

## GERMAN HISTORY, 1945–1990: THIRTEENTH TRANSATLANTIC DOCTORAL SEMINAR IN GERMAN HISTORY

Seminar at the GHI and Georgetown University, May 2–5, 2007. Jointly organized by the GHI and the BMW Center for German and European Studies at Georgetown University. Conveners: Roger Chickering (Georgetown University) and Richard F. Wetzell (GHI). Faculty Mentors: Jost Dülffer (University of Cologne), Catherine Epstein (Amherst College), Heide Fehrenbach (Northern Illinois University), Martin Sabrow (Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung Potsdam/University of Potsdam).

The thirteenth Transatlantic Doctoral Seminar brought together sixteen doctoral students from Europe and North America to discuss their dissertation projects on German history since 1945. The first panel examined memory politics in East and West Germany. Michael Meng's paper explored the treatment of Potsdam's two main Jewish sites—its synagogue and Jewish cemetery—as a way to analyze broader questions about memory and German-Jewish relations in the early German Democratic Republic. In an effort to transform Potsdam into a socialist city, party officials generally disregarded demands for historic preservation and tore down buildings that did not fit easily into its antifascist interpretation of the Nazi past. It was not until the late 1970s and early 1980s, Meng argued, that this official interpretation of the past was challenged on the local level, when ordinary citizens sought to recover the few remnants of Jewish life that remained in Potsdam. Kristina Meyer examined how the postwar Social Democratic Party (SPD) dealt with the resistance and persecution of Social Democrats during the Third Reich. Although the SPD worked hard for the compensation of victims and the just punishment of perpetrators, Meyer concluded that the party also contributed to the marginalization of the Social Democratic resistance in the public consciousness of West German society. Social Democratic *Vergangenheitspolitik* was largely determined by efforts at postwar integration, social pressures to conform, and the necessities of pragmatic politics.

The second panel focused on the postwar occupation and reeducation efforts in the western part of Germany. Nina Verheyen analyzed *Diskussionsveranstaltungen* (events featuring public discussions) and discussion programs in radio and television in 1950s West Germany. She argued that the "appetite for discussion" revealed in these events and programs was closely related to American reeducation programs of the immediate postwar period. The US occupation authorities regarded discussions as a key

feature of democracy and therefore encouraged the practice of discussion in the German population. Heather Dichter's paper investigated the role of sports in postwar reeducation. The Americans, British, and French all gave sports a prominent role in their broader public diplomacy programs. They created institutions to train instructors and developed exchange programs for sports. The Western allies, Dichter argued, included sports in their occupation policies because they believed that sports would further democratization.

The third panel explored the history of minorities in West German society. Susanne Schönborn examined the 1984/85 debate about Rainer Werner Fassbinder's play *Der Müll, die Stadt und der Tod* in order to study how Jewish identities were constructed at the intersection of external and internal perceptions of Jewishness. The Fassbinder debate, she argued, changed the self-understanding of Jews living in West Germany. For the first time, the Jewish response to antisemitism was no longer one of paralysis; instead, Jews used their confrontation with antisemitism to fight for creating conditions that would allow them to continue living in West Germany. Jennifer Miller's paper on "guest workers" in West Germany focused on the Turkish perspective to challenge the traditional narrative. Interactions between the Turkish and German employment offices, and between workers and officials, resulted in significant modifications of the "guest worker" application process. These adjustments, Miller argued, reveal breakdowns in the streamlined process portrayed by manuals, media, and politicians, and demonstrate that workers were able to maintain a sense of autonomy and ambition.

East German culture and everyday life was the subject of the fourth session, which turned from textual sources to visual culture and music. Justinian Jampol's paper explored the integration of the Picasso Peace Dove and the slogan "Freundschaft-Druschba" into the realm of GDR folk art and handicrafts. Political symbols, he argued, evolved into expressions of cultural association that were quite removed from politics. Leonard Schmieding examined the cultural transfer of hip-hop culture into East Germany in the 1980s as an ambivalent process of Americanization. While his analysis of individual negotiating processes emphasized juvenile identity formation through hip-hop, his analysis of state responses demonstrated the state's failure to control juvenile hip-hop actors, thus enabling them to establish small niches of personal freedom in the East German dictatorship.

The fifth panel was devoted to the history of sexuality. Erik Huneke's paper examined the creation of a nationwide network of relationship counseling centers in the GDR during the mid-1960s. Whereas existing scholarship has focused on marital counseling's connection to the eugenic

and demographic concerns of state population policy, Huneke argued that the expansion of such counseling also reflected the psychologization of the socialist self and the emergence of sex as a cultural language in the GDR. The population's willingness to seek assistance in resolving sexual problems became a litmus test not only for confidence in the idea of relationship counseling, but also for trust in the state itself. Eva-Maria Silies explored the question of to what extent the birth-control pill, introduced in 1961, changed West German women's experiences of sexuality and contraception in the 1960s and 1970s. Their experiences with the pill, she contended, led women to distance themselves from the generation of their mothers and to develop a new body consciousness and self-consciousness. These processes also led to a transformation of moral values in postwar West Germany.

The sixth panel turned from sex to recreational drugs. Kraig Larkin's paper focused on the responses of German civilians and the American Military Government to extensive tobacco shortages in the initial postwar years. The scarcity of cigarettes and the strategies Germans employed to increase their access to tobacco products, he argued, profoundly influenced the subsequent development of West Germany's cigarette market. Will Morris investigated West German heroin use during the 1970s, focusing on Frankfurt. He argued that the substance's appeal to young leftists is explained by heroin's radicalness, as evinced by its physiological kick, perceived danger, and social opprobrium. According to Morris, when they shot up, these young consumers were acting out the decade's radical slogan: "Tu was!"

The seventh panel focused on political protest movements in West Germany. Quinn Slobodian's paper examined the New Left's use of graphic images as tools of protest against repressive governments, in particular the protest films of Harun Farocki and the furor around the film *Africa Addio*. He showed how, in their efforts to transmit a political message, members of the New Left were affected by and sometimes able to transcend the sensationalist methods of shock favored by the mainstream media. Sabine Dworog analyzed the political conflicts generated by plans to expand the Frankfurt airport from 1960 to 1980. She argued that the debates and conflicts reveal the gradual dissolution of the congruence of interests between the airport authority, the government that initiated the airport expansion, and the public that used the airport's services. From the 1960s to the 1980s, the social framework for government action was profoundly transformed.

The eighth and final panel was devoted to the history of the media. Jürgen Kniep analyzed film censorship in West Germany. His examination of *Jugendschutz*—the campaign to protect youth against sexuality

and violence in the cinema—in the 1950s showed that the campaign reflected more general socio-cultural fears, which led contemporaries to give it an antimodern thrust. His study of the *Sexwelle* films of the early 1970s sought to demonstrate how film and film censorship produced new “mental images” of a formerly taboo topic. Hendrik Pletz investigated the relationship between innovations in media technology and changes in media content in 1980s West Germany. The introduction of home video recorders (VCRs) and the resulting change of the distribution structures for audio-visual content were accompanied by an aesthetic transformation of television. These dual processes, Pletz argued, inaugurated a gradual dissolution of the boundaries between imagination and reality, private and public, in the audiovisual media.

Reflecting on the seminar as a whole, one notes the dominance of cultural history, demonstrating the continued vigor of the “cultural turn” in German history on both sides of the Atlantic. More surprising was the small number of papers on East Germany (only four out of sixteen), which seems to indicate a waning of the post-unification boom in GDR history. Political history (especially the Cold War), transnational history, and comparative history were virtually absent. With the exception of Michael Meng’s project (comparing the GDR and Poland), none of the dissertation projects was comparative.

The discussions at the different panels were wide-ranging; nevertheless, several recurring themes emerged. The first of these dealt with the role of value judgments in historical analysis. While some participants took paper writers to task for injecting current memory politics or their own views into their work and argued that historians ought to focus on historicization, others countered that historical research is inevitably influenced by the historian’s values and concerns, so that all one can demand is transparency about the historian’s political stance. A second theme derived from the participants’ desire to connect their cultural-history projects to issues in political history. This strand in the discussion centered on the difficulties of attributing political meaning to material objects (Jampol’s GDR artifacts) or to social, cultural, or physical activities, such as sports (Dichter), sex (Huneke) or hip-hop music (Schmieding). While everyone agreed on the need to distinguish between the attribution of political meanings by the historian and by contemporaries, difficult questions remained: What kinds of evidence can the historian draw on to document the political meaning of physical artifacts? How does one demonstrate that sports acquired a “democratic” meaning? More fundamentally: If *Herrschaft* is always a “social practice” and all culture is political, where does one draw the boundary between culture and politics? Finally, seminar participants repeatedly pondered the question of how the historical study of marginal groups in German society (such as

Jews, *Gastarbeiter*, hip-hop youth, or drug users) can be used not just to add minority voices to the historical narrative, but to decenter and reshape the narrative itself.

Richard F. Wetzell

## Participants and Their Topics

HEATHER DICHTER (University of Toronto), *Game-Plan for Democracy: Western Allied Public Diplomacy and Sport in Occupied Germany*

SABINE DWOROG (University of Tübingen), *Der Wandel von Staatsaufgaben: Die Konflikte um den Ausbau des Frankfurter Flughafens im Kontext gesellschaftlicher Umbrüche, 1960–1980*

ERIC HUNEKE (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor), *A Palimpsest of the Weimar Sex Reform Movement? Relationship Counseling Centers in the German Democratic Republic during the 1960s*

JUSTINIAN JAMPOL (Oxford University), *Volkskunst, Kulturhäuser, and Brigadebücher: Approaching Everyday Culture in East Germany, 1961–1989 (and beyond)*

JÜRGEN KNIEP (University of Freiburg), *Der Film liegt auf der Grenze: Filmzensur in Westdeutschland, 1945–1990*

KRAIG LARKIN (State University of New York, Stony Brook), *A Few Cigarettes Will Do Wonders: Cigarettes, Consumption, and Memory in Post-1945 Western Germany*

MICHAEL MENG (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill), *From Destruction to Preservation: Jewish Sites in Germany and Poland after the Holocaust*

KRISTINA MEYER (University of Jena), *Sozialdemokratische Vergangenheitspolitik: Zum Umgang der SPD mit Widerstand, Verfolgung und Wiedergutmachung seit 1945*

JENNIFER MILLER (Rutgers University), *RSVP: The Application Process and the Path to Germany of the First Generation of Turkish ‘Guest Workers’*

WILL MORRIS (University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign), *Heroin as a Radical Substance*

HENDRIK PLETZ (University of Cologne), *Technische Innovation und medialer Wandel in den 1980er Jahren: Zum Konsum des Imaginären in der Realität der Postmoderne*

LEONARD SCHMIEDING (University of Leipzig), *Von “Windmills,” “Headspins” und “Powermoves”: Die Jugendkultur HipHop in der DDR zwischen Anpassung und Protest*

SUSANNE SCHÖNBORN (Technical University, Berlin), *Jüdische Identitäten in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland im Spiegel politischer Debatten*

EVA-MARIA SILIES (University of Göttingen), *Liebe, Lust und Last: Die Pille als weibliche Generationserfahrung, 1960–1980*

QUINN SLOBODIAN (New York University), *Corpse Polemics: The Third World and the Politics of Gore in 1960s West Germany*

NINA VERHEYEN (Free University, Berlin), *Die Verordnung des Diskurses: Diskussionslust und Re-education in der westdeutschen Gesellschaft der 50er Jahre*