



Call for Papers

## **Pop after Communism. The Transformation of Popular Culture after 1989/90**

Organiser: Jürgen Danyel (Leibniz Centre for Contemporary History Potsdam)

Place: Berlin

From-To: 15 – 17 Nov. 2023

Deadline: 31 May 2023

The social changes that went along with the political upheaval of 1989/90 in the countries of state socialism were not limited to the political system, economic structures or social conditions. The late phase and the end of state socialism were marked by a far-reaching transformation of popular culture, with global cultural changes becoming an important driver of the post-communist transformation. Up to now, there have been some individual studies on the history of pop in the 1990s and early 2000s with a particular view to the united Germany, the countries of East-Central and South-Eastern Europe and the states that emerged with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, but no comprehensive overview of the globally entangled transformation processes in pop culture. The conference hence aims to bring together researchers in the broader field of “pop history” to examine the overarching tendencies of this fundamental socio-cultural change and the protagonists and institutions that determined it from a comparative perspective. The focus of the conference is on pop music and the entire range of pop cultural forms of expression (e.g. film, fashion, literature).

While both pop music, especially with its subcultural scenes, and youth culture, which became highly differentiated in state socialist societies in the 1980s, are now relatively well researched, only a few studies follow their development through the social transformations that began after the political upheaval of 1989/90. Thus, relatively little is known about how state cultural institutions were dissolved or transformed in order to adapt to the new conditions and which paths their former representatives took after the political upheaval. Significant differences between the individual countries, e.g. with regard to gradual liberalisation tendencies or repressive policies that continued until the end of state socialism, must therefore be taken into account just as the distinctive preconditions for the developments beginning after 1989/90.

With the fall of the Iron Curtain and the resulting cultural “freedom of movement”, Western culture became easily accessible to the population of the former Eastern Bloc countries. The first half of the 1990s in particular was marked by the catch-up effects that came with an unhindered flood of Western (pop) culture. In comparison, the formerly established (and often politically protected) representatives of pop culture under state socialism experienced an enormous loss of importance and audience, as they were now directly competing with the Western “originals” while being widely associated with dictatorship and a strong loyalty to the former autocratic systems. However, the caesura of 1989/90 was not absolute: already in the last decades of state socialism, more or less officially tolerated private-sector structures existed in the field of pop culture. “Pop imports” from the West became an instrument of state cultural policy.

Yet, the political changes also meant a clear turning point for the subcultural scenes and fan cultures, which partly dissolved or were absorbed into the new conditions of pop culture, since cultural frictions in everyday life disappeared with the end of state socialism. Then again, the East also experienced an astonishing blossoming as a space for the development of new pop cultural trends, even if this was primarily limited to the urban centres. In particular, the metropolises, especially Berlin with its club scene, techno parties and the Love Parade, became centres of new pop cultural trends in the 1990s, which exerted an international attraction and developed their own economic structures. The market-economy structures taking hold in the former countries of state socialism changed the conditions of production and reception for pop culture. Formerly state-run record labels, radio and television stations, artists’ and concert agencies, clubs and leisure facilities were privatised, taken over by established Western companies or failed in the new competitive environment. The people involved in the field of pop culture also struggled with considerable economic adjustment problems.

However, in the second half of the 1990s already, a revival began, which is described as “communist nostalgia” or by the often-denunciatory term “Ostalgie”. Pop from the East became a projection surface for a remembrance of state socialism that was more strongly related to biographical, everyday life recollections. The retro wave in pop culture that is simultaneously overflowing in the West provided additional fertile ground for this transformation of pop into an increasingly commercialised memory machine. In addition, after the upheaval, pop in general was progressively integrated into political marketing and mobilisation strategies and served as a motor and vantage point for national identity formation. In this context nationalist and right-wing extremist activists importantly recurred to the styles, codes and motifs of pop culture.

With a view to the aforementioned research field, we are inviting submissions on the following topics:

- **Changes:** new pop cultural movements, scenes and trends after 1989/90, transformation of cultural institutions after the end of state socialism
- **Subjectivity:** persistent and new models and practices of gender, sexuality, identity, bodies and drugs in pop culture
- **Politics and nation:** pop cultural expressions of national identities and of changing positions, pop and migration movements
- **Economy:** new sales markets and distribution channels for media and the culture industry
- **Digitisation and mediatisation:** video culture, changes in pop production, media consumption and sound carriers
- **Myths and narratives:** freedom, pop and the Fall of the Wall, techno as unification culture, Backwardness of the East
- **Memory:** museality and historicisation of pop and the studies of popular culture, retro waves, “communist nostalgia” and “Ostalgie”.

The conference will take place from **15 to 17 November 2023** in Berlin (Germany). Conference language is English. For speakers without institutional affiliation, travel and accommodation costs can be covered on application. Contributions should not exceed a speaking time of 20 minutes. Proposals for papers (maximum 300 words) from all disciplines as well as a short bi-bibliographical note are requested until **31 May 2023** and should be directed to Jürgen Danyel ([danyel@zzf-potsdam.de](mailto:danyel@zzf-potsdam.de)) and Florian Völker ([voelker@zzf-potsdam.de](mailto:voelker@zzf-potsdam.de)). Contributors will receive a feedback by 15 June 2023.

**Contact:**

Jürgen Danyel (Leibniz Centre for Contemporary History Potsdam): [danyel@zzf-potsdam.de](mailto:danyel@zzf-potsdam.de)

Florian Völker (Leibniz Centre for Contemporary History Potsdam): [voelker@zzf-potsdam.de](mailto:voelker@zzf-potsdam.de)