Remembering and Rethinking the GDR. Multiple Perspectives and Plural Authenticities

Veranstalter: Anna Saunders / Debbie Pinfold, ‘After the Wall’ Network, Bangor University, UK
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The conference concluded a series of workshops held by the ‘After the Wall’ Network which explored the nature of GDR memories from an interdisciplinary perspective, with speakers from a wide range of fields including literary studies, film studies, musicology, historical studies, political science and anthropology.

Opening the conference, keynote speaker PATRICIA HOGWOOD (Westminster) spoke in favour of the idea of combining memory research with an interdisciplinary perspective. Hogwood assessed the applicability of memory research into the Holocaust and the National Socialist past in understanding the nature and role of collective memory in post-GDR society, and came to the conclusion that concepts such as ‘victimhood’ and ‘normalisation’ must be reconsidered in a contemporary context. According to Hogwood a shift in methodological focus from collecting and evaluating recounted memory to tracing and evaluating evidenced behaviour helps to strengthen contextualisation, as well as the potential for the wider application of findings.

NADINE NOWROTH (Dublin) opened the first panel comparing two autobiographical literary texts, namely Die Sache mit B by Hans-Joachim Schädlich and Immer wieder Dezember by Susanne Schädlich. Both texts deal with the trauma of betrayal by a close family member and formed the basis for Nowroth’s discussion of the question of voicelessness, the influence of distance and the impact of public discourse. In the second paper, SARA JONES (Bristol) analysed the interaction between communicative memory and the mediation of memory through the examination of autobiographical accounts of victims of Stasi oppression. Literary accounts that thematise Stasi surveillance were then the focus of ANNIE RING’s (Cambridge) paper. According to Ring, Ich by Wolfgang Hilbig challenges the established moral categories of perpetration and victimhood with a more complex subject-position: the double agent.

MARK ALLINSON (Bristol) opened the second panel with a paper that examined the collective memory of the GDR’s army, as represented in non-fictional as well as fictional sources, such as Haußmann’s film NVA, and suggests an underrepresentation and a general absence of the NVA in the memory landscape of the GDR. MIKE DENNIS (Wolverhampton) took a closer look at the ‘Aufarbeitung’ of the clandestine and state-run doping programme in elite GDR sport, contrasting personal memoirs and pamphlets by former officials and with the work of scholars and scientists that is based on original SED and MfS records. ANNE-MARIE PAILHES (Paris Quest Nanterre) introduced her research project in which she interviewed nineteen former members of the Gesellschaft für Deutsch-Sowjetische Freundschaft, in order to examine which individual motivations and political traditions helped to build and maintain this organisation.

In the third panel CATHERINE MOIR (Sheffield) analysed the concept of ‘Ostalgie’ by drawing on Bloch’s notion of ‘Zukunft in der Vergangenheit’. She identified this phenomenon as a social attitude which expresses unfulfilled expectations. ‘Ostalgie’ was also the topic of CLAIRE HYLAND’s (Bath) paper, in which she analysed interviews to show that East Germans born in the seventies use this popular discourse to distinguish between themselves and others. In the last paper of this panel, FELIX RINGEL (Cambridge) discussed the situation of young people in the shrinking town of Hoyerswerda and examined the mobilisation of GDR remembrance for the purposes of ‘moral education’.

In the fourth panel ANSELMA GALLINAT (Newcastle) presented the findings of her fieldwork in East Germany and highlighted the importance of the context of remembrance. While for the state, ‘correct remembrance’ is connected with democracy, individual memory mirrors the complexity of
life in the GDR, connecting past and present to serve the continuity of the self. DAVID CLARKE (Bath) outlined the development of political discourse regarding compensation for victims of the SED-regime since 1990, and examined the definition and symbolic value of victimhood. In her paper CHLOE PAYER (Exeter) examined four GDR museums exhibiting everyday objects. Drawing on ‘rubbish theory’ she concluded that objects may produce contradictory narratives, often acting as markers of social distinction in the GDR.

GEERT CRAUWELS (Brussels) started the fifth panel by examining the influence of the GDR discourse of power on the private and interpersonal spheres, as represented in literary reflections such as Brussig’s Wasserfarben and Kubiczek’s Junge Talente. SIOBHAN FINN (Western Australia) suggested a close link between traditions in German music and identity construction, basing her findings on interviews with GDR musicians and archival sources. In her paper ASTRID MIGNON KIRCHHOF (Berlin) thematised the contrast between the dismissal of voluntary work in the GDR by many citizens who were forced to get involved, and voluntary work in the area of nature preservation and landscape conservation by enthusiasts, suggesting an interrelationship between their work and their identity construction as citizens of the GDR.

Panel six opened with ANDREA BRAIT (Vienna) discussing the GDR at the museum, in particular the conflict between ‘Ostalgie’ and scientific research in the field. In her paper REBECCA DOLGOY (Montréal) looked at re-creative commemorative events in Berlin in 2009 connected to the fall of the Berlin Wall. While on an individual level re-creative remembering interpretively revisits the past and acknowledges the fact that the past is not a static place, on a collective level this form of remembering runs the risk of simplifying or even damaging that which is being remembered. GABRIELE MÜLLER (Toronto) presented a collaborative project which examines evolving processes of knowledge production in German culture and the construction of collective memory through visual media and the museum.

KATJA WARCHOLD (Galway) opened the seventh panel with a discussion of writing motifs of GDR authors born in the 60s and 70s and positioned their autobiographical texts in contrast to remembrance of the GDR in ‘Ostalgie’-Shows on the one hand and the narrow focus on the SED dictatorship on the other. DEBBIE PINFOLD (Bristol) focused on the impact such texts have on cultural memory. She argued that although these texts present individual experiences, their narratives can coincide with the national narrative depending on their genre. JULIANE SCHÖNEICH (Osnabrück) argued that GDR authors born in the 50s and 60s favoured an ironic approach in their writing about the ‘Wende’, whereas older generations resorted to self-defence and self-reflection in their autobiographical texts about that time.

In his keynote, BILL NIVEN (Nottingham) reconsidered the claim that the theme of flight and expulsion from Eastern Europe after WWII was taboo in the GDR. By looking at literary texts such as Anna Seghers’ Friedensgeschichten and films such as Arthur Pohl’s Die Brücke, he argued that the contribution of GDR culture to portraying the theme of flight and expulsion has been played down. Niven pointed out that cultural articulations are often not taken seriously and pleaded for a non-dismissive approach.

In the plenary, AXEL KLAUSMEIER (Berlin) introduced new additions to the Berlin Wall documentation centre and memorial site at Bernauer Straße, highlighting the importance of authenticity and raising questions regarding new forms and paths of public remembrance.

UTE HIRSEKORN (Nottingham) opened panel eight with an analysis of Günter Schabowski’s autobiographical publications. Drawing on concepts of autobiographical memory, Hirsekorn demonstrated Schabowski’s successful preservation of his narrative identity through autobiographical memory, in spite of the radical changes in political and social realities during the ‘Wende’. JOANNE SAYNER (Birmingham) re-examined the contemporary conceptualisation of GDR antifascism as a state doctrine by looking at Greta Kuckhoff’s writings and memories of fascism, with the aim of engaging with and challenging institutionalised narratives of memory. Investigating Jürgen
Fuchs’ autobiographical text *Magdalena*, JEFFREY WEISS (Limerick) discussed the author’s attempt to come to terms with the impact of the GDR state security on his life by exploring internal structures, patterns of thinking and the language of the state institutions, each of which is represented by different and somewhat conflicting voices.

The interplay between the omnipresent images of November 1989 and individual memory of the fall of the Berlin Wall in the texts of the anthology *Die Nacht, in der die Mauer fiel* was the topic of the first paper by DENNIS TATE (Bath) in the ninth panel. ALEXANDRA KAISER (Leipzig) argued in her paper that the celebrations in 2009 in East Germany marked a significant shift in German memory culture towards the East German perspective. RICHARD MILLINGTON (Liverpool) presented the results of his survey on the reception of the 17th June 1953 in the memory of eye witnesses of the uprising in Magdeburg and those born after this event. He argued that the diversity of perceptions can be explained by the effect of SED-propaganda, the shock about the violence and the influence of a West German perspective.

The first paper of panel ten by SILKE ARNOLD-DE SIMINE (Birkbeck) concerned museums exhibiting objects from GDR everyday life such as the ‘DDR Museum’ (Berlin) and the ‘Dokumentationszentrum Alltagskultur der DDR’ (Eisenhüttenstadt). By emphasizing the ‘normality’ of life in the GDR, both museums are accused of neglecting the fact that the GDR was a dictatorship, which raises the question of whether daily life can be separated from the political regime. The second speaker SYBILLE FRANK (Darmstadt) thematised questions of authenticity in the conflict caused by competing memorial sites: the private, temporary memorial to Wall victims at Checkpoint Charlie and the Senate-backed Wall documentation centre and memorial at Bernauer Straße. The question of authenticity was also raised by ROSWITHA SKARE (Tromsø) who identified cinematic and para-textual strategies used in the film *Das Leben der Anderen* to present it as an authentic medium through which to remember the GDR and its State Security.

FRANCESCO AVERSA (Ferrara) opened the eleventh panel with an analysis of Kurt Drawert’s *Ich hielt meinen Schatten für einen anderen und grüßte*, in which he drew on Fühmann’s idea of myth. The returning motif of the ‘Doppelgänger’ as a tendency in ‘Berlinliteratur’ at the turn of the millennium was presented by ELKE GILSON (Ghent). Discussing Klaus Schlesinger’s *Trug* she argued that the return to romantic motifs such as autoscopy could be read as a symptom of crisis in memory culture. The way that GDR authors such as Monika Maron and Wolfgang Hilbig responded to the politically-motivated accusation that their writing was part of an unethical regime was the topic of VALESKA STEINIG’s paper. In their post-‘Wende’ texts, both authors reject the simplified categories of perpetrator and victim and point out that such categorical memory patterns are unsustainable.

In the last panel, MONIKA DURRER (Western Australia) presented the findings of her field research in Western Australia which focused on the oral histories of East Germans who migrated to Australia after the fall of the Berlin Wall. In light of existing literature on East German identity she investigated the extent to which distance from the homeland influences identity construction, and asked what forms of nostalgia have emerged within diasporic identities. According to ELAINE KELLY (Edinburgh) diasporic memories are shaped by a nostalgia which involves a more fluid and critical mediation between past and present, and therefore fall into Svetlana Boym’s category of reflective nostalgia. By focusing on musical reflections of the state after 1989, she examined the viability of positioning East German composers in terms of a diasporic community. PAUL O’HANRAHAN (Liverpool) reflected on the impact of the reunification of Berlin on literary representations of urban space in three Berlin novels by Hugo Hamilton.

In the concluding round table discussion it was agreed that in order to understand the GDR as a whole, an interdisciplinary approach is necessary. By looking at smaller groups and focusing on more defined concepts of remembering, the multiplicities of the ‘GDRs of the mind’ become clearer. The importance of an exter-
nal view on German debates was pointed out, as well as the need to examine the GDR not only in comparison with the West but within a worldwide context. For further details, see: http://afterthewall.bangor.ac.uk /conference.php?catid=&subid=7620.

Conference overview:

Keynote:
Patricia Hogwood: Selective Memory: channeling the past in post-GDR society

Panel 1: Narratives of Oppression: Remembering the Stasi

Nadine Nowroth: Trauma und autobiographisches Schreiben – der Sprachlosigkeit Worte geben

Sara Jones: Community and Genre: Autobiographical Rememberings of Stasi Oppression

Annie Ring: Double-Agents: Narratives of Complicity and In-Security in Literature Remembering the Ministerium für Staatssicherheit

Panel 2: Representing the GDR as a ‘durchherrschte Gesellschaft’?

Mark Allinson: Leben in der Truppe: Reported, Represented, Remembered

Mike Dennis: Remembering to Forget: Elite Sport, Doping and Contesting the Past

Anne-Marie Pailhès: Die Gesellschaft für Deutsch-Sowjetische Freundschaft: Versuch einer Sicht von unten

Panel 3: The Future of the GDR

Catherine Moir: The ‘blaue Stunde’ and the Past and Future of the GDR

Claire Hyland: ‘Ostalgie passt nicht’: Individual interpretations of and interaction with Ostalgie

Felix Ringel: The Future of GDR-Memory: Temporal Politics and Moral Education in an East German Shrinking City

Panel 4: Re-interpreting the Past for the Purposes of the Present?

Anselma Gallinat: Memory matters and contexts

David Clarke: From Welfarization to Hero-ization: Compensating the Victims of Human Rights Abuses in the GDR

Chloe Paver: Grauer Alltag versus bunte Produktwelt: Museums of GDR Life as Sites of Contradiction and Complexity

Panel 5: Identification and Identity

Geert Cruwels: Die DDR lässt sich gut erzählen – oder die Rhetorik des Schweigens

Siobhan Finn: Classical Music, National Identity and Politics: Recollections of Everyday Life as a Musician in the GDR

Astrid Mignon Kirchhof: „Wir lieben und gestalten unsere sozialistische Heimat“: Naturschutz in der DDR

Panel 6: Public Narratives

Andrea Brait: The GDR at the Museum – Between Academic Debate and „Ostalgie“

Rebecca Dolgoy: Lingering and Fabricated Echoes of Mauerfall: The Problematic Practise of Re-creative Remembering

Gabriele Mueller: Re-Imaging the Niche: Visual Reconstructions of Private Spaces in the GDR

Panel 7: Young Narratives of the GDR

Katja Warchold: Anstoß nehmen – wie sich junge ostdeutsche Autoren in ihren autobiographischen Texten mit dem öffentlichen Erinnern an die DDR auseinander setzen

Debbie Pinfold: „We weren’t all Zonenkinder“: Post-Wende accounts of growing up in the GDR

Juliane Schöneich: Literary transformations of the Wende in the work of „younger“ authors from the former GDR

Keynote:
Bill Niven: Flight and Expulsion in East Germany: A Case of Marginalisation and Taboo?

Plenary: Memory in Practice

Axel Klausmeier: Die Erweiterung der Gedenkstätte Berliner Mauer an der Bernauer Straße – Neue Wege des staatlichen Erinnerns und Gedenkens

Panel 8: Autobiographical accounts of prominent personalities
Ute Hirsekorn: Dynamiken des autobiographischen Gedächtnisses in den autobiographischen Texten der DDR-Führungselite am Beispiel Günter Schabowskis „Gewendete“ Ansichten – Von diktatorischer Herrschaftsgestalt zu psychopathischer Opfergestalt?

Joanne Sayner: Reframing Antifascism: Greta Kuckhoff as Author, Commentator and Critic

Jeffrey Weiss: Multiple Voices: Polyphony as a Form of Remembrance in Jürgen Fuchs’ Magdalena

Panel 9: Memories of Key Dates

Dennis Tate: „Wenn ich versuche, mich zu erinnern, sehe ich nur die Fernsehbilder“ – The Iconic Images of November 1989 as a Hindrance to Literary Remembering


Richard Millington: „Helden ohne Ruhm“ or „abenteuerlustige Rowdys“? Remembering the protagonists of the uprising of 17 June 1953 in the GDR

Panel 10: Questions of Authenticity

Silke Arnold-de Simine: GDR Museums and Everyday Memory

Sybille Frank: Competing for the Best Wall Memorial: The Contested Creation of an „Authentic“ Cold War Heritage in Berlin

Roswitha Skare: Film als authentisches Erinnerungsmedium? Authentizitätsstrategien in Das Leben der Anderen

Panel 11: Multiple Selves and Mythical Realities in Literary Texts

Francesco Aversa: „Eine Fantasie aus der Kategorie Atlantis“. Das Verschwundene und das Chthonische in der Post-DDR-Literatur

Elke Gilson: Doppelgänger als Symptom einer Wahrnehmungs- und Erinnerungskrise in der Nachwendeliteratur, am Beispiel von Klaus Schlesingers Trug

Valeska Steinig: DDR-Kritik in Varianten fingiert-autobiografischer Erinnerungen nach 1990 am Beispiel Wolfgang Hilbigs und Monika Marons

Panel 12: On the Margins: Migration, Diaspora and the Outside View

Monika Durrer: 20 years on… Issues of migration, memory and identity for East Germans in Australia

Elaine Kelly: Reflective nostalgia and diasporic memory: Composing East Germany after 1989


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