

Part III

Joining the World Economy

In the initial years after the fall of the Wall, the East Germans felt they were taken over by the dominant social system of the Federal Republic of Germany. The employees traced the decisive changes in their enterprises back to the influence of West Germany's economic power, funded by West German institutions. They perceived it as a collision with a previously competing political and economic system to which people were either ready to adapt or which they resisted. The 'market' was embodied by West German consumers and 'privatization' by the Treuhand institution. The antithesis, whether as an opponent or as a goal to strive for, seemed recognizable and was personified.

As the employees in the East Berlin subsidiary of the multinational corporation Hochinauf quickly learned, this perspective on the world was merely a fraction of the new social conditions. In contrast to the employees at Taghell and Stanex, they were transposed onto a global corporate scene through the purchase of their firm by a multinational company. The question was no longer whether they felt West or East German – these categories certainly tended to dissolve into 'Owis', in other words, East Germans who earned Western wages in the West (*Ostdeutsche, die zu Westtarifen im Westen arbeiteten*), and 'Wossis', that is, West Germans who worked in the East (*Westdeutsche, die im Osten arbeiteten*). Instead, the employees were summoned to find their new identity via the multinational company, which was defined as a 'family', the Hochinauf family, by corporate ideologues. Identity, which at the time of the GDR was supposed to emerge from socialism and the 'people of the GDR', was now expected to come out of belonging to the multinational company.

The multinational company Hochinauf is like 'a racing car with constantly new, constantly better fine tuning', an expert in the field wrote in 1996 in New York. About twenty years ago the company had begun to expand and maintain a constantly changing network of

production plants in thirty countries, and run maintenance branches in 220 countries. Hochinauf appeared to be a company of the future, which effortlessly crossed national borders, fitting its products with the latest technologies, developing and producing increasingly eye-catching models for its customers. Its company strategy is in harmony with cataclysmic forecasts for the future, which predict an explosive surge in global population. Rural depopulation in most parts of the world and urban growth in the so-called newly industrializing countries are factors which permeate the official company strategy and permit positive forecasts for future turnover. An increase of 700 million people in cities throughout Southeast Asia means more high-rise flats and therefore a greater demand for lifts and escalators.

The collapse of the planned economies in Central and Eastern Europe generated hope for a rise in demand for technologically valuable products and Hochinauf rapidly expanded its range of action to encompass the ex-socialist countries in order to win ground on rivals that also operated internationally. The company is continuing to develop. In 1997 the strategy of maintaining local production plants with a variety of products was abandoned. The new president announced he would transform Hochinauf into a truly 'global company', reduce the product variety in favour of flexible standard models whose standardized components could be produced on a global scale at the cheapest production sites. Plans were made to trim the forty-five factories and nineteen engineering centres down to four or five main locations by 2002.

The mental geography of the employees at Hochinauf – or so the story went – would no longer be confined to the borders of a country, but would include the network of company branches throughout the world.