Lukas Bartl

Give Yoga a Chance

War Anxieties, Rituals and the Pitfalls of Community Building in GDR Health Advisors of the 1980s

Abstract

Health-care magazines both disturb and reassure their readers – they may even seek to soothe the very anxieties they have created. Within their pages, communal and individual problems are interwoven, and complicated affiliations are created between writers, readers and their surrounding world. This article examines the twelve issues of the GDR health-care magazine *Deine Gesundheit* published in 1984 to illustrate how existential and banal concerns together formed an all-permeating apprehension. Two topics that appear throughout the issues of 1984 are (1) the threat of nuclear war and (2) yoga. They formed the two ends of a discourse of apprehension by GDR advisors that had begun in the 1970s and peaked in 1984. Drawing on James Carey's theory of ritual communication, this article illustrates the political use of such a discourse to rally readers around the flag, but it also raises the pitfalls of such attempts at community building, for advice media tended to individualise health problems.

Keywords

History of Health, History of Emotions, German Democratic Republic (GDR), Ritual Communication, Subjectivation, Yoga, Cold War History

Biography

Lukas Bartl is a doctoral student in Contemporary History at the Max-Weber-Centre Erfurt and the University of Graz. His research focuses on the topics of nervousness, stress and relaxation in health magazines published in the GDR which he interprets as political tools fostering individual responsibility and self-governance.

Introduction

A rope is looped around and across the inflated red balloon, deforming its shape and squeezing it to bursting point. "Overpressure" is the visual message and the title above the balloon, which appeared on the cover of the

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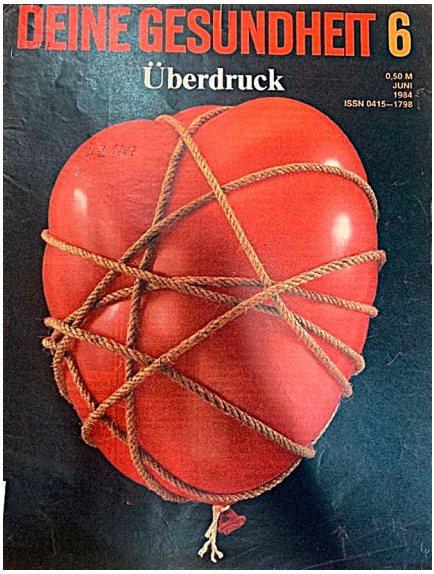


Fig. 1: "Überdruck" [Overpressure]. Cover by Norbert Vogel, *Deine Gesundheit*, June 1984.

June 1984 edition of *Deine Gesundheit* (Your Health), a health magazine published in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) (fig.1).

The June issue and its central theme, "psycho-nervous defects", are testament to a growing preoccupation with both the physical burden created by the outside world and the psychological burden induced by what educational films by the German Hygiene Museum in Dresden called "sensory flooding" *(Reizüberflutung)*, or the "growing environmental noise of our days".[1] Questions of how to deal with the stimuli of an ever-faster, ever-louder environment kept the directors and writers of movies, guidebooks and health-care magazines busy. The red balloon served to illustrate the ever-tighter squeeze on people's health, which made the search for relaxation and peace a pressing issue. The key was to find the balance between too much pressure and too little.

In 1984 that balance seemed more at risk than ever, not only on a personal level but also on the level of global politics. The development of SS-20 rockets by the Warsaw Pact and the subsequent NATO double-track decision in December 1979 had raised the temperature of the Cold War and had created concern and protest in both German states.[2]

A multitude of ecological (pollution, Waldsterben, the threat to the ozone layer), medical (AIDS) and political uncertainties peaked in 1984, the "year of maximal and multiple fears", as Jens Balzer describes it.[3] Nature was no longer eternal. A neighbour's body was a potential threat. Now the balance of the nuclear powers might be shifting. The red balloon might explode at any minute.

1 Gesundheit ist trainierbar (Deutsches Hygiene-Museum Dresden / DHMD, GDR 1974); Lärm (DHMD, GDR 1979).

2 See e. g. Hanisch 2011.

3 Balzer 2021, 279.

A health-advice magazine might seem a curious lens through which to examine the emotional climax of the Cold War, but as we will see, *Deine Gesundheit* and other GDR health-care advice offer an illuminating perspective on the interwovenness of communal and individual anxieties and of existential and banal problems and cast light on the complicated ties between writers, readers and their surrounding world. This article concentrates on the 12 issues of *Deine Gesundheit* published in 1984 and on two topics that dominated their coverage: the threat of nuclear war and yoga. As we will see, the appearance of these topics side by side is more than simply a curious blending of otherwise unconnected concerns. Growing fear of an escalation of the no-longer-so-Cold War went hand in hand with existing concerns about stress, noise and accelerating pressures, and together they merged into a wider sense of unrest and risk to which the readers of the magazine were subjected.

Ritualistic Reading

The thinking of American media theorist and critic James W. Carey about community and media has helped shape this article, although in the end, as we shall see, it is possibly too simplistic for our topic. Carey differentiates between two modes of communication.[4] The dominant understanding of communication as the sending and receiving of information falls into the category of "transmission", but if the cultural and societal meaning of communication is ignored, the story is only half-written. Carey therefore adds a second function to communication, which falls under the heading "ritual". Influenced by the Durkheimian assumption that ideas and beliefs emerge from social practices, he emphasises how communication can strengthen mutually lived experiences, creating bonds and shared beliefs. Communication as ritual reinforces such beliefs and stabilises society over time. The reading of a newspaper or magazine, Carey proposes, can be interpreted as both an intake of transmitted information and a ritual act, with the reader participating in the construction, demolition or affirmation of a view of the world shared by a community of writers and readers.[5]

Living and thinking in North America, James Carey drew inspiration and examples from his experience of a media market where opinions and ideolo-

4 Carey 2008, 12–14.

5 Carey 2008, 18.

gies compete for the reader's favour. Every periodical in such a market must provide its readers with what Margaret Beetham has called an "offer of identity", to keep them returning.[6] The magazine market in the GDR did not face such competition over identity. The media were controlled by the state. The only "offer of identity" was the "socialist personality", the ruling party's idea of a harmonious, active, class conscious and, lest we forget, happy GDR citizen.[7] The absence of alternative identities in GDR media makes it harder to judge whether readers actually saw themselves as part of the medially constructed community, but it does not thwart analysis of the *invocation* of that community. Additionally, GDR media did not unreservedly serve the purposes of the state as has often been supposed. They each had their own voice, which sometimes blended with the voice of the state but sometimes took on a surprisingly independent tone. The notion that media was "the sharpest weapon of the Party", a phrase coined by Gunter Holzweißig in the early 2000s, obscures the leeway available to journalists, photographers and graphic designers.[8]

Deine Gesundheit

The magazine that is this article's focus was a popular health magazine in the GDR, famous for its graphic design and its broad spectrum of topics.[9] In the 1980s its circulation reached 345,000 copies,[10] and its readership was likely considerably higher: estimates by the magazine itself assumed a possible monthly readership of more than one million.[11] Subordinate at first to the German Hygiene Museum in Dresden and from 1972 to the National Committee for Health Education, *Deine Gesundheit* was a central element of official health education in the GDR. It was intended to do more than simply inform citizens about health-related issues, for, in the words of a member of the National Committee for Health Education, it was to "influence the lifestyle of a large section of the population in a regulating

6 Beetham 2000, 95.

7 Düring 2021, 74–78; Dengel 2005, 86.

8 Holzweißig 2002.

9 See e. g. Linek 2015, 88–106.

10 Letter from head of the publishing house *Verlag Volk und Gesundheit*, Dolf Künzel, to the press office of the GDR, dated 8 July 1987. Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde (BArch) DC/9/1527.

11 Misgeld 1975, 168.

manner".[12] Health education was not simply a matter of the communication of information; it should inform desires, character traits and behaviour.[13] On a semantic level, the articles and opinion pieces spoke directly to the reader as an individual, but as an individual within the broader society. The title of the magazine used the second-person singular possessive form, ***Deine** Gesundheit*, **your** health, to remind each reader of his/her individual responsibility for his/her health, but the editorials and articles were largely dominated by the first-person plural form, translating as "**we**" and "**our**". Unlike film and radio, print was able to address the masses through individual consumption.

The magazine sought to change the behaviour of GDR citizens, but it was not the ideal tool for the job. We know little about the work of journalists and editors at *Deine Gesundheit*, but judging from memories of head editor Ursula Hertel and longtime journalist Cornelia Fischer-Börold, the influence of the SED *(Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands)*, the ruling party in the GDR, on its content seems to have been rather lose.[14] Dietrich Mühlberg has gone so far as to propose that the magazine was one of the few forums in the GDR where daily problems could be discussed.[15] The letter section, titled *Dialog*, published a few readers' letters each month and did indeed provide an opportunity to share anxieties, hopes and frustrations. *Deine Gesundheit* was part of the GDR's *Eingabensystem*, or petition system, which allowed individuals to voice complaints to authorities as long as they did not question economic or political arrangements as a whole.[16] But unlike other forums, *Deine Gesundheit* published on otherwise taboo topics, with articles mentioning homosexuality, mental health and environmental problems. Only rarely do we find in the magazine long blocks of dense text conveying political speeches by anyone from a government minister to the temporary secretary of some committee. And occasionally the magazine did voice critique, sometimes in text but more often in illustrations or graphic designs. Despite these occasional deviations from the ideological guidelines on spe-

12 Letter by member of the National Committee for Health Education Dr. [unknown first name] Thräuradt to Kurt Blecha, head of the National Press Office, dated 1 June 1972. BArch DC/9/9080.

13 Deutsches Hygiene-Museum in der DDR 1980, 20.

14 Mühlberg1999, 77–90; Interview with Cornelia Fischer-Börold, conducted by the author, 21 January 2021.

15 Mühlberg 1992, 49.

16 See e. g. Port 2007, 102–103; Mühlberg 2004, 243–244.

cific topics, the magazine nonetheless remained committed to socialism and to its duty to educate readers in the interest of the state.

As for other media in the GDR, for *Deine Gesundheit*, too, the relationship between writers and readers can be summed up as a form of what Madleen Podewski has identified as "authoritarian understanding".[17] Its writing oscillated between educational emancipation and paternalistic subjectivation, and it is fair to assume that readers were aware of its contradictory nature. Carey wrote of communication as ritualistic, but in this instance the overt ritual was less than perfect. Reading between the lines was just as important as reading the lines themselves. Readers could discern the occasional societal criticism in text and image, but they would also have noticed the repetitive rendition of Party views. They had the option to select what was important for their own lives.

Reagan and Relaxation

Chronobiology, sleeplessness and the noise levels of disco music had dominated the journal's reports in the last months of 1983.[18] The year before, articles had been published on psychology, the accelerating effects of technical innovations, and the changing relationship of humans and nature.[19] The world presented in *Deine Gesundheit* was moving ever faster and becoming ever louder. Its articles and movies told of an "overload of stimuli",[20] fed fears of a widespread "social desynchronisation"[21] and diagnosed disturbances in the "clock of life".[22]

The cover of the January 1984 issue presents a counterpoint. A shirtless man sits in *Gomukhasana* (cow-face pose) to welcome the readership of *Deine Gesundheit* to the new year (fig. 2). A series on yoga would then

17 The term goes back to Madleen Podewski's presentation „Was bleibt von uns? Was die Neue Berliner Illustrierte (NBI) nach der ‚Wende' aus der DDR machte" given at the workshop *Zeitschriftenmilieus in der DDR und während der Wende* in Erfurt, 7 to 8 February 2025.

18 Seibt 1983, 260–263; Fischer 1983, 292–294; Siegmund/Brinkmann 1983, 324–327; Walter 1983, 342–343.

19 Handt/Vaic 1982, 58–59; Bach/Ott 1982, 83–85; Hofmann 1982, 156–157; Mann 1982, 248–249; Dörre 1982, 260–263; Pachmann 1982, 264–266.

20 Gesundheit ist trainierbar (DHMD 1974), DHMD 2007/614.

21 Seibt 1983, 261.

22 Mletzko/Mletzko 1982.

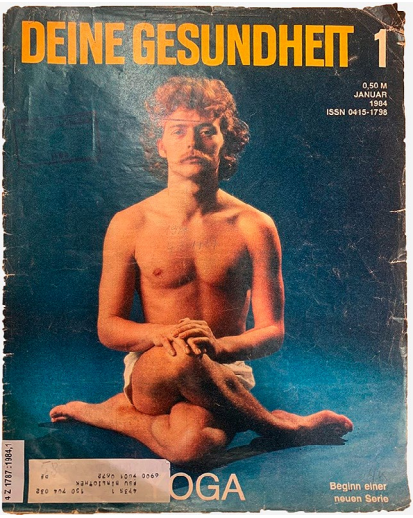


Fig 2: "Yoga", cover by Joachim Kirchmair, *Deine Gesundheit*, January 1984.



Fig 3: Image by Wolfgang Geisler, back cover of *Deine Gesundheit*, January 1984.

accompany readers through a year marked by dread of war. Stoking those fears, the back cover of the January 1984 issue (fig. 3) was as discomforting as the front cover was calm.[23]

The back pages of the issues of 1984 were each designed by a different artist and revolved around the arms race and fears of a nuclear war. In each instance, the artwork was accompanied by a short article, about one column long, by a medical practitioner who was a member of the initiative International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW).[24] These texts on the magazine's last page further contributed to a poignant address to the readership as a community under threat. "We need to prevent a nuclear inferno", warned urologist and member of the SED's Central Committee Professor Moritz Mebel in the January 1984 issue. His choice of pronoun is an interesting example of the confusing distribution of responsibility presented to the readers: the nuclear threat was the fault of the West, the United States

23 Back cover of *Deine Gesundheit*, January 1984. The slogan on the back cover may allude to the song "Do the Russians want War? / Khotyat li russkiye voyny?" by Yevgeny Yevtushenko, which was performed by chansonnier Mark Bernes in 1961.

24 It is worth noting that the IPPNW was an international association with members from both sides of the Iron Curtain, but the columns in *Deine Gesundheit* were written exclusively by East German members.

or simply US president Ronald Reagan, but the duty to prevent nuclear war was everyone's, including the readers of *Deine Gesundheit*. While authors and designers changed, the message remained. Readers were reminded of both their individual responsibilities and their belonging to a collective beyond their immediate control. In February 1984, Dr Wolf Rainer Cario, head of a paediatric clinic in Berlin-Buch warned, "The increased threat of war in Europe because of the craze of armament must make us close ranks in a resolute manner."[25]

Whether *Deine Gesundheit*'s politicisation in 1984 was the outcome of a deliberate order by the SED's Central Committee or whether it was the result of internal discussions by the magazine's editorial board cannot be answered, owing to a lack of sources. It is striking, though, that in 1983 two articles in another health magazine had condemned West Germany's rearmament and harshly criticised the alleged pressure there on medical practitioners who were outspoken pacifists.[26] These two articles are remarkable as they were published in the *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Hygiene und ihre Grenzgebiete*, an academic journal that circulated very largely amongst only health educators and doctors, who made up a significant part of the circle of writers publishing in *Deine Gesundheit*. The conflation of public health and the global arms race was therefore not exclusive to *Deine Gesundheit*. The fact that a journal with a narrow focus on health and social hygiene had shifted from its established course would seem to confirm the suspicion that a push by political decision-makers was behind the publication of pacifistic content, even in magazines on the fringes of public attention. Articles in both *Deine Gesundheit* and the *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Hygiene und ihre Grenzgebiete* had always included ideological references, but while pacificism was a key component of the SED's claim to legitimacy, it had not been the main ideological component of their articles.

The intensification of public reminders of the shared fate of the socialist community and its shared enemy came as the GDR was experiencing both international and domestic pressure. A growing number of increasingly "impatient" and "insistent" petitions reached the various state institutions from the late 1970s onwards.[27] The introduction of "military lessons" *(Wehrunterricht)* in the ninth grade in 1978, subsequently also in the tenth

25 Cario 1984, 63.

26 Rohland 1983, 631–633; Richter 1983, 633–635.

27 See e. g. Staadt 1996, 17–18; Hanisch 2011, 167.

grade, led to a general unease and fed small but growing political activism in the GDR.[28] The expulsion of peace activist Roland Jahn in 1983 moved the GDR into the international spotlight. The number of exit-visa applications reached a new height in 1984,[29] which in combination with the deteriorating economic and financial situation forced the SED to loosen its regulation of emigration. Even as the socialist state was feeling the strains, the deteriorating relationship between the two blocs in the period before 1984 and the threat of nuclear war cast a shadow not only over the future of the state but over life itself. Since the late 1970s, non-state actors, especially the church, had gradually wrestled the torch of pacifism from the hands of the Party, which therefore no longer had a monopoly on calls for peace. This ideological opposition threatened the SED's legitimacy and reinforced the need for intensified pacifistic propaganda.[30] The emphasis on communal effort and pacifism in *Deine Gesundheit* can therefore be read not only as a reaction to world events but also as an attempt to regain the initiative by emphasising the state's idealistic core.

Both articles and images now directed their criticism at two targets. One was the opposition within the GDR, although it was never openly termed "opposition". *Deine Gesundheit* focused on "idealists" who thought an ethical commitment to pacifism sufficient to prevent war. They were reminded of their naivety and that a *Friedensbewegung* (peace movement) was of no consequence without its dialectical relationship with the *Friedenskampf* (peace struggle) fought by the Soviet Union and its allies.[31] Most columns and graphics were more direct and did not hesitate to name and shame the second target of criticism: warmongers from the West. The risk of nuclear war was personified by President Reagan, the bogeyman in the press and culture of the GDR. In 1983, Reagan had been nicknamed "crazy star" by the rock band Berluc in their single "No Bomb", which topped the East German charts.[32] A year later, in its July 1984 edition, *Deine Gesundheit* chose a more serious tone when the back cover, designed by Utz Müller, compared the "crazy star" to Adolf Hitler. The illustration described the invasion of Grenada by the United States in 1983 as a test run for a third world war and

28 See e. g. Koch 2000; Kowalczuk 2009, 234–237.
29 See e. g. Wentker 2011, 152; Gieseke 2011, 182–183.
30 See e. g. Hanisch 2011, 161–164.
31 Werner 1984, 127.
32 See e. g. Leitner 1994, 23–24.

compared it with Germany's support of General Franco through its infamous Condor Legion. The text read, "Hitler rehearsed the II. World War in GRANADA in 1936 … in GRENADA in 1983, Reagan rehearsed the III." The comparison was accompanied by the depiction of a swastika merging into a dollar sign.[33]

Not all the illustrations and articles were so confrontational. On some of the back covers, the reader can discern – by looking very closely – greetings across the blocs. For instance, the November 1984 issue's back cover with its slogan "Become active – not radioactive" *(aktiv werden – nicht radioaktiv)* hinted at a popular slogan of the West German environmental and anti-nuclear movement: "Rather active today than radioactive tomorrow" *(lieber heute aktiv als morgen radioaktiv)*.[34] In the GDR, the slogan had already decorated the stage of the 1982 rock concert *Rock für den Frieden* (Rock for Peace).[35] Its embrace by the political leaders, even if only when accompanied by clear anti-Western slogans like *Sonne statt Reagan* (Sun instead of Reagan/rain, a play on words as the German *Regen* [rain] is phonetically similar to *Reagan*), can be interpreted as a concession to a growing environmental and peace movement in the GDR that drew inspiration from West German role models.[36] A comparably soft approach towards West Germany is discernible in *Deine Gesundheit* throughout the year. While Reagan was directly attacked in the illustrations, current West German chancellor Helmut Kohl and his predecessor Helmut Schmidt were not mentioned at all. The exclusion of West Germany and its leaders from critique was in line with the attempt by Erich Honecker, leader in East Germany, to find a middle ground from which to oppose what was deemed Western aggression and intensify cooperation with West Germany.[37] The series of illustrations ended in December 1984 with a citation from Honecker's open letter to Helmut Kohl in 1983: "no new weapons of mass destruction, no new missiles, no confrontation, but disarmament!".[38]

Pressure compresses. Writing and reading about pressure and feeling under pressure can also compress. In a society experiencing ever-stronger

33 *Deine Gesundheit*, July 1984, 224.
34 See Tompkins 2016.
35 Mählert/Stephan 1996, 232–233.
36 Saunders 2005, 285.
37 Wentker 2011.
38 *Deine Gesundheit*, December 1984, 384.

centrifugal forces, the war-related series in *Deine Gesundheit* served to rally its readership around a common hope for peace and aimed to strengthen a sense of community. The topic of pressure was a medial tool used to remind readers of their belonging to a socialist community under threat. But when we apply Carey's concept of ritualistic reading, we notice that the community-building effect was more complex and more difficult to control than his theory allows. There is not one single community discernible in the discourse of *Deine Gesundheit*, but rather many. The demonisation of the Western enemy was apparent, albeit with notable gaps, namely the lack of mention of neighbouring West Germany. The staggering existential threat complicated community building: a nuclear war would have had such all-encompassing effect that it was futile to present one specific community as at risk. The aim of *Deine Gesundheit*'s coverage was to strengthen a distinct East German sense of community, but the community it actually fostered was more comprehensive than it intended.

The community discourse was further complicated by the confusing distribution of responsibility for peace, which the magazine laid on all shoulders, including those of politicians and *Deine Gesundheit*'s writers and readers. Such arbitrary breadth could not be compartmentalised and created instead a collectivised sense of being under threat. This effect will become even clearer when we consider attempts to soothe readers, to provide relief in the face of general threat.

Do-It-Yourself Rituals

We need to return to Roland Bier, the shirtless man on the cover of the January 1984 issue (fig. 2). Bier's poses and those of his female counterpart, Inge Lehmann, featured in every issue throughout 1984. The series was not the first time yoga was mentioned in *Deine Gesundheit*, for three years earlier it had been presented as a means to counter fear.[39] But the front page in January 1984 and the extensive series that followed marked the breakthrough of yoga practice into the GDR mainstream. The history of yoga in the GDR, and especially the perspective of East German practitioners, is yet to be fully explored, although a pioneering study by Matthias Tietke has laid valuable groundwork.[40]

39 Frohburg 1981, 239.
40 See e. g. Tietke 2014.

Yoga – or *Yoganastik* as it was sometimes called in the GDR – had been eyed with suspicion for some years by the government because of its roots in Indian spirituality and growing popularity in the Western world. However, no unified policy towards yoga was ever established. In the 1950s and 1960s, there had seemed no need to officially address something performed by only a small group of people, although one known practitioner was excluded from Party membership.[41] If ever mentioned in health guides, yoga featured at most as one "occult" practice amongst others, against which the government campaigned. Some authors did admit to an admiration for the tranquil state of the prototypical yogi, but they did not advise their readers to try the technique.[42] From the 1970s onwards, yoga was allowed to feature in media and grow in popularity, although only in a form aligned with socialist ideals. Advocates pointed out yoga's potential for optimising health and productivity. In September 1978, at a conference in Mariánské Lázně, Czechoslovakian physician Ctibor Dostálek argued that yoga could help citizens become "more resistant" to the "stimuli resulting from the complexity of modern society" and therefore more productive.[43] Such manipulation enabled yoga to be integrated into the meritocratic tone of GDR media, although the trope of the lazy and withdrawn hippie remained strong, featuring as late as 1980 in the cinema hit Und nächstes Jahr am Balaton (And Next Year at Lake Balaton, Hermann Zschoche, GDR).[44]

Yoga's status remained ambiguous. In 1979 an official ban on yoga by the *Deutscher Turn- und Sportbund*, the main East German sports organisation, coincided with the foundation of a working group on yoga and traditional Indian medicine in Leipzig.[45] The group was infiltrated by the Stasi[46] but continued to be tolerated because yoga was observed to help combat the challenges of modern life. The first guide to yoga, published one year earlier, treated yoga as a form of physical exercise with no transcendental associations. *Yoganastik für jedermann* (Yoganastik for Everyone) was a collection of lessons that aimed to provide "active relaxation" for the stressed worker.[47] First published in 1977 as a series of articles in the newspaper *Volksstimme*,

41 Tietke 2014, 30–31.
42 See e. g. Kleinsorge/Klumbies 1967, 12.
43 Lang/Arend 2023, 207.
44 Tietke 2014, 24–25.
45 Wiese 2003, 459; Tietke 2014, 86–87.
46 Tietke 2014, 76–78.
47 Stahlberg 1978, 4.

the instructions were turned into a book in reply to the overwhelming response and demand by readers for more.[48] The 1984 series in *Deine Gesundheit* sang from the same hymn sheet. It refrained from any sacralisation and made clear that yoga should be understood only as healthy for the physical body. Any "mystification" of yoga was an abuse and a distortion of the benefits of the exercises.[49]

The series' author, Fritz Klingberg, a neurophysiologist from the University of Leipzig and regular speaker at the *Arbeitskreis für Yoga und altindische Medizin* (Working Group for Yoga and Ancient Indian Medicine) wrote before a backdrop of a reawakening of religiosity in countries bordering the GDR and to some extent within the GDR itself. In Poland, the election of Pope John Paul II in 1978 had ignited a new enthusiasm for Roman Catholicism,[50] while in West Germany both the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches were amplifying the country's growing peace movement.[51] In the GDR itself, the Protestant church provided space for articulation and protest in relative safety, at a remove from the grasp of the state, and as noted above, it positioned itself as representative of pacifism, one of the SED's own legitimising claims.[52] Display of the symbol "Schwerter zu Pflugscharen" (swords to ploughshares) in late 1981 accompanied a newfound and religiously infused pacifist and political sentiment.[53] The repetitive statements against a religious or mystical interpretation of yoga should therefore be read not only in light of ideological distance from religion but also alongside attacks on pacifistic idealists. The attribution of religious meaning to yoga was explicitly rejected, but *Deine Gesundheit* could still advocate for its rituals in the secular life of readers. The explicit goal was to teach readers not only how to improve their physical wellbeing, but also how to reach a state of mind untroubled by external distractions. Only a few years earlier a practice such as meditation would have been identified as a relic of a superstitious past now overcome by the scientific-technological progress of socialism. Now, however, in the face of an end to all progress and history, Klingberg's question in the November 1984 issue "Do we need meditation?"[54] could only be answered in the affirmative.

48 Tietke 2014, 33–34.
49 Klingberg 1984b, 215.
50 Bösch 2013, 170–171.
51 Lepp 2010, 379–381.
52 Pollack 2009, 272–275; Hanisch 2011, 161–164.
53 Garstecki 2011, 368.
54 Klingberg 1984d, 303–306.

Erving Goffman has suggested that while religious rituals persist in modern societies, God or gods have been replaced by the individual self.[55] Yoga as advised in *Deine Gesundheit* served precisely this purpose. It promised enhanced exploration of the emotion of its practitioners and their social environment. In September 1984, the magazine explained how facial expressions could be trained and asked readers to practise in front of a mirror, where they could engage in an emotional conversation with themselves.[56] Being in contact with one's "true" feelings was proposed as a way to deepen "emotional resonance", a form of nonverbal, emotional communication with others and oneself.[57] Such practices bring us to Anthony F. C. Wallace's concept of modern solitary rituals as a form of "autocommunication".[58] But as much as communication with oneself was emphasised, the magazine made clear that yoga would also shield its practitioner from overstimulation. Yoga promised peace, stability and balance.[59] The magazine's aim here was not to deepen its readers' connection to the outside world but to reduce it. The articles on yoga were in line with a shift in health education towards an emphasis on the individual, its potential, precariousness and responsibilities.

The response to the series was overwhelmingly positive. The June 1984 issue of *Deine Gesundheit*, on pressure and psychology, resonated strongly with its readers and resulted in a flood of letters to the magazine's editorial board.[60] In a seemingly uncontrollable world, control over at least one's own body was welcome. Reader Lore K. reported the positive effect she was feeling, which, she wrote, would surely only improve over time.[61] Rainer J. from Schwerin wanted to know more about the "purposeful and aware structuring of daily routines".[62] Words from a letter from Günter B. in Leipzig suggest that yoga landed with the readership of *Deine Gesundheit* precisely as had been hoped: "The main reason I occupy myself with yoga: 1. Achieving inner peace, 2. Improving relaxation and body posture."[63]

55 See e. g. Goffman 1967, 95.
56 Klingberg 1984c, 271–274.
57 Klingberg 1984c, 271.
58 Wallace 1996, 63.
59 Klingberg 1984a, 143.
60 Misgeld 1984, 226.
61 *Deine Gesundheit*, July 1984, 214.
62 *Deine Gesundheit*, July 1984, 214.
63 *Deine Gesundheit*, July 1984, 214.

Conclusion

In 1984, in a world in turmoil, *Deine Gesundheit* offered a monthly warning of the grave dangers ahead, but it also sought to reassure its readers through a shared identity, shared enemy and shared practices. The actual outcome was more complex. The conflation of the comparatively small health risks of the everyday with the overwhelming risk of nuclear annihilation enforced but also diluted a sense of community. The existential risk of nuclear war brought home to readers the danger they faced as individuals and as citizens of the GDR, but it also highlighted their membership of a global, or at least cross-bloc, community. Within the collective, individuals sensed the threats they faced. The series on yoga further individualised the handling of emotions: relief from anxiety could be found in disconnecting from the world. The twelve issues of *Deine Gesundheit* that appeared in 1984 provide a case study that is all the more fascinating specifically because it is contradictory, particularly when it touches on ritual communication and community building. As so often, the reality proved more complicated than the theory.

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