 40.2 (1986), 385.

<sup>101</sup> Baylis, "Explaining," 386.

<sup>102</sup> Borneman, "Time-Space Compression," 43.

<sup>103</sup> Günter Gaus, *Wo Deutschland liegt: Eine Ortsbestimmung* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1983), 73.

<sup>104</sup> Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship*, 129.

<sup>105</sup> Fulbrook, 143.

East Germans retreated into distinct activities to create their own present.<sup>106</sup> Petersson noted this tendency, too, describing how she turned inward to her *Freundenkreisen* (“circles of friends”) to “really live.” They “partied a lot, discussed a lot, and drank a lot—one really lived.”<sup>107</sup>

In 1969, the seeds for the extended present were evident in the emphasis on private life and commodities. And by 1979, the present was king, indeed.

### 1979: “A Proud Balance for Us All”

By 1979, the grand, utopian ideas of the coming of communism had wholly disappeared. Instead of a plan leading to the victory of socialism, 1979 saw a plan to build apartments. Although the beginnings of a shift away from an idealized portrayal of the future began in 1969, there still existed a residual hope in the power of technology to automate and streamline production and ensure, at the very least, a comfortable future. But “DDR 1990”—the proposal to dedicate approximately ten percent of the GDR’s national income to building apartments until the year 1990—was a pragmatic, palpable vision of the future that explicitly promoted a citizen’s right to receive a private piece of the great socialist “work of millions.”<sup>108</sup> The shortage of proper apartments that had plagued both East and West Germany after the end of the Second World War had never been completely solved in the GDR; couples were often forced to continue living with their parents for lack of available living space. Following the reorientation of time toward the private sphere that began with the 1969 anniversary propaganda, the plan to build apartments represented a sanctification of private retreat over the collective construction of socialism. Indeed, the state’s emphasis on developing people’s access to the private represented an attempt to extend the present while limiting the future, mirroring the general trend toward private “niche” activities found in some sectors of the population. Hope was not placed in the coming of communism, but rather in the possibility of a private apartment by 1990—far from the promise of communism’s arrival between the years 1980 and 2000 made in 1959. The notion of a viable future within the socialist system began to disappear from people’s consciousness.

Indeed, the state abetted the feeling of an extended present, even if it ostensibly adhered to models of previous anniversary celebrations. For example,

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<sup>106</sup> Gardens shared by groups of friends became the symbol of this movement toward a “niche society” (see discussion in Mary Fulbrook’s *Anatomy of a Dictatorship*, 143). For information about how private identities were created with influence from the West, see “Rock ‘n’ Roll, Female Sexuality, and the Cold War Battle over German Identities” by Uta G. Poiger, *The Journal of Modern History* 68.3 (1996), 577-616.

<sup>107</sup> Petersson, Interview.

<sup>108</sup> Gries, 296.

the planning phase for the 1979 celebration began a full 14 months before the start of anniversary year—that is to say, 24 months before the actual anniversary on October 7. Still, a suitable motto for the obligatory economic contest of the anniversary year could not be found, and the slogan from 1974—“From Every Mark and Every Gram of Material a Greater Efficiency”—was used in default.<sup>109</sup> The gesture provides a poignant example of the overall stagnation of the period. The experience of 1974 became that of 1979, extending the present in face of a lack of a stirring future. That is not to say, however, that the old theme of economic production was absent. *Neues Deutschland* was still inclined to publish an array of stories lauding the incredible industrial production in “competition” (*Wettbewerb*) in honor of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, like the two decennials before it. Late September 1979 saw distinction given to work collectives that achieved especially high output for the “Course GDR 30” economic competition, for example, but a new dimension had entered the rhetoric surrounding the competition. Now, “every person should recognize their own objective in the Plan.”<sup>110</sup> In the same vein as the scheme to build apartments, the state moved toward an assertion of the private to draw attention away from the collective failure of GDR industrial production. The state still encouraged the GDR population to work, but cast production in terms of personal achievement. The tone of collectivity was lowered. Traditional components of previous anniversary components were subtly changed to fit the temporal reality of stagnation that both the state and GDR citizens faced.

This feeling of stagnation found expression in the anniversary’s propagandistic display, captured in the decennial celebrations’ general slogan “A Proud Balance for Us All.” In contrast to the ebullient optimism of 1959 anniversary propaganda, the 1979 notion of “balance” indicated the act of stopping and evaluating one’s position, ultimately seeking contentment in the current social situation. “Balance” by no means conveys unbridled progress, asserting instead that stagnation should be embraced. Referring at once back to “DDR 1990” construction plan, this “balance” was most often symbolized by a construction worker on anniversary propaganda. Once again, the state employed an anthropomorphic narrative to represent its development. One propaganda poster depicted a child’s hand-written description of his or her construction worker father, who “is 30 like my fatherland.”<sup>111</sup> The generation of 49ers—those children born with the Republic—had reached maturity and started families of their own. But the state in its 30<sup>th</sup> year was not nearly as optimistic as it was in 1949. The future, which before had seemed so limitless and open for possibility, had been limited to a

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<sup>109</sup> Gibas and Gries, “Inszenierung,” 26.

<sup>110</sup> “Ehrung für hohe Leistungen im 'Mach mit!'-Wettbewerb,” *Neues Deutschland*, 24 Sept. 1979; “Reportage vom Wettbewerb zum 30. Jahrestag unserer Republik: Jeder soll im Plan auch sein eigenes Ziel erkennen,” *Neues Deutschland*, 26 Sept. 1979.

<sup>111</sup> Wiedergeburt, 294.



dynamic present and then finally to an apartment. Significantly, Honecker even retooled the anniversary celebration itself, rededicating it as the National Holiday of the GDR and thus historicizing it more than ever before.<sup>112</sup> If the 1950s were directed at the future and the 1960s focused on the present, then the 1970s represented a step back into history. Progress had literally begun to regress.

However, pervasive stagnation was not a foregone conclusion in the early 1970s. When Erich Honecker replaced Walter Ulbricht as the First Secretary of the SED in 1971, many people, including Petersson, hoped that the political nature of the GDR might change with him.<sup>113</sup> But in his “really existing socialism,” Honecker wholeheartedly rejected acceleration toward the goal of the socialist future in favor of a pragmatic vision of gradual change. He had, according to Gries, “discovered slowness.” The first years of Honecker’s state were marked by attempts to ameliorating social condition in the here and now, rather than in the distant communist future.<sup>114</sup> Unfortunately for Honecker and the GDR population, though, heightened expectations of economic improvement and political freedom were not met.<sup>115</sup> At the same time, West Germany’s recognition of the GDR as a separate state in 1972 and the GDR’s signing of the Helsinki Accords in 1975 contributed to the fact “that many East Germans now had to view their state as a permanent internationally recognized entity, and that any end to the division of Germany was now a most unlikely possibility.”<sup>116</sup> It now seemed as if there would be no escape from the East German system.

The temporal experience of state and society were more aligned than ever before. Both were experiencing a deep stagnation and an impending hopelessness that included the sense of futurelessness that would contribute greatly to the state’s 1989 collapse. Although politically the GDR leadership seemed to have consolidated its power according to plan, the social picture was far more ambiguous. With a social hierarchy that had largely crystallized by the mid-1960s, the East Germany of the 1970s and 1980s did not offer more than meager prospects for upward mobility, leading to a growing frustration and disillusionment among those born after the GDR’s founding.<sup>117</sup> According to Corey Ross:

Many other basic features of ‘real existing socialism’ were rooted precisely in the problems and unintended developments that had emerged as a result of older continuities or the contradictions of the socialist transformation itself:

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<sup>112</sup> Gries, 297.

<sup>113</sup> To this, she said: “One hoped that with Honecker, things would get better. But it only *seemed* to get better, and at that time spying and *Stasi* operations actually increased.”

<sup>114</sup> Fulbrook, 145.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Fulbrook, 146-7.

<sup>117</sup> Ross, 196.

the ‘hidden bargaining’ in the factors, a west-oriented youth broadly averse to being ‘organized,’ a grumbling and politically apathetic countryside, widespread complacency and inactivity among the party and mass organizations at the grass-roots, widespread minor corruption and collusion, the ‘shadow economy’ as partial compensation for the contradictions and inefficiencies of the planned economy, the list goes on. Apart from the gradual improvement of basic living standards and social facilities (which after the dismantling of the NES [New Economic System] at the close of the 1960s were based more on Western credits than productivity gains in the GDR), this basic picture at the grass-roots changed relatively little until the collapse of the regime two and half decades later (197).

After thirty years of existence, the GDR had been reorganized to the general satisfaction of its leaders. Significantly, though, this development had finished by the mid-1960s, and in its wake emerged no real movement to revitalize the state or address the problems that such a development had caused.

In the context of a lack of future, the state as well as its citizens turned inward toward an ever-extending present to escape the futurelessness of a life fettered to a system in economic decline. But while the state then regressed into the past, the citizens remained in the present, constructing the informal friendship circles that would later coalesce into formal resistance to challenge the regime in 1989, often within the framework of the German Protestant Church.<sup>118</sup> Here, then, is the fundamental disconnect: stuck in the past, the state could not and did not react to the possibilities of reform offered by new General Secretary of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev’s *perestroika* and *glasnost* beginning in 1985. Remaining in the present gave the people quicker access to the future than the state that had rejected it.

### 1989: The 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Revolution

And so the stage was set for the GDR’s last anniversary celebration. Yet the 1959 table—the one promising prosperity, peace and happiness—was nowhere to be seen. But the show must go on—and it did, with the help of massive police and *Stasi* intervention.<sup>119</sup> The structure of the official celebrations was not any different than the other three decennial jubilees, though. The 1989 decennial celebration contained the same elements as the three celebrations before it: a long planning

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<sup>118</sup> Mary Fulbrook details how many nonconformists came together under the guise of East German Protestantism as a result of state policies that restricted higher education opportunities to those who exhibited “nonconformity” with state policies (203). Petersson was also barred from finishing her university studies due to her involvement in a movement in favor of the Prague Spring uprising in 1968. Her crime was termed *staatsfeindlicher Hetze*, or “subversive agitation” against the state.

<sup>119</sup> Fulbrook, 253.

phase, the declaration of a year of increased economic production in honor of the anniversary, a mass rally in Marx Engels Platz, speeches by political leaders, and a torchlight procession of Free German Youth symbolizing their promise to be the light of the socialist future. But this time, non-state orchestrated, popular demonstrations occurred alongside the official rallies, ending only after participants' arrest and physical intimidation.<sup>120</sup> On October 9, 1989, 80,000 people gathered in Leipzig as a direct challenge to the empty celebratory ritual.<sup>121</sup> Exactly one month later, people were taking sledgehammers to the Berlin Wall.

So how did the propaganda of the GDR's last decennial celebration appear? Much like the first. Semantically similar to the 1959 setting the table metaphor, the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary slogan "Quality—Productivity—Saving of Time" returned to the idea of industrial production as the path to victory.<sup>122</sup> In the run-up to the anniversary on October 7, high production "for a strong DDR" was lauded on numerous occasions in *Neues Deutschland*.<sup>123</sup> On September 12, an article about young coal worker Uwe Krüger appeared with the title: "The Best in the Competition Daily, Because We Know Quite Clearly Why."<sup>124</sup> In the article, Krüger, with a wife and a young baby at home in his new apartment, asserts that "we should not be put off from our good path." Although the article is ostensibly about industrial production, it is clear why Krüger is imploring his fellow citizens to "stay on track." Just a few weeks earlier, Hungary had opened up its border to Austria, suddenly offering access to the West to thousands of East Germans who quickly found refuge in Budapest embassies.<sup>125</sup> Domestically, reform movements buoyed by Gorbachev's *perestroika* and *glasnost* notion of economic and political liberalization had gained in influence. "The good path" of GDR socialism was in one of its deepest crises to date.

In this context, that the "balance" of 1979 had been replaced by an emphasis on production reflecting the quality of 1959 anniversary propaganda is telling. Clearly threatened, the GDR state leadership attempted to evoke the spirit of production of another, more optimistic time. Significantly, this time was chiefly

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<sup>120</sup> Fulbrook, 253.

<sup>121</sup> Rainer and Gries, "Die Inszenierung," 12.

<sup>122</sup> In "Die 'runden' Geburtstage," Rainer Gries ironically notes that the *Zeitgewinn* ("saving of time") element of the 1989 slogan *Qualität—Produktivität—Zeitgewinn* could just as well have referred to Erich Honecker's attempt to gain more political time (299).

<sup>123</sup> For example, see "Hohe Arbeitsleistungen im August in Vorbereitung des 40. Jahrestages der DDR," *Neues Deutschland*, 7 Sept. 1989 or "Für eine starke DDR—jeden Tag hohe Leistungen," *Neues Deutschland*, 12 Sept. 1989.

<sup>124</sup> "Täglich das beste im Wettbewerb, denn wir wissen ganz genau wofür," *Neues Deutschland*, 12 Sept. 1989.

<sup>125</sup> East German refugees were given automatic citizenship in the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) upon arrival.

ensconced in the GDR's own history. If 1979 witnessed a step back into the past, 1989 saw a leap. In the speeches and propaganda surrounding the anniversary, a uniquely East German history was consistently and repeatedly evoked. Erich Honecker declared the fortieth anniversary of the GDR to be forty years of "heroic work" and "successful struggle for the advancement of our socialist Republic for the welfare of the people."<sup>126</sup> The international workers' movement was not ignored, but for the first time, a definitive East German history was clearly prioritized. The implications of this were two-fold. First, emphasis was laid on a specific GDR identity rather than a more general identification with the working-class movement. By separating itself, however subtly, from the international communist movement, the SED implicitly rejected Gorbachev's moves toward economic and political liberalization in favor of the "good" East German path.<sup>127</sup> Secondly, the stress on East German history suggested the existence of a distinctly East German identity, directly at odds with the Germans in the West. According to the state leadership, the GDR was not only a just state, but also populated by a different brand of Germans. Indeed, the frequency of articles in *Neues Deutschland* documenting Western provocateurs, neo-Nazis, and social ills increased significantly in the run-up to the fortieth anniversary. The emphasis on a distinctly East German history and identity was a direct reaction to the political events of the 1989 and the 1980s in general. In a last ditch effort to avoid confronting the troubles of the present, the SED separated the GDR from both the capitalist West and the socialist East to retreat into the safe haven of its past.

But appeals to the past did not stop the stream of East Germans pouring into Hungary en route to Austria nor assuage the crowds of people gathering in ever-increasing numbers in the weekly Monday Leipzig meetings. Like in 1979, Honecker tried to turn to a distinctly East German national past to hide the lack of both a viable present and future. But in 1989, his efforts were met by protest rather than silent resentment; Honecker's resignation in favor of Egon Krenz followed shortly thereafter on October 17-18.<sup>128</sup> Less than one month later, on November 9, 1989, the Berlin Wall "fell"—travel restrictions to the West were summarily lifted. And in March of the next year, the GDR was voted out of existence.

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<sup>126</sup> Erich Honecker, "Festrede zum vierzigsten Jahrestag von Erich Honecker: Die DDR baut auch im fünften Jahrzehnt auf die Tatkraft aller," *Neues Deutschland*, 7 Oct. 1989.

<sup>127</sup> For more information about the relationship between East Germany and the Soviet Union during the 1980s, see Daniel Hamilton, "Dateline East Germany: The Wall Behind the Wall," *Foreign Policy* 76 (1989): 176-197.

<sup>128</sup> Called the "palace revolution" in reference to the Palace of the Republic, the seat of the SED leadership in Berlin, Honecker was actually ousted from his post as General Secretary of the SED. Similar to Ulbricht's "resignation" in 1971, Honecker cited ill-health as a motive for his resignation to obscure the fact that he was deposed. See Fulbrook, 257.

The fortieth anniversary celebrations reveal how temporally distinct the state had actually become from the GDR population. The GDR leadership was stuck in the past, while its citizens suffered from an increasing sense of futurelessness within an ever-extending and stagnating present. By 1989, the state and its people operated within different temporal entities—the past and the present—with the distance between them slowly increasing. The state could not offer a future that corresponded with the desires of the GDR population—increased consumer goods and political and economic freedom—and thus retreated. But while the state retreated, the people continued living in a futureless present, outwardly conforming but inwardly resenting the state of affairs. Suddenly, the futurelessness ended—but only for the GDR population. While the state continued retreating into the past through its rejection of reform, Gorbachev's *perestroika* and *glasnost* offered a tangible vision of the future that finally disconnected the temporal experiences of the citizenry from the state. While the state had found its retreat in the past, the people had discovered that a new political reality could achieve the promises that state rhetoric had always located in the present. And with the state stuck in the past and the population moving toward the future, the present became nonexistent. Finally, the GDR collapsed in that hole, a silent temporal implosion.

## Conclusion

At the end of it all, the collapse of the present spelled the collapse of the bridge connecting the regime with the people. To be fair, the bridge was tenuous, even at the beginning—the German Democratic Republic was not established according to popular will, but rather imposed on an arbitrary section of what was left of Germany after the Second World War was finally over.

Yet the first decade of the GDR was its most hopeful, and the bridge could have been strengthened then, buoyed by the spirit of reconstruction and societal renewal. Instead, Soviet tanks crushed the first East German attempt at democratic reform on July 17, 1953. By the GDR's first decennial anniversary on October 7, 1959, the beginnings of the temporal disconnect that would devastate the GDR in the next great effort at democratic reform in 1989 could already be seen. In its propaganda and rhetoric, the state under Walter Ulbricht tried to harness the reconstructive spirit of the early 1950s in service of the great project of the construction of socialism. But this proved unsuccessful. The repression of July 1953 and general resentment toward economic restructuring and the lack of freedom had ruined the project of socialist construction before it even began. In 1959, the state tried to orient its people toward an intangible communist future, but the people, wary of the state's intentions, stayed in the present.

And the SED took notice. By 1969, the state celebrated a privatization and commoditization of everyday life that focused on enjoyment in the present rather

than unbridled progress toward a largely utopian future. By the late 1960s, it had become clear that the GDR would not overtake the West's levels of industrial production. In response, the SED aimed to create an extended present to veil the fact that the possibility of a collective communist future would be delayed, if it could exist at all. By focusing attention on free time and private satisfaction, the state began to limit time by decreasing emphasis on the future and placing it rather on pleasure in the present. In doing so, the state reflected and perhaps responded to the trends of privatization that existed in the general GDR population. With the West virtually unreachable after the building of the Berlin Wall in August 1961, GDR citizens were forced to resign themselves to a future in East Germany. But in protest of this limitation—and perhaps to evade the pain of it—they retreated to informal friendship groups and small gardens, and thus thwarted the socialist project in their own small ways. And yet, the late 1960s represents the time when the experience of the state and the people were most temporally similar.

By 1979, though, the state had begun to retreat into the past while the people languished in the extended present. The only future that the SED could offer was a private apartment by the year 1990, a narrow, limited degradation of the optimism that had characterized 1959. Moreover, new General Secretary Honecker looked towards a distinctly East German history and identity, emphasizing balance and moderation. But at this point of time, social mobility was near nonexistent for young East Germans, promises of more consumer goods were not met, and balance translated into stagnation. A sense of futurelessness pervaded the general population. But the people did not retreat into the past like the state did. For this reason, when Gorbachev's plans of *perestroika* and *glasnost* actually offered a viable future, the people were closer than the state to grasp it. Reform was impossible for the state that looked backward. But the people looked forward, stepped into the future, and the present collapsed between them in 1989. The bridge between the state and the people—the present—no longer existed. And neither did the German Democratic Republic.

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