

## Ideological locations and dis-locations: Visual responses from post-communist countries (30 min. plus 10 min discussion)

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### Introduction

While many scholars have applied theories of dis-locations to physical migration (including myself in *Identity and Image. Refugee Artists from Nazi Germany in Britain, 1933-1945*, Kromsdorf/Weimar: VDG Verlag, 400 pp), I will explore the question as to how artists who experienced ideological migration caused by a collective political-economic upheaval respond visually to their specific dislocations.

A case in point will be the photography installation produced by Harald Hauswald, one of 10 artists (**Fig.**) who have been commissioned by 'Overcoming Dictatorships', a €500,000 EU-funded project (2 ½-years) which aims at creating a dialogue on experiences of the change from dictatorship to democracy between writers and artists and also to improve communication between central Eastern and Western Europe (**Fig.**). In accordance with the guidelines of the Culture 2000 Scheme, institutions in seven countries have been involved as organizers and partners: project management and main applicant has been Prof. Dr. Dr. Gerhard Besier, chair for Research for Totalitarianism at the Technische Universität Dresden in **Germany**, Prof. Dr. Ehrhard Cziomer for Prof. Dr. Klemens Budzowski, The Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski Krakow University College, **Poland**, Dr. Marius Oprea, Director of the Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes in Romania in Bucharest, **Romania**, Doc. PhDr Kristina Kaiserová, CSc., University of Jan Evangelista Purkyně, Ústí nad Labem, **Czech Republic**, Katalin Gádaros for Prof. Dr. Istvan Rev from the Open Society Archives (OSA) at the University Budapest, **Hungary**, Prof. Dr. Gustavo Corni from the University of Trento, **Italy** and me from the Department of History of Art, University of Birmingham. While members of five post-communist countries reflected on the more current opening of the Iron Curtain, those from Italy and also Germany would be able to look at the topic from the perspective of a Second or even Third Generation. A member from Britain has become involved because, as we argued in the application form, albeit the country not having faced dictatorships (and

therefore none of the artists come from Britain), it established authoritarian systems as a colonial country. Therefore it also provides backgrounds to support the understanding and reflection between east and west. The partners from these seven countries suggested artists and writers who were then invited to take part in the workshops.

(Fig.) While the writers had readings at previous workshops and publish their poems and short stories in an anthology to come out in May 2008, the visual art works will be shown in an exhibition touring through all participating countries (i.e. Germany, Poland, Romania, Czech Republic, Hungary, and Italy) with the opening in Birmingham, where they will be shown at the Rotunda of the Aston Webb Building from 9 October to 8 November 2008.

Interest in the contemporary art produced in those countries involved, particularly the former Soviet satellite states, in the west is increasing. In **2005** the Modern Museum at Oxford organised an exhibition under the title *Arrivals – Art from the New Europe*. It has grown out of a two-year collaboration between Modern Art Oxford and Turner Contemporary introducing the work of artists from the expanded European Union. The publication covers the ten *Arrivals* countries to the EU in 2004: Poland, Slovenia, Lithuania, Latvia, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Slovakia, Estonia, Hungary and Malta and includes images of the artists' works, installation shots from the exhibitions, behind the scenes photographs and specially commissioned essays by gallery directors, curators, critics and art historians from across the EU.

The exhibition attempts to overcome its title 'Arrivals' (as if these countries have not been there before) and a treatment of art works which is in parts similar to what has become known as Primitivism (the new, the exotic) in the prefaces and introductions by including essays written by curators and art historians from the perspective of each country.

While the selection of the countries for this exhibition is based on the relationship to Europe, those for the exhibition *After the Wall*, shown at the Moderna Museet, Stockholm in **1999** and at the Ludwig Museum of Contemporary Art in Budapest in 2000, primarily focused on previously communist countries. Initially being a research project which would result in an exhibition, a publication and a symposium, it was dedicated to art and culture of the decade 1989 to 1999 in post-communist Europe, revealing, according to David Elliott, the Director of the Moderna Museet in Stockholm and co-editor of the exhibition catalogue, 'that this is a state of being which can reflect many different realities. In the space of ten years the map of Europe has been

redrawn and along with it many individuals' sense of identity and belonging.' The catalogue revolves around the themes of art as a kind of 'social sculpture' (1), the impact of History on identity definitions (2), personal and artistic subjectivity in governments in which the individual was formerly subordinated to the collective (3) and the issues of gender constructions as different from communist stereotypes, which 'claimed to give universal emancipation.'

Both exhibition catalogues are organised by countries to appreciate each country's individuality. Different from our project, however, *After the Wall* interpreted art in a broader sense, including also music and performance from 22 countries, among them all those formerly Soviet satellite states involved in this project. In addition, it looked at the period until 1999, while 'Overcoming Dictatorships' is also able to consider the years until 2007/beginning of 2008, years, in which particularly the European Union has been redrawn again and again. And although the themes in *After the Wall* also play a role in the present project, 'Overcoming Dictatorships' does not primarily look back to a state *after*, but understands itself as part of the reflective and art creative process of actual 'overcoming' dictatorships.

A further difference to both of these shows, however, is that the works for our exhibition has grown out of workshops organised as part of the EU-funded project on 'Overcoming Dictatorships'. These workshops offer the possibility for the artists to get in contact with each other, to exchange experiences which they have undergone in their countries. In addition we opened a blog as an electronic communication platform between the seven workshops (<http://overcomings.blogspot.com/>). (Fig.)

Parts of the works for 'Overcoming dictatorships' have been commissioned specifically for this exhibition, but even more, the project is not assembling simply ordered works. The artists (creative artists and poets) themselves together with scholars from the countries involved, are participating in, and their works, hence, are growing out of workshops organised as part of the EU-funded project on 'Overcoming Dictatorships'. These workshops offer the possibility for the artists to get in contact with each other, to experience their respective countries and work environments, and jointly reflect and exchange experiences which they have undergone and are still undergoing in their countries. To underline the ongoing process of mental migration, we use an interactive web-blog as an electronic communication platform between the seven workshops (<http://overcomings.blogspot.com/>). (Fig.)

Because of this kind of a set-up, the artists had a major say about the inclusion of works. Therefore, it is not only in some sense a communal work, but also methodologically informed by oral history. The meetings are filmed and the artistic and scholarly exchanges constitute primary material for this project.

The c. 15 works, which will be shown at the exhibition (partly produced newly, partly taken from the already existing oeuvre of each artist), centre around the topic of the project 'Overcoming Dictatorships.' In the round table discussion at the first workshop with the artists held in Poland from 30 March to 1 April 2007, the artists questioned the title of the project 'overcoming dictatorships' and described various forms of 'overcoming' as mourning for the past, remembering and overcoming the past. They also mentioned the generational gap: the project involves artists who lived under the communist regime, such as Sándor Pinczehelyi from Pécs, born in 1946 (HU), but also those who were only children or teenagers then, such as Vlad Nancă from Bucharest born in 1979. The artists also addressed the present and mentioned new dictatorships in terms of religions, economic dictatorships, art and dictatorships in terms of medium, networks, globalisation and the definition of 'artist' – as reflected in the visual arts and art market and in the exhibits of the exhibition show.

On the basis of the results of the round table discussion, I would like to analyse their works as signifiers of dis-locations experienced both in terms of the past (through processes of mourning, remembering and attempts of overcoming) and the present (critical approach to the ideology of the western art market, the new political government and Europe). I will argue that the works represent what Homi K. Bhabha called the 'instability of cultural signification', attempts of individuals to overcome given collective identity formations which question both the political past (the Soviet bloc), but also 'our' present, i.e. European Union and Western democracy. A case in point will be the photographic installation of Harald Hauswald entitled *Time Travels* of 2008 (Fig.).

### **Processes of Overcoming**

We can and have to question the term 'overcoming' as much as we criticise the archaeological conservation of 'after'. Paradoxically, 'dictatorships' seems to be a common denominator that is more clearly shaped and with which scholars and artists can identify. Although 'dictatorship' is usually applied to the political sphere - mainly to describe totalitarian systems in the first half of the twentieth century or also Caesar-

ianism and Bonapartism as well as the GDR and Soviet Union, other uses in the art field can be found, such as the absolute authority related to patronage and curatorship.

Remembering the past – comparison with now or in German *Nach dem Vergessen das Erinnern* (Remembering after forgetting/leaving behind) this is the motto of Lutz Rathenow, who published several books together with Harald Hauswald, notably *Ost-Berlin* (**Fig.**), which appeared in a number of editions and whose success, particu-

larly since 2005, and *Gewendet* (**Fig.**), which continues in some ways the more successful *Ost-Berlin* book, contrasting photographs taken pre-1989 with those afterwards, sometimes of the same place. While Rathenow as the writer supplies the text in memories, aphorisma and stories, sometimes only loosely related to the photographs,

Harald Hauswald contributed black-and-white photographs, which have also been shown at a variety of international galleries. In my eyes they represent more than, as Giovanni di Lorenzo notes, a kind of archeological inventory. Hauswald's contribu-

tion to the EU project's exhibition, *Time Travels* of 2008 (**Fig.**), consists of an installation of 15 black-and-white photographs of the same size (that is 37 x 33 cm), all taken in Berlin, except for two from Dresden. Indeed, these photographs are more than just a social historical documentary, accompanied only by place and date rather than programmatic titles; with them, as Döbert writes about Hauswald's exhibition in Jena in 2007, the long gone GDR lives further; Rathenow and Hauswald re-presented the past system, made it alive again, disturbed those viewers for whom the past was past. Rathenow and Hauswald led to a journey into the past, for some East German viewers with the effect of re-recognizing. Six of 15 photographs depict the Branden-

burg Gate (respectively the Pariser Platz in front of the east side of the Brandenburg Gate), the symbol and centre of Berlin and for many that of a new Germany. The view

of the gate is always from the east to the west, revealing the photographer's East German identity as living and working in the former GDR. The photograph in the centre (**Fig.**) is taken of the Brandenburg Gate on 22 December 1989, the day of its reopening after being shut and barrickaded over almost three decades. The reopening

was actually watched by thousands of people (**Fig.**), who spilled on to the city's streets cheering in the pouring rain to watch the historic ceremony in which Helmut Kohl, West German Chancellor at this time, walked through the gate to be greeted by Hans Modrow, the East German Prime Minister. This ceremony and event effectively ended the division of East and West Germany, as it was still in place in 1982, the photograph below (**Fig., Fig.**), depicting the longing from the east to the west and now

reminding the viewer of a desire now exposed as a far-away dream. This photograph was already published in 1987 with the following text by Rathenow (cited in English after the 2005 edition):

‘The Brandenburg Gate is the only place where anyone may look at and photograph the border without attracting attention. Rabbits hop over the green areas in the prohibited zone’ (p. 54).

**(Fig.)** The photograph on the top entitled after the square’s name *Pariser Platz* depicts The Brandenburg Gate in 2005, indicating that the story does not end in 1989; **(Fig.)** the back of a living sculpture imitating the Statue of Liberty is depicted in front of an open-air exhibition of the Brandenburg Gate as it looked like after the Second World War – the photographs on nearly life-size boards are visited by a number of tourists in summer clothes. Here photography is self-referential, but even more so on the photograph on the left **(Fig.)** of the Brandenburg Gate on 22 Dec. 1989 **(Fig.)**, which shows the nearly life-size photographs solely. **(Fig.) (Fig.)** The living sculpture not only alludes to the temporarney of the photographed scene, but also at the world importance of the Brandenburg Gate and its symbol for freedom and individuality, in front of which many speeches were held, such as the one by the U.S. president President Ronald Reagan, who famously challenged the Soviet Union on 12 June 1987, when he spoke to an audience on the West Berlin side, demanding the razing of the Berlin Wall with the words ‘Mr Gorbachev, tear down this wall!’ Indeed, the wall came down, but the gate still stands, and the living Statue of Liberty in the picture shows his bottom to his Eastern visitors.

Centre stage in *Brandenburg Gate, Berlin* of 2005 **(Fig.)** forms a man posing in front of a camera, taking a picture of him with the Brandenburg Gate in the background – the Brandenburg Gate as a tourist attraction. After being refurbished, the gate has been closed again for vehicle traffic and much of the Pariser Platz has been turned into a cobblestone pedestrian zone – imitating a place of peace. While the image shown before **(Fig.)** represents self-referentiality of the medium, **(Fig.)** this photograph is self-referential as regards the act of taking a photograph. It does not capture an object but rather the process of creating a self-portrait – however again pressed into an object.

**(Fig.)** The Brandenburg Gate forms the backdrop of a number of staged exhibitions, such as depicted in *Brandenburg Gate* of Berlin 2000. The numerous white and

black bears are orderly arranged. The city crest of Berlin (**Fig**) shows a black bear with red tongue on two feet. Its origins are unknown, but may well be an allusion to the founder of the Mark Brandenburg, Albrecht the Bear, and has been adopted for all Berlin since 1990. (**Fig.**) Astrid Kuhlmeier, who reviewed this photograph when published in *Gewendet*, dismisses it as naïve, particularly when compared with the one on its right, *Brandenburg Gate, Berlin* of 1982. However, she misses the point. She overlooks the similarity with all those photographs depicting conformity, such as the lined-up, mass-produced Trabi cars on its far right and the marching Soviets in the middle of the next row. The forms have changed, but the mass-produced, lined-up bears have been imported into the same street that leads to the place of the Trabi-cars.

(**Fig.**) The far left to these pictures continue the Berlin stories into the postmodern: the Potsdamer Platz and the Alexanderplatz, two famous squares, are shown as places of temporaneity – (**Fig.**) the balloons blown on the *Potsdamer Platz, Berlin* of 2005 will not last long –, individuality – (**Fig.** *Alexanderplatz, Berlin* of 2006), people walk in various directions and the front person performs on its own for a few cent – and free play (**Fig.** *Alexanderplatz, Berlin* of 2006). As Rathenow notes these photographs depict moments of the contemporary which – as Hauswald’s other pictures remind us – will also be soon history. The Alexanderplatz, also referring to Hauswald’s latest book with the same title (**Fig.**), which depicts photographs from before and after 1989 together with essays by 14 authors, represents a fascination for the photographer. It is not a beautiful square, but loud and exciting through dealers and street performers today, as also depicted on both photographs entitled (**Figs.**) *Alexanderplatz, Berlin* of 2006. With its size of 80,000 square meters after its redesign in 1969, which also included the erection of Walter Wornacka’s so called *Brunnen der Völkerfreundschaft* (Fountain of the friendship of nations) as depicted on the lower *Alexanderplatz, Berlin* of 2006 and Erich John’s *Urania-Weltzeituhr*, the square was used in order to propagate the GDR’s emphasis on internationality. For Markus Deggerich and Peter Wensierski, the critics of Hauswald’s book, it forms the most eastern and honest face of the city; quiet in contrast to the Potsdamer Platz (**Fig.**), which formed a symbol of the collapse of the GDR in 1989, becoming the biggest construction site in any European city in the 1990s, now vanished under the erection of skyscrapers and one of the largest underground stations in Berlin, so that it probably now represents the most ‘western’ face of Berlin. As captured here by Hauswald

(**Figs.** all three), both squares are homes for vibrant, momentary street life known to any large city.

In stark contrast to these is the exact opposite site of the installation (**Fig.**), inhabited by photographs taken before 1989: cars and people in rank and file, ridiculed by the photograph of 1 May 1987 (**Fig.**): it shows how easy it is that such orderly behaviour fails. Considering the fact that the photograph of a procession in celebration of the *Arbeiterstaat* (**Fig.**) in *Berlin* was taken on 1 May 1989, only a few months before the collapse of the very state which was celebrated on that day, exposes the ideology and its cultural forms as a mockery of the GDR. It goes without saying that these photographs from the former GDR form a counter-part to the then official photojournalist press.

(**Fig.**) *Underground Line A, Berlin* of 1986 is a photographic character study of individuals – individuality which did not count much in the GDR. In East German newspapers, reviewers of Hauswald's exhibitions usually comment on the unspectacular side depicted by Hauswald. Barbara Glasser believes that this was due to Hauswald's job as telegram boy in the GDR. As such, he went to the courtyards, getting to know the unspectacular life of the plain and simple citizens. To get the photograph, also entitled *Feierabend in der U-Bahn* (After Work in the Tube), Hauswald took six shots. He reports that none of those portrayed moved between taking each photograph, reminding him of the three monkeys of which one does not see, the other does not hear and the third does not say anything.

The photograph of the *Schlossplatz, Berlin* of 1982 (**Fig.**), showing a couple close to each other amongst numerous rows of East German cars is probably the only one which depicts nostalgia for an era which is gone, often called *Ostalgie* (east-algia). It might represent one of those photographs which Döbert might have had in mind when writing about the exhibition in Jena in 2007: The photographs are often rosy memories of a GDR which was probably not only black-and-white.

(**Fig.**) The pair of the fries of the Procession of the Dukes, which is at the back side of the Royal Mews in Dresden, is taken from the same angle; the top photograph shows marching Soviet police in 1984, while the lower one depicts a group of photographing tourists in 2005. These two pictures encompass in some ways what Hauswald showed in the other photographs of Berlin, the before and after.

(**Fig.**) Most of the photographs seem to be snap-shots, initiating long and short stories based on those already known to the spectator. Hauswald still only produces

black-and-white photographs, so that the absence of colour opens the pictures' facets. The gap between each of these photographs, which can be interpreted with what Derrida called the void, the unsayable, represents the space full of tension, where the spectator experiences mourning, remembering, becomes disturbed, is reminded of old hopes and new illusions and thus enter processes of overcoming.

While other artists involved in the project also refer to the before and after in the works which will be part of the exhibition *Overcoming Dictatorships* (**Figs. 2x**), none of the artists has referred explicitly to the physical danger, mistreatment and cruelty under dictatorships, focusing rather on social and economic pressures. This is surprising, since some of the artists suffered under Communism respectively Socialism, amongst them also Harald Hauswald.

The photographer, born in Radebeul, near Dresden, in 1954, had to be very careful when taking photographs in Berlin since the beginning of the 1980s (he had moved to Berlin in 1977). These were not published in the GDR, but appeared in journals published in West Germany such as *GEO*, *Stern* and *ZEIT Magazin* and book format published by Piper in Munich in 1987 at the time of Berlin's 750th anniversary, as mentioned above. The book, with a text by GDR dissident Lutz Rathenow and photographs of everyday life in East Berlin, was reissued in 2005 (**Fig.**) with a different selection of photographs both on the cover and in the book. In its preface, Rathenow mentions that he and Hauswald emptied an apartment in a rundown back part of a residential building and plastered it with his photos to be able to discuss the selection for the book for weeks. He reports that the photographs of this mini-exhibition 'mysteriously vanished without a trace from Harald Hauswald's archive and have never resurfaced.' An answer for such inscrutability may be found in the reception of the book by the GDR government. The book was not openly defaming; the photographs *Brandenburg Gate Berlin* of 1982 (**Fig.**) and *Underground Line A, Berlin* of 1986 (**Fig.**) included in *Time Travels* of 2008 also appeared in the book. However, the German title Ost-Berlin (East Berlin), which was used officially in West Germany and unofficially in the GDR for the Eastern part of Berlin until reunification (officially East Berlin was 'Berlin' – the capital of the GDR for GDR authorities), attracted its attention assumingly because of its non-heroic approach, contrasting those official GDR photographs, which rather cultivated the myth of the socialist proletarian state. Rathenow, having now been able to consider secret Stasi files, cites a

letter of Kurt Hager, the leading GDR politician for cultural issues, written to Erich Mielke, GDR Minister of State Security at the time when the book appeared in 1987:

The suitability of instigating proceedings through the director of GDR copyright law, as proposed by you, must be thoroughly reconsidered. It would be better, if, after the book's publication, the customs authorities were to instigate a criminal investigation due to customs and currency offences.

Although describing the Berlin book as part of the Cold War may have been a little too pretentious from the authors, it nevertheless instigated 'an expert group [which] compiled a report of many pages' and the concluding verdict by Mielke:

'The proposal that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs employ suitable means to point out to agencies in Bonn that the publication of the book by Rathenow and Hauswald in Piper Verlag is an unfriendly act contravening the cultural exchange between the GDR and the FRG as laid out in the culture convention, meets with my approval. I will arrange for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to instruct comrade Moldt accordingly.'

According to the authors, the book was sold out within a year, but, and this may demonstrate the publishing-house's loyalty to the FRG government, not reissued despite its sale success. It was Harenberg in Dortmund which produced a bibliophile edition in 1989, which again sold out in a year.

Because of such unheroic photographs of life in East Berlin, Hauswald had to experience surveillance, house searching, interrogations, and a warrant in 1985. Altogether, his Stasi file weighed seven kilos. He earned his living by being telegram messenger, restorer and photo-lab assistant and exhibited in youth clubs, rooms of churches and private flats. Although without doubt, the major reason for the latter was political, Hauswald's photographs were aesthetically untimely in the 1980s, a period in which GDR photography ignored the social reality and concentrated on art photography, paying no attention to social documentary photography. After 1989, however, Hauswald's reputation changed, even receiving the *Bundesverdienstkreuz* (order of merit of the Federal Republic of Germany), the highest tribute the Federal Republic of Germany can pay to individuals in 1997.

It is interesting to note that while in 1999, David Elliott observed that 'in the majority (but not all) of the twenty two countries [participating in the exhibition *After the Wall*] Communism (Marxist-Leninism) is an ideology which has been firmly consigned to the past and is now regarded as an irrelevance, if not an embarrassment, to the present and future', nearly a decade later, there is a shift; processes such as

mourning but also remembering the past imply that the past is not irrelevant to the now, as the sale success of the 2005 book of Hauswald and Rathenow, which is now in its third edition, proves.

### **Ideological and technical dis-locations**

**(Fig.)** In this paper, I have shown that Harald Hauswald's installation deal with overcoming dictatorships through processes of remembering, rarely mourning (*Ostalgia*) and recording historic moments. He (1) attempts to overcome collective identity formations of the past, (2) celebrates the freedom, short-livedness and singularity of the west, and also (3) critically engages with new collective identities, such as the conformity of tourists, staged identities and the sameness of globalisation.

In the GDR, Hauswald was ideologically dis-located. The fall of the wall and thus the political change, resulting in a democratic, free market society, has given him a celebrity status and thus, one may argue, he has been ideologically located.

His work, however, function as signifiers of dis-locations and attempts of relocation which can never be achieved fully. This is partly due to the multitude of photographs (instead of one) which prevents fixation. Furthermore, each image depicting a location at a certain moment in time stated next to each photograph is only seemingly *located*, because at the moment of taking the picture, this moment is gone – what remains is the photograph as a medium of preservation of that particular locality. In between lies a slight postponement, which Baudrillard calls a state of uncertainty. A photograph represents for him the simulation of reality. In other words, this slight postponement is the reason for the dislocation of any photograph, but because of its resemblance with what has been photographed, the viewer develops a desire for this reality, which will always remain an attempt to reach it. Similarly overcoming dictatorships may always remain an unfilled desire, a process – in process.