



Parallel Gazes
Szabolcs KissPál

Introduction

Responding to the open call of the Hungarian Cultural Centre for a site-specific installation, Szabolcs KissPál's new photographic series, *Parallel Gazes* took the cultural connections between the UK and Hungary as its point of departure. Instead of seeking the reasons for the sparse history of such relations, KissPál mapped the few existing links, a narrow segment of cultural identity shared by the two countries, or more precisely, by their capitals: London and Budapest, focusing on their public monuments, which represent forms and tools that enhance, control and contribute to collective memory and identity.

Gaze, a loaded term, first emerged in relation to the discipline of psychoanalysis, and soon after became central also to critical theory and a wide range of cultural studies of the 20th century. According to various schools, the concept of *gaze* is understood in multiple ways, yet, generally and loosely it can be described as one of the key concepts in play which examine and reveal mechanisms of the construction of (self)identity, relations of power and the connection to real, imaginary or culturally determined surroundings.

Parallel Gazes captures sites in two cities and investigates publicly shared identity and memory through inverting the gaze of the 'tourist'. As opposed to the regular pictures taken on the sites of memorials, KissPál's series of photography is shot from another perspective and shows the 'gaze' of the public monuments and statues of historic figures to whom these sites are (or once were) dedicated. The photo installation therefore focuses on urban landscapes; often contrasting environments that these figures have been continuously 'looking at' since their erection, and which together outline a collection of 'parallel

sites', an alternative map depicting distant locations where the same cultural values are praised. Through the simple but powerful gesture of inversion - in which *our* gaze is mirrored - the *Parallel Gazes* series emphasizes the complexity of the relation between object and subject, and questions how (and by whom) collective identity becomes constructed.

The photo series by KissPál is an inventory of sites and eight historical personalities associated to them.* Spanning from the 16th to the mid 20th century, these figures are: William Shakespeare, Isaac Newton, George Washington, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Mohandas Gandhi, Winston Churchill, Béla Bartók and Raoul Wallenberg. This arbitrary list of great statesmen, scientists, musicians and writers is linked together and doubled by their 'parallel sites' that filter the meanings identified with the figures appearing in two geographically, historically and culturally different settings as each other's doppelgänger.

The second chapter of *Parallel Gazes* is dedicated to Karl Marx's memorial in London's Highgate Cemetery and is paired with the reconstructed points of view of Marx statues in Budapest, where, after the fall of the Soviet Empire, all Marx statues have been removed and some of them are relocated in a sculpture park (known also as 'sculpture cemetery') on the outskirts of the city. (The only exception to this is the statue that remained in the entrance lobby of the Corvinus University of Economics, which, according to an urban legend, is so gigantic and heavy, that for technical reasons couldn't leave the building.) In a brief introduction to KissPál's second series, Péter György describes Marx's altering perceptions in different geographical and temporal contexts, explaining how the removal of a statue can be just as much significant as the erection of a new one.

Contrary to the case of the Marx 'incarcerated' in the university building, the Hungarian composer, Bartók's statue is in temporary exile in a depository due to the long lasting debates concerning its new location in London. The Bartók memorial is a replica of the Bartók statue by Imre Varga in Budapest and its original site was a small square near to the house where Bartók used to live once in South Kensington. Composed to look in the direction of his own flat, the figure was erected in 2004 but stood there only for a few years, as in 2008 the authorities had to take down the sculpture to complete renovation and the reorganization of traffic around the square. The local council proposed a site for the statue in the southern corner of the new square, which has been refused by a group of civilians responsible for the erection of the statue (mainly Hungarians living in London and devoted to Bartók's music), claiming a central and more 'appropriate' position for Bartók. For this group of civilians, the case of the Bartók memorial therefore became an expression of national pride confronted with the principles and strategies of local urban planning, and as I am writing, the exile of Bartók still continues.

As Marx or Bartók, all the nine figures have their history both in London and Budapest, which is just as revelatory of our contemporary politics than the past they meant to symbolize and memorize. This short exhibition guide aims to contextualise both of these by publishing KissPál's artistic research accompanied with archival photos, short essays and a rare document, *Physic History* transcribed by David R. Morris recording an obscure and complicated - if not impossible - attempt of bringing back these nine figures from the past and connecting them through an imaginary discussion within this publication.

Eszter Steierhoffer

* The list is based on the artist's comprehensive research, and it may not be fully inclusive.



South Kensington Station, London
*(Imre Varga, 2004,
replica, temporarily removed)*

Bartók Memorial House,
Csalán Street, Budapest
(Imre Varga, 1981)



Bartók



Parliament Square, London
(Ivor Roberts-Jones, 1973)

Churchill Walkway, Városliget
(City Park), Budapest
(Imre Varga, 2003)

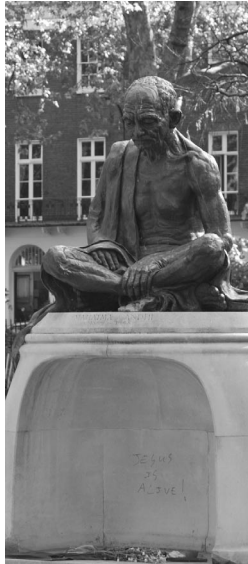


Churchill



Tavistock Square, London
(*Fredda Brilliant, 1968*)

Gellérthegy, Budapest
(*Nándor Wagner, 2001*)



Gandhi



Orange Square, London
(Philip Jackson, 1994)



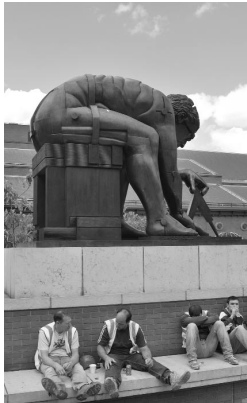
Hungarian State Opera,
Budapest
(László Marton, 1966)





British Library, London
(Eduardo Paolozzi, 1998)

Hungarian Academy of
Sciences, Budapest
(Miklós Révay, 1864)

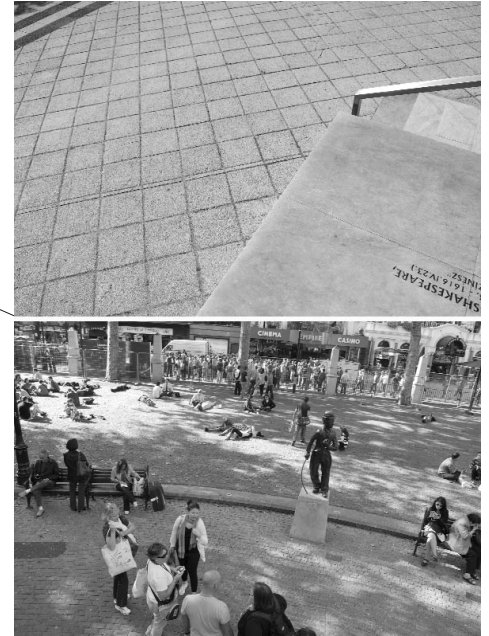


Newton

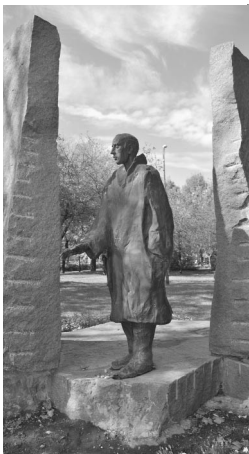


Leicester Square, London
(adaptation, 1874)

Vigadó Square, Budapest
(Andor Mészáros, 2003)



Shakespeare



Szilágyi Erzsébet Fásor,
Budapest
(Imre Varga, 1987)

Great Cumberland Gate,
Marylebone, London
(Philip Jackson, 1994)



Wallenberg



Trafalgar Square, London
*(Jean Antoine Houdon,
replica, 1924)*

Washington Walkway,
Városliget (City Park),
Budapest
(Gyula Bezerédi, 1906)



Washington

William Shakespeare

(26 April 1564 – 23 April 1616)

Sir Isaac Newton

(4 January 1643 – 31 March 1727)

George Washington

(22 February 1732 – 14 December 1799)

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

(27 January 1756 – 5 December 1791)

Karl Heinrich Marx

(5 May 1818 – 14 March 1883)

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi

(2 October 1869 – 30 January 1948)

Sir Winston Leonard Spencer-Churchill

(30 November 1874 – 24 January 1965)

Béla Bartók

(25 March 1881 – 26 September 1945)

Raoul Wallenberg

(4 August 1912 – 17 July 1947?)

Psychic History:

Music, horses and double vision

The following is a transcript of a séance that took place during a Columbia University conference, "Psychic Histories", in 1965. The conference was an attempt to bring clairvoyance, E.S.P. and retrocognition techniques into the academic world, and this session aimed to channel the spirits of nine "great men of history", in the hope of "expanding the field of historico-spiritual possibility, and producing new debates within the metaphysical narrative."¹

The 'spiritualist message service' was conducted by a group of professional mediums.² Witnesses were not permitted, but the proceedings were recorded onto video-cassette, which was shown in a presentation the following day. Although controversial at the time, this event has been largely ignored by the academic community since (with a few notable exceptions³), and what follows is the complete transcript of the psychic session, just as it was presented to the conference in 1965.

Conversation transcribed by David R. Morris

¹ From the *Psychic Histories* programme (1965) held at NYU library archive.

² The group included notable British spiritualists Estelle Roberts and Benjamin Creme

³ See F. Cohen's excellent *Interventions in the Canon* (1988) and Barnham & Rose's *Digging the Other Side* (1970)

*(Silence - the low hum of the video-cassette recorder.
The spirits appear unsettled, and eye one another nervously.)*

Karl (Waiting for someone to break the ice) It holds in all sciences that every beginning is difficult. . .

William If this were play'd upon a stage now, I could condemn it as an improbable fiction. Surely that is the true beginning of our end?

Winston (Frowning) This is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning.

Raoul Before it all began, in the autumn of '38, I went up to see my friend Björn Burchardt, who had a hunting and fishing lodge at Lake Ross in Hälsingland. Once, we had two young ladies there over the weekend - we were all headed for a strange dance at a mountain pasture, referred to as a bogäspe - and we stayed on for the rest of the week. We consumed so much food in that short amount of time that we had to transport it in using a horse and fully laden cart. It was a very remote area, and it was possible to fish, swim, and run around as undisturbed as anywhere in America.

George (Grinning at Raoul) Ah, I remember an encounter in the woods here when I was a young man, meeting more than thirty Indians coming from war with only one scalp. We had some liquor with us, of which we gave them a part. This, elevating their spirits, put them in the humor of dancing. We then had a war dance. After clearing a large space and making a great fire in the middle, the men seated themselves around it, and the speaker made a grand speech, telling them in what manner they were to dance.

Winston You can always count on Americans to do the right thing - after they've tried everything else!

(He chuckles to himself, and drifts over towards the liquor cabinet. George Washington looks vaguely irritated.)

George Well anyway, after he had finished, the best dancer jumped up, as one awakened from sleep, and ran and jumped about the ring in a most comical manner. He was followed by the rest. Then began their music, which was performed with a pot half full of water and a deerskin stretched tight over it, and a gourd with some shot in it to rattle, and a piece of horse's tail tied to it to make it look fine.

Mohandas Yes, the leader of satyagraha ought to be like an expert musician - they should have control over the most delicate notes, and the ability to judge whether a note is too loud or too low.

William Agreed, the man that hath no music in himself, nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds, is fit for treasons, stratagems and spoils.

Mohandas But in society at large, the ability to take up the tune given by a music expert is considered sufficient. *(Eyeing the video recorder.)* There is truly sufficient Art in my life, though you might not see what you call works of Art about me.

Karl (Stroking his beard) In a social order dominated by capitalist production even the non-capitalist producer is gripped by capitalist conceptions, so the little fish are swallowed by the sharks and the lambs by the stock exchange wolves. In short, competition has to shoulder the responsibility of explaining all the meaningless ideas

of the economists, whereas it should rather be the economists who explain competition.

Béla Indeed, competitions are for horses, not artists.

Karl You know, in England women are still occasionally used instead of horses for hauling canal boats, because the labour required to produce horses and machines is an accurately known quantity, while that required to maintain the women of the surplus population is below all calculation.

Winston (Wistfully) There is nothing better for the inside of a man than the outside of a horse. I rode extensively whilst exiled in Salzburg between the wars; no hour of life is wasted that is spent in the saddle.

Wolfgang Amadeus Well, I compare a good melodist to a fine racer, and counterpointists to hack post-horses! Therefore be advised, let well alone and remember the old Italian proverb: 'Chi sa più, meno sa - Who knows most, knows least. (He hums a tune under his breath)

William A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!

(All laugh)

George I heard the bullets whistle, and, believe me, there is something charming in the sound.

Mohandas (Frowning) The movement against war is sound.

Winston But nothing in life is so exhilarating as being shot at without result.

Béla Well gentlemen, my own idea is brotherhood in spite of all wars and conflicts. I try, to the best of my ability, to serve this idea in my music; therefore I don't reject any influence, wherever it comes from.

(Sudden discordance, vociferation ...)

Isaac *(Scrutinising the video recorder, and fiddling with its mechanisms)* But I can judge from whence an echo or other sound comes though I see not the sounding body, and this judgment depends not at all on ye tone. The analogy will stand between ye situations of sounds and the situations of visible things.

George Visible things? Gentlemen, you will permit me to put on my spectacles, for, I have grown not only gray, but almost blind in the service of my country. Now, when one side only of a story is heard and often repeated, the human mind becomes impressed with it insensibly.

Isaac Ah, well it may be that the cause of an object's appearing one to both eyes is not its appearing of the same colour form and bigness to both, but in the same situation or place. Distort one eye and you will see ye coincident images of ye object divide from one another and one of them remove from ye other upwards downwards or sideways to a greater or lesser distance according as ye distortion is: and when the eyes are let return to their natural posture the two images advance towards one another till they become coincident and by that coincidence appear but one.

(All look puzzled)

Wolfgang Amadeus A most singular occurrence - who can foresee the strange coincidences that come to pass?

Winston Yes, sight is peculiar isn't it? The farther backward you can look, the farther forward you can see.

(At this point Mozart rolls his eyes, and departs back to the spirit world)

Isaac When we look with two eyes distorted so as to see the same object double, then the soul judges she sees two things so situate and distant. You will say, how is this coincidence made? I answer, what if I know not?

(Isaac looks around hesitatingly while the rest seem further confused. The image and sound of the video-cassette becomes disturbed for a few seconds)

William Is that the true beginning of our end?

(Impatient murmurs, groans. The spirits begin to fade away.)

Winston This is not the end. It is -

Karl Go on, get out! Last words are for fools who haven't said enough.

William Men of few words are the best men.

Mohandas Hē Ram.

George 'Tis well.

(The remaining spirits depart.)

References

All the above dialogue can be traced to the recorded speech, writing and correspondence of each speaker: Karl Marx, William Shakespeare, Winston Churchill, Raoul Wallenberg, George Washington, Mohandas Gandhi, Béla Bartók, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and Isaac Newton.

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Washington Irving *Life of George Washington* Vol. 5 (G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1857) p.373



Corvinus University of
Economics, Budapest
(Aladár Farkas, 1956)



Highgate Cemetery, London
(Laurence Bradshaw, 1956)



Marx



Heroes Square, Budapest
(unknown, 1919, temporary)



Roosevelt Square, Budapest
(unknown, 1919, temporary)



Marx



Jászai Mari Square, Budapest
(György Segesdi, 1971-92)



Marx, Marxism, London and Budapest

Back in the days when Karl Marx lived in London, he was able to freely expound his views on the revolutionary path of capitalist transformation until death. He was rightly regarded in England as both a social scientist and a revolutionary, just as Lenin was several decades later, when he propounded his own even more radical theories in the same city. Marx's grave in Highgate Cemetery now lies on the London sightseeing circuit and hordes of tourists seek it out in order to daydream about the fate of émigré and left-wing ideas in the capitalist order.

However, the same Karl Marx never made it to Budapest, a city which during the 133 days of the Commune of 1919 erected a temporary statue in his honour that also served to cover up a monument to national statehood. After 1945 when, in the name of Marx's theories - and with Soviet help - a state socialist system was established that represented a radical rejection of capitalism, numerous statues were erected to the German philosopher, sometimes showing him alone and sometimes in the company of fellow founding theoretician, Friedrich Engels. In London, Marxism was never a 'state religion' in the sense that it was in the countries of the Eastern Bloc, where for decades it was taken as the starting point of official doctrines. The fact that later generations of Marxists living over there never read a single line of Marx and perhaps did not even know that he had not considered himself a Marxist, is a completely different issue.

After 1989 the intellectual stratum of the new Hungarian Republic responsible for the fate of public symbols was neither desirous nor capable of making the appropriately large gesture of seeing Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels as German social philosophers, rather than as the ideological founders of the defunct party state and its social order. In actual fact both points of view,

or both readings, were equally valid. In the exhibition we see the empty space that evokes the Marx/Engels statue on Jászai Mari Square, which as a work of art was actually closer to the contemporary aesthetics of Western brutalism than to socialist realism. There were numerous arguments for seeing the statue as a document of cultural history and not as something else. At the same time and with understandable passion, numerous voices were raised expressing the view that since the statue stood next to the headquarters of the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party, its removal would be a symbolic gesture that provided incontrovertible proof of the ending and destruction of party power.

A good twenty years ago, I took part from time to time in the work of the committee that decided the fate of the city's street names and public statues, and as far as I can recall, there were only a few in favour of leaving the statue in question in place. In order to subscribe to that argument, it was neither necessary to be a Marxist nor a liberal, in fact it was actually more a matter of being conservative: according to the consideration that while radical interventions in the city's history could give rise to the appearance of a symbolic revolution, in reality this had not happened, so that consequently we have no right to reenact the politics of space and time of the French Revolution.

But that is not what happened. Metapolitical arguments proved stronger than logical, direct and honest political principles: and in fact it has taken twenty years for one of the leading artists of a new generation to express the idea that there are invisible memory traces on Jászai Mari Square. This is how memory and the history of ideology have become part of contemporary art, and while justice cannot be achieved after the fact and retroactive justice has nothing in common with art, we can be comforted by the thought that after the dullness of forgetting, we are now finally witnessing the artistic use and cultural appropriation of political history.

Péter György



Memento Park, (originally on Jászai Mari Square), Budapest
(*György Segesdi, 1992*)





Ajtósi Dürer Row, Budapest
(*Gyula Kófalvy, 1963-?*)



Szabolcs KISSPÁL (1967) lives and works in Budapest, Hungary. In his multidimensional practice he works across a wide range of media, including photography, video, installation and conceptual interventions. Moving on the intersection of new media and visual arts, *KissPál* focuses on social and political issues of the Hungarian and global contemporary society.

His works were widely shown internationally in Europe, Asia, and the United States, in venues such as the Venice Biennial, the Whitstable Biennial, W139 Amsterdam, NCCA Moscow, the Seoul Media Art Biennial, Apexart and ISCP in New York.

For more information:

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Biographies of the authors of texts

Péter GYÖRGY is reader of the Institute for Art Theory and Media Studies, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest and at the Media Research Centre, Budapest University of Technology. His research interest is 20th-21st century Hungarian art history, theory and practice of contemporary art, and the cultural context of new media. He is the author of 12 books and hundreds of journal articles. He is the founder of a number of institutions and programmes (e.g. the Media Centre and MA programme in Communication Studies at ELTE, the Media Research Centre at BME).

David R. MORRIS is twenty-six years old and lives in London. He has recently written a philosophy course for teenagers and provided commentaries on prison art for the Koestler Trust. When he is not writing he tutors philosophy and makes records. He is currently completing an MA in Critical Writing in Art and Design at the Royal College of Art.

Eszter STEIERHOFFER is an art historian and curator based in London. She studied history of art and architecture in Budapest and in Italy, then pursued her studies in curating contemporary art at the Royal College of Art in London. Currently she is undertaking PhD research in Critical and Historical Studies at the RCA, and directs the Art Network Agency Programme at the HCC.

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