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

Anke Pinkert
University of Chicago

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Anke Pinkert  
*University of Chicago*

**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 legitimate 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”**  

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

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SECTION II: Constructing Socialism in the GDR

1. Antifascism: the legitimation of power?
   Wolf, Christa. Patterns of Childhood. 1976 (excerpts).

2. The wall: border, fence or mirror?

SECTION III: Dissent, Opposition, Dissidence

5. Of “real” and “true” socialism: intellectual oppositions

6. Youth: commitment or rebellion?/The church movement
   Kundera, Milan. The Unbearable Lightness of Being (film).

7. Women: emancipation in a paternal State

8. The power of jokes

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)

EPILOGUE

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