

WHY BERLIN?

Olivier Morel – What has motivated my work is a desire to understand the various contexts in which authors have had to write under pressure. For some individuals in Berlin who experienced tremendous constraints, writing enabled them to free themselves from inhibition. What interests me about the literary space of Berlin is that this urban location has served not only as the capital of the Third Reich, but also as the capital of the German Democratic Republic, and therefore attracted a whole generation of writers after the fall of the wall. Their relationship to the city is complex and complicated. Between 1989 and 2009, there were authors who came to Berlin in order to comprehend how their own stories were connected to the history of the city. It is the case with Jewish Hungarian authors like George Tabori, who lived in Berlin in 1933, and had fled the city when the Nazis came to power. He returned to the city in 1969 with a play titled *The Cannibals* that provoked a scandal. The play, which evoked Tabori's father's extermination in Auschwitz, deeply modified the way in which Germans considered the Holocaust at that time.

I am also interested in the reaction of Imre Kertész when he was awarded the Nobel Prize. The author gave a speech in which he declared that it wasn't he who was expressing himself, but rather someone behind him. He said he felt like he was being watched, observed. When we look at the texts he penned at that time, we can see that it is a specter who is speaking, an other. One of the favorite themes of Kertész is that of the other; it is the title of one of his famous novels. This other who is always there is "the other self," the writing self. This "I" who writes represents the point of resistance in literature in the context of a dictatorship. This sensation of being other than oneself that continues to exist after 1989 but that is made manifest in a relationship to space is, for Kertész, his relationship to the space of Berlin. When he was awarded the Nobel Prize, he was in the process of choosing Berlin as home, in spite of himself!

Why Berlin? That's the question: Why Berlin? There is a constellation of authors who come from the entire world who find themselves in this space of Berlin that is a space of contradictions but that is also a space that allows for the profound emergence of the other self of literature. Berlin, the Berlin of Kertész, the Berlin of Tabori, is the Berlin in which it will finally be possible to enter into a livable, decent relationship with that which one wants to forget and which is impossible to forget. This is the story of Tabori whose famous play, *The Cannibals*, that brought him back to Berlin even though the author lived in the United States where he had written for Hitchcock in Los Angeles and had no desire to return. At the same time, when he comes back, he sees that he can finally reach a bearable relationship with the unbearable memory of the death of his father, for which he blames himself. This is the structure of not wanting to forget what one is desperately seeking to forget. And when he accepted the Nobel Prize, Kertész found himself

forced to face the inevitable question: Why Berlin? There is no easy answer. It is in the texts that he wrote in the 1990s, especially *Someone Other* in the city, and his wife tells him, things go well when we are in Berlin! So he winds up electing to live in Berlin...