

The Pastoral, Nostalgia and Political Power in Leipzig, Germany¹

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In Leipzig, restorative nostalgia reasserted itself in the 1990s after being eclipsed by the pastoral in the 1960s and 1970s. The re-emergence of restorative nostalgia does not mean that the pastoral has fallen into disuse. Socialist-era politicians draw on the pastoral when they discuss their housing situation, and express their misgivings of the changes that the current administration has initiated since 1990. They invoke the suburbs and countryside as sites of self-renewal, idealized spaces in which they can express their values. At a deeper level, the pastoral charters socialist-era politicians' relocation from the city to the periphery, mirroring their marginalisation in the aftermath of unification. In contrast, Leipzig's current politicians have an affinity for restorative nostalgia, and attempt to restore Leipzig's alleged golden age, its character and energy before World War II. Restorative nostalgia implies criticism of socialist-era development, and, by extension, the contribution of socialist-era politicians. Restorative nostalgia also makes it seem as if the city's development plans are the outcome of tradition, rather than politics. Tracing former and current politicians' affinity for the pastoral and restorative nostalgia, this article provides insight into the relationship between the pastoral, nostalgia and political power.

Key words: East Germany, politicians, city planners, elite, legitimacy, pastoral, nostalgia, power.

A city is at least three things. It is a phenomenon that emerges as the result of many actions and interactions, a setting that shapes different ways of life by accident and by design, and a multifaceted idea that individuals invoke in the course of discovering and expressing their identity and power.² In this article, I am interested in the latter meaning of the city, the city as an idea. Specifically, I aim to understand how deposed and current elites in post-socialist Europe represent the city, and how do their representations of the city align with their identity and power. Previously, I examined Leipzig's former

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² The three aspects of the city—as an emergent phenomenon, a setting, and an idea—align with three underlying assumptions: The city as an outcome, cause, and object of reflection. For a definition of the city, I turn to George Cowgill. The city is 'a permanent settlement within the larger territory occupied by a society considered home by a significant number of residents whose activities, roles, practices, experiences, identities, and attitudes differ significantly from those of other members of the society who identify most closely with 'rural' lands outside such settlements' (Cowgill 2004: 526).

politicians' maligned reputation and their accounts of their employment, social life, and housing situation (Touval 2000). Before Germany's unification, Leipzig's socialist-era politicians attended city council meetings, served on committees, and, in some cases, worked fulltime in city hall or the regional party administration. In the course of the peaceful revolution, however, they were, for the most part, discredited and removed from power (Welzel 1996: 28). Here I return to the issue of housing with a fresh perspective, analyzing how they represent the city, and how their representations of the city relate to their downfall from power. I compare their idea of the city with current politicians' perspective, noting how their respective ideas of the city mediate their contrasting circumstances.

Different stakeholders, including scholars, reach for reality-framing tropes such as time and space to capture the changes that have taken place over the past two decades in post-socialist Europe, and my informants are no exception (Weszkalnys 2010: 16). Socialist-era politicians draw on the pastoral to displace themselves in space, while current politicians draw on restorative nostalgia to displace themselves in time. They invoke the city's spatial and temporal aspects to comment on the city as a setting.³ How good is the city to its residents? As one might imagine, former and current politicians provide very different answers. When Leipzig's socialist-era politicians draw on the pastoral, they are not merely comparing the city with the suburbs and countryside; they are also dramatizing the current administration's flawed policies, and creating particular physical, social, emotional, and moral juxtapositions between the centre and the periphery which resonate with their loss of power. In contrast, current politicians have an affinity with nostalgia, particularly restorative nostalgia. They locate Leipzig's unique energy in the pre-socialist past, and aim to bring back features of the urban landscape that recall the city's true identity. Restorative nostalgia implies disapproval of East Germany's imprint on the urban landscape, and the contribution of the city's socialist-era politicians. Restorative nostalgia also masks current politicians' policy initiatives, making their projects seem grounded in tradition, rather than power.⁴

A contested issue in Leipzig since at least the early twentieth century, housing, and related attributes of the city as a setting, such as neighbourhood development and urban policy, inform the context of former politicians' affinity for the pastoral and current politicians' affinity for restorative nostalgia. In the late nineteenth century, urban migration changed the power structure in the city, and by the 1920s housing policy was determined by the socialist parties and the lower-middle class. Seeking to remedy the

³ Some ideas of the city address the city as an emergent phenomenon. Faced with a declining population base, Leipzigers debate the conditions that allow typically urban attributes to surface. This is a topic for a future article.

⁴ Current politicians' emphasis on citizen participation in urban planning further masks the power dynamics behind urban policy initiatives (Weszkalnys 2008: 255).

housing shortage, in which several families, including boarders, occupied one apartment, the city government created a municipal building company, which aimed to make housing more readily available (Shäfer 2007: 110). Another response to industrialization and overcrowding was the desire to bring nature into the city (Hennecke 2011: 75). When animated by a critique of the city, this desire is an example of the pastoral.⁵



Leipzig contrast

After the destruction of World War II, ‘improving people’s homes—and delivering ever more badly needed worker accommodations—emerged as a central plank of every SED party congress and was a perennial subject of great anxiety’ (Betts 2008: 115). Concurrent with the effort to address the acute housing shortage, there was an attempt early on to recover the traditional flair of the inner city (Jürgens 1994: 302). In the 1960s, however, historic reconstruction was confidently rejected in favour of a new socialist style. Socialist architecture was financially feasible, and aligned with the prevailing ideology of utopia, a total break from the past, a new Germany. While there was an ongoing effort to maintain and improve old apartment units, the authorities emphasized new construction. Historic buildings that survived the war, including St. Paul’s Church, which dates to the twelfth-century, were razed to give way to cube-like office buildings and apartment blocks (Gormsen 1996: 14).

The demise of restorative nostalgia in the 1960s was followed by the emergence of the pastoral as a template for housing development, evidenced, for example, by the large housing estate of Grünau. Deriving from the German word for green (Grün), Grünau is a neighbourhood of prefabricated high-rises designed to accommodate 85,000 people (Kabisch et al. 2008: 12). Built in the 1970s and 1980s, and located in Leipzig’s southwest corner, Grünau’s apartment buildings are surrounded by green lawns and trees, a far cry from the open-pit mines to the south, and Plagwitz’s smokestacks and poorly-maintained accommodations to the east. Grünau’s carefully landscaped surroundings imply a critical stance toward

⁵Because social actors attribute different meanings to the urban landscape at different points in time (Rotenberg 1995), one should be careful when interpreting the meaning that different stakeholders attribute to parks and garden development in Leipzig.

typical city living, revealing the pastoral as its source of inspiration, and conjuring a historical sequence in which restorative nostalgia gives way to the pastoral.⁶

Interestingly, while it served as an inspiration for residential development, East German authorities perceived the pastoral as potentially subversive. Romanticism, in which the pastoral features prominently, was rejected as a threat to modernity. ‘Romantic artists’ were seen as ‘disengaged, retreating to the past and indulging in alternative realities, in nature, religion, and the exotic’ (Kelly 2009: 200). Georg Lukács located ‘the origins of socialism ... in the rationalism of the Enlightenment,’ and argued that the ‘romantic school’ led to ‘bourgeois capitalism and fascism’ (quoted in Kelly 2009: 199). However, the reception of the romantics in East Germany evolved over time. In the 1960s Georg Knepler legitimated romantic composers by classifying them as realists, who engaged ‘with the world around them’ and ‘explored alternative modes of society’ (Kelly 2009: 200). There was a rising interest in romanticism in the 1970s (Leeder 1990: 214), and in the 1980s the pastoral featured in oppositional discourse. ‘Trenchant “civilization critiques”... sprang from the strong sentiment that the GDR had become too modernized and that more traditional elements—Christian faith, love of nature, and so forth—had to assert themselves...’ (Pence and Betts 2008: 14).

Restorative nostalgia re-emerged in the post-unification era, with city planners compensating for the destruction of Leipzig’s architectural heritage by reinstating features of the urban landscape that are allegedly emblematic of its true identity. The re-emergence of restorative nostalgia, however, does not mean that the pastoral has fallen into disuse. The pastoral’s subversive reputation and its association with East Germany’s housing development efforts align with former politicians’ marginal position and personal history. In the next section, I present the accounts of socialist-era politicians whom I met while conducting fieldwork in Leipzig between October 1996 and August 1997, attending public events and interviewing people who were active in various associations and political parties. Although anthropologists in the field assume several roles, including that of interviewer and participant-observer, enabling them to probe the gap between what their informants say and do, my analysis of former politicians derives from what they told me in an interview setting, and limited participant-observation. Also, due to the limitations of space, I present here the two former politicians whose accounts evoke the pastoral most fully.

⁶ Admittedly, in the 1980s there was an effort to integrate new socialist-style buildings into the preexisting street pattern, even when this pattern required that the buildings be laid out at an unusual angle to each other, such as at the eastern end of Kreuz St., a few minutes walk from downtown. Another design choice that suggests the pull of the past (though not restorative nostalgia) is the design of slopping rooftops in Dorotheenplatz.



Leipzig courtyards, old and new

Former Politicians' Accounts of Their Housing Situation

Ms Haussmann was born around 1940, and spent her childhood in Engelsdorf, a town bordering Leipzig.⁷ She has a degree in engineering, and worked as a site engineer constructing chimneys all over East Germany. As a member of the Socialist Unity Party (SED), she served as Leipzig's deputy mayor and chair of the planning committee from 1983 until she was let go in May 1989. After the peaceful revolution, she was hired by a West German real estate firm, and later became an independent real estate agent. Between 1992 and 1997, she shared office space in Gholis with a lawyer. By the time I met her in 1997, she no longer needed to rent office space because she was always in her car, or as she puts it, *immer im Auto unterwegs*.

After the peaceful revolution, she invested money that she inherited in real estate, purchasing several acres of land just north of Leipzig. Keeping a parcel to herself and her husband, she sold another parcel to her brother and his wife, and the rest to people who became her neighbours. In the aerial photograph of the housing development that she shares with me, the streets twist and turn, giving the impression that her neighbourhood developed slowly over time. She likes the fact that her new home is close to natural springs and a forest. On weekends, she and her husband travel to their vacation home in Dübener Heide, a wooded area where they have a vacation home, and where they can let their dog run around without a leash.

Following an initial conversation at a café, we walk through an arcade in downtown. While she finds that it has been beautifully redone, she does not feel safe in this space anymore; she is afraid that someone will grab her handbag. Furthermore, she does not like the other arcades that are dressed up to look like nineteenth-century pubs. Later that afternoon, when we drive through Grünau, she points to

⁷ All names are pseudonyms.

parking spaces overgrown with weeds. She explains that the neighbourhood associations which were responsible for maintenance before 1989 were dissolved, replaced by crews of makeshift workers. As makeshift work is cut back, the neighbourhood deteriorates further.

Her preference for suburban and rural environments and dislike of the changes that have taken place in Leipzig suggest a pastoral pattern, in which the suburbs and countryside are idealized to the detriment of the city. East Germany, she says, invested money so kids could be kids; sports, art and culture kept them busy. Youth centres were among the very first things to be constructed in Grünau. Now youth centres are eliminated—she uses the word *abgeschafft*—and the youth are on the street. Every society, she muses, has its own form of violence. People strive for more and better things; whatever they do not already have. When she looks at it logically, it will overflow its banks, *es ufert alles aus*.

‘It’ refers to society’s dire situation. The social situation in downtown Leipzig and Grünau is deteriorating, and society is not investing enough resources in its youth to properly reproduce itself over time. The reference to a flood in her account implies that the city will not be able to overcome its troubles. Meanwhile, she describes her freestanding house in the suburbs and her rural vacation home as places for family, self-renewal, and freedom.

Born in 1952 in Pomerania (northern East Germany), Dr Block joined the Socialist Unity Party (SED) in 1975. She worked as a biologist at the university, and is currently employed by a health insurance firm, evaluating drugs. Between 1984 and 1989, she was a delegate to the City Council on behalf of the Cultural Association (Kulturbund), leaving her position in May 1989 to protest election fraud. Between 1993 and 1995, she returned to elected office, this time as a delegate to the City Council on behalf of the Green Party. She resides in a large draughty apartment in an old building with her husband and two children. Right after the peaceful revolution her building was claimed by the descendants of the original owner, who, in turn, sold the building to a West German real estate investment firm. The firm failed to solicit bids from the current tenants, inviting West Germans to come and look at the property instead, because they assumed that people in the East do not have a bank account. The real estate firm started to renovate the building, and then stopped halfway, and now the roof is covered with plastic. Her rent is still low, but once the work would be completed, her apartment would become very expensive. It is very large—one hundred and fifty square meters—which means that the rent will be somewhere between 2,000 and 2,500 DM per month (excluding utilities). This level of rent, she says, is fair, yet there are no tax benefits for paying rent.

Alongside her building, her immediate neighbourhood has been undergoing change. She dislikes the contemporary architecture, the new buildings of glass and concrete. Although there are meadows close by, they are not sufficiently close to improve her quality of life, and there are no trees in the vicinity of her

building. Her neighbours have already left, and she and her family are planning to move out as well; she and her husband are building a new house in the suburbs.

Although she and her family will benefit financially from building a new house, the project upsets her environmental sensibility. She explains that if everyone were to do what she is doing, there will be little open space left. Although environmentally speaking she is making a mistake, there are mitigating factors. The new house is in an area zoned for housing, and the neighbourhood is accessible by streetcar. While the neighbours are building houses which are not ecologically sound, her architect is designing an Ecohaus, a house with good materials that follows strict environmental standards. She hired former East Germans to build the house, and purchased building materials that are produced in eastern Germany. She has lived in East Germany for almost forty years and is, as she puts it, an ‘Ossie,’ an East German.

Like Ms Haussmann, Dr Block draws a contrast between the city and its periphery. Her new home in the suburbs represents an idealized, environmentally friendly modernity. Unlike her future neighbours, she follows strict environmental standards and sources materials locally. Defining herself as an environmentalist and a local patriot, she invokes a self-conscious pastoralism that is carefully orchestrated against a backdrop of environmental degradation and the diminishing power of city dwellers—former citizens of East Germany—within united Germany.

The pastoral, nostalgia and power

I define the pastoral as a pattern of meaning in which the urban, as the site of a dominant yet ill-conceived way of life, is criticized by juxtaposing it to the rural, the site of renewal, nature, peace, and tranquility. My informants pattern their accounts of their housing situation along pastoral lines. The pastoral is entangled with their attempt at self-renewal, their interests and values, as well as their predicament as former politicians, individuals who have lost power and personal prestige in the aftermath of the peaceful revolution. Dr Block imbues the pastoral with post-industrial values, particularly environmentalism, while Ms Haussmann, who is twelve years her senior, with the pride of launching a successful career in real estate. In their discussion of urban living, Dr Block and Ms Haussmann invoke rent, maintenance, ownership, and the immediate neighbourhood, attributes which the pastoral dramatizes as flawed. Because housing is a politically-charged issue, and the pastoral has had a subversive subtext in East Germany, their accounts are more critical than they might seem to someone who is not familiar with the local context.

To understand better the relationship between the pastoral and political power, I would like to explore Leipzig’s current politicians’ affinity for restorative nostalgia. However, before I do that, I would like to acknowledge that the evidence and its context of elicitation make the comparison between the pastoral and nostalgia rather tenuous. My evidence of the pastoral is based on personal interviews, while the evidence of nostalgia is based on attendance in public events in which city planners discuss housing

projects in front of an audience. Nevertheless, the comparison is productive of further thoughts about how deposited and current political elites employ pastoralism and nostalgia to signify their identity and relations to power.

Current politicians' personal commitment to revitalizing Leipzig's urban core is reflected in their choice of residence. A number of high-ranking politicians, including the former mayor, live in old neighbourhoods within walking distance of downtown and the beautifully restored arcades mentioned by Ms Haussmann. While restorative nostalgia is not the only template for urban development after the peaceful revolution—there are other influences in Leipzig besides restorative nostalgia, such as glass and steel buildings—the city invests great care in historic preservation. When the head of the city's planning authority communicates to Leipzig residents the concept guiding the development of the inner city, he displays a photograph of pre-World War II Leipzig, featuring a narrow street lined with buildings with elegantly-textured facades (event observed on 1.15.97, Saal der Alten Nikolaischule). At another event, he explains that with the exception of cases in which they hinder functionality, the city uses historical materials for the roads, sidewalks, and lighting fixtures (2.5.1997, New City Hall). These materials recall the past and reflect nostalgia for a bygone era.

Current politicians' restorative nostalgia is different and distinct from *Ostalgie*, or the longing to some aspects of the East German past, which has been documented in eastern Germany by Daphne Berdahl. *Ostalgie* changed over time, comprising initially 'unnamed acts of minor resistance' in the face of rapid change in the aftermath of the peaceful revolution. It was then 'mobilized' by 'the capitalist market to validate and re-narrate the daily experience of East German life,' and finally consisted of 'reflexive commentary' about East Germany's demise (Keenan 2011). Though an important phenomenon, current politicians' restorative nostalgia is better understood with reference to Anna Seghers' sense of nostalgia than *Ostalgie*. Drawing on *The Future of Nostalgia* by Svetlana Boym, Stacy Hartman contrasts Anna Seghers' restorative nostalgia, with its aim of restoration and revival, to Christa Wolf's reflective nostalgia, in which longing has a dream-like quality without the goal of return (Hartman 2009: 31). Within an abstract and context-free typology of nostalgia, current politicians' nostalgia is comparable to Seghers'.⁸

But how are the pastoral and restorative nostalgia related to political power? Current politicians' restorative nostalgia implies that Leipzig will reassume its prominent role when features of the urban

⁸ Seghers and Wolf are prominent East German writers. The generational shift from Seghers to Wolf roughly coincides with the demise of restorative nostalgia and the rise of the pastoral. However, other varieties of nostalgia, such as reflective nostalgia, may well have been important in different spheres of life in East Germany during the 1970s and 1980s.

landscape that symbolize its past glory will be restored. At a deeper level, restorative nostalgia suggests that current politicians locate the city's creative capacity in the pre-socialist past. They seek to displace the city in time, and capture its special spirit and energy by bringing back the qualities that it possessed before World War II. In contrast, former politicians employ the pastoral to displace themselves in space. They imply that life and creativity are found in the periphery, safe from the ills of a decaying city.⁹ Ms Haussmann establishes her home in a new suburban division that she helped develop near natural springs and a forest, and bemoans the dire consequences of discontinuing East Germany's investment in children and youth, as well as other changes that erode Leipzig's urban fabric. Dr Block builds an environmentally friendly home in the suburbs, while the building in which she lives in in the city is in a state of half-repair. While the pastoral invokes sites of self-renewal where people can express their values and thrive, it is also employed to critique Leipzig's deterioration, showing the city's alleged decline to be the result of misguided policies.

The pastoral and restorative nostalgia mirror former and current politicians' distinct positions. Former politicians have an affinity for the pastoral, because the pastoral is a pattern of meaning that charts movement from the centre to the periphery, movement which mirrors their change of status, their relocation to the political margins. Conversely, current politicians have an affinity for restorative nostalgia, because it legitimates and naturalizes their hold on power. Restorative nostalgia makes their actions seem as if they are anchored in the past, rather than the product of an alignment of power which favours them and their policies.¹⁰ The contrast between former and current politicians provides insight into the relationship between the pastoral, restorative nostalgia and political power, at a time in Leipzig's history when restorative nostalgia has become prominent again, after being eclipsed by the pastoral in the 1960s and 1970s. It also highlights how deposed and current elites' distinct ideas of the city mediate their identity and power. Their ideas address the urban setting—the current political elite intends to change the urban setting, while the deposed elite finds it flawed and plans an exit—and reveal their understanding of who they are and the scope of their influence.

⁹ Writing about myth and ideology in Madagascar, Maurice Bloch (1986) analyses how creativity is attributed to a transcendent realm rather than the individuals who are engaged in productive labour. Here I argue that former politicians imply that creativity is located outside the city, while current politicians locate this capacity in Leipzig proper.

¹⁰ To follow Robert Paine (1981), the political opposition employs metaphors, while office holders, metonymy. In Leipzig, former politicians draw on the pastoral, conjuring a negative metaphor between the city and its periphery, while current politicians draw on restorative nostalgia, creating a metonymic order among different features of the urban landscape.

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