

20 Years Fall of the Berlin Wall--Germany, a Sustainable Democracy?

On **November 6th, 2009**, the University of North Carolina at Greensboro is hosting a **symposium** entitled “20 Years Fall of the Wall--Germany, a Sustainable Democracy?” to commemorate the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and to reflect on the historical changes and contemporary consequences of the fall of the Iron Curtain.

On **November 20th, 2009**, the University of North Carolina at Greensboro is hosting **Peter Schneider**. Peter Schneider will meet with students between 11 and 12/noon in Curry 225. In the afternoon, he will give a talk and read from his book at 2 PM in the Faculty Center. We cordially invite you and your students to meet one of the most important contemporary German authors in order to commemorate the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War and to discuss its legacy!

Peter Schneider is one of the most prolific authors currently writing in German. He is particularly known for his participation in the sixties student movement and his subsequent engagement with political issues and their cultural representation in literature and film. He is also a very engaged participant in the transatlantic dialogue between the U.S. and Germany (Writer-in-Residence and Visiting Professor at numerous American universities, including: Stanford, Princeton, Dartmouth, Harvard, Washington University (St. Louis), and Georgetown University, and Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson Center, Washington, D.C.) He authored over 20 books, including novels, short stories and essays, some of them translated into 20 different languages, including the following in English: *The Wall Jumper*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), *The German Comedy* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1991), *Couplings* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1996), *Eduard's Homecoming* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2000), *Lenz*, in *Three Contemporary German Novellas* (New York: The German Library, 2001). He also writes screenplays and publishes in newspapers and journals, including *The New York Times*. For more information about Peter Schneider please visit his website at <http://www.peterschneider-autor.de/>

Here is what British critic Dennis Tate writes about Schneider's *Wall Jumper*, one of the most important book about the German division to be published before the Wall fell:

“It was only in the 1980s that the phenomenon of the ‘Wall in the Head’ came to be identified, as the inevitable consequence of the radically different forms of socialization practised in the two postwar German states, which intensified after the building of the Wall and surprisingly continued afterwards during the era of détente, when it became easier at least for West Germans to visit the East on a regular basis and establish close friendships. The problem was defined in one of the few West German works to confront the long-term psychological effects of division, Peter Schneider's *Der Mauerspringer* (*The Wall Jumper*), which appeared in 1981. Schneider was one of the German student radicals of the 1960s attracted to West Berlin because of its unique geographical position, an island cut off from the rest of the Federal Republic by the territory of the GDR, a place where experiments in détente could be conducted as the Cold War receded. He took full advantage of the new opportunities for travel in the East in the 1970s to compare notes with his counterparts there, and in the process began to compile a collection of often bizarre stories describing the impact the Wall had had on individuals living on both sides. He initially thought he would get the inspiration for a work of fiction from this research, but

rapidly had to conclude that in this case the facts were much stranger than fiction would ever dare to be, and he ended up simply recounting them – for example, the story of the West Berliner who obsessively registered his individual protest at the building of the Wall by climbing over it whenever he felt like it, without a care for the obvious risks of being shot or blown up, enjoying the fuss of being arrested and then released again, finally becoming an equal embarrassment to the authorities on both sides. Or the East Berlin teenagers who ingeniously found a way of getting out over their side of the Wall, but only so that they could nip across to see the latest films showing in West Berlin’s cinemas. They had no notion of escaping, quietly making their way back home after each outing and then wondering what the fuss was about when they too finally got arrested – and so on. Schneider also found that his many friends from East Berlin, regardless of whether they still lived there or had left in disillusionment, still betrayed their origins in their negative response to many aspects of life in the West which he took for granted. This led him to the far-sighted conclusion – for no-one would have been prepared to bet in the early 1980s that the GDR would have collapsed before the decade was over – that ‘it will take longer to dismantle the Wall in the Head than any demolition firm will need for the visible Wall’.” (Dennis Tate, “Border Crossings and Walls in Heads: German Culture since Unification” at <http://www.bath.ac.uk/eri/pdf/op-tate.pdf>)

Please find attached an excerpt from the *Wall Jumper* (in German with English translation). Peter Schneider’s other publications are available at the university library. We encourage students to submit questions and comments prior to Peter Schneider’s visit to Dr. Rinner at s_rinner@uncg.edu.

Questions?

Please email the organizers of these events,
Corey Johnson, Geography, corey_johnson@uncg.edu
Arndt Niebisch, German and European Studies, a_niebis@uncg.edu
Susanne Rinner, German Studies, s_rinner@uncg.edu

We would like to thank the following organizations for their support:

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