

Berlin Program Summer Workshop
June 18-19, 2015
FU Berlin, Seminarzentrum, Room L 115

Violence, Oppression, and Civil Disobedience: From the Cold War Past to the Neoliberal Present

Report



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The year 2015 marks the 25th anniversary of the unification of Germany as well as dramatic moments of civil disobedience across the globe. In the same year, for example, Mandela was freed from prison in South Africa and the Persian Gulf War started. The year 2015 is also the 50th anniversary of the end of the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials in West Germany, a year that saw American troops arriving in Vietnam, the Watts Riots in LA, and Malcolm X's assassination. These events signify important transitional moments – beginnings and endings – in national and international histories and relations. At the center of each of these moments of civil disobedience are both violence and oppression.

The fourth annual workshop of the Berlin Program for Advanced German and European Studies looked through German eyes at violence, oppression, and civil disobedience on a global scale from the Cold War past to the Neoliberal present. The 38 participants (among them nine fellows and five alumni) explored how Germans—East, West, unified—engaged in or responded to violence, oppression and resistance in their own countries/country and abroad since 1945. Approaching these questions from different disciplinary angles – Anthropology, Art History, German Studies, History, Political Science, Literary, Film and Cultural Studies – the participants explored subjects ranging from socially engaged art and music to theoretical questions of structural violence. This report has been written by Berlin Program Fellows.

Thursday, June 18

Panel I: CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE IN WEST GERMANY

Moderator: Alexander Reisenbichler, George Washington University/FU Berlin

Lauren Graber, Independent Researcher

Kunstbarrikaden: Gruppe GEFLECHT and the Student Movement in Munich, 1967-1970

Carol Hager, Bryn Mawr

Citizen Initiatives in Germany: Structural Violence, Civil Disobedience, and Democratization

The first panel in the Berlin Program Summer Workshop addressed civil disobedience in West Germany starting in the mid-1960s. Lauren Graber's paper, "Kunstbarrikaden: Gruppe GEFLECHT and the Student Movement in Munich, 1967-1970," investigated a period of radicalization and politicization among Munich-based artists, students, and activists. Formed in 1966 as part of the extra-parliamentary opposition, GEFLECHT utilized a distinct and cohesive artistic style, most notably in the "anti-object," to galvanize protest. The aesthetic discourse that

emerged around anti-objects sought to highlight and critique the corrupt power structures of post-war West Germany and spur the Munich Kunstakademie to confront its problematic past (and present). By 1970, GEFLECHT helped win limited reforms and the group served as an archetype for protests in following decades. Carol Hager's paper, "Citizen Initiatives in Germany: Structural Violence, Civil Disobedience, and Democratization," analyzed the expansion and evolution of protest groups in West Germany from local groups interested in community services to broad anti-system protests with widespread popular support. Hager argues that clashes with the state and police, especially those involving protesters occupying sites of planned Nuclear Plants, did not alienate the broader German public from the culture of protest. Quite the opposite, clashes with authority awoke much of the public to the overarching power imbalances in German society. In this way, direct or personal violence highlighted the structural violence inherent to the German state, economy, and society, fueling vibrant grassroots activism throughout the 20th century and up to today, where it can be seen in cases like Stuttgart 21.

Patrick Gilner, Berlin Program Fellow 2014-2015

Panel II: WEST GERMAN PROTESTS IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT

Moderator: Jenny Wüstenberg, Freie Universität Berlin/EBS University Wiesbaden

Michael Lawrence Hughes, Wake Forest University

Civil Disobedience and Violence in Transnational Perspective. American and West German Anti-Nuclear-Power Protesters, 1975-1982

Josh Alvizu, Yale University

KlugeKitKongoKit: Pseudo-Documentary and the Military Industrial Complex

Very broadly, the panel presents two projects dealing with the nature of international interaction and influence of two streams of anti-establishment activity: one working against the international development of nuclear technology, the other questioning the legitimacy of dominance of space exploration by the two major powers of the Cold War. In its nearly incomprehensible and senseless juxtaposition of four contexts (of military and space technology development by Germans in post-colonial Congo, community-based autonomous astronaut collectives, and a close reading of two avant-garde pseudo-documentaries), Alvizu's paper strikingly raises the question of how such parallel streams of counter-cultural thinking are related, if at all, and what theoretical or discursive underpinnings they might share. Such an experiment in coherence provides an excellent context for Hughes' paper, in which, oddly enough, a similar tension about the nature of the relationship of the American and West German anti-nuclear movement also becomes apparent. Whereas for Alvizu's paper, there is clearly no interaction between the four contexts he chooses, Hughes's paper illustrates a truly transatlantic interaction as Europeans find themselves using American principles of civil disobedience, but with the subsequent reimportation of German strategies by Americans into their own context. Nevertheless, despite the appearance that there is no influence, as seems evident in the case of Alvizu's four contexts, it seems doubtful that such anti-establishment thinking ever happens in isolation, and thus the panel presents an area of further research into how such disparate and seemingly irrelevant international streams of activity are related or perhaps drawing from similar discourses.

Ritwik Banerji, Berlin Program Fellow 2015-2016

Panel III: WIR SIND DAS VOLK: Protests in Eastern Germany, 1989-2015

Moderator: April Eisman, Iowa State University

Martina Metzger, Bavarian Army Museum

Peaceful Protest in Berlin and Leipzig in Autumn 1989: Coping with Past Experiences of Violent Oppression

Christiane Olivo, University of Northern Colorado-Greeley

The Meaning of “Wir sind das Volk” and the Popular Battle over Democratic Values

The two papers in this panel addressed political protests in East Germany and their differing relationships to democracy. In 1989, the slogan “Wir sind das Volk” was used to champion the power of the people and their contribution to the collapse of the communist dictatorship. Martina Metzger’s paper, “Peaceful Protest in Berlin and Leipzig in Autumn 1989: Coping with Past Experience of Violent Oppression,” analyzed the process by which East German citizens overcame their fear and the legacy of repression — including the violent response of communist governments to protests in Berlin in 1953, Hungary in 1956 and Prague in 1968—and participated in peaceful protests to lobby for democratic change. As Metzger points out, the protests in Berlin and Leipzig were a rare example of how a dictatorship was overthrown by a non-violent movement. Christiane Olivo’s “The Meaning of ‘Wir sind das Volk’ and the Popular Battle over Democratic Values,” examined two cases of right-wing extremist mobilization in Leipzig-- one surrounding emergency housing for refugees in Schönefeld and the other in response to plans to build a new mosque in Gohlis—to demonstrate how the extreme-right embodied populist politics and thereby analyze what kind of citizen activism strengthens democracy and what kind does not. Olivo argues that drawing on the people, as a homogenous unity that embodies popular sovereignty is not always the democratic ideal and that citizen participation is also not always inherently good for democracy. Instead, Olivo notes, we need a more nuanced approach to assess the kinds of activities and principles that strengthen contemporary liberal democracy.

Deborah Barton, Berlin Program Postdoctoral Fellow 2014-2015

Panel IV: REASSESSING EAST GERMAN REPRESSION

Moderator: Jeremy DeWaal, FU Berlin/Vanderbilt University

Christina Schwenkel, University of California-Riverside

Traveling Architecture: East German Urban Designs in Vietnam

Amitai Touval, Baruch College

Elite Continuity and the Acknowledgement of Political Repression

First panelist Christina Schwenkel spoke about the urban architectural housing project of the German Democratic Republic in the city of Vinh in Vietnam from her paper “Traveling Architecture: East German Urban Designs in Vietnam”. The disastrous destruction that resulted from air raids of the United States during the 1960s and 1970s, led to the GDR seizing its chance to strengthen international relationships “to embed cityscapes within a particular materiality of modernity.” Today these housing projects are seen as un-modern and as an experimental project

that failed international solidarity and global socialism. Schwenkel shows in her paper how East German housing architecture was transported abroad to create new urban development outside the GDR and how residents adopted the idea of “socialist modernity.” Having lived in the housing project Quang Trung during her long-term research, Schwenkel was able to interview residents and architects who worked with GDR specialists. What appeared to the visitor as a rather dull copy of architectural GDR design is in fact, as Schwenkel shows, a creation of “diverse buildings and dwellings with their own unique flair.” Residents individualized their apartments “to produce a more culturally suitable style of ‘civilized’ urban living”. Her contribution points at a new definition of socialist modernity abroad, in which socialist architectural uniformity and Western modernity was modified and adjusted by the residents to please own cultural and economic values.

In the second segment of this panel Amitai Touval spoke about Leipzig East German politicians and their perception of oppression during the period of the GDR from his paper “Elite Continuity and the Acknowledgement of Political Repression.” He conducted interviews with former politicians showing that those who rejected notions of oppression (“the marginalized”) during the GDR period were less likely to continue a political career in the united Germany. By contrast, those who admitted oppression (“the resilient”) continued to serve in public positions post-1989. Touval further expands the definition of elite community by not only pointing out these two groups of East German politicians, but also by describing the personal journey of “the resilient” and their way of transforming belonging to and subsequently departing from this elite community. In addition, his research points to a more individualized perspective of an East German elite community taking into consideration elements of party affiliation, rank, age, education and professional background.

Katrin Bahr, Berlin Program Fellow 2015-2016

FILM SCREENING: Berlin East Side Gallery by Karin Kaper und Dirk Szuszi

Friday, June 19, 2015

Panel V: CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE AND SOCIAL PROTEST IN A NEOLIBERAL WORLD

Moderator: Robert Pirro, Georgia Southern University

Josefin Graef, University of Birmingham

Narrating Intra-societal Violence in Germany: Textual Responses to the *National Socialist Underground* (NSU) and the Notion of Terrorism

Jill E. Twark, East Carolina University

Die Toten Hosen, Rammstein, Azad, and Massiv: German Rock and Rap Go Global for Social Justice

Daniel Calzada, Freie Universität Berlin

Non-partisan movements and protest parties in Greece, Spain and Germany, 2011-2015

In the first paper, Josefin Graef, a doctoral researcher at the University of Birmingham, looked at the ways the German media reported a string of crimes committed by the National Socialist

Underground (NSU) from the late 1990s through 2011. Her paper first showed the dynamics of storytelling. For Graef, stories illuminate the author's perception of the society in which he/she lives, and stories are also written with an eye towards the conclusion. Second, she showed that terrorism is a narrative tool and a dynamic concept, raising wider questions about narrating violence over time. Discussion focused on how the NSU conceived of itself (as either left- or right-wing) and whether the term terrorism was even helpful to describe the incident.

Jill E. Twark, an associate professor of German at East Carolina University, presented her paper on contemporary rap and rock artists in Germany. Twark argued that artists in both genres make socio-political commentaries on issues like racism, poverty, and immigration. She argued that this commentary exists, even when artists such as Rammstein claim that they do not have political aims. For Twark, these artists both uphold a particularly German identity and adopt modes of self-representation that are typically found among American music artists. Discussion questions included the existence of German right-leaning musicians and the larger significance of artists engaging with politics.

Finally, Daniel Calzada Vázquez, a student at the Freie Universität, presented a paper on anti-austerity movements and protest parties in Spain and Greece. He approached social movements and political parties together, arguing that political protest parties recognize the demands of protest movements and that both groups are marked by horizontal organization. One particularly interesting discussion question focused on the issue of the globalization for similar protest movements and parties.

As moderator Professor Pirro pointed out, these three papers looked at unconventional politics: right-wing terrorism, music, and democratic politics and protests. As the discussion showed, these papers emphasized the importance of popular ideas to politics and protest.

Colleen Anderson Berlin Program Fellow 2014-2015

Panel VI: RESISTANCE AND DISOBEDIENCE IN FILM AND LITERATURE

Moderator: Tom Haakenson, California College of the Arts

Friedemann Weidauer, University of Connecticut

State Sanctioned Terror and Individual Resistance in the Film *The White Ribbon*

Larson Powell, University of Missouri-Kansas City

Archive of the Revolution: Konrad Wolf's *Lissy*

Martina Lüke, University of Connecticut

"The Situation Is Hopeless But Not Serious" – Violence, Disobedience, and Oppression in Billy Wilder's *One, Two, Three* (1961)

Jan Lensen, Freie Universität Berlin

Towards a Non-Violent Memory Ethics? Remembering the Second World War in Marcel Beyer's *Flughunde* (1995)

How do literary texts and films respond to or engage in resistance and disobedience? Panel VI addressed this question by focusing on different strategies of representation. In his talk,

Friedemann Weidauer focused on Michael Haneke's New-Historicist approach to filmmaking in *The White Ribbon* and its representation of a pre-World-War-I Germany. While offering examples of Haneke's attempts to produce an effect of authenticity, Weidauer also drew attention to disjunctures between the film's voiceover narrator and its images. Weidauer argued that Haneke's film, rather than validating viewers' expectations, instead points to a lack of answers to fundamental questions about this historical period. In his presentation, Larson Powell noted how political resistance during the Weimar Republic was co-opted by the GDR. Powell furthermore argued that unreleased DEFA films should be considered as an archive, documenting the ways in which the GDR sought to understand and frame its relationship to the Weimar past. Martina Lüke's presentation focused on Billy Wilder's comedy *One, Two Three*, investigating a connection between the film's popular and critical failure in Germany in 1961, and memories of rape and violence in the aftermath of World War II. Noting that the film attained cult status in Germany after its 1985 re-release, Lüke presented ostensibly humorous scenes and argued for their relevance vis-à-vis historical violence in post-war Berlin. Jan Lensen's talk emphasized the importance of generations for assessing literary representations of commemorative violence. Delineating first, second and third generation authors, Lensen argued that in the case of the latter, historical truth claims are replaced by literary discourse. Referencing Marcel Beyer's *Flughunde*, Lensen characterized this discourse in terms of an integrative ethic that combines perspectives of both victimhood and perpetration.

Arthur Salvo, Berlin Program Fellow 2014-15

Excursion: Berlin East Side Gallery and Beyond: Public Art on Both Sides of the Oberbaumbrücke, guided by Barbara Wolbert, European University Viadrina

Has a piece of concrete topped celluloid as the site for the most famous kiss? Erich Honneker's socialist fraternal kiss with Leonid Breschnew during the GDR 30th anniversary festivities in 1979 was captured by press photographer Régis Bossu. Painter Dmitri Vrubel used this image for his work which he subtitled *My God, Help Me to Survive This Deadly Love*. This year's tour was conceptualized by Barbara Wolbert in close connection to the documentary film "Berlin East Side Gallery" which was screened a day before. The tour started from the gallery's southeastern corner and discussed a number of wall paintings as well as public art in the neighborhood. Erected as a so-called "Hinterlandmauer" in 1961, this section of the wall was turned into a gallery by Bodo Sperling, Barbara Greul Ashanata, Jörg Kubitzki and David Monti. With its 105 paintings spanning over 1,2 km along Mühlendamm in Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg it is the longest standing part of the Berlin Wall and considered by some the biggest open air gallery. It is impossible to summarize the artwork displayed here, so go there or check the website: www.eastsidegallery.com.

Crossing over to the Spreespeicher (altes Eierkühlhaus) we come to Olaf Metzel's sculpture "13.4.1981" which was originally situated on Kurfürstendamm at the corner of Joachimsthaler Str. Metzel's work was commissioned for the 750th anniversary of Berlin and consists of a pile of crowd control barriers and a shopping cart. The fierce debate that ensued over contemporary art in West Berlin in 1987 included denouncements of Metzel's piece as a pile of rubbish and a waste of tax money. The reaction to this particular piece probably owes a lot to its name which refers to April 13 when riots broke out following a false report which claimed a jailed RAF terrorist to be dead.

Walking over one of Berlin's most famous bridges and perhaps most beautiful bridges, the Oberbaumbrücke again connects Friedrichshain and Kreuzberg. Built in 1896 to replace an older wooden bridge, the bridge lost most of its functions after the Wall was built in 1961 and U-Bahn could only go to Schlesisches Tor. After December 1963, the bridge was used a pedestrian border crossing point for West Berliner to enter East Berlin.

On the Kreuzberg side, we explored a sculpture path from Schlesische Str. to May-Ayim-Ufer titled "Human Landscape" which was designed to visualize "Kreuzberg as crystallization point for immigration." Among the fascinating but often overlooked artworks are: "Dove Vai" (Italian: Where do you go?), two reclining figures in bronze and iron by Andreas Wegner and Mehmed Aksoy's "People in the City" (Menschen in der Stadt) composed of nine white Carrara-marble figures. It is easy to miss these works sprayed full of graffiti – some of them under the iron subway line supports: https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Menschenlandschaft_Berlin.

Our last stop, the "Signalkugel" by Ulrike Mohr, marks the site of a historic quay which was destroyed during the war. The red ball on a ten-meter metal mast drops when a boat goes by and gets pushed up again via an air compression system. The restored underground waiting rooms are now used by a restaurant and as communal art space with changing exhibits.
<http://www.stadtentwicklung.berlin.de/staedtebau/foerderprogramme/stadtumbau/Doppelkaianlage-May-Ayim-Ufer-PDF.3289.o.html>.

Karin Goihl, Berlin Program

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Berlin Program Alumni Panel at the GSA in Washington D.C., October 4, 2015

Writing Histories of Germans Abroad:

Approaches and Methodologies to German Sources on Africa and the Middle East

<http://www.fu-berlin.de/en/sites/bprogram/roundtables/BPGSA-pro-2015.pdf>

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