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Power and Resistance: The Case of the GDR in the Eastern European Context

Note: This course was proposed for and received the Stuart Tave Teaching Fellowship. It will be taught to undergraduates in the humanities (in English).

Description:

This course pursues three goals: to analyze the history and culture of “real existing” socialism; to introduce students to concepts of power and resistance developed inside and outside of a socialist context; and to employ these concepts to investigate, if not explain, the breakdown of socialism. Critically, the course aims at questioning the current discussions of socialism and its breakdown in terms such as commitment and autonomy, subversion and affirmation; more constructively, we will confront these Eastern and Western reflections with the historical specificity of the GDR as a German socialist state, that is, as a state between East and West, and Fascism and Socialism.

The course is divided into four sections. Section I (weeks 1-2) investigates the revolutionary events in 1989 with a special focus on the question of agency. This serves as an entry into the framing question of this course: What are the different mechanisms that legitimize and/or undermine political power? Section II (weeks 3-4) shows that this question must be understood with reference to the specific historical past (fascism/antifascism) and place (East/West, border) the GDR occupied. Section III (weeks 5-9) explores various forms of opposition to the power of the state – church and women’s movement, critical intellectuals, counterculture, etc. – in order to analyze, and perhaps question, their claims to subversiveness. More an epilogue than a section in its own right, the last week will be devoted to two post-‘89 literary mediations on power and evil in Europe after the collapse of the Eastern block.

Course Requirements:

- 1) introducing one session: presentation (max. 10 minutes) and thesis paper (1 page)
- 2) mid-term paper: in-depth analysis of one of the discussed texts (4-5 pages)
- 3) term paper that presents a clearly outlined problem and that uses at least one GDR text and one non-GDR text (12-15 pages)

Syllabus:

SECTION I: The Collapse of Socialism

1. East German, West German and other views of the “revolution”

- Wolf, Christa. “The GDR Forever.” *The New York Times*. December 8, 1989, 4.
 Binder, David. “Despite All, German Literati Keep Jousting,” *The New York Times*. August 24, 1990, 3.
 Habermas, Jürgen. “Yet Again: A Unified Nation of Angry DM-Burghers?” *When the Wall Came down: Reactions to German Unification*. New York: Routledge, 1992.
 Maron, Monika. “Writers and the People.” *New German Critique* 39 (originally published in *Der Spiegel*, 7, 1990).

2. The writer, the “public sphere” and the State

- Wolf, Christa. *What Remains*. 1979/1990. *What Remains and Other Stories*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1993.
 Solzhenitsyn, Alexander. Lecture, Winner of Nobel prize, 1973.
 Foucault, Michael. “The masked Philosopher.” *Politics, Philosophy, Culture. Interviews and other Writings 1977-1984*. Ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman. New York: Routledge, 1988. 323-330.

SECTION II: Constructing Socialism in the GDR

1. Antifascism: the legitimization of power?

- Fühmann, Franz. "Coming down the mountains" and "For the First Time: Germany." *The Car with the Yellow Star*. 1962. Berlin: Seven Seas, 1968.
Wolf, Christa. *Patterns of Childhood*. 1976 (excerpts).

2. The wall: border, fence or mirror?

- Wolf, Konrad/Wolf, Christa. *Divided Heaven*. 1963 (film).
Brasch, Thomas. "Flies in my Face." *New German Critique* 12 (1977).
Maaz, Hans-Joachim. *Behind the Wall: the inner life of Communist Germany*. New York: Horton, 1995 (excerpts).

SECTION III: Dissent, Opposition, Dissidence

5. Of "real" and "true" socialism: intellectual oppositions

- Havemann, Robert. *An Alienated Man*. London: Davis-Poynter, 1973 (excerpts).
Mischnik, Adam. *The Letters from Prison*. 1984 (excerpts).
Kristeva, Julia. "A New Type of Intellectual: The Dissident." *The Kristeva Reader*. Ed. Toril Moi. New York: Columbia, 1986. 292-300.

6. Youth: commitment or rebellion?/The church movement

- Braun, Volker. *Unfinished Story*. 1975.
Kundera, Milan. *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (film).
Smith, Roland. "The Church under GDR." *Honecker's Germany*. Ed. David Child. London: Allen and Unwin, 1985.
Ostow, Robin. "Jewish Education and the Jewish Youth in East Berlin" and "The View from West Berlin." *Jews in Contemporary East Germany*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989. (interviews)

7. Women: emancipation in a paternal State

- Kirsch, Sarah. "Turbulent Years." *The Panther Woman*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1973.
Anonymous. "Lesbians in the GDR." *New German Critique*. Spring/Summer 1981.
Einhorn, Barbara. *Cinderella Goes to the Market: Citizenship, Gender, and Women's Movement in East Central Europe*. New York: Verso, 1993. (excerpts)

8. The power of jokes

- Hein, Christoph. *The Tango Player*. 1989. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1992.
Freud, Sigmund. "The Motives of Jokes – Jokes as a social process." *Jokes and their Relationship to the Unconscious*. *Standard Edition*. Vol. 8. London: Hogarth Press, 1960.

9. Counterculture or powerhouse?: The Prenzlauer Berg

- Kolbe, Uwe. "I was raised in the name of a Weltanschauung" and other poetry.
Papenfuss-Gorek, Bert. "alkfowl rapt dripping", "but primarily" and other poetry.
Michael, Klaus and Thomas Wohlfahrt, eds. *Vogel oder Käfig sein: Kunst und Literatur aus unabhängigen Zeitschriften in der DDR*. (art/printings)
Interviews with Sascha Anderson, Rainer Schedlinski, Bert Papenfuss-Gorek in Robert von Hallberg. *Literary Intellectuals and the Dissolution of the State*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

EPILOGUE

10. After the collapse of socialism: post 1989 Eastern and Western meditation on power/resistance autonomy/commitment

- Havel, Vaclav. *Summer Meditation*. 1992 (excerpts).
McEwan, Ian. *Black Dogs*. 1989. New York: Dantam Books, 1994.