

REPORTAGE: BERLIN AND THE VOLPI BALL

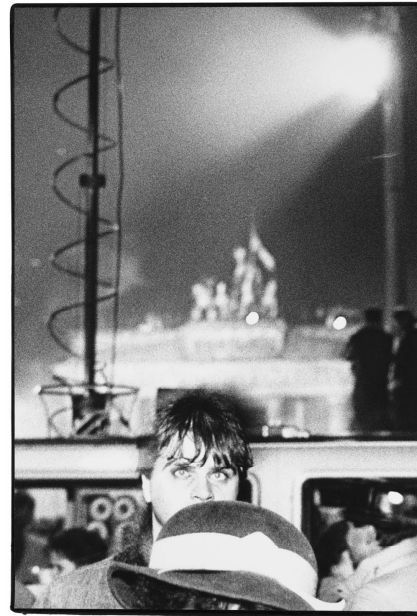
I sensed a climate of violence and danger

Richard Avedon, 1989

The photographer has entered into a series of consciously controlled transactions against a backdrop of irrationality, of the arbitrary, of the unthinkable.

Jane Livingston, 1994

On New Years Eve 1989 The Berlin Wall, which for more than a quarter of a century had divided East from West Berlin, was demolished. The wall had been a physical symbol of the Iron Curtain between Western and Eastern Europe and ultimately between the allies of WW1 and the Soviet Union. Its demolition was therefore a major turning point in the Cold War and Avedon, along with thousands of others, was there to witness its destruction.



Brandenburg Gate, Germany, New Years Eve, 1989

POINTS OF DEPARTURE:

1. The fall of the Berlin Wall was a celebration however it also symbolized the end of a period of violence and division for many Germans and ushered in an era of international uncertainty. What atmosphere do both of Avedon's images above create?

2. It is easy to assume that in these images Avedon is just passive spectator to the events taking place around him, however the climate of “violence and danger” he identified at the fall of the wall was very personal, and different from the experience recorded by many others. How does Avedon compose these images to depict the tension and implicit danger that he sensed?
3. Avedon’s Reportage photography at this time is distinctive for seeming to represent a series of lucky accidents however as Jane Livingston points out this is most often the result of careful planning.



Volpi Ball, Italy, 1991

- a. This image of the Volpi Ball above was taken a year and a half after the Brandenburg photographs. The ball was one of the last examples of its kind, a meeting point of a decaying European aristocracy and Avedon was there as both guest and photographer. What impression of the ball do you get from this image? Does it look carefully composed or the record of a fleeting moment?
 - b. The image is in fact a very carefully composed collage of different images taken by Avedon that evening. How does the knowledge that this is a collage affect our reading of the image?
4. Having documented the fall of the Berlin Wall Avedon said “After Brandenburg it seemed to me that I could have gone further. I’d had only limited control of my intentions. I wanted more control.” Bearing this in mind how do all three images show us the ways in which Avedon extended the control of the studio to the field of Reportage? How does this set him apart amongst other Reportage photographers?